

FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

It Takes a Church to Grow a Pastor

- ▶ The Power of Radical Hospitality
- ▶ It Takes a Church to Prepare a Pastor: A Personal Testimony
- ▶ Mentor the Mentors: A True Call to Ministry
- ▶ The Second-Career Call

FRONTLINE

Volume 36 • Number 1



14 MENTOR THE MENTORS: A TRUE CALL TO MINISTRY

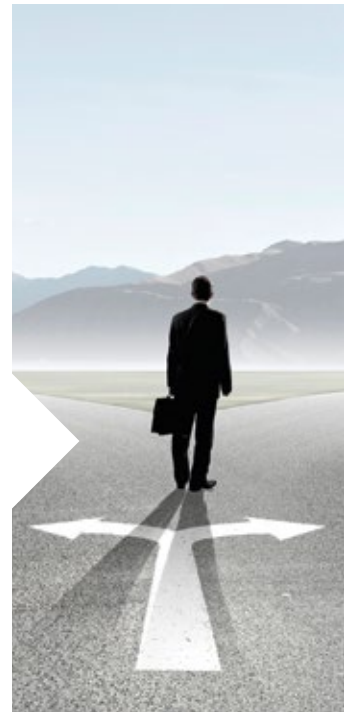
Jeff Caupp

What boys and fathers need is life-upon-life mentorship: pastors, grandfathers, and mature men, walking alongside families in intentional, purposeful ways.

18 THE SECOND-CAREER CALL

Matt Klassen

“A few years ago, I left my career of twenty-five years and began my employment at the church as ‘Ministry Manager.’”



4 CALLED IN COMMUNITY: THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE SHAPING OF PASTORAL MINISTRY

Nathan Mestler

It is within the rhythms of congregational life—worship, service, relationships, and accountability—that a person’s true character is revealed.

10 IT TAKES A CHURCH TO PREPARE A PASTOR: A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Ron Perry

“I did not look much like a future pastor, but God used the whole church to work in my life and form me into the man he wanted me to be.”

7 THE POWER OF RADICAL HOSPITALITY

David Shumate

“From that moment, our lives changed drastically, most importantly because of the influence of the indwelling Spirit and His Word, but also through the fellowship of our new Christian family.”

12 HOW GOD USES HIS PEOPLE TO PREPARE FUTURE GENERATIONS TO MINISTER

Scott Olson

1 Peter 4:7–11 gives us a pattern for creating an atmosphere that nurtures a generation of future leaders.



SOUND WORDS

INSPIRATION FOR THE PASTOR’S STUDY

I: First Partaker

Praying In the Spirit Effectually Enabled
Mark Minnick

V: Bring . . . the Books

More Books for a Deserted Island
Alan Patterson

VI: Straight Cuts

Repentance
Wesley Barley

VII: Windows

Lessons in Evangelism from Our Neighborhood
Ben Smith

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

It Takes a Church to Grow a Pastor

DEPARTMENTS

20 NEWS FROM ALL OVER

22 ON THE HOME FRONT

22 BEST OF PROCLAIM & DEFEND

24 REGIONAL REPORTS

28 HEART TO HEART

She Has Done
What She Could
Janet Clark Shay

30 AT A GLANCE

The Lord's Prayer: Praying for
New Covenant Fulfillment
Layton Talbert

32 WITH THE WORD TO THE WORLD

The Time Is Now
Jim Tillotson

34 STEWARDSHIP MATTERS

Benevolence
Corey Pfaffe

38 CHAPLAIN'S REPORT

FBFI Chaplain Retirement
Ceremonies Honor Faithful
Service

If we view the landscape of the Bible-believing church, we will see along with many encouraging signs some serious needs. One of the most pressing, I believe, is the scarcity of leaders, not only to expand the harvest but to replace mature leaders who are reaching the end of their ministries. We see this crying need both for established churches and church planting in the United States and for foreign missions.

Of course, the most important thing we can do is plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers (Matt. 9:38). As we do, however, we must be aware that after Christ gave this command to His disciples, He sent them out (Matt. 10:1). If we hope to pray according to the will of God, we must be willing to be used by the Holy Spirit to fulfill our own petition. Some must be willing to go, and the rest must be willing to send and support them.

Moreover, we must prepare leaders. I have been a part of seminary education, as a student and as a teacher, for almost forty years; I love our fundamentalist educational institutions. Nevertheless, I have become convinced that many have the wrong impression about the ministry: that God calls leaders in isolation, directs them to seminary for training, and then sends them to passive, waiting churches as fully prepared leaders. This idea is both unbiblical and impractical. As Nathan Mestler demonstrates in this issue, the Bible is clear that the entire church is responsible to participate fully in the identification, preparation, and commissioning of leaders.

Given that the church is a body, all members have a vital role to play in this task. First, the members are those who, through their evangelism and discipleship, lay the first row of stones in the lives of future leaders. As my testimony, "Radical Hospitality," demonstrates, we have no idea how our personal investment in the lives of new believers can influence them for future service.

Sometimes, this ministry requires loving confrontation, as the article by Ron Perry illustrates. A group of mature brothers in the church lovingly confronted him and began a process that led to his salvation and call to the ministry, and both the pastors and people of the church were instrumental in preparing him for his future pastorate. Scott Olson's teaching and testimony emphasizes the vital disciple-making nature of successful local churches and the influence that many different people have on future ministers.

One of the chief concerns regarding the scarcity of pastors has been called the boy crisis, a serious neglect of mentoring, which has resulted in arrested adolescence and serious character flaws in young men. In recent years many have started searching for their role in society and significance as men. This crisis has not left the church unaffected. Jeff Caupp has given us an important key to helping boys (future pastors and leaders) in our churches. He argues that instead of blaming fathers or simply giving them another discipleship book, pastors and other mature men in the church need to come alongside and mentor the mentors.

At the other end of the spectrum are older members of our churches who have been serving the Lord in secular occupations. It is not unusual for some of these to sense the Lord's calling to second-career ministry, using the practical skill and experience that they have obtained and adding to it a deeper understanding of the Bible, theology, and practical ministry. Matt Klassen's personal experience provides a fascinating window into the process by which God calls and by which the church supports these new, yet mature, ministers.

God uses His church to call, prepare, consecrate, and support His ministers. The question is whether you are willing to take part in this great work.

David Shumate, Associate Editor

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Nathan Mestler

Called in Community: The Local Church and the Shaping of Pastoral Ministry

Too often the call to pastoral ministry is thought of as a mystical experience, detached from the objective truth of Scripture and divorced from the life of the church.

The call to ministry is not merely a personal ambition or vocational preference but a work that God accomplishes through His church. In the Pastoral Epistles, especially Paul's first letter to Timothy, the call to the ministry is deeply embedded in the life, doctrine, and discernment of the local church. It is a divine summons that unfolds within a community shaped by the gospel, marked by sound doctrine, and attentive to the Spirit's gifting and sovereign preparation.

In 1 Timothy, Paul writes to his protégé Timothy, who is serving in Ephesus, to instruct him on how people ought to conduct themselves in “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15). This church context is not incidental; it is essential to his calling. The local church is the soil in which the call to ministry is planted, nurtured, and confirmed. Four key components emerge from the text that help us understand this call: a commitment to the gospel, the presence of godly character, recognition of pastoral gifts by the church, and God’s sovereign preparation.

A COMMITMENT TO THE GOSPEL: THE ADMINISTRATION OF GOD’S PROGRAM

Paul begins his letter with a charge to Timothy: “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3). This charge is not merely administrative; it is theological. Timothy is entrusted with guarding the gospel, the “stewardship from God that is by faith” (1:4, ESV). The Greek word used here, *oikonomia*, refers to the administration or management of a household, God’s household.

The call to ministry begins with a deep commitment to this stewardship. The pastor is not the architect of the church’s mission, but the steward of God’s revealed plan. This stewardship includes proclaiming sound doctrine, refuting error, and ensuring that the church remains centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ. The local church, then, becomes the proving ground for this commitment. It is where the minister learns to handle the Word of truth rightly (2 Tim. 2:15), to teach with patience and authority, and to shepherd people toward maturity in Christ.

In this sense, the call to ministry is not first about personal fulfillment but about fidelity to the gospel. The church discerns this call not by evaluating charisma or ambition, but by observing a person’s unwavering dedication to the truth of Scripture and the mission of God. There are certainly many within the body of Christ who share this commitment and are not called to be pastors, but surely no one is called to be a pastor who does not have this commitment abiding deeply within his soul.

GODLY CHARACTER: THE MORAL QUALIFICATIONS OF MINISTRY

Paul’s emphasis on character is unmistakable. In 1 Timothy 3:1–7, he outlines the qualifications for overseers, and the list is strikingly focused on moral integrity rather than ministerial skill. The overseer must be above reproach, self-controlled, respectable, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his household well and have a good reputation with outsiders.

This emphasis reflects a profound theological truth: ministry is not merely about what a person does, but who a person is. The gospel that pastors proclaim must be embodied in their lives. The local church plays a vital role in discerning this character. It is within the rhythms of congregational life—worship, service, relationships, and accountability—that a person’s true character is revealed.

Godly character is not developed in isolation. It is forged in community, tested in conflict, and refined through discipleship. The church sees the fruit of the Spirit in a person’s life and discerns whether that fruit is consistent and mature. A person may be gifted in preaching or leadership, but without godly character, those gifts become dangerous rather than edifying.

Moreover, Paul warns Timothy to “take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:16). The two are inseparable. The call to ministry is not a call just to teach truth but to live it. The local church, therefore, must affirm not only a candidate’s doctrinal soundness but also his spiritual maturity and moral integrity.

RECOGNITION OF GIFTS BY THE CHURCH: AFFIRMATION FROM ELDERS AND MEMBERS

The third component of the call to ministry is communal recognition. In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul reminds Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership”

(NKJV). This verse reveals a powerful dynamic: the call to ministry is not self-authenticated. It is discerned and affirmed by the church, particularly its leaders.

The laying on of hands is more than a ceremonial gesture; it is a public endorsement of God’s work in a person’s life. The elders and congregation, through prayer and discernment, recognize the Spirit’s gifting and affirm the individual’s readiness for ministry. This recognition is not limited to formal ordination; it begins with informal observations of faithfulness, leadership, and spiritual fruit.

The local church is uniquely positioned to make this assessment. It sees the man in everyday life, not just in moments of performance. It observes how he treats his family, how he responds to criticism, and how he serves without recognition. These observations form the basis for communal affirmation.

Importantly, this recognition is not merely about ability; it is about calling. A person may be capable of preaching or organizing, but the church must discern whether those gifts are accompanied by a divine summons. The affirmation of the church is a safeguard against self-deception and selfish ambition.

SOVEREIGN PREPARATION: GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL SHAPING OF TIMOTHY

The call to ministry is never random. It is the result of God’s sovereign preparation, often unfolding through ordinary yet divinely orchestrated circumstances. Timothy’s life is a compelling example of this truth. Though his father was a Gentile and likely not a believer (Acts 16:1), Timothy was nurtured in the faith by his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois. Paul commends this legacy in 2 Timothy 1:5, noting the “sincere faith” that first lived in them and now lives in Timothy. From childhood, Timothy was taught the sacred Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15), which laid a theological foundation long before he ever met Paul.

THIS EMPHASIS REFLECTS A PROFOUND THEOLOGICAL TRUTH: MINISTRY IS NOT MERELY ABOUT WHAT A PERSON DOES, BUT WHO A PERSON IS. THE GOSPEL THAT PASTORS PROCLAIM MUST BE EMBODIED IN THEIR LIVES.

This early spiritual formation was not incidental; it was sovereign. God was preparing Timothy through the faithful witness of godly women, even in a home where spiritual leadership from a father was absent. The local church must recognize that God often works through unexpected channels, shaping future leaders through quiet, consistent discipleship in the home and church community.

Then, in God's perfect timing, Paul entered Timothy's life. During Paul's second missionary journey, he encountered Timothy in Lystra and was so impressed by his reputation among the believers that he invited him to join the mission (Acts 16:2-3). From that moment, Timothy became Paul's close companion, mentee, and eventually his trusted delegate. Paul refers to him as his "true son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2, NKJV), a term that reflects not only affection but spiritual lineage. Timothy's call to ministry was confirmed and deepened through this mentoring relationship, which itself was a sovereign gift.

This divine preparation through family, Scripture, and mentorship illustrates that the call to ministry is not an impulse but a long obedience in the same direction.

The local church must be attentive to these patterns in a person's life. Has God been shaping this individual through formative relationships, trials, and spiritual growth? Has the person demonstrated a trajectory of faithfulness and teachability over time?

Timothy's story reminds us that God's preparation often begins before we are aware of it. It is the church's role to recognize and affirm this preparation, not as a human achievement but as evidence of divine calling. The call to ministry, then, is not just about readiness; it is about providence. It is about seeing the hand of God at work in a life and responding with faithful affirmation.

CONCLUSION: A COMMUNAL AND THEOLOGICAL CALL

The call to pastoral ministry is a sacred trust, and its context is the local church. It is within this community that the call is discerned, tested, and affirmed. The four components outlined in 1 Timothy—commitment to the gospel, godly character, communal recognition, and sovereign preparation—form an objective framework for understanding this call.

In an age that often prioritizes charisma over character and platform presence over pastoral care, the Pastoral Epistles call us back to a biblical vision of ministry. The local church is not a stepping-stone to influence; it is the crucible of calling. It is where the gospel is lived, where character is formed, where gifts are recognized, and where God's sovereign hand is revealed.

For those considering ministry, the question is not merely "Do I feel called?" but "Has the church discerned God's call in my life?" For churches, the responsibility is not just to fill positions but to faithfully steward the process of discernment. And for all of us, the reminder is clear: the call to ministry is a call to serve Christ by serving His people, in the context of His church, for the sake of His glory.

Nathan Mestler is the president of International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona, a frequent camp and conference speaker, and wing chaplain in the Arizona Air National Guard. He and his wife Bethany have four children.



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David Shumate

The Power of Radical Hospitality



A few years before we came to Christ, Linda and I met at our secular university. After graduation, we were married and expected to pursue graduate studies. In the fall of 1983, Linda enrolled in pharmacology, and I began studying law. We both had been exposed to the gospel in our growing-up years, but neither of us realized our need for the Savior. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit was working, poking at our consciences and causing us to be dissatisfied with our lives. God also had His people in strategic locations. I became friends with Russell, a fellow law student who was a believer. For my part, I thought I was a Christian, but my faith was only intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel, not genuine trust in the Savior.

One evening in the summer of 1984, I asked Russell about a campus group's worship service that my wife and I had recently attended. In the conversation, I explained my religious beliefs: that Jesus Christ died and rose again and that a person is saved by faith instead of by works. He asked me whether I knew if I would go to heaven. When I replied that I did not, he simply said, "If you really believed what you say you believe, you would know." I did not come to Christ that night, but my friend's challenge continued to pry at the door of my heart. Over the next few weeks Linda and I got to know Russell, his wife Beth, and their three young children, visiting the church that they were attending.

However, God in His providence had another family for us to meet. Russell had prevailed upon Bill, a good friend of his and a recent seminary graduate, to come and plant a Bible-believing church. When I first saw Bill, I thought, "He doesn't look like a pastor." (I am not sure what I was expecting.) For Bill's part, he had a fervent love for God, a passion for souls, and a pastor's heart. That afternoon, Linda and I went out for ice cream with Russell and Bill and heard more about the gospel. They joked that they were going to witness only to piano players until they had one for their church plant. As it turned out, Linda became the portable-keyboard accompanist for our tiny congregation.

While Bill was in South Carolina, preparing to bring his wife Sherrill and their four small children, God continued to work on Linda and me. One Friday afternoon in late August, my thoughts were in such a whirl that I decided to eat lunch by myself so that I could think. While I was sitting in a seafood restaurant, God's Holy Spirit opened the eyes of my understanding. I called out for salvation, the load of sin fell from my shoulders, and I felt like a completely different person. That evening, I haltingly explained to Linda what had happened to me, and, not knowing what else to say, I asked her, "Has anything like that happened to you?" She responded, "I think it has!" "When?" I asked. "Two days ago," she replied.

Bill had urged her to read the Gospel of John, which was written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, we might have life in His name (John 20:31). Moreover, Bill admonished her to promise God that she would do whatever He told her to do. The Word worked faith in her soul and brought her eternal life as she placed her faith in Jesus.

From that moment, our lives changed drastically, most importantly because of the influence of the indwelling Spirit and His Word, but also through the fellowship of our new Christian family. The church plant began meeting in Bill and Sherrill's apartment—six adults and seven children! Bill began preaching through the Word, and Linda and I both devoured it.

But this was not just Sunday and Wednesday go-to-meeting Christianity. We spent hundreds of hours with Russell and Beth and Bill and Sherrill, constantly visiting in their homes, observing how they lived out their faith and how they reared their children. I am so glad

I HAVE OFTEN WONDERED HOW WE COULD POSSIBLY REPAY OUR DEAR FRIENDS AND SPIRITUAL PARENTS FOR THEIR INVESTMENT IN OUR LIVES. THEN I REALIZED THAT IT DOES NOT WORK THAT WAY. NONE OF US CAN FULLY PAY IT BACK, BUT WE CAN PAY IT FORWARD.

that Linda and I did not know the proverb, “Seldom set foot in your neighbor’s house, lest he become weary of you and hate you” (Prov. 25:17, NKJV). Our friends included us in every aspect of their family life. Someone has defined hospitality as the skill of making people feel at ease. When we were with them, we felt like we belonged.

Our graduate school environment was not particularly supportive of our Bible-believing Christian faith. We felt like we were living in an alien world and could not wait for the next opportunity to be with our Christian family. Until the end of that school year, when Russell graduated, I spent much of my spare time at the law school talking with him about anything and everything, gaining a biblical perspective on life. I did not realize it at the time, but I was receiving intensive discipleship. The radical hospitality of our friends deeply instilled in us the desire for and practice of regular fellowship with God’s people.

Linda and I certainly experienced this proverb: “There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). I remember making a comment to Bill and Sherrill and being seized by the fear that I had inadvertently offended them. Then the realization came to me that the only way not to enjoy the love of these dear folks would be to reject it and run away from it. We learned from them and from Russell and Beth what it means to be accepted by God in the Beloved.

Decades later I was introduced to the discipleship question, “Are your friendships transactional or transformational?” Without question, our early friends and mentors were used by God to transform us in ways that we still do not fully appreciate. A couple of events stand out, however. The summer after our salvation, Linda and I were away while I was interning at a couple of law firms. Sherrill was expecting their fifth child, and their lease on their apartment was due to expire at the end of August. Their landlord let them know that he would not renew the lease because he wanted to turn the flat into studio apartments.

Bill and Sherrill looked all summer for a suitable apartment, to no avail. When I returned in August, we joined in the search and began praying for God to provide. At the end of the month, Bill asked the landlord for another month and promised that at the end of September he would move out. One Sunday, the day before they had to vacate the apartment, our little congregation prayed, but there was still no answer. Bill announced that he had given his word to the landlord, and so he arranged to rent a truck. The next day we helped them pack, none of us knowing where they would go. Late that afternoon, Bill received a call and, after listening for a moment, almost shouted, “Of course we can move in tomorrow!” God had provided them a place at the last moment, and not only to them but to us as well, because their apartment was our where our church met, and we had been praying with them for God’s provision. I remember rejoicing, “The Lord has given us a new apartment!” By inviting us so intimately into their lives, our friends had taught us a lesson in faith that we will never forget.

Over the two years while I was completing law school—my friends had wisely counseled me to finish what I started—God would not leave me alone about going into the ministry. During this time, Bill helped me study the Bible and select reliable tools, reinforcing and directing my nascent call to the ministry. Six months after graduation, I knew I needed to leave the field of law and go to seminary. During the process, Russell was instrumental in helping me make a principled, God-fearing decision about how and where to prepare. I greatly appreciate how much thought and effort he invested in teaching me to think biblically.

Bill and Russell have both gone home to the arms of Jesus; Sherrill and Beth continue to serve the Lord here. It is perhaps ironic that the church plant never made it off the ground, but do not try to tell me that it was a failure. God simply had something else in mind. His

ways are higher than our ways. In the forty years since our salvation, God has continued to prepare, grow, and lead us through various ministries, including pastoring, missions work, and theological education. It is perhaps natural and proper for us to feel like we have done little for the Lord, given all that He has done for us. However, what has been done in our life and ministry owes much to the radical hospitality of our first disciples.

I have often wondered how we could possibly repay our dear friends and spiritual parents for their investment in our lives. Then I realized that it does not work that way. None of us can fully pay it back, but we can pay it forward. Some years ago, it occurred to me that I could honor and bless my friends by becoming a more Christlike and fruitful servant. I know that at the Judgment Seat they will have their share in the reward, not only for what God had done for, in, and through us, but also for what those we have influenced will do for Him, and so on until Jesus returns.

I am afraid we tend to take our privileges for granted. Linda and I have been taught, blessed, and encouraged by an innumerable company of people. However, I cannot help but think that those early years were crucial in setting our direction and grounding us in the fundamentals of Christian living. I wonder, are there young believers that you could invite into your home and your life? Is there someone who needs to hear what the Lord has taught you and to see the trial and growth of your faith so that they can emulate it? If the Holy Spirit is to respond to the prayer that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into His harvest, there will need to be an army of people who love God and who are prepared to invest in future workers and leaders. If you will allow God to use you in this way, you will not lose your reward.

David Shumate and his wife Linda serve at International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona, where he is the academic dean, and where she works in recruitment and mentoring. They have six children and twelve grandchildren.



Editor’s note: While this FrontLine issue was in production, Sherrill unexpectedly went home to be with the Lord. We will miss her, but we are thankful that she was able to see a draft of this article before her passing.



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It Takes a Church to Prepare a Pastor:

I winced as I had heard a pastor say, “I don’t have time to have young men training with me in the ministry. I’m too busy doing the ministry, and our church has too much going on to also have to teach guys how to do the ministry!” I responded negatively for three reasons. First, the Bible gives clear evidence that the local church is the premiere institution for identifying and training the future leaders of the church.¹ It is a predominant topic of the New Testament. A church that is failing in this area is failing to do something God specifically called it to do.

Second, the pastor’s statement grieved me because a church that is not identifying and training the next generation of leaders misses the joy of watching God work in the lives of young people. It is precious to see God choose, call, and equip a future pastor or missionary and to know that He used a local church in that process.

Third, I responded in sadness to the statement because a church that does not invest in the next generation will probably not have future leaders to carry the ministry forward. As a pastor in California, I regularly encounter churches in the West who are either without pastors or whose pastor is nearing retirement and has no one within the body ready to take up his mantle.

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I thank the Lord that I am the product of a church that *did* invest in the next generation. Each day, I see the fruit of their investment in my life as I serve the Lord

in the ministry to which He has called me. Although I was raised in a Christian home, I was not saved until I was eighteen years old. I still remember the day when a small group of businessmen from the church our family attended sat me down and over the span of two hours pled with me to consider my ways and come to Christ. Though I left that night angry at them and at the church they represented, I could not get away from the fact that a group of laymen, who were not pastors, had cared enough about me to organize that meeting and move out of their comfort zone to confront a teen with the gospel. I was not saved that night, but after a few months of really bad decisions and the Holy Spirit’s relentless conviction, I came to Christ.

As a new Christian, I was immature, spiritually messy, and plagued by bad habits that God had to break. I did not look much like a future pastor at that time, but God used the whole church to work in my life and form me into the man He wanted me to be. In the pulpit, my pastor was a master of teaching the Bible and articulating its principles in a way a young Christian could put them into practice. In many respects, his primary ministry to me was teaching me how to preach by his example. While he ministered to me from the pulpit, those businessmen and others in the congregation continued to take the time to invest in me personally, with the hope of seeing me grow in Christ and one day serve Him with my life. My church was a factory for producing well-equipped

young people to do the work of the ministry, and it was the launching pad for the ministry I do today. I’m eternally grateful for all that they did in my life.

As I look back and consider those formative years, I see four practical things that those men and our local church congregation did to assist me in getting into the ministry.

Though I was young and immature, the congregation patiently allowed me to minister. My freshman year of college, I heard an announcement from the pulpit that our church needed a Sunday school teacher for first graders. Though I had never taught before or had any kind of children’s ministry training, I volunteered for the job; and the church gave me the opportunity to teach the class. As much as I wanted to help the children learn, I was really learning from them. They were gracious in allowing me to teach them, but the real grace came from their parents who entrusted their children to me each Sunday.

Even now I see the benefit of my having had the privilege of teaching those first graders. I periodically preach a message to teens from Colossians 1 that I originally crafted for that first-grade Sunday school class. Who would have thought that a rusty presentation of Colossians 1 to a group of first graders would develop into a message that I have now preached over fifty times at camps, chapels, and youth group gatherings!

When I ministered at my church, the congregation encouraged me and said things that cast a vision for me of ways that

A Personal Testimony

God could use me in future ministry. The first sermon I preached was terrible. I used an illustration about bubble gum, I took a verse out of context, and I delivered the message with rapid speed and a quaking voice. Though I look back on that message with embarrassment, I regularly remember the encouragement that followed it. A sweet elderly couple approached me immediately after the service was over and shared with me that they could certainly see me one day pastoring and preaching every Sunday. Throughout my college years, those kinds of encouraging words kept coming my way. People would tell me specific things they were seeing God doing in me and what they imagined God could one day do through me.

In fact, I am ministering in California today largely because a godly man planted the seed in my mind that, based on how God had created me, he could see me doing a neat work in California one day. It was his words that nudged me to consider the mission field in which I now serve.

The congregation had members who financially invested in me in ways that fueled my continued direction in ministry. I do not have the stories that some college students have of receiving money in their mailbox to help with tuition. God never chose to provide for me in that way, but I do have a story about the man who bought my plane ticket so I could work at a Christian camp one summer. I have the story of a family that gave me cash for fuel in my truck to enable me to drive

across the country from South Carolina to California to the church where I did my summer internship. I have the stories of men who gave me side jobs throughout college to help me pay my school bill and finish debt free. Though none of the gifts of money were large gifts of thousands of dollars, all were valuable gifts given with love and at specific times for very specific reasons to help me serve the Lord. Those gifts were financial investments that are still reaping fruit to this day.

The congregation had members that continued to encourage me even after I moved and began to minister thousands of miles away. One of those members was Joel Korver. He wasn't a pastor or a deacon, but a godly businessman who played a significant role in my life. In fact, he was one of the primary voices of witness that led to my salvation. He was the man who suggested I go to California and serve the Lord. He was one of the men who gave me side jobs to help me get through college. Most of all, he was the one who repeatedly checked on me over the years to make sure I was still serving the Lord faithfully.

The last time I saw Joel Korver was on a Sunday when he surprised me by showing up in the back of the church I pastor. He told me that afternoon that he had driven through the night to get to my church that Sunday morning because he wanted to join our family for lunch so he could make sure we were okay and were still faithfully serving the Lord. That afternoon we laughed, prayed, and praised the Lord together.

What an encouragement it was to me to be reminded that someone was still cheering for me to do right and serve the Lord. Joel is now with the Lord, but his influence and investment live on in me and in the lives of others to whom he ministered. I am eternally grateful to God both for Joel's investment in me before I went into the ministry and for his specific care for me through the years after I went into the ministry.

My pastor during those formative years helped me much with all four of the things I listed above. He was ultimately the one who allowed me to minister, he gave me verbal encouragement, he invested in me while I was sitting in his congregation, and he encouraged me to stay faithful after I moved away. But it was the congregation, working alongside my pastor, who truly made the investment effective. May God help members of other church congregations across our country assist pastors in the training and development of the next generation of church leaders.

Ron Perry pastors Faith Baptist Church in Folsom, California. He has ministered in California for the last twenty-five years with his wife Beneth. In addition to pastoring, he serves as a chaplain for the Folsom Police Department and loves investing in his community for the sake of the gospel.



¹ The church recognized and called leaders (Acts 13:1-3). The church equips leaders for ministry service (2 Tim. 2:2; Eph. 4:11-12; Phil. 2:22).

How God Uses His People to Prepare Future Generations to Minister

Every church that functions according to God's design affects the families who attend and inspires and helps them to fulfill the Great Commission. As they spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, they impact their neighbors and their world.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells His disciples that they will testify of Him, starting in Jerusalem then extending into the surrounding areas until the whole earth has heard. But first they were to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit's power. In Acts 2:42, we read of the gathering of the first church after Pentecost and the practices of these early believers. These included a steadfast commitment to the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. This first church grew greatly, and its members had incredible impact on their communities, even amid cultural resistance and harsh persecution. Bible-believing churches continue this work in simple obedience to the same commission of Christ empowered by the same Spirit of God.

In Minnesota a pastor, moved by the urgency of the gospel, visited houses near the church to share the gospel with unbelievers and to invite believers to join their fellowship. He knocked on our family's door and invited us to church. This pastor began to disciple my father, and

the church did the same with our whole family. Because of a job promotion, our family moved to Arizona only two short years later, but those years left an indelible mark on my parents, and our family was well prepared for the next opportunities of service to God and for the challenges of life in the West. When that pastor began discipling my father, he could not have known how my father would be used of God in the West. He became a deacon and an Awana commander, and his wife became a Sparks director. Together they cared for and taught a Sunday School class for one-year-olds, and later he became the business manager of their thriving church. His two very young sons, whom the pastor met that day in Minnesota, grew up to serve in several ministries and are now pastors in their home church in Arizona. One grandson was called into pastoral ministry. The story is much bigger than can be told here, and many more names and demonstrations of God's grace could be included.

How did a knock on a door lead to a spiritual harvest in that family and in those to whom they have ministered? What did the believers in that Minnesota church do to prepare and equip my whole family to serve God? What does this practical ministry look like today?

The apostle Peter, writing to the persecuted church scattered abroad, begins with a reminder that Christ suffered (1 Pet. 4:1) to free us from sin and that we are no longer to be ruled by sin but to live for the will of God. He then, in 1 Peter 4:7–11, instructs the believers on the manner and the process of discipling and equipping believers in the church. This passage gives us a pattern for creating an atmosphere that nurtures a generation of future leaders.

AN ATMOSPHERE OF URGENCY

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers
(1 Pet. 4:7, NKJV).

Believers are to live with urgency, keeping the imminent return of the Lord in mind. Since we know the end is coming soon, we must teach the doctrines of Scripture and apply them to present living—to life in whatever culture we are immersed in. This is crucial preparation for the next generation. They must learn to look to Scripture for the foundation of every decision and motivation.

We must teach the importance of a prayer-filled life and demonstrate it in conduct that springs from sober living and sound judgment. Such a life will be distinct from the world because it reflects true fellowship with God and the work of the Spirit

of God in a person's life. Do you remember how you learned to pray? Can you recall the first time you realized that the way you pray changes the way you live? One of our church members, when hearing a person tell of a difficulty or a need, would immediately and without warning move directly into prayer, asking God to assist and meet that need. He did this in person, on the phone, or even texting. This effective way of praying has become regular practice for me.

AN ATMOSPHERE OF FERVENT LOVE

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." (1 Pet. 4:8, NKJV)

Offer the grace of fervent love to each other, even when forgiveness and restoration from sin is necessary. There are different ways to express love. The Bible's description of love stands in stark contrast to the way our culture understands and shows love. Fervent love answers unkind and even sinful actions with grace-filled responses, extending forgiveness and seeking the restoration of fractured relationships. Experiencing how love covers a multitude of sins is a critical lesson on the power of life in Christ.

AN ATMOSPHERE OF HOSPITALITY

Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. (1 Pet. 4:9, NKJV)

Demonstrate hospitality with a good attitude, even when it is inconvenient and difficult. Hospitality is one of the distinguishing characteristics of believers. In the church it is a qualification for leadership (Titus 1:8). Hospitality is a demonstration

of Christlike love and is one of the best ways to reach out to those in need, both inside and outside the family of God. Displaying hospitality in a variety of situations is a crucial example and expression of the church. What is hospitality? One person in our church described hospitality as the art of setting people around you at ease. It also could be described as the act of meeting a need without drawing attention to yourself. Hospitality is not always obvious because its actions are intentionally kept private or hidden.

AN ATMOSPHERE OF SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Pet. 4:10, NKJV)

Each member must act as a steward of the gift(s) God has given him for the good of the other members. Each believer in Christ has been given at least one gift, and these gifted abilities, even skills, are to be used in the body of Christ for the edification and equipping of the saints. These abilities come in a variety of forms and are to be used to accomplish God's purposes and for His glory that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:11)

Peter reveals two important dynamics. As the church ministered to my family and

prepared us to fulfill the purposes of God, there were two ways they accomplished the tasks of discipleship and equipping for ministry—speaking and serving. Insightfully, the apostle is explicit about what makes speaking faithful—when it is sharing God's perspective and teaching. Likewise, serving is made possible, profitable, and sustainable when it is done in the power God provides. The purpose of both speaking and serving gifts is that God might be glorified in all things.

In this passage Peter teaches the distinctive values of a biblically founded and spiritually effective church culture. This culture includes a distinct language, spoken and taught through common vocabulary and usage, defined and demonstrated by our moment-by-moment example. Speak and act, teach and demonstrate, say and serve—as we multiply these simple forms of communications, we teach truth and prepare one another to give an answer for the hope that lies within us.

The community of believers that consistently manifests these characteristics will see the fruits of their faithfulness extend over many generations. The seeds sown by ministry will have surprising results, both impacting their immediate community and bearing fruit well into eternity.

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



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Mentor the Mentors: A True Call to Ministry

An alarm has sounded in our American culture—some call it the “boy crisis.” Boys (adolescent males, aged 12–18) are growing up in a world that is radically different from that of their fathers and grandfathers. Academic, emotional, physical, and spiritual struggles are more than common. As a result, within our congregations, too many young men have drifted into withdrawal, alienation, or shallow escapes. A contributing factor to this crisis is fatherlessness, which includes not only the physically absent father, but also the distracted and uncertain father who spiritually abandons his son, leaving him to wander through adolescence without intentional guidance.

It is easy to blame fathers for this crisis, but what they need is not another guilt-inducing lecture or quick-fix book. What they need is godly mentors—spiritually mature men, especially pastors, who respond to this need and begin to proactively, purposefully, and passionately mentor the mentors.

MENTORING: LIFE TOUCHING LIFE

Mentoring cannot be rushed or reduced to quick interactions—there is no such thing as “drive-by mentoring.” What boys and fathers need is life upon life interaction: pastors, grandfathers, and mature men walking alongside families in intentional, purposeful ways. Sometimes this means a brother standing with his sister as she raises a boy alone. It may be a grandfather, in the resources of his later years, investing in a young father or directly in a grandson for eternal purposes.

Pastors, in particular, must take up this calling. Addressing this crisis may mean that their task is to walk with the fathers of their congregation, equipping them to



guide their sons into genuine discipleship. Jesus Himself modeled this kind of mentoring—not through teaching alone, but by inviting His disciples into His daily life. True mentoring is always personal, always relational. Paul’s charges in Ephesians 4:12 and 2 Timothy 2:2 reinforce this reality: the commands to equip the saints, entrust truth to faithful men, and multiply the work of the ministry are always relational.

Our churches, of all places, should be fertile ground where fathers are cultivated, strengthened, and equipped to disciple their sons. The following six guideposts mark out that pathway, each

serving as a vital marker in raising boys for the glory of God.

RIGHTEOUSNESS: CHANGED BY GOD, CALLED TO WALK WITH GOD

The foundation of true manhood is righteousness—a righteousness that comes only by accepting Jesus’ gracious and vicarious sacrifice and is lived out in daily obedience. Pastors must continually remind fathers that the greatest need of their sons is not success or comfort but a father who knows, loves, and walks with God. Since we are His, we therefore walk with Him.

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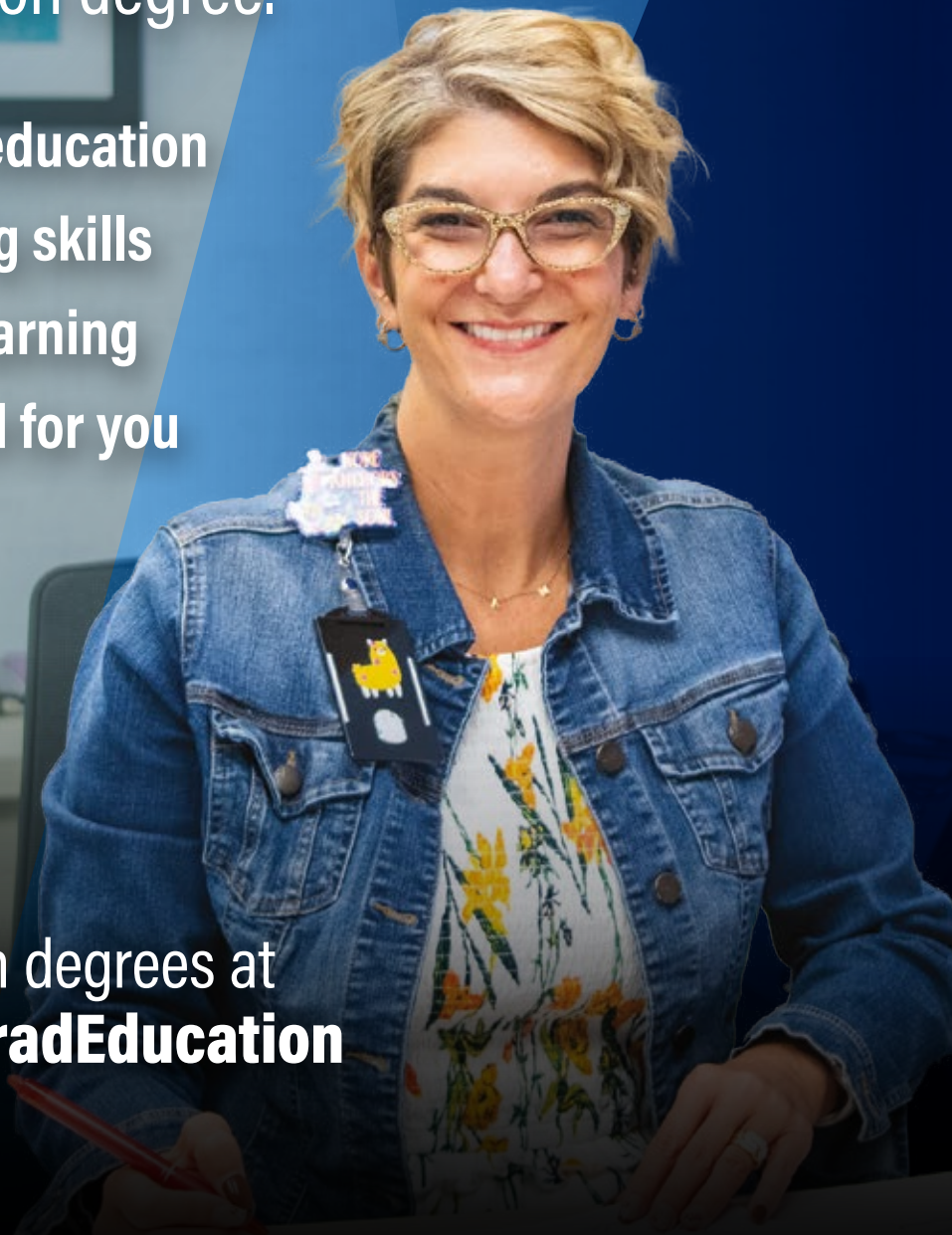
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Practically, this may mean training fathers in how to lead family worship, how to make wise choices in entertainment, how to show mercy in correction, how to manage their time and resources effectively, or even how to admit to failure with humility. Fathers must embody genuine devotion, not cold legalism, walking in the Spirit and displaying the joyful outworking of their salvation. A boy whose father stands firm in faith sees with his own eyes what it means to be both a child of God and a man of God.

RELATIONSHIP: SONS NEED FATHERS, FATHERS NEED PASTORS

Godly manhood is best learned relationally, side by side and shoulder to shoulder. Believers are commanded to look not only to their own interests but also to the interests of others (Phil. 2:4). Fathers need reminders to enter their sons' world, especially when the interests of their sons differ from their own.

Pastors can model this relational discipleship by intentionally building relationships with all the fathers in their congregation. Genuine hospitality—sharing a life, a meal, a struggle, and a joy in genuine transparency—models what it looks like to invest deeply and to care intentionally for others.

Relationships may need to be facilitated through pastor-led, father-son activities such as camping trips, service projects, musical events, or wilderness hikes. Daily opportunities, such as sharing an exercise routine, completing household projects, participating in the choir together, or even playing a simple two-player game, can strengthen the relational bond between fathers and sons. Manhood matures when cultivated in the soil of godly relationships, watered by example, and rooted in Christ.

rites of passage: MARKING THE transition to manhood

Across history, cultures have marked the transition from boyhood to manhood with rites of passage—clear signposts that say, “You are no longer a child. You are now on the path to becoming a man.” Within a



Christian context, such passages provide fathers and sons with both direction and motivation.

This passage should be marked by intentional events where a mother steps back from her primary discipling role, affirms her son's growth, and transfers a greater leadership role to the father. The father, in turn, takes that lead—training his son in healthy habits, mindful relationships, responsible academics, faithful practices, and the wise stewardship of his money, his time, and his personal devotion to God.

Pastors can prepare fathers for this passage in advance. A “B.A.M.” (Becoming a Man) Seminar, weekend session, or multiple-week group partnership designed for dads with boys approaching the age of ten or eleven could provide practical instruction and examples for this life change.

The actual passage event might take the form of an annual retreat that includes a formal dinner or a wilderness trip—an event where boys hear God's Word and receive counsel from older men, while completing an in-depth study of God's Word—that

anchors the moment both in a relationship and in biblical truth. The intentional passage event teaches boys that manhood is purposeful, honorable, and worth striving for.

responsibility: FAITHFUL EXECUTION AMID CHALLENGES

Maturity—especially male maturity—also develops through responsibility.

Boys learn manhood first by example—when they see their fathers faithfully providing, serving, and persevering. Watching Dad work diligently, pay bills, help at church, or sacrificially serve a neighbor teaches that manhood looks a lot like the faithful execution of small tasks, even amid challenges.

Pastors can encourage this by privately affirming fathers who demonstrate this and publicly celebrating them. As the saying goes, “you get what you honor.” Public acknowledgment of faithful responsibility inspires others to follow.

Second, boys learn manhood through practice. When boys are entrusted with real responsibility, such as caring for siblings, maintaining expensive equipment, starting a small business, solving a complex community problem, or faithfully performing a repetitive task, they respond and grow. Real responsibility in real-life scenarios develops real men.

LET US RISE AS MENTORS OF MENTORS, WALKING WITH FATHERS WHO WALK WITH THEIR SONS AS WE ALL FOLLOW CHRIST.

Continued on page 27

FRONTLINE



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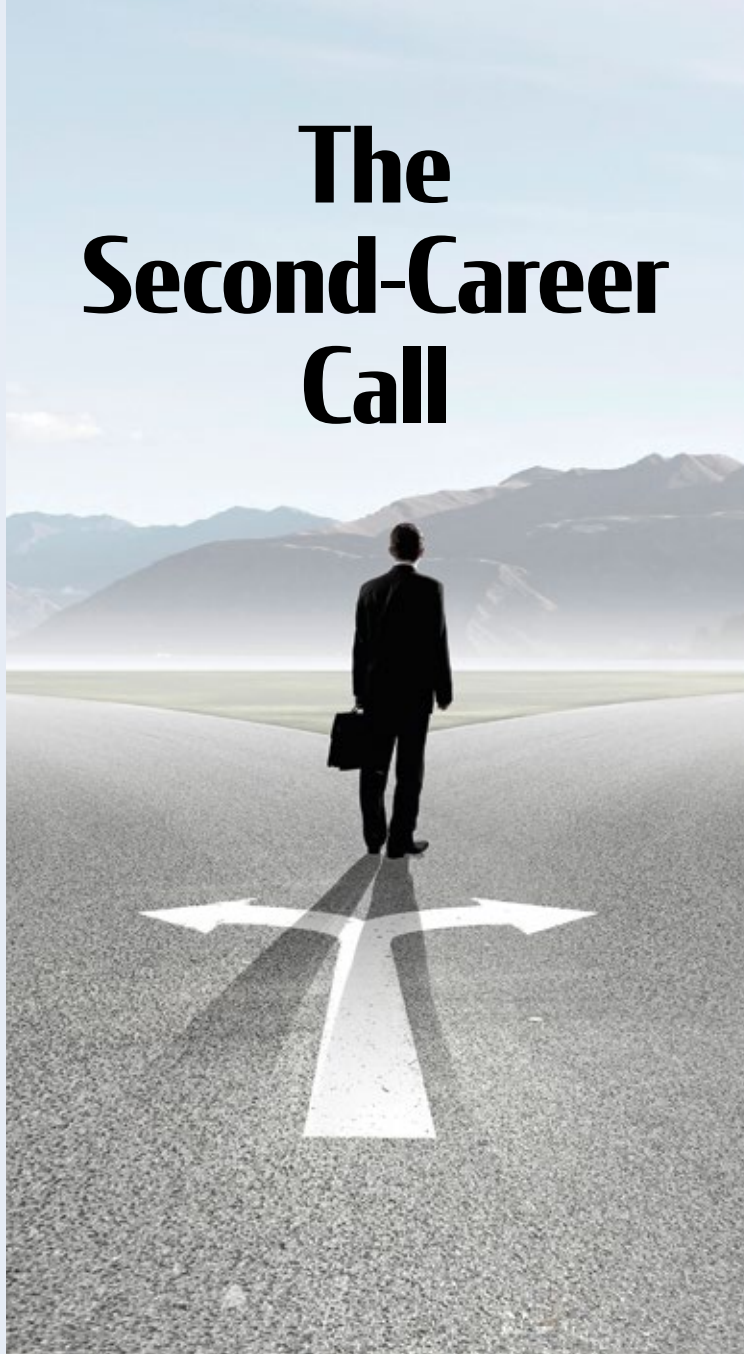
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Matt Klassen

The Second-Career Call



I cannot recall the exact date when I first felt the call into full-time ministry, but I do clearly remember the event that sparked it. It was a busy weekend at the movie theater complex I managed. I was in my office working on the computer when a panicked call came over the radio from one of the ushers, stating there was a medical emergency in Auditorium #7.

I shot out of my chair and headed to what I knew was a sold-out auditorium of about 270 people. When I arrived, it was clear who needed help. A teenage girl was having severe convulsions in her chair. One of my associate managers, who had followed me, was already on the phone with a 911 operator. I quickly radioed for the movie to be stopped as we attempted to help this poor family.

Seeing this girl helpless in her seizures was unsettling, but what remains most seared in my mind is the picture of her family. The girl's father was standing on the stairway, staring at his daughter. He made no effort to comfort his wife, aid his daugh-

ter, or even pray. The mother was hysterical and unable to help. The younger brother reclined in his chair looking irritated and embarrassed. Only the grandmother held the poor convulsing girl.

I rushed up the stairs to the family. Immediately, the mother wrapped me in a hug. As I reassured her that help was coming, two things went through my mind. First, this family's inability to respond with compassion moved me. My second thought was that this family needed Christ. Yes, they needed physical rescue, but it was clear that they were in turmoil. They needed the Savior!

In minutes, the paramedics arrived and handled the situation. Before I could

connect with the family, they and their daughter were rushed to the hospital. I never got to tell them that I was going to pray for them, that I would be happy to help them beyond the walls of the theater, and that there was hope for their family in Christ. Instead, I went back to my office and cried. I felt I could only go

so far to help them in my present role, and I was feeling the burden to do more. In that moment I knew God was calling me to something new.

At the time, I didn't know what to do with this burden. Several obstacles came to mind. The first was training. My wife and I were saved in our mid-twenties, and we began attending a Bible-preaching church. Many people came alongside to mentor and disciple us, but I had never received any formal ministry training. In my mind, that was a significant obstacle.

The second obstacle was finances. I started as a general manager when I was twenty years old. God had provided generously for our family through that career. I

BY GOD'S GRACE, I GET TO DO THE VERY THINGS I DELIGHT IN: DISCIPLING OTHERS, TEACHING GOD'S WORD, SERVING OUR CHURCH, AND MINISTERING TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. THAT IS A WONDERFUL PROMOTION. I AM DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR THE WORK THE LORD IS DOING IN ME AND THROUGH ME.

wondered if I could adjust to living on lower wages if God called us to do that.

The third obstacle was location. We loved our church family and the ministry God had allowed us to be part of! I didn't have a desire to go anywhere else; I wanted to remain and serve the Lord. Would we be willing to leave our church family to follow God's call?

Despite these perceived obstacles, I didn't want to ignore what God was doing in my heart. I prayed about these matters, and God answered in some remarkable ways. First, on a drive to a work event, I was on the phone with my pastor friend who is also the president of a Bible college and seminary. I was asking his counsel about a ministry matter that I was facing. During that call, I shared that I felt God was perhaps burdening my heart to leave my career and pursue full-time ministry. I communicated my desire for formal ministry training and wanted to learn more about the time commitment and cost of attending Bible college.

To my surprise, he responded by saying that if I was willing to take that step of faith to serve the Lord, then the Bible college would help me with the cost. I was stunned, grateful, and overwhelmed. It was a generous offer, but more importantly, it seemed to confirm God's calling.

The second answer to prayer came during COVID-19. The theater industry was decimated due to months of stringent isolation requirements. My employer had to make drastic furloughs. I was one of the managers they kept on. Many of my colleagues were not as fortunate. However, my company reduced our salaries by forty percent. It was a huge blow, and I had no idea how we would get by as a family. To add to the challenge, my pay cut was just slightly less than what was required to qualify for government unemployment assistance. It was a stressful period.

Yet, I would not trade that season of testing for anything, because God answered again. He uniquely met all our needs each month in creative ways. We received unexpected gifts from our church family, a payout we had forgotten about, a government assistance check I had not applied for, and even a large gift from a Christian neighbor we did not often interact with. Each came exactly when it was needed. I left that season knowing God would take care of us in every season. He helped my weak faith by showing His tremendous love for us in meeting our every need.

Finally, God gave us an opportunity for full-time ministry. Not too long after returning to a post-pandemic work schedule, a position opened at our church. This was the final obstacle in my mind, and God removed it. I asked my pastor if he would consider me for the role before seeking an outside candidate. To my delight, he agreed, and we began the process of exploring and working through the next steps.

A few years ago, I left my career of twenty-five years and began my employment at the church as "Ministry Manager." I now function much like an executive pastor. I have been given the opportunity to teach, disciple, train, and help with the daily needs of our ministry. And I have loved every day of my job, even the hard ones. While working full-time at the church, I am also working to obtain theological education. By God's grace and the generosity of others, He is equipping and growing me. My church has willingly invested in me by allowing me to attend school during a portion of my work hours.

Never in my wildest imagination would I have envisioned this course for my life. I see the hand of God in all of it and marvel. At the lowest point of worry in our family's life, these verses from Psalm 23 became very precious to me:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

The knowledge that the Lord Himself is my Shepherd who leads me both in valleys of shadow and beside the still waters is an ever-present comfort. I would never have thought, at age forty-five, that I would leave my career in management for something new and wonderfully unfamiliar.

Yet the change has been amazing. I get a front-row seat to see God at work in so many ways. By God's grace, I get to do the very things I delight in: discipling others, teaching God's Word, serving our church, and ministering to the needs of others. That is a wonderful promotion. I am deeply grateful for the work the Lord is doing in me and through me. Not everyone is called into vocational ministry, but all who belong to Christ are called into full-time service for our King. I am very grateful for the opportunity to do this as my livelihood.

I recognize there may be someone reading this article who is considering giving his life to full-time ministry. You might even be thinking about the ministry as a second career. Perhaps, like me, you see the obstacles and wonder if God can make a way. Let me encourage you with a passage the Lord recently impressed on me:

And the LORD said unto Abraham, "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Gen. 18:13-14)

Clearly, nothing is too difficult for our God. If He is calling us to serve Him with our lives, He can and will make a way.

Matt Klassen serves as ministry manager at Faith Baptist Church in Folsom, California, while also pursuing part-time studies through International Baptist College and Seminary. He and his wife, Kua, have been married for 25 years and are blessed with two children, Samantha and Noah.



FRONTLINE

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News From All Over

George Binoka accepted the call to become the senior pastor at Berean Baptist Church of San Tan Valley in Arizona. When the church began its search for a new senior pastor in July, God, in His grace, immediately brought to their thoughts George Binoka and his wife



Lexie, who were seeking guidance from God about their next steps and considering church planting. George, a graduate of IBCS with both BA and MDiv degrees, had a successful ministry in Kenya, planting a South Sudanese church under missionary Mike Mestler. This ministry was unexpectedly cut short due to a medical emergency. Upon returning to America, George became an effective outreach pastor for Northwest Valley Baptist Church in Glendale, Arizona, for three years. God is truly good; a process that typically spans a few years was completed in just three months!



Nathan Dupont was installed as pastor of Westside Baptist Church of Eugene, Oregon, on September 26, 2025. He previously served as the assistant pastor of First Baptist Church in Gallipolis, Ohio. His wife is Christina (Fisher) and their children are Elizabeth, Hannah, Lydia,

and Andrew. Westside had been without a pastor for nearly two years. During that time, GFA Missions Interim Pastor Kenneth Jackson served at Westside for thirteen months. Pastor Jackson and GFA Interim Director Marshall Fant both participated in the installation service.



Ken Jackson, Nathan and Christina Dupont, Marshall Fant

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SOUND WORDS

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

FIRST PARTAKER

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

Praying *In the Spirit* Effectually Enabled

My subject is a noble one and I trust the Lord put it in my heart to choose it, and did not leave me to prosecute it, by my own light, or in my own spirit.

John Newton

The other morning I was out walking round an athletic complex near our home and found myself desperate for the Lord to hear. Most Christians, perhaps especially most pastors and missionaries, know painfully such times.

In such hours, it is not unusual to be almost frantic to be certain that we are praying aright. Perhaps it was this craving for assurance that the great apostle Paul had in mind when he concluded his exhortations about withstanding spiritual warfare with the admonition to pray *in the Spirit* (Eph. 6:18). We are to do this, he said, *at all times*. How much more when a particular time is overwhelmingly troubling (*I am so troubled that I cannot speak* [Ps. 77:4])?

Such a soul condition can be entirely Christlike (*He began to be distressed and troubled* [Mark 14:33, NASB]). But if it actually is Christlike (not carnal self-absorption), one sure evidence will be that also, like Christ, we will be fixated on pouring out our soul to just one Ear alone.

The contention of this short series has been that it is entirely possible to be conscious that we are doing this *in the Spirit*; that is, to know it confidently. Repeated experiences will confirm that this is not only possible,

but almost always essential to any renewing of our sense of well-being.

There are at least four ways of assessing ourselves about this. The first three can be summarized as (1) praying as He is, (2) praying as He does, and (3) praying at His prompting.

First, to pray *as He is* means that we ourselves are of the Spirit's identifying character. Over ninety times He is characterized in Scripture as being *holy*. Do we want to be certain that we are praying *in Him*? *As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy* (1 Pet. 1:15). *Pray . . . lifting up holy hands* (1 Tim. 2:8).

In a chapter entitled, “The Life that Can Pray,” Andrew Murray illustrated the necessity of this.

Here on earth the influence of one who asks a favour for others depends entirely on his character, and the relationship he bears to him with whom he is interceding. It is what he is that gives weight to what he asks. It is no otherwise with God. Our power in prayer depends upon our life.¹

But have we sinned? Well, if so, have we confessed it genuinely, as David did?

I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Ps. 32:5, NKJV)

Even in the aftermath of the sin which had been his greatest, and when, being severely chastened, he was at his lowest point (see the superscription to Psalm 3), David could still testify, *I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill* (Ps. 3:4). So being holy, in order to pray, isn't to be sinless. It is, however, to deal with our sin in the right way.

INSIDE

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

Second, to pray *in the Spirit* is to pray *as He does*. The previous installment of this article explained this as meaning to pray in strict accordance with God's will, just as the Spirit Himself does (Rom. 8:26–27). If we respond, *But what is God's will?*, the answer is, first, whatever the Holy Spirit has inscripturated in our Bibles. The words that the Holy Spirit has breathed out in the Scripture are the very essence of the Father's will.

Christ taught this factor of praying scriptural prayers as being a foremost condition to answers. *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you* (John 15:7). There are, of course, many things about which we pray that are not directly addressed by Scripture. In these cases, to pray as the Spirit does is to pray as the Son of God did in Gethsemane. He made His own desires known to the Father, but He concluded with, *Not my will, but thine be done*.

There are external influences that distract and discourage our praying. Unquestionably, some are intensely demonic. Others are merely circumstantial. There's no need to state them here. We all have our own awareness of such things, which sometimes include the very people for whom we wish to find time to pray. It's comforting to read that the Lord Himself faced this same ironic hindrance.

Third, to pray *in the Spirit* is to pray *at His prompting*. Perhaps “prompting” is far too weak a word. I trust that it is not an entirely wrong one. At best it can only begin to describe the experience for which the Scripture uses the word *led* (*led of the Spirit*, Gal. 5:18; *as many as are led by the Spirit of God*, Rom. 8:14).

This leading is sometimes clearly the direct result of something outside us that has brought prayer to our mind: preaching, reading, or fellowshiping. But often this leading is an internal inclination that can't be explained by any apparent external influence. We must beware of dismissing such experiences out of an appropriate but sometimes misapplied zeal to safeguard the uniqueness of the miracle of revelation. Internal, Spiritual leading isn't revelatory in any miraculous sense. It is, however, as supernatural as any of the Spirit's other operations within the life of a believer.

Either way, we're taught that those who are *led by the Spirit* display it by their *walk in the Spirit* (Gal. 5:16). Can anyone doubt that the throne of grace is **the foremost place** to which a Spirit-filled walk would lead day by day, even hour by hour? When we walk into God's presence by prayer, according to this leading, this

prompting, can we doubt that this is an aspect of what it means to pray *in the Spirit*? How careful, then, we should be not to quench Him by treating these promptings indifferently.

These first three conditions to praying *in the Spirit*, then, fall into the categories of (1) character, (2) content, and (3) commencement. There is now a **final** condition which must come into operation as soon as we begin to pray. It is described in Ephesians 3:16 as being *strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man* (NASB).

This statement occurs in Paul's relating to the Ephesians various spiritual experiences about which he prayed for them. Each requires the very same empowering by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he prayed for it first. It is the necessary means to the others.

Although in this passage Paul doesn't include prayer as one of these experiences requiring this Spiritual empowering, who can question but that it is? Surely we realize (from bitter experience?) that we no more have self-ability to pray effectually than we have to do anything else Godward. Whether it is teaching or exhorting or any other ministry, it requires *the ability* (strength) *which God giveth* (1 Pet. 4:11) by His Spirit. Joel Beeke states it simply: *All the things of Christ are ours only by the Spirit. . . . If we listed every aspect of the Christian life, beside each item we could add, “by the Spirit.”*²

This necessary connection between the Holy Spirit's influences and our praying rightly is stated explicitly in Ephesians 5:18–20. *Be filled with the Spirit . . . giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Note the experiential line drawn straight from being *filled with the Spirit* to our *giving thanks always*. The latter is the enabled, empowered result of the former.

It is also confirmatory of this point that the third Person of the Godhead is called *the Spirit of grace and supplication* (Zech. 12:10, NKJV). He is the Source, the Energizer, the effectual Enabler of true (as opposed to merely *formal*) supplication. Or, for further confirmation, give full weight to Paul's description of us as those *who worship God in the Spirit* (not *spirit*, but *Spirit*;³ Phil. 3:3, NKJV). We worship *by the Spirit*—that is, *by His enabling, by His enlivening power*.

To restate the issue I'm raising, one of the primary ways that we can be assured that we are praying *in the Spirit* is when we are praying *by His enabling*. This is the fourth scriptural factor of praying *in the Spirit*. We pray in the Spirit when we pray *as He is, as He does, at His prompting, and by His enabling*. Undoubtedly, a case could be made for one or two additional considerations (such as, *for His ends*), but I'd suggest that these four cover most of the ground.

So I'd like to entertain two questions naturally raised by this last factor, praying *by His enabling*. The first is a *why* question, the second a *what*.

Why is it necessary for us to be Spiritually enabled to pray? Actually, it might seem unnecessary to ask this. *Surely*, we might say, *every Christian knows the answer*. But I think it's a helpful question to explore. Answering it can be one of the most powerful ways of really impressing down into our consciousness what heretofore we may be confessing only superficially, or even by hearsay alone.

Among other considerations, the answer to which I most want to draw attention is one which it seems we really learn only through many disappointing defeats. Andrew Murray wrote,

To speak specially of the lack of prayer, and the desire of living a fuller prayer-life . . . we have so often resolved to pray more and better, and have failed. . . . Our prayers, instead of being a joy and a strength, are a source of continual self-condemnation and doubt.⁴

Repeated failure. Failure despite many resolutions. John Newton wrote to another minister of this vexing experience, confessing to his *unaccountable backwardness to pray*. He said that he could *write, or read, or converse . . . with a ready will*. But when it came to praying, *my carnal heart is apt to start from it*.⁵

Why don't we pray as we want to? As we feel so deeply convinced and convicted that we should? As we so repeatedly resolve to do?

There are external influences that distract and discourage our praying. Unquestionably, some are intensely demonic. Others are merely circumstantial. There's no need to state them here. We all have our own awareness of such things, which sometimes include the very people for whom we wish to find time to pray. It's comforting to read that the Lord Himself faced this same ironic hindrance.

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, *All men seek for thee*. (Mark 1:35–37)

But our greatest problem is one which we easily overlook. Newton explained it this way: *Prayer is more spiritual and inward than any of these* (writing, reading, fellowshiping, etc.). *The more spiritual any duty is, the more my carnal heart is apt to start from it*. John Owen had exposed this phenomenon previously in his writings on the Holy Spirit. Even though we are unquestionably Christians, he said, when we resolve to approach God in prayer, *there is a secret alienation still working in us from all duties of immediate communion with him*.⁶

In other words, the disinclination to pray is to be explained, first, in terms of the teaching of Romans 7:21—*When I would do good, evil is present with me* (“when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand,” ESV). This is unquestionably the very taproot of all our struggles to pray. If *evil lies close at hand* when we try to do any spiritual good whatsoever, how much

more when the good we want to do is, in Newton's words, *more spiritual and inward* than anything else that we do in God's service?

We've come, then, back full circle to the context of our foundational text for praying *in the Spirit* (Eph. 6:18). That context is what Paul explains about the spiritual nature of our warfare (vv. 11–17). However, what his explanation in Ephesians 6 doesn't include, but which Romans 7 adds, is that the first and most primal reality is that this spiritual warfare isn't with any evil outside ourselves. It *is* our self.

We don't always recognize the manifestations of this internal, spiritual warfare. James Ussher (whose dates for Scripture chronology sometimes were printed in Bibles) listed some of the more subtle ways in which our sinful self opposes our efforts to pray: *roving imaginations, inordinate affections, dullness of spirit, weakness of faith, coldness in feeling, faintness in asking, weariness in waiting, too much passion in our own matters, and too little compassion in other men's miseries*.⁷

Or look at Peter, James, and John in the garden that night. They were asked to watch with their Lord. But He found them overcome by their own disposition, *sleeping for sorrow* (Luke 22:45).

Only one power is able to overcome all these internal hindrances: the almighty power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16–17). 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 conduct and influence of those graces which are to be exercised therein. This some call the “grace of prayer” that is given us by the Holy Ghost.⁸

Albert Simpson Reitz, a Baptist minister, put our need into song. After a day of prayer conducted by the Evangelical Prayer Union at his Rosehill church, Reitz sat down and penned a text and music that undoubtedly reflected the stirring of his own soul. Some of its most memorable lines are,

Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray. . . .
My weakened will, Lord, Thou canst renew;
My sinful nature Thou canst subdue;
Fill me just now with power anew,
Power to pray and power to do!

Does this not reveal the help it would be to restudy the parable of the Vine (John 15)? Perhaps we have never really understood it. Perhaps we have not yet believed its promise of *much fruit* (v. 8) to those branches whose praying is in conscious dependence for what can be received only from the Vine.

The Spirit's enabling is no less than His transmitting the very life of Christ to His branches. Without this (Him), we can do nothing (v. 5). Though we have often

attempted it, the reality is that we cannot even pray aright apart from Him. But through Him who strengthens us we can do all things (Phil. 4:13), including praying.

Paul does not say, *I can do all things because I am a Christian*. He says, *I can do all things because Christ is strengthening me*. Day by day, hour by hour (*I need Thee every hour!*), at the very time and in the very ways and at our very weakest point, Christ the Vine is imparting His very own resurrection life to us. He is doing so through the agency of the Holy Spirit in whom He has baptized us, with whom He fills us to do all that He asks of us.

There is no other way in which to pray *in the Spirit*. All else may be right—we may be in a state of conscious holiness (as the Spirit Himself is), our words may be the very words of Scripture (the Spirit's words), and we may be praying in response to His leading. But are we consciously *dependent*? Have we prayed to be *able* to pray? Are we, in the very act of prayer, *strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man* (Eph. 3:16, NASB)?

What Spiritual empowering must have been experienced by Anna! *A widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day* (Luke 2:37).

I want to conclude with a second question about the Spirit's enabling us to pray. It is the **What** question: *With what does the Holy Spirit strengthen us for praying?*

It isn't primarily with something physical—something that prevents our falling asleep, upholds us in a certain posture (kneeling, or standing with our hands uplifted to heaven), or energizes us to pray longer. We may request the Spirit's help in any of these, but they aren't our greatest needs.

We need first a much greater faith. This is a highly personal matter, about which each one must examine himself alone. We believe the things that we read in the Bible. We wouldn't be Christians if we didn't. But when it comes to our actually drawing near on the basis of what we read, and asking confidently for the exact things promised, we face the great hindrance of not being entirely persuaded that they will come true for us. For me! For you! Do we not many times need to begin our praying with, *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief* (Mark 9:24)? When He answers, we will then (but only then) experience the enabling to *abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost* (Rom. 15:13).

The answers to the *what* question include also the energizing of the Christlike graces that the Holy Spirit is growing in our hearts. To truly pray *in the Spirit* is to pray in love and joy and peace, and in all the other fruits of the Spirit. Humility, reverence, self-effacement, simplicity, sensitivity—these and more evidence themselves in our demeanor, even in private, when all is Spirit-controlled.

There is also this: praying by the Spirit's enabling also brings strengthened spiritual conceptions. Spiritual-mindedness, spiritual assessment, and spiritual outlook are alive in those moments that the Spirit of God is ministering the things of Christ to us while we pray.

David Brainerd combined a great deal of this in a single diary entry dated July 8, 1744. I include it, not as a benchmark, but as a window into what we may all seek.

Near night, though very weary was enabled to read God's Word with some sweet relish of it, and to pray with affection, fervency, and (I trust) faith: My soul was more sensibly dependent on God than usual. Was watchful, tender, and jealous of my own heart, lest I should admit carelessness and vain thoughts, and grieve the blessed Spirit, so that he should withdraw his sweet, kind, and tender influences. Longed to "depart and be with Christ" [Phil. 1:23], more than at any time of late. My soul was exceedingly united to the saints of ancient times, as well as those now living: especially my soul melted for the society of Elijah and Elisha. Was enabled to cry to God with a child-like spirit, and to continue instant in prayer for some time. Was much enlarged in the sweet duty of intercession: Was enabled to remember great numbers of dear friends, and precious souls, as well as Christ's ministers. Continued in this frame, afraid of every idle thought, till I dropped asleep.⁹

When we begin to understand these things, we realize why it is not the younger (like Brainerd) but the older saints in our churches who are often the very strongest for this work. How utterly misperceiving to think that when Christians grow old they are then so spiritually weak that they can do nothing but pray. Actually, it is the other way round. If their many years have been the Lord's schooling in grace, they are now, finally, strong enough to pray as men ought. It is an encouraging thought. Something high at which to aim.

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¹ Andrew Murray, *The Ministry of Intercession: A Plea for More Prayer* (London, 1898), 55.

² Joel Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology* (Crossway, 2021), 3:51, 53.

³ See explanations and arguments from commentators as denominationally varied as John Eadie, Gordon Fee, Gerald Hawthorne, William Hendriksen, R. C. H. Lenski, H. C. G. Moule, Peter O'Brien, and A. T. Robertson.

⁴ Murray, 81.

⁵ John Newton, "Eight Letters to the Rev. Mr.——," Letter 8, in *Cardiphonia: Or, The Utterance of a Heart* (London, 1781), 2:105.

⁶ John Owen, *Works*, IV:259.

⁷ James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity, or the Sum and Substance of Christian Religion*, 3rd ed. (London, 1648), 349.

⁸ Owen, IV:259.

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd* (Edinburgh, 1765), 121.

More Books for a Deserted Island

A biblical writer said (nearly 3000 years ago!) that “of making many books there is no end” (Ecc. 12:12). He seems to be speaking of life in his day, so what would he say if he lived in our day of not only physical but also digital books? No end is in sight! Nevertheless, I am given the daunting task of selecting just five books to have with me on a deserted island where I am stranded with no prospect of deliverance. I do somehow have with me a Bible, a hymnbook, and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. (Hopefully, my Bible would be an interlinear version containing the Greek and Hebrew as well as the English.) For the five other books, here are my suggestions and the reasoning for them.

As a missionary I cannot imagine being without missionary biographies. Not only do the excellent ones make for fascinating stories, but they have the added element of being true! They describe real men and women with courage, with lives of both excitement and drudgery, of escapes from deadly dangers, of scholarly achievements and simple perseverance, of joys and sorrows, of advances and setbacks in cross-cultural experiences of the best and worst of human activity.

My first choice would be the autobiography *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides*. The recounting of his upbringing in a godly home shows the immense value that kind of background provides for a missionary. His account of the effect his godly father had upon his life is unforgettably heart-warming. He writes about walking six miles with his dad and then their parting as John went off to training and ministry in Glasgow:

The appearance of my father, when we parted—his advice, prayers, and tears—have often, all through life, risen vividly before my mind, and do so now while I am writing, as if it had been an hour ago. In my earlier years particularly, when exposed to many temptations, his parting form rose before me as that of a guardian Angel.*

In the islands of the New Hebrides, Paton exemplified fearless courage and confident faith in the face of numerous threats to his life from violent islanders, the volatile weather of the Pacific, and the isolation of the islands. His undaunted confidence in the Lord’s calling enabled him to endure countless trials and see remarkable fruit that continues to this day.

The second book I would choose is the biography *William Carey*, written by his great-grandson, Samuel Pearce Carey. Carey is rightly considered the father of modern missions. His life inspires in numerous ways, but given his humble beginnings one would never have guessed God would use him so mightily. This poor shoe cobbler faced staggering trials and tests of faith from the time he stirred up his fellow Baptist pastors to begin an

overseas missions effort until the time of his death in Serampore, India. The words on his tomb capture his genuine humility: “A wretched, poor, and helpless worm, On Thy kind arms I fall.” He was regarded as a brilliant linguist, the best non-Indian linguist in India. He was incredibly capable, but he explained his success with the simple statement, “I can plod.” His example of “plodding” through the trials of initial resistance to overseas missions from fellow pastors, poverty during early years in India, a deranged wife who tried to kill him, a fire that destroyed much of the early translation work, and a later schism brought on by younger and unsympathetic new team members, proves his own assessment. I would need that kind of enduring faith if stranded on an island!

To the Golden Shore, a fascinating biography of Adoniram Judson by Courtney Anderson, would be the third book. Considered America’s first official foreign missionary, Judson like Carey lived a story stranger than fiction. I don’t have room to tell about Judson’s conversion, compelling sense of calling, marriage to his first wife Ann and her sustaining him in a Burmese prison only to die shortly after his release, his excessive grief as he carried out a vigil of grief for days beside her grave in the dangerous jungle, his second and third marriages (also blessed and spiritually fruitful in Burma), and his still-in-use Burmese Bible translation.

My fourth book would be something to provide rich, inspiring, and comforting devotional thoughts. Given its format and the practical insights and zealous heart of its author, I would want with me Charles Spurgeon’s *Morning and Evening*. What better way to begin and end a day than reading those warm-hearted musings? The fact that they would last for a year should help keep them fresh.

So far I have chosen much that stirs the heart and arouses the imagination. I would conclude with the choice of a solid book of theology: Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. Comprehensive, well-organized, and written with unusual clarity and focus on personal application, this tome would serve me well for careful, detailed study of all the major doctrines. Those few areas in which I would disagree with his positions would help to keep the mind active.

Finally, I am hoping I can find a way on this island to make a good cup of coffee to enhance my enjoyment of this reading material!

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* John G. Paton, *John G. Paton* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 26.

Repentance

Some time back I was speaking with a fellow believer and challenged him that his concept of repentance was incomplete. His response was, “Give me a Bible verse.” I must confess that I had very little to share in defense of the doctrine of repentance. What can we learn about the related words *repent* and *repentance* in our New Testament?

It is certainly an important term. It is used to summarize the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2, 8, 11). It was a major part of Jesus’ preaching about the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 4:17; Luke 3:3). The twelve took the same message with them on their first preaching journey (Mark 6:12), and after the resurrection, it continued to be central to the apostles’ preaching (Acts 2:38, 3:19; 17:30; 26:20). Repentance is the means of escaping judgment (Luke 10:13–14; 16:30) or condemnation (Luke 11:32). It is how you avoid perishing (Luke 13:3, 5; 2 Pet. 3:9). Our repentance also brings great joy to God (Luke 15:10). Repentance is clearly an important concept.

The change of mind that Scripture primarily deals with is the change that the unbeliever must make. Christ stated plainly that He came to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32).

The Greek verb *metanoō* (μετανοεω) shows up 34 times in the New Testament and is always translated *repent* in the NASB. The noun occurs 22 times with the translation *repentance*. This consistency is also true of other major translations such as the KJV and the ESV, and demonstrates that there is significant overlap between the Greek and the English words. The BDAG Greek lexicon agrees with Webster in defining the word as “to change one’s mind.” This is the reason we find repentance and faith linked so closely (Mark 1:15) or even used interchangeably (Acts 17:30, 34). Repentance involves changing what we believe.

The change of mind that Scripture primarily deals with is the change that the unbeliever must make. Christ stated plainly that He came to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). The preaching of Christ and the apostles made repentance a prerequisite for salvation (Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38). We must change what we think about our deeds in relation to salvation. We all tend to think that our dead works count for something (Heb. 6:1). Only when we repent about that can we come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:25). We must change our minds about who God is and how He is worshiped. Chorazin and Bethsaida were to be judged by God because they would not accept who Jesus was (Matt. 11:20–21). Simon was told to change his mind about the wicked

desire and intent to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:22). Unbelievers are often called to repent of idolatry (Rev. 2:21; 9:20). In the final judgments, men will refuse to change their minds and give God glory (Rev. 16:9). We must also change our minds about what actions are acceptable to God (Acts 8:22; 26:20; Rev. 2:21–22; 9:21; 16:11). When John the Baptist baptized people for repentance, they were baptized *confessing their sins* (Matt. 3:2, 6). John taught that certain behaviors are *in keeping with* repentance (Matt. 3:8; cf. Luke 3:10–14). All this fits nicely with everything that Paul teaches us about our unregenerate minds in Ephesians 4:17–24.

Changing our mind isn’t only a foundational step for becoming a believer (Heb. 6:1), it is a regular part of a believer’s walk. A brother who has sinned should change his mind about that (Luke 17:3) in order to reconcile. Paul was concerned that the believers in Corinth would not change their minds concerning the impurity, immorality, and sensuality that they had practiced in the past (2 Cor. 12:21). In Revelation, the Apostle John gives us several examples of times when a believer must change his mind. The church at Ephesus had left their first love and they were told to repent of that (Rev. 2:5). The believers at Pergamum were told to change their minds about teachings that promoted idolatry and immorality, and about “the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (2:14–16). Christ rebuked the church at Sardis and called her to change her mind about her deeds (3:1–3). The church at Laodicea was called to change their minds about being lukewarm spiritually (3:19). It is clear that Christians can believe in wrong doctrine or have wrong practices and must at times repent.

It is helpful to consider two concrete examples of repentance in the New Testament. The night Jesus was betrayed, Peter famously swore faithfulness to Jesus, claiming to be special even among the twelve (Matt. 26:33–35). When he tragically failed forty verses later, he went out and wept bitterly. Later, Jesus restored him (John 21). In 1 Corinthians, Paul dealt with the church about a brother living in sin (5:1–5) in order to bring that brother to repentance (5:5; cf. Matt. 18:15). It appears that Paul’s instructions were followed and successful, because in his second letter Paul encouraged the believers to forgive and comfort the one lest he be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (2 Cor. 2:7). We should note from these two examples the sorrow that each man experienced. There is such a thing as false repentance (Heb. 6:6; 12:17). A genuine change of mind is produced only by godly sorrow over sin (2 Cor. 7:10). If we cannot mourn, we will never be comforted (Matt. 5:4). Perhaps this is the most important lesson of all.

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Lessons in Evangelism from Our Neighborhood

Over the last few years my wife and I have been increasingly convicted about our need to reach out into our community with the gospel. Obviously, this can be challenging when so much of our time is dedicated to our kids and our church family, but as we began to pray about opportunities and think more strategically, the Lord provided opportunities and has even given our church a greater desire to be faithful witnesses for Christ in our area.

No change like that comes without difficulty, and we have had to navigate difficult questions, not only about the use of our time, but also about when and how to build relationships with unbelievers, how to direct our conversations toward the Lord, and when to press forward or when to pause with certain individuals. All these questions require a wisdom that comes only from God and remind us that we are dependent on Him from beginning to end in all our faith-filled endeavors. As we have moved forward, there have been several truths that we have found helpful to keep in the forefront of our minds, and we have encouraged our church family to remember them as well.

EVERYONE IS LOOKING FOR PURPOSE

No matter what someone’s life looks like on the outside, everyone is looking for a purpose. It can be easy for my wife and I to look around our neighborhood, see successful couples who are older than us and seem to have attained their goals, and assume that they are not going to be open to conversations about spiritual things. After all, from their point of view, what do we really have to benefit them? To be honest, some of them have responded in this way, but we have also had enough conversations to know that if people will slow down long enough to notice, they are seeking some sense of purpose. This is why every culture tells stories about their origin and destiny. We long to answer the questions, “Where did I come from?” “Why am I here?” and “Where am I going?” Most people, though certainly not all, have figured out that career, money, or possessions are poor ultimate goals. But what does that leave? Many turn to relationships, seeing their spouse, children, and wider family as the ultimate “why” of their life. Yet even those good things are temporary and passing. What happens when a marriage collapses or loved ones tragically die? The crippling response that many experience in these times reveals that their purpose was built on something fleeting.

We must point our friends, acquaintances, and coworkers to the one unchanging Person in the universe. Our ultimate purpose must be found in our relationship with our Creator. Only then will we discover the satisfaction for which our souls were made. As Blaise Pascal wrote:

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself. (*Pensées*)

THE UNDERLYING OBJECTION IS SIN

Another truth we have considered is that regardless of someone’s philosophical or theological objections to the gospel, the underlying objection (whether they realize it or not) is their unwillingness to let go of sin. There is perhaps no one more honest about this reality than Augustine. He was a brilliant man with a faithful Christian mother. He could, and often did, raise intellectual objections to Christianity, and for years he pursued various philosophies from Manichaeism to Neoplatonism. But when he finally surrendered to Christ and later reflected on his conversion, he recognized that his fundamental obstacle was his attachment to sin. He famously described his attitude with this prayer: “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet” (*Confessions* 8.7). He admitted that while God did use philosophy in various ways to point him toward the truth, it could not give him the power to surrender his lusts. He described his condition in vivid terms:

The enemy held my will in his power and from it he had made a chain and shackled me. For my will was perverse and lust had grown from it, and when I gave in to lust habit was born, and when I did not resist the habit, it became a necessity. These were the links which together formed what I have called my chain, and it held me fast in the duress of servitude. (*Confessions* 8.5)

Augustine was quite candid that his ultimate barrier wasn’t a lack of intellectual answers but unwillingness to give up sin. In our gospel conversations we should answer objections carefully and take concerns seriously, but we must remember that beneath every refusal lies rebellion against God.’

COUNTERFEIT GOSPELS ABOUND

We must also remember that there are counterfeit messages competing with the gospel, even ones that present themselves as Christian. We need to be sure that we are not confusing the true gospel with these counterfeits. I have become increasingly convinced that most people believe the Christian message is essentially, “Be a good person and God will let you into heaven.” This moralistic self-reliance is the social religion of our day,

and it is so prevalent that even when we are sharing the true gospel many people assume we are teaching moralism. In our gospel conversations we need to make it abundantly clear that no one can make themselves good enough to please God, and that merely abandoning certain sins is not the same thing as submitting to Christ and His gospel.

I saw this firsthand as a teenager serving in an inner-city rescue mission. It was obvious that many of those men confused sobriety with salvation. The Bible warns against false gospels and their deadly results. Counterfeit gospels are spiritually destructive like carbon monoxide is physically destructive. Every few months we hear in the news about families who have died from carbon monoxide poisoning. In one recent case in Ohio, an entire family, including young children, all died in their sleep. Carbon monoxide kills because when it enters the lungs, it bonds to the body's hemoglobin, taking the place of oxygen. The body then suffocates even though there is oxygen present. In the same way, false gospels take up the place in the heart that belongs to the true gospel.

People's hearts become deadened to Christ because they are convinced that their goodness or their deeds will make them acceptable to God. Even people who would not consider themselves theists go about establishing their own righteousness. Years ago we knew a lady who rescued lost animals. She built a barn that housed over a hundred lost cats, and when we talked with her, it became obvious that those cats were her righteousness. Some people think that having the correct political opinions, on the right or on the left, or championing the correct causes makes them more righteous than others, and in their minds that's all it really takes to secure eternal salvation. Whatever the form, these are counterfeit gospels. We must work carefully and diligently to present the gospel message in its fullness, clarifying that salvation is found in the righteousness of Christ alone.

WE MUST SPEAK WITH URGENCY

My wife and I are committed to building long-term relationships that may eventually provide gospel openings, and we are in this for the long haul. We also recognize that we need to speak boldly and with urgency. Much has been written in recent years about "lifestyle evangelism," and some of that emphasis was a needed correction to abrupt and impersonal gospel approaches. But we have not accomplished actual evangelism until we have communicated the evangel—the gospel. I have often heard it said, "Preach the gospel. Use words, if necessary." I understand the sentiment of that. But words are always necessary for the preaching of the gospel. God has determined that the gospel is to be communicated through human language. After all, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17, NASB).

Every year California deals with wildfires. Our hot, dry summers leave us susceptible to seasonal fires, and in the past decade we have seen some particularly destructive fires in our area. Often these fires move so quickly that there is little time to evacuate. Yet frequently evacuation warnings go unheeded because people underestimate the danger and refuse to leave. Maybe this is our version of Florida's "hurri-

cane fatigue." People become so accustomed to these kinds of events and warnings that they simply do not believe it will be bad enough to require them to leave. Or they cling too tightly to their possessions to entrust their safety to the first responders. That lack of urgency often has deadly and destructive consequences.

If we truly care for the lost and want them to understand the danger of their eternal condition, our warnings must have a sense of urgency as well. This does not mean abandoning relationships or refusing small talk. It simply means that we must get around to calling our unbelieving friends to repentance and faith in Christ. Love for the lost and passion for God's glory demand courageous urgency in our witness for Christ.

WE MUST PERSEVERE IN PRAYER

My wife and I have also been reminded that evangelism takes perseverance. Relationships take time and gospel conversations sometimes come slowly. Last year the Lord brought a family to our church who had recently moved into our area. When they shared their testimony of salvation, they told about an older couple who had lived on their street in Louisiana. That couple invested in them for several years, welcoming them into their home, celebrating the birth of their first child, inviting them to church, and sharing the gospel faithfully with them. After years of persistent and prayerful witness that family came to faith in Christ, was baptized, and become faithful members of their neighbors' church. That older couple persevered in witness and in prayer, and in God's goodness they were able to see the fruit of their labor.

Are we prepared to persevere? Are we prepared to persevere when we may never see the results? Augustine's mother, Monica, prayed for her son's conversion for fifteen years, suffering great heartache before she finally saw him come to Christ. George Müller prayed throughout his life for the salvation of five specific friends. One was converted after about five years, three more over several decades, and the last only after Müller's death. Imagine that: George Müller died having seen four of the five men he prayed for converted, but the Lord saw fit to answer his last request only after his death. Are we willing to faithfully, perseveringly witness for Christ and intercede for the souls of others even if we never see the fruit? We pray because we know that the work of salvation is the Lord's work. He is pleased to use us as His ambassadors, but the work belongs to Him alone.

May we take up this calling with confidence, knowing that everyone is seeking purpose, that sin is the true barrier, that counterfeits abound, that urgency is needed, and that prayer must never cease. May the Lord reap a bountiful harvest so that, as hymnwriter Chris Anderson has put it, "some for whose souls we pray will share our joy that day, joining our song for the sake of His name."

Ben Smith pastors Vacaville Bible Church in Vacaville, California.

* **Editor's note:** Most readers understand that Augustine taught baptismal regeneration and was the fountainhead of Catholic church authority by using the allegorical approach to Scriptures. This does not impact the point the writer is making here.

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Westside Baptist Church
6260 West 4th Street
Greeley, CO 80634
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

April 10, 2026

New Mexico Regional Fellowship

Manzano Baptist Church
12411 Linn Ave NE
Albuquerque, NM 87123
Host pastor: Mark Zahn
Coordinator: Dan Mauldin

May 18-19, 2026

Wyoming Regional Fellowship

Location: TBA
Coordinator: Jay Sprecher

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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Parents Don't Get a 100% Guarantee, and That's a Good Thing

By Kevin Schaal | August 31, 2025

We want guarantees. This is especially true for parents in ministry. My family has to be perfect. When we came to Arizona to plant a church, our first child was on the way. We had these youthful ideals about our perfect family. We had dreams and expectations. I held that little boy in my arms for the first time, and an overwhelming sense of responsibility—even dread—filled my mind. How in the world am I going to protect this child from harm?

<https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/08/31/parents-dont-get-a-100-guarantee-and-thats-a-good-thing/>

Creation Order, Broken Families, and God's Grace

By Ben Hicks | October 9, 2025

Teaching apologetics has taught me a lot. It's made me learn to think on my feet, and it's challenged me to think through questions I would never have thought to ask. It has also, at times, helped me to see common yet wrong thinking. This happened a few years ago as we were going through God's design for the family. I was laying out the biblical teaching that the ideal situation for a family is a father, mother, and their children, and was a little surprised when I got pushback. "What about widows?" "Can single people adopt?" "What about blended families?" "Should someone move in with a single aunt or with a foster family?" "What about couples that can't have children?"

<https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/10/09/creation-order-broken-families-and-gods-grace/>

The Rare Jewel of Contentment in Childlessness

By Eric Hanson | August 12, 2025

Many newly married couples look forward to establishing a home and starting a family, which includes children. Oftentimes, they would discuss how many children they would like, as well as possible names, physical features, and personal goals for their future children. Young ladies would even start planning their nursery, children's outfits, and practical needs. Joy and anticipation exist with the excitement of having children and raising a godly heritage. Such were the aspirations, dreams, and longings that Bethany and I shared together. This is an innate and good desire from God to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:28). In fact, a life without children was not part of our discussions or plans.

Facing Questions: Soon after we were married, well-meaning individuals asked us when we were planning on having children. The questions compounded more as each year went by. As the season of our childlessness prolonged, the questions became more difficult and awkward to answer.

<https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2025/08/12/the-rare-jewel-of-contentment-in-childlessness/>

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Regional Reports

NEW MEXICO FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Submitted by Dan Mauldin, Regional Coordinator

Our regional fellowship in the state of New Mexico met on Friday, October 10, at Manzano Baptist Church in Albuquerque. Pastor Mark Zahn and his church were gracious and generous hosts for our small meeting of five pastors. One of the churches that usually fellowships with us has been without a pastor for almost a year. Please pray with us that Scripture Baptist Church in Las Cruces, New Mexico, will have a pastor soon. Your prayers are greatly appreciated. I am thankful for the faithful men who attend our meetings. Our next fellowship will be April 10, 2026.

NEW ENGLAND FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Submitted by Taigen Joos, Regional Coordinator

On Saturday, October 25, 2025, Heritage Baptist Church hosted its 9th New England Foundations Conference, which doubles as the FBFI regional fellowship. About 115 people from around New England enjoyed great fellowship and teaching. Our guest speaker for the day was Pastor Tim Potter, President of Arch Ministries, a ministry of Grace Church of Mentor, Ohio. Pastor Potter spoke on making disciples of Jesus Christ through relational evangelism and building a disciple-making culture in our churches. Pastor Taigen Joos also spoke in one session on the necessity of discipling our own

families. Workshop sessions on disciple-making were presented by Pastor Matt Fagan and Mrs. Laura Williams.

One of the highlights of the day was a testimony time where people shared stories of witnessing opportunities they've had recently. It was a joy to hear of God's working in people's lives throughout New England. Our prayer is that God would continue to do a great work in this historic region of the United States, saving souls and changing lives for His own glory. All who came were greatly encouraged to be part of the plan that God has for this region. Our next fellowship is scheduled for October 24, 2026.



CENTRAL FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Submitted by Marcus Heffernan, Regional Coordinator

The FBFI Central Regional meeting was joyfully hosted by Dr. Dale and Jody Heffernan with Midland Baptist Church (Wichita, KS) on October 20–22. Dr. Bud Steadman carried the preaching theme of “I will run the way . . .” (Ps. 119:32a) and encouraged us with lessons from the history of Sandy Creek and the Separate Baptists from the mid-1700s. Additional preaching sessions by Dr. Ben Heffernan focused on “The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit” and “The Importance of

Exegetical Preaching of Whole Books of the Bible.” Anne Byford had a session with the ladies, and the youth had several breakout sessions. Dr. Dave and Anne Byford were recognized for their forty years of faithful ministry at Faith Baptist Church (Manhattan, KS) and Challenge Christian Camp. Our two-day meeting was full of preaching, teaching, prayer, singing, discussion, and fellowship around good food. Our hearts were enlarged by the Lord, and we look forward to the blessing of our next regional fellowship hosted by Pastor Jason Shirk at Harvest Hills Baptist Church (Yukon, OK) on October 26–27, 2026.



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Mentor the Mentors: A True Call to Ministry

Continued from page 16

RISK: COURAGEOUS FAITH

If responsibility is the destination of manhood, then risk is the path that leads boys there. Growth does not come in safety and ease; it comes through challenges that stretch faith, involve risk, and carry the real possibility of failure. From Moses challenging Pharaoh, to David defying Goliath, to Jonathan engaging a Philistine garrison, to Peter stepping onto a stormy sea, Scripture shows us that men are forged when fear meets faith. Maturity requires courage, and courage is born when the outcome is uncertain, but trust in God is present.

Pastors and fathers could therefore consider how to create opportunities for boys to face challenges such as solving complex projects, supporting the vulnerable, or venturing into new experiences. And if a boy stumbles, a father's role is not to rescue or merely to console but to call him forward, and to challenge him again: "Stand up, my son. Trust God. Try again. But do not quit." Boys long for this kind of test, so let us give it to them and walk beside them as they grow into courageous men of God.

REWARD: PURPOSE AND LEGACY

Finally, boys thrive when they see progress in their lives and when that progress is celebrated by people they respect. Hollow participation trophies have no place here. The goal is recognition of genuine effort, growth, and perseverance. Pastors and fathers alike can mark milestones with public words of affirmation, visible tokens of achievement, and meaningful celebrations. They can affirm the deeper reality that all our labor is a response to God's grace and leads us toward the ultimate reward: hearing Him say, "Well done." Boys who taste the joy of faithful, purpose-filled service today will hunger for its culmination in eternity. Fathers who embrace the responsibility of raising another generation for God's glory will fulfill a legacy worthy of their devotion.

RESOLVE: THE CALL TO CONTEND

Pastors, this is not another church program; it is nothing short of an alarm signaling an ongoing spiritual warfare. The enemy seeks to destroy our boys

before they become men of God. If he can dismantle today's sons, he will have defeated tomorrow's leaders. We cannot afford deficient fathers, nor can we afford drifting sons.

Let us rise as mentors of mentors, walking with fathers who walk with their sons as we all follow Christ. Let us develop a culture in our churches that defines, affirms, celebrates, and perpetuates biblical manhood. Let us embrace it not as just another task to accomplish, but as a true call to ministry. Let us seek to honor and glorify our Lord, in His grace and in His power, by equipping Christ-centered leaders who will pass the faith to the next generation. In doing so, we are not merely raising men; we are raising Christ's leaders who will perpetuate His light in the generations to come.

Jeff Caupp has served at Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona, since 2006. As executive pastor, he seeks to glorify God by serving the church family and facilitating ministry through Time for Tots Preschool, Tri-City Christian Academy, and International Baptist College and Seminary.



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Heart to Heart

Janet Clark Shay

She Has Done What She Could

George Binoka glanced at his mother's Arabic Bible resting on the bookcase behind his desk. Warm memories flooded the young outreach pastor's soul.

In 1964, George's mother, Terez Koryal, was born in a Chaldean farming village in Northern Iraq. She was the second youngest of six siblings in an Eastern Orthodox family. It was a Muslim society that treated women as possessions. In the early 1990s, her father negotiated her betrothal to Burhan Binoka.

When Saddam Hussein marched troops into Kuwait, Terez's father and brothers faced conscription. Knowing it meant suicide to resist the American pushback, the men packed up their families and fled across Turkey to the Mediterranean, where refugees jammed into overloaded ragtag boats. No matter. The smugglers charged by the head!

Sometime after launching, the Binokas' boat capsized. Terror-stricken, they endured hunger, fear, and darkness. Three days passed before sailors rescued them.

Reunited, the families petitioned for political asylum at the US embassy in Athens, Greece. After two years, they received their green cards and purchased flights to Detroit, Michigan. Nine months pregnant, Terez told officials she was only six months along, but as they entered French airspace, Terez went into labor. They touched down in Nice, France, and rushed to a hospital where Terez gave birth to a son, George.

Once cleared for travel, the family departed for America and settled in a heavily Muslim community. A daughter, Savien, was born two years later. Soon, Terez's health began to decline, while physical abuse and unfaithfulness drove her to divorce. Eventually, diagnosed with debilitating rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, she was forced to rely on her family for support. In 2005, they uprooted to Arizona, where nine family members crowded into a rental.

Concerned when George embraced the negative influence of his public school, Terez asked her brother to find a private Christian school. Baptist, Catholic—*anyone using the Bible*. Near their home, her brother spotted a small school associated with Northwest Valley Baptist Church. "We'd like to enroll a couple of kids," he told the principal. The following day, Terez's children began fourth and sixth grade at Arrowhead Christian Academy.

Terry and Dorene Bartles, who ran the church's bus ministry, began taking the Binokas to church. God had given Bartles a big heart for this family, and slowly Terez's trust grew.

Because she struggled to understand the service in English, she attended an Arabic church on Sunday afternoons, where she met Amira, who lovingly shared Christ. However, relinquishing her Catholic icons was hard for Terez. One day, Amira asked, "What has Mary ever done for you? Jesus died for you." God brought it all together when Terez heard the gospel on Arabic TV through the BBC, and in the quiet of her home, she took Jesus as her Savior.

Though bedridden or chair-bound and on massive regimens of medication, Terez prayed on her knees daily. Often, the kids arrived home from school to find their mom on the floor. She had the determination to get down there, but couldn't get back up. Getting down on her knees made no sense to George, and he'd reprimand his mom. "I'm praying to my God," she'd answer. "Don't worry about it. If I'm stuck here, then I'm stuck here."

Her hands barely able to grip a highlighter, she marked passages in her Bible daily. George saw the change, but it didn't register. "I figured she'd always been religious, and this was her *thing*."

She handed gospel tracts to Dial-a-Ride drivers, store clerks, you name it, often embarrassing George. She'd beg her doctor, "I know, I know, last time you told me no, but please, you need to come. You need to come listen. Come to my church. Promise me!"

Five foot tall and frail, Terez personified Shakespeare's quote: "Though she be but little, she is fierce." Terez raised her hand each Wednesday night at prayer meeting. "Pray for George and Savien." Faithful expectation. No details.

Over the next three years, Dorene served as Terez's caregiver, and George acted as translator for innumerable hospital stays and medical appointments. When her needs extended beyond Dorene's capabilities, Terez moved to a full nursing care facility, and the Bartles welcomed George and Savien into their home. By now, Terez's extended family had moved to California. It had been physically impossible for her to go with them.

"Mom thought much too highly of me," George reflected. "In her world, where men did pretty much what they wanted, I was the authority. She hoped I'd stay out of trouble but did little to discipline me."

"Savien and I thought Mom was stingy," said George. "If we asked for a candy bar at the store, she'd tell us we could eat when we got home." Yet, she had me write tithe checks for hundreds of dollars. When Dorene caught her sending one-hundred-dollar bills to a gospel station in the

Continued on page 36



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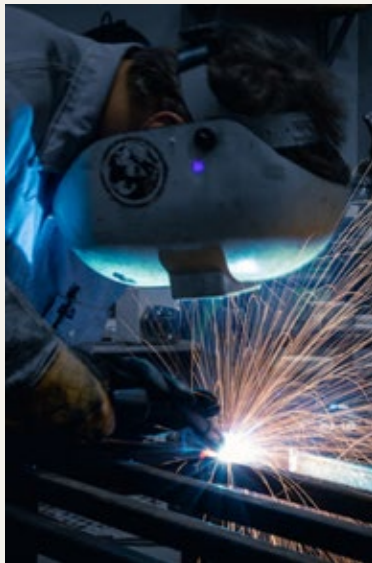
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The Lord's Prayer: Praying

God's people are meant to be praying for the fulfillment of God's prophecies. I don't have space to argue that assertion here. Elsewhere I have tried to make the case for the importance of prayerfully participating in the prophetic purposes and promises of God.¹ Even though they will surely come to pass—precisely because God has unequivocally declared that they will—He calls His people to participate in praying for their fulfillment. Those calls are predominantly in the Old Testament (Isa. 62:6–7; Jer. 29:10–14; Ezek. 36:36–37; Zech. 12:9–10). Do such Old Testament commands have anything to do with *us*? Are there any parallel exhortations in the New Testament? I believe there are, and one is the well-known Lord's Prayer.²

Why did Jesus instruct His disciples specifically to pray to the Father, "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven"? I do not deny an applicational, personal component of praying this way; we should desire God's name to be sanctified in us, and God's rule and will to have free sway within us. But if the personal dimension was, in fact, the primary applicational intent of the Lord's instruction, He could have expressed those model requests in much more obvious and straightforward ways. After all, the second half of the model prayer is loaded with personal pronouns: *give us our daily bread; forgive us our iniquities as we forgive those who sin against us; lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*. But those first three requests are not.

The first half of that prayer focuses not on asking God to help *us* do things, nor on asking God to do things *for us* or even *in us*. Rather, it focuses on our asking God to accomplish certain things *for Himself*: may **Your** name be sanctified, may **Your** kingdom come, may **Your** will be done. When we democratize these requests, isolate them from their cultural and covenantal context—a Jewish rabbi teaching His Jewish followers how to pray—and apply them only individualistically, we are missing important hermeneutical signals. And we're missing the point of what we are supposed to be praying for, and why.

MAY YOUR NAME BE SANCTIFIED

Let's start with the first request Jesus taught His followers to pray. Where does this language of hallowing or sanctifying God's name come from? Originally, it was a stipulation of the old covenant (see Lev. 22:32; Isa. 29:22–23).

Ezekiel 36 is the most thorough explanation of how God intends to see to it that His name is sanctified not only within Israel but internationally. Speaking of historical Israel (note the multiple references to both **God's name** and *the nations*), Yahweh says:

When they came to *the nations*, wherever they went, they **profaned My holy name**. . . . But I had concern for **My holy name**, which the house of Israel had profaned among *the nations* wherever they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God: 'I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for **My holy name's sake**, which you have profaned among

the nations wherever you went. And **I will sanctify My great name**, which has been profaned among *the nations*, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, **when I am hallowed** in you before their eyes. (Ezek. 36:20–23, NKJV)

How will God accomplish this national and international sanctification of His name? By sovereignly converting, graciously cleansing, and permanently restoring Israel. Yahweh continues describing this redemptive work in the nation Israel in Ezekiel 36:24–28 (cf. 39:6–8, 25–26; 43:7–8).

So when we pray for God's name to be hallowed—if we are praying with theological, covenantal, contextualized understanding—we are praying (or should be) for the conversion and restoration of Israel in the sight of all the nations. That this is the intended meaning and focus of this petition is corroborated by the next petition we are instructed to offer.

MAY YOUR KINGDOM COME

Continuing in the same new-covenant context of Ezekiel, Yahweh says,

"Thus says the Lord God: 'Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations . . . and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land . . . and **one king shall be king over them all**; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. . . . **David My servant shall be king over them**, and they shall all have one shepherd. (Ezek. 37:21–24, NKJV)

The establishment of God's Davidic King over Israel will be the avenue through which Messiah's reign will extend universally, as so many prophecies predict (e.g., Ps. 2:6–8; Isa. 9:6–7; 55:3–5; 60:3–12; 61:1–9; Jer. 30:8–9; Dan. 7:27).

In his recent commentary on Luke, Old Testament scholar Dale Ralph Davis combines the first two petitions and makes the connection to Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 36 is essential for understanding this dual petition. In Ezekiel 36:23 God speaks of how His name will be held sacred or holy. . . . He will show how holy His great name is, and He will do so by thoroughly restoring Israel . . . to the land (Ezek 36:24, 28–30, 33–36). . . . I am convinced this is the proper background for the first petition of this prayer. "Let your name be held holy." . . . We are praying that He will bring about the final restoration of His people. The petition does not exclude other "honorings" of God, but it prays primarily for a "last thing" thing. The parallel petition, "Your kingdom come," supports this view. Yes, the kingdom in one sense had already come in the presence and work of Jesus (cf. Luke 11:20; 17:20–21). But by asking that God's kingdom "come," we are assuming that it has yet to come in its fullness, in all its power and glory—and that is what we especially pray for in this prayer.³

for New Covenant Fulfillment

Walter Liefeld also connects these first two petitions and sees in them a prayer for a specific eschatological event.⁴ But it's not just the first two requests that go together. Davis and Liefeld connect only the first two requests, because the text they are commenting on (Luke 11) does not include a third request found in Matthew 6:10. But a third new-covenant expectation follows naturally from the international sanctification of God's name as a result of the international establishment of God's reign—the doing of God's will on earth.

MAY YOUR WILL BE DONE

The disciples expressed to the resurrected Christ their expectation of an imminent establishment of the kingdom (Acts 1:6). The Lord left intact all their notions about the nature of that kingdom. He clarified only that the timing of its establishment was entirely in the Father's hands (Acts 1:7)—which explains why Jesus taught us, in this model prayer, to direct these requests related to the coming of the kingdom to “our Father in heaven.”

Integrally connected to the coming of the kingdom promised in the new covenant is not only the international sanctification of God's name, but an international conformity to His will. That will be possible because one of the principal provisions of the new covenant is the supernatural implanting of the divine law in the human heart: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts” (Jer. 31:33). Again, Ezekiel's new-covenant descriptions both echo and expand on the description in Jeremiah: “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek. 36:27, NKJV; cf. 37:24). Again, this aspect of the new covenant is also echoed elsewhere (Isa. 9:6–7; 60:21; 62:1–2; Zech. 8:20–23; 14:2–21).

ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

I set this phrase apart because it almost certainly is designed to modify not just the third request but all three, “in view of the careful balance of the three preceding clauses.”⁵ God's name receives the fame and reverence it deserves in heaven; restoring that to earth as well is an express goal of the new covenant. His kingdom holds unquestioned sway in heaven, and will one day on earth as well. His will is performed from the heart in heaven, and the full implementation of the new covenant will implant His law in the hearts of an entire globe of redeemed people. In short, the model prayer given by the Lord as a paradigm for our praying is characterized by “(1) a theocentric worldview, (2) that is eschatological in focus, and (3) that calls for human partnership in the divine purpose”⁶—which is the point with which this article began: the privilege and responsibility of God's people praying forward His prophetic purposes and promises.

LEARNING TO LINK THE LORD'S PRAYER WITH NEW COVENANT FULFILLMENT

The astonishing parallels between the promises of the new covenant and the requests our Lord taught His disciples to pray are

neither accidental nor imaginary. The petitions Jesus taught us to forestage in our praying and thinking are requests of massive theological and eschatological scope—prayers that in a single breath encompass the whole breadth and sweep of God's revealed purpose for the earth. *Mean* them when you pray them! *Desire* them when you pray them! *Expect* them when you pray them! They are requests that *will be infallibly fulfilled*.

Because their scope reaches far beyond just Israel to include God's ultimate purpose to glorify Himself in His people and among all the nations, they are pertinent expectations for the church to keep in mind and to participate in praying forward.

Even though they are ultimately eschatologically focused, these petitions have immediate personal impact as well. Christ put a very practical edge on the blade of this prayer practice. A little later in this same context, He exhorts His followers not to fret about the most basic necessities of life—food and clothing—because our Father knows we need these things and He will supply them (Matt. 6:25–32). He does not say, “Don't pray about them”; He actually taught us to do that in 6:11. Instead, He says, “Don't fret about them.” Jesus directs our attention to where our prayerful concern ought to concentrate: “But seek ye first the **kingdom of God, and his righteousness**; and all these [other] things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

Do you hear the connection back to Jesus' earlier prayer instruction? Seeking God's kingdom and righteousness does not mean looking for it, as though it were hidden somewhere; it means *pursuing* it. How? One way is through prayer (“Your kingdom come. Your will be done.”). The priority of our praying should not be a preoccupation with the mundane material matters of life. We should instead make the international and universal hallowing of God's name, coming of God's kingdom, and doing of God's will—all on earth as in heaven—a central focus in our priorities and in our praying. When we do that, we are anticipating and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:12 NASB, ESV, Darby), when God's prophetic purposes will infallibly be fulfilled (Isa. 55:10–13). In addition, something very important happens to us: we become more like God.

¹ See Layton Talbert, *Not by Chance: Learning to Trust a Sovereign God* (BJU Press, 2001), Chapter 13, “Providence and Prayer.”

² I use the expression “Lord's Prayer” in the grammatical sense (subjective genitive) of a prayer given by the Lord to His disciples as an instructional model.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke 1–13: The Year of the Lord's Favor* (Christian Focus, 2021), 197–99.

⁴ Walter Liefeld, “Luke,” *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984), 8:947.

⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 2007), 135.

⁶ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 1997), 442.

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The Time Is Now

On September 10, 2025, Charlie Kirk was assassinated. On September 21, Charlie's funeral service was held at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. Over ninety thousand people attended in person and over twenty million watched on TV or online. Also in attendance was the President of the United States and almost his entire cabinet. There has been nothing like this in recent history.

Charlie was a Christian who was very bold in his faith, and he was the founder of Turning Point USA, a non-profit organization whose mission is to identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of fiscal responsibility, free markets, and limited government.

During his funeral, the gospel was presented to a staggering number of people. I personally have seen an amazing spiritual harvest since Charlie was assassinated. The Sunday after his death, I was speaking at a church anniversary in Wisconsin. After the service there was a potluck, and at the end an older couple came up and asked if they could ask me some questions. I said that was fine, and the wife told me she agreed that the LGBTQ lifestyle is wrong, but "shouldn't we love those people?" I told her yes, we should. She told me she believed killing a two-year-old was as wrong as killing an unborn child, but "shouldn't we love people who have had an abortion?" Again, I told her yes, we should. I asked why she was asking these questions, and she said she really didn't know much about Charlie Kirk until he was assassinated. But as she started reading things online, she got the impression Christians didn't like these people.

I shared how God loves these people and that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. I asked if she was a Christian, and she said, "Oh yes. I thank the Lord every day." I asked if anyone had ever shown her from a Bible what a person needed to do to become a Christian. She said no. I asked if I could do that, and she said yes. So the three of us sat down, and I went through the plan of salvation with her. When I finished, I asked if she wanted to trust Christ as her Savior. She said yes, but she wanted to do it later at home.

Her husband asked if she knew what to pray, and she looked at me and asked if I could go over what she needed to say one more time. I said, "You need to admit you are a sinner." She said, "I know I am a sinner." I said, "You have to believe Jesus died on the cross and rose again to pay for our sins." She said, "I believe Jesus died and rose again to pay for my sins." I said, "You then need to commit your life to Christ." And she said, "I commit my life to Christ." I told her according to Romans 10:9-13 that she was now a Christian. She got a huge grin on her face. She was seventy-four years old.

The next week I was at a church in eastern Canada. The pastor said they had seen thirty first-time visitors in the past two weeks, primarily college age. When he asked why they were there, they said, "Have you heard of Charlie Kirk?"

The third week after Charlie's death, I was speaking at a church in Phoenix, Arizona. I was preaching more on evangelism than salvation, but I gave an invitation, and three people responded that they did not know where they would go if they were to die that day. After the service,

a twenty-three-year-old young man came and told me he got saved that morning.

I remember that after 9/11 we had lots of church people who got very engaged. We had a visitation program, and for two weeks it was the largest group that came out for visitation all year. Sadly, the increase seemed to last only for that two weeks. What is different about the situation today is that there seems to be a real interest, especially among young people, in church and God. It seems there has almost never been an easier time to share the gospel than right now.

I hope that what happened to Charlie does not cause Christians to hide their faith. I hope, as we are seeing a real interest among lost people, it causes Christians to share their faith more than they ever have. What an easy lead-in just to ask lost neighbors, coworkers, and friends what they think about what happened to Charlie.

By the time this article is published, Charlie's death will be several months in the past. I hope as you reflect on the events of the past several months, you will take opportunities to engage lost people and share your faith. We will not all change the world like Charlie, but by God's grace, He can use us to change someone's world. As my friend Carl Kerby always says, "Stay bold," and take the Word to 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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Corey A. Pfaffe



Benevolence

The wife of a wealthy farmer with many hired hands, Abigail was constantly in the kitchen. Her cupboards were well stocked with bakery items. Sacks of flour and other grains lay ready for the next recipe. Her stores of preserved fruits filled her pantry. Daily, her butcher brought fresh meat to be roasted for the famished workmen.

Abigail would have admired my grandmother's preparation. Her pantry shelves held glass quart jars of peaches, pears, and plums lined up like tall, proud soldiers on parade. One of my favorites was stewed tomatoes—a fruit, you know.

Abigail's husband, Nabal, was a self-made man. At least that's the tough guy image he sought to project. I imagine he'd spout, "What's mine is mine and, no, I'm not sharing!" He was a "harsh and badly behaved man" (a unique and potent translation by the ESV in 1 Samuel 25:3) who mistreated King David's men.

David and his men were charging forward on a mission to exact vengeance on Nabal for his stinginess and ingratitude, but Abigail was armed to head them off. She saved her family because she was prepared to share.

We have a name for generosity and spontaneity—*benevolence*. Today's New Testament churches collectively and Christian families individually must prepare benevolence and administer benevolence following God's design.

PREPARE BENEVOLENCE

Consecrated believers offer sacrifices to God. Not tangible ones, but "the fruit of our lips giving thanks." Consecrated believ-

ers also offer sacrifices to others—not worship, but benevolence. We are not to *forget* to share (Heb. 13:15–16). We might not forget, but a lack of preparation produces the same result as forgetting. If we are not prepared, our needy brothers and sisters in Christ will go without.

Paul instructed the Philippians (and us) to "*look out . . . for the interests of others*" (2:4, NASB). What good would it be for us to "look out" if we were not prepared to respond?

Perhaps your church prepares to be benevolent by collecting designated gifts, but what might you and your family members do to prepare for benevolence? Several years ago, my family studied Scripture about giving. We became convicted about our lack of generosity toward others. We cared about the needs of others, but like the Christians quizzed by James, our thoughts and even words were of little profit.

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? (2:15–16)

It was then that we designated a portion of our family budget to give to others. It wasn't much, just \$25 a month, but it was right to do. If a need came to our attention that month we could respond in a small way. If not, we contributed the money to our church's designated collection—no more scrounging around in a wallet or purse for a few dollars that were intended for family groceries.

Over the past twenty years, we've been able to set aside funds in our own designated benevolence fund. Once set aside to honor God's command to share, distributing it seems like spending someone else's money—God's. It's truly fun.

Abigail stocked her pantry. Could you stock a personal benevolence fund?

ADMINISTER BENEVOLENCE

The early church faced extreme calls for benevolence, yet Luke wrote, "Neither was there any among them that lacked" (Acts 4:34). How was that possible? God had prepared the assemblies with a few believers who had both resources and willingness to share.

Funds were received in and administered out "unto every man according as he had need" (Acts 4:35). Inquiry was made so that none lacked. Those who were initially on the giving end could easily end up on the receiving end as persecution intensified. The apostle Paul addressed this give-and-take reality when he wrote to the Corinthians challenging them to give of their own meager resources to the believers in Jerusalem:

I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want. (2 Cor. 8:13–14)

A problem of administration arose in the Jerusalem church. As we learn in Acts 6, the newly appointed deacons addressed it honorably while offering a practical



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model for churches today. To this I add a few more considerations in the administration of benevolence.

- Provide funds directly addressing a need. Buy the groceries. Pay the utility bill. Fix the car. As a young deacon, I listened in horror as our church treasurer reported that our benevolence check had been cashed at a bar.
- Invest *time* to help a needy individual or family beyond a one-time gift. Is there a need for budgeting help? Advice for car repairs? Mentoring in-home meal planning?
- In the case of church benevolence, encourage recipients themselves to contribute in turn to the church's benevolence fund when they become able. This follows Paul's biblical instruction.

Abigail's preparation led to sharing. Start your preparation today—set aside ten dollars, twenty dollars, or whatever amount God leads you to give. Stock your benevolence pantry and discover the new joy of cheerful giving.

Corey Pfafe 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.



She Has Done What She Could

Continued from page 28

Middle East, George confronted his mom. "What do you think you're doing?"

"God has put this on my heart. He has blessed us, and He will provide," said Terez.

"I had to admit, He always *did* provide," said George. "The Bartles personally sacrificed for us, in addition to giving us birthday and Christmas gifts, and there were others too."

Thinking about his mom's love and experiencing love from the Bartles and other church people, George placed his faith in Jesus during his junior year of high school when an evangelist shared Christ's love at the school's chapel service. Later, when George won first place in the preaching category at the school's Fine Arts Festival, Terez set her heart on him becoming a pastor.

Terez was feisty, with a keen sense of humor, but when someone had a need? "She'd give a stranger twenty dollars but wouldn't take us to McDonald's," said George. "Like her faith, she did nothing halfway. She spoke Arabic, Chaldean, Turkish, Greek, and Kurdish fluently and broken English."

Hard-working and strong-willed, Terez hadn't endured suffering by being weak. She insisted the house be kept pristine and could not abide wastefulness. When learning of someone living in a sinful state, she'd say, "Look! They act as though God doesn't watch."

When Terez began to suffer severe delusions, she was admitted to a mental ward. Sent to a care facility, she suffered a stroke. In June, beginning his first day as

a counselor at Ironwood Christian Camp, George learned his mother was dying and returned home immediately. "I read her beloved Psalms in Arabic and didn't leave her bedside."

On Wednesday night, Mom opened her eyes for the first time in three days. "It's okay to go be with Jesus," George whispered. A tear ran down her cheek, and 48-year-old Terez met her Savior.

"Ethnically an Iraqi Chaldean born in France and holding American citizenship, God has brought me full circle," George smiled.

From a rebellious teen to a child of God, today George is blessed with his wife, Lexie, and two children. He served a mission term in Kenya and is now in ministry at the same church that embraced his family two decades earlier. His mom's Arabic Bible is a poignant reminder that, despite trials and affliction, "*She has done what she could.*"

Janet Clark Shay is an inspirational biographer. She authored *The Prayer That Makes a Difference*, *This Side of Heaven*, and *Called to Swim* among other works. She lives with her husband in Glendale, Arizona, and is blessed with a large extended family.



Editor's note: George recently accepted the call to be the senior pastor at Berean Baptist Church in San Tan Valley, Arizona. See his ministry update in *News From All Over*.

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FBFI Chaplain Retirement Ceremonies Honor Faithful Service

CH (LTC) Scott Bullock: August 22, 2025, was a big day for the Bullock family as they celebrated Scott's retirement from Army active-duty service. Over ninety friends and family members joined the event from near and far as a great support to Scott and Kara. After enjoying a buffet lunch at Fort Jackson's "1917 Club," CH (COL) Greg Long, the Deputy Commandant at the Army's Institute of Religious Leadership (USA-IRL), recognized both Scott's and Kara's contributions to the US Army. Kara was recognized with the Chief of Chaplain's Certificate of Appreciation for twenty-eight years of support along with the Army Chief of Staff spouse's honor certificate. FBFI Chaplain Endorser, CH (COL) Joe Willis (Ret.), presented Scott with a retirement watch on behalf of the FBFI. Chaplain Long presented Scott's retirement award, the Army's Legion of Merit. Kara took the podium to thank her close friends and family for their ongoing support over the years. Scott's high school youth pastor, Air Force Chaplain (Ret.) David Dersch, also spoke on behalf of the family. Then Scott concluded the event by recognizing the entire family including their parents, their son, Army 1LT Jonathan Bullock, and their daughter Jinnea, now a high school teacher in upstate South Carolina.



Scott completed over twenty-eight years and eight months of uniformed federal service. Scott and Kara plan to settle in the north Greenville area in support of their local church and family.

Michael D. Sproul, Ch, Brigadier General, USAF (Ret.): Thirty-four-plus years of military service and hundreds of days away from home sharing the gospel and counseling hurting souls is hard to fit into a one-hour retirement ceremony. The Chief of Chaplains for the Air Force came from the Pentagon to Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona, on August 22, 2025, to lead the ceremony. Mike was honored to have him come and states, "He loves the Lord and knows him as his Savior. It was great working in that environment for the last two years to backfill him any time he was gone from his seat on the fourth floor, E-ring, of the Pentagon."



Mike thanked Elma, his wife of forty years, during the ceremony. Over the last twelve years, Mike had been gone one out of every four days, while most of those years also being a senior pastor. Elma made sure he was packed and ready to go to serve our military members. She worked a full-time job, took care of

her mother who was declining into dementia, and was bookkeeper/junior church teacher/ladies ministry leader/church cook/two-year-old Sunday School teacher, etc., all to serve others in their congregations. Mike would always say, "Christ is the hero in my story, and Elma is my second hero."

A young man who grew up under Mike's ministry at Tri-City provided the special music with a professional brass group he organized. The music was spectacular!





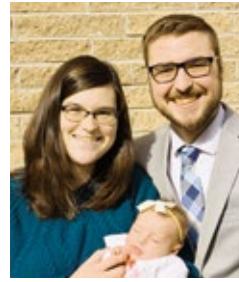
Mike's team from the Arizona National Guard Headquarters put together a great program. A man whom Mike had led to Christ thirty years ago in Guam flew in from Montana to say, "Thank you." Mike had not seen him or communicated with him since 1996 when they had both left active duty. He married and reared a family that all love Jesus. He wanted to fly in and tell Mike what Elma meant to him as a single twenty-year-old guy in Guam.

Mike testifies, "It's amazing to see God's hand in your ministry life work in ways that you never expected. I had saved one example of every uniform and pair of boots I had ever worn and put them up on display, as well as over eighty coins I had received through my military ministry. Each coin is a story of a life I was allowed to impact through the power of the Spirit. I've had the privilege to lead every rank from E-1 to O-10 to Christ. It's been an honor every day to serve God and country."


Two men that Mike recently recruited into the chaplaincy have left their churches to deploy with their airmen to the Middle East. Mike relates, "What may be the most rewarding aspect of these thirty-four years is knowing that there are godly young pastors who choose to leave family and their churches to reach souls that would most likely never walk into the door of a church, but in desperation they will reach out to a chaplain in a deployed location and find Christ! It's great to know that as you hand off your passion for the souls of military members, there are young men waiting to pick up the baton."

WELCOME OUR NEWLY ENDORSED FBFI CHAPLAIN APPLICANTS

Hunter Maeder and his wife Erica currently reside in Altoona, Iowa, where Hunter is employed with the Iowa Army National Guard as a full-time contractor. He and his family are members of Altoona Regular Baptist Church where Hunter serves as a deacon. Even though Hunter has finished two degrees already, he currently is working on his MDiv through Liberty University and desires to become a chaplain in the Army National Guard upon completion of his degree. Hunter and Erica have a daughter, Hattie Mae, and are expecting their second daughter in November 2025. Hunter was interviewed on August 28, 2025.



Joshua Zollers and his wife HollyBeth were interviewed by the FBFI Chaplaincy Commission on October 2, 2025. Joshua currently serves as an assistant to the pastor at First Baptist Church of Fort Atkinson, where he also plans to be ordained in April 2026. Josh served four years in the Air Force and got out in 2021 to continue his ministry education. Once he finishes his educational and ministerial requirements in Wisconsin, he would like to return to the National Guard or Reserves as a chaplain. Josh and HollyBeth recently welcomed their first child, Elizabeth Joy, on September 13.







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