

November/December 2022

FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

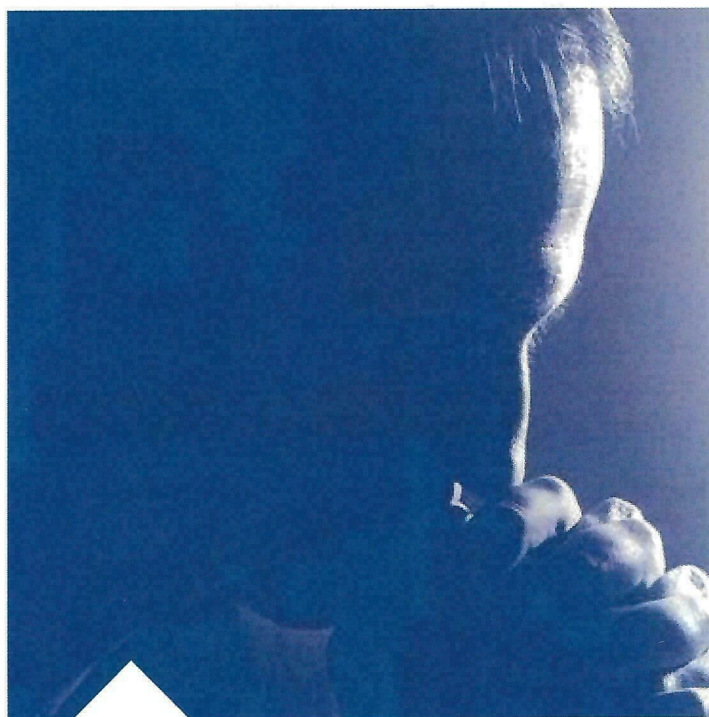
Prayer

Putting It
into Practice

- ▶ Praying Unsearchable Riches for Treasured Believers
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FRONTLINE

Volume 32 • Number 6



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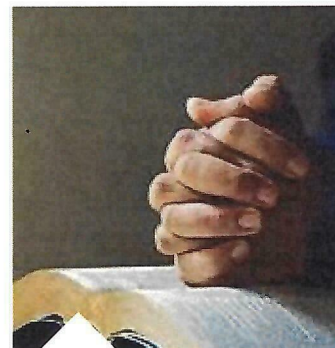
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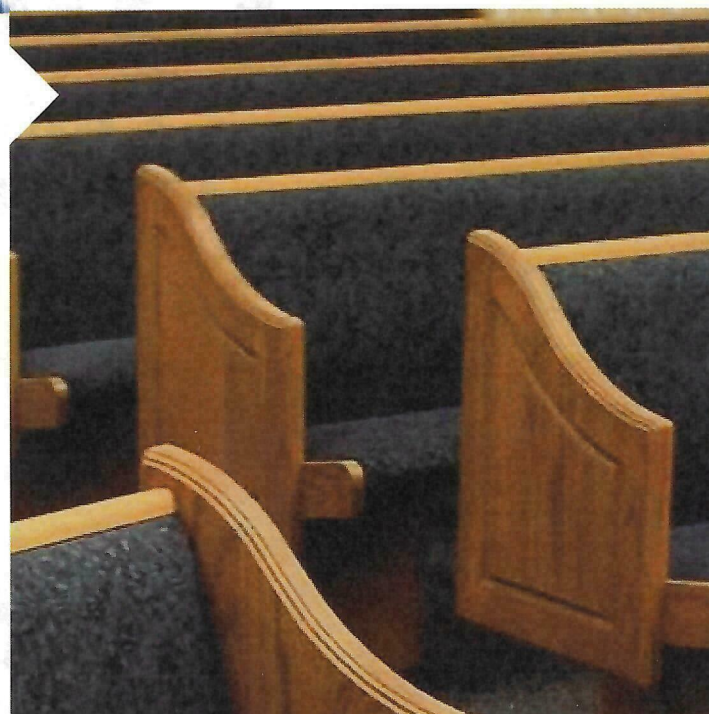
We often believe that God is able to answer our prayers, but do we believe that He, will?



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



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Prayer: Putting It into Practice

Few topics are more important to the Christian life than prayer. At the same time, there are few areas of the Christian life where we feel as much the

gap between what we ought to be and what we are. Books on prayer abound, and many passages and principles of Scripture are worthy of our attention. Prayer, like everything else in the Christian life, rests upon what God has revealed about Himself and His will. God is infinitely powerful, wise, and good. He wills for us to have fellowship with Him and to participate in His work through communicating with Him. With this firmly in mind, our hope is that this issue of *FrontLine* will offer practical help and encouragement to pray.

The Scriptures repeatedly urge us to pray for one another. This often leads to a difficulty, however: precisely what should we pray for fellow believers? When we hear petitions for unsaved relatives, neighbors, or coworkers, we know that regardless of their temporal difficulties, their greatest need is to come to Christ in salvation. Sometimes, however, we are at a loss as to how to pray for Christians beyond their physical or financial needs. In this issue Robert Vincent helps us understand God's prayer priorities by looking at Paul's prayers for believers. In these wonderful passages we are introduced to the unfathomable riches of grace that are our inheritance in Jesus Christ. It is God's will, and it should be our earnest petition, that we would understand and appropriate these blessings.

Such spiritual blessings can be a great encouragement to us in dark seasons, as demonstrated by the powerful testimony of Jeanna Kamp, who has been witness of the great grace of God in prayer in difficult circumstances. Through what the world would call tragedy, she relates

how her relationship with the Lord has been deepened and her prayer life strengthened as He has given her "songs in the night."

Continuing in this practical vein is David Shumate's contribution, encouraging us to pray for the servant of God who preaches His Word. Every preacher engages in spiritual warfare. Psalm 20, written to invoke the blessing of God upon Israel's king on the eve of physical battle, yields rich principles that we can apply to praying for the men of God in pulpits today. The first part does the preliminary work of demonstrating the theological connection between Israel's national conflict and the church's spiritual struggle. The second shows why we must earnestly plead with the Lord for those who open His Word to us.

The vital importance of prayer in the ministry is then illustrated by testimonies from two mission fields. Ron Cochran, who serves in Mexico, writes of the extraordinary blessings that have come from the long-standing cooperative prayer meetings of the fundamental Bible-believing churches in his city. Half a world away in Japan, missionary Kim Melton relates how God, in gracious response to her prayer for one new soul, wooed the heart of a lost man, gave him an insatiable hunger for the Word of God, brought him to Christ, and brought new vitality to the church. Finally, Nathan Mestler suggests two practical ways that we can have more energetic and effective times together in prayer. He writes that these two approaches have greatly enriched prayer with the students of the Bible college where he serves.

It is our earnest desire that these ideas and testimonies will encourage and instruct us to converse more frequently, more earnestly, and more effectively with our Heavenly Father.

Praying Unsearchable Riches for Treasured Believers

After following our study group's guide through the Louvre for much of the morning, scurrying from gallery to gallery to maximize the limited time, I had almost become desensitized to the wonders. The Louvre is the largest museum in the world, with four levels stretching the equivalent of eleven city blocks. It is populated with hundreds of thousands of artifacts, sculptures, and paintings, some reaching back to ancient civilization. Our guide told us if we looked at one artifact per minute, 24 hours a day, in six months we still would not have seen all that the Louvre offers.

Suddenly, we were in a crowd, hushed with a shared sense of awe and appreciation. We were in room 711 of Denon Wing where the *Mona Lisa* hangs. The *Mona Lisa*, considered the most valuable painting in the world, is insured for nearly one billion dollars. It is the most visited display in the most visited museum in the world. I had heard of Leonardo da Vinci's Reformation era masterpiece since my childhood, and now here I was—those artistic eyes now following me as I maneuvered

myself to different vantage points in the room. Though not to the same level as our art-historian guide, I was growing in my knowledge of the *Mona Lisa* and its illustrious artist.

In a similar way, the apostle Paul is our spiritual tour guide, introducing us to the wonders of the Christian world. Paul repeatedly reminds us not only of the truth of these riches but that in Christ they belong to us. Without Paul's skilled help we would know far less of all that God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9). Paul's inspired letters document unsearchable riches of Christ embedded in the New Covenant that Paul had been redeemed to enjoy himself and to proclaim to others—wonders whose riches transformed him and that he earnestly prayed would transform others.

One of the richest catalogs of our spiritual blessings in Christ is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (1:17–23; 3:14–19). Paul's love and concern for the Ephesian church is obvious in one of the most touching prayer scenes in all of Scripture. In Acts 20 Paul is taking his final leave of

the Ephesian elders, who had traveled at least two full days to meet him in Miletus. After a heartfelt charge, Paul kneels and prays with them. The prayer issued a tearful, heart-wrenching farewell. Luke does not record Paul's prayer on that occasion, but in Ephesians Paul reveals his earnest prayers for the believers in the same church. As McLaren points out, from this we can learn much about Paul's spiritual priorities:

A man's prayers for others are a very fair thermometer of his own religious condition. **What he asks** for them will largely indicate what he thinks best for himself; and **how he asks** it will show the firmness of his own faith and the fervour of his own feeling. There is nothing colder than the intercession of a cold Christian; and, on the other hand, in no part of the fervid Apostle Paul's writings do his words come more winged and fast, or his spirit glow with greater fervour of affection and holy desire than in his petitions for his friends (Alexander McLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, 17 vols., 13:52; emphasis added).

When eavesdropping intently on Paul's prayers in Ephesians, we notice that his rich prayers for others focus on profound spiritual requests that are typically not found in our prayers, likely because we still are not as enamored as Paul was with our riches in Christ. Therefore, being mentored in prayer by Paul includes our growing comprehension and enjoyment of the realities that he teaches us to pray for others.

PAUL PRAYS FOR OUR GROWING KNOWLEDGE

In the two prayers for the Ephesians, Paul uses three different verbs for our knowing (*eido*, 1:18; *katalambano*, 3:18; *ginosko*, 3:19). In addition, he prays that God might give believers a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge (*epiginosis*) of God (1:17). Paul's concern is for more than head knowledge. He yearns for our reception of these truths to combine with spiritual perception so that we would be persuaded of them and come to possess them, or better, that they would take

possession of us. It is an ever-deepening embrace of the realities in which God has already embraced us. The word Paul uses for "comprehend" in 3:18 is picturesque—it is the equivalent of a mental football tackle. We grasp hold of truth to wrestle with it and subdue it. Paul clearly aspires to active spiritual learning language! This is a comprehension that is not passive but one that requires spiritual strengthening.

PAUL'S PRAYERS REMIND US OF GOD'S ENABLING MIRACLES

Naturally, when we were outside of Christ, we hardly knew what we didn't know. Our understanding was darkened, but we professed ourselves wise. We had no capacity to even see such realities contained in Paul's prayers, much less to comprehend them with appreciation. Within these prayers, Paul reminds us of two fundamental realities that enable us to know such wonders: our eyes have been enlightened (1:18) and we have been rooted and grounded in love (3:17).

Enlightened Eyes. We are born spiritually blind, essentially without working eyes. Our blindness was probably most manifest in that we mistakenly believed that we had clear sight! John Newton wrote to a friend, "There are many who stumble in the noonday, not for want of light, but for the want of eyes" (in J. Todd Murray, *Beyond Amazing Grace*, 62). None of us was born using our eyes to seek God (Rom. 3:11). We loved darkness, chose darkness (John 3:19–21), and walked in darkness (1 John 2:11). Our blindness was made worse by the work of Satan (2 Cor. 4:4). We could not see God (Heb. 12:14), His kingdom (John 3:3), His gospel (2 Cor. 4:4–5), or the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). God alone can enlighten eyes. It is not something we do for ourselves or something others can do for us. It is a supernatural work comparable to the first day of creation when God made the light (2 Cor. 4:6). The expression "eyes of our understanding" (lit. "eyes of our hearts") conveys that this is something far deeper than the miracle of physical sight.

When we pray, we are often encouraged to shut our eyes. This helps us not to be distracted by the visible so that we can focus on the invisible—to see more clearly with the eye of faith what is not

visible to the naked eye or visible to the unbelieving eye.

In Love, Rooted and Grounded. The same God who opens our eyes also roots and grounds us. Paul teaches the Ephesian believers that God is growing a building (2:21–22) for His Spirit of which they are a living part. "Rooted and grounded" reflect that unique image. The Body of Christ is both a living vine with branches and a building of living stones founded on Christ. God has graciously rooted and "foundationed" that building in love. What love? The eternal and enduring love of the members of the Godhead for each other that gave birth to our redemption, the love of each member of the Godhead for members in the body, the love God enables us to return to each member of the Godhead, and the love He enables us to have for other members of the building.

Having God-enlightened eyes and being rooted and grounded by Him in love, we are now placed by God in precisely the best position to perceive, comprehend, and intimately know the realities for which Paul prays. Just in these two prayers, Paul prays that we could come to know five grand wonders:

- The hope of God's calling (1:18).
- The riches of the glory of God's inheritance for the saints (1:18).
- The exceeding greatness of God's power toward those who believe (1:19).
- The expansive dimensions of the great work that God the Father is doing through the church (3:18).
- The surpassing love of Christ (3:19).

Each of these wonders surpasses the greatest humanly produced masterpiece and makes for a rich study. Together they constitute galleries of spiritual wonders reflecting God's sublime and innumerable thoughts toward us. Each is worth far more than the entire collection housed in the Louvre. May God deepen our understanding of these things so that they inform our prayers for our brothers and sisters who are treasures themselves.

Robert Vincent is the pastor of Grace Bible Church in Milford, Ohio.



Songs in the Night

When I was growing up, I would know when my mother was having a restless night because she would be listening to the calm, deep voice of Franklyn MacCormack on WGN radio in Chicago. His songs in the dark of night would float through the air, as would the readings of poems or literature he would choose to calm the worried soul. It may have been *Songs in the Night* on WCFL that she listened to as well, but the memory still lingers in my mind.

It wasn't until some years ago, after I was truly saved, that the reference to "songs in the night" in the Bible popped out to me. In one Bible reference Elihu was trying to point out to Job that many who are afflicted complain about their trials but never cry out to God (Job 35:9-13). They don't repent of their sins, nor do they seek the comfort that only the Lord can give. "Songs in the night" from God can give us patience to wait out the problem, consolation during the situation, and joy

and thanksgiving for what can be learned during those rough times. Elihu's reference was ill-placed with Job, but the reference still lingers with me as I review the progression of my faith.

"BORN AGAIN"?

Though raised in church from birth, the phrase "born again" was foreign to my ears. We learned Bible stories and Bible verses and the catechism, but understanding what that life-changing "born-again" step meant was an unknown. Thus other parts of a faith-building life were foreign as well . . . such as prayer as an experience rather than a duty. Memorized prayers for bedtime and mealtime were staples. In hindsight, they were not bad—they did keep your focus on the Lord, but they did not go far enough. Prayer was part of my life, but only that.

It was a special aunt that started drawing me to the fact that there was something more to religion. When my life was thrown upside-down in early years of marriage, it was Aunt Vi who started sending me Bible

verses written on 3 x 5 cards or in a short note that she mailed to me even though we lived not that far apart. It was her way of saying that God loved us and would take care of us, that she was praying for us, and that things would get better.

Her prayers lifted me; they expanded my prayer life, and I was growing in faith. My sweet husband prayed with me at night, and our devotion to the Lord was significant. When his health began to fail, we realized that we had to move across the country from the Midwest to California for him to feel better. In California we had one week to find a place to live and came to the final day with nothing more to see. Praying that night, we asked the Lord to lead, and putting our complete trust in Him, we fell asleep in peace. Isaiah 26:3 was not familiar to me at the time, but it held true: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee." When our realtor called the next morning, we could hardly believe where the Lord had reserved a place for us



... better than we could ever have chosen ourselves.

It reminds me now of the disciples praying for Peter's release from prison. When the Lord sent an angel to loose his chains, open the prison doors, and lead him past the guards to the street, he realized he was not dreaming. Those who had been praying at John Mark's house could not believe Rhoda, who left Peter standing at the gate, as she told them of Peter's release (Acts 12:6–17). How many times have I prayed with a hesitant spirit, hoping that God would answer my prayer, but not quite expecting the answer requested? Belief versus unbelief... learning to trust more, admitting I'm not where I should be.

BORN AGAIN!

It wasn't many years later that my husband's health declined again. California air was no longer fresh due to more pollution, and we were seemingly led to Arizona, where my daughter could go to college and my husband could find

relief. However, within two years, doctors discovered pancreatic cancer, and my husband survived only three months after that diagnosis. He spent a month in the hospital not long before his death, and one Sunday morning after church I arrived in his hospital room greeted by a very sick man with a huge smile on his face. "I know what it means to be born again!" he exclaimed. "I know what it means!" A missionary nephew had come in to talk with him and shared the import of the decision... and he had grasped the meaning and prayed for salvation.

However, I did not grasp the meaning, so upon his death, grief overwhelmed me! So many thoughts: What could I have done that I didn't do, what shouldn't I have done that I did? What could I have said or not said that would have been better? There seemed to be no peace about it. Praise the Lord for His grace. Instead of turning from Him, I turned to Him, searching Scripture for answers, reading psalms that really made no sense to me... until one day, His

Word hit my heart! I knew what it meant to be born again! The blinders came off, and God made a difference in all aspects of my life, including my prayer life. The Lord became my strength, and One to whom I talked at any time.

C. H. Spurgeon wrote that "God alone can give us songs in the night." That truth became real for me. When I would wake up in the middle of the night, the Lord would give me a song. When I would rise in the morning, there would be a song in my mind. It was Spurgeon again who said, "Our griefs cannot mar the melody of our praise; we reckon them to be the bass part of our life's song." We sing with Mary the mother of Jesus, "For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name" (Luke 1:49).

As a relatively young widow, it was difficult for me at times. Loneliness would creep into my thoughts, but a handful of prayer warriors upheld me. It took twelve long years before I finally prayed a prayer of contentment and resolution to accept

the situation that God had allowed in my life. That must have been what He was waiting for; within a matter of weeks, a widower approached me with an invitation to date, which eventually led to marriage. The Lord blessed.

Now I am alone again. After a little more than thirteen years, my husband died in the season of Covid.

This time the direct communication with the Comforter began immediately. His blessings have been innumerable. Loss is difficult, but having the Lord beside me makes it much easier. My church family supported me with their hands and feet as I needed them. But the prayers . . . oh, I am overwhelmed by their prayers! There is no doubt that through their prayers the Lord gave me comfort, helped direct me when huge decisions had to be made, sustained me during health issues, and has continued to bring His blessings upon me.

When situations necessitated the sale of my house, I prayed for a family who would love the house, be an asset to the neighborhood, and be able to have a place for their children to grow. Within twelve hours of placing the house on the market, such a family offered everything we asked, so it was an easy decision. And the Lord provided a new home for me . . . more than I even knew I would want. His Word comes to mind: "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps. 37:4).

The transformation in my life is ongoing, but, looking back, I see significant times and situations that gave prayer more meaning and import. I am reminded of the Lord's desires and requirements of me.

- May my words of encouragement, Scripture verses, or phone calls keep others focused on the Lord. My aunt provided that for me, but her prayers were foundational. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).
- May my prayers of thanksgiving be abundant—in times of prosperity but even more in times of trial. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as

ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving" (Col. 2:6–7). Andrew Murray wrote, "Thanksgiving will draw our hearts out to God and keep us engaged with Him."

- May the Lord convict me often of my sin so that my prayers for forgiveness keep a clean slate. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).
- Prayers of the body of the Church carry much weight. May I be a part of that body that is unified in prayer! "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1–3).
- Let belief in what God can do always rid me of doubt. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Ps. 20:7).
- May confidence that the Lord always answers prayer in the best way and at the most appropriate time be an encouragement to persevere in prayer. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isa. 65:24).
- May the Lord give me pause to pray with understanding that He has me where I am for His purpose and for my growth. Let me always say with Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11). Then, "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day" (Ps. 25:4–5).

The Lord's care for me is a result of His grace and mercy and the prayers of many. I have cried aloud to God in times of trial; He has always heard me and has never left my side. I can say as the psalmist, "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my

song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search. . . . I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?" (Ps. 77:5–6, 11–13).

Jeana Kamp is an active member of Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona, and works part-time as support staff at International Baptist College and Seminary. She also writes daily devotionals for PresidentialPrayerTeam.org.



Growing in Prayer

- May my words of encouragement, Scripture verses, or phone calls keep others focused on the Lord.
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Praying for the Preacher from Psalm 20

PART 1—PRAYING FOR THE PREACHER FROM PSALM 20: WHY WE CAN

Ever since I came to know the Lord in my early twenties, my family and I have been blessed to regularly hear preaching from able, faithful expositors of the Word. I have lost count of the times I have been profoundly convicted, encouraged, and transformed under the scalpel of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you have been likewise blessed by a spiritual and eloquent messenger of the Word. If so, you can thank God for His manifold blessings to you.

The realization that the blessing of preaching comes ultimately from God should motivate us to pray. The apostle Paul appealed to the believers that they would intercede for him as he proclaimed the gospel (Eph. 6:19; 2 Thess. 3:1). A study of these passages certainly would be a worthwhile exercise. However, I would like to do something different here and exhort us to pray for our preachers from the truths we find in Psalm 20.

In Part 1 of this article we will examine how we can apply this psalm to praying for our preachers. This theological exercise is necessary because the psalm was written in context different from ours. It dealt directly with Israel's king preparing

to lead the army into battle. Although we find significant spiritual parallels between the warrior-king in the Old Testament and the faithful preacher in the New Testament, it would be wrong to interpret the text as talking about preachers. The text has only one interpretation, the normal interpretation demanded by the words and grammar in their context. Nevertheless, all Scripture is profitable, and the eternal truths of the Word of God have many applications today. It is therefore our obligation to demonstrate why the application of the psalm to the contemporary preacher is theologically justified. Once we have done this, Part 2 will draw out this application in order to motivate us to pray fervently for those who open the Word of God for us.

PSALM 20 IN ITS CONTEXT

Psalm 20 is a benediction, the invocation of God's blessing. We can think of it as an indirect prayer, much like "God bless you." If offered with the right heart, it has the same spiritual power as a prayer directed to God. (See Num. 6:27.) The recipient of the blessing in Psalm 20 is Israel's king. In verse 6 he is called God's "anointed." Although priests and prophets were also anointed in the Old Testament, "the LORD's anointed" and equivalent expressions are used repeatedly of Israel's legitimate kings

(1 Sam. 16:6; 24:6; 26:9; 2 Sam. 1:14; 19:21; 2 Chron. 6:42).

The context of Psalm 20 is an impending battle in which the king must face God's enemies. At that time, kings usually went out to war leading their armies (2 Sam. 11:1), and so were exposed to many dangers. It was not uncommon for a king to be killed in battle (1 Sam. 31:1–6; 1 Kings 22:29–40; 2 Kings 23:29–30). A godly Israelite king would not want to go to war without first being assured of the presence and protection of God. He would seek this through offerings and sacrifices made by the priests on his behalf (Ps. 20:3). We know that animal sacrifices, in themselves, could not guarantee favor with God (1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 15:8; Hosea 6:6). They were, however, a symbolic act of humble trust (Ps. 4:5; 51:16–19) in the grace and mercy of God, and they pictured the ultimate sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:11–14; 1 Pet. 1:19).

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PSALM 20 AND US

But what does Psalm 20 have to do with praying for your preacher? This relationship is based on the theological connections between the Old and New Covenants, between the Nation of Israel and the

Church, and between the king of Israel and God's servants today.

The Old and New Covenants. The covenant that God made with the Nation of Israel at Mount Sinai furthered His promises to Abraham and his descendants to bless them and, through them, all nations (Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:4–6). The peoples of the world lived in spiritual darkness, idolatry, and rebellion (Gen. 6:5, 11–12; 8:21; cf. Ps. 115:2–8; Rom. 1:18–32; Eph. 4:17–19). In order to reach the world, the Lord planned to work through the “seed” of a man of faith, Abraham. That seed of promise was in a physical sense, the Nation of Israel, and in a spiritual sense all those people in both the Old and New Testament periods who trust in Christ (Rom. 4:16). Christ Himself is the ultimate Seed, the descendant of Abraham and of David (Matt. 1:1), the Deliverer of Israel, and the Light of all the nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47).

Throughout the Old Testament God sought to show the Israelites and the other nations that He is the only true God and Savior (Deut. 4:6–7; 1 Kings 8:41–43, 59–60; Isa. 45:21). In so doing He was preparing the world for the coming of Christ. The physical battles that Israel fought were a picture of the spiritual hostility between God and a rebel humanity (1 Sam. 17:46; Rev. 19:11).

Throughout its history, Israel failed to genuinely trust and obey God. Although there were always those who had regenerated hearts, most of the people were still in spiritual unbelief, despite their national affiliation with Jehovah. For this reason, God promised a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8) based on new and better promises (Heb. 8:6). The New Covenant in Jesus Christ, applied both to the Church today and to restored Israel in the future, is a spiritual covenant in which our loyalty to God is not merely formal and external, but is internal and spiritual (Jer. 31:33).

Israel and the Church. The relationship of the New Covenant to the Old helps us to appreciate the similarities and the differences between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church. Israel was God's nation chosen nation, preparing the way for the First Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church consists of people from

PSALM 20

- 1 The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;
- 2 Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;
- 3 Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah.
- 4 Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.
- 5 We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners: the LORD fulfil all thy petitions.
- 6 Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand.
- 7 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.
- 8 They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright.
- 9 Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call.

all nations, testifying of the salvation that Jesus secured on the cross and awaiting His Second Coming in power. Israel occupied a physical land, had a national government, and fought against national enemies with physical weapons. The Church is called to take the forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ to the whole world. Our mission is spiritual, and our warfare and its weapons are spiritual and divine rather than physical and human (2 Cor. 10:3–4). However, our battle is even more intense and momentous than the greatest of human conflicts because we must stand against demonic powers in the celestial sphere, and even against the Arch Deceiver himself (Eph.

6:12). Even more than the armies of Israel in ancient days, believers today must have the protection and the power of God.

The “king” and the King. This leads us to consider the king and the King of kings. Israel's king was to be a man after God's heart who represented the Lord to the people and lead them in fidelity and obedience to Him (1 Sam. 13:14). He was really a vice regent since Jehovah was Israel's true King (1 Sam. 8:7). In his role as God's royal representative, the Lord's anointed (*messiah* in Hebrew) pointed the way to the Great Messiah and King, the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas even the best of human kings failed, the Lord Jesus has conquered and will conquer.

There is also a parallel between the king as God's servant and the New Testament believer. We have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we represent Christ, and we are engaged in spiritual warfare. What is true of all believers is true of God's servant proclaiming His Word. When the Bible is preached, there is a great spiritual conflict taking place between belief and unbelief and between godliness and wickedness. No wonder Paul requested prayer four times in his letters (1 Thess. 5:25; Eph. 6:18–20—boldness in proclamation; Col. 4:3—an opportunity to speak; 2 Thess. 3:1—that the Word of God would have free course and be glorified). Without divine power a preacher can no more expect spiritual victory than a soldier on the modern battlefield can expect to face tanks and fighter aircraft armed only with his fists. Without God's intervention, the day will certainly be lost. Therefore, we must pray for our preachers.

PART 2—PRAYING FOR THE PREACHER FROM PSALM 20: WHY WE SHOULD

In Part 1 of this article we saw how we can legitimately apply the spiritual blessings of Psalm 20 to our minister. With this theological understanding in mind, we can see that Psalm 20 gives us two great motivations to pray. First, verses 1–5 show us that *he* needs it, and, second, verses 6–8 teach us that *we* need it. Based on these two truths, we can have confidence that the Lord will hear us (v. 9).

THE PREACHER NEEDS US TO PRAY (VV. 1-5)

The psalmist prayed that God would bless the king in five specific ways. God's spokesman today has the same needs.

Prayer for Divine Protection. From verse 1, we learn that, like Israel's king, the preacher needs *divine protection*. We must pray that God will hear (and answer) him "in the day of trouble." In Psalm 20 this refers to the day of battle. If our pastor is in a car accident or has suddenly taken ill, we are often quick to pray for him. But one of the times of greatest spiritual danger for the preacher is before, during, and after preaching. Before the message, a thousand distractions can flood his mind to keep him from focusing on prayer and the study of the Word. During the message, he may be afflicted by the fear of offending or by doubts as to the efficacy of the Word. After the message, he may be brought excessively low in discouragement if the message seems to have flopped, or he may succumb to pride if it seems to have gone well. The preacher needs for the Lord to hear his cries and to "defend" him. The latter term translates the Hebrew phrase "set on a high place." Pray that God would lead the preacher upward to the Rock of his salvation.

Prayer for Divine Sanctification. Verse 2 states that the help of God must come to Israel and its king from the sanctuary in Zion. The *sanctuary* (holy place) is the tabernacle/temple, where God demonstrated His presence with His people. The term "Zion" is a frequently used spiritual designation for Jerusalem, the Holy City. Today we have no such holy places. Instead, the presence of God is with us and in us by His Holy Spirit. Therefore, more than anything, we need for the Spirit of God to fill us, purge us from self, and minister through us. Pray that your preacher would be walking and preaching in the Spirit.

Prayer for Divine Acceptance. Not only does the preacher need divine protection and sanctification, he also needs divine approval on both the message and the messenger. In verse 3 the psalmist prays that God would accept the king's "offerings" and "burnt [sacrifices]." These were offerings required by the Law (Lev. 1-7).

BUT WHAT DOES PSALM 20 HAVE TO DO WITH PRAYING FOR YOUR PREACHER? THIS RELATIONSHIP IS BASED ON THE THEOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS, BETWEEN THE NATION OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH, AND BETWEEN THE KING OF ISRAEL AND GOD'S SERVANTS TODAY.

Likewise, we should think of the preacher's message as being offered to God. Although the preacher ministers to us, his sermon is even more an act of service to the Lord. Pray that everything in the message would be biblical and pleasing to the Lord.

Unlike some other offerings, the whole burnt offering was completely consumed upon the altar, thus representing the total devotion of the offerer to the Lord. Both message and messenger must be consecrated to the Lord. This is a particular challenge, especially for the busy pastor who is struggling to manage the responsibilities of practical ministry and study for his messages. It is easy for him to neglect his own soul in the process. Pray that God's Word would so work in the preacher that his face would shine with God's glory. (See Exod. 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:18).

We must understand that, although the Old Testament sacrifices and offerings taught the Israelites their obligations to God, they were also a reminder of the people's failure to fulfill those obligations. That is why sacrifices were needed in the first place. In this they picture the perfect devotion and service of the Lord Jesus Christ, who always pleased the Father, and who is the basis of our acceptance with Him (Rom. 5:1-2). Therefore, although we must pray that the preacher would devotedly serve the Lord, we must also acknowledge with thankfulness that the answer to this prayer hinges not on the merits of the servant but on the perfection of the Savior.

Prayer for Divine Power. In addition to protection, sanctification, and acceptance, the man who opens God's Word needs divine power. Verse 4 asks the Lord to give the king an answer according to his "heart." "Heart" means the inner person, and it often refers to the mind. The next phrase, "fulfil all thy counsel," has to do with the

king's plans. As with any human activity in service to the Lord, God does not work independently of human diligence but through it. The faithful preacher desires God to use the sermon to bring conviction and blessing. To that end, he must work hard to discern the sense of the Scripture and plan how to present it. We should pray that both his general desire and his specific plans would be fulfilled by the powerful working of God. Pray that the preacher's explanations would be clear, that his illustrations would be powerful, and that his applications would meet the specific needs of people's hearts.

Prayer for Divine Results. In verse 5 the psalm shifts its focus to the people, stating that they will rejoice and set up their banners because of the deliverance and victory that the Lord will grant to the king. This makes perfect sense. The king's victory is the people's victory and vice versa. In our own context, Christ has given pastors and teachers to prepare the believers for works of service to build up the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12). True results in preaching are not measured by immediate effects and feelings but by the changed lives of the hearers, *and* by the changed lives of those whom they will influence. Pray that the preaching will create a powerful chain reaction resulting in the spiritual blessing of multitudes.

WE NEED TO PRAY FOR HIM

We have seen five ways in which the preacher needs our prayer. We next learn from verses 6-8 that we also need to pray for the preacher because *we* need it for our own spiritual health and growth.

We Need Spiritual Insight. Notice that verse 6 shifts from "we" to "I." By invoking God's blessing on the king, the psalmist

has had his own faith strengthened. He says, "Now I know that the LORD saveth his anointed." Perhaps he concludes this as he recalls the sacrifices going up in a spiritually pleasing aroma to God. Perhaps his own words have ministered to his soul. Regardless, he exemplifies Christ's command that whatever we ask, we must ask in faith (Mark 11:24). God saves His anointed and will hear from His holy heaven. Why? Because our lives are about much more than us, they are involved in the plans of the God of the universe. Faithful preachers are anointed by God and are servants of heaven. Preaching is not just a religious activity but is an essential part of God's plan.

We Need Spiritual Priorities. Nations, ancient and modern, have always trusted in their advanced weapons of war. In the days of Psalm 20 those were chariots and cavalry, the tanks and fighter planes of the Old Testament world. However, God commanded Israel not to be afraid of the enemies' horses and chariots but to trust in Him (Deut. 20:1), and He prohibited Israel's kings from going to other nations in search of such weapons (Deut. 17:16; Isa. 31:1). This is one of the hardest lessons for us to remember—to trust in the "Name of our God," that is, in His Person and character. Pray that through hearing the faithful exposition of the Scriptures, God's people would increasingly trust Christ in everything.

We Need Spiritual Confidence. In verse 8 the psalmist reminds us that those who trust in human weapons and tactics will surely fall, but those who trust in the Lord will stand. This confidence is hard to maintain in a world that is hostile to God and blind to His ways. The worldly way of unbelief tends to infect believers as well—all the more reason that we need the powerful preaching of the Word of God to build us up in our most holy faith (Jude 20).

The psalm concludes with a direct appeal to God: "Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call." In this verse the "king" could refer to the human king for whom the psalmist has been praying, or it could refer to God, making the second part of the verse parallel with the first part, since God is Israel's ultimate King. In either case, our trust is not in the preacher but in the Lord Jesus Christ who is both God and King. Why not make it our practice to regularly and earnestly plead that the Lord would bless the preaching of His Word this Lord's Day?

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GOD'S SERVANT WHO PREACHES HIS WORD

David Shumate ©2021
Set to "A Light in the Window"
William Batchelder Bradbury, 1864
(Psalm 20)

May the Lord hear your cry in His battle,
And defend you in His mighty Name.
With conquering grace from the
most holy place,
May He steel you His truth to proclaim.

Refrain

God's servant who preaches the Word,
A celestial battle must fight.
We earnestly plead with the Lord,
That He'd grant you His wisdom
and might.

May our God consecrate by His Spirit
Both the message and messenger whole.
Granting all your desire for His
heavenly fire,
May He use you to quicken dead souls.

We will thankfully shout in God's triumph,
While unfurling our banners of praise.
For He'll never despise His beloved
ones' cries,
Nor the prayers that in Jesus we raise.

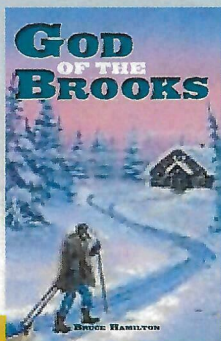
Although some trust in chariots
and horses,
On the name of our God we shall call.
His Son has prevailed, and His Word
cannot fail.
The Messiah will reign over all.

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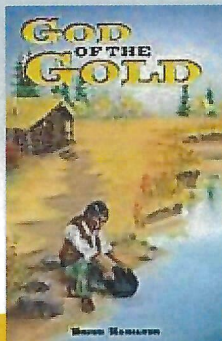
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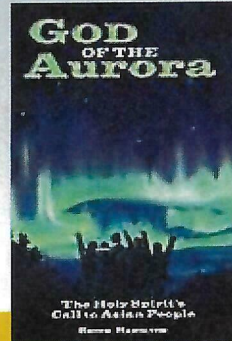
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But Prayer . . .

In our little fellowship of fundamental Baptist churches in Northwest Mexico, we have a phenomenon which is an uncommon event in other regions of the country. On the first Friday of every month seven to eight churches gather to share a short challenge and pray for one another and for the work of the Lord in our areas. Each month the meeting is held in a different church. The pastor of that church preaches to us, we share requests, and we finish with a time of fellowship—which includes food (something that cannot be left out!). Through these prayer meetings the Lord has strengthened our bonds of brotherhood. We have seen God answer prayer, the churches have grown, and more churches have been started.

Each month, I am reminded of the passage in Acts 12 when Peter was put in prison by Herod awaiting execution; verse 5 says, “Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” Whether we are talking about a local assembly or the the Body of Christ at large, prayer can and should be made “without ceasing,” or, as the

word is defined, “fervently,” for the many and varied needs that the Lord allows us to experience daily. There is much that we can glean from Peter’s situation and from this one verse! Let’s consider it briefly.

UNCEASING OPPORTUNE PRAYER

“Prayer was made.” I call that *opportune prayer*, similar to Peter’s own prayer when he was sinking in the waters of the Sea of Galilee, “Lord, save me.” Nehemiah prayed such a prayer when asked by the King of Persia why he was so sad: “So I prayed to the God of heaven” (Neh. 2:4). Likewise, the Lord encourages us to pray for the “grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). So, whatever might be the situation, need, or danger, we are to pray!

Then it says the church prayed “without ceasing.” The word translated “without ceasing” literally means “fervently.” Fervent prayer is that prayer that takes you out of your comfort zone; prayer that is constant, coherent, and energetic. And, taking the English translation as it stands, a petition that affects us to pray that way would very

likely be without ceasing! We prayed for the salvation of my dad for years and years. For a very long time he was not interested in the gospel. I remember various times trying to witness to him and telling him he needed to be saved, and his answer was, “Saved from what?” He would run pastors off. My cousin who is a pastor tried to witness to him, and Dad ran him out of the house as well.

When my father was ninety years old, the doctors found a bad valve in his heart and notified us that he could die any day! I took the next flight out to go try one more time to lead him to Christ but not before writing friends and pastors to pray that I might be able to witness to him. I was able to give him the gospel as clear as I could make it, but his answer was, “I think I will think about it some more.” I tried to make him understand the urgency, but to no avail. I had to get back to the mission field, but before I left, I told my mother’s pastor about his need and the encounter that I had had with him. That next Sunday my dad attended church with my mom, and the following week the pastor went over to



visit him. After the visit the pastor called me to say, in his words, "That was the clearest salvation experience I have ever had with a lost soul." My dad was gloriously saved that day and lived two more years, showing evidence of a converted life.

COLLECTIVE, EFFECTIVE, INTERCESSORY PRAYER

The verse goes on to say that prayer was made "of the church." I would call that *collective prayer*—the prayers we lift up to heaven when we gather together. Now we know the church is not the building nor is it an organization; it an organized group of blood-washed, baptized believers who meet to worship the Lord and pray to Him. The Lord even tells us that "if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask," obviously, according to His will, "it shall be done for them of my Father" (Matt. 18:19)! Without a doubt, that is a wonderful promise to latch on to.

The verse also includes the phrase, "unto God," which I would call *effective prayer*. It seems almost redundant, and it should be a given, that prayer is to be made *to God*, but here and in many other parts of the world, there are those who pray to almost anything! Stones, rivers, trees, celestial orbs, paintings representing angels, biblical characters, saints who have passed away, and even death itself are the recipients of many prayers, all of which go unheard. Their prayer and ours should be

directed to God, and to Him alone! In the first place, He is the only One who can hear our prayers, and, second, He is the only One who can do something about them! But God is not only powerful; He is also concerned about us. The writer of Hebrews says, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:15–16a). So let us come!

The last thing I would mention in this verse is the phrase "for him." That is *intercessory prayer*. The prayer meeting concerning Peter that night was not so much for the comfort of the believers gathered there, but for Peter who was about to be executed . . . the next day! Those prayer warriors stayed up all night fervently interceding for their brother who was awaiting certain death! They weren't praying for something to consume on their own desires. They were praying for someone who was in a worse condition than they were. How many saints in the world are suffering, how many of the Lord's servants are in need in the multitude of mission fields or in times in danger or discouragement? How many are the lost who need salvation and the believers that need to be strengthened? How many laborers need to be sent into the harvest by the Holy Spirit?

WORSHIP GOD FOR HIS ANSWER

Let's follow the Jerusalem church's example of prayer, but let's not be surprised when God does answer. Instead, let's worship Him for hearing and answering our prayers. When Rhoda told the assembly that Peter, for whom they were praying, was outside, they called her crazy! They thought Peter was dead! "It is his angel," they said. When they finally opened the door, they were astonished. Doesn't the Bible say we should pray with faith and believing? May the Lord grant us the grace and motivation to gather together and pray with faith as we serve Him!

Recently, in the churches' prayer meeting, we, a large group of believers from different congregations, knelt before God to make intercessory prayer for a son of one of the pastors, a young man on the brink of death, who had been in a terrible accident. Not long after, we were able to praise God for hearing our prayers and for lifting this young man up. The doctor said, "Someone had His hand in this." Indeed, Someone did, and we know it was God answering our collective, effective, and intercessory prayers.

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Persevering in Prayer

Over the last two years the Lord has been teaching me valuable lessons about *belief* and *perseverance* in prayer. We often pray believing that God is *able* to answer our prayers, but do we believe that He *will*? Persevering in prayer can be especially difficult. We may be praying according to God's will and using Scripture in our petitions that we make to the Lord. When the weeks, months, and years go by and we don't see an answer to that prayer or any evidence that God is working, it's easy to get discouraged and give up. That was the case with me.

ONE SOUL

My husband, Tim, and I serve in Nagoya, Japan, as missionaries. The work in Japan is slow. We don't always see the fruit of our efforts that we would like to see. I remember Tim reminding me that it is our job to be faithful and leave the results with God. Our small church has been growing, and we are thankful for the people God has given us who have a desire to learn His truth from His Word.

Almost two years ago I started praying that the Lord would give us one new soul. I was grateful for the people God had

given us, but I longed to see a new soul saved. We were remaining faithful to what God called us to. I was faithfully building relationships with women in hopes that one of them would be saved. But the weeks and months went by, and God didn't answer my prayer. I don't remember consciously choosing to stop asking the Lord for that one soul, but I confess that I did stop asking.

Last December a young man visited our church for the first time. He kept coming back. He had a Bible with him, but we didn't know much about him. Some of the men in the church talked with him and made him feel welcome. They, along with my husband, answered his questions when he had them. In January of this year, he had surgery that included a sixteen-day hospital stay. He read his Bible for twelve hours every day! It was thrilling when this young man was gloriously saved through his own Bible study and reading. It was the Lord's doing, and it was marvelous in our eyes (Ps. 118:23)!

At some point, this young man started meeting weekly with my husband for Bible study. One day the young man asked Tim about baptism. As a result, my husband

asked him to write out his testimony. As we both read it, we were amazed at what the Lord has done in this young man's heart and life. It has been amazing to watch him grow in His knowledge of God and learn to obey God and His Word. The Lord took this young man to the end of himself. Then with tenderness and lovingkindness, God drew him into a relationship with Himself!

About two weeks before this young man's Easter Sunday baptism, the Lord reminded me of my prayer for one soul. I was grieved in my heart by my lack of belief that God would grant my request. I know that if I ask according to His will, He hears me, and I know that if He hears me, He will answer me (1 John 5:14-15). Above all, I know that God is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9)! So why do I give up so easily and stop persevering in prayer?

PERSEVERING, BELIEVING

I think the main reason for not persevering in prayer is in the area of believing these things when we pray. We believe God *can*, but we don't always believe God *will*. Matthew 21:22 addresses believing in prayer: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall



ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive” (emphasis added). When I cry out to the Lord believing that He can answer my prayer but not believing that He will, I have come to believe that I am doubting God’s goodness. In Psalm 27:13, the psalmist said that he would have “fainted, unless [he] had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” One of the ways we persevere is by believing in the goodness of the Lord. God is good, and whatever He does is good (Ps. 119:68). If He chooses to answer my request immediately, He is good. If He chooses to delay the answer by days, weeks, months, or even years, He is still good! If He chooses to answer it in a way that is different from what I was hoping for, He is still good!

I often sit by that young man at church on Sunday. He is a constant reminder to me of the goodness of God. God heard my prayer. He answered it in His timing. His timing was perfect. When I think about the

details of this man’s testimony, I realize that God was working to bring him to salvation even before I prayed to ask for that one soul. Because I prayed, I have the blessing of receiving a glorious answer to my prayer! I have the fullness of joy mentioned in John 16:24 every time I see this man. He is a constant reminder to me that with God nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). The work in Japan may be slow, but God is still working, and He is able!

Because of the lessons God has taught me during these last two years, I have a new desire for perseverance in my prayer life. Perseverance is defined as a “continued effort to do or achieve something despite the difficulties, failure, or opposition.” I believe that it goes hand in hand with remaining faithful to what God has called me to do. In fact, I cannot do what God has called me to do without persevering in prayer! There will always be difficulties. There will always be fail-

ures on my part and on the part of others. There will always be opposition, especially in the spiritual realm. The struggle against the powers of darkness is real, but “greater is he that is in [me], than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

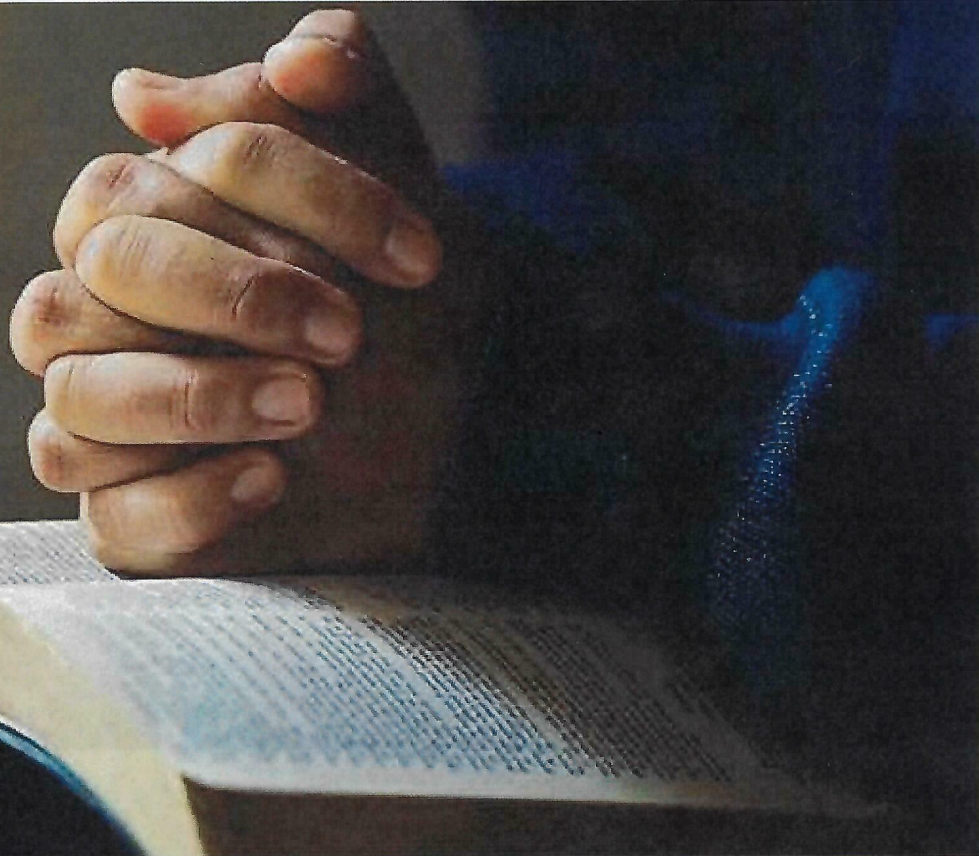
It’s a privilege to serve the Lord in Japan and to witness what He is doing in the hearts and lives of the people there. I am so thankful for God’s patience with me while growing me spiritually by persevering in prayer. A prayer that I often pray is, “Lord, You have told me that if I would believe, I would see Your glory. Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief” (Mark 9:24; John 11:40). I have seen the Lord help me in my unbelief, and every time I see that young man who has been saved, I see the glory of God!



Kim Melton and her husband, Tim, have served as missionaries in Nagoya, Japan, with Baptist World Mission since 2005. Kim enjoys teaching and encouraging the women in the ministry there. The young man mentioned in this article has given his permission to share his testimony on the Melton Update blog. You may read it here: <https://melton-ministryupdates.wordpress.com/testimonies/mr-as-testimony/>.

I DON’T REMEMBER CONSCIOUSLY CHOOSING TO STOP ASKING THE LORD FOR THAT ONE SOUL, BUT I CONFESS THAT I DID STOP ASKING.

Pressing into Prayer



I joke with my homiletics students that if ever they find their invitation failing to elicit a response from an audience, they ought simply to cast a broader net. I suggest that they should add this line to their invitation: “If you feel that you could improve your prayer life, I’d like you to come forward on this next verse.” This is a net broad enough to catch us all!

Many people have dynamic prayer lives, but I have met few who would say that they could not deepen their prayer life. Bought by the blood of Jesus, our sinful hearts transformed, our souls awakened to God, we have a new yearning to commune with our Creator through prayer. The point of this article is not to do a theological examination of prayer or to display its essential elements; it is to suggest some practical methods of prayer that can aid us in having a deeper communion with God.

METHOD #1: PRAYER *IN* BIBLE READING

We often talk about the necessity of having a devotional prayer and Bible reading habit. I would suggest that we can improve on this with a slight adjustment of our terminology; rather than prayer *and* Bible reading we should have a time of prayer *in* Bible reading. The rationale for this first practical method of prayer

accounts for our theological commitments. We are committed to the truth that the Bible is the direct communication of our Creator to us. When we open the pages of Scripture, we hear His very voice! We believe that it is through the Scriptures that we commune with God. We ought then to be careful about compartmentalizing prayer from our reading of Scripture. Our devotional time is actual conversation with the Creator!

The beauty of this method of prayer is that it allows God to set the agenda of our conversation. We listen to Him attentively through the Word and respond to what we have heard Him say. This method requires us to practice all the skills of good active listening: attentiveness, accuracy of understanding, and reflection. Once we have listened with care, we are then to respond to what we have heard. This method imagines our time with God as a two-way conversation—one of both listening and talking with God in the same way that we do with our other vital human relationships.

Step One: Read the text contemplatively and deliberately. Whichever text you are in, read it through in its entirety. I suggest that as you are reading through a book of the Bible, you use a good outline of the book to determine which verses form a communication unit (the chapter breaks are not the best guide). Once you have

determined an easily digestible section of the biblical text, simply read it through carefully. You can consult some basic tools that would help to have a clear understanding of the meaning of any words or phrases. The goal of this read-through is not a thorough exegesis but rather an accurate orientation to the text that you are going to pray through.

Step Two: Praise your way through the passage. In this second step, go back to the start of the passage and begin in a linear fashion to pray your way through the text. This time, however, you are looking for as many praises as you can render to God. In this journey through the passage, you will need to exercise some discipline because you are going to feel the desire to immediately formulate petitions. However, that is coming in the next step. There is a good reason for this round being restricted to praise. Praise logically precedes petition. Praise reminds us of the nature and character of the One whom we are going to petition. You could petition me for a million dollars, but that would be a fool’s errand. First of all, I don’t have it, but secondly, even if I did, I probably wouldn’t give it to you. But God isn’t like that. Praise reminds us of the greatness and goodness of the One whose aid we will seek. It focuses our hearts to petition Him for needs and desires that are in keeping with His character. Dig deep

in your passage and praise Him for all that the text suggests to you.

Step Three: Petition your way through the passage. Lastly, go back to the top of the passage once again. This time, move slowly through the text and formulate prayers to God that are based on the truths being revealed. You will find that you will be eager to do this after you have praised your way through the text. You will also find that your petitions to God will be much better and deeper than your normal list. You will be challenged to align your petitions with the character of the Creator. Petty and selfish petitions don't stand a chance when exposed to the light of God's truth!

The other discovery you will make is that you will have a renewed confidence in your prayers being answered. We all know that God answers prayers that are in harmony with His heart. When you are praying petitions based in the revealed Word of God, you can have a far greater assurance that they are in accordance with the will of God. This leads to deeply faith-filled praying.

Some concluding thoughts on this first method—speed is not the goal. Who cares how quickly you get through a passage when you take this approach? The goal is depth. Additionally, the Psalms are a great place to begin practicing this method. The Psalms are already composed as prayers and therefore make the process more accessible, but it is my contention that this method can and should be employed in all of the scriptural genres. Lastly, this method of prayer is great both as a solo discipline and as a group experience. For about two years we have been praying the Scriptures as a group in my college setting. God has mightily used these prayer times, which occasionally have stretched on for several hours at a time.

METHOD #2: PRAYER DRAFTING

We have probably all been to the prayer meeting where people shared prayer requests for forty-five minutes. Then someone realized that time was almost up and that someone really ought to pray, and so a few minutes of prayer were tacked on to the end. The prayer meeting would have been better characterized as a prayer-request-sharing-time rather than an actual

prayer meeting. Prayer should never be the addendum to a prayer meeting. This second method of prayer is designed to address this problem and is designed for times of intercessory prayer in small-group settings. The idea here is to skip the time when prayer requests are shared and get to praying straight away. The prayer requests will be shared with the group as they are being presented to the Lord.

Step One: Gather your group and start praying. Once the small group is assembled, someone gets the group started by simply beginning to pray. This first person may begin with the standard introductory formula, "Dear Heavenly Father," or whatever variation he prefers and then prays for one prayer request. Here is the important part: after he prays for that one prayer request, he stops; no pontificating, no "amens," just the request and then silence.

Step Two: Begin prayer drafting. Once the first prayer request has been offered, the second person prays. He does not offer any "Dear Heavenly Fathers"; he simply repeats (in his own words, if he likes) the prayer

Continued on page 26

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Mailbag

I have been in Virginia for fifty-five years. I know the political scene very well. I don't want to take anything away from the godly influence in the election cycle of November 2021, but nothing was mentioned in the article [July/August] about the comment that Terry McAuliffe made in the debate on September 29, 2021, about parents not having any rights to say anything about the education of their children. There were two things that played into this. First, when a father was arrested at a Northern Virginia School Board meeting for commenting on his daughter who had been raped in a school bathroom and then when children had to resort to online schooling during the pandemic, many parents began to tune in to the teaching of their children and then saw what was going on.

To have a comment from a candidate for governor saying that parents don't have the right to say anything about the education of their children was a great turning point in the outcome of the elections. Even in reliably Democratic strongholds, there was a changing of the tide after that comment. Thank the Lord for the Christians that were motivated in this election, but that comment in the debate also was a factor.

Don Karnes
Norfolk, VA

Editor's Note: Thank you for your letter. You are correct. The former governor's statements (about abortion and parents' rights) combined with the arrogance of the school boards really fired up believers all over the state. We thank God for the pastors and evangelists who helped churches all over Virginia to take a God-honoring stand on these issues.

Thanks to all of you for keeping this magazine in issue. Lorri and I both benefit from the articles and reference materials.

April McClenney
Chesapeake, VA

I just got the July/August *FrontLine* magazine today. I don't remember when I have ever just sat down and read through the magazine at one sitting the way I did just now. I really appreciated the engaging articles.

Mark Lehman
Taiwan

I found the September/October issue of *FrontLine* quite informative as to apologetics. My takeaway from this issue is not necessarily from the authors' articles themselves, which Mark Herbster alludes to in his preface, "Ready to Answer." It is actually from Jonathan Johnson's #14 reference on page 27.

This is where I am as a Christian and as a Chaplain.

Thank you for a great issue, informative and expanding.

Glenn Booth
Pensacola, FL

Editor's Note: Mr. Booth is referring to footnote 14, p. 27, which reads in part, "There is no better instruction in apologetics than actively pursuing opportunities to share the gospel and answer people's questions in real life."

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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)

Growing Theologically (Part 1)

I'd like to ask you a vital question: *Are you growing theologically?* The question is not whether you read the Bible faithfully, or memorize its verses consistently, or prepare sermons regularly, or think about God and Christ and salvation a great deal. The question is, when it comes to theology, *are you growing?*

What is theology? At its simplest, theology is nothing more than *words* (λόγος) *about God* (θεός). We might assume, therefore, that faithful preachers of the Bible's words about God are experiencing what I'm asking about: theological growth.

Actually, even a Christian child who reads Scripture or hears it taught is a theologian in the making. I'm asking, however, about a more mature kind of theological growth—developing in what we call *systematic* theology.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Let me use an analogy. A child can be taught the alphabet with a set of colored wooden blocks. He learns the letters one by one and is delighted to be able to identify the ABCs. Then we progress to teaching him to use those lettered blocks to spell out entire words. Later, we teach him to combine those words into various combinations in order to make whole statements. All of this is necessary and good. But it is elementary.

Pastors come to a statement like, *in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily* (Col. 2:9). *This means that Jesus is fully God*, they point out. *But Jesus had a body*, they continue. (*Had* is, of course, true. But will they know the importance of explaining that He *has* this

same body to this present hour?) And then they will conclude with basic Christology: *Jesus is also man. So, He is both God and man!*

Of course, all of this is blessedly true. The preaching has accurately combined two building "blocks" of truth (*Jesus is God* and *Jesus is man*) into a simple statement of beginner's Christology: *Jesus is both God and man*. What could be wrong with this?

That's a little like asking what could be wrong with a teacher's stopping short of teaching students any further use of the alphabet than to spell basic words and then to combine them into simplicities such as, "Cats run." The problem is obvious. The proposition that *Jesus is both God and man* is most certainly fundamental, vital theology. But we ought to have advanced theologically considerably beyond this beginner's level. If we're satisfied with explaining no more than this, it most likely betrays stunted doctrinal growth. And that's a significant deficiency.

For one thing, a pastor who is not *growing* theologically is very likely (however unwittingly) to preach theological error. He assumes that he knows the truth, or at least all that he really needs to know. But actually he may not know enough of it to stay within the lines of orthodoxy.

When I was in seminary, I read a sermon by a popular preacher in which he explained that on the cross Jesus became a sinner. He specified, *For the drunkard he became a drunkard. For the adulterer he became an adulterer. For the thief he became a thief*, and so on. This struck me as an especially powerful way of getting across to people that Christ really did bear in His own body all their sin. So, I prepared to preach 2 Corinthians 5:21 (*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin*) with this understanding. But I didn't feel quite confident about it. Thankfully, I hesitated long enough to run it by someone more theologically informed than

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myself, only to discover that this understanding was actually heretical! To explain why required precision on several doctrinal points, a precision that I as yet had not attained. That experience brought me to the sobering realization that my biggest deficiency (and danger) wasn't just *what* I didn't know, but that I didn't even know *that* I didn't know.

I listened recently to a sermon on the Web by an evangelical pastor in which he explained the virgin birth in a way that led to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was an entirely new person. He seemed completely unaware of the critical distinction between the words "person" and "nature," forged carefully in the fires of the early Christological conflicts that engaged Christian theologians for centuries. Just a few months ago I heard on the Web a part of a Sunday school lesson on the attributes of God by a young evangelical assistant pastor. He stated dogmatically that God has not always been omnipresent. He said that he didn't have time to get into the explanation just then. But his brief reasoning was that in eternity past, before the creation of the world, there was nowhere for God to be but in heaven, so He couldn't have been eternally omnipresent. He's always been omnipotent and omniscient, but He has not always been omnipresent. (I should clarify that although neither of these preachers graduated from any of our fundamentalist schools, both were fairly recent graduates of evangelical Baptist colleges.)

Hearing of such minefields, we could conclude that we should stick to simplicities. But that would be an inexcusable shirking of our ministerial stewardship. Why? Because included in our ministerial call is the responsibility to search out and display for our people Truth's glories. Not just its "elementaries." Its *glories*!

The renowned British Bible expositor G. Campbell Morgan (1863–1945) used to explain his own conception of this calling by quoting a devout longing expressed beautifully by the English pastor/poet, George Herbert (1593–1633). Herbert said of the sacred Scripture,

Oh that I knew how all thy lights combine,
And the configurations of their glory!
Seeing not only how each verse doth shine,
But all the constellations of the story.

What Herbert is talking about is this: I open my Bible and see here, there, and everywhere scriptural "stars." Each brilliant statement of theology shines with a light sublime—glorious *words about God*. But there's much, much more upon which to feast the eyes of my heart (Eph. 1:18).

God has skillfully positioned all of these individual stars into spectacular "constellations." Some can be traced relatively easily from reference to cross reference to cross reference right across the surfaces of the Bible's

books and chapters. All a pastor has to do is to connect and exposit several textual dots and the congregation is enabled to see unified configurations. However, there are glorious displays of truth that emerge to view only through explanations that have been informed by *systematizing the entirety* of scriptural revelation on a particular doctrinal point.

For instance, let's return to the earlier example of preaching on Christ's unique person. Are we growing theologically in our own understanding of it? What more do we know of the brilliant constellation that has been discovered through centuries and centuries of devout thought and clarification concerning the union of His two natures? And can we, therefore, describe and extol our Lord's person more knowingly and more movingly than when we left seminary?

It raises the question of whether I can really be a faithful minister while contenting myself with merely calling attention to points of light here and there. Is that sufficient for showing myself *approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*? People who have studied astronomy can combine the lights. It's their occupation to be able to trace constellations. And it's our occupational calling to do with Scripture and its truths something very similar. If we don't, there is a sense in which we are failing to display the glory that God is due.

Let me continue the analogy to astronomy. The Bible says that *the heavens declare the glory of God* (Ps. 19:1). That *glory* is enhanced by the fact that at least some of heaven's literal stars are combined in identifiable clusters. "Here," says a knowledgeable astronomer, "let me trace them out for you. Look at them! Feast your eyes upon them! Now let me tell you the vast distances between the stars that make them up. Here's how large those stars are, and here are their magnitudes and their names. And now listen to Job. God alone, he says, is *so wise in heart and mighty in strength* as to be able to combine stars into those constellations like *Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades* (Job 9:4, 9). "Ohhhh," we exclaim, "What a God!" "Oh, the glory of God! Hallelujah!" we cry. "Praise the LORD!"

This is exactly what takes place when we read the great apostle Paul's letters such as Galatians, Romans, Colossians, and Ephesians. Paul points out various Scriptures and their underlying *doctrines* and shines them upon the great themes of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The result of these educated, skillful syntheses is *GLORY TO GOD ALONE*!

We read and watch unfold the same process in the letter to the Hebrews, the combining of the Old Testament "stars" into traceable, theological constellations. When those constellations are illumined we feel like shouting, "Glory!"

What Paul did, and what the writer to the Hebrews did, is what preacher/theologians are called to do steadily and growingly through the years. It is a good thing that we faithfully exposit texts. It is our calling to do so. But it is a much grander thing to illumine exposition with systematic theology. This also is our calling, *comparing spiritual things with spiritual* (1 Cor. 2:13)¹ until our people are moved to give God greater and greater glory.

HOW TO NURTURE GROWTH

There are some especially effective resources for nurturing theological understanding.

(1) Studying a Catechism. This is undoubtedly the simplest way to sharpen oneself theologically. Initially this won't sound appealing, but a catechism is like a skeleton. It carries and holds together the entire body of revealed Truth on a frame of relatively few "bones." All of the organs and systems of our fleshly body are draped over and around just 206 bones. Similarly, various catechisms have attempted carrying and conveying the whole counsel of God (or at least much of it) by employing a relatively small number of questions and answers. The most well-known catechism, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, makes use of just 107. Spurgeon reduced that number to only 82.

For several centuries catechisms were widely employed by Baptist pastors and theologians for grounding not just the children but also the adults in their congregations. In the last half of the seventeenth century several leading English Baptists (including John Bunyan) produced their own catechisms. Later, John Sutcliffe (Olney, England), Ann Judson (wife of Adoniram), C. H. Spurgeon, the American Baptist Publication Society, J. P. Boyce (founder of Southern Seminary), John Broadus, and many others produced Baptist catechisms and argued for their critical importance. Thankfully, more and more Baptist churches today are realizing the need to return to diligent catechetical instruction. Several years ago our church produced a pretribulation-al, premillennial, Baptist catechism which we entitled *Treeology Theology*. Through memorization and repetition it has most certainly grown our entire congregation theologically. (See mountcalvarybaptist.org/treeology.)

Regardless of whether or not a pastor introduces a catechism to his congregation, he will experience himself an almost immediate surge of theological growth by studying one. I cannot recommend too highly a personal study of a sound catechism. For some introductory help, you would find *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts: The Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life* (Founders Press, 2021), by Baptist historian Tom Nettles, to be both useful and inspirational. He testifies of his own experience with this kind of study: *I confess that I love catechisms. . . . It is spiritually refreshing to meditate on the phrases of the responses and to investigate the Scriptures used to*

*develop those responses. That exercise has been as helpful in my personal theological education as any other single practice.*²

If you do decide to study a catechism, you'll find additional depth in using an exposition as well. Since the historical Baptist catechisms employ many of the Westminster Shorter Catechism's questions and answers, expositions of the latter also inform much of the content of our standard Baptist catechisms. Two of the most accessible and spiritually savory are those done by the Puritans Thomas Watson and Thomas Vincent.

(2) Studying a Confession of Faith. Confessions of faith are the next level up from catechisms. They fill out what catechisms condense. For instance, compare these two statements concerning the issue of the person of Jesus Christ raised earlier. The first is from a historic Baptist catechism, the second from a historic Baptist confession.

1693 Baptist Catechism (or Keach's Catechism)

Christ, the Son of God, became man by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul; being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born of her, yet without sin.

1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

You can see at a glance the substantial advance from a catechism to a confession. Catechisms have the advantage of mental portability because they can be memorized relatively easily. Confessions add fuller mental comprehension by expansion and clarification. And clarification of a sound confession is extremely useful. For instance, the confession qualifies that the two natures exist in one person *without conversion, composition, or confusion*. These are truths resulting from centuries of intense Christological debate. But what do they mean? Why are they important? How are they useful?

In his *Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Evangelical Press, 1999), Samuel Waldron explains briefly: *Any mixture of Christ's two natures would result in a third nature in between, or in the absorption of one or the other of Christ's natures. Why would either of those two results be a problem?* A. A. Hodge explains more fully.

The very point proved in Scripture is that Christ always continued a true God and a true man—not something else between the two. Now, the essential properties of deity cannot be communicated to humanity—that is, humanity cannot be made to be infinite, self-existent, eternal, and absolutely perfect; because, if it possessed these, it would cease to be human. . . . The same is true with respect to Christ's divinity. If that should take on the limitations of humanity, it would cease to be divine. . . . Hence, since Christ is both God and man, it follows that he cannot be a mixture of both, which is neither.³

Obviously, then, it is critical for preachers to understand these theological distinctions. But where and when do they become useful? Waldron and Hodge apply them briefly to two passages that we will inevitably have to explain to our people. Here's one:

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father (Mark 13:32).

On the basis of the clarifications, *distinct natures . . . without conversion, composition, or confusion*, Waldron writes: *He remained at one and the same time "God over all blessed forever" (Rom. 9:5), and the man who was ignorant of the day and hour of his return in glory (Mark 13:32).* Here's a second very difficult text to explain:

. . . to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

Again, Hodge explains by applying the precise theological qualifications that he had just noted. I've bolded a few critical words.

While the Scriptures constantly affirm (as we have seen) of the **one person** whatsoever is true, without exception of **either nature**, they never affirm of either nature that which belongs to the other. It is said that God—i.e., the person who is a God—gave his blood for his Church; but it is never said that his divinity died, or that his humanity came down from heaven.

You may have to read a confession's explanations or qualifications several times before you understand them. They are condensed. That's an advantage. But

it's also the limitation that requires our slowing down and pondering their precise words or going to an exposition for help.

A recently published systematic theology urges that when pastors are preparing to preach a particular doctrine, they would profit greatly from reading the relevant portions in some of the historic confessions.

Such documents reflect the best wisdom of the ages and often provide deeper insights into biblical truth. They also guard us against repeating the imbalances, errors, and heresies of the past or wandering into idiosyncratic teachings that very few Christians have ever held. Confessions are not enemies of biblical interpretation but are its best friends as we strive to pass on the apostolic deposit of truth (2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2).⁴

One of the most useful tools for consulting and comparing some of the best historic confessions is a 288-page work edited by Joel Beeke and Sinclair Ferguson titled *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*. It proceeds through six standard theological topics (God, man, Christ, salvation, church, last things). Page by page, the editors display side-by-side in seven parallel columns the articles and subpoints of five historic confessions on those topics, plus the Westminster larger and shorter catechisms. If you are a Baptist, and particularly if you are a pretribulational, premillennial Baptist, you hold different positions than what is taught on those points by these historic Reformed confessions. But when it comes to the fundamentals, you will find that they provide a great deal of edifying, reverent insight.

To be continued . . .

Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. You may watch his live streams or recorded sermons here: <https://www.mountcalvarybaptist.org/pages/sermons/>.

¹ The Greek of this expression, πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες, is capable of at least three credible understandings (and, therefore, translations). If we understand the verb, συγκρίνοντες, to refer here to *making comparisons* (as it does in its only other NT usages (both in 2 Cor. 10:12), then the two occurrences of πνευματικός, both in the plural, identify the things being compared. They are *spirituals* (of some kind). The context makes explicit what these are; thoughts, words, and wisdom that are *the things freely given to us by God* (v. 12, NASB), *words . . . taught by the Spirit* (v. 13, NASB).

² *Teaching Truth, Training Hearts: The Study of Catechisms in Baptist Life* (Calvary Press Publishing, 1998), 11.

³ *The Confession of Faith: A Commentary* (1869, rpt., Banner of Truth, 1992).

⁴ Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology* (Crossway, 2019), I:166.

John Owen on Overcoming Sin and Temptation

I was recently asked by a young man for a book recommendation that would strengthen his battle against the flesh and help him become a more selfless husband. I found myself turning to one that has helped believers for over five hundred years.

I was significantly helped in my early years of pastoral ministry by reading through John Owen's classic book *Mortification of Sin*, and I was eager to share that experience with him. One of the benefits of turning to older Christian writers is that they tend to challenge the weaknesses and limited perspectives of our own generation. On the other hand, Puritan writers are well known for their challenging prose, and Owen's works are perhaps among some of the most demanding. His dense material, complex thought progression, and archaic wording can often seem impenetrable to the modern reader. There are, of course, modernizations and abridgements available for many Christian classics, including many of Owen's writings, but they are not all equal in quality. Abridgments in particular seem to struggle to capture the force and depth of the original.

Thankfully, when it comes to *Mortification of Sin*, there is an excellent modern edition available. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor have teamed up to produce a unique printing of Owen's three sin-related classics in one cover. *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (Crossway, 2006) includes *Mortification of Sin*, *Of Temptation*, and *Indwelling Sin in Believers*. While *Mortification* is the most well known of these three works and the one I was most interested to introduce to my friend, the three titles together provide a comprehensive overview of Owen's scholarly and pastoral study of sin.

Mortification of Sin focuses primarily on the teaching of Romans 8:13: “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” The book contains three parts, each dealing successively with the necessity, nature, and means of mortification. Owen is especially gifted at turning our confidence for spiritual growth away from ourselves and focusing it on the accomplished work of Christ and the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit. He also deftly exposes the kinds of counterfeit mortification for which we are all too inclined to settle.

Of Temptation begins with Jesus' exhortation to “watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matt. 26:41). This verse forms the basis of the four sections in the book. Part 1 describes the nature of temptation. Part 2 exposes the danger of entering temptation. Part 3 argues that the avoidance of temptation is the duty of all believers. And Part 4 rounds out his discussion by applying his teaching to general cases and practical directions.

Indwelling Sin in Believers is comprised of three parts of unequal length. Owen begins by describing the nature of indwelling sin

through a short discussion of Romans 7:21: “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Part 2 forms the bulk of the book, focusing on the power and efficacy of indwelling sin, especially how temptation becomes sin. In Part 3 Owen looks at the effect and strength of indwelling sin in both believers and unbelievers.

While these three titles form a *tour de force* of theological precision and pastoral wisdom, it is not merely their presence together that makes this edition by Kapic and Taylor especially helpful. What makes their work so valuable is that they have managed to maintain the wording of Owen's originals while providing significant editorial helps and formatting choices that make them far more accessible to modern readers.

In the Preface, Justin Taylor gives a detailed explanation of the editorial changes they made. I will not mention all the features he lists, but I will highlight some that I have found the most helpful. They have

- provided overviews of the thesis arguments for all three books.
- footnoted difficult vocabulary words or phrases (at their first occurrence in each book) and collected them into a glossary.
- updated archaic spellings, pronouns, and word forms (e.g., “thou” to “you”; “hath” to “have”; “concernements” to “concerns”).
- transliterated all Hebrew and Greek words, and provided a translation if Owen didn't provide one.
- translated all Latin phrases that Owen leaves untranslated.
- added headings and italics throughout, along with extensive outlines of their own at the end, in order to aid the reader in following the flow of Owen's thought.

I believe these changes, combined with an attractive modern typeset and additional resources (such as a short biography of Owen and a Scripture index) make this the most useful edition of these three classics available today.

Kapic and Taylor have similarly edited Owen's *Communion with God*, published under the title *Communion with the Triune God* (Crossway, 2007). I recently purchased that book and look forward to digging into it soon. If it is anything like their previous work, this edition will be another great resource for deepening our understanding and worship of our Triune God. I encourage you to take up these great books and read.

Ben Smith pastors Vacaville Bible Church in Vacaville, California.

Acts 2:38—Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins?

It was a warm, muggy, South Carolina summer evening. A Christian brother and I were going door-to-door in our church's neighborhood getting to know the neighbors better and finding out where they were spiritually. I had just asked the man at the door if he was a Christian, if he was saved. “Oh, yes. I was baptized as a child.” Does he have any biblical warrant for his answer? Well, it actually seems as if he may. Take Acts 2:38, for instance: “Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”

It seems pretty clear: “Be baptized . . . for the remission of sins.” That's what the Bible says. Yes, that it what it says, but what exactly does that mean? The confusion revolves around that troublesome little preposition “for.” Prepositions describe the relationship between two things, such as that piece of chocolate cake sitting *on* the kitchen table. You may pick up that piece of chocolate cake *with* your hand, and pretty soon that chocolatey goodness is *in* your tummy, and it eventually ends up *around* your waist, causing you to regret your decision to ingest it *down* your esophagus.

Part of the problem with prepositions, however, is that they can be notoriously broad in their range of meaning. Back to that piece of chocolate cake, you could eat it *with* a fork, or *with* some ice cream, or even *with* your friend. (Careful what you mean there!) Or you could eat it *for* breakfast, or *for* a dollar, or *for* a while, or *for* the calories (as opposed to *in spite of* them). The exhaustive *Oxford English Dictionary* lists thirty-one different definitions of “for.”

So what does all this have to do with Acts 2:38? The function of the preposition “for” in that passage almost seems to indicate purpose: be baptized *for the purpose of* having your sins remitted. Or result: be baptized *so that* your sins will be forgiven. Does “for” in Acts 2:38 indicate purpose, result, or does it have some other meaning?

One of the fundamental rules of Bible interpretation is that we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. If there is a question about the correct interpretation of a particular passage, we must allow other clear passages to inform our interpretation of the difficult passage. With the *possible, apparent* exceptions of Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, and Mark 16:16, the Bible consistently teaches that salvation is by grace through faith, with no mention of baptism: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31). “God . . . shall justify . . . through faith” (Rom. 3:30). “If thou shalt . . . believe in thine heart . . . thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9). If the Bible is so repeatedly clear

that salvation is by grace through faith *alone*, why does Acts 2:38 seem to require baptism?

Based on clear biblical teaching elsewhere, “for” in Acts 2:38 cannot indicate purpose or result. Having our sins forgiven is neither the purpose nor the result of our being baptized. The Greek word translated “for” here is the Greek preposition *eis*, which is usually translated “to” or “into,” but it is also translated “in,” “at,” “on,” “against,” “toward,” “over,” etc. Just like English prepositions, Greek prepositions have considerable flexibility depending on the context. What we want to know is how *eis* is intended in Acts 2:38: “Be baptized . . . *eis* the forgiveness of sins.”

So, let's look at another passage in which *eis* is connected with baptism. John the Baptist said to the crowd that came to him to be baptized: “I indeed baptize you with water *eis* repentance” (Matt. 3:11). These people were not being baptized for the purpose of repenting. Repentance is something that happens *internally*, but a person can demonstrate it externally by some sort of action. They were being baptized to express externally the repentance that had already taken place within them. They were being baptized *because of* their repentance. This same use of *eis* occurs elsewhere. In Luke 11:32, Jesus proclaimed to the crowd that “the men of Nineveh . . . repented *eis* the preaching of Jonas.” The men of Nineveh did not repent for the purpose of Jonah's preaching; that makes no sense at all. Rather, they repented *because of* the preaching of Jonah.

This same usage of *eis* seems to make the best sense in Acts 2:38 (a baptismal context much like Matt. 3:11). “Be baptized . . . *because of* the remission of sins.” Peter is not calling the people to be baptized for the purpose of getting their sins forgiven. We know from lots of other Scriptures that that's not how it works. Rather, he is instructing them to be baptized *because of* the forgiveness of their sins. Because they have repented and their sins have been forgiven, they must now be baptized as a public testimony to that reality. *BDAG* includes this usage of *eis*. Incidentally, this causal use of the English preposition “for” appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as well.

Based on the Bible's teaching regarding the forgiveness of sins and the usage pattern of *eis* we see elsewhere, it is clear that Acts 2:38 does not teach that baptism causes forgiveness of sins. It teaches, rather, that we must be baptized because our sins have already been forgiven.

Andrew Threlfall and his wife, Charlene, are missionaries in South Asia where he teaches at a Bible college and seminary.

Titles of Our Lord

Several years ago, while listening to an evangelist over the course of a week, the thought crossed my mind that when he referred to our Lord he did so almost exclusively by the name "Jesus"; not the "Lord," or "Lord Jesus" or "Christ" or "Jesus Christ" or any such combination, but over and over just "Jesus."

This observation was just starting to occupy my thinking when I went to a session where the evangelist was not preaching but was talking about discipleship in the context of the church plant of which he was a part. He spent a fair amount of time on the idea of relationship-building for the sake of discipleship and as he did, he kept referring to expressions such as "safe," "non-threatening," "affirming," "authentic," and so on. It was such a pronounced emphasis that I took note of it, and it left me with questions.

One of the questions it left me with was whether the previous observation about referring to our Lord only as "Jesus" was somehow tied into being safe, non-threatening, affirming, authentic, relatable, and so on. While some questions were still fresh on my mind, I decided to learn more about the church plant this evangelist was a part of. When I did, I observed that all aspects of the "worship" involved were casual; dress was casual, the architecture was casual, all accessories were casual, even the preaching was more of an informal talk—and there was a lot of talk about "Jesus."

The preaching I had heard was textual, for which I was thankful; but as I continued reflecting on my exposure to this ministry, I realized that the preaching did little to identify a message of a paragraph or section of Scripture or to do something with it that resembled "heralding" a sovereign's message.

I haven't mentioned the music yet, but it probably wouldn't take you much thought to guess what the prevailing style of music in the church plant is—a contemporary sound involving a praise band and a praise team with many upraised hands and closed eyes and swaying back and forth. It seemed there were quite a few connections—from the total vocabulary to the styles and aura.

I came out of that week with the thought in mind to do a broader study and observe the proportion of references in the Scripture to "Jesus" alone as opposed to other titles. Before I got to it, I ran into a ministry friend who is a true Bible scholar with substantial theological training, and we were discussing changes in worship style. During that conversation I said, "I've been wondering if there isn't a purposeful change to using the name

'Jesus' almost exclusively to refer to our Lord." He responded immediately by saying, "I think there are only a couple of occasions where Paul uses the name 'Jesus' by itself." So I launched into accumulating the data.

MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, JOHN, ACTS

If you start with the first five books of our New Testament—the four Gospels and Acts—you will find there is an abundant usage of "Jesus" alone (Matthew: 126; Mark: 90; Luke: 94; John: 229; Acts 26). The overwhelming majority of those occasions are in narrative expressions such as "and Jesus said," or "and Jesus came into Galilee," and so on. When our Lord's personal history is told, the Spirit-directed narrators use His personal name.

However, as I was making observations from the usages in these largely narrative books, I was struck with the fact that the sheer data is far from the entire picture. In Matthew 16, in one of the most theologically significant texts of the entire gospel record, Jesus intentionally solicited a response from the twelve concerning His identity. When He did, the way He probed was to say, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" (v. 13). He asked what we would refer to as a "leading question." We might say He was "priming the pump." Right in a question about His identity He refers to Himself by this title "the Son of Man." Matthew records Jesus' referring to Himself with this title on thirty-two occasions. All agree that the primary significance comes from the connection to Daniel 7 where the Son of Man receives from the Ancient of Days an exclusive and everlasting kingdom. After "priming the pump" a bit by this title, He ultimately hears Peter proclaim, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Jesus then replies that anyone who gets that correct has been blessed by God with eyes to see it. He wanted His disciples to think of Him in terms of "the Christ" and "the Son of Man."

John tells us at the conclusion of his Gospel that his purpose in writing his report about Jesus is to persuade men to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God (John 20:30–31). Don't think of Him merely as Jesus of Nazareth; think of Him as the Christ, the God-man.

One of Luke's repeated reports in Acts is that Paul convinced people from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (see for instance Acts 17:3; 18:5; 18:28). We could overstate conclusions when making arguments from silence, but it still seems worth noting that in Paul's church planting and evangelistic endeavors we don't read of his attempting to convince people that Jesus was

safe, non-threatening, authentic, relatable, and so on: he labored to show people that Jesus is the Christ.

So even in the narrative sections that tell the personal story of the life of Jesus, key text after key text witnesses to the fact that neither Jesus, nor the apostles, nor the Holy Spirit who superintended the record, wanted us to ever think of just the man, Jesus.

THE PAULINE EPISTLES

When I went to the Pauline Epistles, I found there were several more examples than my friend had recalled when he was just talking off the top of his head, but there were still very, very few references to simply the name “Jesus.” In the thirteen epistles Paul penned, from Romans to Philemon, I found ten total occurrences where the name “Jesus” is not used with an accompanying title as in “Lord Jesus” or “Jesus Christ.”

However, just observing the data by itself is again not the full story. In Romans 8:11 the Spirit “raised up Jesus from the dead,” and “raised up Christ from the dead.” In 2 Corinthians 4:5 Paul said he and his companions were the servants of the church for “Jesus” sake, but in that same verse he had already referred to preaching “Christ Jesus the Lord.” In Philippians 2:10 it is to the name of “Jesus” that every knee will bow, but when that happens in verse 11, every tongue will confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” These are three of the ten occurrences of “Jesus” alone in Paul’s writings: that Jesus is a Jesus who is Christ, who is the Lord, and who is one to whom every knee shall bow.

HEBREWS THROUGH REVELATION

In the last nine books of the Bible, from Hebrews through Revelation, there are thirteen occurrences where we observe the name “Jesus” alone. There are seven occurrences in Hebrews, and they are all in references to the Lord’s priestly ministry, to His suffering, to the shedding of His blood, and to His death. He suffered as a real man would. He is a high priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities. The simple human name “Jesus” fits such themes. Yet, even in a book that has these several references to the man Jesus, there are more references to Jesus as “Christ,” our “Lord,” or “Jesus, the Son of God.” In the epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude there are no occurrences of the name “Jesus” alone. In Revelation there are six occurrences.

It is insightful to consider these limited references to “Jesus” alone against the backdrop of the abundant references to our Lord as the “Christ.” There are 585 total occasions where He is referred to as the “Christ.” Those are more limited in the Gospels, with only 62 total in all four Gospels, and the rate of occurrences starts to pick up some with 46 in Acts. When we get out of the narratives and move to the Epistles and do a total count from Romans to Revelation, there are 477 occurrences where the Lord is referred to as the “Christ”; again, as opposed to just 23 total references to “Jesus” alone in the same books of the Scripture. Within the scope of Bible study this is significant because the epistles are Spirit-inspired commentary on the significance of the person and work of our Lord as narrated to

It is insightful to consider these limited references to “Jesus” alone against the backdrop of the abundant references to our Lord as the “Christ.”

us in the Gospel. In these epistles the title “Christ” takes on a particular prominence.

PROPER TERMINOLOGY LEADS TO PROPER BALANCE

The burden I have is that we use terminology that properly shapes our understanding of the Lord. The image of God formed in the mind is oftentimes a product of repetition and sustained exposure. Worship style—not just music but preaching and everything that is part of the atmosphere—is significant. Vocabulary is significant. The impact accumulates. The image of God that is formed in our minds is not merely the product of what is emphasized but also of what is left out. We should not remove all references to the man Jesus, to the suffering Jesus, and to the priestly Jesus, but we will be out of keeping with the full witness of the Scripture if we intentionally or unintentionally leave out the multitude of references to “Christ” and our “Lord.” The observations we underscored above would suggest that these aren’t equal emphases in the Scripture, but that the weight should be on the one who is the “Christ.”

I will propose that the out-of-balance emphasis on “Jesus” alone has coincided with the rise in music of the “Jesus is my boyfriend” or “Jesus is my homeboy” type songs. Perhaps less blatant, while still reflecting a shift, there is a great deal of talk of “Jesus being there for me” and even “Jesus having my back.” I am thankful for tender, supportive grandfathers, but this is largely the figure for many.

Recently the mother of a college-aged boy expressed her grief about how many men in a Christian college have feminine-like traits, even to the point of talking femininely. I shared this mom’s comments with my family, and one of my children said a professor recently proposed that girls are going for feminine-like guys because that is the way they are thinking of Jesus.

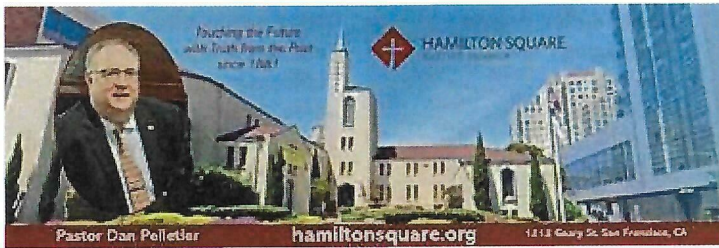
Nearly any display of strength of conviction and leadership is viewed today as harsh and unloving. The ideal boyfriend is soft and easily manipulated. It seems that for some that is the ideal “Jesus” as well.

Jesus is most certainly our High Priest, and He is our friend, and we have the privilege of a personal relationship with Him. But in the Scripture the priest is also the king. Texts such as Psalm 110 make that connection explicitly.

Let us pray that the Lord will help us to have and develop more and more a proper image of Himself in our minds for His honor and our good.

Tom Fuller pastors Faith Baptist Church in Easley, South Carolina.

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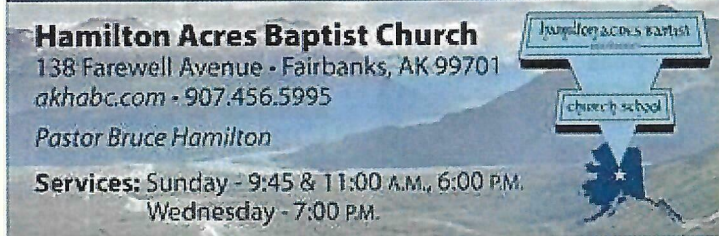
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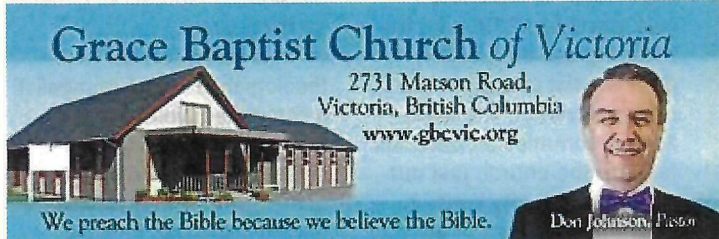


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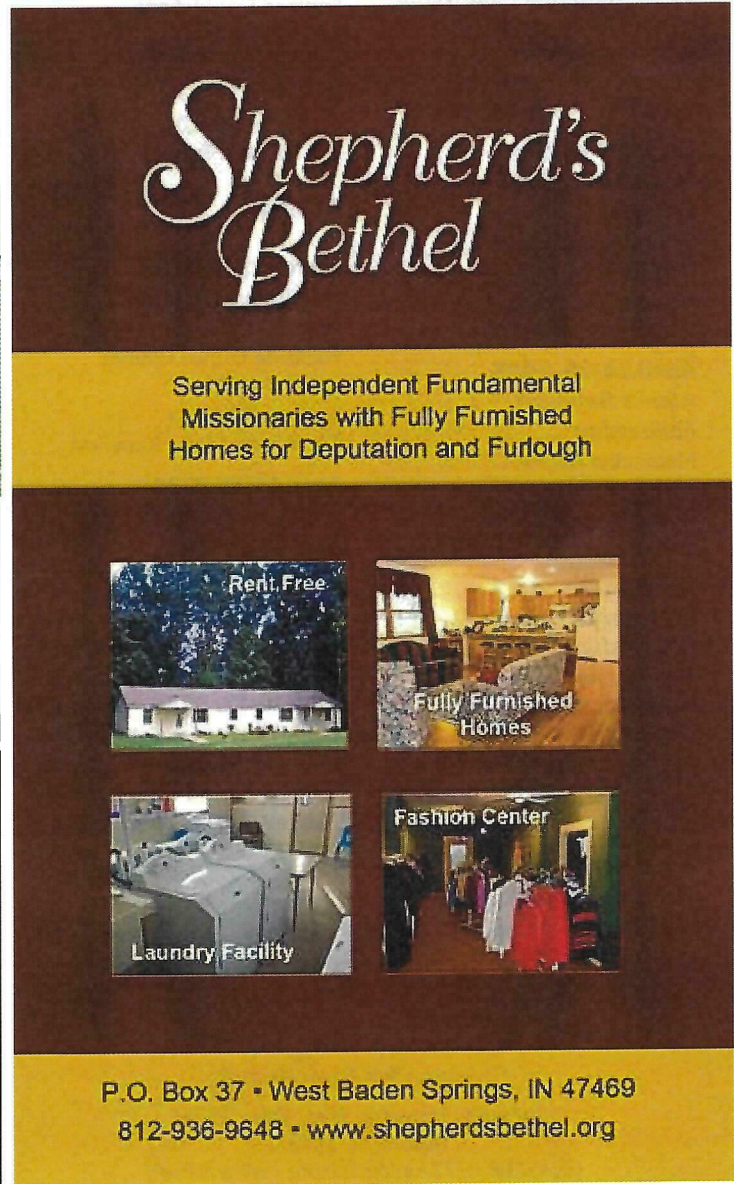


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Greeley, CO 80634
970.346.8610
Coordinator: Dan Unruh

February 6-7, 2023

FBFI Winter Board Meeting

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

March 6-8, 2023

South Regional Fellowship

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

April 23-24, 2023

Northwest Regional Fellowship

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

April 24-26, 2023

Alaska Regional Fellowship

Maranatha Baptist Church
7747 E 6th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99504
Coordinator: Bruce Hamilton

April 24-25, 2023

Wyoming Regional Fellowship

First Baptist Church
646 North Tyler Avenue
Pinedale, WY 82924

May 9-11, 2023

Philippines Regional Fellowship

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

June 12-14, 2023

FBFI Annual Fellowship

Faith Baptist Bible College
1900 Northwest 4th St.
Ankeny, IA 50023

September 12, 2023

NYC Regional Fellowship

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

October 14, 2023

New England Regional Fellowship

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

2024

March 11-12, 2024

Northwest Regional Fellowship

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

April 15-17, 2024

South Regional FBFI Fellowship

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

June 10-12, 2024

FBFI Annual Fellowship

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

News From All Over

Commander Tavis Long

was promoted to the rank of Captain CHC, US Navy, on September 30, 2022. The ceremony was conducted at Good News Baptist Church in Chesapeake, Virginia, with Captain Nakia Cooper, Commanding Officer of the USS Wasp, as the presiding officer. Also in attendance from the FBFI were Chaplains Mike Ascher, John Radacsy, Trenten Long and Joe Willis. It was a special honor to have Tavis's father, CDR Robert Long, USCG (retired), at the ceremony. Tavis was accompanied by his wife, Kendal, and their five children. His youngest child helped his dad pin on his new rank.



Thomas Balzamo is the pastor of the Colonial Baptist Church in Bozrah, Connecticut. The church was started in 2015 with the desire to see an independent Baptist church in the city of Norwich. The town zoning commission has thus far kept the church just outside Norwich city limits in Bozrah, but outreach efforts into Norwich continue. The church currently rents a facility and is waiting on the Lord to open a more permanent location in Norwich. Colonial is a small congregation, consisting entirely of new converts being discipled, learning to pray, to trust, to think, to lead, and to evangelize.



2022, to pay tribute to the city officials and law enforcement officers in the local Denver area. Attending was the city mayor as well as the past and present Westminster chief of police. After the morning



sermon, CH Joe Willis (FBFI Endorser) recognized **Larry Robbins** on his retirement from the Westminster Police Department, where he served twenty-three years as an FBFI-endorsed local community chaplain and is now serving as an FBFI regional recruiter.



Dr. Dave Sproul entered heaven on October 12. He served as an evangelist from the late

1950s until fairly recently and became the first general director of International Baptist Missions in 1980, serving there for thirty years.

He was a careful theologian, a fruitful evangelist, a committed biblical fundamentalist, and was a steadfast friend and member of the FBFI. He attended every annual fellowship from the mid-1960s until his health no longer allowed him to do so in the mid-2010s. He may have attended more annual fellowships than any other FBFI member.

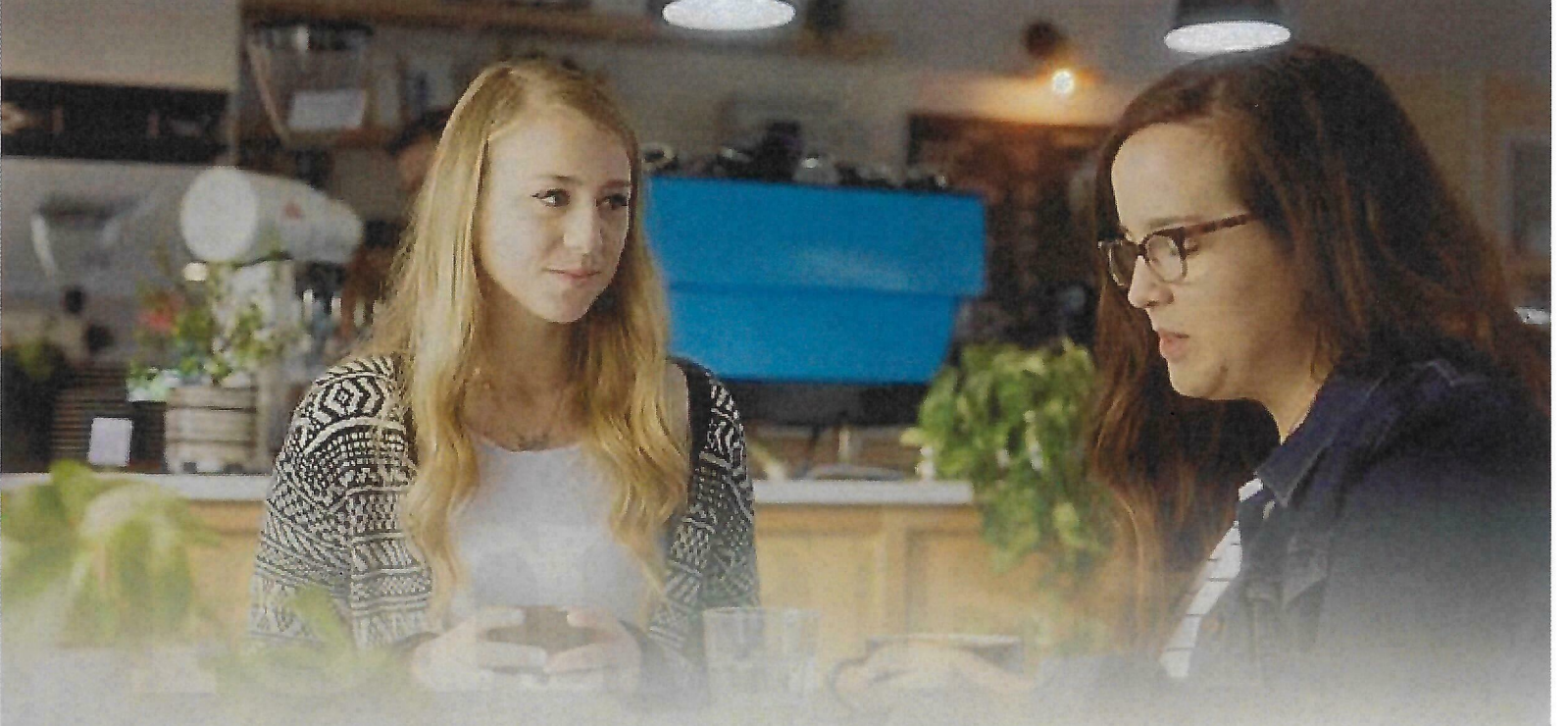
Dr. Sproul mentored many young men into ministry in his leadership role at International Baptist College and with Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona. The impact of his service is presently seen worldwide in thousands of churches and tens of thousands of lives.

Pastor Will Senn and Tri-City Baptist Church in Westminster, Colorado, hosted their annual "Faith and Blue" Sunday on October 9,

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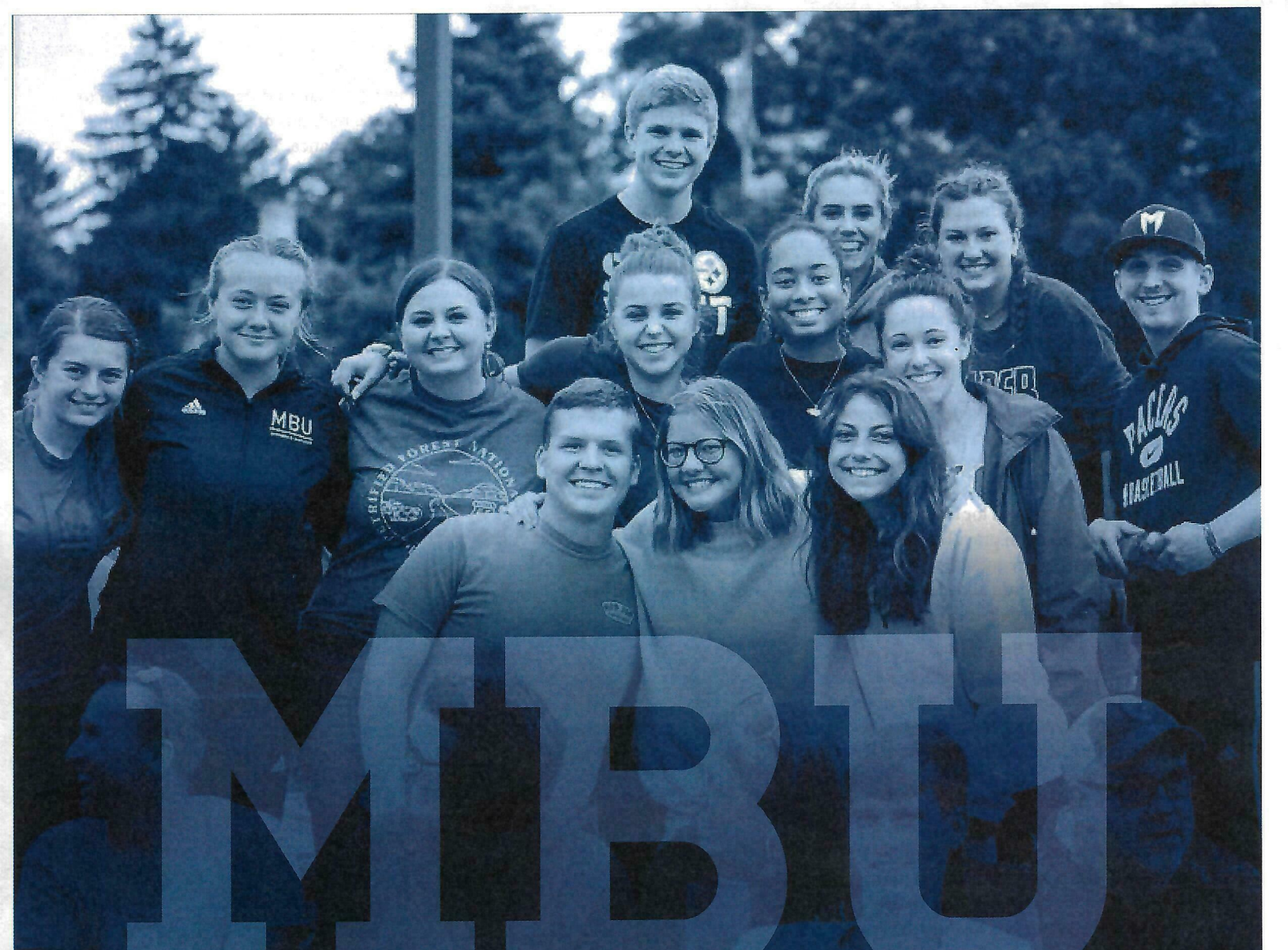
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Pressing into Prayer

Continued from page 19

request of the person who prayed before him and then adds his own prayer request. The second person prays two prayer requests, the one shared by the first person and then the one that he added. Once again, no “amens” or closing formula here—just two prayer requests and then silence. The third person prays for the prayer request that the second person added and then adds his own additional prayer request, so he as well will pray for two prayer requests. The third person in line does not have to remember the first prayer request, which has already been prayed for twice. Each person from this point on prays for two prayer requests, the prayer request the person immediately before him added and then one that he adds himself.

Step Three: Repeat the process. Once the prayer gets back to the first person, just keep going around the circle, each person simply praying for the prayer request offered before him and adding one of his own. Pray this way until the time designated comes to an end. The person who prays last can at last add the “amen” to this special time of communal intercession.

Tips and observations: This method works best with groups of three to five people. If the group gets too big, the prayer time loses some momentum. Secondly, keep the prayer requests relatively brief. This is not the time to elaborate. Simply present the petition in a clear way to the Lord and then be done. Also, be comfortable with silence. Sometimes while praying this way, someone feels the need to pause as he thinks of the prayer request that he wants to add. This is great. It gives everyone time to pause and ponder.

In my experience this approach to praying in small groups is far superior to the approach that we usually use of simply praying around in a circle. The method keeps everyone far more engaged. You have to stay alert and attentive because you are carefully listening to the person who is praying directly before you. This method also leads to praying around the circle multiple times and in fairly rapid succession. Rather than waiting a long time for your turn to pray or praying and trying to stay mentally engaged, with this method you are going to have a turn to pray soon. The

next time that you have a chance to pray in a small group, I encourage you to try this method out. I think that you will find that it leads to a much more engaging time of communal intercession.

There is no magic bullet to having a deeper prayer life. Ultimately the vitality of our prayer life will depend on the vitality of our spiritual life. No method will heal a heart that does not yearn for genuine communion with the Creator. However, I do believe that some deliberate effort to press into prayer and to evaluate our methods of

prayer can make a difference. I urge you to try these methods of prayer the next time you get a chance. They have made a difference in my prayer life, and I think they can make a difference for you as well.

Nathan Mestler has been the president of International Baptist College and Seminary since 2020 and serves on the Bible and Biblical Languages faculty. He also serves as an FBI chaplain as the Wing Chaplain of the 162nd Wing of the Arizona Air National Guard in Tucson, Arizona.



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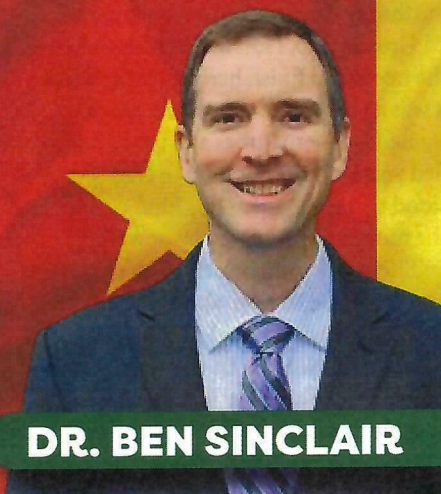


Announces NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With 21 years of service as a veteran BWM missionary to Cameroon, West Africa, Dr. Ben Sinclair was enthusiastically elected as the next Executive Director of Baptist World Mission at the Board's October meeting. He has a track record of effective service for Christ, coupled with a committed stand on the Word of God as a Baptist separatist. He will assume his role on April 1, 2023.

The current Executive Director, Dr. Bud Steadman, is excited to begin his new full-time role as BWM's "Missions Mentor," working with churches and missionaries more closely to advance the Gospel around the world.

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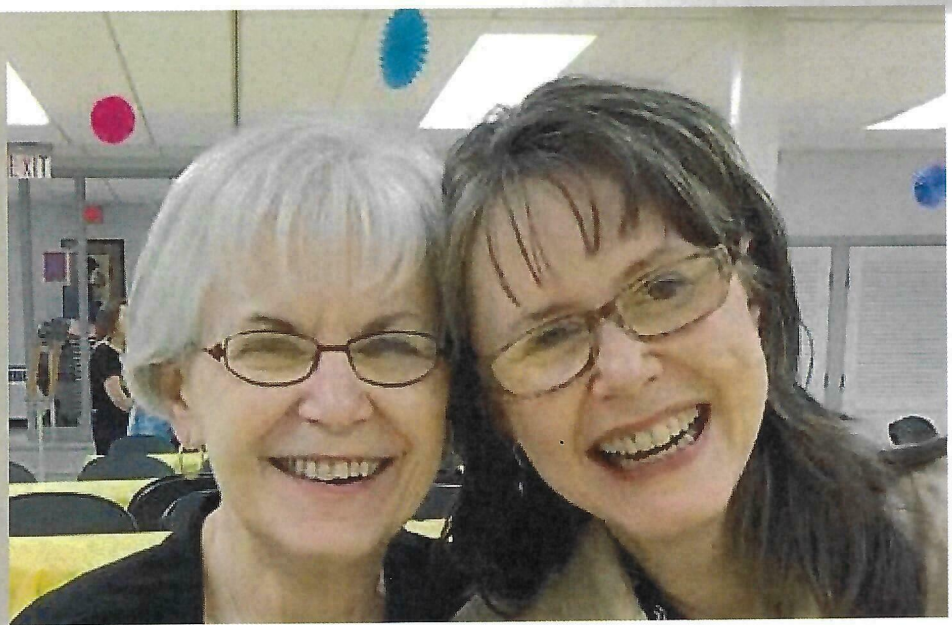


DR. BEN SINCLAIR

Heart to Heart

Carol (Bumgardner) Deatrick

A Mom Who Prays



Having a mom who holds prayer as a very important part of her life did not abstractedly mean that I would have the same dedication or connection that is just “passed down.” Yet, having such a mother (as I’ve been privileged to do) has resulted in a legacy of a loving example and principles that cannot be ignored.

Recently I was speaking to one of my children about how I learned the importance of “not grieving the Spirit of God” because it was a hindrance to His work in our lives. I commented that I learned that lesson from my mom. What I learned about prayer from her is to exchange my earthly wisdom for God’s heavenly wisdom.

Mom implements prayer in a practical and resourceful way. Because of her purposefully putting prayer into her daily life and logging its answers (though my faith many times has an ebb and flow), I can never *not* believe in prayer, because it is prayer to the God who is and to the God who does extraordinary things, shown to me daily by a mother who faithfully goes before the throne. I know God answers prayer.

Growing up, I knew that when Mom said she needed to finish her prayer time that it was a very important time. I saw a tear-stained face sometimes and heard her muffled voice talking out loud to God. I understood that if she spent this kind of time on it, she must really find it to be powerful.

She is my role model. I have heard and continue to hear about her prayers and their answers, and I know she speaks to others about them as well. Her transparency and her vision for others to have the same joy have given her

many opportunities to share the value and practice of prayer. She’s done this in small-group settings, in opportunities for discipleship and mentoring, and countless other caring ways. Her prayer life is more than a “textbook” form; it is a living, breathing part of her soul that enters countless daily conversations and interactions. I’ve seen the value she puts on connecting with people and of letting other people into her life in a transparent way so that they can all help sharpen each other, share joys and sorrows, and enjoy the body of Christ.

As I’ve seen Mom connect with people about their lives and their prayers, I’ve decided that that attribute would be important to cultivate in my own life. As I’ve watched Mom, I have grown. I have changed as I’ve seen the result of her love and passion for sharing. She spends time—much time—on eternal things and believes that prayer and service to the Lord go hand in hand. To me, this is normal Christianity.

She is definitely herself, and she does not expect me to be a carbon copy of her. She has encouraged me to know that God will teach me in the way that I best learn and that, as I pray, the answer will come. When she sees obstacles and when she faces challenges and difficult or new situations, they bring her excitement because they are opportunities to take things to her Father and to watch, seeing what He will do; they are an impetus to be with Someone she loves the deepest.

We took a trip to Israel this year and were in the same tour group. She had to manage bringing most of her own limited-choice foods for the trip of two weeks, and she

trusted that the Lord wanted her to go and that He would sustain her. I watched as He did! Many examples of trust like this have shown me repeatedly that she is walking by faith and obeying the Lord. This happens because she is in communion with Him.

She speaks to all about prayer—

I hear it—

Her transparency and vision

I hear repetition and rehearsing

Therefore, it has the element of sharing and supplicating.

She connects with people about prayer—

I feel it—

Her camaraderie and excitement

I perceive network and warmth

My involvement takes time and going outside of myself to love and engage with others.

She implements a rhythm of prayer—

I view it—

Her practicality and resourcefulness

I see intentionality and purpose

I will always believe in it.

She values the quietness and stillness of prayer—

I sense it—

Her focus and depth

I feel comfort and simplicity

My own soul needs time for communion with God.

Carol Deatrick and her husband, Levi, live in the St. Louis area where Levi pastors Lifegate Baptist Church (lifegatebaptist-church.org). Carol enjoys her family, nature journaling, baking, and “one-on-one” ministry.

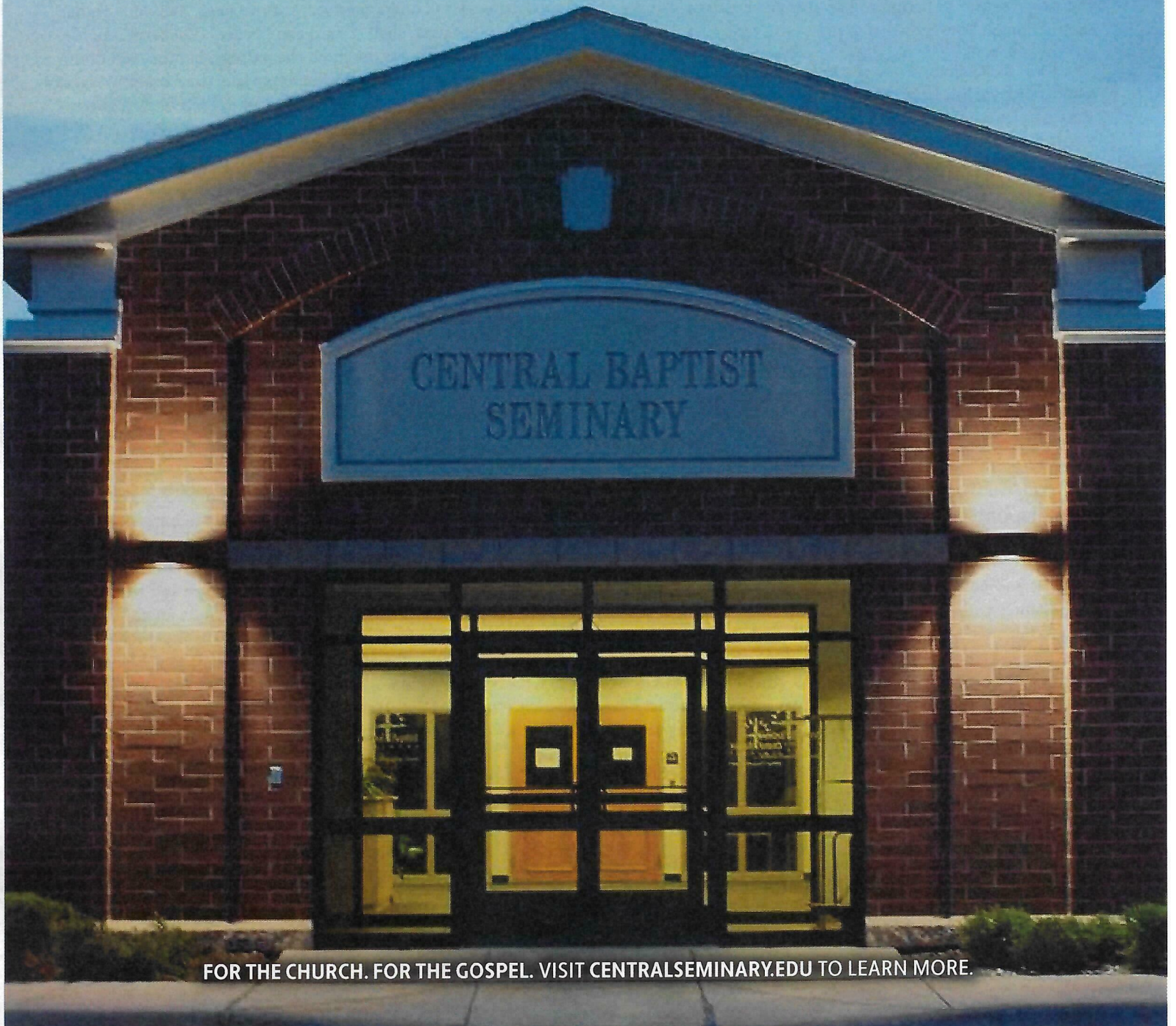




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A photograph of the exterior of Central Baptist Seminary at dusk. The building is constructed of red brick with a large arched entrance. Above the entrance is a sign that reads "CENTRAL BAPTIST SEMINARY". The entrance is illuminated from within, and there are four large, glowing light fixtures on the brick walls flanking the entrance. The sky is a deep blue.

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Two things stand out about Matthew 6. First, it's the first time anyone in the Bible ever explicitly teaches us how to pray. That's pretty remarkable. Nowhere did Moses ever teach the Israelites how to pray. Neither the psalmists nor the prophets ever say, "Pray this way. Here's what you should say. This is the way to address God in prayer." There are lots of great prayers all over the Old Testament, and they are certainly instructive by example. But never before in Scripture has anyone actually given specific instruction on how and what to pray, until Jesus.

That's not to say that no one else ever did that. We know John the Baptist did; we just have no record of what he taught. In Luke 11 the disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray like John taught his disciples. Jesus' answer is instructive. He didn't say that "prayer isn't something you teach, it's just something you do," or "It doesn't really matter what or how you pray because God knows your heart," or "Just rely on the Spirit to lead you in prayer." He gave them a model. He taught them *how* and *what* to pray: "When you pray, say this. Pray these kinds of things, and pray them this way."

The second remarkable thing about this text is the title by which Jesus instructs us to pray to God: "Our Father." One thing that makes this remarkable is the context. The overarching theme of this sermon is the Kingdom of God. Matthew introduces the sermon in 4:17: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." What did that preaching sound like? Read the next three chapters—His first recorded sermon refers to the kingdom directly ten times. What title(s) for deity would you expect Jesus to emphasize in a sermon about the kingdom? "King"? That designation occurs only once in the sermon (5:35). "Lord"? Five times. "God"? Six times. More than any other title, the one by which Jesus identifies, preaches, teaches, and applies the truth about God and His kingdom in this sermon is this one: "Father" (17 times). In fact, "Father" is Jesus' characteristic designation for God throughout Matthew (44 times). This is distinctive of Matthew among the Synoptic Gospels. (Mark uses "Father" only 5 times; Luke, the longest Gospel, uses it a total of 17 times.) If you zoom in on Matthew 6, you discover this whole part of the sermon focuses on prayer, and Jesus keeps sharpening that focus.

WHERE TO PRAY: PRIVATELY, NOT OSTENTATIOUSLY (MATT. 6:5-6)

Jesus starts with *where* to pray, and why. Jesus has already exemplified this by habitually praying in the wilderness (Luke 5:16). The problem Jesus identifies in terms of *where* is not merely private prayer vs. public prayer. Jesus sometimes prayed publicly

(baptism, feeding of the multitudes, raising of Lazarus). Pastors are not sinning because they pray publicly from the pulpit. The issue is *motive*. You can see that right in Jesus' words. A *desire* ("they love") for *public* prayer ("that they may be seen of men") is a symptom of hypocrisy ("[be] not as the hypocrites"). Why do we pray where we pray? Secret prayer is witnessed by *the* only one that matters—the one to whom it's addressed ("thy Father"). The consolation Jesus offers may seem surprising: "and your Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward you openly." (The term "openly" is a disputed reading throughout the passage, but it need not imply anything contradictory or inappropriate, since other passages imply the same thing [1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10]). In fact, there is an emphasis on *reward* throughout the sermon (5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18; cf. "treasure," 6:19, 20, 21). We tend to think that any focus on reward is ignoble or even carnal. Jesus does not seem to think so, and appeals to it as a legitimate encouragement. The confidence that none of our praying is pointless, unheard, unnoticed, or forgotten is a biblical incentive to pray.

HOW TO PRAY: THOUGHTFULLY, NOT THOUGHTLESSLY (6:7-8)

This principle might almost be expressed as "Pray Thoughtfully, Not Wordfully." That reads a little awkwardly, but it captures part of Jesus' point. Jesus does not say "use not repetitions"; sometimes He did that Himself (Matt. 26:44; cf. Paul, 2 Cor. 12:8). Jesus specifies "*vain* repetitions." What can make our words in prayer "*vain*"? They may be vain because the words themselves are empty filler, thoughtless phrases, habitual repetitions without heart or mind. They may be vain because we sometimes seem to imagine that we need to fully inform God of details He may not know, or of exactly what we think He needs to do. Or they may be vain because we pile up words on the assumption that the longer and wordier we make our prayer, the more likely it is to get God's attention and a favorable response from Him. This seems to be the direction the Lord takes this thought. Literally the text reads, "Do not *battalogeō* like the heathen"; the word means "to babble" or "to talk idly." Different translations attempt to capture the sense: "heap up empty phrases" (ESV); "use meaningless repetition" (NASB); "babble" (CSB); "babble repetitiously" (NET); "keep on babbling" (NIV). Jesus is censuring the kind of praying done in heathen religions where prayer is viewed as a magical formula to manipulate the god or alter the worshipper—like the priests of Baal pleading, "O Baal hear us" for half a day (1 Kings 18:26), or the idolators crying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" for two hours (Acts 19:34).

Some Jews had a habit of doing this by piling up terms and titles for God. One famous prayer begins, "Blessed, praised, and glorified,

Father (Matthew 6)

exalted, extolled, and honored, magnified and lauded be the name of the Holy One.” There is one Jewish prayer which actually begins with sixteen different adjectives attached to the name of God. There was a kind of intoxication with words. “When a man begins to think more of how he is praying than of what he is praying, his prayer dies upon his lips” (Barclay, *Matthew*, I:195–96).

True worship may genuinely delight in the kind of meditative prayer that is as profuse and self-forgetful in its expressions of adoration as the perfume and tears that the woman in Luke 7 poured out on Jesus’ feet. But what Jesus is correcting is the mentality that sometimes motivates verbose praying: those who “think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” The problem is viewing long prayers as a means to getting God’s attention and favor. The ideas that repetition is required to get God’s attention, or that prayer is a way of manipulating God, or that long prayers merit a favorable answer from God, or that prayer needs to fully inform God of something He does not know, are all characteristic of paganism.

WHAT TO PRAY: THEREFORE, INSTEAD, PRAY LIKE THIS (6:9–15)

In contrast, Jesus then gives a positive pattern of the kinds of things to pray about and the way to petition for them. It begins with our approach to God as “our Father in heaven.” Jesus is not introducing some radically new concept here. In the Old Testament, God is said to be like a father (Ps. 68:5; 103:13), identifies Himself as a father (Mal. 1:6), and is also called and even prayed to as Father (Deut. 32:6; Mal. 2:10; Ps. 89:26; Isa. 63:16, 64:8). So, describing God as a Father, thinking of God as Father, and even directly addressing God as Father are not new. But this dimension of God’s character has never been so accentuated as it is by Jesus, especially in Matthew, and particularly in the Sermon on the Mount.

It is a title of address that mingles majestic transcendence (“in heaven”—He is all-powerful, above all, ruling over all) with astonishing condescension (“our Father”—He is familiar, caring, compassionate, aware, attentive). Contrast these titles for a moment: God, Lord, Master, Almighty, King, Savior, Redeemer *versus* Father. What does that title, that name and role, convey that the others do not? And why does Jesus choose this term as the shaping context for His teachings all through this sermon, specifically in this instruction on how we pray? Because relationally this one is foundational. It is unique in its implications of tenderness, care, provision, protection, closeness, acceptance. Unlike all the others, it is a family term. And this is the one Jesus teaches us to use in prayer and to condition how we think of God in prayer.

Interestingly, the term “Father” never occurs in the Quran as a title for God. Islam has 99 names and descriptive titles for God, but “Father” is not one of them. Muslims have no Father in heaven. But Jesus taught—repeatedly and emphatically—Christians do.

AN ILLUSTRATION

Charles Hodge was one of the theological giants of Princeton’s early history as a bastion of orthodoxy. He was a brilliant intellect, a prolific writer, and a favorite among seminary students. (Two bits of trivia: [1] he was married to a great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, and [2] chronic pain in his right leg forced him to walk with a cane for most of his life.)

In the biography *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton*, Andrew Hoffercker describes the revered seminary professor’s “intense interest and attention to his children.” Here’s one way he showed it. He had a study built as an addition onto his home (you can still see the addition on the left side of that house today). The addition had an exterior door that opened to the outside, toward the seminary’s main lecture hall, so that seminary students could come to see him without having to come through the house and disturbing the family. The exterior door on that addition naturally had a lock; so students may or may not have had access to him at any given time for any number of reasons.

The interior door connecting the study to the rest of the house, however, was different. That door had no lock. In fact, it didn’t even have a latch. Hoffercker describes it as a door with “no latch . . . only springs” so that “even the smallest” of his children “always had easy access to their father” (Hoffercker, 85). They didn’t even have to be tall enough or strong enough to turn a doorknob. All they had to do was push the door open into his presence.

It doesn’t take lots of words or persuasive pleadings to get God to unlock the door and listen to you. If you’re coming from inside the house, if He’s your Father, *there’s no lock or latch; only springs*. It doesn’t take great faith, or great faithfulness, to push your way into His presence; if you’re coming from inside the house, all it takes is enough faith and enough desire to push open a spring door and say, “Father.”

First John 3:1 exhorts us to consider the Father’s love toward us that we should be called the children of God. And so we are. Let’s act like it in our praying.

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

Does Prayer Matter?

Does prayer matter? Do things change because of prayer? Theologically the answer is yes. What has been the greatest answer to prayer you have seen so far? How long ago was it?

The Bible tells us in John 14:13 and 16:24 the two main reasons God answers prayer: so that He gets glorified and so our joy is full. Both automatically happen when we have an answer to prayer. When God answers a prayer, we know we were not just “lucky” or that “it just happened that way.” We give God glory, and we are so happy. We know that God does not say yes to every request, but we also know God does not always say no.

PREACHING ON PRAYER

I served as an assistant pastor in a suburb of Chicago. As most assistants, I wanted to preach, but I was allowed to preach only when the senior pastor was gone or sick. Unfortunately for me at the time I had a very healthy pastor. Then one day he told me he wanted me to do a series on Wednesday nights. I was so excited, and, for whatever reason, I chose to do the series on prayer.

I finished the series by preaching on the eight hindrances to answered prayer. I had preached the first four and was going to finish the series by preaching the last four on the following Wednesday night.

On Friday of that week I attended a pastors’ conference at Bethel Baptist Church in Schaumburg, Illinois. I heard a speaker comment that we need to look at our church facilities the way a first-time visitor would. As I drove back to our

church that day, it was as if I was seeing it for the first time.

The church had twenty acres sandwiched between a medical center and some of the nicest homes in our town at the time. Both of them were landscaped beautifully. Our church had the only gravel driveway and parking lot in town that I was aware of. You drove past the church to get to the parking lot. Between the driveway and the church was a hundred-foot weed bed. We had almost no landscaping. Right across from the church was our hundred-year-old farmhouse parsonage with the paint peeling off it and a huge dead tree out front with the bark falling off. It sort of looked like a haunted house. In other words, it looked pretty bad.

REACHING OUT IN PRAYER

I went to bed that night and prayed that we would be able to make our place look better. The next day three single guys from my college and career class called and said, “Let’s cut down that dead tree in front of the parsonage.” It took us most of the day, but we got it cut down. Just getting rid of that tree improved the look of our property.

I prayed Saturday and Sunday night for God to help us make our property look better. On Monday morning, I had my meeting with the pastor as we normally did, and when I went into my office, there was a message on the answering machine. The message was from a local greenhouse asking if I could stop by because they wanted to donate some shrubs to our church.

I went over to get the senior pastor, but he was gone. I went to get my wife, who has the green thumb of the two of us, and she was gone. It was as though God were saying, “You prayed for this; you get down there.”

I pulled up in front of the greenhouse and met the owner. She had never visited our church. I had never met her before, and, as far as I knew, she was not a Christian. As I got out of my truck, she said, “I know this is going to sound weird, but I have felt for three days that God wants me to give your church some shrubs, and I felt it so strongly this morning I thought God might kill me if I didn’t call you today.” I was stunned. I let her know that I didn’t want anyone to die, but that I had been praying for three days to make our place look better. She then looked at me and said in front of her whole greenhouse, “Well, what do you want?” I told her I didn’t know, but our facility looked terrible because we had no landscaping. She said, “I know. I drive by your church every day.” She then proceeded to start tagging shrubs. The shrubs filled a very long flatbed trailer and the back of a full-size pickup. She then had her crew deliver them.

REAPING THE BENEFITS OF PRAYER

My pastor decided that he and I would plant the shrubs the next day. I borrowed a tiller and tilled up the hundred-foot weed bed. We began planting; the temperature

Continue on page 35

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Regional Reports

NEW YORK CITY REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Matthew Recker

The FBFI NYC Regional Fellowship met on September 13, 2022, at Bethel Baptist Fellowship in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. About twenty-five men in full time ministry attended along with their wives, children, and other faithful church servants. Overall, more than sixty attended the meeting cohosted by Heritage Baptist Church and Bethel Baptist Fellowship. We had a delicious breakfast with bagels and coffee at 9 a.m. Our special speakers were Dr. Marshall and Gretchen Fant. Dr. Fant serves at Gospel Fellowship Association Missions as director of church consulting, development, and revitalization. He presently leads Faith Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina, as interim pastor. Gretchen is a certified counselor with many experiences helping women grow into Christlikeness.

At 10 a.m. Dr. Marshall Fant spoke on "The State of Your Church: Tools for Analyzing the Health of Your Church." At 11 a.m. he spoke on "Common Traits of Healthy Churches." Gretchen had a women's session on "Women Helping Women: Basics of Biblical Change."

We concluded our sessions with a "Question and Answer" time with Marshall Fant, Jim Bickel, and Craig

Hartman. This was followed by a delicious luncheon provided by Heritage Baptist Church. Participants received a free thumb drive full of materials compiled by Bruce McAllister and Marsh Fant, a *FrontLine* magazine, a *Sowing and Reaping* newsletter (produced by Gospel Fellowship Associations), and notes of the sessions. Everyone had a rich time of fellowship in the Word and with each other. One pastor wrote, "Thank you for hosting the great fellowship today!"

Our meeting next year will be on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at Bethel Baptist Fellowship. Our keynote speaker will be Jon Crocker, the new Executive Director of Gospel Fellowship Association Missions. Jon has served in Mexico as the GFA Regional Director of North America before becoming Executive Director of GFAM.



CHAPLAINS' RETREAT

THE EDGE CHRISTIAN CAMP, SPRING GROVE, VIRGINIA

Malinda Duvall

Because we had such a successful chaplains' retreat in 2020 at the Edge Christian Camp in Spring Grove, Virginia, we returned there again this year on September 13–17. Chaplains are a unique group, and our speakers, David and Linda Shumate, had sessions that were not only spiritually focused, but also practical for everyone. Scott and Jennifer Carsley and the camp staff went above and beyond to make sure it was an excellent retreat for the whole family. The ladies enjoyed a proper English tea on the porch of the Eastover Manor house on the James River, an 1800s plantation home on the camp property. Thank you to six supporting churches who generously gave to enable our chaplain families to attend. It was a great retreat in every way with lots of time for fellowship and rest in addition to the good teaching.

NEW MEXICO REGIONAL MEETING

Larry Robbins

Pastor Mark Zahn of Manzano Baptist Church in Albuquerque hosted the Regional Fellowship meeting of the FBFI





New Mexico Fellowship

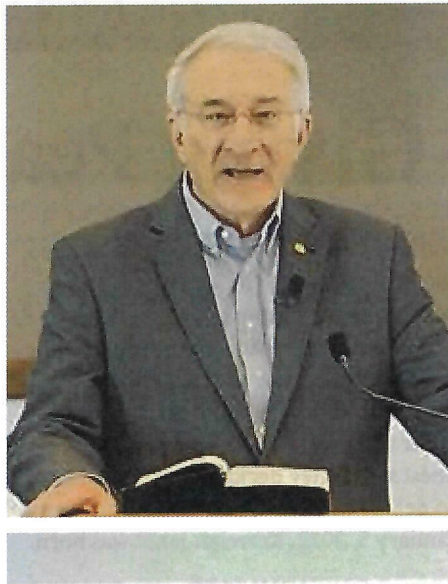
on September 22–23. Coordinator Pastor Dan Mauldin arranged for Dr. Kevin Schaal and Chaplain Larry Robbins to be the guest speakers. Dr. Schaal preached a three-part series from the Book of Jonah, challenging each one not to rebel against God's plan but following the plan of God without bitterness. Pastor Robbins spoke on Romans 13 as it applies to the chaplaincy and our governing authorities—relating several personal stories of God miraculously intervening at the Westminster Police Department. While small in number, the group enjoyed warm fellowship and encouragement at the conference.

NEW ENGLAND FOUNDATIONS CONFERENCE AND FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Taigen Joos

On Saturday, October 15, 2022, about 135 believers from five New England states gathered at Heritage Baptist Church in Dover, New Hampshire, for its annual New England Foundations Conference and FBFI regional fellowship. Bruce McAllister and Marshall Fant were the keynote speak-

ers, and Gretchen Fant spoke to the ladies. The day was filled with exuberant singing, heart-warming fellowship, and practical biblical teaching about growing healthy churches. We rejoice in what God is doing in New England and look forward to next year's conference on October 14, 2023, with Chuck Phelps.



New England Fellowship



Does Prayer Matter

Continued from page 32

reached the high 90s with high humidity; and we both realized we had been sitting behind a desk way too long.

The owner of the greenhouse called my wife and asked how we liked the shrubs. My wife told her we loved them and that the pastors were outside planting them right now. She said, "The pastors are planting them? I'm coming down."

She pulled up and we were soaked in sweat, and when she saw what we were doing, she asked if I would drive to her farm because she wanted to donate flowers. She gave us two hundred full-grown geraniums, six cokes from her pop machine, and four huge hanging baskets—two for my wife, and two for the senior pastor's wife.

Her son walked out and I let him know this was the largest answer to prayer I had ever had, and thanked him. He then asked if we had any tree bark to put around all the shrubs. I said no. He then pointed to a whole pallet of bags of tree bark and said, "Take the whole pallet."

My wife called her friends and on Wednesday morning they planted all those flowers and spread out all the tree bark. Our property was transformed. When people came to church that night, you could not help but notice the massive transformation. I will share what God did in that service in my next article as well as share the eight hindrances to answered prayer.

Needless to say, I am convinced prayer makes a difference. May we be the men and women of prayer God wants us to be. He will be glorified and our joy will be full!

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



Chaplain's Report

Brittany Torres



Finding Life-Giving Peace

Editor's Note: In this issue our Chaplain's Report is written not by one of our chaplains but by a chaplain's spouse.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).

What exactly is the peace of God? So many people search for peace aside from Christ, yet never seem to find it. They look in all the wrong places, yet never seem to be able to grasp the truth of God's ultimate, life-giving, hope-filled, beyond-understanding peace. It took almost losing my own life before I found this life-giving peace.

The birth of a baby is usually an exciting thing, right? We had so much excitement leading up to Child Number Six coming in January. Unfortunately, this pregnancy felt different than all the others, as I struggled with breathing the whole pregnancy. Doctors didn't seem too concerned; after all, I was pregnant, right? At a

routine checkup with my OB, she noticed the baby seemed to be in distress, so she sent me to the hospital to be monitored. I told the doctor that I was having difficulty breathing; she ordered a chest x-ray and noticed fluid built up in my lungs. After the doctors collaborated about my chest x-ray, they decided it would be best to deliver the baby via c-section, and on January 5, 2022, Kerreigh Janet was born.

MORE DIFFICULTIES

I thought all my breathing issues would be solved now that I was no longer pregnant. Little did I realize how wrong that thought was. After being sent home two days later, I found myself being rushed to the hospital via ambulance on January 10. My oxygen saturation was 66%, and the paramedics didn't hold much hope I would survive. I spent a few hours in the ER on 100% oxygen with doctors running tests, with doctors finally realizing my heart was in trouble. I was sent to ICU where they performed a thoracentesis, draining 1.5L of fluid off my lungs. They diagnosed me with peripartum cardiomyopathy, which causes the heart muscle to expand like a balloon, holding fluid in and around the

heart. This also caused a leaking mitral valve and left bundle branch block, causing my heart to function at only 25–30%. Five days later I was sent home with some medication—hoping that would help the heart function better.

I received a referral to a cardiologist, who referred me to a specialist at Loma Linda. He uttered words I never thought I'd hear: "I'm sorry, but you need a heart transplant." My husband and I left the cardiology lab in shock. We sat in our car and just stared at each other and began crying. After a tearful prayer time, we headed home to tell the kids. A few months later my hair began to fall out by the handfuls, my teeth began to decay quickly, and I lost weight in my face causing my cheeks to look sunken. The end of May I was admitted to Loma Linda, and little did I realize I would be there for a total of fifty-seven days.

To the outside world looking in, our lives looked completely hopeless. However, from day one of this journey, the Lord showed Himself faithful. He showed us that His will for our lives was to allow us to go through this journey while He carried us through it on the

wings of the peace He so freely gives if we all but ask Him. So we asked Him for His peace, mercy, grace, and anything else He was willing to give us to help us get through this life-changing journey. There were moments of paralyzing fear and terror, moments when I cried on my husband's shoulder, begging God to take me home, and moments of fearful anxiety. Yet, in all these times, God showed Himself faithful in the presence of His amazing, life-giving peace, whether through Scripture, prayer, a quote from a book, family and friends coming to visit, the chaplains at the hospital, the nurses, phlebotomists, doctors, housekeepers—who followed His leading to come pray at my bedside. He was constantly sending someone or something my way to show me how much peace He could give if I

would only accept it. I did! My life at the hospital had its ups and downs, but God was always there. Even the nurses and doctors noticed something was different about me than most other patients. My response: "It's all God."

A NEW HEART

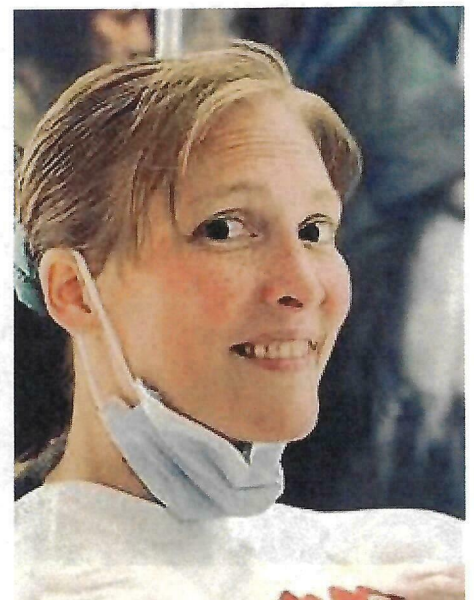
The night before we found out there was a match for me, I slept like a baby. I woke up the next morning to the news that that evening at 8 I would be carted down to OR to receive a new heart—a time we thought would never come, yet it all happened quite quickly. On July 14, 2022, I received a new heart. Unfortunately, I had a convulsive seizure only two hours post-op, and they coded me twice. I was hooked up to a few machines and monitored very closely, but nothing else happened. The

attending physician (a Muslim) told my husband that I was a "medical miracle." I was only on a third of the medications they usually give to transplant patients, and everything that happened post-surgery should have killed me. My husband's response: "Praise the Lord."

I was discharged from the hospital just ten days post-surgery, only four days away from our fifteenth wedding anniversary, for which I had been praying. The adjustment period has been rough and long, but God continues to show Himself faithful in showing us His peace and mercy.

The next step in this journey is the emotional stress and trauma this has taken on the family and me. The ups and downs, the fear of a transplant rejection, the adjustment to a mommy not being "normal," etc., have led to a lot of tears and frustrations. I have been reminded of Isaiah 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." And John 16:33, "That in me ye might have peace." This is what we cling to and from where we gain our strength. From that strength comes our joy and what makes us "different" during the trials of life that make the outside world feel hopeless.

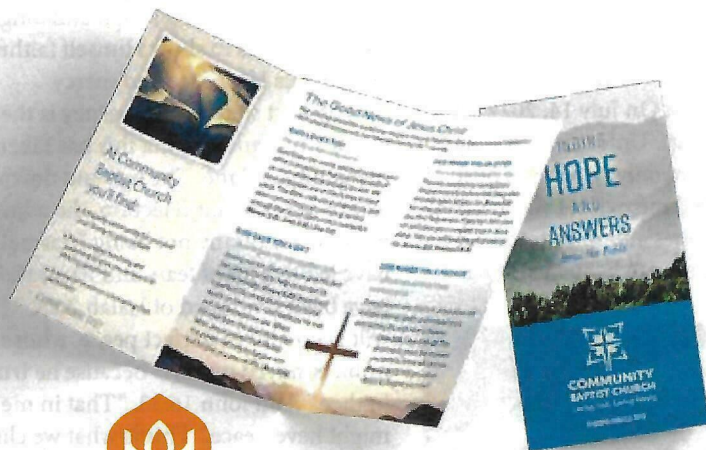
Brittany Torres, pastor's wife and mother of six, serves with her husband, Major Christian Torres, USAR, at Riverside Baptist Church in Riverside, California. She homeschools four of her six children and is currently writing a book explaining God's peace in the midst of life's trials.



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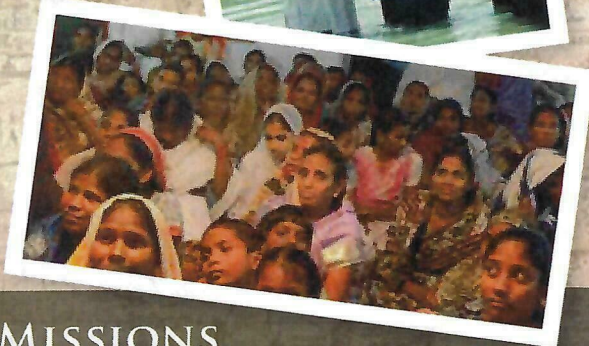
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Evangelist's Perspective

Jerry Sivnksty



The Great Price Paid

In John 15:13 the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." This is the supreme price that one could pay for another person.

Recently there was a shooting at a street parade in which, sadly, several people were killed. One man was killed because he used his own body to shield his young son. I read a poem by an unknown author who wrote, "Love ever gives, forgives, outlives; and ever stands with open hands; and while it lives it gives, for while it gives it lives; and this is love's prerogative, to give—and give—and give." Love is willing to pay the price for others who could never pay it on their own.

I have a pastor friend in Tipton, Indiana, who recently related a story that deeply touched my heart, and I want to share it with you. My friend wrote,

John Gilbert only lived to age twenty-five. When John was five years old, he was diagnosed with Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, a genetic progressive debilitating disease. It would claim John's life twenty years later, but not before subtracting almost everything from him. Every year John Gilbert lost something. In time, he lost the ability to do all the outward things that we take for granted, even the ability to speak. But there was one moment that stood out. It happened when he was invited to a National Football League fundraising auction. When it began, one particular item caught John's eye: a basketball signed by all the players of the Sacramento Kings. John so desperately wanted that ball that

when it came up for bid, he felt his hand raise up in the air. His mother quickly brought it back down, knowing they did not have the funds to cover any bid. The bidding on the basketball continued with excitement. It rose to an astounding amount compared to other items at the auction and especially to the real value of the ball. Finally, a man made a bid that no one else could possibly match and won the prize. The man walked to the front and claimed the basketball; but instead of going back to his seat, this man walked across the room and gently placed it into the thin, small hands of the boy who would never dribble that ball down a court, never throw it to a teammate, never fire it from the foul line, but who would cherish it for as long as he lived. John Gilbert, while he was still able, wrote these words: "It took me a moment to realize what the man had done. I remember hearing gasps all around the room, then thunderous applause and weeping eyes. To this day I am amazed!"

As I read this account, it immediately caused me to think of the much greater price the Lord Jesus Christ paid for my sins and the gift of eternal life. We read in 1 John 2:2, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." The Lord Jesus shed His blood for the sins of all mankind. Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." First Peter

1:18–19 relates, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." And, according to Hebrews 9:22, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."

There is nothing in comparison to the worth of the precious blood of Christ for the cleansing of sin. Ponder this thought . . . What if all the stars in the millions of galaxies were made of solid gold; if every grain of sand were pure gold dust; if every snowflake that ever fell on this earth was made of silver; and if every drop of water on earth was made of pearl? Their entire worth would never avail to pay the price for sin—the price of my sin, the price of your sin. That is why Peter said to the lame man who was asking for alms in Acts 3:6, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." In the very next verse we read, "And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength."

May we never underestimate the power of the blood of Christ. If you know someone who does not know Christ as his Savior, share the message of the great price He paid for his sins.

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