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FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

The Christian School Revival

- A History and Assessment of the Christian School Movement
- The Benefits of a Christian School Education
- How to Spot a Counterfeit Christian School
- Why We Need More Christian School Teachers for Christian Schools

The Christian School Revival

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

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The Christian School Revival

I was very excited when I heard about the choice of this issue's topic! I am a product of the Christian school movement. All my K–12 education was in Christian schools. My parents were teachers in Christian schools. My children are now attending a Christian school. This is the world I grew up in, and it was a wonderful privilege to do so. It is a movement I believe in. Because of attending Christian schools, I personally benefitted greatly in my academic development but also and especially in my walk with the Lord.

When I was in the eighth grade in Toledo, Ohio, God used an assignment to call me into ministry. In Bible class, we were assigned to write about what we thought God wanted us to do with our lives. God had been working on me before this time, but this assignment weighed on me. I did

not want my classmates to know what I was considering. However, I felt that it would be dishonest to write about something other than what God was calling me to do. I am so thankful for that assignment, which God used in my life to make this decision and declare it!

Our articles in this issue center on the new need for Christian schools. I believe this need is greater now than when I started in a Christian school nearly fifty years ago. The first article describes my personal history with the Christian school movement, its developments, and its new vitality. In the next article my wife describes the joys and benefits of a Christian school for our two young children.

For the next piece, I asked one of our veteran teachers, Mr. David Horner, to articulate some of the wisdom he gained from his many years as a Christian school administrator. Though he has been teaching at Faith Baptist Bible College for twenty-four years, he spent more than two decades actively serving in Christian schools as a teacher and administra-

tor. He is a wonderful friend of mine, and we both share Toledo as our hometown.

Dr. Mark Stupka, chair of our teacher education program, offers a soul-searching perspective on what a genuine Christian school looks like. He describes its "DNA"—its ultimate priorities and concerns. He, too, has extensive experience as Christian school administrator. Following his article, I challenge us all to answer the call that my parents did in joining the Christian school movement. With the recent growth it has experienced, we need more committed Christians to replenish the ranks of teachers, administrators, and required staff. Imagine this: what would the next generation of believers look like if there were no Christian schools? The Christian school movement needs to flourish!

Dr. Lynn McCool, whose contributions to our institution I deeply value, has spent many years as a Christian school teacher. She provides a thought-provoking exploration of the historical development of education.

In addition to this historical perspective, she offers a compelling discussion of a biblical framework for education. Her article challenges us to cultivate intellectual growth and to produce thoughtful individuals who understand both the limitations and virtues of the liberal arts, all while directing the mind toward the glory of God.

Every writer in this issue has had personal experience in the Christian school movement—experience in teaching/administration and experience as parents. Each recognizes the value and necessity of the Christian school, especially in the times we live in today.

Ken Rathbun, Associate Editor

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Why This Topic?

The Christian school movement is exploding, thanks to changes in educational choice laws that are sweeping across our nation. The Christian school movement gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s amid rising concerns over public schools, including busing programs, drugs on campus, and the removal of prayer. The movement faced huge growing pains from the 1980s through the 2000s. Many Christian schools could not compete with the growing homeschool movement. There were financial, spiritual, and ministry challenges that were overwhelming for many churches.

Now, however, two factors have led to a revival of Christian school education.

Public schools across the country have become institutions for indoctrination with evil.

In the last four years, the transgender movement has pushed biological boys into girls' bathrooms and girls' sports. Students are being encouraged to transition while parents are being kept in the dark. Trust in the public school has vanished, especially for people of faith.

At the same time, school choice laws are springing up everywhere as a result of the Carson/Makin Supreme Court decision in June of 2022. As of the time of this writing, thirteen states plus Washington, DC, have near-universal school choice, and six more states are about to pass legislation. In almost all cases, parents are given the freedom to decide where to spend their children's education dollars.

The result of these factors is an explosion in the demand for Christian schools. At the same time, however, Christian colleges are graduating a record-low number of teachers. Our Christian school turns away almost as many children as we enroll because we lack both the teachers and the space to meet the

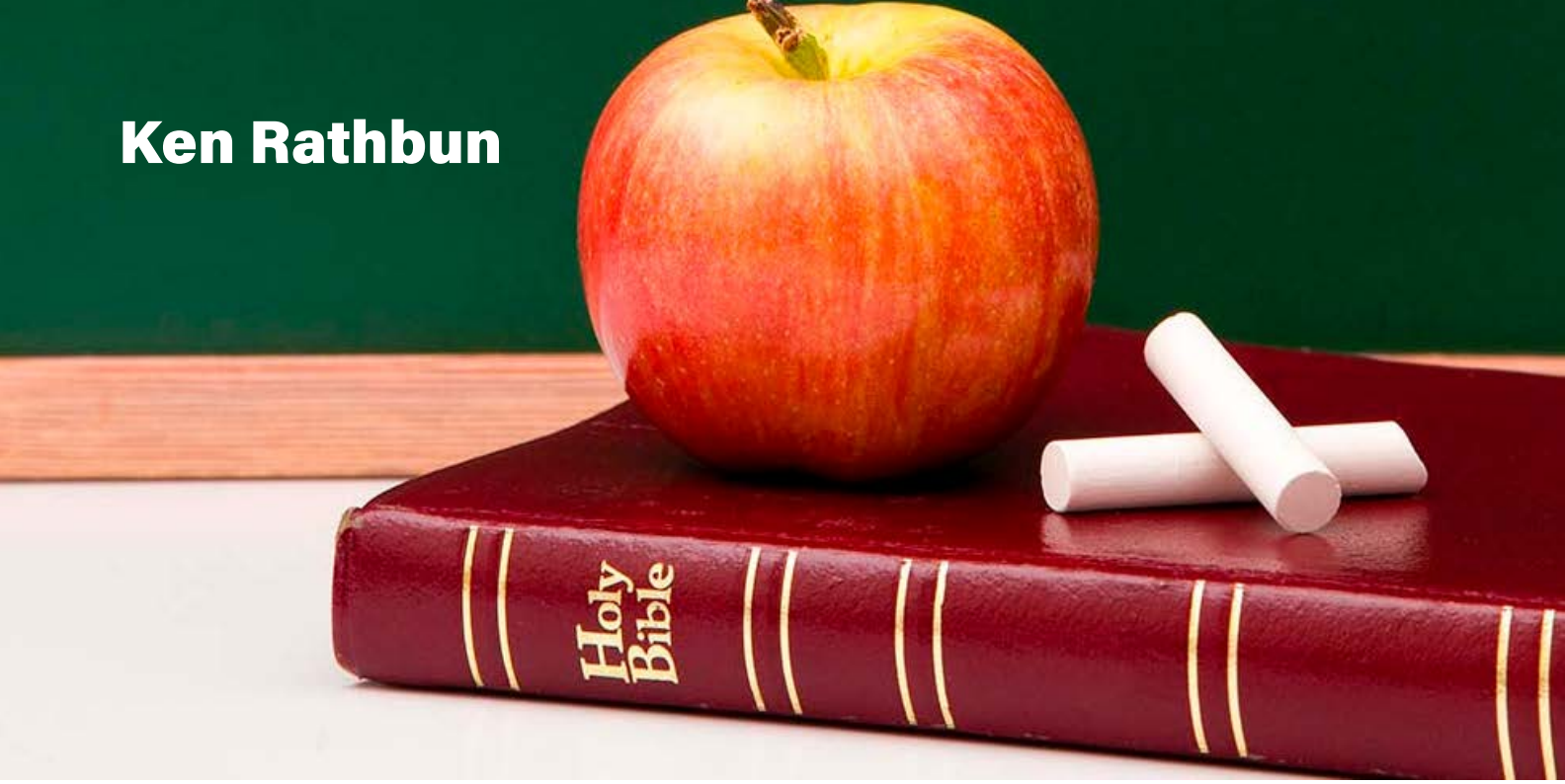
need. As we scramble to find space and teachers, we have the luxury of being more selective with enrollment, but that is only a matter of local ministry convenience. The need for Christian schools in our country is huge.

Explosive growth often comes with unintended consequences. In the 1980s the hot topic was how local church Christian schools completely overshadowed church youth ministry. We need to keep Great Commission priorities and local church integrity as we address the avalanche of demand for Christian education.

The Christian school discussion is one that we must have again. Let's start here.

Kevin Schaal, Editor

Ken Rathbun



A History and Assessment of the Christian School Movement

I am writing this article as an informal, perhaps semi-autobiographical, narrative. I do not consider this *the* history of the movement, but rather *a* history. My orientation to the Christian school movement happened in the 1970s when I began my schooling in Omaha, Nebraska, at a small Christian school that was connected to a local Baptist church. I went to kindergarten there, and both of my parents taught in the school. I learned to

read, write, and interact with classmates and learned respect for my teachers.

Though that is my beginning in the Christian school movement, its history pre-dates me by many years. Depending on how you think about it, a case could be made that Christian education dates back many hundreds of years. State-established public schools as we know them originated much later. But as I recall hearing many times growing up, the Christian school movement's immediate context in the United States was the 1962 ruling by the Supreme Court to ban the practice of sanctioned prayer in public schools. The reason for this judgment was that such prayer was a constitutional violation of the First Amendment. Of course, the establishment of Christian schools pre-dated this ruling by several decades, but many people back in the 1970s pointed to this decision as one that galvanized believers as a call—and for some, even a duty—for parents to have

their children educated in a Christian environment by Christian teachers.

ABHORRENT VALUES

How bad were the public schools? I have in my library a secular book written by a public-school educator in the 1950s that reveals quite a few viewpoints differing from those of Bible-believing Christians. Many of this educator's ideas about children were based on a warped view of anthropology. Human beings are little better than animals, in his view, and this is particularly evident in children. In the decades since the author wrote the book, his views and others like his have become mainstream. The implications of the anti-God, evolutionary mindset as it worked itself out in our educational institutions have led to disastrous results.

There have been many attempts to thwart the negative consequences of this kind of philosophy. Anti-bullying, anti-alcohol, anti-drug, anti-teenage pregnancy, and other

campaigns have not addressed the heart of the issue, because it is the issue of the heart. As far back as the 1920s, J. Gresham Machen, the well-known conservative Bible professor from Princeton Seminary, criticized the attempt to provide an education "that trains the mind without training the moral sense." He called the attempt to do so "a menace to civilization."*

THE BIBLE BASIS

We are inundated with bad news about the American public school system. But what do we have to put in its place? What is the foundational philosophy that we must champion? Why is it better? Those fundamental questions need to have clear answers. Where should we start?

My wife Cléa and I have sought—though not always successfully!—to impart to our young children the need to fear the Lord. The book of Proverbs readily comes to mind. It seems Proverbs 1:7–8 is never far from our thoughts

(or our exhortations to our children!): "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."

The task and purpose of Christian schools is to reinforce the work that parents do at home with their children. Most Christian parents have learned that sending their children to a Christian school does not in any way absolve them of their God-given responsibility to nurture their children toward godliness. Parents play the key role in fostering their children's appetites and affections toward the things of God (Col. 3:1–2). We are exhorted to do so by God's Word, as Ephesians 6:4 reminds us fathers especially: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

To do this requires a concerted effort to disciple our children. I find it also takes an enormous amount of energy. I have often been

reminded of God's sense of humor as I find myself parenting my young children as a father in my mid-50s. But much is to be gained by taking advantage of the challenges, trials, and struggles my children face and teaching them how God is working in their lives to accomplish their transformation for His glory.

I also found those same lessons apply to myself, as God reveals my own heart to me when adverse circumstances come. Additionally, I find many opportunities to reveal to my children the contrast between God's way of thinking and the world's. I remind myself that I must be diligent to do this, no matter how tired I am!

Many other significant Scriptures magnify the power of God and the responsibilities of parents to guide their children in the way of Christlikeness. I love the stark contrast Joshua made, which is just as true today as it was in his day: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will

serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: *but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*" (Josh. 24:15).

Our world is not a place where a Bible-based belief system is valued, appreciated, or encouraged. Rather, the opposite is true and the opportunities to exert influence over children and teens are endless. Devices no bigger than your hand are ready and able to provide the world's philosophy and values to our children on a 24/7 basis. That is why many Christian parents have decided to partner with Christians schools to support the Christian educational values they want their children to embrace.

THE VALUE OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

In speaking of Christian schools' value, I have in mind two groups to whom they appeal. The first group is the large number

of parents who are willing to make personal sacrifices to allow their children to attend Christian schools. The second group consists of the faculty and staff of those Christian schools. Growing up in the home of parents who were Christian school teachers, I saw that their calling took great dedication to the teaching and nurture of their students. As a teenager, I would often want to sample the freshly baked cookies my mother had just made, only to be told they were for her second-grade class. She cared about her students.

THE TASK AND PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS IS TO REINFORCE THE WORK THAT PARENTS DO AT HOME WITH THEIR CHILDREN. MOST CHRISTIAN PARENTS HAVE LEARNED THAT SENDING THEIR CHILDREN TO A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL DOES NOT IN ANY WAY ABSOLVE THEM OF THEIR GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY TO NURTURE THEIR CHILDREN TOWARD GODLINESS.

Christian school teachers teach not only because they are dedicated, but also because this kind of endeavor is a ministry and a calling. Many teachers make sacrifices to accomplish their calling to help train the next generation. They want to see their students understand the gospel, accept the gospel, and live within the parameters of the gospel.

OVERRIDING CONCERNS

What current challenges do Christian schools provide answers for that are convincing to so many Bible-believing people? Out of many such issues, several are important to highlight:

Parental control. It is a tragedy that some state schools allow children to make life-changing (and sometimes life-threatening) decisions, and even encourage and support those decisions, without parents being informed. The underlying assumption is that teachers know better than parents what is best for their children.

Gender identity. I am so thankful that the Christian school teachers who teach our children understand and support our views about biology and the differences between men and women. I was surprised at how quickly so many people, especially educators, willingly embraced what is so obviously wrong. This failure goes beyond fairness in sports and prohibiting biological males from competing against biological females. It actually involves rebellion against the way God designed us. It is saying that God made a mistake.

Communication of the gospel. Christian school teachers are free to communicate the gospel and speak truth to their students. They do not have to worry about getting in trouble for sharing their faith. In fact, their administrators want them to do so. In state schools, teachers are not allowed to speak freely. In fact, I think we would all be surprised to know all the topics that are prohibited.

Awareness of a biblical worldview. Rather than demeaning and attacking a biblical worldview, Christian school teachers have the joy of sharing it, promoting it, and challenging students to embrace it. Having a biblical worldview that asserts God's unlimited wisdom and humanity's comprehensive corruption is essential, especially as we consider social problems such as economic issues and historical catastrophes—everything from colonialism to genocide. If a biblical understanding of our world is neglected, students will be misled and confused into thinking that God is not in control.

Calling out wrong behavior. I am deeply grateful that Christian school teachers inform us about the behavior problems of our children. In other types of schools, teachers refrain from doing that or even calling sinful behavior wrong. While it is humbling to hear of our children's shortcomings (and there are many!), we do value the fact that the teachers

care enough about our children to alert us. We are truly thankful for their concern.

THE DECLINE OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL MOVEMENT

From many perspectives, the Christian school movement has not experienced a decline at all. However, starting in the 1990s, I caught wind of a way of thinking that suggested the best days of the Christian school movement were behind us. Some schools downsized, restructured, or closed. Some church-based schools took stock of how much their school was costing the church. No doubt some questioned whether the effort was still worth it. Some Christian schools may have even strayed from their mission.

THE RESURGENCE

With our society's embrace of gender fluidity, a trend that has accelerated greatly since our family moved back to the United States in 2016, the demise of the Christian school

movement is simply a delusion. Many good Christian schools are experiencing a rapid increase. Their greatest challenges include finding both space for expansion and qualified faculty to fill teaching roles.

The truth is, there is more need for the Christian school movement than ever before. With due respect to the significance of banning prayer in public schools in the early 1960s, that issue pales in comparison to today's alarming developments:

- gender-affirming counsel and gender dysphoria in general
- an evolutionary worldview
- an anti-God, anti-supernatural mindset
- refusal to tolerate different views (the cancel culture)
- rejection of serious discussion of differing points of view

Christian schools are needed now in a way that seems different than before. Our

Christian identity is under attack, and only through God's enablement will committed Christians be able to preserve it.

Another sign of resurgence stems from the fact that several states have allowed voucher systems or student savings accounts that help families pay for the Christian education of their children. The opportunities of school choice can be a help to struggling families. While other good options are out there (we were a homeschooling family for several years), we were delighted when the chance came to put our children in a Christian school.

Of course, as with churches, there is no such thing as a perfect Christian school. Compared to other alternatives, however, it is an option that all concerned parents should consider. The key point is that Christian parents must be aware of the dangers of an anti-Christian environment for the education of their children.

THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Did you know that you might be able to help a Christian school near you? The fact is that these schools' need for qualified faculty, particularly in the areas of advanced math and science, means that second-career opportunities abound. While the opportunities depend on your qualifications and experience, your contribution may help the next generation reject an evolutionary worldview and embrace what Genesis 1–11 teaches. Math teaches us about God's orderliness, and history reveals the corruption of humanity. Students need writing skills to articulate and perpetuate our biblical worldview to others.

Though I hold degrees from two state institutions, it is the Christian education I received that I value most highly. I obtained a great foundation upon which to build. I like to say that it is best to build the bottom of a boat before you put it in the water. My first secular instruction came after thirteen years of

Christian school, four years of Bible college, and a year of seminary. That is not a model for all to follow, but it illustrates the value of laying a strong foundation of truth that started with my attending a Christian school in the 1970s.

Ken Rathbun is the academic vice president for Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary. He served previously as a missionary in Jamaica for fourteen years with Baptist Mid-Missions. He and his wife Cléa live in Ankeny, Iowa, with their two young children.

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* J. Gresham Machen, "Reforming the Government Schools" in *Education, Christianity, and the State: Essays by J. Gresham Machen*, ed. John W. Robbins (Trinity Foundation, 1987), 60.

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Cléa Rathbun

The Benefits of a Christian School Education

My son started his academic journey in kindergarten in a Christian school not far from our home. We could not have had a better teacher for him. His teacher was kind but firm. She was as concerned for her students' spiritual condition and growth as she was for their academic progress. Above all, she was a disciplemaker and a faithful teacher of the gospel. Any time our son needed some extra teaching moments (there were lots of those throughout the year), she would

point him to the cross. It became a common saying at our house to be "under the cross" whenever one needed instruction and correction. With the global interruption of COVID, the school year was cut short, and most of the lessons had to be done via Zoom, but we are forever grateful for this teacher's investment in the life of our son.

Teaching is formative and indoctrinating. It has spiritual ramifications. Teaching and learning occur against the backdrop of a worldview. If teaching is not purposefully biblical, what takes place is teaching based on a secular mindset, worldview, and perspective. From my personal experience growing up in Brazil, my own observations and experience of the models provided here in the States, and as a parent, I see many benefits in the Christian school setting as an effective system that provides sound Christian education for our children.

MY EXPERIENCE GROWING UP

I grew up in Brazil, receiving most of my elementary education in the Brazil public school system. Christian schooling, as we know it here in the States, was not an option, at least not in my hometown in the Amazon, and homeschooling was a very foreign concept.

For three years I attended a parochial school, a mix between a public institution and a Roman Catholic one, funded by the state but managed by the church. In my hometown, this was the closest thing to Christian education that parents without financial means could hope to provide for their children. Parents did not have to pay, but students had to pass an admission test to attend, and the draw was the promise of better academic preparedness than what was being offered in the public system. So I received good academic education and a whole lot of Catholic teaching. Their system worked—sort of. Moral education was upheld as the norm, students in general were

better behaved than those who attended other schools, and good grades were part of the package. However, we had regular religious instruction, and Catholic prayers were recited in the morning before class. As a young believer, I often thought about what the most respectful course of action during those moments should be. Should I keep quiet? Should I pray silently? Should I close my eyes? I did a bit of everything. One way or another, I memorized those prayers and the basics of the Catholic catechism without even trying to; it happened just by hearing these things repeatedly.

MY EXPERIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

Here in the United States, my experience has been that public schools are known for their academic ability, with resources that often far exceed those available for Christian schools and other private institutions. Their extracurricular activities are also very much sought after, with sports and music education at the top of the list. However, as with the Catholic school I attend-

ed in Brazil, the academic benefits come with embedded philosophies that can be in direct opposition to biblical principles. No matter the type of school, whether Christian or not, children are being preached to, indoctrinated by the values and morals upheld by the school system, and more importantly, by their teachers. Some of these teachings are not said out loud. Much is taught by omission. And for many schools across this country, God and biblical teachings have been omitted or openly rejected and replaced by secular psychology.

THE BENEFITS OF A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

We were so thrilled when our two young children were accepted and enrolled in a Christian school this past year. Since then, the list of benefits we see with this model has grown. Each passing day, we continue to be amazed at the many ways God has been using this school for the betterment of our children. God keeps giving us the assurance that this was the right choice for us.

The Christian school setting provides us with structure. There is a set routine that is not easily disrupted. Students and parents know what to expect and exceptions to the rule are anticipated and dealt with ahead of time.

With the organized schedule, we also become accountable for what our children are working on, as we help them learn at home. Furthermore, we see the added benefit of our children being accountable to teachers and other instructors at school. It becomes a motivation for them to do their best and learn to love excellence, even as Paul exhorted his readers: "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10).

The Christian school ensures a Christian educational environment. We are glad for a place that not only is receptive to Christian ethics but also encourages and fosters the nurturing of our own Christian values. Our son and daughter have learned much just by being

around teachers and fellow believers, by walking with them, and by learning what godliness looks like.

We are grateful for the gospel being constantly preached to our children. The gospel is taught, repeated, and held as the basis for daily godly life. We marvel at the work of God's grace that teaches us and our children to deny ungodliness and to live for His glory (Titus 2:14–17).

We are glad that, as in our home, our children hear wrongs being called out by the right names. Sin is labeled sin and dealt with in accordance with biblical teachings. As parents, we are made fully aware of what happens at school, so that we can reinforce what is being taught and address sinful attitudes and behavior at home. Those are humbling teachable moments for us as well, and God has used many such instances for our good.

Lastly, as we experienced with Lucas' kindergarten teacher, we once again have godly Christian educators invested in the lives of

both of our children. We love that they have the privilege of being discipled by faithful disciples of Christ.

Clèa Rathbun, MA (Faith Baptist Theological Seminary), is the mother of two children (ages 7 and 10). She was a great asset to her husband Ken as a missionary in Jamaica, being active in various women's ministries. Currently, she faithfully serves in her local church in women's ministry and in the youth department with her husband.

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David Horner

What Makes an Effective Christian School Administrator?

Reflections of a Former Administrator

Over the last few years, many parents, Christian and non-Christian alike, have become disillusioned with the public school system. During the pandemic, parents saw, through the online teaching, how little in the way of academics their children were receiving and how the agenda of wokeness was dominating what was being taught. As a result, many parents began looking for alternatives, Christian schools among them. Christian schools grew at amazing rates, and

new schools began to open. When selecting a Christian school for their children, parents need to consider a number of factors, including curriculum, doctrine, educational philosophy, faculty credentials, and administration format. One of the key factors is the administrator of the school. So, what does an effective administrator look like? What should parents look for in the school administrator when choosing the school for their children? As a former Christian school administrator, I have several suggestions for parents to consider.

SPIRITUAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

First of all, an effective Christian school administrator needs to be a growing, vibrant Christian himself or herself. Howard Hendricks, in his book Teaching to Change Lives, mentions spiritual growth as one of the key principles for being an effective teacher and, by implication, an effective administrator. He notes, "If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow." The demands of ministry

make it a must for Christian leaders (teachers and administrators) to be growing in their walk with the Lord. They need to be spending time daily in prayer and personal Bible study and walking closely with the Lord. The demands of ministry in a Christian school will challenge any administrator. He or she is fighting a spiritual battle for the welfare of the students and teachers in the school. An administrator who is weak spiritually will not be able to lead the school in the right direction or handle the daily challenges he or she will face.

In addition, the Christian school administrator needs to be growing in his or her professional life. Keeping current on educational trends and political issues affecting Christian education is vital for the administrator to lead the school effectively in our present political and social environment. Because we are "in the world but not of the world," the hard reality is that much of society is not favorable toward the Christian school movement. The school administrator cannot be ignorant of

the views and potential threats that face our schools, nor can he or she be uninformed of the changing methods and techniques of education. Some of these methods are not appropriate for the Christian school, though many of them can be adapted to our advantage. The effective Christian school leader wants his or her teachers to be providing the best education possible to the students. Parents are entrusting their children to the school to produce educated, capable Christian citizens who will make a difference in the world.

EMPOWERMENT OF OTHERS

A second area to consider is that an effective Christian school administrator needs to delegate, not dictate. Part of effective leadership is developing others into capable servants for the Lord by giving them responsibilities and following up on the results. If the school has hired qualified teachers, then the administrator needs to let them use their talents and

abilities for the good of the students. God gifts individuals with particular skills, and a good administrator observes those skills and helps the individual develop those skills. The administrator needs to look for teachers and other staff members who are gifted in certain areas, and he or she should then cultivate those gifts. Developing teacher-leaders, curriculum experts, highly effective classroom managers, and potential assistant administrators will only enhance the school's overall operation and reputation. An effective administrator produces effective teachers, who, in turn, produce productive Christian citizens from the student body. An administrator who only tells his or her staff what to do and who takes on most of the duties alone is not doing the staff, the students, or their parents any favors. No one person is good at everything. The administrator needs to know his or her strengths, cultivate those strengths, and find others who have the strengths he or she does not have and cultivate those strengths in them. The school benefits

from the wise administrator who humbly recognizes his or her weaknesses and then finds others who are strong in those areas and turns them loose to "do the job."

As an example from my personal experience, when I became the administrator of one Christian school, I met with the elementary teachers during my first in-service there and asked them to develop their lunch and playground duty schedules. They were shocked. They told me the previous administrator had always developed those schedules and simply handed out their assignments. I told them that they were better qualified than I was to know who should be on playground duty at a certain time, who should go to lunch first, and what would be the most efficient schedule, since they worked with their students and each other all day. The teachers excitedly created their schedules and gave me a copy. It was a simple act of empowerment, but it was a great morale boost, and it

relieved me of one more duty that I really did not need to be doing. Did I lose any authority or respect by not dictating the schedules to them? No, I created a positive environment that encouraged the teachers and made for a better working situation.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Third, the effective Christian school administrator needs to take an old saying to heart: "It's not what you expect, but what you inspect." That is, the administrator does not spend the day at his or her desk but rather gets out into the hallways and classrooms of the school to see what is happening. It may surprise some, but simply walking the halls provides the students with a sense of security and provides the administrator with lots of information. When I did this, I learned quite a bit about what was happening among the student body, and I was sometimes able to nip a problem in the bud by listening to con-

versations as I walked by the hallway lockers. Students did not realize that I was listening to them as they talked with friends, but I was. In addition, visiting the classrooms at various times during the year allowed me to assess the effectiveness of the teachers and the general atmosphere of their classrooms. Watching the teacher-student interactions, seeing the teacher instructing the students, and even noting the appearance of the room gave me a lot of good information. It allowed me to help those teachers who were struggling with classroom management or classroom discipline, to make suggestions for creating a better classroom environment, and to commend those teachers who were doing a great job. It also let me know of teachers who really did not belong in the classroom, and that helped me make the best decisions regarding contract renewals. An administrator who stays in the office most of the time will not know the heartbeat of the school nor will he or she help the faculty be their best by providing feedback and giving

suggestions for improvement. That administrator may get a lot of paperwork done, but he or she will not be truly effective.

DISCERNMENT AND COURAGE

A fourth factor to consider is that an effective Christian school administrator needs to be discerning and willing to make the hard decisions. No one likes confrontation or conflict, but the effective administrator must look beyond personal comfort and the desire to be liked and do what is best for the school. This may mean not renewing a teacher's contract even though the teacher is well liked or has a lot of friends among parents. Ineffective teachers, those with negative attitudes, or those who are unwilling to make changes are not an asset to the school and will do more harm than good to the overall effectiveness and reputation of the school. After an administrator has worked with a weak or negative teacher for a time and yet sees no improvement, then it is time to part ways. Over the

years as an administrator, I have had to make that hard decision at times and not renew a teacher's contract. It was not a pleasant task, but it was a necessary one. Administrators who are unwilling to take this type of action will end up hurting the school.

Besides making hard decisions regarding personnel, the effective administrator may have to make equally hard decisions regarding the student body. Not every student or family is suited to the Christian school. Some parents like the idea of a Christian school as a way to reform or correct their rebellious child. This is a formula for disaster in most cases. The older the student, the less likely it is that time in the Christian school will "fix" the problem. Only God can change a heart; we humans are incapable of doing that, so it is not wise to allow negative, rebellious students into the school. Many times, I had to tell a family "no" to enrolling their child in the school. They might have been disappointed or even angry at my decision, but I was responsible to the

other parents, who in good faith had enrolled their children in the school, assuming that we would assist them in training their young people to be godly adults. One or two rebellious students in a class can easily change the entire atmosphere of that class for the worse. It is unfair to the teacher, parents, and other students to allow the "scoffer" into the school.

By the same token, it may be necessary to discipline or even dismiss a student for violating school rules. While heartbreaking and emotionally trying, dismissing students may be an action an administrator must take for the sake of the rest of the student body. Rules are in place for a reason, and if the leadership will not enforce the rules, then everyone suffers. Mercy and grace are commendable traits, and God has both attributes, but God is also a God of justice, and sometimes the administrator must be just rather than merciful. In my years as an administrator, I had to dismiss any number of students, and while it was hard

at the time, it always proved to be the right action in the end. There were also a few times when I acted in mercy, and that was the right decision, but sometimes that action came back to haunt me. The effective administrator has to be discerning, asking God for wisdom and direction. He or she also has to be willing to do what is best for the school.

FLEXIBILITY

Finally, the effective Christian school administrator has to be flexible and resilient. Life has a way of throwing the unexpected at us, and we must be able to roll with the punches. An administrator who is inflexible will find himself or herself frustrated, unhappy, and even frequently panic-stricken. Over my years as an administrator, I had any number of times when my expectations were not met or something totally unexpected happened. In one school, a teacher became angry with the pastor of the sponsoring church over a decision he made and quit two weeks before

the new school year began. The Lord blessed, and I was able to find a teacher to replace her in time, but it made for some tense moments and deep concerns. Dealing with unhappy parents, unhappy teachers, and unhappy students can wear on the administrator, but ultimately the Lord is in control and has allowed these situations for a reason. The administrator needs to take the long view and realize that God has a plan, and part of that plan includes the present unpleasant circumstances. Making wise decisions through seeking counsel and prayer and realizing that there is a purpose for every situation will help the administrator weather the storm and move forward. God always blesses faithfulness.

As parents, if your children are in a well-run Christian school with an effective administrator, be thankful and supportive. If you are looking for a Christian school, ask questions, observe, and talk with other parents and teachers. If that school has an effective administra-

tor, then you can be more confident that your children will receive the training they need to become competent Christian adults. It will give you peace of mind knowing that your school has an effective administrator at the helm.

David Horner was a Christian school teacher and administrator for twenty-three years in Ohio and Michigan. He has served faithfully at Faith Baptist Bible College since 2001 in the Teacher Education Department.

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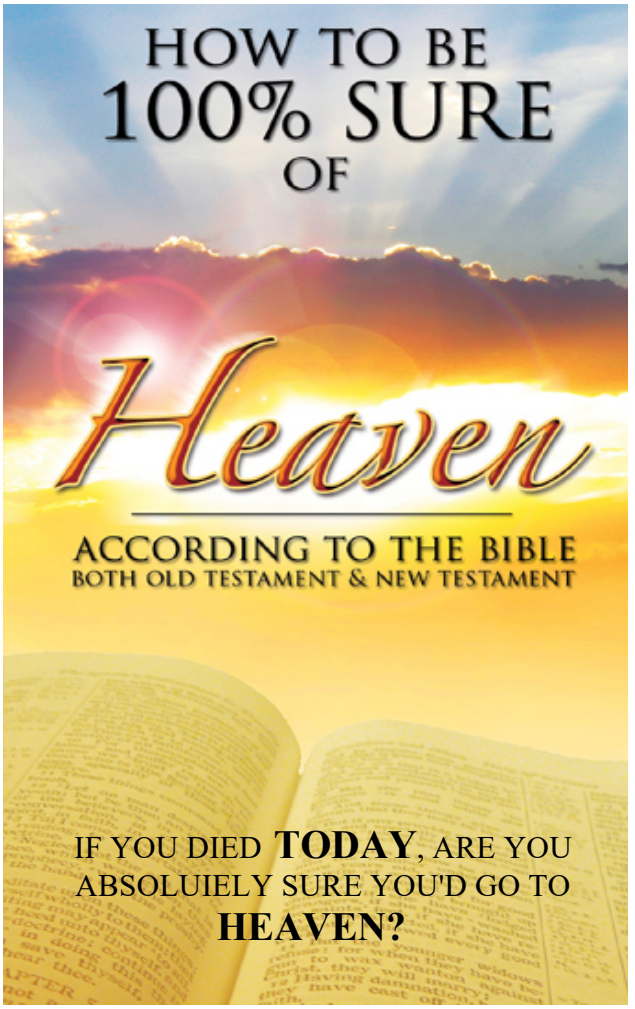

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Mark Stupka

How to Spot a Counterfeit Christian School

By the grace of God, I recently completed my fortieth year as a Christian educator, and I am thankful that the Lord has given me the opportunity to be a teacher and to share His Word freely with students over the years. I spent fifteen years as a K-12 Christian school teacher, coach, and principal in Iowa and Minnesota before becoming an instructor at Faith Baptist Bible College in the fall of 1999. Over the past twenty-five years I have visited scores of Christian schools

around the country and the world while observing student teachers and practicum students. I have seen many great schools that are shining brightly, bringing honor to the Lord. Yet, sadly, other schools are just going through the motions and failing to impact students' lives and their communities for God's glory.

Maybe you are a Christian school leader who is wondering if your school is genuinely accomplishing its mission, or perhaps you are a parent who is looking for a great Christian school for your children. If so, I trust that this article will help you to identify the marks of "counterfeit" Christian schools and make wise decisions in the future.

COUNTERFEIT CLUE #1: LOOK AT ITS PRODUCT

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave His disciples instructions to help them identify false teachers, and these principles can help us identify counterfeit Christian schools as well. In particular, Jesus explained that good

trees bring forth good fruit, and corrupt trees bring forth evil fruit (Matt. 7:15–20). To put it simply, we can identify a tree by the fruit it produces. I believe that we can apply this principle to schools as well—we can determine if a school is a genuine Christian school by the fruit it produces.

So, what is the fruit of a Christian school? The fruit of a school is seen primarily in the lives of its graduates. With this in mind, we will investigate these questions: "What kind of graduates is the school producing?" and "Are these graduates any different from the graduates of a secular school?" These questions are not easy to answer, but we can start by investigating the mission statements of Christian schools, the college choices of school graduates, and the occupations of school alumni.

Mission statements. A genuine Christian school needs a clear mission statement, and there should be evidence that the mission is being accomplished. The mission state-

ment should identify the main goal of the school clearly and concisely. What mission should Christian schools seek to accomplish? It seems logical that Christian schools should focus to some degree upon the Great Commission that was given by Christ to all believers in Matthew 28:19–20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . ." In these verses Christ commands believers to teach all nations to observe His commands, making disciples of Jesus Christ. In his classic book *Walking with God in the Classroom: Christian Approaches to Teaching and Learning*, Dr. Harro Van Brummelen states that "the overall aim of Christian schooling is to help students be and become responsive disciples of Jesus Christ. Students learn concepts, abilities, and forms of creative expression

that enable them to serve God and their fellow human beings with mercy, justice, and integrity" (p. 27). If this is so, we should ask ourselves, "Are students coming to know Christ as their Savior on a regular basis as a result of the school's ministry?" and "Are the school's graduates following in the footsteps of Christ after graduating from high school? Are they moving into adulthood showing a desire to serve God and others?" These questions are not easy to answer statistically, yet tracking alumni after graduation is possible and well worth the effort when it comes to determining the genuine success of a school. School leaders should investigate the following: (1) What occupations are the school's graduates pursuing after graduation? (2) Are the alumni of the school still attending and serving in churches? (3) Where are alumni attending college? The replies to these questions will help to determine whether the school is genuinely Christian or not.

Alumni occupations. Related to the previous questions, it is truly possible to serve the Lord in a variety of occupations, so I'm not implying that all Christian school graduates ought to become full-time pastors or missionaries! Yet it seems reasonable and proper to anticipate that many of the graduates of genuine Christian schools will pursue full-time ministries and service-related occupations. We would also expect that Christian school alumni will continue to attend and serve in their churches after graduating from high school, yet the Barna Research Group reports that approximately three out of five young Christians are leaving the church either permanently or for an extended period after age fifteen. Yes, it is true that students' families typically have a stronger influence on their children's attitudes toward church attendance and Christian service, yet genuine Christian schools will help to deepen the students' faith and commitment to Christ through clear and relevant

biblical teachings related to science, sexuality, and other important cultural issues. A deeply rooted faith will motivate youth to attend church to learn more about God and fellowship with His people. In addition, these young believers will crave to please God through loving and serving Him.

College choices. Of the three original questions, the final question regarding college enrollment is probably the easiest to assess. Many of us have attended high school graduations, and we have seen the college and occupational plans of the graduates. Yes, these plans often change over the years, but initial plans can provide an indication of the heart attitudes of these young graduates as well as the career guidance that has been provided. As I consider the initial plans of these graduates, these questions come to mind: "Are the graduates seeking to attend prestigious colleges to pursue high-paying occupations, or are they seeking first the kingdom of God?"

"What kind of counseling is being provided to the seniors as they determine their college choices?" Sadly, it appears that some counterfeit Christian schools are providing college and career guidance that is similar to that of the secular schools.

Another way to investigate the fruit of a school is simply to talk with its graduates. At our college, the education department faculty interviews each of our seniors to learn more about their worldview and their philosophies of life and education. This has been one of the best ways to determine if our school has been accomplishing its mission. Whether you are a school administrator or an interested parent, I would encourage you to talk to one or more of the school's alumni to gain insights about their overall impressions of the school and the impact that it has had on their lives. The information gained through such conversations is well worth the time and effort involved.

COUNTERFEIT CLUE #2: LOOK AT ITS PEOPLE

When we think of great schools, we may envision schools that have beautiful campuses with the latest technology in large, well-lit classrooms. Others are impressed with cutting-edge athletic facilities with well-groomed athletic fields and possibly even an Olympic-sized swimming pool! Yes, these wonderful facilities can be great resources, but they don't necessarily result in an excellent Christian education.

Jesus Christ, the ultimate Master Teacher, reminds us that the teacher is more important than the curriculum or the educational facilities. Ronald Allen, in his book, *Lord of Song: The Messiah Revealed in the Psalms*, underscores the impact of Christ's teaching:

> We tend to link a great teacher with a great institution. Jesus had no such ties.
>
> We tend to think of a great teacher as

one who makes difficult things less complex. Jesus seemed to show new complexities in simple things.

We tend to anticipate that a great teacher helps us face life more independently. Jesus kept insisting that life must be lived in full dependence on another.

We tend to associate a great teacher with technical language of his or her field. Jesus used simple language and everyday things.

We tend to link a great teacher to his or her brilliant, intellectual students. Those who learned best from Jesus were the poor, the lonely, the simple.

We tend to think of a great teacher in the setting of a classroom. Jesus' classroom was a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, a corner of a living room, a walk along a path, a small space in a little boat.

Today we tend to look for a teacher to use multimedia tools. Jesus' tools were the heavens, the fields, mountains and birds, storms and sheep, a vineyard, a well, and a banquet. In short, whatever was around He would use as a teaching tool.

What can we conclude from these statements regarding the Master Teacher? As I consider this, I am reminded that one of the core values taught in the Philosophy of Education course here at Faith Baptist Bible College is "The Importance of the Teacher," and we affirm that "Christian schools will fail without teachers who clearly understand, teach, and live from the perspective of a radical biblical worldview. Schools need to offer their teachers sustained, biblically authentic professional development." This core value reminds us that authentic Christian teachers are essential to enable Christian schools to accomplish their mission.

What are qualities of an authentic Christian school teacher? One could write an entire book on this topic, but I won't go into great detail here. Rather, I will highlight a few key pieces of evidence that will indicate if a teacher is the "real deal"—if they are poised to make a genuine and positive impact for Christ.

First, every Christian school teacher should be able to share a clear salvation testimony and provide evidence of a life that is dedicated to serving the Lord. The apostle Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Paul realized that he was a role model for other believers, just as teachers are for their students. Hypocrites—those whose lives do not match their teachings—stifle the environment of a Christian school. Therefore, school leaders must take great care when hiring teachers, remembering that a heart for the Lord is the most important credential for a Christian educator. Teachers who

love the Lord will also love their students and serve faithfully in their schools and churches.

Second, Christian school teachers should have a strong knowledge of God's Word. Colossians 3:16 points out the importance of being saturated with the Word of God when it says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." How can we determine whether a teacher has a strong knowledge of God's Word? Here are some clues that may help to determine this: (1) Has the teacher been saved and living for the Lord for many years? New believers may not have a strong knowledge of the Bible or a stable relationship with the Lord. (2) Does the teacher have experience teaching Bible classes in a church setting? Those who have taught the Bible in church will likely have deeper understandings of biblical truths than those who have not had this experience. (3) Did the teacher graduate from a Bible or

Christian college? Not all Bible college graduates have a strong knowledge of God's Word, and a degree from a Christian college does not guarantee that the individual has a heart for the Lord—yet it is a step in the right direction! In summary, genuine Christian schools will make the selection of mature, godly teachers one of their highest priorities.

Related to this topic, the entire staff of a genuine Christian school demonstrates a positive spirit of love, joy, and unity. They actually enjoy teaching young people and serving the Lord together! Sadly, many schools are characterized by complaining, gossiping, and quarrelling. Should we be surprised when graduates of these counterfeit Christian schools leave these schools and their churches, never to return?

COUNTERFEIT CLUE #3: LOOK AT ITS PROCESSES

There are many ways to teach effectively—Jesus' teaching methods give evidence of this!

He used lectures, object lessons, parables, and other creative techniques to teach His disciples. Christian schoolteachers should also use a variety of teaching methods to stimulate maximum learning. Yet a variety of teaching methods are used in secular schools as well, so what is unique about the teaching process in a genuine Christian school? The answer is biblical integration.

Genuine Christian schools infuse truths and principles from the Bible into all subject areas of the curriculum. This is much more than just tacking a Bible verse onto a lesson. Biblical integration is accomplished when the teacher creatively helps students to understand how God's Word is related to all aspects of knowledge and life. Many Christian schools provide training to help their teachers learn to integrate biblical principles into their teaching consistently. This is commendable, yet the most important prerequisite to effective biblical integration is a

Spirit-filled teacher whose heart and mind are saturated with the Word of God.

When people think of school curriculum, they often focus solely upon academic subjects. Yet the actual curriculum of a school includes a variety of learning experiences, including what is taught through athletics, fine arts, and dress codes. Are students learning to compete with humility and respect for others, or are the coaches encouraging players to win at any cost? Are students practicing and performing music to the glory of God, or are prideful attitudes being promoted? Does a school teach students to dress modestly in the classroom while it requires volleyball players or cheerleaders to wear immodest uniforms? Schools must beware of hypocritical practices that must not be tolerated in genuine Christian schools.

Students who are consistently exposed to biblical integration tend to develop a strong biblical worldview. Curriculum is important,

yet the lives of loving, genuine Christian teachers send the strongest worldview message to the young people. This old saying is true: "Your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks." When students see genuine Christian teachers living and teaching authentically, effectively, and lovingly, the students' perspectives and lives will be impacted dramatically for God's glory.

SUMMARY

We can identify counterfeit Christian schools by looking at their products, people, and processes. Genuine Christian schools produce many graduates who are committed to serving the Lord; counterfeit Christian schools do not. Counterfeit Christian schools tend to focus upon academic and athletic achievements while overlooking spiritual development.

Educators at genuine Christian schools are joyful, committed Christians, while com-

plainers and gossipers plague schools that are struggling to maintain their Christian influence. The Bible is integrated into all areas of a genuine Christian school's curriculum, while the Bible makes only occasional, inconsistent appearances in counterfeit Christian schools.

Christian school educators and parents should not despair if their school does not currently attain "genuine Christian school" status. Rather, they should identify current weaknesses and take steps to make positive changes. May all Christian school educators and parents endeavor to develop schools that are truly Christian for the good of the young people and the glory of God.

Mark Stupka, EdD, is the chair of the Teacher Education Program at Faith Baptist Bible College, where he has taught for twenty-six years. He is happily married to Janice and has four children and eleven grandchildren.

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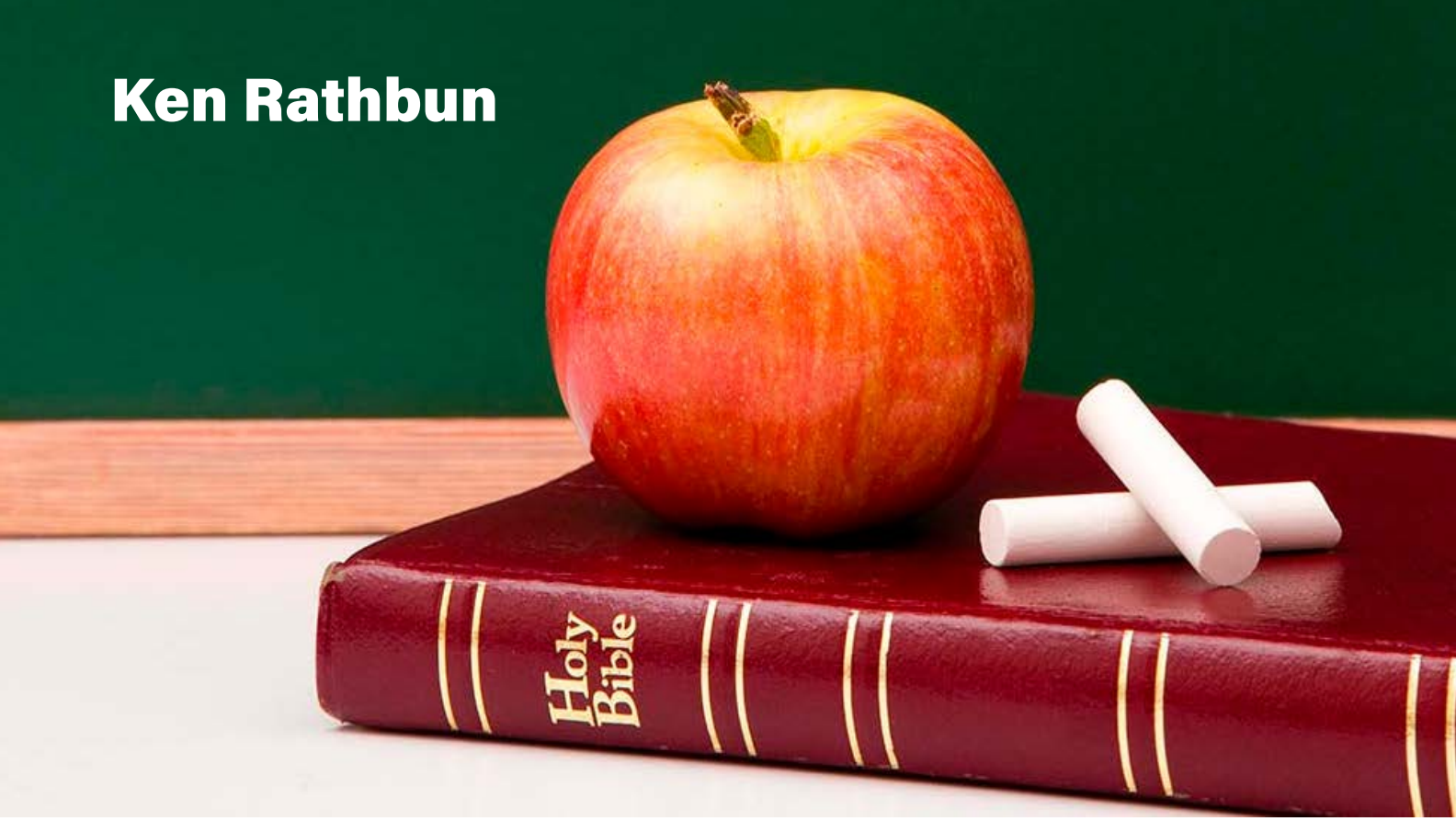

Why We Need More Christian School Teachers for Christian Schools

Multiple generations of believing parents have prioritized the Christian school movement for their families. The movement has been around for a good number of years. While Christian schools are not the only way for Christian parents to edu-

cate their children, they do bring a number of blessings to many.

However, like any movement, the Christian school movement needs to be replenished. Believers in each generation need to assess its value, count the cost, and take action as they see fit. One of the ways to do so is to encourage more people to pursue training at Christian institutions of higher learning for the purpose of joining the Christian school movement. There are several powerful reasons for doing so.

THE NEED IS GREAT

We give God thanks for several years of increasing enrollment at Faith Baptist Bible College. Our Teacher Education Program is currently the largest program in our institution. Every graduate we produce receives multiple offers for teaching positions. The sad truth is that there are still not enough graduates to supply the requests we get. Just

this week I received the news that plans are underway for a new Christian high school to start in a large city several hours from our campus. The news came with an invitation for our graduates to help with this enterprise. This is one of many such requests, and we wish we could supply all of them. But the simple truth is that we cannot. Christian parents should value and champion the Christian school movement. They should consider whether they are called to this field themselves and should encourage their children to do so as well.

THE STAKES ARE HIGH

What is the urgency for Christian schools to flourish? The significant truth we face in our nation and the world is that we are battling for the souls of our children. An argument could be made that we are not winning this battle. Ephesians 6:12 comes to mind: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rul-

ers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The opportunity to imprint a message, a philosophy, a mindset, and a worldview is greatly enhanced when children are young. Ask yourself this: How influential is the kind of instruction they receive and the mark that it leaves on their impressionable minds? Now put this scenario into that of a Christian school as compared with your local public school. What kind of instruction, philosophy, and worldview do you think the next generation should have?

What is at stake is the recapturing of the next generation. This should be a concern of all believers, whether or not they have school-age children. If you are like me, and you do have young children, it is all the more critical for us to desire the flourishing of the Christian school movement. That will take our influence to show its value to those people looking to determine the path God has for their lives. We need to champion the

Christian school movement. Pastors, missionaries, parents, grandparents, and academic advisors in Christian high schools and Bible colleges should be involved in this task.

UNGODLY PHILOSOPHIES ARE WELL ENTRENCHED AND OFTEN UNCHALLENGED

The philosophies we oppose are not supportive of a biblical worldview. Evolution, transgenderism, humanism, woke-ism—the list is endless. These philosophies are fed to children and teens every day during the school year, and they are largely unopposed. They often are accepted as gospel truth and defended as ardently as any fundamentalist would defend his or her views.

I witnessed this when listening to debate some time ago in our state capitol's legislative sessions. A bill was being debated that would allow funds for concerned parents to send their children to the school of their choice. The legislators who opposed the bill wanted

to fight for every dollar and every child to be in public schools. They want every opportunity to turn *our* children to *their* approach of thinking. As parents, we should be concerned. Those whose children are grown should also be concerned. We need to ask ourselves, "Are we retaining the next generation? How strong will Christianity be in the future?"

Again, Christian schools should be supported with great teachers. That can happen if we see this task as a priority and use the influence we have to encourage people to consider joining the Christian school movement, particularly as teachers.

CHRISTIAN PARENTS ARE ACCOUNTABLE

As parents, we are accountable to the Lord for our children. We all want what (we think) is best for them. What do you think is God's best for your children? Often, we think in terms of financial comfort for them. We have hope that they will "do well" in life. Perhaps we think of

power, influence, and opportunity for them. But as we can readily observe in our society, financial "success" itself (however defined) does not necessarily result in contentment, happiness, pleasure, or satisfaction. Encouraging our children to pursue a life of service as Christian school teachers is a great aspiration.

Scripture shows us what this looks like: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Tim. 1:5). This passage shows the result of grandparents and parents passing to their grandchildren and children a love for God and His Word.

Colossians 3:1–2 is also appropriate here: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." We are to help foster good affections and godly desires in the lives of our children.

OUR CHILDREN ARE IMPORTANT

Generally speaking, many of our Bible-believing churches are not always successful in retaining their teens after they graduate from high school. My wife and I serve in the youth ministry in our local church, and we have seen this lack of success not only in our own church, but in others as well. National trends and statistics support this observation. Many Christian families are losing their children as practicing Christians after they become adults. They are not continuing in the faith. New terms are even being coined to describe this process, such as "de-conversion."

Why does this happen? Christian schools are not the answer to every problem. But addressing the basic perspective of a child's and teen's educational upbringing can be essential to determining the cause. I am reminded of Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." I realize this is a

proverb, not a promise, but at least we should make every effort to provide a solid, biblical framework that our children can use to make sense of life. What a rewarding "career choice" one could have in helping mold that perspective in young people.

THE DIFFERENCES ARE CLEAR

Are we losing the battle for our children and for the next generation of believers? A question like that is a broad one, but it is one we need to consider. What observations can you make in your own experience, in your own church, in your own family? The goal is retaining our children and seeing them transformed into effective adult believers who prioritize the Lord in their lives and in the families they will eventually start.

The Christian school movement is not the solution to all these issues. However, the choice is clear between the educational system of state schools and the educational perspec-

tive that caring Christian school teachers do provide. We will move further toward reaching the goal when Christian schools with dedicated Christian teachers who are truly valued are flourishing.

Ken Rathbun is the academic vice president for Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary. He served previously as a missionary in Jamaica for fourteen years with Baptist Mid-Missions. He and his wife Cléa live in Ankeny, Iowa, with their two young children.

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Lynn B. McCool

Rooted in Truth

The Biblical Framework for Christian Education

Christian education is built upon a biblical philosophy that frames our understanding of human nature and the capacity to learn. At its core, this philosophy acknowledges two key truths about humanity. First, humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), which gives us a unique value and purpose. We possess a spiritual, moral, and intellectual nature—able to think, create, and reflect. We are designed to live in harmony with God as originally intended in the Garden of Eden, where humans thrived in perfect communion with their Creator.

However, the second truth introduces tension: while we are created in God's image,

humanity is also marred by sin. Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden (Gen. 3) introduced sin, which now affects every aspect of our being. The Fall brought pain, suffering, and brokenness into the world, and this fallen state influences our behavior, thinking, and learning. Education, therefore, cannot be seen as a neutral activity; it is shaped by what we believe about human nature and the purpose of life. This brings us to a crucial question: *What kind of educational framework should guide the development of our children?*

A COMPARISON OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Throughout history, educational philosophies have evolved, shaped by cultural, religious, and intellectual influences. These philosophies reflect humanity's ongoing effort to understand learning, purpose, and human nature. By examining the development of these ideas, we can assess how differ-

ent approaches align or conflict with a biblical perspective.

Classical Greece and Rome. In ancient Greece and Rome, education aimed to develop the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—to produce virtuous citizens. Philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle emphasized critical thinking, moral development, and intellectual growth. Socrates, through his method of questioning, encouraged self-examination and the pursuit of truth. Plato's ideal educational system in *The Republic* emphasized the importance of forming philosopher-kings, and Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, highlighted practical knowledge and ethics as keys to flourishing. These classical ideas laid the foundation for Western educational traditions.

Medieval period. During the medieval period, education was closely tied to the church and focused on preserving religious and classical knowledge. Theologians such as Thomas

Aquinas integrated reason with faith, emphasizing that both could lead to a deeper understanding of God's truth. This period marked education as a way to prepare individuals for spiritual and moral living.

Renaissance and Reformation. The Renaissance revived classical ideals, focusing on humanism, creativity, and critical inquiry. Thinkers such as Erasmus and Petrarch combined classical learning with Christian moral teachings. Meanwhile, the Reformation transformed education, emphasizing the importance of literacy to read the Scripture. Leaders like Martin Luther advocated for universal education, and John Calvin emphasized the role of education in fostering both spiritual growth and civic responsibility.

The Enlightenment. The Enlightenment introduced a shift toward reason, scientific inquiry, and individual autonomy. Thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau promoted educational approaches

that encouraged experiential learning, moral development, and respect for children's natural curiosity. These ideas laid the groundwork for modern progressive education, which values the development of individual autonomy and critical thinking.

Victorian Era and progressive education. In the nineteenth century, Victorian education emphasized moral discipline and character development in preparation for industrial and colonial expansion. Key figures such as John Stuart Mill and Horace Mann advocated for accessible public education that would prepare students for democratic participation. The early twentieth century saw the rise of progressive education, with John Dewey emphasizing hands-on, student-centered learning to prepare individuals for a democratic society.

Contemporary education. Today's education system emphasizes lifelong learning, digital literacy, and global citizenship. With

the integration of technology and a focus on diversity and inclusion, educators seek to prepare students for an interconnected world. However, the shift toward autonomy and social efficiency often contrasts with a biblical view that emphasizes moral responsibility and the pursuit of truth.

A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION

A biblical framework for education seeks to form the whole person—mind, heart, and soul—with the ultimate purpose of knowing and glorifying God. This approach is rooted in Scripture, which teaches that all truth comes from God (John 1:1, 9) and that we should set our minds on things above (Col. 3:2). Unlike secular educational philosophies that focus on autonomy and societal participation, a biblical approach to Christian education integrates faith and reason, aiming to develop students who love what is good, true, and beautiful because these qualities reflect the nature of God.

Foundational thinkers in biblical education. Plato's philosophical ideas on virtue and knowledge resonate with a biblical view of ultimate reality. His emphasis on turning the soul toward the Good mirrors the biblical call to seek after God. Augustine built on this, viewing education as a way to reorder disordered loves, so that the learner might love God rightly (*Confessions*, Book I). Thomas Aquinas further integrated faith with reason, recognizing that all truth originates from God and that education should lead individuals to seek truth in all its forms.

The role of the liberal arts. John Henry Newman's vision of education emphasized the importance of knowledge in shaping individuals for life's complexities. He argued that intellectual growth must serve spiritual and moral ends, aligning with the biblical command to love God with all your "heart . . . soul, and . . . mind" (Matt. 22:37). Dorothy Sayers, in "The Lost Tools of

Learning," called for a return to the classical trivium—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—to teach students how to think and learn, reflecting the biblical values of wisdom and discernment (1 Thess. 5:21).

Education and moral responsibility. Christian educators such as C. S. Lewis and Jonathan Edwards emphasized the moral and spiritual dimensions of education. Lewis warned against a fragmented education that separates intellect from morality, advocating for an education that cultivates individuals whose intellects and affections are aligned with objective moral truths (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Edwards, in his work *The End for Which God Created the World*, emphasized the importance of directing both the mind and heart toward the glory of God. Education, in this view, is a process of shaping individuals who can discern truth and live in accordance with God's purposes.

The goal of biblical education. The goal of biblical education is not only intellectual competence but also moral virtue and spiritual devotion. It integrates knowledge with faith and aims to form students who are wise, virtuous, and able to discern and defend truth in a world of competing values. As 1 Corinthians 10:31 teaches, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." This framework shapes all areas of learning, from mathematics to literature, as interconnected and reflective of God's glory.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

A biblical framework for Christian education offers a comprehensive and coherent approach to human nature, learning, and the ultimate purpose of education. Unlike secular or humanistic approaches, which often separate moral, intellectual, and spiritual development, a biblical approach emphasizes the integration of faith and reason, and the intellect and morality. When examined through

the lens of a biblical worldview, the educational philosophies outlined in the previous sections reveal key areas where biblical education excels in shaping students who are not only intellectually capable but also morally virtuous, emotionally intelligent, and spiritually mature.

1. Giving glory to God vs. autonomy. The biblical approach to education distinguishes itself by its ultimate aim: to glorify God in all things, including the intellectual and creative endeavors of students (1 Cor. 10:31). This purpose shapes every aspect of education, compelling students to pursue knowledge, creativity, and excellence not for self-promotion or societal approval but as an act of worship. This contrasts with secular educational philosophies, which often elevate individual autonomy and personal achievement as the central goals of education.

Students educated within a biblical framework are not merely encouraged to explore

their interests but are called to see their talents and intellectual pursuits as gifts from God meant to honor Him and serve others. This larger purpose imparts a sense of direction, meaning, and motivation that fosters deep engagement with academic subjects, inspiring students to use their knowledge creatively and humbly for the common good.

2. Integrating faith and reason. One of the significant contributions of a biblical worldview to education is the seamless integration of faith and reason. The Christian understanding that all truth is God's truth (John 1:9) empowers students to approach their studies with confidence and curiosity. There is no division between sacred and secular knowledge because God is the Creator of all things and everything in the world—whether mathematics, science, literature, or art—reflects His glory and wisdom. In contrast, secular education often treats faith and reason as distinct realms, and sometimes even

contradictory ones. This disjointed approach can lead to intellectual fragmentation and a diminished understanding of how knowledge in different fields interconnects.

A biblical worldview, however, encourages students to explore and connect disciplines, recognizing that each area of study contributes to a fuller understanding of the Creator and His creation. For example, a student studying physics does so with the knowledge that the laws of nature reveal something about the orderly nature of God's work. A student of literature can see how stories reflect the deeper truths of the human condition and God's redemptive narrative. This integrated approach cultivates students who are more well-rounded, as they see no subject as isolated but as part of a unified whole that points to the Creator's wisdom.

3. Acquiring moral virtue and character formation. While secular education often focuses primarily on intellectual development

or social utility, biblical education emphasizes the importance of moral and character development. This focus on virtue is deeply embedded in the Scriptures, which call us to pursue wisdom (Prov. 4:7), justice and humility (Mic. 6:8), and love (Matt. 22:37–39). Biblical education recognizes that true knowledge cannot be divorced from moral formation, as wisdom without virtue can lead to harm rather than flourishing.

Christian educators and schools intentionally create environments where students are trained to live according to the moral truths revealed in Scripture. This holistic approach helps students grow not only in their cognitive abilities but also in their moral and spiritual lives, producing graduates who are compassionate, wise, humble, and just. This emphasis on character development is particularly important in a world where secular education often neglects the moral implications of knowledge, leading to students who

may be technically proficient but lack the ethical framework to use their knowledge responsibly.

4. Understanding creativity as a reflection of God's image. A biblical worldview fosters creativity by recognizing that humans, as image-bearers of God (Gen. 1:27), are inherently creative. The act of creation—whether in art, music, science, or literature—reflects the nature of God, who is the Creator of all things. As a result, students educated within a biblical framework are encouraged to cultivate their creative abilities as a form of imitation of God's creative work.

By contrast, secular education often confines creativity to specific disciplines such as the arts or innovation and technology, reducing its scope to something that can be measured. However, a biblical perspective sees creativity as an essential aspect of human nature that spans all areas of life. Whether students are solving mathematical problems,

developing technological innovations, or composing symphonies, creativity is encouraged as a means of expressing God-given potential and solving real-world problems for the common good. This holistic view of creativity produces students who are more likely to think outside the box, approach problems from multiple angles, and innovate in ways that are grounded in both purpose and moral responsibility.

5. Developing a transcendent sense of purpose. Biblical education cultivates a sense of purpose that transcends the immediate and the temporal. Unlike secular education, which often prioritizes career preparation or societal conformity, a biblical framework teaches students that their lives are part of a larger, divine narrative. The ultimate goal of education is not just personal success or social integration but a deeper, eternal purpose—namely, to know and glorify God (Rom. 15:6).

This transcendent purpose shapes students

into individuals who are motivated by more than just their own interests or societal expectations. They understand that their gifts, talents, and education are ultimately meant to serve God and others, creating a profound sense of responsibility. This awareness leads to a commitment to excellence that is not driven by competition or comparison but by a desire to honor the Creator through their work.

FOSTERING WELL-ROUNDED, CREATIVE STUDENTS

In summary, the biblical framework of education is distinctly positioned to produce well-rounded and creative students because it integrates intellect, character, creativity, and a transcendent purpose into a holistic model of learning. By rooting education in the *imago Dei* and the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty, this framework creates a more cohesive, integrated approach to knowledge and life. Unlike secular educational models, which often separate academic achievement from

moral and spiritual formation, a biblical worldview nurtures the whole person, preparing students not only to excel academically but also to live lives of wisdom, virtue, and purpose. As a result, students educated within a biblical framework are better equipped to contribute meaningfully to society, solve complex problems with creativity and integrity, and reflect God's glory in all they do. This perspective on education is beneficial not only for individual students but also for the world, as these students become leaders, innovators, and change-makers who seek to use their knowledge and abilities to advance the kingdom of God and the flourishing of humanity.

Lynn B. McCool, PhD, is the director of digital education and an adjunct professor of communication at Faith Baptist Bible College. She holds a doctorate in rhetoric and professional communication. In addition to her academic role, she and her husband Dan are active in the music and Sunday School ministries at their local church in Des Moines, Iowa.

FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

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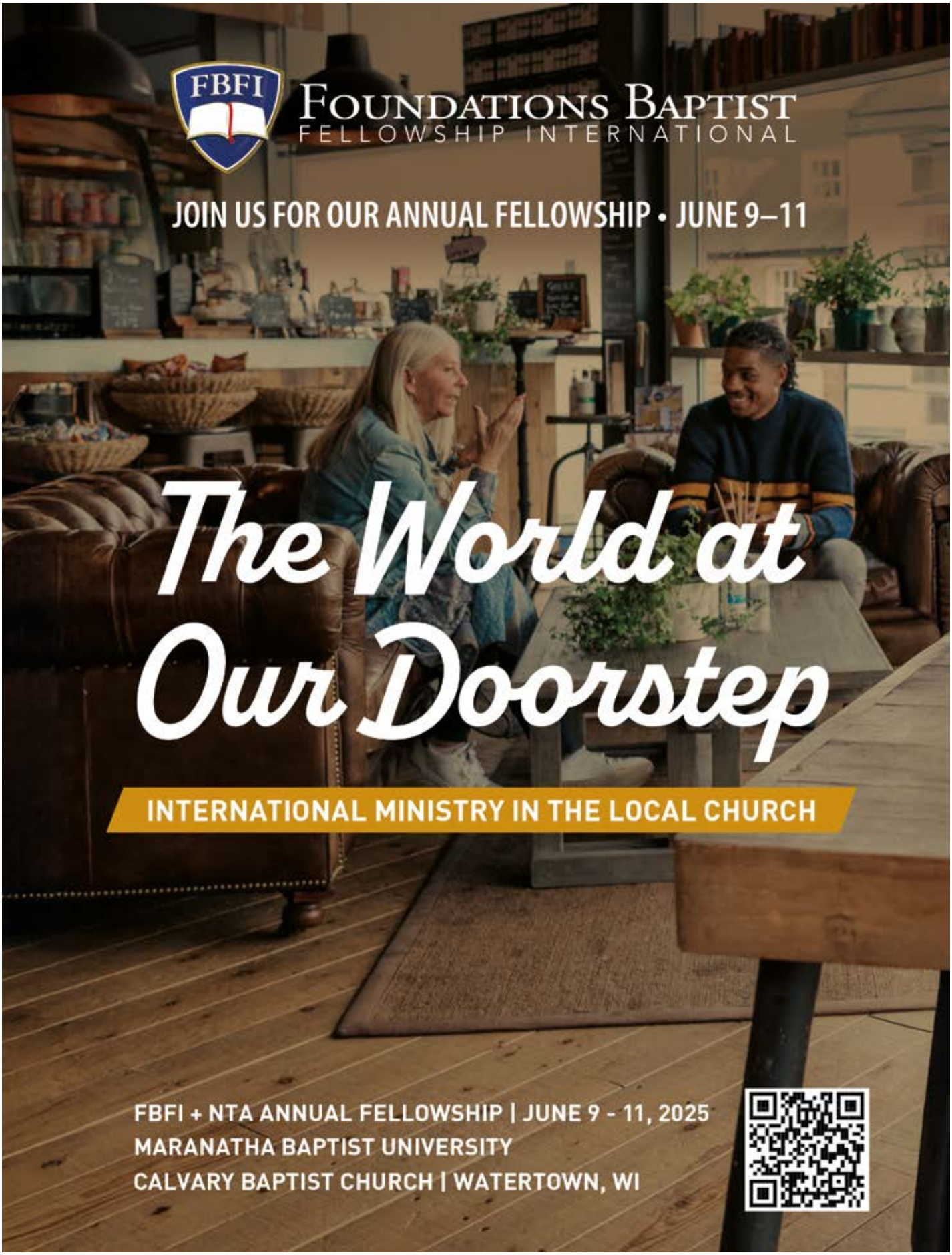
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INSPIRATION FOR THE PASTOR'S STUDY

SOUND WORDS

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

FIRST PARTAKER

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

A Lifting Up in the Case of Great Sins

In 1855 C. H. Spurgeon began weekly meetings to instruct a would-be preacher named T. W. Medhurst. Having come to Christ under Spurgeon's ministry, this zealous young man soon launched himself out into the streets to attempt to imitate his pastor's bold style. Some of the congregation were unimpressed, however, and advised Spurgeon that Medhurst was insufficiently trained. When Spurgeon interviewed the young man to discuss his fledgling attempts, Medhurst insisted, *I must preach, sir: and I shall preach unless you cut off my head!* Thus began Spurgeon's mentoring Medhurst for the ministry, and within a few years, to his founding of a college to train pastors.

Ten years later Spurgeon inaugurated an Annual Conference at the college. For twenty-seven years his yearly message to the preachers was the Conference's high-water mark. After his death, twelve of these sermons were published under the title, *An All-Round Ministry*. Though not as widely read as his *Lectures to My Students*, it is every bit its equal for delightful, scriptural, sage pastoral theology.

One evening recently, while thumbing through the bound 1881 edition of his magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*, I came across an additional message preached to the college in March of that year. I read it immediately and experienced a welcome quickening regarding preaching Christ. What an instruction and an inspiration! I trust that you will be similarly blessed!

Ministers of the gospel, let Christ be your *subject*, and let Christ be your *model*. Find in him not only the truth you utter, but the way and life of your utterance.

As for Christ's being our subject, what other topic can engross a Christian minister's attention? He is certainly untrue to him who called him if he puts his Master into any but the chief seat or overshadows him with other themes.

Whatever else you leave out, let Christ Jesus never be forgotten. Preach all that you know about Christ—all that you have learned from the Scriptures, all that you have experienced at his hands, all that his Spirit has enabled you to perceive and enjoy. Give each of his doctrines a fair share of your attention, for blessed are they who keep his sayings. Preach all that Christ set forth in his life; all that he commanded, all that he did, all that he suffered, and all that he was. Is not this range enough, even for those who, like Solomon, have *largeness of heart even as the sand which is on the seashore*?

What a work is before you if you preach all that Jesus was as to his person, offices, relationships, works, and triumphs. The central sun of your whole system must be his glorious sacrifice for sin. As the starry cross holds the chief place among the southern constellations, so let it be the main glory of your ministry. Let there be no muddle nor mixture about the doctrine of substitution. Say plainly that *he was made a curse for us*, that he bare the iniquities of his people, and died *the just for the unjust to bring us to God*.

Set him forth *before their eyes evidently crucified among them*.

You can never grow weary of this subject. It is an inexhaustible fountain of wonder. Angels desire to look into it, and glorified spirits fall down in adoration as they think of it. Like a fair landscape, it will grow upon you. The more you look into it the more you will see in it. God fed his people for forty years with manna, and it was only their lust which made them long for flesh. Their every-day diet was all that they really needed, and all that God ever gave them in love—the quails were sent in anger. We are not authorized to hand out anything but the bread which came down from heaven, and the true Israel will never weary of it. If the mixed multitude sigh for the leeks, and garlic, and onions of Egyptian philosophy, let them buy their provender at the stall of the nearest "intellectual preacher," but as for you, I beseech you, deal in nothing but the bread of life. Nothing else will stand you in such good stead for profitable discourses as the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else will keep a congregation in a gracious condition. Nothing

else will win souls. Nothing else will bring you a soft pillow when you are nearing your last account. Let your motto be, *None but Christ*.

Every piece of music has its own proper key, and the proper pitch for the gospel is to be found in the gospel itself. How, then, did Christ preach? I cannot attempt to describe his style and manner at length; but here are a few hints.

Did he not preach *most solemnly?* There was weight about every word that he said, meaning in every gesture, force in every tone. He was never a trifler, he did not show off his abilities nor aim at winning applause. He was in solemn, self-forgetting earnest. His accents were those of conviction, his voice was as the voice of God, his very attitudes pleaded with men.

Although our Lord always spoke solemnly, yet never drearily, there is a pleasant interest about his words, for **he preached glad tidings *joyfully***. It was evidently his meat and his drink to do the will of him that sent him. He delighted in his ministry, and in it he found refreshment. I cannot imagine our Saviour during those three years wearing the aspect of one who was tired of his work, or as speaking merely because he was

expected to do so, in a dull, monotonous, lifeless manner. His heart was in his sermons, and parables, and gracious talks; he loved to be God's ambassador, and would not have exchanged his office to rule empires. He would not be diverted from his life's great mission, and when other work was set before him, he said, *Who made me a judge or a divider over you?* O men of the world, how could you invite him to such a task? Wist ye not that he must be about his Father's business? He said, *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*. He found a satisfaction in his mission so great that even for the most painful part of it he sighed, saying, *I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!*

God forbid, my brethren, that we should ever say of our pulpit or pastoral work, "What a weariness it is!" For in it the joy of the Lord is our strength, and our love to our service will be the life of it by God's grace. Let us joy in our high vocation, and never follow it as if we had made a mistake, and would be glad to rectify it by getting out of the ministry if we dared. Let your joy in your service impart an interest to your dis-

courses, making them fragrant with the peace which reigns in your own soul. *The fruit of the Spirit is joy*. Let your hearers see many a specimen of that fruit in your sermons. Preach Christ from the constraints of love, or not at all. Your Lord was no slavish herald, forced to unwilling labour, and he will not have his gospel of liberty proclaimed by hirelings, who have no delight in their message.

Our Lord Jesus also preached very *meekly*. Gentleness was an eminent characteristic of his manner, for he was himself meek and lowly in heart, stooping to the lowest of men without appearing to condescend, taking the little children in his arms and blessing them, and doing it so naturally that you might admire but could not wonder. He did not speak to the poor and ignorant like a very great man, who was so very high up that he had to come down a great many steps to them. He addressed them as a friend, and entreated them as a brother. *Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him*, because there was no affectation of superiority about him.

We carry his cross, let us copy his lowliness. Of him it was written, *He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench*. Contention and strife were not for him, he was the Preacher and the Prince of Peace. Scolding in the pulpit, bitterness in conversation, asperity of manner, and domineering over others are not for us, for they are not Christly things.

Yet if we preach Christ in a Christly way we must preach him *courageously*. There was nothing cowardly about our Lord, no shirking or shrinking, no cultivation of soft speech to win favour from men. He was never anxious to cut the gospel diamond into a shape which should please the taste of the period. He was brave as a lion though gentle as a lamb; keen as the surgeon's knife, though tender as a mother's hand. How bravely he rebuked the sins of the Pharisees! He never trembled before any of his hearers, not even when they took up stones to stone him; nor, what is sometimes harder to avoid, did he flinch when he was in the midst of his own acquaintance, and, like every other preacher, was without honour among his

own countrymen. He came unto his own and his own received him not, but took him to the top of the hill on which their city was built that they might cast him down headlong. I never heard anybody say that our Lord was brave, because the remark would be altogether superfluous. There is a cool, calm, self-possession about Jesus which it would be hard to match in the life of any other man. He does not brace and rouse himself up to heroism, he is always a hero; but it is always in a way so natural to him that his grandest actions seem only such as you would expect from so sublime a nature. It is the natural calmness of his heart which makes Christ's life so serenely brave. Be you like him. Never go into the pulpit timidly, so as to be afraid of men's faces, lest you be put to shame before them. But, without uttering or feeling defiance, confront the multitude on God's behalf with the fearlessness which becomes the ambassador of God. If what you say be of God, say it out like a man; nay, rather like "the Son of man."

Recollect that one point of Christ's style was his *simplicity of language*. He used great plainness of speech. Though under one aspect of truth it may be said that he veiled his meaning

under parabolic curtains so that men did not see it, yet the veil was so thin that those who desired to see the light did see it all the better for that veil, which did but make the light more suitable for feeble eyes. Certainly Jesus had no preference for hard words. You do not find him puzzling his hearers with the terms of the schools or the refinings of the scribes. His language was such that the common people heard him gladly. I wonder what our Lord would have done with some of the books translated from the German with which we have been favoured in past years. Devour stones and grind granite rocks between your teeth, and then hope to feed upon some of the great thoughts of the learned mystifiers of the age, whose thought creation is chaos, and whose word-utterance is as darkness itself. Jesus, the light of the world, was most luminous in his style. Not that I plead for the rags or nakedness of mental poverty. Let goodly truth be arrayed in fit apparel; but I decry the Babylonish garment and the meretricious finery with which some would disguise the virgin daughter of Zion. Aspire to be understood rather than to be admired. Seek not to produce a wondering but

an instructed audience. Be as plain as a pikestaff in your doctrine and clear as the sun in the heavens in your gospel. Let there be nothing difficult about what you preach, except that which naturally and inevitably surrounds truths of surpassing sublimity and spirituality.

Yet, while our blessed Lord preached very plainly and simply, you must remember that **there was much *instruction* in every discourse.** I have heard the expression "simple gospel" used by persons who seemed themselves to be simple enough by nature, and far beyond the necessity of making violent efforts in that direction. I do not believe in a *simple* gospel which is suited for simpletons because there is nothing in it. Let your teaching be clear as crystal, but deep as the sea.

Our congregations are not to be treated as if they were the infant classes of a Sunday-school. Foundation truths are to be taught frequently; but there must be building up as well. Let there be real teaching in what you have to say, or you will create dissatisfaction among your best hearers. The notion that we have only to cry, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*,

and repeat forever the same simplicities, will be fatal to a continuous ministry over one people if we attempt to carry it out. Leave off thinking and you may as well leave off preaching. Our Lord Jesus was no repeater of a parrot cry. The poor had the gospel preached to them, but it was not a poor gospel. What condensed thought he uttered! What massive, masterly expressions he used: such as, *I am the way, the truth, and the life*; or that other grand announcement, *He that hath seen me hath seen the Father*. A fulness dwelt in him, and fulness therefore flowed from him. His was no shadow of empty oratory; he gave to men the substance of eternal blessing. In simple language he proclaimed infinite mysteries, and none who heard him could say that he ever wasted time with barren words, or poured forth vain repetitions of worn-out phrases.

Do, brethren, be as solid in matter as you are simple in manner. Let your apples be apples of gold, and the baskets, baskets of silver; no wild crabs [wild apples] thrown into hampers will suffice for the service of the Great King.

There was also in the Saviour's preaching a wonderful mixture of devotion. He might have prayed his sermons. He did pray *in* his sermons.

His sermons were the result of his prayers, and were followed by his prayers. His public discourses were the children of his midnight devotions. They were born in the morning, but he travailed with them all night, and agonized until they were brought forth. This is the way to preach.

Pray the divine message into yourself, and then preach it out of yourself. Speak with God for men, and then speak with men for God. To turn from prayer to preaching and from preaching again to prayer was most natural with Jesus; when he was alone with God his heart was pleading for men, and when he was in the midst of the throng his soul was pleading for God. He was always with God, and God was always with him. You never find him for a single moment in a condition in which he was not fit to deal with men's souls, for you never find him out of communion with God.

The only other remark I will now make is that the distinguishing trait in the Saviour's preaching was *his love*. He had an intense affection for his hearers. He had no need to say so, for he looked it, he spoke it, he lived it, he died to prove it. He was incarnate love, and his

preaching was his heart set to words. Some men seem to be incarnate dignity. Christ was dignified; yet men saw more of his affection than of his glory. Some men are like embodied tempests. Oh, how they storm! But God is not in the wind, and he is not often in the fire. The still, small voice of tender love is usually the medium of divine communication.

I have known brethren who have appeared to take for their example, not Jesus, but the prophet Jonah. These would seem to care more for their ministerial honour than for the fate of men. They have a sharp, short, spiritual bark about them, as if they suspected everybody, and most of all those who came to confess their faith in Christ. A churlish and cynical manner is by no means uncommon among men, but Jesus was full of love both in heart and manner, and he would have his ministers to be intensely affectionate to their flocks. He desired men to become his followers for their good, and when they rejected him his great grief was because they were losing the blessing which would have come to them if they had received him as their Saviour.

I do not know that I should point to any one sermon and say, “How loving our Lord was in that”; but I would bid you look at the whole of his ministry, and tell me where was ever such devoted love to men. When he has to speak sternly, as well as at every other time, his tenderness is apparent. He laments even while he condemns. If Jerusalem must be doomed, its sentence is pronounced by a voice that is choked for utterance. He bathes the furbished sword in a flood of tears. Nay, he went far beyond weeping, for he was ready to die, and did die, to finish the work which he had undertaken for our sakes. In some sense he was dying throughout the whole of his career, looking forward to death, shut up for death within his own spirit, dying daily for those whom he loved. In such a spirit let us proclaim the gospel of the loving God.

Thus, my beloved brethren, I hold up to you Jesus Christ as the model preacher. I hold up no man beside, and I earnestly advise you never to become slavish copyists of any living preachers. Do you reply that you need a living teacher? I reply that Jesus is a living model; for, blessed be God, he ever liveth. There is also

this choice advantage about him, that he is an accessible model. For at all times we may sit at his feet. You may find faults in all other preachers, for the best of men are men at the best. But there are no flaws, eccentricities, or infirmities in him, for he is perfection. You may regard the ablest of preachers as your beacons as well as your guiding-lights. But in Jesus you will find nothing to avoid, and everything to admire. Preach Christ, then, in a Christly way, and you shall enter into your Master's joy, and share in your Master's glory at the last.

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

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BRING . . . THE BOOKS

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

More Books for a Deserted Island

What five books, in addition to a Bible, a hymnal, and *Pilgrim's Progress,* would I bring with me were I to be stranded indefinitely on a desert island? Clearly the point of such a question is to focus the mind on books that are worthy of repeated reading and long meditation.

On a desert island, I may want some fiction. I'm fairly confident that I've read (or had read to me) at least one of the Chronicles of Narnia (and sometimes all seven) every year since I've been able to read chapter books. I'm sorely tempted to bring my omnibus edition of the Chronicles with me to the island. These books are fun adventure stories. And while they are not always doctrinally faithful (Lewis wrongly proposes that right-hearted worship of a false god could be unwitting worship of the true God in *The Last Battle*), they contain a great deal of wisdom. But given the five-book limit, I'm afraid Narnia will have to be enjoyed in the imagination rather than on the printed page.

I'd pack *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry*. The first part of this volume is *The Life of*

Philip Henry, written by his son, the famed commentator Matthew Henry. It is the kind of biography that warms religious affections, brings conviction of sin, and encourages the reader in his walk with Christ. It is surely one of the best biographies that I've read, and it repays repeated readings.

Here is a sample:

> There were but forty-one communicants in that parish, when he first set up the ordinance of the Lord's Supper; and they were never doubled. Yet he had such low thoughts of himself, that he not only never sought for a larger sphere, but would never hearken to any overtures of that kind made to him. And withal, he had such high thoughts of his work, and the worth of souls, that he laid out himself with as much diligence and vigour here as if he had the oversight of the greatest and most considerable parish in the country. The greatest part of the parish were poor tenants, and labouring husbandmen; but the souls of such, he used to say, are as precious as the souls of the rich, and to be looked after accordingly. (*The Life of Philip Henry*, 38)

J. C. Ryle's *Holiness* is another volume worthy of packing for this excursion. I first encountered Ryle in high school through his book *Thoughts for Young*

Men. The book was bound as a paperback with a contemporary design. But when I started to read it, it was unlike any book for young men that I had read at that point in my life. Despite being over a hundred years old, Ryle's direct, forceful exhortation still communicated—and convicted. Those same qualities are found in *Holiness*. I read *Holiness* in college and found myself challenged by Ryle to pursue holiness. When I finished the book, I thought that it would be a book worthy of being reread each year. I've not done that, but it is certainly a worthy candidate for a desert island sojourn.

I would probably want to have something exegetical to work through while on the desert island. Most commentaries on the Bible are multivolume, and a commentary on a single book would limit the scope of my exegetical endeavors. Thus, I propose to bring along *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*. I've read only selectively from this volume, which exceeds a thousand pages, but what I've read has been helpful. And I can see the benefit of having some fresh reading for my desert sojourn. After over a dozen introductory essays, this volume contains over eighty essays on key Old Testament messianic texts.

The next volume I'd like to pack doesn't exist, but I wish it did: *The Collected Hermeneutical and Eschatological Essays of Craig A. Blaising.* Were I to edit this volume, I'd certainly include his essays arguing for the pretribulational and premillennial positions from the Counterpoints volumes on the Rapture and on the Millennium. His defense of the pretribulational rapture is the most convincing I've read, and his vision of the new creation is not only exegetically sound, but consonant with the whole storyline of Scripture. I'd also include Blaising's stellar essay "Israel and Hermeneutics," from *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel*. This essay demonstrates scripturally the shortcomings of a supersessionist hermeneutic. Blaising's four articles on the day of the Lord in volume 169 of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, which include treatments of Daniel 9 and 2 Peter 3, would merit inclusion. Maybe such a volume will exist by the time I leave.

Finally, since poetry is so worthwhile for meditation, I'd pack a book of devotional poetry. I'm tempted to select one of Leland Ryken's recent volumes, *Poetry of Redemption*, *A Treasury of Thanksgiving*, or *A Treasury of Nature*. Ryken pairs beautiful artwork with sacred poetry followed by brief devotional expositions. The poetry and exposi-

tions serve well to warm the heart at the beginning of a time of personal devotions. What I'd probably pack, however, is George Herbert's *The Complete English Works*. Herbert's poetry is so rich in meaning and devotional in tone that it will more than suffice for a desert sojourn.

Brian Collins is an elder at Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina, and Biblical Worldview Lead Specialist at BJU Press.

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Does God Want Us to Sing Psalms Today?

"The law of the Lord is perfect" (Ps. 19:7). All of God's Word is perfect, and He is all-wise in His treatment of every topic, including music. As one invested in biblical music, I have wished that God had said more specific things about music. But then I sometimes catch myself not applying personally enough what God *has* said about music.

The two most prominent New Testament references to music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) are repetitive in their emphasis of singing "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." Opinions vary widely on whether to sing psalms today. Some sing psalms exclusively. Others never sing psalms. The amazing thing is we often fail to wrestle with the details of Scripture.

Colossians 3:16 reads, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (ESV).[1] A close parallel, Ephesians 5:18b–

19 reads, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (NASB). The participle *singing psalms* gains an imperatival force by connection to the earlier commands.[2] But church application varies, partly because expositors vary on the definitions of terms.

Does the term "psalms" refer only to the inspired psalms? In the New Testament the term *psalm* (*psalmos*) often clearly refers to the inspired psalms (Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33). However, in 1 Corinthians 14:26 ("every one of you has a psalm") the term seems to refer more loosely to a generic song. The verb form *psallō* (Rom. 15:9; James 5:13) connotes singing, though not necessarily with an inspired psalm.

The Septuagint at times translated the terms *psalms*, *hymns*, and *songs* interchangeably. Fifty psalm titles translate the Hebrew *mizmor* as *psalmos,*[3] but over thirty psalm titles also include the Hebrew *shir* ("song"). *Shir* is more general, also referring to love songs, drinking songs, and laments.[4] The Septuagint translators, however, use the term *hymn* (*humnos*) of the psalm David introduced in Psalm 40:3. They also use *psalmos* for a taunt song (Lam. 3:14). More

importantly, at the Last Supper, Christ and the disciples "hymned" a psalm (the verb form of *humnos*, Matt. 26:30).[5]

How would the Ephesians and Colossians have understood "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"? We know the early church sang the inspired psalms, having sung them earlier in the synagogues. Therefore, even if *psalmos* is sometimes more general, in all likelihood they would have thought of this as referring to the 150.

Another vital consideration is the psalms themselves. God wrote over 150 song texts, intending that they be experienced *as music*. He wanted the beauty and sweetness of melody to let the message of the words "dwell richly" within us (Col. 3:16). Am I missing something God intends if I merely read the psalms? Even if I see no airtight mandate, should I not want to sing psalms, if for no other reason than because God wrote them as songs?

My title includes a concession. Does God want us to sing psalms *today*? Contemporary worship aside, even traditional hymnody today differs greatly from the Hebraistic literary style of the psalms. The musical style also greatly differs. Hebrews sang in unison in chant-like modal melodic patterns.[6] Because of these factors, believers have set psalm texts to stan-

dard English poetic meters and also rhymed the lines. At times, in fidelity to the original, psalm settings have been so stilted as to be counterproductive to their purpose.

Thankfully, numerous psalm settings exist that are beautiful, singable, and faithful to the original. Churches that sing psalms are richly edified. They enjoy a fuller range of themes—wisdom, ethics, justice, and warning—perhaps underemphasized in standard hymnals. The inspired psalms also contain strong judgments on sin and on the wicked. Singing these may feel initially inappropriate; however, singing such themes internalizes God's holiness and hatred of sin in a deeper way through the music.

Singing psalms also reinforces a biblical philosophy of music. The other terms—*hymns* and *spiritual songs*—imply variety in types of songs, rather than exclusive psalmody. Other Scriptures also set philosophic parameters for our music. But including beautiful psalm settings in our worship strengthens our focus of "speaking to ourselves," and "letting the word of Christ dwell richly," rather than merely tickling our ears. Knowing God's thoughts are higher than ours, we may need to adjust our idea of hymnody. God's law—including His inspired hymnal—is perfect.

Peter Davis holds bachelor's and master's degrees in Bible and music (BJU) and a PhD from the University of Oklahoma. He chairs the music department at International Baptist College and Seminary.

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[1] ESV punctuation reflects Greek meaning and echoes wording in 1:28.

[2] A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," *EBC*, 11:74.

[3] Paragraph details from G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, abridged ed. (Eerdmans, 1985), 1226.

[4] Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," *EBC*, 5:38. See Song 1:1; Isa. 24:9; Amos 8:10.

[5] According to the Talmud, Psalms 115–118 were sung after the Passover meal.

[6] Regular rhythm, time signatures, and major and minor keys developed much later, in the Renaissance era.

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

Forgiveness: The Oil of Life

Preparing for the ministry requires knowing what ministry is. It is easy to have idealized thoughts about any profession. For example, in high school, one of my daughters wanted to be a nurse—until she was required to serve in a hospital one summer. Though she loved helping people, she was bothered around their suffering. She learned that God made her a "people person," but she was not well-suited to be a nurse.

So how does a man know what ministry really is? Is it the man in the pulpit? Is it a well-educated scholar? Is it leadership abilities? Does it include other needs like counseling, prayer, music, administration and so much more? While all these are areas to develop as much as possible, that growth should continue throughout a life of ministry. But what is essential in preparing for ministry? I will argue that the greatest preparation for ministry is considerable time with a man doing the ministry you aim to do. It has been said, "If you want to learn how to do something well,

find someone who is already doing it and learn from him."

When I was a newer pastor, God abrought into my life a retired pastor. I invited him to return each year for preaching services with the prayerful hope that the church would be helped. Whether that happened or not, I was helped immensely. Observing the pattern of everything he did fashioned me. Whether connecting with men or ladies, older or younger, children, deacons, visitors, or members, he demonstrated respect and love. His ministry was all about people: knowing them, helping them, loving them, pointing them to God and His Word. How could anything be more obvious? But observing that being lived out was a powerful and ministry-changing example for me.

On the other hand, here are some heartaches regarding men preparing for ministry. One was asked to consider candidating. He agreed but stated that he would need more money despite having zero experience as a lead pastor. (He had been offered $82,000 and required $132,000!) Another aspiring to ministry said he "would not consider serving as a missionary." A third had completed excellent PhD work yet could not connect in a meaningful and practical way with the church people. All these were good men yet each demonstrated significant need. Perhaps a teachable

and hungry attitude coupled with mentorship by a more experienced man would have made a big difference. The academics were outstanding but academic answers were not sufficient. Giving the right answers is ineffective if we do not relate well with people.

Another man who prepared for ministry by earning a DMin did not believe "teens need preaching" so he determined to play kickball with them instead of attending the evening service. Another time, when a church member had emergency surgery, that same Doctor of Ministry declined to offer financial help from the church because he saw the family car turn into a restaurant parking lot. Perhaps for him the seminary classroom became like a discussion with medical students doing an autopsy, where options and alternatives can be examined at leisure. However, pastors do not minister to corpses. In real life there may not be the opportunity for advisable sterile equipment and surroundings; if the severed carotid artery is not stopped now, the patient dies. So in ministry, the ideal is not always doable. Help people. Apply the Scriptures. Talk to God and let people listen. Love no matter what. Some lessons can be learned only by doing ministry, not just discussing it.

Perhaps we can argue that thorough preparation for ministry requires shadowing a man doing minis-

try. There is no substitute for observing the day-by-day attitudes and actions of the man in ministry. Who would argue that a dentist is prepared for his work after classroom training alone? Further, how much help would it be to spend much time observing dental work and discussing with the dentist the decisions and procedures involved? Applying that to ministry, observing and discussing how an experienced minister works through ministry issues may become a positive contribution to both the endurance and effectiveness of future ministry.

Jesus spoke of a disciple (not a vocational minister) when He said, "It is enough for the disciple that he be *as his master*, and the servant *as his lord*" (Matt. 10:25). He also said, "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be *as his master*" (Luke 6:40).

David L. Cummins put it like this: "We grant that Bible colleges and seminaries were not available in the early days of our republic as they are now, and much of ministerial training had to be given on a one-to-one basis. But in these days we would do well to establish pastoral and missionary apprenticeships, where Christian youth receive hands-on training for the work of the ministry at home and abroad. There is really no shortcut in successful Christian service.

Formal education is essential, but it cannot replace actual experience received under the supervision of a tried and proven servant of God" (*This Day in Baptist History II*, p. 447).

Charles Wingard wrote, "We all need mentors. With so many voices *telling* us what to do, it's vitally important that we have godly, thoughtful, experienced people *showing* us what to do. Preparing for a life in ministry is demanding work—and I'm not just talking about your seminary workload. You need real-life pastoral experience under the direction of a mentor." (https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/future-pastors-mentors/)

Bob Jones Jr. (*How to Improve Your Preaching*, p. 14) wrote of one preparing to be an artist: "In one of the art galleries of Europe a young man stood enrapt before a portrait done by one of the great masters. As he looked his eyes filled with tears. Another visitor to the gallery noticed him standing there and said, 'Young man, what troubles you?' Still gazing on the painting, the youth replied, 'I can't paint like that. I never will be able to paint like that.' Then his face brightened. 'But, thank God,' he said, 'I am a painter too.'" The man preparing for ministry needs an example, perhaps even almost a hero. To have someone who believes in you,

encourages you, and even admonishes you is of more value than a terminal degree.

Consider the influence of Paul's life and words on Timothy. In Paul's second epistle to Timothy, that younger man read these words from his mentor.

- "Timothy, my dearly beloved son . . ." (1:2)
- "I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day." (1:3)
- "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee." (1:5)
- "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee." (1:6)
- "God hath not given us the spirit of fear." (1:7)
- "Hold fast the form of sound words." (1:13)
- "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." (2:1)
- "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2:3)
- "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." (2:4)
- "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits." (2:6)
- "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." (2:7)

- “Study to shew thyself approved unto God.” (2:15)
- “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace.” (2:22)
- “Foolish and unlearned questions avoid.” (2:23)
- “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” (3:1)
- “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life . . .” (3:10)
- “Preach the word.” (4:2)
- “Make full proof of thy ministry.” (4:5)
- “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.” (4:9)
- “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit.” (4:22)

And lest we forget, this relationship of ministry preparation apparently had its beginning with this counsel: “Then came he [Paul] to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:1–

3). Consider that godly influence as well as the humble and teachable response from Timothy.

Years later, Paul wrote to this son in the faith: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). Is it not significant that Paul and God's Spirit prioritized Timothy taking heed both to himself and his teaching, and which of the two was mentioned first? Sadly, the minister with apparent doctrinal fidelity and the absence of personal character is not uncommon today. Such a man might be spared if he had a "Paul" in his life who was invited to "talk straight" to him about any area of his life.

George Young wrote of a man named George Hunter, who could be described as a mentor: "He was not a man who would attract the attention of men of the world. He did not impress by his efficiency or his ability. His personality was neither dramatic nor glamorous. He was not a 'good mixer,' preferring to live apart from other missionaries, buying his food on the street and cooking it himself. Those accustomed to external judgments would dismiss him as an old crank and politely ignore him, but to the child of God with eyes to see, here was spiritual greatness of the highest order. There was something grand and inspiring about

him. One look at his face and his bearing revealed the white purity and shining serenity of a man of God. Cheerfulness and gentleness radiated from him as he spoke about his work. Gaiety sparkled from his eyes as he related some humorous incident. He was one who obviously enjoyed life, for to him to live was Christ, and daily communion with his Lord had kept him fresh and alert. His faculties were amazingly bright for a man of eighty-three; he was vigorous in mind and good in memory as he related past adventures. What an interesting talker he was and what varied interests he had in travel, geography, exploration and languages, and yet one dominant purpose shone through all his talk—the will of God, which for him meant bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the needy people of Sinkiang. It was that which impressed me—his single-mindedness. He did me good by unconsciously revealing his interior simplicity of aim. He was not cluttered up by doing many things. He was unentangled by the affairs of this life. He just lived to do the will of God. Everything else grooved into this narrow way. Like an athlete, he cut out of his life all comforts and indulgences that his body might be tough and inured to intense suffering and strenuous effort. As we talked together, I felt I had the rare privilege of talking

to a saint" (*George Hunter: Apostle of Turkistan*, pp. 98–99).

Here is an invaluable gift for a man preparing for ministry: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Phil. 4:9). What an amazing statement of affirmation and encouragement!

Gentlemen who are serving in ministry need to give back. They can find men preparing for ministry and pour themselves into the man who wants that influence. There really is no substitute for a godly mentor, advisor, counselor, friend, and, in a word, a good pastor. All ministers need one. Be one.

Dan MacAvoy pastored for forty-one years until October 2024. He and his wife Janice plan to serve with GFA in both interim pastor work and missionary furlough replacement.

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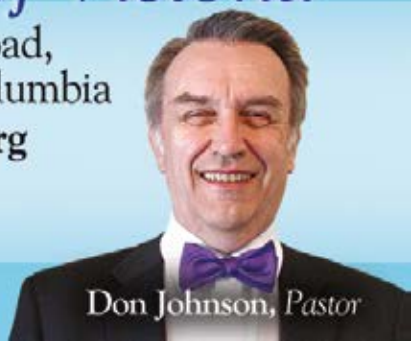

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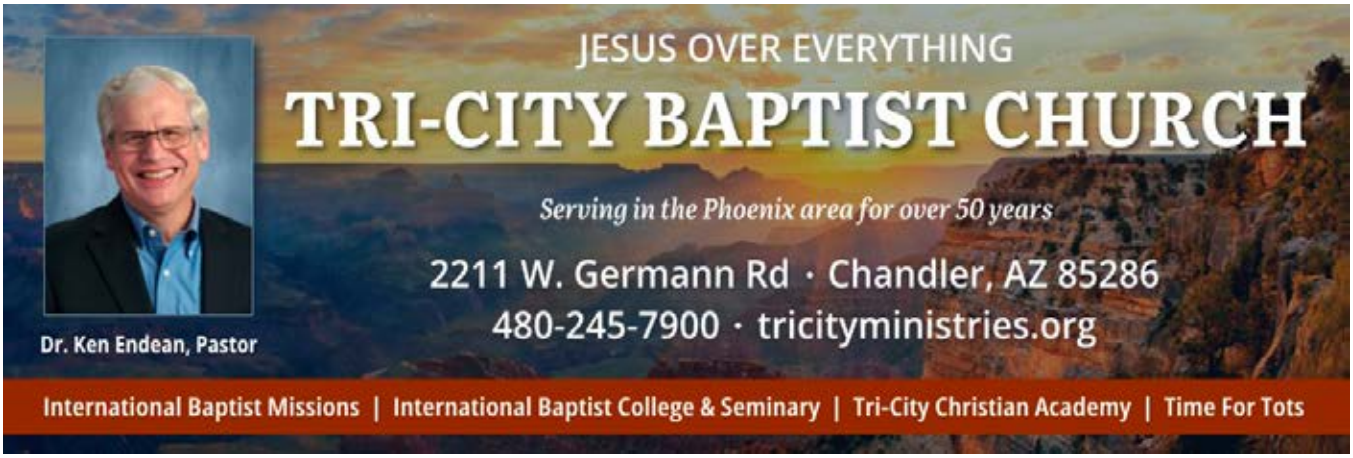

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Coordinator: Taigen Joos

2026

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BEST OF *PROCLAIM & DEFEND*

DECEMBER 15, 2024 TO FEBRUARY 15, 2024

- Visitors: 17,406
- Sessions: 20,508
- Pageviews: 29,001

TOP ARTICLES* PUBLISHED IN THIS PERIOD:

- "The Word Is Jesus! Should You Let Jordan Peterson Preach the Word to You?"
- "Illegal Immigration and the Bible-Believing Church"
- "Our Answer to 'Imagine'"
- "How to Thrive in 2025: The Hands of Men and the Hand of God (Proverbs 27:23–27)"
- "On Warning Presidents, Truth, and Justice"
- "DEI and the Local Church"
- "AI: Developing a Christian Perspective"
- "From Pastor Nicholas to Santa Claus"

Of course, many articles published earlier than our reporting period also receive much interest. We encourage you to make *Proclaim & Defend* a regular part of time you spend on the Internet.

Check out the latest at ***www.proclaimanddefend.org*** (or follow us on Facebook, where we post daily links).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PROCLAIM & DEFEND PODCAST

We feature interviews with our *FrontLine* authors as the main attraction on the podcast. This allows us to go into a bit more depth than we can do in the articles themselves, enhancing what we produce in the magazine. We have other features as well; please check us out at https://proclaimdefend.substack.com/.

As of this writing, we are just starting our series on the January/February edition of *FrontLine,* titled "AI: Developing a Christian Perspective," also the title of one of the top articles mentioned above. Here are the first two podcasts in this series with more to come:

- "Interview 61: AI: Developing a Christian Perspective" (Dave Shumate)
- "Interview 62: Developing a Biblical Perspective on Technology" (Erik Hanson)

Other recent podcasts of interest:

- "Interview 60: The Only Wise Pursuit" (David Saxon)
- "Interview 57: Maturity and Wisdom" (Bryan and Rebecca Brock)
- "Interview 56: The Thinking Christian: Biblical Wisdom in an Emotionally Driven World" (David Anderson)
- "Interview 53: Revelation: When Does God's Wrath Begin?" (Mark Swedberg)

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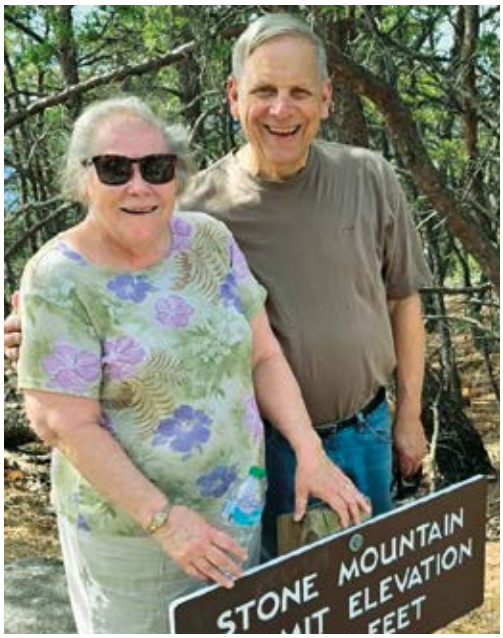
Regional Report

SOUTH FBFI REGIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Submitted by Tony Facenda,
FBFI South Regional Coordinator

The 2025 FBFI South Region held their fellowship at Swan Creek Baptist Church in Jonesville, North Carolina, on March 17–19. The theme was "First Things First" from Matthew 6. The fellowship was well attended, and the spirit of the meeting was sweet.

Dr. Daniel Anderson, president of Appalachian Bible College, and Thad Berry, from The Anchorage Camp, presented messages focused on determining



and maintaining the preeminence of God's will in the heart and life of believers.

Of the twelve workshops offered during the week, three included sessions for women presented by Chaya Berry, Blair Bishop, and Karen Facenda. The ladies responded encouragingly to the practical, beneficial, and interactive teaching. The other nine sessions were open to everyone and included topics such as confronting the woke culture, maintaining the right priorities in one's personal life, and maintaining a clear focus in one's ministry.

The meals and dessert times, provided by the church in the gym area, provided relaxing times of fellowship. The optional afternoon activities included a hike up Stone Mountain on Tuesday and a trip to Mount Airy and "Mayberry" on Wednesday. The fellowship was a blessing to all who attended.

The 2026 FBFI South Fellowship will be held at Faith Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, April 20–22.

Please consider attending a fellowship in your region! These meetings are times of biblical encouragement, growth, and blessing for both men and women.

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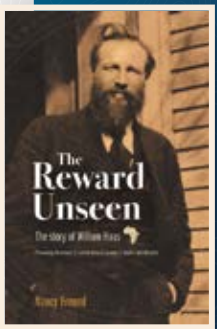

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Heart to Heart

Shannon Steuerwald

A Heavenly Take on Nerdiness

As I sat down to write this article and was thinking through the theme of Christian education, I started counting all the different "school" experiences I've had. I went from homeschool to public school to Christian school. Plus, I grew up attending weekly Sunday school. While in homeschool, I learned to read. While in public school, I learned to gamble playing with marbles and to run fast playing kiss chase (don't worry, no boy caught me). As a Christian school student, I learned to think critically and biblically (thus, no more gambling and kiss chase), and I also learned what I didn't know (which was quite a bit according to my mom who worked to catch me up to my grade level). While in Sunday school, I have learned to value the rehearsal of God's Word (so I have no plans to "graduate" from Sunday school). I also experienced community college, Bible college, and Christian uni-

versity. I won't go into detail of what I learned at each of those institutions, but all three played key roles in my growth and understanding of God's big world.

Furthermore, I grew up surrounded by Christian educators in my immediate and extended family. My parents saw the rise of Christian schools early in their career and worked tirelessly in the classroom to bring validity and quality to the Christian school movement. After God called my parents into camp work and moved them to the middle of California's Mojave Desert, they started a Christian school, and this Christian school, the one I currently administrate, is still a huge blessing to the desert communities surrounding it. Upon high school graduation, I pursued a degree in education, and I've spent my adult life in the ministry of Christian education. My own children graduated from my alma mater, which was started by their grandfather, and now my daughter is a third-generation Christian school teacher in a school nearby.

Education has been and continues to be my life's mission and work. But in all honesty, every one of us in some way do the work of education. Education—teaching and learning—is every Christian's life work, even if you aren't in the official capacity of a classroom teacher. First, if we live life as God intended, we never stop learning and having teachers in our

lives. This is a good and noble truth to embrace and seek. God values the humble heart that is learning and growing in its knowledge and understanding of God and His ways (2 Pet. 3:18; Prov. 3:1–8; 2 Pet. 1:5; Ps. 119). Second, if we live life as God intended, we never stop being a teacher in others' lives. This is also a good and noble truth to embrace and seek. God values the humble teacher *and* mentor who is discipling others in God's ways and wonders (Matt. 28:19–20; Heb. 5:12–14; Deut. 6:7–9). What this means for all of us is that we are, at any given time in our day, learning or teaching. Paul gives a sobering reminder to young Timothy that the way he lives his life is, in fact, teaching something and someone (1 Tim. 4:12–13). Asking consideration questions such as "Who is teaching me?" or "What am I learning from that teacher?" or "What is my life teaching others?" are provoking and challenging to all of us. Being a holy steward of what I learn and what I teach takes intentional discipline. What we find from studying Scripture is that we can't get away from learning and teaching.

Education isn't just an earthly task. Learning happens throughout eternity! We will never stop learning about God and His ways, even long after time stops (Eph. 2:6–7; 1 Cor. 13:12). Sin didn't cause us to become learners; it just made learning harder.

Before sin entered this world through Adam's and Eve's choices, they were learners. God created us to be eternal learners about Him! I can't imagine what learning will be like without the hindrances of sin in my life, but I know the subject of my learning—God—will be grand and glorious!

Some of my favorite people are teachers; they are nerdy, passionate, missional, service-minded, and usually in need of encouragement. (We just had Nerd Day at our school, and I felt so at home for that spirit day!) The best of the best teachers love learning, love sharing, and love enabling others to learn. God gave me a gift when He placed me in the home of educators who were natural teachers and avid learners. I learned under their tutelage in the most impactful classrooms: dinner time, Saturday morning chore time, evenings in the living room, car rides, and family devotions. Although my children would say they, too, suffered through nerdy lessons around our dinner table, today they love sharing nerdy information with me. Now, I get to watch them be teachers and learners as adults.

That's why Christian education is so vital: it impacts generations! As a child, I had little say as to who I was taught by and how I was taught. As an adult, I don't pay enough attention to these things. My dad

would tell his school parents, "The product will be only as good and wholesome as the process." We are all teachers, and we are all learning. Let's together be intentional about our teaching and learning—for the sake of future generations and for our own growth!

Shannon Steuerwald and her husband Steve serve at Ironwood, a Christian camp in California. They have five adult children, three of their own and two that their sons wisely picked for wives. Shannon is the principal of Ironwood Christian Academy and executive director of the Golden State Association of Christian Schools. She loves speaking to ladies and teachers, soaking in her desert landscape, and being nerdy with her grandson.

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At A Glance

Layton Talbert

Jesus: The Only Hope of the Helpless

The Gospels are both a challenge and a joy to read, to study, and to teach and preach. It has been my personal experience that the more I press the specificity of the details, especially where one Gospel seems to differ from another, the more they validate my confidence in the absolute accuracy and complementary reliability of their respective records.

I have long been especially fascinated by comparative studies in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). When I get the chance to teach in that area, I perpetuate a study device that I learned from my professor (and pastor, Mark Minnick) in that course as a seminary student myself. Choose a different colored pencil for each Gospel (for me, Matthew is blue, Mark is red, and Luke is green), and read through a harmony of the Gospels (my favorite is by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry), highlighting any details that

are unique to only one Gospel account. That practice often enables you to discover theological themes and emphases that are distinctive to the message of one writer. This column is devoted to a theme that is distinctively highlighted by Mark.

Mark often presents more colorful and (surprisingly, given his brevity) more complete accounts of certain events than the other Gospel writers. The details peculiar to Mark's record of events also recorded by Matthew and Luke suggest an emphasis unique to Mark. It is not a dominating theme, but it surfaces enough to underscore a point to which only Mark repeatedly calls our attention in such detail.

Mark's account of four miracles recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (the demoniac of Gadara, the woman with a hemorrhage, the feeding of the five thousand, and a demoniac boy) reflects a recurring emphasis that is absent from the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke, and even from other recorded miracles. That theme is the utter helplessness of those to whom Jesus ministered. They could neither help themselves nor be helped by others; Christ alone could meet their need.

Now obviously, helplessness is a given in practically every miracle; that's usually what makes a miracle necessary. But Mark (and in these cases, Mark

alone) keeps directing the reader's attention to the graphic reality of that helplessness. In addition to his details of helplessness in these miracle accounts, Mark alone includes a parable that underscores the same idea of human helplessness.

PARABLE: GROWTH OF THE SEED (4:26-28)

This uniquely Markan parable primarily underscores human powerlessness even in something so basic as the growing of crops. G. Campbell Morgan notes that the parable suggests "our helplessness in the matter of the germination of the seed." Human means and responsibilities are offset by human limitations and ignorance and, in the end, impotence. Explaining the spiritual implications of this parable, J. C. Ryle observes, "The heart of man, in like manner, will never of itself turn to God, repent, believe, and obey. It is utterly barren of grace. It is entirely dead towards God, and unable to give itself spiritual life." Man can and must apply the means of spiritual growth at his disposal; yet he is, in himself, utterly helpless to effect growth or fruit. The parable is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If humans are helpless even in such mundane yet necessary earthly matters, how much more in the spiritual realm?

MIRACLE: A DEMON-POSSESSED MAN (5:3–5)

This miracle pericope occupies a fairly lengthy passage (5:1–20). But the details that only Mark includes, underscoring the absolute helplessness of this man, are pushed to the front of the account (5:3–5): (1) *no one was able to bind him anymore, despite repeated efforts*; (2) *even chains and shackles could not hold him*; (3) *no human was strong enough to subdue him*; (4) *his suffering was relentless, lonely, and suicidal*. Mark portrays a *man* who is clearly *beyond the help of anyone and everyone*. Even the strongest men had tried to restrain and tame him; the only other occurrence of this Greek word (James 3:7–8) implies that even the most ferocious wild *beasts* can be tamed by man, but not this demoniac! Rather, "his indomitable fierceness made him the despair of human efforts" (Hiebert). Verse 5 goes even further to describe in pathetic terms this suicidal demoniac's utter misery and hopelessness, bound as he was beyond all human restraint, relief, or deliverance. Until Jesus came, no help was found that could match the demonic forces that ravaged this poor man.

MIRACLE: A HEMORRHAGING WOMAN (5:25–27)

Again, the miracle occupies several verses (5:25–34), and all the Synoptics mention that this woman had been suffering for twelve years. But Mark alone inserts additional details that heighten the hopelessness of her condition (5:25–27): (1) *she had suffered greatly* (she had "endured much"); (2) *she was the despair of human professionals* (Luke notes that no one could heal her, but Mark adds that she had seen "many physicians"); and (3) *the best human help only exacerbated her condition* (she "was no better but rather grew worse"). Mark describes a woman who was beyond the help of the very professionals and specialists who should have been able to help her if anyone could. That is the point. She had exhausted all the medical help that her money could buy. In fact, despite (and maybe even because of) all the remedial efforts of physicians, her condition only deteriorated, as "doctor after doctor proved a disappointment to her expectations of recovery." In short, "her problem extended beyond the reach of medical skills" (Hiebert)—but not beyond the reach of Christ's power. Interestingly, even Luke the physician does not dwell on the utter helplessness and despair of this woman nearly as emphatically as Mark does.

MIRACLE: FEEDING OF FIVE THOUSAND (6:34, 41)

Mark also presents people as a whole to be helpless to meet their own needs, like sheep. Matthew also uses the "sheep without a shepherd" analogy, though on a different occasion and in a different context (Matt. 9:36). Mark applies it directly to Jesus' miraculous provision for their needs—a provision that is obviously intended to transcend the mere physical realm in its implications. Cranfield observes that "the characteristic of the multitude which is stressed here as calling forth Jesus' pity is its helplessness and bewilderment, its likeness to shepherdless sheep." Jesus the Good Shepherd provides help personally and miraculously for these helpless sheep.

MIRACLE: A DEMON-POSSESSED BOY (9:20B-27)

In this last instance, Mark's account (9:14–29, 16 verses) is significantly longer than Matthew's (17:14–21, 8 verses) and Luke's (9:37–43, 7 verses). And once again, Mark furnishes an abundance of details omitted by the others, emphasizing the helplessness and hopelessness of this situation. Except for the one phrase "he rebuked the unclean spirit" in the middle of 9:25, everything from the end of 9:20 all the way through 9:27 is recorded only by

Mark: (1) *the pathetic sight of the boy rolling about and foaming at the mouth* (9:20b); (2) *the duration of this condition ever since childhood* (9:21); (3) *the frequently life-threatening nature of this condition* (9:22a); (4) *the pitiful appeal of the father to Jesus for help* (9:22); (5) *the father's appeal to Jesus even to help him believe* (9:24); (6) *the dramatic nature of Jesus' rescue of the boy from the demon* (9:25–27). Mark depicts a boy who is beyond the help even of distinguished spiritual leaders like the disciples of Jesus. Only Mark records the extended conversation with the father. Christ's question (v. 21) "led the father to confess the natural hopelessness of the boy's condition" that "had characterized most of his life" (Hiebert). The father's desperate request ("But if You can do anything, have mercy on us and help us") further stresses his own personal sense of helplessness. Jesus' reply is captured well in the NASB: "'If You can!'" Jesus compassionately but firmly underscores the absurdity of the suggestion that even *He* might be helpless in this situation! Mark uniquely presents Christ as both the only hope to rescue this otherwise helpless boy, and the only help to empower the faith of this otherwise hopeless father.

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS

How do you turn a study like this into a Sunday morning sermon or a Thursday night Bible study? In exposition, the points should grow naturally and organically out of the text; the text drives the points and determines their wording. What follows is one attempt to exemplify an approach that does not talk *about* the text, but lets the text itself do the talking and drive the conversation. I've also tried to make the points practical, applicational, and as specific as the passage is. Personally, I would use the parable of the growth of the seed as an introduction to the larger idea of human helplessness and Jesus as our only hope. This theme from Mark might then unfold something like this.

I. Deliverance from Suicidal Hopelessness (Mark 5:3–5)

A. He is wild and untamable.
B. He is desolate and miserable.
C. He is self-destructive and suicidal.

Mark describes a man who is beyond the help of anyone and everyone. This is not to say that all such self-destructive behavior or suicidal tendencies are directly demonically inspired (though they certainly can be). But if Jesus could rescue a case this severe

and demonically driven, He can rescue those today who find themselves in a similar situation. And He's the *only* one who can.

II. Healing from an Incurable Condition (Mark 5:25–27)

A. Human help only multiplies our suffering.
B. Human help only depletes our resources.
C. Human help makes us even worse.

Mark portrays a woman who is beyond the help of professionals. Sin is a condition from which no psychologist or psychiatrist can deliver you. This miracle was one of physical healing. You may be in need of physical healing; if so, Christ can certainly do that for you. But the Bible clarifies not only that *physical* healing is not always God's will, but also that physical healing is not the most important kind. The condition the Scripture focuses our attention on is a congenital disease that infects everyone—sin. It is terminal; in fact, it is eternally terminal. Christ is the only one with both power and authority to do what no one else can.

III. Rescue for Helpless Parents and Vulnerable Children (Mark 9:20–27)

A. The heartache of destructive behavior in our children.

B. Appeal to Christ, not man, in faith.

Here Mark portrays a child and his father who are beyond the help of even the disciples. Only Mark records this extended conversation with the father. The father's desperate request stresses his own sense of helplessness. Christ is the only help of this otherwise helpless boy, and the only hope for this parent's battle with doubt and despair.

IV. Security and Sustenance for All (Mark 6:34, 41)

A. Like sheep, we are all leaderless and needy.

B. Like sheep, we are all ignorant and vulnerable.

Mark portrays all people, who apart from Jesus are like shepherdless sheep, as helpless to meet their own deepest needs. Christ is the Good Shepherd who cares and provides for His sheep; but that extends far beyond the meeting of mere temporal or material needs. Our first need as wandering sheep is to be taught—that's what Jesus does. If we are not willing to be taught, we exempt ourselves from the benefits of security and sustenance that He gives to His sheep.

Conclusion

The first role the Good Shepherd plays for His sheep is to save them from danger (John 10). We must first be brought into His fold. It does not matter what your present condition is or how helpless you are or who or what has failed you in the past. Christ is the Helper of the Helpless, and the only Helper—and only our refusal to acknowledge our helplessness hinders Him from helping us.

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

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Jim Tillotson

A Farmer and a Stolen Tract

Do you remember the first time you visited a church? Perhaps over the holidays you visited a church. Did you feel the church was friendly? Have you ever invited unsaved friends to church, only to have no one come up and talk to them? Have you ever seen someone else in your church frequently bring visitors to church, while it seems no one you have invited has come?

I would like to address these questions, beginning with the last one. How do you get people to be willing to hear the gospel or to be willing to go to church? John 13:35 states, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (NKJV). Matthew 5:16 commands, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (NKJV). Galatians 6:9–10 also reminds us to "not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let

us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (NKJV).

When I was a pastor in Canada, a farmer who had been visiting our church came to see me. He sat across from me and pulled out the Bridge tract. He said, "I have come to confess that I stole this tract from your church, but I want to tell you the story behind it." (All of our tracts were free, but he was so new to our church that he did not know that.) Here is his story.

I took the tract because I was burdened for my neighbor, and I wanted to give it to him. I was praying for the right opportunity and shortly after taking the tract, the opportunity came. My neighbor was baling hay, and his tractor broke down. There was a storm coming. Hay will lose some of its value if it gets rained on, so he came up my drive and asked if there was any way he could rent my tractor for the day to get his hay in. Right away I thought, "This is my opportunity." I said yes and volunteered to help.

We worked all day and just got the last of the hay covered up when it began to rain like crazy. He was so happy that we got the hay in before the rain that he asked me what he owed me. I told him he couldn't pay me but that if he wanted to do something, I would

like him to read this Bridge tract. My neighbor said, "No way! I have the money to pay you, you used your tractor, your gas, and your time. Just let me pay you." I refused again and said that the only payment I would receive is if he would take the tract and read it. My neighbor said, "Well, whatever!" and took the tract.

The next week, my neighbor had an interview for a job in town. He got the job, but on his way home, he was killed in a car accident. All I could think about was whether he had read the tract. I went over to offer my condolences to his wife and see if there was anything my wife and I could do to help. When his wife opened the door and saw me, she said, "Just wait right here." She went inside and came back with the Bridge tract. She said, "Do you remember giving this to my husband last week?" I said I did. She said that he came home and as they sat down for supper, he told her that after all their neighbor (me) had done for them, they were definitely going to read the tract after supper. When they were finished reading it, they both agreed with what it said, and she said that they both prayed the prayer on the back. She looked at me with tears streaming down her face and asked, "Does that mean he is in heaven?" I assured her that since he had accepted God's gift of salvation, he was in heaven!

I told the farmer to continue stealing tracts from our church as much as he wanted. I think you would agree that this man was far more willing to read and consider the tract because of what the neighbor did for him instead of just putting it in his mailbox without helping him.

One of the differences between a church that is seeing visitors on a regular basis and a church that is not is that the one is reaching out to the lost in their community and the other is waiting for the lost to come to them. Both want to see people saved, both want visitors to come, but typically only the first kind of church is seeing it happen. Salt is not beneficial if it stays in the saltshaker. If we are going to be salt and light, we are going to have to find creative ways to engage our communities and neighborhoods.

I wonder how many of us would have been too busy or too cheap to help and thus have missed a gospel opportunity. I have thought of that farmer many times since then, and it has been a good example for me to let lost people see my good works so they can glorify my Father in heaven. I believe prayer is also a big difference between these two kinds of churches, and I will address that in a future article. May God help us be effective in taking the Word to the World.

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

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Corey A. Pfaffe

Financial Stewardship By The Christian Family: Legacy And Inheritance

Legacy. Hezekiah's son Manasseh inherited his father's legacy of selfishness (2 Kings 20:19). Joshua's house heard its patriarch bequeath a legacy of devotion (Josh. 24:15).

The stewardship of our lives matters, maybe even more potently *after* our lives. This issue's column continues our study "Stewardship for the Christian Family."

The prophet Jeremiah addressed Israelite men and women who would seriously consider their legacies. Would they be remembered for their wisdom? Or for their physical vigor? Or even for their financial abundance? He warned, "No, as you consider your life, if you must glory, glory in your testimony as a man or woman who understands and knows God" (Jer. 9:23–24, paraphrase).

Jeremiah acknowledged that there were some in his day who were blessed with financial abundance. But his rebellious listeners had forgotten that God was the source of their riches and that any glory—and any memory of their wealthy estates—belonged to God.

We rarely think of a Christian's *legacy* without also considering the *inheritance* he or she leaves to others.

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT INHERITANCE

The first references in the Bible to inheritance involve Abraham. Before he had children, he was concerned that his servant would inherit his wealth (Gen. 15:3). Eventually, all of Abraham's riches were left to his son Isaac (Gen. 24:36).

You do not *create* wealth. You *gather* it. "Abram took Sarai his wife . . . and all their substance that they had *gathered* . . . and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan" (Gen. 12:5).

If you Google "Creating Wealth" you may find a book with this title. The author is apparently quite popular—he has more positive reviews than negative ones, if that means anything. But I don't believe the message of his title. His schemes may be very good at

gathering wealth, but only God creates it. God *makes* riches (1 Sam. 2:7).

It has been said, "You can't take it with you." Timothy was taught to remind his wealthy church members of this: "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7). The size of your estate means nothing when you stand before God (Prov. 22:2; James 1:10).

WHAT THE BIBLE COMMANDS ABOUT INHERITANCE

The first commandment of the Bible regarding inheritance: Don't spend it all before you die. "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children" (Prov. 13:22, NKJV). The alternative is to spend all your savings and to become dependent on others. Paul used the concept of leaving an inheritance to illustrate his heartfelt obligation to *give* to his children in the faith rather than to *get* something back from them: "children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children" (2 Cor. 12:14, NASB).

Second, bequeath wisdom *and* an inheritance: "Wisdom *along with* an inheritance is good." (Ecc. 7:11, NASB). Premature access to an inheritance can be a curse rather than a blessing (Prov. 20:21). While *you* may have exercised wisdom in stewarding

your wealth, leaving your acquired wealth to a fool (Solomon's words, not mine) threatens to cancel your legacy of fulfilling God's purposes in enabling you to gather it (Ecc. 2:18–19).

WHAT THE BIBLE COUNSELS ABOUT INHERITANCE

Two counterweights compete as you use your retirement income and savings. Biblical wisdom is at the fulcrum between the weighty concerns of outliving your money and leaving an inheritance.

Financial advisors have suggested rules of thumb for annual withdrawal from your savings balances available upon retirement: Target a living expense budget of 85% of your pre-retirement spending and withdraw 4% of your savings balance in year number one.

Paul strongly condemned a failure to plan wisely for the material needs of your family (1 Tim. 5:8). Financial independence as you age likely requires living frugally so that others, often your own children, can manage their money without the added burden of caring for your expenses.

Jesus commanded His followers to "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:20). What might this look like in a financial sense?

- Giving during your lifetime to family and others as needs come to your attention.
- Supporting Christian ministries. (Christian financial advisor Larry Burkett is credited with this saying: "Do your giving while you're living, so you're knowing where it's going.")
- Directing bequests from your estate.

To have an estate to bequeath, you must avoid outliving your savings. And you need a plan for what is left when you are gone. But don't confuse having a plan with hoarding your treasure (James 5:3–8). Your bequests should be directed in two ways.

- *To family.* You may designate either equally or preferentially, but don't be ambiguous in your last will and testament.
- *To Christian ministries.* Communicate your values to your family and friends by these designations. Seek the counsel of Christian advisors who clearly reflect your values for family and ministry. Consider giving first to your local church.

FURTHER RESOURCES TO CONSIDER:

- *Inheritolatry*, James D. Wise's 2017 book on a responsible and God-honoring approach to the distribution of your estate.

- *KingdomAdvisors.com*. Check out its *About Us* page, specifically "Our Core Beliefs," to understand its network of Christian professionals who promote God-honoring estate planning.
- *Provision.org* and other similar resources directed toward advising Christians in their planned giving.

Corey Pfaffe serves as the CEO of MinistryCPA, a certified public accounting firm based in Watertown, Wisconsin. The firm works with ministry clients in virtually every US state and every continent. He and his wife Laurie have served in various lay capacities as members of Calvary Baptist Church of Watertown for more than thirty-five years.

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CH Joe Willis

Serving Alongside: Women in the Chaplaincy

The FBFI chaplaincy is a very diverse group of individuals serving in various positions of ministry. Some of our men are active-duty military chaplains serving in the uniformed services: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and Civil Air Patrol. Some of our men serve in various components of these services: Army National Guard/Reserves, Navy Reserves, Air Force Reserves/Air National Guard, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and some in state militias or the state guard. Several men in our organization minister to the policemen and firemen in their cities and local communities. Some men serve in hospitals, in hospice, in PTSD counseling ministries, and even to the Secret Service. But counted among this group of honorable men are two wonderful women chaplains.

Jane Keller of the Santa Ana Police Department and In Pursuit Ministries has served alongside her husband Bob in the FBFI since 2005. For many years they worked

in the Pomona Police department, but in 2019 God moved them to the Santa Ana Police Department. Several of the goals of In Pursuit Ministries are to conduct ride-alongs, provide moral and spiritual support, perform death notifications, and assist on suicide calls. In Pursuit Ministries also provides prayer, devotionals, and, in many cases, just friendship. With so many departments having females on their staffs, it only makes sense that Jane can be a tremendous asset in this arena. Over the years, Jane has graciously worked alongside Bob to conduct many of these functions, if not all of them. In January of 2022, Bob and Jane were nominated as Chaplains of the Year in the Santa Ana Police Department. When I visited them a short time ago, everyone in their local department gave glowing reports of the blessing that these two have been. We are so glad to have this dynamic duo working for the Lord in this capacity in Southern California.

The newest addition to our female chaplains is Kyla Jackson. Kyla is preparing to serve alongside her husband Joe in one of the main hospitals in Lansing, Michigan. Joe and Kyla are on staff at Community Baptist Church where Joe serves as the Administrative Pastor under his father, Tim Jackson. Tim came to us just a few months

ago to become an FBFI chaplain as well. Joe and Kyla have been married for fourteen years and have three beautiful children. In the course of Joe's new work in the hospital, it was mentioned that the hospital also wanted a female chaplain on its staff. Joe eagerly recommended his wife, and the rest is FBFI history. Performing the ministry of a hospital chaplain is very unique and often challenging, but it is frequently most gratifying. Hospital chaplains can offer emotional, moral, ethical, and spiritual counseling to patients struggling with health or faith-related issues. Chaplains can offer comfort to those who are struggling with grief during the loss of a loved one or provide peace to those who are anxious about an upcoming procedure or test result. Sometimes this ministry can be done through the reading of Scripture, praying with patients or family members, listening to their concerns, or just being present with them in their time of need. After we heard of this great opportunity, Kyla was interviewed by the FBFI Chaplain Commission on January 23, 2025, and received into our chaplain family to serve alongside her husband Joe.

We are so grateful for these ladies and their willingness to be used in these ministries. So many opportunities are available for women in our local communities around the nation. Pregnancy crisis centers, domestic abuse facilities, and female correctional facilities are just a few of the places where female chaplains or counselors are needed to help meet the spiritual needs of women who are in very difficult circumstances and in need of spiritual help as well. If churches would like to expand their outreach into local community facilities, the FBFI can be a tool to help get chaplains—both men and women—into these areas.

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