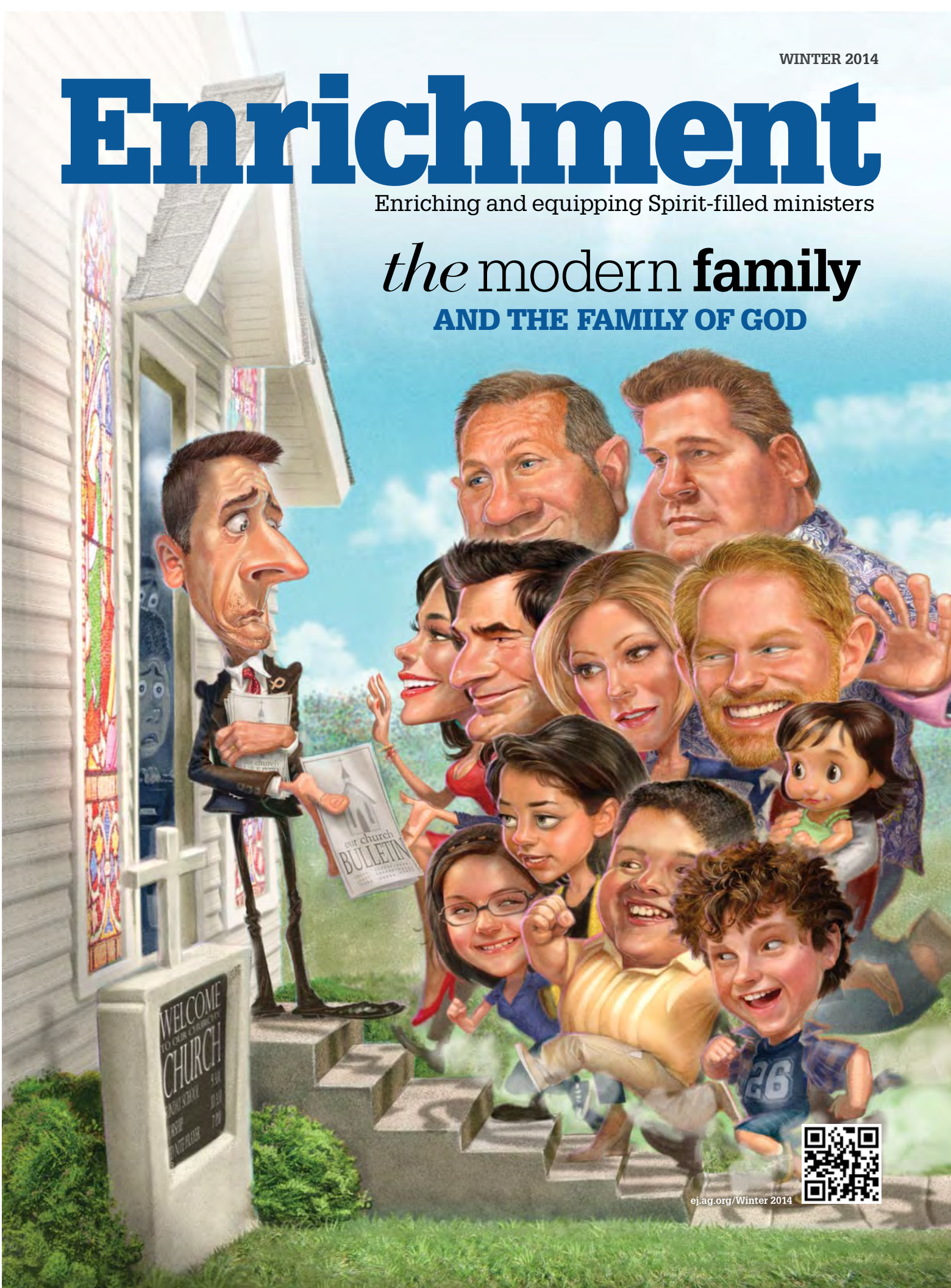


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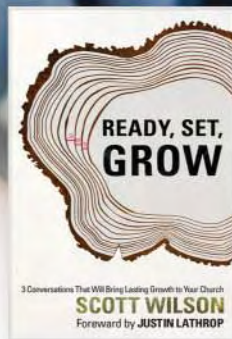
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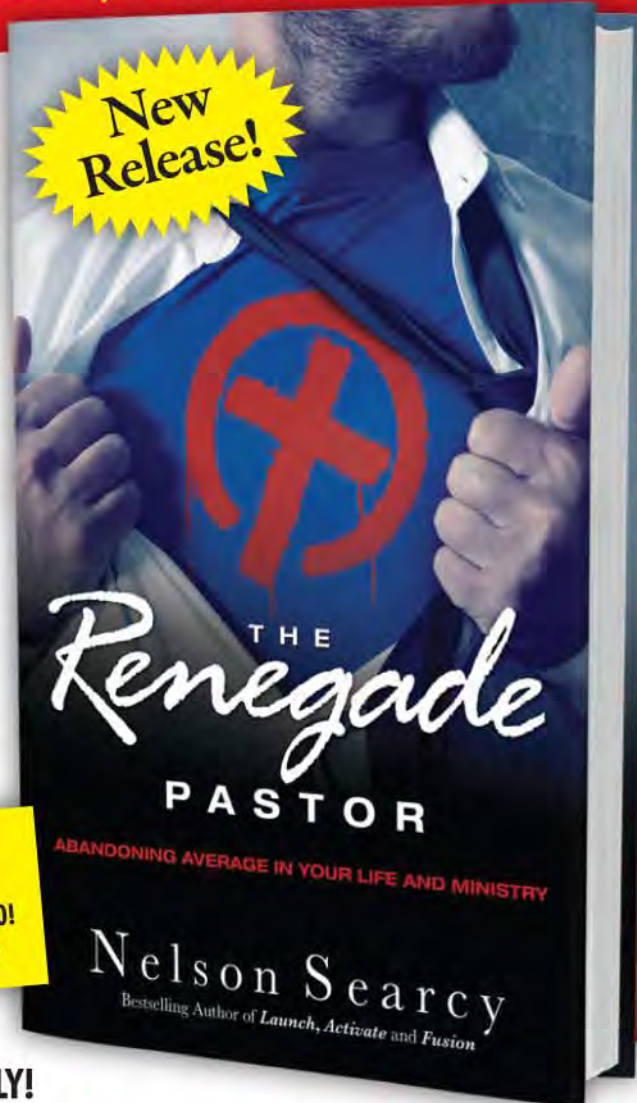
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- 2 It lets me say "yes" to God in the middle of a "no" world.
- 3 I draw strength and encouragement from the atmosphere of worship, Word, and presence.
- 4 It sends a clear and positive message to all the negative messages that try to invade my space every day.
- 5 It shows my family what is of greatest value to me.
- 6 It says to my friends and neighbors that I am a person under authority.
- 7 It puts me in an intentional place where I can know God, and learn more about His ways and His will for me.
- 8 It lets me hear again ... and again, the stories of God's love for me from a person I love and respect.

— T. RAY RACHELS,
Irvine, California



“All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you. PSALM 145:10”



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LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS

Followership
101

If you're looking for a cure for weak leaders, ask the doctor.

Dr. James C. Galvin has served as a consultant to businesses, non-profit organizations, and churches for decades and knows what effective leadership looks like.



In addition, he knows his Bible, having been one of the creators and senior editors of the all-time best-selling *Life Application Study Bible*. And now he has written a book that combines both of those areas of expertise.

Galvin's book, *I've Got Your Back: Biblical Principles for Leading and Following Well* (St. Charles, Illinois: TENTHPOWER Publishing, 2012) unpacks the biblical principles for leading and following well. This tome is not what you would expect (long chapters on leadership essentials); instead, the book unfolds as a story of four Christian friends, who struggle under poor leaders on the job and at church. As a work of fiction, the story pulls the reader along while teaching and illustrating the principles of good leadership and good "followership." The friends, and the reader, learn together through group Bible study and a wise mentor. The last fourth of the book presents "A Concise Theology of Leadership and Followership," followed by an eight-session discussion guide.

This is an excellent resource for individual and group study. Jim Wilhoit, PhD., professor of Christian education, Wheaton College, states: "The final chapter does a masterful job of providing a theology of leadership. ... I deeply appreciate the way Jim Galvin acknowledges the tensions in leadership and followership."

Most pastors wonder how to develop young leaders in the church. This book can help.

— DAVE VEERMAN, Naperville, Illinois

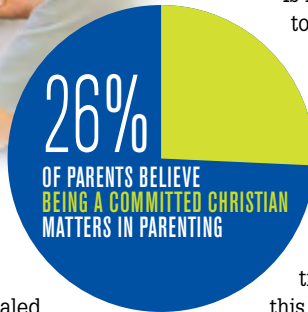
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AMERICAN FAMILY RESEARCH

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT?

A recent Lifeway Research survey¹ revealed that roughly one-third of parents view religion as an important characteristic for being a good parent (31 percent men; 35 percent women). Just over one-fourth (26 percent both men and women) believe being a committed Christian matters in parenting. Considering that 3 out of



4 adults in the U.S. identify themselves as Christian, the fact those surveyed downplay religious commitment should raise serious concerns for the church and its leaders.

Is it enough, then, to offer age-graded and segregated programs to address this issue? Have these programs, in fact, potentially added to this problem in that families have no meaningful worship and ministry experience that puts them together at the same time and place? Could it be

that an intentional ministry strategy that ministers to the whole family creates some incentive for the family to practice its faith at home?

The time has clearly come for a family-focused ministry that finds a way to integrate the whole family into a fully engaged discipleship process that moves out of the church building and into daily life.

— RANDY WALLS, director, continuing education, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

Note

1. Russ Rankin, "Research: Religious Convictions Not Among Most Desired Parental Traits" <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/research-religious-convictions-not-among-most-desired-parent-traits> [accessed on 8 July 2013].

WHAT IN THE WORLD

PUT OTHERS FIRST

In June 1968, Dr. Jim Reddick did just that. Along with his 12-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son, the Seattle dentist set out to climb 14,000 foot Mt. Rainier. Reddick was making good on a promise he had made to Sharon and David a year before. As they reached the 9,000 foot level on Friday, the threesome encountered an unexpected storm with blinding snow and 60 miles-per-hour winds.

When the temperature plummeted, Reddick told his children they would have to dig in fast and make a shelter. Turning their backs to the blizzard they started to scoop out a cave with their mess kit plates. The trio was making good progress, but before they could carve a cave large enough for all three of them to fit in, the wind

grew worse and their little cave started to fill up with drifting snow.

Because the makeshift cave had room for only one sleeping bag, the loving father ordered the kids to crawl into it. With no space inside, Reddick curled up in his bag at the entrance to the cave, his body serving as a protective shelter from the wind, snow, and cold.

The kids' dad distracted them from the fearful ordeal by telling them stories, relating Bible verses, and leading them in songs and prayer. From time to time he would reach with his exposed hand and give the children's sleeping bag a squeeze to reassure them. But when several hours passed without another squeeze from that big hand, Sharon and David feared the worse. On Sunday when a search party discovered the cave, the kids realized their fears. Their dad had given his life to save theirs.

The dramatic story of the Reddick family is a sad (but inspiring) example of self-sacrifice. All the same, laying down our lives for our friends and family does not necessarily mean dying that they might live. Jesus told His followers, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:12,13).

What Jesus had in mind is more of a death to ego. It means developing a lifestyle characterized by the pattern of putting others first. That's how Jesus loved us and that is how He says we measure our love for others.

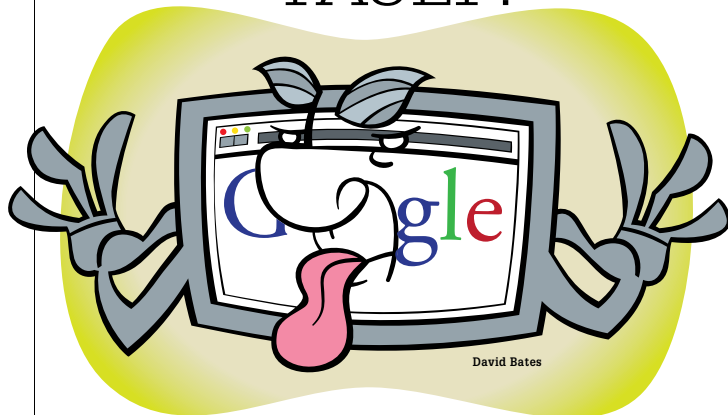
— GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington

From *Finding God in "It's a Wonderful Life"* by Greg Asimakopoulos. Published by Christianaudio, 2012. Used with permission.

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TECHNOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

IS IT THE
INTERNET'S
FAULT?



David Bates

In 2012, journalist Paul Miller conducted a yearlong social experiment of fasting from technology to prove that everything was the Internet's fault. He said, "I thought the Internet was making me unproductive. I thought it lacked meaning. I thought it was 'corrupting my soul.'"

He stopped to smell the roses, lost 15 pounds without trying, read books, and had face-to-face interactions with people. But then, he said, "I fell out of sync with the flow of life." And he found that all his bad habits were just as present in a life without technology.

After a year, he concluded that "the Internet isn't an individual pursuit, it's something we do with each other." We may create kinds of connection different from eras gone-by, but we do connect. It turns out that "the real world is inextricably linked to the Internet," Miller says.

Technology is core to our lives, seductively must-have, convenient, connecting, powerful, and time-saving. On the other hand, it is also an expensive, distracting, time-sucking obstacle to connecting, and a platform for all manner of evil.

In the church management software industry, we straddle the line between championing the power of technology for Kingdom purposes and understanding the wolf-in-sheep's clothing potentially lurking in just about everything. We live in the tension between these two dichotomies and challenge the idea that technology is what's wrong with the world.

Miller's conclusions beg a question reminiscent of Pilate's query: "What will you do with Jesus?" For us, it's: *What will we do with the Internet and technology?* And, most important, *How will we, as a body of believers, claim them for God?*

To learn how a 10,000-member church leverages technology to offer excellent member care, download the free *The Village Reporting Case Study* by ACTIVE Network Faith at www.ACTIVEFaith.com/EnrichmentJournal.

— MARK DeMOSS, director of professional services at ACTIVE Network Faith

TO ILLUSTRATE



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THE HOPES AND FEARS
OF ALL THE YEARS
ARE MET IN THEE

In the movie *The Odd Life of Timothy Green*, Jim and Cynthia Green long to have a child of their own. After exhausting all means of conception, health professionals tell them there is no hope. Returning home they grieve the death of their dream but choose to imagine one last time what the baby they will never have would have been like.

As the couple verbalized the qualities they wanted want their child to have, Jim wrote words and phrases on strips of paper. These characteristics include: Someone who'd never give up; someone who would have a good heart; someone who would be funny; someone who would be honest to a fault; someone who would be musical; someone who would be artistic; a glass half-full person; someone who would love and be loved; someone who would score the winning goal.

Jim then placed the pieces of paper in a small wooden box and buried it in the backyard garden. Amazingly, during the night the unthinkable occurs. A boy appears where Jim buried the box and to the delight of the infertile couple, this boy incarnates the qualities for which they dreamed.

In Scripture, infertility and unlikely birth is a common backdrop against which God displayed His power. In the unlikely birth of Jesus, we see the ultimate fulfillment of humanity's hopes and dreams. Someone who taught us how to love and who scored "the winning goal."

— GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington

For more information on this movie, visit wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Odd_Life_of_Timothy_Green



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THE MARRIAGE MATRIX

OPTIONAL, DISPOSABLE, REDEFINABLE?

Matt Chandler is a fascinating individual. In his mid-30s, he is the lead pastor of a church of 10,000+ in the Dallas area. Matt has gained national attention with the rapid growth of the church (160 in attendance in 2002), his podcasts (in the top five), and books.

Matt's recent publication, written with Jared Wilson, arose out of his realizing that most professing Christians have very little understanding of the gospel. This affects their relationship with God, certainly, but also has implications for the church and their witness in the world.

Before 1970, "living in sin" or "shacking up" was illegal in every state. Today only seven states have laws making

unmarried cohabitation illegal, although states rarely enforce it. Cohabitation has sky rocketed since 1990:

U.S. Unmarried — Partner Households¹

	HOUSEHOLDS	PEOPLE
2012	7.8 million	15.6 million
2000	5.5 million	11 million
1990	2.8 million	5.6 million

- Over half of all couples cohabit before marriage.
- Senior single-again adults cohabit due to the IRS marriage penalty.
- 21 percent of all unmarried-partner households include children.

Reasons Couples Cohabitate

- Antimarrriage sentiments
- Financial
- Easy access to sex
- Compatibility
- Hope of marriage
- Lack of stigma
- Conformity to social pressure
- Avoid divorce
- Avoid financial penalty of marriage

Is Culture Speaking Louder Than the Church?

The church needs to be aware of this growing trend. Non-Christians are not the only people cohabiting. Many pastors no longer preach against

cohabitation for fear of offending cohabitating couples in their church. The church needs to teach the biblical and ethical reasons and benefits of waiting until marriage. These include:

- principles of wise mate selection.
- importance of life commitment to marriage (Matthew 19:6).
- higher divorce rate for those who cohabit.
- consequences of sex outside of marriage and a lifetime commitment (immoral memories, pain of break up, pregnancy, venereal diseases, being unprepared for children, sexual disillusionment, mistrust/distrust of opposite sex).
- biblical foundations for marriage (Genesis 2:18–26).

— DENNIS FRANCK, director, Single Adult Ministries, Springfield, Missouri

Note

1. America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2012. Found at: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

Recommended Resources

Book:

Mike and Harriet McManus, *Living Together: Myths, Risks & Answers* (New York: Howard Books, 2008).

Websites:

Marriage Savers: Preparing, Strengthening and Restoring Marriages [marriagesavers.org/sites/Contact/biography.htm].

Step Family Association of America [familyfirst.com/stepfamily-association-of-america.html]

UTHTRAX

Sharp Curve Ahead

As youth investors, our responsibility is to mark out the clear road to success. We preach purity. Give guidelines on girlfriends. Teach faithful friendships. But maybe we are missing something big. Are we preparing teens for trouble?

Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Jesus made sure His disciples knew tough stuff is around the corner. You will have trouble. He didn't mince words. He didn't dance around the subject of hard times. He didn't say, "You might have trouble," or "If you have trouble." No. He was clear, "You will have trouble."

But, He did not just leave them with this depressing news. In the prior verses, He gave them clear direction. *The Holy Spirit will guide you. My Father will give you what you ask for in My name. Find peace in Me. Put your hope in Me ... no matter what.*

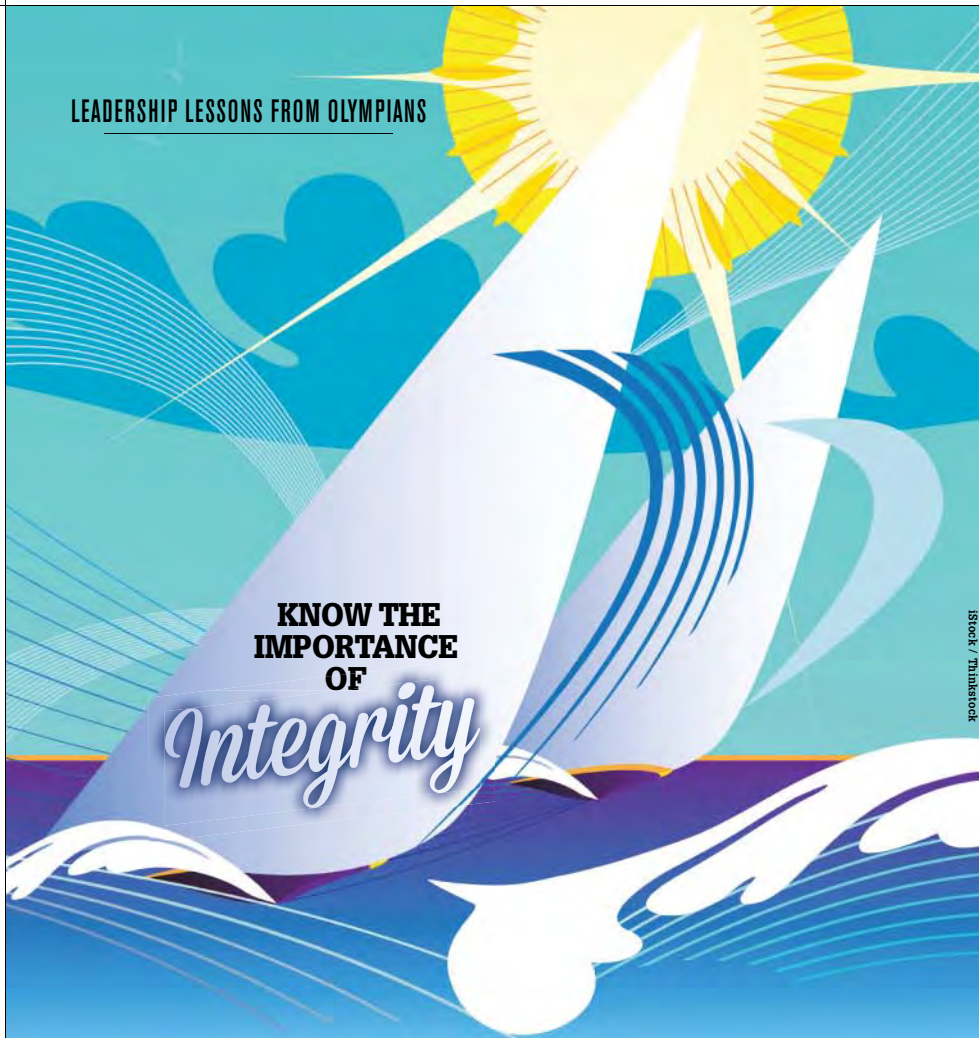
Jesus never promised us sunshine and fun times every day. Quite the opposite. If we do not prepare teens for trouble, we shield them from pain, and we are doing them a terrible disservice. Trouble might take place tomorrow ... it might take place today. We must prepare them.

— LYNETTE COWELL, Charlotte, North Carolina



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LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM OLYMPIANS



KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF Integrity

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Abraham Lincoln said, “I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside me.” That kind of integrity was important to Canadian Olympic sailor Lawrence Lemieux.

At the 1988 Games in Seoul, Lemieux was sailing at a quick clip and on his way to the gold medal when he heard cries of two Singaporean sailors competing in a different event nearby. One of them was desperately clinging to his boat that had capsized under 6-foot waves. The currents had swept the other sailor more than 50 feet away.

Lemieux recalls: “My thought process was: *Do they really need help because a lot of times you are able to save yourself.*” He called out to them but they could not hear him.

Instead of remaining in the race, Lemieux set course for the sailors pulling them onto his boat. Later, it became clear that one, if not both of the sailors, would have drowned. Because of his actions Lemieux came in 23rd place.

“I could have won the gold,” he said “but, in the same circumstances, I would do what I did again.”

Lemieux’ act, however, did not go unrewarded. The International Olympic Committee presented him with the Pierre de Coubertin medal for sportsmanship. Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch said: “By your sportsmanship, self-sacrifice, and courage, you embody all that is right with the Olympic ideal.” Olympic athletes know the importance of integrity. They do not adhere to the mistaken philosophy of winning at all costs.

— VICTOR M. PARACHIN, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Next time in *Enrichment*

The Next **100** Years

In 2014, the Assemblies of God enters its centennial.

Rather than asking our authors to take a retrospective look into our Fellowship’s past, we asked them to take a prospective look into our Fellowship’s future. Should the Lord tarry, what are the things the AG needs to do to better accomplish our four reasons for being: evangelism, worship, discipleship, and compassion? Our authors — all respected leaders within the Fellowship — offer their answers to this important question.

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UPWORDS

PROVERBIAL INTAKE: PROTECTION

Our prayers should span three important areas — contentment for the heart, protection for the body and soul, and wisdom for the mind. The Book of Proverbs addresses these in great detail.

As Americans, we go to great expense to protect the things we value. We purchase insurance to protect our property and lives. We install security systems to protect our homes and businesses. We exercise and take nutritional supplements to protect our health. But what about our souls and spirits? How do we protect them? As Christians, these are the most valued treasures we have.

To gain protection from God, we must do at least two things.

1. **Fear Him** — “The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm” (Proverbs 19:23, ESV).
2. **Trust Him** — “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe” (Proverbs 29:25, ESV).

Fearing God is not hard. The Bible explains His miracles and penalties quite clearly. But trusting God can be a different story. If trust is the underlying factor to any relationship, why is it so difficult to accept?

Before I can trust, I need to have faith that the person will deliver as promised. If I wreck my car, I have faith the insurance company will deliver. If I subscribe to a regular workout regiment, I believe my health will improve.

By developing our faith in God, we trust His promises will prevail, His power will protect, and His divinity will deliver safety and security for our bodies and souls forever. This is a trust we can count on.

— **JAMES L. CASTELLANO, Emmaus, Pennsylvania**

Note

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Nine Steps to Pastors Finishing Well

By **Dick Hardy**



Every pastor wants to finish his or her life and ministry at the top of their game. Yet, things along the way can hinder their effectiveness. This author discusses some of these hindrances and how pastors can finish well.

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Parenting: A Tough Business

By **T. Ray Rachels**



How do you guide your children on the right paths when there are so many options? With practical examples and fatherly wisdom, T. Ray Rachels explains how we can be positive examples and guide our children on the right path.

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The Characteristics of Pentecostal Preaching, Part 2

By **Steve D. Eutsler**



Pentecostal preaching is unique. The author provides practical ideas to help Pentecostals preach more effectively. Part 1 of this article appeared in the fall 2013 EJ Online.

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The Path of Humility: What a Lowly Pirate Has in Common With Isaiah and Paul

By **Nick Fox**



Pride can keep us from seeing ourselves as others — and God — see us. Isaiah and Paul both understood the danger in pride. We can learn from them an important lesson in humility.

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Growing Disciples Organically: The Jesus Method of Spiritual Formation

By **Don Detrick**



Growing disciples is a lot like farming. Discipleship is “the natural growth that occurs when we merge authentic faith in Jesus Christ with intentional alignment to the principles of Scripture and empowered by the Holy Spirit, while living with and serving others.”



"You

PURCHASED

MEN FOR

GOD FROM

EVERY TRIBE

AND LANGUAGE

AND PEOPLE

AND NATION"

(REV. 5:9, NIV).

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TO

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TO THE NATIONS
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Holding Staff and Saints Accountable

BY CAL LEMON

You have been praying, hoping, and, even in a weak moment, crossing your fingers. But nothing has changed. You have administrative responsibility for six people in your ministry. These committed profes-

sionals are passionate about their ministries and connect well with their particular constituencies. There is a problem. Two of six staff have a checkered history of not “delivering” on their spiritual dreams and strategic promises.

And then there are the saints (nonsalaried volunteers) who are always euphoric at the launching of a new ministry but often no-shows when it is time to deliver on their commitments.

“THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO ROCK THIS BOAT”

There is never a good time to confront someone about his or her performance in the church. You openly admit your spiritual community is not Google, AT&T, or JPMorgan Chase. You are not building a for-profit enterprise that comes with the unapologetic privilege that you can get in someone’s face to clarify employment expectations.

No, you remind yourself, biblical protocol quietly whispers sanctity, civility, and vast choruses of patience. When frustrated, the church usually goes silent and waits for the underperforming saint or parishioner to receive a calling to another expression of the body of Christ.

But, after spending time on your knees, you need to confront the fact your expression of the kingdom of God is anemic and stumbling. Staff or volunteers consistently miss deadlines. Enthusiasm is pathetically episodic and highly dependent on the right voice speaking at the right time. And, your divine dreams have become ecclesiastical nightmares.

In the wake of these profound confessions



If you need to mature your skills of accountability with a staff person or a fellow believer, here are four sequential steps that will provide clear choices to those who follow in your spiritual wake.

we often say to ourselves, *the last thing we need right now is to rock this boat*. So, you, the spiritual leader, button your lip and internally begin to blame the spirit of the age for this epidemic indolence.

Frankly you are frightened that if you “lowered the boom” on members of your staff or the folks who warm the pews, the advancements made in your ministry would stagger and self-destruct as a result of another internal conflict.

THE CALL INSIDE YOUR CALLING

The only reason you may be reading this column is your “calling” to ministry. You have erected a fulcrum on which your entire life teeters: God, the Creator of the universe, knows your name and called you to serve Him in some divinely appointed mission. But, your calling also assumes you will be an adept leader.

Leadership is your unique ability to get out in front of fellow believers, point in a specific direction, and then look behind you to see the faithful follow. Your skills will normally include verbal alacrity, positive use of positional power, spiritual conviction, divine creativity, and always ready to say with conviction, “This is the direction we will move.”

Someone has to stand in the gap between spiritual dreams and a strategic future. This person cannot be a George C. Patton or Casper Milquetoast. Leaders are definitive persons who open a door that no one saw or thought was permanently locked.

Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, captured it best when he wrote in *Primal Leadership*, “Quite simply, in any human group the leader has maximal power to sway everyone. ...”

Therefore, leadership creates mirroring. The people who sit with you and in front of you will, over a period of time, reflect your connection with Christ. You, the spiritual leader, are a powerful person in God’s kingdom.

STEPS TO ACCOUNTABILITY

If you need to mature your skills of accountability with a staff person or a fellow believer, here are four sequential steps that will provide clear choices to those who follow in your spiritual wake.

First, use concise, transparent, and accurate language. It is important that you not use glib generalities (“You haven’t responded

positively to any of my requests over the last 5 years”) in this conversation. Rather, the words will offer clarity: “I asked for a report last Tuesday on the junior high ministry and have not received it as of today.”

In this first step, stay away from “you” accusatory language and replace it with “I” statements. When you speak just for yourself, there is nowhere for the conversation to wander and become a blame game.

Second, make sure you are not requiring accountability from someone who has no control over specific people or circumstances.

If a parishioner does not have access to names, addresses, and phone numbers of potential givers, how can this person be accountable for designing and executing a building fund pledge drive?

Third, ask yourself, “Does this person, who I am counting on, have a long history of failing to keep commitments in this ministry?” If the answer to that question is yes, here are two responses.

If this is a staff person, are you using a semiannual or annual performance review? The best way to fairly and consistently address under-performing staff is to create a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), which is usually reviewed every 90 days for one year with special attention to specific due dates for changes in attitude and/or increased productivity.

On the other hand, do you have a nonsalaried member of your ministry whose “reliability quotient” (cannot be trusted to follow through) is in negative numbers? If so, suggest a change in responsibility with this statement, “I sense this assignment does not match your spiritual gifts in our ministry. Tell me, am I right or wrong?” Notice you are not criticizing; you are opening a conversation to uncover greater fulfillment for this member of your ministry.

Fourth, devise a method to continually initiate contact between you and this staff member or parishioner. If you only showed up once to let this person know how disappointed and confused you were with him/her, there will be little or no progress between the two of you.

So, if this person has a long history of failing to complete mutually agreed on tasks, and you never question how he/she is doing with wrapping up important commitments, plan on more misunderstanding

Accountability must always combine a gentle review of commitments made to Christ and His church coupled with the thundering insistence these promises must be kept.

and emotionally-laden silence between the two of you.

Specifically, I am recommending you send the staff person or the member of a congregation a summary e-mail or handwritten note following your first accountability conversation. In this correspondence, give a date when you will either initiate a phone call or personally make an appointment for the two of you to evaluate whether there has been any change. Place this appointment on a written schedule or in an electronic organizer that will audibly remind you of your commitment to follow up.

If you said a year ago to someone in your ministry who makes commitments and does not keep them, “Let’s get together some time and revise our expectations of each other” and that conversation never happened, you may be bobbing around today on the placid surface of ecclesiastical mediocrity where no one rocks any boat.

ACCOUNTABILITY WITH A THUNDERING, VELVET HAND

Dan Fogelberg, a well-known musician, wrote and performed his popular song, *The Leader of the Band*.¹ He wove the lyrics around his father’s profound influence when he applied a “thundering, velvet hand” to the impressionable wet clay of Fogelberg’s emerging life.

In the same way, accountability, for those of us who speak for the Eternal Father, must always combine a gentle review of commitments made to Christ and His church coupled with the thundering insistence these promises must be kept.

Accountability — or your responsibility as a spiritual leader to gently review the promises made to Christ and His church and deliver this message with thundering reminders that these commitments must be kept — is the Holy Spirit’s message of grace and grit to those called to build the kingdom of God. ☒

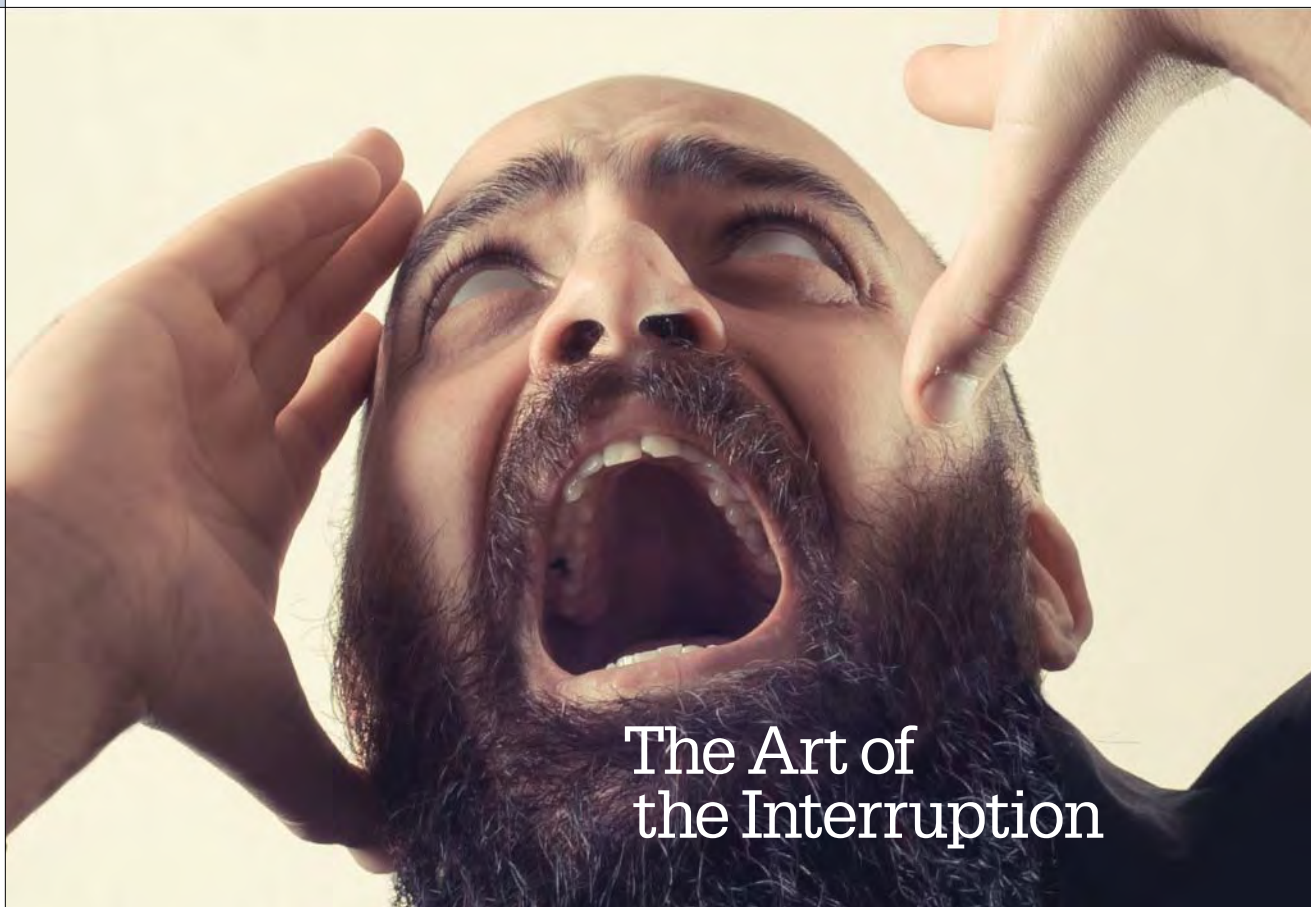
Note

1. Dan Fogelberg, “Leader Of The Band” ©EMI Music Publishing, 1981.



CAL LeMON, D.Min., president, Executive Enrichment, Inc., Springfield, Missouri, a corporate education and consulting firm

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The Art of the Interruption

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BY SCOTT HAGAN

Bartimaeus could tell by the vibrations of the soil there were more sandals than normal. Listening carefully to the Morse Code of the marketplace, he heard the sounds of muffled murmurings growing steadily. This would be it for him. It was time for the lame to get loud. He was sick of his role as a piece of social street wreckage. He secured someone nearby to tip him off at precisely the right moment. The tip came. After inhaling, Bartimaeus bellowed, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47).

Several heads turned at once. Who would be that obnoxious? This was like having the ugly behaving cousin crash the inner party. Before they could restrain him, a second audio assault hit. No one could remember someone yelling that loud in public.

Jesus was the new paradigm. Bartimaeus



Without the capacity to be interrupted, grace has no platform.

was the old parasite. Many still viewed Jesus through the idea of earthly majesty, not Kingdom servanthood. As such, being subjected to this ill-mannered display of street life was not fitting for royalty. They assumed Jesus was equally as insulted as they were by this rude outburst from the man who had obviously forgotten about his caste-system decorum.

The religiously driven handlers standing nearby jumped into action to provide security. They had ordered children to get off His lap. They had commanded the worshipping woman to stop embarrassing herself. So telling this blind man to pipe down was why these guys existed in the first place.

But instead of rebuking, Jesus felt something shoot through His spleen. Gut-wrenching compassion moved Jesus to stop. The worthless and intrusive roadside beggar was now the center of God’s universe. Without the capacity to be interrupted, grace has no platform.

The religion-first crowd always gets worked up when they see the church giving away free stuff to irresponsible people. They forget that Jesus gave away all of His gifts for free in the greatest giveaway in the history of

the universe. Certainly a man must work if he wants to eat, but many in the church are looking for more than work ethic before they send the family an invitation. They want to see perfection over an extended period of time before they deem someone is sincere enough.

Don't ever be fooled by the crowd. Religion is barren. It has no family because it can produce no family. Religion is about preservation, not procreation. Religion always believes people are replaceable; but a true family, whether physical or spiritual in nature, understands that each member is truly irreplaceable. Religion demands a contribution for continued membership. Either you are all in or all out. No family deals with one another in that manner when operating in love.

The American church has a real tension when something interrupts it. While churches are busy trying to be glamorous department store window presentations, the world needs us to be messy laboratories where love and transformation are working themselves out. Mercy is how we conceive new family members — it demonstrates the goodness of God that leads people to repentance and restoration. Mercy is the greatest antireligious act you can commit.

Religion is not a relationship. The Pharisees were not a family. Religion loves sitting first class. Religion loves teaching but despises having to be an example. Religion loves seeing others lift the load. Religion loves fine clothing to define success. Religion loves having people call its name in public. Religion loves to pray if there is money involved. Religion loves to travel, results notwithstanding. Fancy buildings intoxicate religion. Most of all, religion has mastered the art of trivial pursuits.

Everything about religious fervor is exclusionary. Mercy, however, conceives lasting relationship and family, and is everything opposite of religion. Religion perpetuates more separation and fuels the terror of relational deprivation. The kingdom of God is not tolerant of those who seek to codify their compromise through false teaching, but it does allow people to fully enter with all the chaos and mess their current situation has created. Yes, you can eat before you shower. People and churches who demonstrate true family love, not on the basis of prequalification or limited in its supply, are like cattle prods driving deep against the thick layers of unresponsive religious self that lay all around us.

True followers of Christ hold the patent and mastery of all things relational and all things family.

Building a family is tough. Being a family is tougher. It is inconvenient and at times completely irrational in its love and continued ambition for the individual. True followers of Christ hold the patent and mastery of all things relational and all things family, demonstrating that theology without the distribution of mercy cannot hold our relationships in tact. They will fray in the storm.

Promises, not performances, provide the base of a family. The Holy Spirit is our endless supply. The mercy that is required for keeping our relationships healthy is like harbor wind. There is plenty to lift every sail. The Pharisees saw light, love, grace, and mercy as limited commodities originating from the human heart rather than unlimited qualities coming down from above. Budgeting is what religion does best, but what families do best is lavish.

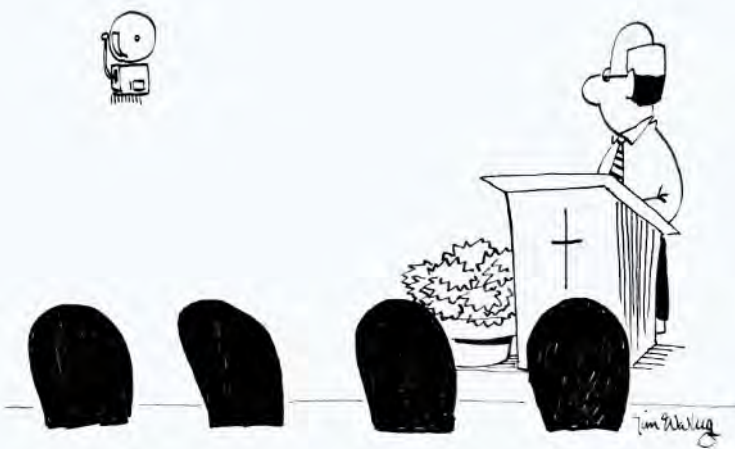
Bartimaeus was sick of the deprivation. He simply didn't care any longer to live beneath the yoke of his current conditions. He came to believe the risk of religion ostracizing him was worth the risk of finding connection in the Kingdom.

At the end of the day, loud won. 📣



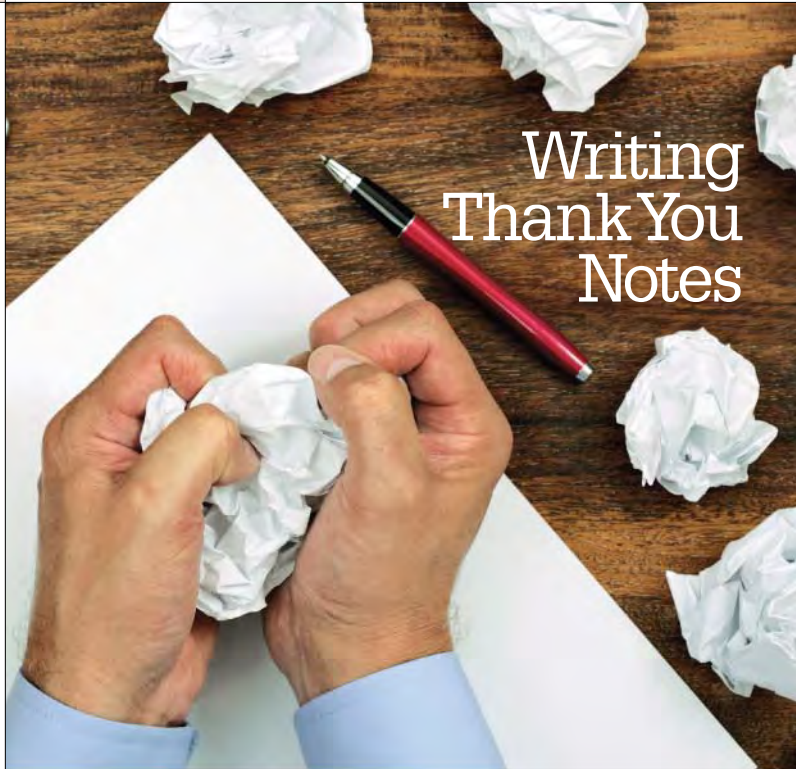
SCOTT HAGAN is senior pastor Real Life Church of the Assemblies of God, Sacramento, California.

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During the week someone installed a recess bell.



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BY DOUG GREEN

Willie Nelson was singing about his girlfriends, but all I could think about were people who have passed through our church:

*To all the ones I've loved before
Who traveled in and out our door
I'm glad they came along
I dedicate this song.*

To all the ones I've loved before.¹

My list of former girlfriends is rather short, not much content for a song, but it dawned on me: I have preached a lot of sermons to a lot of people. Doing the math in my head it appears, in fact, I have preached over 800 sermons (or over 2,000 if you count the years of multiple services). So, in celebration of over two decades of preaching from behind the same pulpit, I want to do what you are supposed to do after a good birthday party. I want to write thank you notes. I bought cards, so here we go.



Because of you, I lose sleep, battle doubt, fight fear, overcome temptation, sacrifice leisure, and try to do my best to deliver God's Word for you and your family.

Take out first note card and start writing:

TO ALL THE ONES WHO ONLY HEARD ME PREACH ONCE

Thank you for giving me a shot to gain your ear. Over the years I have thought about you a lot, especially on Mondays. I can only assume, for those of you who left mid-sermon, you were responding to an emergency text message. We all get them; they're inconvenient. To those who stayed till the benediction but ran for the parking lot at the final "Amen," thank you for hearing the whole of it. I have often thought, in a rare moment of confidence, it was probably the loud music, the less-than-perfect greeters, or the uncomfortable chairs that drove you away. Rapidly away. It certainly couldn't have been the preaching, for ...

Ah ... never mind ... can't send that one. Crumble. Toss into the trash can.

New note card:

TO ALL THE ONES WHO SLEPT WHILE I SPOKE

Thank you for feeling so confident to do what I wanted to do: take a nap. I looked straight at you. I wasn't mad at you; I envied you. Do you know how good a nap sounds on a Sunday morning, especially after a restless Saturday night? Life sure isn't fair. Then again, maybe it is fair, for on Mondays I sleep in late when you're ...

Nah ... not a good idea. I don't want any of my pastor friends to know I have sleepers in my church. Crumble. Trash. Take out new note card:

TO ALL THE ONES WHO BECAME PART OF US, THEN LEFT

Thank you for the memories. I remember the first time you came to a service. You chose to come back. How encouraged I was to see you again. Over the years we wept; we laughed. We shared a lot of life together. I remember how kind you were after your father's funeral, letting me know God used me. I remember telling your story in the sermon and thinking your story was the best thing I said that morning. I remember dedicating your children to the Lord, baptizing them years later, and then watching them go off to college. I remember missions trips. Picnics. Fist bumps in the foyer.

Then, I heard you were shopping around for

another church, another pastor. I remember getting the word from somebody else that you had left the church. I took the high road when I heard because it's the right thing to do. But if you want me to be honest, it felt like a kick in the gut. It sucked the wind out of my sails. I was ready to quit, convinced everybody else was quitting. It was hard, for I loved you, and I loved your family. I gave myself to you. Every week. I spoke God's Word to you. We shared the same. ...

Nah ... I can't send this. I really want to, but I won't. But it's good to get it on paper, for I still miss them. I forgot how much I loved them.

Let me try again:

TO ALL THE ONES WHO CAME AND STAYED

Thank you. Do you have any idea how special it is to share God's Word with you? I remember the morning you looked up and caught my eye during the invitation to receive Christ as Lord and Savior. You had tears in your eyes. You decided to follow Jesus, and I got to be there to see it happen. Amazing.

You've grown since that time. You're such a part of what God is doing in our church. When I think of you, I think I have a great job. You make me want to study and prepare all the more for next Sunday. I love how you respond to what God says. You have fallen in love with His Word, and it's a blast to see how much you love Him.

Remember, a few years ago, when I asked you to help me be a better preacher, and I couldn't get you to tell me what was wrong with my preaching? When I pressed you for why you wouldn't reveal my weaknesses, you told me you loved me and the sermon was not a performance but a part of our relationship. You, in fact, told me how our conversation on a Thursday was almost *more* important than my sermon on Sunday. You said you loved my preaching because you loved me, helping me understand what it means to be a pastor.

You make me want to be a better pastor. Because of you, I put myself through the grind of sermon prep every week. The gnawing that starts about Tuesday, knowing that on Sunday I'll stand behind the pulpit and speak on behalf of God Almighty, has never gone away. I'm as nervous today as when I first started. I want to get it right for I know it matters. Because you hear His Word and apply it each week, I am willing to wrestle with my

Once you establish the content of a biblical text, there are infinite ways you can communicate it to your audience.

own self-righteousness and let the biblical text do something in my heart every week. It means a lot to me when I hear Jesus say, "For their sake I sanctify myself," because that's what I do every week. Because of you, I lose sleep, battle doubt, fight fear, overcome temptation, sacrifice leisure, and try to do my best to deliver God's Word for you and your family. It's impossible to be amazing every week, so I just shoot to be faithful. Humble, too. I've learned the hard way there is no such thing as a great sermon, just a great text; there is no such thing as a great preacher, just a great Christ.

Because of you, He has used me.

I love you,

Doug

your pastor, your preacher, your friend.

Folded. Stuffed. Sealed. Stamped. Left in the mailbox for future reference.

To be retrieved on Mondays. 📧

Note

1. Words adapted from *All the Girls I've Loved Before*, written by Albert Hammond and Hal David, © EMI Music Publishing.



DOUG GREEN, D.Min., founding pastor, North Hills Church, Brea, California

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"I don't like what I'm becoming in his ministry."

Parables

BY MARC TURNAGE

Jesus most frequently taught using story parables.¹ The story parable provides images from real life (they are not fables) that serve to communicate a primary message to people (parables are not allegories). Parables use concrete language and examples to communicate difficult or esoteric ideas, concepts, and theology. As such, much of the meaning of the parable comes from within the culture and setting of the parable, something that was part of the collective consciousness of the audience. People told parables to make concepts understood; they never told parables to hide or keep secrets. The challenge for the modern interpreter lies in understanding the embedded cultural setting of the parables taken for granted by the one telling the parable and his audience.

The sages of Israel utilized parables as a principal vehicle to illustrate and communicate their theology by using images and language that the common person could grasp; but, at the same time, parables often have a subcurrent running through them that the intelligentsia understood. Far from being simple images, people connected parables with the highest level of Jewish scriptural education.

The genre of story parable is unique to Jesus in the Gospels and the Jewish sages. Jesus and the sages not only similarly used the genre of story parables, but the theology communicated in the Jewish parables and the parables of Jesus is similar. Parables do not appear in the Dead Sea Scrolls or other Jewish literature of the first century, nor do they appear in the writings of Greek and Roman authors. They come from the fertile soil of rabbinic oral instruction and Torah education. Significantly, all story parables in rabbinic literature are composed in Hebrew even during later periods where Aramaic was the dominant language of the Jewish people; Hebrew is always the language of parables. We should assume, then, that Jesus originally told all of His parables in Hebrew.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25–37) is



Parables use concrete language and examples to communicate difficult or esoteric ideas, concepts, and theology.



perhaps one of the most well-known of Jesus’ parables. The origin of the parable derives from an exchange between Jesus and an expert in the Law. The scribe asked Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (verse 25, ESV²). Jesus responded to his question in a very Jewish manner with another question, asking him to summarize the Law. The scribe responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,” and Leviticus 19:18, “and your neighbor as yourself.”

Why did he read those two passages together? The first passage, of course, is part of the *Shema* (“Hear, O Israel”) that Jews in the first century recited daily (*m. Berachot* 1.1). Jewish interpreters, like Jesus and Paul, connected biblical passages because of shared language between the two verses. We call this hermeneutical method *gezerah shevah*. Language, not theology, drove the hermeneutic. Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 are two of only three passages in the entire Old Testament that begin with the phrase תבואו (“and you will love”). Jewish exegetes would have seen this phrase as a connection between the passages in which the second assists in interpreting the first.

Jesus replied to the scribe that he had answered correctly, “Do this and you will live.”

The scribe proceeded to ask, “And who is my neighbor?” He sought further clarification as to who was his “neighbor.” His question asked Jesus to draw a line indicating who was inside and who was outside the commandment, and thus who he was obligated to.

To answer his question, Jesus told a parable based upon the third Old Testament passage that begins with תבואו “and you shall love,” Leviticus 19:34: “And you shall love the foreigner” (author’s translation). This exchange demonstrates the erudition and Torah learning of Jesus and that He functioned at the highest level. It also betrays His incredibly creative genius.

In the parable, Jesus told a story using a common occurrence about a person traveling the road between Jerusalem and Jericho and falling among thieves. The thieves beat the man and left him for dead. Jesus’ description of the man as “half-dead” indicates that he was on the threshold of dying. This explains the hesitancy of the priest and Levite to help him. If they helped him, and he died, they would have become ritually impure and not

been able to perform their religious duties. Herein lies the tension of the parable: Does the call of God supersede the needs of the human individual?

THE THEOLOGY OF THE PARABLE

In the centuries leading up to the first century, Judaism experienced a theological revolution that evolved into a new sensitivity of the value of the human individual.³ Two biblical verses stood at the heart of this revolution: Leviticus 19:18, which came to be read, “Love your neighbor who is *like yourself*,” and Genesis 1:27, “In the image of God he created them.” God created humans in His image and, therefore, they have intrinsic value. Moreover, in the manner in which I treat one created in the image of God, who is like myself, God will respond to me.

The scribe Jesus ben Sirā, writing at the beginning of the second century B.C., stated, “Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does anyone harbor anger against another, and expect healing from the Lord? If one has no mercy toward another like himself, can he then seek pardon for his own sins?” (28:2–4).

In the book of *Jubilees*, written around the same time as Ben Sirā, we find, “And among yourselves, my sons, be loving of your brothers as a man loves himself, with each man seeking for his brother what is good for him, and acting together on the earth, and loving each other as themselves” (36:4).

Jesus embraced this emerging Jewish humanism and its emphasis on the value of the individual, as well as God acting toward us in the manner we act toward others. The question of the lawyer in Luke 10:29 sought to further clarify who is my neighbor. Jesus answered this question by building a parable based on Leviticus 19:34 and making the hero of the parable a Samaritan — someone outside of the Jewish community — who showed mercy (10:37) toward one like himself. Moreover, Jesus rephrased the man’s question by asking, “Which of these three, do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” (ESV). The man’s question sought to identify insiders and outsiders, those I’m obligated to and those to which I have no obligation. Jesus turned the question on its head, and said, “You go be the neighbor.” This parallels His teaching elsewhere



People told parables to make concepts understood; they never told parables to hide or keep secrets.

when He stated that, “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). In other words, God does not distinguish in His mercy, and neither should we.

Shimon the Righteous, a sage who lived in the third century B.C., stated, “On three things the world stands: on the Torah, on the Temple service, and on deeds of loving-kindness” (*m. Avot* 1:2). The order of the three indicates their priority according to Shimon, so for him, Torah study was preeminent, but the Temple service superseded deeds of loving-kindness. The attitude reflects that of the priest and Levite in Jesus’ parable: their ritual duty, their calling, was more important than the needs of the individual. For Jesus, however, something greater than the Temple exists (Matthew 12:6); the needs of the human individual and our need before God to show mercy toward others like ourselves.⁴ ■

Notes

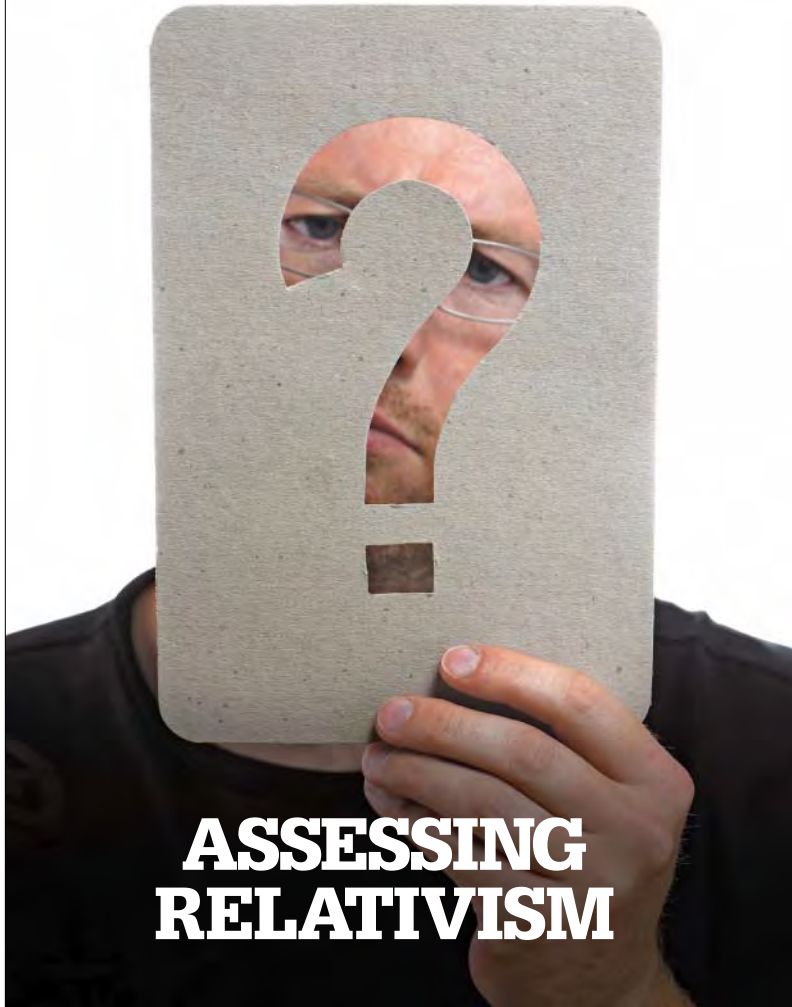
1. Brad Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998).
2. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, copyright © 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
3. David Flusser, “A New Sensitivity in Judaism and the Christian Message,” in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1988), 469–489; Marc Turnage, “Who’s Image?,” *Enrichment* journal (Summer, 2011): 116; idem, “The Three Pillars of Jesus’ Faith,” *Enrichment* journal (Fall, 2001): 100.
4. Many interpreters of Matthew 12:6 assume that when Jesus spoke about “something greater than the temple” He was referring to himself, particularly in light of His statement, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (verse 8). These interpreters see the phrase “Son of Man” messianically. There are two problems with this interpretation: 1) the Greek of Matthew 12:6 for “something greater” is in the neuter case, and therefore, cannot refer to Jesus, which would have been in the masculine case. Charity toward others fits the neuter case. 2) Jesus’ statement “Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” does not refer to Jesus either as the Markan parallel makes clear: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The phrase “Son of Man” in (verse 28) is the common use of the term in Hebrew meaning a human being (see Psalm 8). In the Gospels, Jesus used the term *son of man* in three ways: 1) meaning a human being — the Everyman, 2) as part of the Passion predictions, and 3) to speak about the future end of days judge. Quite simply, the only one of these three meanings that makes sense in the context of Matthew 12:6 is “the Everyman.” The “son of man” is not a messianic title. Moreover, we find an exact parallel to the Markan statement, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” in the earliest rabbinic commentary on Exodus — the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* — that verifies my reading of the sentence that “the son of man (i.e., a human being) is lord of the Sabbath.” This statement, too, is not about Jesus.



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“IT’S ALL RELATIVE” and Other Such Absolute Statements:



ASSESSING RELATIVISM

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BY PAUL COPAN

You have probably heard all kinds of relativistic statements: “That’s just true for you but not for me,” or “That’s just your reality,” or “Who are you to say that someone else is wrong?” Some might consider you arrogant or even dangerous for



believing in “truth” or “moral standards.” Relativists even get angry with nonrelativists, which is strange if you think about it. Pope John Paul II called this phenomenon “the dictatorship of relativism.”

Here’s some scary news.¹ In one survey, 83 percent of American teenagers claimed moral truth depends on circumstances; only 6 percent of teens said objective moral values exist; 75 percent of adults (18 to 35) claimed to embrace moral relativism. What’s even scarier is that statistic is more than 10 years old.

In this article, I address two major problems with relativism — it is *self-refuting* or *self-contradictory* and it is *selective*. In the second half of this article, I offer some practical responses to relativism.

PROBLEMS WITH RELATIVISM

1. Relativism Is Self-Refuting: Relativists Believe Their View Is True for Everyone

Before we can assess relativism, let’s get our terms straight. What do we mean by *relativism* and *truth*? While we are at it, look at two loaded and misunderstood terms — *tolerance* and *judging*.

a. Defining Relativism and Truth: *Relativism* is the view that a belief or philosophy of life can be true for one person but not for another. When it comes to morality, one person’s or culture’s *moral* beliefs may be “right” for them but not necessarily for another. Truth is relative — that is, dependent on my own feelings, preferences, time of history, or culture.

The opposite of relative is *absolute* or *objective*. Truth does not depend on what people believe or what period of history in which they are living. Even if everyone believed the earth is flat, it would still be round.

What then is *truth*? Truth is a *match-up with reality*. If a belief, story, idea, or statement does not match up with reality, with the way things really are, then it’s false. “The moon is made of cheese” is false because it does not match up with reality. *Only reality confers truth or falsity*. A true statement is *faithful to reality*.

b. Why Relativists Are Absolutists:

Despite the relativist’s claims, the average relativist believes the following to be *true for everyone* — not just for him/her:

- *You should not say that someone else is wrong.*
- *All views are equally acceptable.*

- *You should not impose morality on others.*
- *You ought to be “tolerant” and should not “judge.”*
- *You ought to be open-minded.*

Consider some typical relativistic slogans and assertions, which turn out to be an exercise in self-refutation:

- *Truth is just a matter of perspective:* Is this true (“if you disagree with my perspective, you are wrong”), or is it just another trivial perspective?
- *There are no facts, only interpretations:* Is that just a fact, or is that just your interpretation?
- *You can do whatever you want, just as long as you do not hurt anyone:* Why is it wrong to hurt someone? Isn’t this a moral standard that we should not violate?
- *You can do whatever you want, just as long as it is between two consenting adults:* Why the absolute rule about consenting adults?

c. Relativism, Tolerance, and Judging:

Have you ever been in a conversation where someone charged you with being “intolerant”? Or perhaps someone condescendingly asks: “Who are you to judge someone else?” Suggestion: Don’t immediately address the accusation, but ask for a definition. Find out what the relativist means by *tolerance* or *judge*. As it turns out, relativists use terms they cannot live up to themselves. They make themselves the exception to their own rules.

The *classical* understanding of *tolerance* is *putting up with what one takes to be erroneous or false*.² We do not tolerate chocolate or ice cream. We enjoy them. Today, however, *tolerance* has come to mean “accepting all views as true or equally legitimate.” So, to disagree with another is arrogant. But think about it: How can you accept *both* Buddhism (which rejects God) and the Christian faith (which affirms God’s existence)? It’s a contradiction, plain and simple.

What about the term *judging*? Relativists like to cite Matthew 7:1: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” They say that means *saying that someone else is wrong*. But is this what Jesus meant? Not at all. First, it makes no sense: if someone accuses you of “judging,” isn’t that person judging *you* for judging *someone else*? Second, Jesus himself strongly disagrees with His religious opponents (see

In one survey, 83 percent of American teenagers claimed moral truth depends on circumstances; only 6 percent of teens said objective moral values exist; 75 percent of adults (18 to 35) claimed to embrace moral relativism.



the “woes” of Matthew 23). Third, Jesus said: “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment” (John 7:24).

Matthew 7’s context indicates a problem people need to address — a speck in someone’s eye. But believers should not go with a sense of moral superiority (“judging” or “being judgmental”); they should examine themselves first (taking the log out of their own eye) before confronting sin in another, but rather with a spirit of humility (cp. Galatians 6:1).

2. Relativism Is Selective: People Are Usually Relativists About God / Religion and Ethics.

a. Relativists are not relativists about trivial facts that do not challenge their personal autonomy: People are not relativistic about stop signs, about the roundness of the earth, about who won the Super Bowl, or about the stock market. People are not relativists about labels on prescription bottles (“that’s true for the pharmacist but not for me”). They do not claim that “Paris may be in France for some people but not for others.”

People are primarily relativists about *God* and *morality*. Clearly, the existence of God — the Cosmic Authority — is a game-changer. He has a claim on our lives. If the relativist’s motivation is personal autonomy or “freedom” rather than truth, then God is a perceived threat who constricts them. Now, bad motivations *don’t disprove* relativism. They remind us not to assume relativists just need basic logic lessons to “fix” them. No, they’ll just shrug their shoulders and say, “Whatever” — and walk away.

b. Relativists Become Moral Absolutists When It Comes to Their Rights and Their Property. When it comes to ethics, if people think that torturing babies for fun or raping is “right for some people but not others,” they have not reflected very deeply on the basis for morality. *Such people do not need an argument; they need help.*

Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland has written about an illuminating encounter with a student at the University of Vermont.³ Moreland was speaking in a dorm, and a relativistic student who lived there told him, “Whatever is true for you is true for you and whatever is true for me is true for me. If something works for you because you believe it, that’s great. But no one should force his or her views on

other people since everything is relative.” As Moreland left, he unplugged the student’s stereo and started out the door with it.

The student protested: “Hey, what are you doing? ... You can’t do that.”

Moreland replied, “You’re not going to *force* on me the belief that it is wrong to steal your stereo, are you?” He then went on to point out to the student that, when it’s convenient, people say they don’t care about sexual morality or cheating on exams. But they become moral absolutists in a hurry when someone steals *their* things or violates their rights. That is, they are *selective* moral relativists.

Interestingly, a few weeks later this student became a follower of Christ because he recognized the connection between God and human dignity and rights — that God made us in His image. I like to tell churches that this could be a great new evangelistic method called “Stealing Stereos for Jesus.”

Speaking at an open forum in Oswego, New York, one wintry night, I addressed a young woman’s charge that I was “ethnocentric.” (Of course, she believed that it was morally wrong for anyone to be ethnocentric.) Why? Because I believed my morality should be imposed on everyone else.

I replied, “If you were walking down a dark alley where an attacker was waiting to rape you, but there was also a bystander who would be willing to help, would you want the bystander to impose his morality on your attacker?”

Noticeably shaking, she shot back, “You’re distorting what I’m saying.”

I said, “Not at all. My point is that it’s easy to be a relativist when evil is out there and not bothering me. But when someone violates my rights — when someone violates me — then I recognize this is wrong.”

At Kennesaw State University near Atlanta, my lecture topic was: “When Racism and Bigotry Are Okay.”⁴ The school newspaper did not want to advertise my “intolerant” talk. Thankfully, a Christian editor explained, “You can’t be a relativist and oppose racism and bigotry. If so, you are not really a relativist.

Let’s draw some strands together. First, *relativism is a belief of convenience*; it makes no intellectual or moral demands on us. Why struggle with intellectual or moral challenges? Relativism is really just *lazy thinking*.

Second, *truth is inescapable*. While in high school my daughter, Valerie, didn’t raise her

People are not relativistic about stop signs, about the roundness of the earth, about who won the Super Bowl, or about the stock market.



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hand when the teacher asked the class, “How many of you believe there’s no such thing as truth?” When her teacher asked why Valerie didn’t raise her hand, she said, “If you say there’s no truth, you’re basically saying that it’s true that there is no truth. To deny the truth is to affirm it.”

Third, *knowledge is inescapable*. People who say “you can’t know” apparently know that you can’t know. Even skeptics — who question whether you can know — still seem to know their minds should follow logical laws and that their minds are not systematically deceiving them.

Fourth, *even if we are limited and biased, this does not mean we cannot know truly*. Why think we have to know with 100 percent certainty? If people insist on this, how can they know — or show — that knowledge requires 100 percent certainty? They can’t.

Fifth, *we find ourselves bumping up against reality all the time — traffic jams, cancer, AIDS in Africa*. We have no control over these realities. These things are not just true for some people but not for others. If so, relativism becomes an easy way to get rid of the world’s leading problems: “AIDS or pollution may be a problem for some people but not for me.” No, relativism is simply out of touch with reality. What’s more, it’s soul-destroying. The Christian writer Dorothy Sayers writes of the relativist’s “tolerance”: “In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.”⁵

REACHING RELATIVISTS

How do we engage relativists? How do we help them, by God’s grace, move a step or two closer to embracing Christ?

a. Ask why the relativist holds the view she does. She will likely give you *objective reasons* for holding her view: “So many people hold so many differing beliefs” — a view she takes — which she takes to be undeniably true. But a lot of times relativism springs from the inability to trust and commit. This could be a good conversational starting point.

b. A Christian life well lived speaks more

clearly to a relativist than logical answers:

Relativists may shrug off contradictions we point out, but it's hard to shake off a life of love and integrity: "By this all will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:35). Begin by *building relationships with relativists* and *modeling a life of integrity*; this also will expose the hollowness and self-centeredness of their own existence.

c. Relativists think their belief system brings freedom, but it's actually a life of bondage, enslavements, and addictions.

Relativism turns people into mere shadows of humanity. Many unbelievers assume that God's authority will undermine their well-being. Ironically, this is backward: "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:25). Jesus said "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32), and a few verses later He connects this freedom to himself, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Pastor Tim Keller advises Christians not to simply "scold" relativists for premarital sex or mushy views of truth. These are symptoms of something deeper: "Instead of telling them they are sinning because they are sleeping with their girlfriends or boyfriends, I tell them that they are sinning because they are looking to their romances to give their lives meaning, to justify and save them, to give them what they should be looking for from God. This idolatry leads to anxiety, obsessiveness, envy, and resentment. I have found that when you describe their lives in terms of idolatry, postmodern people do not give much resistance. Then Christ and His salvation can be presented not (at this point) so much as their only hope for forgiveness, but as their only hope for freedom."⁶

d. Think relationally with relativists: Don Everts and Doug Schaupp work as campus ministers with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Their book, *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus*, is full of stories of relativists or postmoderns who found their way to Christ.⁶ The first major step all of them took was moving from *distrust* to *trust* of dedicated, loving Christians. Many relativists will not consider Christ because they distrust people in general, and perhaps Christians in particular. Christians need to be a *safe place* for the relativist so, by God's grace, she can move from

Many professing Christians actually operate with a relativistic mindset. Is it any wonder why onlookers don't see anything attractive about them?

complacency to curiosity, from resistance to openness, from meandering to intentionally seeking truth — and ultimately entering into God's kingdom.

Many professing Christians actually operate with a relativistic mindset. Is it any wonder why onlookers don't see anything attractive about them? We must ask ourselves: *Do relativists see a changed life that demands a supernatural explanation? Or do they see an unchanged life that helps reinforce their relativism?* As believers, we must go beyond pointing out the self-contradictory, selective nature of relativism to exposing the bland, hollow shell of relativism.

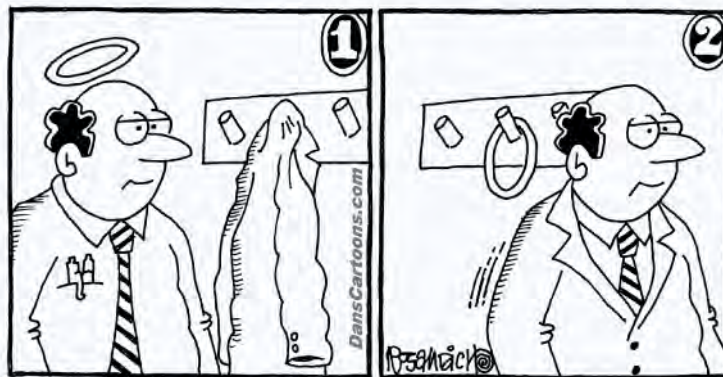
Notes

1. Barna Group, "Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings," 12 February 2002, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/67-americans-are-most-likely-to-base-truth-on-feelings?q=americans+likely+base+truth+feelings> (accessed May 2, 2013).
2. Maurice Cranston, "Toleration," in Paul Edwards, ed., *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 8 (New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1967), 143.
3. J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 153,54.
4. While my topic was provocative, the substance of the lecture condemned racism/bigotry on the basis of moral absolutes.
5. Dorothy Sayers, *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 152.
6. Tim Keller, "The Gospel in All Its Forms," *Leadership Journal* 29/2 (2008): 6, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/spring/9.74a.html?start=1> (accessed May 1, 2013).



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Pastor Adams officially retires from Cornerstone Assembly.

Dementia and Caregiving: Remembering Spiritual Needs

BY CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL

Not all bioethical dilemmas involve doctors in a hospital setting. For patients with dementia, many ethical issues revolve around everyday caregiving situations involving family members and friends.

Now that Susan provided care at home for her mom whom doctors recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, getting to church on Sunday became a rare treat. Sitting through the long service filled with people whose names she could no longer recall became too difficult and embarrassing for her mom. Susan longed for the support of her church, but her growing responsibilities as a caregiver squeezed out the time for fellowship.

Mark felt a touch of guilt every time he told his wife he was going grocery shopping at the end of his visit to her at the nursing home. Yet, this story helped her accept his departure without becoming agitated.

Rose felt relieved that her sister's room in the assisted living facility had a door alarm, but her sister resented the technology as a restriction of her freedom.



As a pastor, you can make a difference by helping caregivers stay connected to the community of believers and affirming the dignity of the person affected by dementia.

The World Health Organization estimates that 35.6 million people worldwide are living with dementia, and expects that number to double by 2030.¹ Many patients with dementia continue to live at home, especially in the early stages of their disease. Although patients lose intellectual capabilities, the need for spiritual care remains. As a pastor, you can make a difference by helping caregivers stay connected to the community of believers and affirming the dignity of the person affected by dementia.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCOPE OF DEMENTIA

Dementia is a cluster of symptoms rather than a single disease. Three of the main causes of dementia are Alzheimer's disease, Lewy body disease, and cerebrovascular disease. Other causes of dementia include Parkinson's disease, Pick's disease, Korsakoff's syndrome, Binswanger's disease, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD). All these diseases affect a person's ability to recall information, communicate with others, and make rational decisions.

These diseases are biological in origin, but they quickly become social and spiritual diseases as well. A person's erratic behavior can separate the person from the rest of the community and limit opportunities to worship with other believers. Changes in personality may cause a person with dementia to behave in ways not in keeping with his or her character before the illness. For example, the patient may swear, become argumentative, and act aggressively as a result of changes in brain function. Loss of memory and language skills may impede the practice of the patient's faith.

When you minister to patients with dementia, remember to separate the effects of the disease from your experience with the patient. A person behaving inappropriately as a result of personality changes from dementia has not become weak in his or her faith. Try to overlook the disease-related behavior and give the patient the gift of your relaxed and accepting presence.

DEFINING THE SOURCE OF DIGNITY

Emphasize the source of human dignity as you minister to patients with dementia and their caregivers. Help them remember a person's worth comes from being made in

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the image of God, not a person's ability to think and make rational decisions. Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This intrinsic worth does not diminish in the face of illness or disability. A disease that erases memories and creates confusion in the mind leaves the soul intact.

The care we show to the most vulnerable among us demonstrates our love for Christ. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, Jesus explained to His disciples that when they look after the sick, they are caring for Him (Matthew 25:36). Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Becoming a caregiver is an opportunity to put faith in action. Ministering to the sick allows us to express love for Christ as well as love for fellow believers.

In 1 Corinthians 12:26,27, Paul reminds believers of the value of each member of the body of Christ: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." This teaching not only calls believers to come alongside members of the body of Christ who are suffering, but it also recognizes that everyone makes a valuable contribution. Believers enjoying good health can learn spiritual lessons about patience, true joy, and peace from believers facing diminishing capabilities.

PROVIDING THE SUPPORT OF COMMUNITY

Churches can provide support to caregivers and patients in a variety of ways. For example, you can create special services to minister to patients in the early stages of memory loss. Such services should be short, follow a simple routine, and include familiar worship music. You can also make opportunities for continued church participation through small groups or home visits.

By developing church programs to provide practical help, you can ease the burdens of caregivers. Many times caregivers face ethical dilemmas such as balancing the patient's desire for freedom with the need to minimize risk because of lack of resources. Caregivers can become socially isolated, financially

By developing church programs to provide practical help, you can ease the burdens of caregivers.

drained, and emotionally exhausted. Perhaps your church can provide meals or help with household tasks. Someone from your church ministry team might be able to sit with a patient to permit the caregiver to attend church or take care of other responsibilities.

Growing technologies provide potential solutions for caregivers and patients. Assistive technologies can support the independence and safety of patients with dementia. A device can be as simple and inexpensive as a calendar clock with large numbers that helps patients orient to the month, day, and year, as well as the hour and minute. Complex assistive technology such as automated home systems can manage lighting, temperature, and safety features in the home.

Of course, the most important component of any technology is the human response. Technology that warns a caregiver when a patient leaves a room can enhance life for the patient if the technology summons a person to help the patient accomplish his or her desire in a safe manner. If the technology leads to the patient being confined to a room, then the patient will resent the technology as restrictive. When the emphasis stays on human dignity, technology works for patients instead of against them.

By caring for the caregivers, you can help families grow closer while dealing with the grief that accompanies the progressive decline of a loved one with dementia. When you guide caregivers through ethical challenges using biblical insight, you reduce the guilt experienced by caregivers and ease tensions within family relationships. Addressing spiritual needs helps patients experience love, protection, and respect. Throughout a season of memory loss, you can ensure a person that you have not forgotten his or her core identity. ■

Note

1. World Health Organization and Alzheimer's Disease International, *Dementia: A Public Health Priority*, http://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/dementia_report_2012/en/index.html (accessed April 22, 2013).



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How Can I Better Deal With Depression?

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BY GABRIELE RIENAS

Q I was devastated to learn recently that a pastor's wife in our town committed suicide. I had met her only a few times. She appeared to be a solid ministry partner with her husband. I cannot stop thinking about how tragic this is. I have had some private battles with periodic depression. Generally, I push through them alone, but this news makes me wonder if there is something more I can do to deal with it better.

A You are right to take another look at what you are experiencing and to ask questions about dealing with depression. Depression is a diagnosable, treatable condition. Even men and women



It seems difficult for a Christian leader to admit a struggle with despondency for fear he or she will appear weak or unspiritual.

of the Bible experienced periods of despair and overwhelming sadness. Unfortunately, it seems difficult for a Christian leader to admit a struggle with despondency for fear he or she will appear weak or unspiritual.

For ministry wives, the public role makes it difficult to risk vulnerability by speaking up. Ironically, depression is extremely common among pastors' wives. You are not alone.

An article¹ written by Donna Bordelon Alder details a survey that she and Dr. Cecil Paul, psychology professor at Eastern Nazarene College, developed. They administered it to a number of pastors' wives and the results reveal the following:

- The average pastor's wife in the survey was 39.1 years old and had been in ministry for 12.2 years.
- For the most part she described the ministry as rewarding, exciting, and challenging.
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being poor) she felt 7.45 about life and 6.78 about herself.
- Fifty-four percent of the women surveyed reported both ups and downs in ministry.
- Twelve percent only saw the downs.

The most compelling finding was that 88 percent of all the women surveyed answered yes to the question, "Have you ever experienced periods of depression?" Twenty-five percent said they had suffered depression once or twice in their lifetime. Twenty-three percent reported once or twice a year.

Remember that these are the same women who reported a general satisfaction with ministry along with positive feelings about their role. The reason for the strong correlation between ministry and depression is not clear. However, it would not be a great stretch to assume that contributing factors would include spiritual warfare, the pressures, demands, high expectations, and challenging relational dynamics of ministry.

It seems you are aware of what you are dealing with when you cycle through the dark times. Unfortunately, there are many women who experience something like this and falsely conclude that they are unspiritual, undisciplined, or even crazy. They are not aware that their condition is diagnosable and manageable.

Depression is a likely diagnosis if five of the following symptoms are present:

- sadness (or irritability) that lasts at least 2 weeks or longer
- loss of interest or pleasure in things that normally would bring satisfaction
- a shift in eating habits (increase or decrease of food intake)
- a shift in sleeping habits (increase or decrease)
- restlessness or apathy
- fatigue or loss of energy
- feelings of worthlessness
- difficulty concentrating or focusing
- thoughts of death

Some people will experience one or two episodes of depression in a lifetime, while others cycle through periods of despondency on a cyclical basis. The questions remains, What they can do to better deal with it?

I am assuming you already have a prayer life and a relationship with Jesus as your Shelter and your Helper. However, in the dark times it is common to feel like God is distant and unavailable. Continue to exercise your faith as much as you can, leaning on what you know rather than what you feel. Listen to worship music that emphasizes God's nearness and love.

Here are some additional suggestions:

Admit it: There is no shame in admitting to being depressed or having a tendency to cycle through times of depression. God certainly knows about this and many others experience it. Other than putting on appearances, you gain nothing by keeping it a secret. Instead, as a leadership wife you have a marvelous opportunity to model a healthy perspective on life, admitting the dark times, while walking through them without succumbing to despair. Yes, people are watching. Let them see real life walked out in honest ways.

Talk to someone. Do not try to walk through this alone. Talk to someone about what you are going through. Find a counselor or a trusted mentor who will not minimize or over-spiritualize your struggle. If necessary, invest time and money in this. Your investment will last for a lifetime. One of the biggest sources of both stress and peace in your life is your pattern of thinking. A counselor can help you address your thought life and your beliefs about yourself. Studies indicate that this is among the most successful intervention for depression.

Gather prayer partners who stand ready

One of the biggest sources of both stress and peace in your life is your pattern of thinking.

to pray for you without requiring all the details. Depression seeks isolation but force yourself to stay connected to supportive friends and the important people in your life.

See your doctor. Multiple physical factors can contribute to depression. Among those are hormones, side effects from prescription drug, genetics, and chemistry. Visit your doctor to address the physical reasons. At the same time, discuss any treatment options and seriously consider them.

Self-care: Take care of yourself physically, relationally, and emotionally. This is not selfish but rather stewarding your physical, spiritual, and emotional self in a way that honors both God and yourself. Examine your eating habits, your sleeping habits, your support network (does it exist?), and your stressors. Simplify your life wherever possible and get back to the basics of rest, worship, family, and fun.

Getting back to the tragic event that motivated your question, one thing is absolutely essential. If ideas and fantasies about ways to injure or kill yourself accompany recurring thoughts of death, do not hesitate to get help immediately. If you do not have a counselor or proactive family member you can talk to about this, call 911, a crisis hotline, or get to an emergency room ASAP. Tell someone who takes you seriously now.

Thank you for your honest question. The tragic loss in your town reminds us once again that pastors' wives are real people capable of experiencing great brokenness and despair. Like anyone else, we are utterly dependent on God's grace every day to walk with Him and to allow Him to show us how to walk wisely and victoriously. 🙏

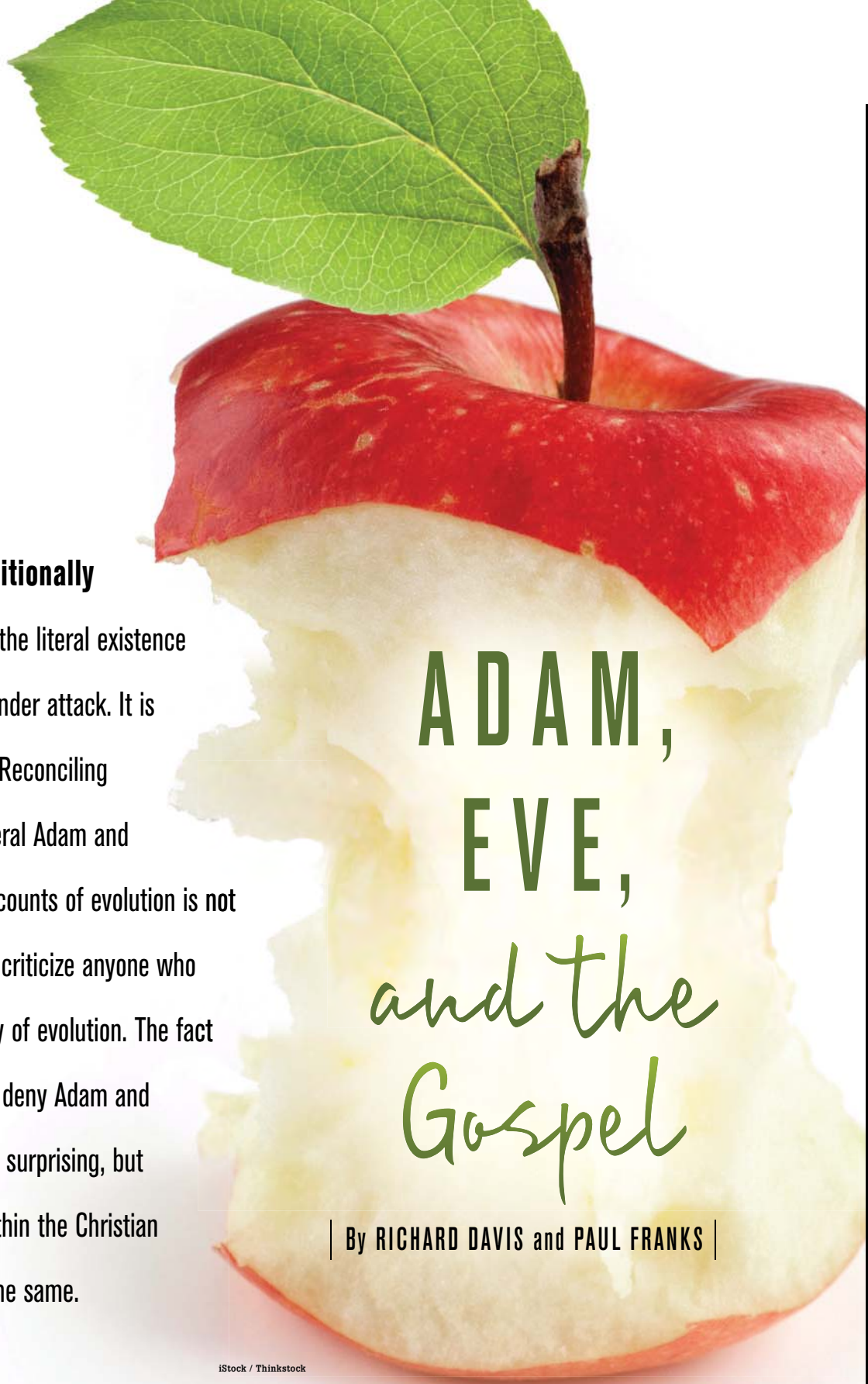
Note

1. Donna Bordelon Alder, "How to Encourage Your Pastor's Wife," *Thriving Pastor* (2005), <http://www.thrivingpastor.org/articles/married/A000000065.cfm>. (accessed 5 April 2013).



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The traditionally accepted belief in the literal existence of Adam and Eve is under attack. It is not hard to see why. Reconciling the existence of a literal Adam and Eve with standard accounts of evolution is not easy, and people will criticize anyone who questions the veracity of evolution. The fact non-Christians would deny Adam and Eve's existence is not surprising, but the growing trend within the Christian community is to do the same.

ADAM,
EVE,
*and the
Gospel*

| By RICHARD DAVIS and PAUL FRANKS |

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For example, Christian evolutionist Denis Lamoureux writes, “My central conclusion in this book is clear: Adam never existed, and this fact has no impact whatsoever on the foundational beliefs of Christianity.”¹ On this account, Adam did not exist, but was simply a mental construct — a figment of the prescientific Near Eastern mind.

Brian McLaren is equally explicit in his denial that we are not to take the accounts of Adam literally. Of the Genesis accounts of Adam, including those describing the Fall, McLaren writes, “It is patently obvious to me that these stories aren’t intended to be taken literally.”²

Many responses to such statements focus on how to properly interpret those early passages. While those responses are necessary, and quite helpful, we hope to provide an additional type of response. We aim to show: 1) there are problematic *theological* consequences in rejecting a literal Adam and 2) there is a powerful *philosophical* argument demonstrating the need for a literal Adam.

THEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING THE LITERAL EXISTENCE OF ADAM

First, let us begin with a consideration of what Jesus thought about Adam’s existence. When the Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife, Jesus pointed out that Moses allowed for divorce (Deuteronomy 24), but only because of the stubborn reality of human rebellion. God’s intention, however, was that divorce would never take place, but “from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:2–9, ESV³).

Although not specifically named, anyone with even a passing familiarity of the Creation story knows whom Jesus is talking about. The “them” are Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:27). Now what is helpful about this passage is this: The Pharisees based their understanding of divorce on Moses’ teaching. But Jesus pointed out that Moses was simply conceding that divorce would occur because of the hardness of human sin and weakness. The Pharisees had an inadequate basis for their teaching on divorce whereas Jesus based His teaching on divorce premised on certain facts about Adam and Eve. That is, Jesus thought the existence of Adam and Eve provided a *better* basis for understanding how God views divorce.

Two questions now arise. First, how could Jesus’ teaching on divorce be *better* than the Pharisees’ teaching if Jesus based His teaching on something that was false? He did not appeal to a “figment of the prescientific Near Eastern mind” to justify His teaching. He appealed to the existence of Adam and Eve.

A second, and more theologically troubling, question is this: What do we make of the fact God incarnate held *false* beliefs about Adam and

THE FACT NON-CHRISTIANS WOULD DENY ADAM AND EVE’S EXISTENCE IS NOT SURPRISING, BUT THE GROWING TREND WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS TO DO THE SAME.

Eve? Even if one says He did not believe Adam existed, but just used the idea to communicate to His audience, it seems strange for God, who is incapable of lying (Numbers 23:19), to use false ideas to communicate truth. If there were no Adam and Eve, then surely Jesus, God the Son, would have been able to communicate His thoughts on divorce without, at the same time, propagating false beliefs. In sum, if there were no physical Adam and Eve, then, in addition to His teaching on divorce being less well grounded than the Pharisees’, Jesus also either held false beliefs or willingly propagated them.

There are further theological concerns though. Consider what the apostle Paul said about Adam. Paul quite clearly links our redemption in Christ with the historic reality of the fall of Adam. At the core of his theological masterpiece Paul writes, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12, ESV). This pinpoints sin’s entry into the world. How did sin, and through it death, gain its foothold in the world? It was “through one man.” Notice Paul says “man” — not myth, legend, or Near Eastern construct — but man. Myths, legends, and constructs cannot sin. You need a moral agent with the power of choice to bring sin “into the world.” There can be no sin (or death) without a sinner. Sin is not a free-floating airborne virus you simply breathe in. Rather, like a deadly cancer, sin gets its life from a host.

With the fall of Adam (and its effects) in place, Paul ratchets up the



ADAM, EVE, AND THE GOSPEL (continued from page 33)

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argument to establish two major doctrinal points: 1) "If many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many" (5:15, ESV), 2) "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (5:17, ESV).

Notice the form of the reasoning in both cases: "If . . . much more." It's the same way Jesus reasoned in Mark 2:9-11 — "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — He said to the paralytic — "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home" (ESV). The onlookers recognized that anyone could say, "I can forgive sins," regardless of an ability to do so. This is why Jesus provided them with something that was easier to believe, even if harder to pull off. Because they knew the man was paralyzed, once they saw him pick up his bed and leave, it was easy to believe that Jesus could heal. It was on that basis — Jesus' ability to heal — that they were to accept what was harder to believe — Jesus' ability to forgive sins.

How does this relate to what Paul tells us in Romans 5? Paul recognized that it was hard to accept that grace and life abound to many through one man — Christ. This is why he first calls their attention to what was easier to believe, that sin and death entered through one man — Adam. If you take away Adam and his trespass — the much easier thing to believe in Paul's mind — you lose his "much mores." If Lamoureux and McLaren, among others, are right, then we no longer have the grounds for accepting the wonderful promises Paul writes about in Romans — that grace and righteousness and life abound to many through Christ.

A PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF ADAM

So far we have seen that there are problems with denying the existence of Adam, but we need not stop at that. There are also good reasons to believe that Adam existed. This begins with something that we all recognize in ourselves — our basic operating systems are deeply flawed. Our natures are sinful and our hearts corrupt. What, then, could be the

cause of this? What could cause us to have this sinful nature? There are three — and only three — possibilities for why we have a sinful nature. It is either uncaused (there is no reason or explanation for why we have it), self-caused (we brought it into existence ourselves), or it is caused by another. Consider each of these in turn.

Our sin nature is uncaused

The least plausible option is that there is no cause of a sin nature. Why is this the least plausible option? Well, simply put, because it is impossible. To say that our sin nature is *uncaused* would imply that something (a sin nature) came into existence out of nothing and for no reason. The problem with this is that it denies the obviously true principle that anything that begins to exist must have a cause for its existence. Imagine what denying such a commonsense principle would do to our scientific research. When trying to find the cause of cancer, medical researchers would have to entertain the possibility that there simply is no cause of cancer — it can just suddenly arise uncaused (perhaps this will be the next argument from the tobacco industry).⁴

Our sin nature is self-caused

The first option is obviously a failure, but what about the second? Could each of us be the cause of our own sin nature? The prospects do not look all that promising because on this view our choosing to sin would precede our possessing a sin nature, but things are precisely the other way around. Not only is this confirmed in our personal experience, but Scripture also teaches that our sin nature comes first and our sinful choices come second. Jesus tells us that "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexually immorality, theft, false witness, slander" (Matthew 15:19, ESV). Our evil thoughts do not cause our malformed heart; it's the other way around. Here someone might object to this ordering by saying, "You do not know that there wasn't a time much earlier — one you cannot now remember — where (like Adam) you had no sin nature but then brought one into existence by your own free choice." The problem with this objection is that it flies in the face of Psalm 51:5: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." None of us were sinning from the time of conception of course; that is not even possible. But David says we were nevertheless "sinful." The implication here is that you can be sinful without actually sinning and that such sinfulness is present from conception. Clearly then, our sin nature comes first and our sinful choices later, thus ruling out the second option.

Our sin nature is caused by another

The final option is that another caused our sinful nature. We inherit



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our fallen natures from our parents, who also inherited theirs, and so on down the line. Now here is the important point. This chain of prior generations from which we inherited our sin natures cannot go back forever. For then there would be no explanation for why anyone had a sin nature – no explanation for how sin entered the human race in the first place. The best explanation for the existence of a sin nature is precisely what we see in the biblical account. There was an original human pair – Adam (“the man,” Genesis 2:20, ESV) and Eve (“the mother of all living,” Genesis 3:20, ESV) – who sinned but did not do so because they had a sin nature. It is the physical existence of Adam and Eve that stops the regress of sin natures and provides an explanation for why we have one now.

CONCLUSION

There are several ways one might go about arguing against false ideas. One way is to show that the idea has, unavoidably, problematic consequences. This method provides the resources for refuting Lamoureux’s earlier claim that denying the real existence of Adam “has no impact whatsoever on the foundational beliefs of Christianity.”

It is simply false that such a denial would have no impact on the foundational beliefs of Christianity. Any view that results in both Jesus and Paul believing and teaching false ideas will necessarily have a tremendous impact on one’s understanding of Christianity. As we have seen, this is what happens. Denying that Adam and Eve existed means that not only did Jesus and Paul hold and communicate false beliefs (which would necessitate the denial of the inerrancy of the Bible), but also that we have no reason to accept some of their theological claims either because they depend on those false beliefs. We should also note that such an argument is not likely to persuade someone like McLaren, but that is not due to a fault in the argument. Instead, it is due to the fact McLaren is already committed to a radical reworking of historical notions of Christianity. Once you are ready to cast off entirely the notions of “the Fall” and “original sin,”⁵ then the rejection of Adam and Eve is a minor issue.

Another way one might demonstrate that an idea is false is to give a positive argument establishing what the false idea denies. We have seen that there is a powerful philosophical argument for the existence of Adam and Eve – an argument that simply makes use of the thoroughly biblical notion of “sin nature.” Combined, these responses show that one need not shy away from maintaining that there was a literal Adam and Eve. In fact, we ought to do what Jesus and Paul did, proclaim it boldly both among fellow believers and those outside the Christian community. 📌



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NOTES

1. Denis Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 367.
2. Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 48.
3. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
4. For further elaboration of this point, especially as it relates to God creating the universe from nothing, we highly recommend Paul Copan’s article in *Enrichment*, “If God Made the Universe, Who Made God?” vol. 17, no. 2 (2012): 122–25.
5. McLaren, 43. Tellingly, according to McLaren, the account of “the Fall” is not only one absent a fall, but is actually the first stage of humanity’s ascent (*ibid.*, 50).



THE KINGDOM NET:



Learning to Network Like Jesus

| By JOSEPH CASTLEBERRY |

CONSIDER THE SPIRITUAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND PRACTICAL REASONS
YOU SHOULD MASTER THE ART OF NETWORKING.

Pastors don't

know anything about business." I

have heard statements like this frequently

enough that they no longer surprise me,

even though they still may irritate me.

Such a hyperbolic denunciation of my

profession will usually draw a defensive

comment from me. But the fact remains

— and it really bothers me — I need to

improve my business skills if I want to

obey my ministry calling and achieve its

greatest possible effect.

A particular area of business skills has enormous potential for enhancing a minister's performance — networking. No one can operate any kind of business or professional practice successfully without establishing a network of relationships that will make the availability of their goods and service known to the people who need them. That fact applies as much to church ministry as it does to any other field of work and perhaps even more powerfully, since networking is part of the nature of the kingdom of God. To operate successfully in God's kingdom, you must have good networking skills.

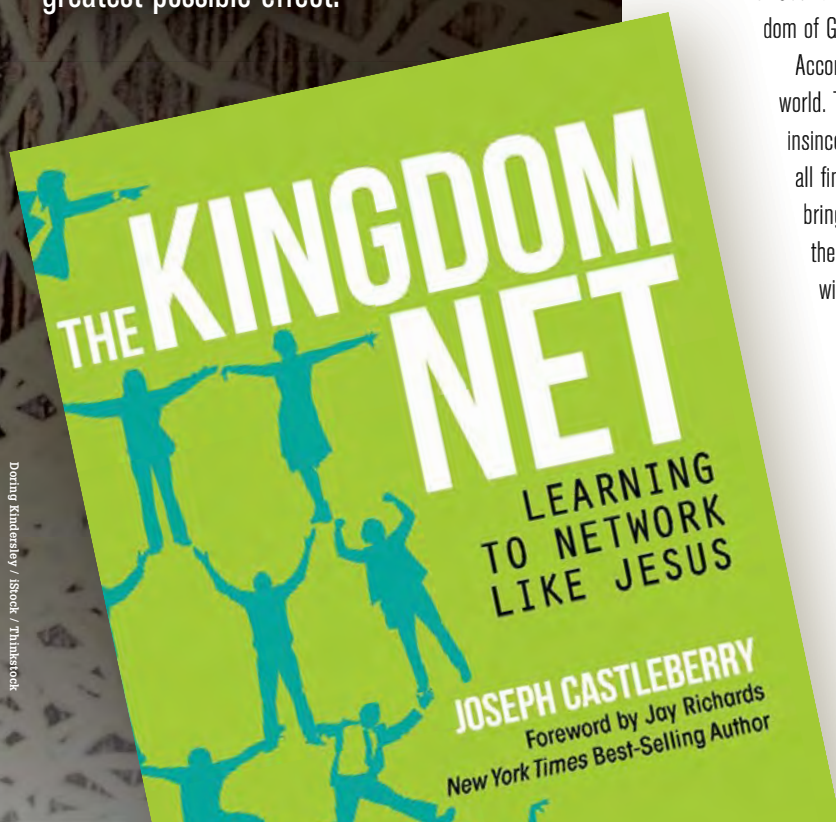
After spending several years studying and honing my own networking skills to improve my obedience to my ministry calling, I have written a book, *The Kingdom Net: Learning to Network Like Jesus*, so I can share what I have learned and empower others to greater influence for Christ. The following excerpts from this book should give you some insights about the spiritual, theological, and practical reasons you should master in the art of networking.

THE KINGDOM NET

The kingdom of God, Jesus said, is like a net (Matthew 13:47). That figurative saying from the Parable of the Net has special meaning in today's world of Internet, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Classmates.com, e-mailing, texting, and other social networking tools. Unlike many languages, English has a specific word for net-like relational connections: network. Since networks describe metaphorical nets rather than literal ones, we could accurately understand Jesus to say, "The kingdom of God is a network." As a matter of fact, I like to call the kingdom of God the "Kingdom net."

According to Jesus, the Kingdom is God's net cast into the world. The net catches both good fish and bad. Sincere and insincere people, true believers and faithless fellow travelers, all find themselves caught up in it. The kingdom of God brings in a lot of people; and, as we will see, some of them become part of the network itself. In the end, God will sort out who belongs and who does not.

Like New Testament-era fishermen working their nets, God constantly works the Kingdom net — weaving it larger, mending its torn places, catching more fish. In another parable-like saying, Jesus told His disciples, "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mark 1:17). The disciples of Jesus Christ serve as His fishers — in effect, the network He deploys to catch more people.



CARRYING ON WITH JESUS' WORK

Jesus meant for His disciples to do more miracles and evangelize and win more people than He had done during His life on earth. In fact, the disciples of Jesus have carried on His works for 20 centuries since His death. The numerical tally of their miracles and their “fishing results” vastly exceeds the total number of people Jesus touched during His life on earth. Of course, Jesus deserves all the credit for our accomplishments since He performed them all through us. And He will also reap all the profits. After all, we are His fishing company. The big one that got away, the little ones we almost let slip through the net, the fish we caught and delivered to His shore — all the “net profits” belong to Him.

If the kingdom of God is a net, then it is primarily a fishnet. The Kingdom does not seek to take the place of earthly governments, businesses, the family, schools, labor unions, hospitals, any other institution of society. The Kingdom net exists to fish. Although the Kingdom embraces and holds sway over every dimension of our lives, it can never truly and fully reflect the reign of God over us without engaging us in the King's quest to seek and save the lost. The Kingdom net always involves reconciling lost people to the God who loves them. Kingdom networking ultimately focuses on bringing people to Jesus.

When we see the people of God brought together under the lordship of Christ and sense our connection to them through the Holy Spirit who makes King Jesus present in us all, we see the Kingdom. So the kingdom of God is both visible and invisible. The presence of Jesus, at work through His people, makes it visible. The parable of the net[work] portrays the Kingdom as a network of people.

WHY FISHERMEN?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus called so many fishermen to become His disciples? It's because they were “net-workers.”

No, I am not attempting some lame humor. I am serious. Fishermen were the kind of people Jesus needed. Certainly, Jesus' disciples did not understand many things when He chose them. None of them were great theologians, skilled writers, trained public speakers, or psychological counselors. They had not received training in any of the subjects so popular in

today's Bible colleges and seminaries. But they all had one indisputable qualification: They were networkers.

At the most literal level, Peter and his friends knew how fishing nets worked. They knew how to make nets, how to cast them over the side of the boat, how to work them in the water, how to draw them back into the boat, and how to mend and maintain them after the day's work. But they also knew something even more vital.

Running a successful fishing business in first-century Israel required more than just working nets. It also required networking. Fishermen not only knew how to work nets, but also how to work as a team. They knew how to take the fish to market and sell them. They knew how to find people who would transport the fish into the interior of the country and market them in the surrounding communities. They understood distribution, marketing, sales, profit margins, and other business aspects of their work. We would recognize them today as expert networkers.

If you intend to fish for people, then you have to know how to operate people “nets.” Networking is the essential Kingdom task; but, despite this fact, seminaries do not commonly teach courses in networking. I do not think the word ever came up during my own 10 years of academic training for Christian ministry. To be fair, the word *network* had not entered the vernacular by my time — the early 1980s — except in broadcasting. But even so, how could we have overlooked such an incredibly important skill?

As a college president, I serve as Networker-in-Chief for my school. I love it; since, as a people person, I delight in maintaining friendships, meeting new people, and weaving these relationships into a broader, stronger network that we can deploy to accomplish our mission as a university. I love my job, and I love the people-tasks it entails. I especially love the fact the fruit of our work relates so directly to the mission of God's kingdom. But my job holds no patent on networking. Any follower of Jesus, regardless of his or her work, can express the kingdom of God through networking.

SACRED AND SECULAR CALLING

All occupations have both secular and sacred dimensions — whether you are a pastor, bus driver, lawyer, factory worker, engineer, farmer, businessperson, artist, doctor, or something else. Callings get their sacredness from the One who does the calling; and, because God has called us all, all callings are sacred. They are all secular too (i.e. “worldly”), because the people God has called us to live in the world. (If you allow your profession of faith to make you uncomfortable and awkward around those who do not share your faith in Christ, you will not succeed in allowing God to use you for expanding the Kingdom net.)



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A minister who sees pastoral work as only sacred, and not also secular, will stunt his or her church and personal life. Too many pastors spend all their time with Christians, dooming them to a form of leadership that remains merely transactional and hardly ever becomes truly transformational.



**WHEN PASTORS SPEND
ALL THEIR TIME
WITH CHRISTIANS,**

**YOU CAN SAFELY BET THAT THE MEMBERS OF THEIR
CONGREGATIONS WILL DO THE SAME.**

According to the leadership theory of James McGregor Burns, most leadership is merely transactional. In other words, leaders trade their performance for goods and services their followers can offer them. So maybe a pastor offers preaching, coordination of religious rituals like the sacraments, weddings, funerals, and other services, in exchange for a place of honor in the community, a (usually) small salary, and perhaps a parsonage to live in. Transactional pastors place a strong emphasis on maintaining the church's traditions and the status quo. They seldom call on the people in their church to do anything hard or sacrificial, and the people do not really expect their pastor to do much, either. The church does not grow, people do not routinely come to Christ through the church's ministry, and no one experiences transformation. Over time, the church population grows older and older . . . and in time . . . it disappears.

By contrast, transformational leadership centers on a transforming vision. The leader calls on the community to make sacrifices and take risks to achieve the vision. If the vision involves evangelism, the church calls on its members to spend time not only with Christians, but also with people who have not yet entered the Kingdom.

When pastors spend all their time with Christians, you can safely bet that the members of their congregations will do the same. Some churches even make strong efforts to get Christians to do business primarily with other Christians and to avoid doing business with people outside their Christian circle. It sounds like a great formula for creating lawsuits between Christians, but not a sound business or evangelistic strategy.

A pastor friend, an extremely effective evangelist, requires all of his

staff to cultivate friendships with unbelievers. He knows they will never bring people to Christ unless they talk to people who do not know Christ. As part of their job reports, they must describe how and with whom they are building friendships outside the church. As a result, over the past 10 years, the church has multiplied five times in membership.

Some might claim they have a calling to minister inside the church rather than evangelize those who do not yet know the Lord. I have no doubt that some people have a calling to work primarily with believers, for example, to teach in a Christian college or school, or to manage a Christian compassion agency, or to lead a Christian denomination. These kinds of agencies play important roles in the Kingdom and have great value for a variety of reasons. And people in these kinds of vocations will often spend more time with Christians than with non-Christians. But even they must realize that their "Christian work" can never take the place of the mission of God. It can support and aid others who focus on evangelism, but it can never relieve them of the basic Kingdom calling to share their faith in Christ with those who have not yet experienced the reality and power of His rule. Those who work full-time in Christian businesses and agencies must take extra care to maintain opportunities to meet, befriend, and influence people who need a saving encounter with the Lord.

PASSIVITY IN NETWORKING

Inside the warm fellowship of a denomination, we find it easy to take a passive approach to building networks. Our elected leaders carry the responsibility for holding the Fellowship together. They plan regional and local meetings. They manage health insurance and retirement plans. They coordinate missionary efforts and promote denominationally sponsored colleges and carry out other denominational tasks.

Missionaries in denominations often network brilliantly, especially in those groups that believe in "faith missions." Building a group of about 100 or more churches to support their work, they carefully stay in touch with that financial lifeline from whatever far-flung locale they may serve. But often, denominational pastors have the luxury of having the network brought to them. They seem to have no need to get overly intentional about networking. Independent pastors, on the other hand, have to get much more aggressive in their networking. If they do not go out and make a network, they will not have one. An intentional and aggressive commitment to networking — inside the church and outside — may in fact be one of the main reasons that independent churches are growing faster than denominational churches in America.¹ Being part of a denomination brings awesome benefits, but it should not become a trap that leads to passivity in networking.

THE KINGDOM NET: LEARNING TO NETWORK LIKE JESUS *(continued from page 39)*

One might think that the essence of pastoral work is networking. I think that a certain kind of networking is indeed the essence of effective pastoral work. But many church leaders do not seem as vigorous in their networking as they might be. The median size for churches in the United States is around 75 members.² From that fact, it would seem that most pastors manage to carry out their ministry in a fairly small social circle — say, some 500 to 1,000 people.

Such a small circle can result in a warm community of believers, but those communities can often become too inwardly focused. Without a vigorous process of continual, conscious networking, the circle does not grow. And a stagnant church has a hard time explaining how it is following Jesus and obeying the Great Commission. I mean no condemnation here, as reasons may exist as to why a particular church cannot grow in its specific location. But such churches will always feel that something important is missing. If a church really cannot grow because of its location, then it has an extra heavy responsibility to help churches grow in other places. That requires them to get deeply involved in the Great Commission by sending, giving, and praying.

FULL-FLEDGED RELATIONSHIPS

Some people assume that we can live compartmentalized lives where we leave Jesus at home or at church. Many Christians do not welcome Jesus into their workplace. As a result, we share Jesus with our friends who already believe in Him, and we do not share Jesus with those who do not believe in Him. But Kingdom networking will not flow on that short circuit. Developing full-fledged friendships, complete with shared activities outside of religious activities, almost always bears the ripest fruit. Such activities might include helping people move into their houses, playing golf, attending sporting events, making quilts, playing in the local civic symphony, or getting active in a civic organization such as Rotary International. The options are as diverse as human interests.

As real relationships develop, the reality of Christ in our lives begins to emerge. Sometimes, deeper relationships allow us to share our Kingdom networks with people in ways that benefit them professionally or personally in completely nonspiritual aspects. As we support them with our prayers and engage them with the Kingdom net, we will eventually touch them spiritually as well. No matter what else we do to bring our coworkers to Christ, we should be faithful to pray for them.

JESUS' NETWORKING

Jesus expanded the Kingdom net everywhere He went, calling people like the tax collectors Levi and Zacchaeus to repentance and forgiveness and a changed life that put their skills to work in new ways. He

interacted with sinful people and religious people, powerful people and the oppressed, the sick and the healthy. He received crucial support from a young boy with a few loaves and fishes, which He multiplied to feed a large crowd. He had a meal with just about everyone. In all these encounters, He conducted a master class in human relations. Given the spectacular spread of Christianity since Jesus first began to declare the Kingdom net, the wise networker will make the study of Jesus' way of dealing with people his or her best textbook on networking. 📖



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This article is excerpted from *The Kingdom Net: Learning to Network Like Jesus* (My Healthy Church, 2013)

NOTES

1. Russell D. Moore, "Where Have All the Presbyterians Gone: Nondenominational churches are the fastest growing in the country." *Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 2011.
2. Hartford Institute for Religion Research. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong. (accessed 15 August 2013).



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the modern family AND THE FAMILY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

By **George Paul Wood**

Jay Pritchett is the head of an extended family. He and his ex-wife, DeDe, have two adult children, Claire and Mitchell. His second wife, Gloria, is Colombian and has one son, Manny Delgado, from a previous marriage. Jay and Gloria also are expecting a son of their own, Joe. Claire married Phil Dunphy, and together they have three teenaged children: Haley, Alex, and Luke. (They are roughly the same age as their step-uncle, Manny.) Mitchell and his partner, Cameron Tucker, adopted Vietnamese orphan Lily, whom they are raising together (and who will be older than her uncle, her father's half-brother, Joe).

Marriage. Children. Divorce. Remarriage. Blended families. Multicultural relationships. Gay marriage. Adoption. These are the comedic elements of *Modern Family*, ABC's award-winning television show. They are also the elements — among many others — of the real modern family.

The question the winter 2014 issue of *Enrichment* seeks to answer is this: How does the Church, which is the family of God, minister to the modern family?

Even framing the question this way is potentially misleading, however, for it assumes that Christian families are whole, while non-Christian families are broken. We pastors know this is false. We know non-Christian families that are whole. We also know churchgoing folk who have premarital sex, get pregnant out of wedlock, cohabit, have affairs, divorce, remarry, etc. Perhaps churchgoers do these things less frequently than the general population, but statistical infrequency is not the same thing as actual holiness.

So, when we ask how the family of God ministers to the modern family, we're talking about how broken people minister the life-changing power of God to other broken people in an especially tender area of their brokenness — namely, their family life.

Entire libraries could be (and have been) written on this topic, so we've had to be selective in the topics we address. Here are the order and logic of the articles that follow:

- In our opening interview — “The State of Our Unions” — leading family scholars Elizabeth Marquardt and W. Bradford Wilcox examine the condition of the family in modern America.
- Diana R. Garland outlines an agenda for family ministry in “Equipping and Supporting Families to Live Faith Together.” That agenda focuses on family formation, Christlike relationships, and a sense of mission.

The next three articles develop ideals for the church: moving singles toward marriage; moving marriages toward health; and when children become part of the picture, moving the entire family toward health.

- In “A Lighthouse of Love,” Susan and Dale Mathis discuss what a church must do to create a pro-marriage culture.
- In “8 Habits of Christlike Marriages,” Robert S. Paul outlines precisely that.
- And in “Family Worship,” Rob Rienow shows how spiritual practices in the home create space for the development of a healthy family.

The final seven articles deal with the realities of families in the church, that is, situations that are less than ideal.

- Jane D. Richard, in “Ministry to Families in the Wake of Divorce,” outlines the best practices for churches in these situations.
- Ron L. Deal talks about “Equipping Blended Families for Healthy Christian Living.”
- Mark E. Strong, in “The Other Face in the Picture,” shows how the church can minister to single-parent households, whether mother- or father-led.
- Mentioning single parents reminds us that many people in our churches are neither spouses nor parents. In “Family-ing’ Single Adults,” Dennis Franck offers suggestions about how to create a single-adult-friendly church.
- Our churches also have the opportunity to help children who don't have families. In “Foster-Care Ministry Matters,” Jay Mooney shows how to make the most of those opportunities.
- Families with disabled members experience tremendous stress in their lives. In “Making Your Church Accessible,” Joe N. Butler outlines three key areas that can make your church more welcoming to them.
- Finally, in “Serve, Don't Shout,” we interview Rick Cole about ministering with love and compassion to LGBT families.

On behalf of the editors, I offer these 12 articles to you with the prayer they will help you and your church bring healing to America's broken families — including the ones in your church. ☒



GEORGE PAUL WOOD, director of Ministerial Resourcing for the Assemblies of God and executive editor of *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri

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The State **of OUR** **UNIONS**

Interview with
Elizabeth Marquardt and W. Bradford Wilcox





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The National Marriage Project (NMP) is “a nonpartisan, nonsectarian, and interdisciplinary initiative located at the University of Virginia.” In 1999, it began publishing *The State of Our Unions*, an annual report, “which monitors the current health of marriage and family life in America.” Since 2009, the Center for Marriage and Family (CMF) of the Institute for American Values — “a nonprofit, non-partisan organization dedicated to strengthening families and civil society in the U.S. and the world” — has jointly published *The State of Our Unions* with NMP.



In this interview, George Paul Wood, executive editor for *Enrichment* journal, talks with leading family scholars Elizabeth Marquardt and W. Bradford Wilcox about the state of marriage and family in America. Marquardt and Wilcox are directors of CMF and NMP, respectively.

in 1955, Frank Sinatra first sang these memorable lines: “Love and marriage, love and marriage, Go together like a horse and carriage. This I tell ya, brother, you can’t have one without the other.” How has the relationship between “love” and “marriage” changed in America since Sinatra sang these lyrics almost 60 years ago?

WILCOX: For most young adults in the United States, romantic love has not changed much over the last half century. It still happens for many people in their late teens and early twenties. The connection between romantic love and a move toward getting married, however, is now quite divergent. Most Americans are getting married in their late twenties and early thirties. There is a growing divide between the onset of love and actual marriage. Also, some men have seen their friends treated badly after their divorce. They see marriage and divorce as bad for men. They think, *Why would I do that if I can get the sexual part without having to be married?*

MARQUARDT: We see this most dramatically in the rapid increase of out-of-wedlock childbearing in the last few decades. Well over 44 percent of children are now born outside of marriage. Many people are delaying marriage, but they are not delaying childbearing.

When you ask them why they do not marry the mother or father of their child, they speak of fears of divorce. This is the impact of the divorce revolution on subsequent generations.

Seventy years ago, romantic love, sex, and marriage were closely tied. Would it be fair say that today they are loosely connected?

MARQUARDT: Yes. People have not changed that much. The longing to bond with another, the feelings of love, and the

desire to put the fruit of your love in children — those basic needs to create a human being — have not changed much in the last 60 years.

The social institutions that help channel romantic love to form social behavior such as getting married, however, have been weakened in young people. They do not see marriage as a blessing. There’s a lot of pain in young people today. Thus, young people are stumbling through one

relationship after another.

I have done some study on becoming a single mom by choice. The desire for a child is natural. These women decided to get pregnant via reproductive technologies rather than wait for the right guy to marry.

These women believe a spouse is supposed to meet them in every possible way, in every possible moment — emotionally, sexually, financially — perfect all the time.

WILCOX: Young adults today expect more — in material and emotional terms — when it comes to starting a marriage and starting a family. Their expectation inflation means that college-educated young adults are still getting married and having kids in marriage in their twenties and thirties. One segment of our American society is having kids but not moving into marriage either for economic or relationship reasons, or because they feel they are not ready.

The purpose of the annual *State of Our Unions* report is to “[monitor] the current health of marriage and family life in America.” As family scholars, what kind of data helps determine the health or sickness of American marriages and families?

WILCOX: Kids are most likely to thrive when an intact biological family raises them. Our indicators tap the extent to which both adults and children are coming close to that ideal — the ideal of a relatively happy marriage, in which married biological parents raise their own kids. We do that by looking at marital quality, the percentage of kids born outside of marriage, the percentage of kids living with two married parents, and divorce rates. Unfortunately, we do not have a good indicator from the government that would easily tap the percentage of kids who are living with their own married biological parents. We try to get that through some indirect means as well with the report.

To examine marital quality we look at social survey reports concerning being “very happy” in your marriage. That is a rather blunt instrument for assessing marital quality. If you look at this in a more academic sense, you will find that scholars look at reports of affection, respect, and commitment.

The first *State of Our Unions* report in 1999 opened with this statement: “Key social indicators suggest a substantial weakening of the institution of marriage.” What reasons did the 1999 report offer for that pessimistic conclusion? How have the key social indicators changed in the 15 years since that report?

MARQUARDT: Around the year 2000, the media and public discussion were more open to the idea that divorce is hard for kids. People were more willing to try to improve their

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marriage rather than divorce at the first sign of trouble. The indicators rose for African-American children being raised by their married parents. This was a positive shift.

At that moment, if we could have come together as a country, we could have really done some good things. Rather than sustaining that, the marriage debate went off in different directions. We started to fight about a lot of other things besides moms and dads.

In the meantime, we see this emerging class divide in marriage. Those who have the privilege and benefit of having gone to college have gotten the message that to do right by their kids, they need to try not to get divorced. We see a very child-raising-intensive model in the family now. The married dads are some of the best dads we have ever had. They are still the breadwinners, but they also are more emotionally involved with their kids than previous generations of fathers.

On the other hand, more fathers than ever are not involved in their kids' lives at all. They are not married to the moms, which means they are not available in any meaningful way after the child is born. If we could recapture that moment when we were ready to say that kids need intact families — they need their mom and dad — we could do some really good things.

WILCOX: There is some ambiguity in changes in these social indicators. Americans who are getting married and having kids — in that order — are more likely to enjoy a stable marriage and a stable family life than their peers who were getting married in the 1970s and '80s at the height of the divorce revolution. Also, the percentage of kids living in single-parent families has stabilized in the last 20 years. More important, college-educated Americans are enjoying relatively stable, relatively high-quality marriages and families.

The problem, however, comes from a tremendous increase in privatization, family instability, and the erosion of a strong marriage culture among working class and poor Americans. We see this in the change in percentage of children born outside of marriage. In 1960, 6 percent of kids were born outside of marriage, compared to about 44 percent today. Most of those kids are being born to moms who do not have a college degree.

One positive change is in the divorce rate. The divorce rate

66 We open the newspaper or turn on the television and think, *It's hopeless*. But it is not hopeless. If a husband and wife come from similar faith traditions, if they come from married-parent families, if they have gone to college, statistically, the odds are lower that they are going to break up. — **Marquardt**



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was about 50 percent in the 1970s and '80s. That rate is about 43 percent now, a modest decline.

Divorce is one of the key social indicators of the health of marriage and family life in America. What kinds of stressors influence a couples' decision to divorce?

WILCOX: A large minority of couples — approximately 43 percent — who are getting married today will get divorced. What leads to divorce? The husband's emotional engagement to his wife is important. After the honeymoon wears off, many men get into their routines of working, helping raise their children, keeping the house going, and they are not emotionally engaged with their wives. This can lead to a downward spiral in many marriages. People expect more in romantic and emotional terms from their marriages. One of the challenges for husbands — and also for wives — is to be affectionate, respectful, and forgiving to one another. In a long-term marriage, that can be quite challenging.

Other factors like unemployment, financial pressures, depression, having a disabled child — any kind of stress can wear away at a marriage and help push it toward divorce.

MARQUARDT: A family's stress is a call to people of faith to help them. If a couple at church has a special-needs child, offer to babysit so the parents can go on a date. I do not want people to get too discouraged. One of the recurring features in our Save Our Unions meetings is an article by Brad Wilcox, "Your Chances of Divorce May Be Much Lower Than You Think." We open the newspaper or turn on the television and think, *It's hopeless*. But it is not hopeless. If a husband and wife come from similar faith traditions, if they come from married-parent families, if they have gone to college, statistically, the odds are lower that they are going to break up.

How does divorce affect children? Are children of divorce more susceptible to falling prey to social pathologies?

MARQUARDT: I wrote a book on the inner lives of children of divorce. We hear a lot about the studies that indicate children

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of divorce are more likely to end up on drugs, in prison, or pregnant as a teenager — troubling outcomes. I wanted to look deeper than that. Even if you end up “fine” as a child of divorce, does this mean that divorce is not a big deal?

I did a study with the late Norval D. Glenn, professor emeritus of sociology at University of Texas at Austin. We talked to grown children of divorce and people who grew up with married parents. A person’s family structure shapes how they approach the big questions of life regarding moral and spiritual beliefs. Children want to know: Who am I, where do I belong, what is truth, who is God, what is right and wrong? If a child grew up traveling back and forth between mom and dad in different worlds, the child must answer these big questions alone.

When parents are married and have differences, it is their job to make sense of the differences; it is not their child’s job. Divorce hands children a big task to make sense of the big questions in life earlier. Some children can rise to that task pretty well, but some really struggle.

Mavis Heatherington, University of Virginia, looked at several studies over a number of years. Of people from divorced families, 20 to 25 percent had what she called *severe long-term damage*, compared to about 10 percent from married families. So those from divorced families were about 2 to 2.5 times as likely to have serious long-term problems.

Some people would say you would want to avoid anything that would double your child’s risks of having serious long-term problems. Other people say since 20 to 25 percent of children of divorce have severe long-term problems, that means 75 to 80 percent are fine. Because a person comes through something without obvious symptoms does not mean that it did not shape him or her.

WILCOX: The most severe consequences of divorce are applicable to the minority of children and to a minority of adults — a large minority, but still a minority. Most adults who were children of divorce end up doing well, but we must think about how much pain we are willing to distribute to the population among both kids and adults.

Family breakups affect some communities at much higher rates. That puts a burden on kids, parents, schools, and local and state

governments. This is not just an individual challenge facing the country; it is a collective challenge facing the country.

An old playground chant says, “First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage.” In America today, people are increasingly ignoring that order — love, marriage, family. How common are cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing? What effects do these practices have on cohabiting couples and on children born and raised out of wedlock?

WILCOX: One of the striking things we see in the research now is that most young women in America are putting love, baby carriage, and marriage in that order. A majority of first-borns are to women who are not married. Kids who are born with unmarried parents are about three times as likely to experience a breakup in their own relationships than kids born to married parents.

MARQUARDT: When we talk about children born outside of marriage, we need to talk about family instability. The divorce rate is troublingly high, but the cohabitation breakup rate is far higher. People say, “Well, you know, little Joey’s mom and dad are not married, but they are living together, so what’s the difference?” The difference is this: They are less likely to stay

together if they have not made that public promise before God and everybody that they are going to stick together. This means a lot of flux in little Joey’s life.

Over the course of childhood, over 18 years or so, a child is more likely to go through lots of different parents’ partners who come in and out of the household. This exposes a child to more risks. Well-documented federal data indicate a mother’s boyfriends are far more likely to harm children than a father’s girlfriends.

Sometimes people ask me, “If you are going to get a divorce, what is the best time for kids?”

There is no good time. The older your child is, the more he/she has to lose. A child’s identity is built on this intact family story that has suddenly come apart. They have a lot to grieve. The younger a child is when parents break up, the more likely he/she is going to grow up in this post-divorce chaos.

“Family breakups affect some communities at much higher rates. That puts a burden on kids, parents, schools, and local and state governments. This is not just an individual challenge facing the country; it is a collective challenge facing the country. — Wilcox



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Several of the *State of Our Unions* reports have highlighted the decline of child-centeredness in our country. What do the reports mean by “child-centeredness,” and what is the meaning and significance of this decline?

MARQUARDT: Child-centeredness is a society in which everyone recognizes that reproducing the next generation is important. It is not just a personal choice or a lifestyle choice; it is something that as a society is good and important.

What does that look like in your community? I live in a child-centered neighborhood, with a lot of playgrounds and good schools, a great library, a police force patrolling the streets, and pretty good neighbors. All that costs money; it requires social privilege. When parents cannot rely on their communities to be child centered and child-friendly, people retreat and try to privatize it in their own way.

The phenomenon of helicopter parenting, hyperparenting, and overscheduled children, in part, is a reaction to a loss of childhood in our societies. Parents feel the need to retreat because they cannot count on any institution to help them.

WILCOX: More concretely, about 49 percent of households had children in the 1960s, compared to about 33 percent today. Families had 3.6 kids on average, down to about 1.9 today. In terms of the amount of time adults are spending with kids, the number of kids they are having, and the presence of children in the home, child-centeredness has declined.

What difference do religious faith and practice make when it comes to marriage and family life? Also, what difference do marriage and family life make to religious faith and practice?

MARQUARDT: Some colleagues and I — Brad was part of this group — brought together social scientists, theologians, and others to reflect on how the shape of their family impacts the faith lives of children as they grow up. Our new report is called “Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?” (<http://www.centerformarriageandfamilies.org/shape-of-families/>).

“It is becoming clear that churches need to be concerned about helping families and child well-being, not just for the sake of the children, but also for the health of the church in the future. People who grow up without married parents are less likely to be involved in a faith community as an adult. — Marquardt



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It is becoming clear that churches need to be concerned about helping families and child well-being, not just for the sake of the children, but also for the health of the church in the future. People who grow up without married parents are less likely to be involved in a faith community as an adult. This has real implications for the future of the church and the vitality of the congregation. Those who grow up without their married parents speak of feeling less understood in their congregations. Only about a fourth who were actively involved in church said that someone in their church reached out to them when their parents divorced.

WILCOX: In general, parents who are regular, involved churchgoers in some kind of religious community tend to be happier with their spouse and their children. We most likely find this kind of pattern in couples who share the same faith and who attend church together and pray together. Christopher Ellison, professor of sociology, University of

Texas at San Antonio, suggests that praying together is a more powerful predictor of one’s satisfaction in marriage than simply attending church together.

Among couples reporting that God is the center of their marriage, 75 percent said they are happy in their marriage, compared with 50 percent of couples who do not have a shared belief that God was present in their marriage.

How does this affect the church? My research suggests we can attribute almost a third of recent declines in church attendance to shifts in family structure. What happens in the family has enormous consequences for what happens in church communities.

How can churches promote healthy marriages and families within their congregations and within the community?

MARQUARDT: Many children of divorce do not have parents bringing them to church. We need to look beyond the doors of the church to figure out how to minister to these kids, how to welcome them.

One of the things I did in one of my studies was to retell the Parable of the Prodigal Son to young people from divorced or

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married-parent families and have them react to it.

People from married-parent families would tend to say, "Oh, yeah, I recognize that. That reminds me of when I went out and messed up, dated a rotten guy, or when my sister got into drugs. We got our heads together and came home, and our parents were there. That story makes sense to me."

People from divorced-parent families would say, "That reminds me of when my dad left," or "It's like after my parents got divorced and my mom had to work all the time, and nobody was ever there."

They do not see the prodigal son as themselves; they see him as their prodigal parents. Their parents wandered off, and they were waiting in the doorway for their parents to come home.

That is not generally the way pastors preach on that parable. If a pastor comes from a married-parent family or a happy family, he or she needs to learn about how these other family experiences shape their lives and thinking. Hear their voices and let them know you understand them.

WILCOX: First, speak the truth in love. Encourage pastors to articulate the teaching of their own tradition when it comes to marriage and family life.

People need to know the stories; they need to know the values that shape their church's approach to marriage and family life. People might have the best values in the world, but they do not have the virtues or the social support to make good on their commitment to marriage or the values for their families. We need to align our values, virtues, and communities in ways that are most likely to foster a strong family life in our congregations.

You said that only about a quarter of kids going through divorce experience the church community reaching out to them. That seems like a growth opportunity.

MARQUARDT: The intentions here are good. When a child's dad dies, people generally say, "Oh wow, something tragic has happened. Johnny's dad died. This is terrible. What can we do? Let's bring food, let's console the family, and let's gather together."

When a divorce happens, everybody flees. They do not want to take sides; they are afraid they will upset the child; they do not want to make the parents mad, so they say nothing. Kids feel a great tragedy — a major upending of their lives, and nobody says anything.

We talked about the fact younger people are more likely to cohabit, more likely to have their first birth out of wedlock, and more likely to have divorced parents. A young couple asks you, "Why marry?" What is your answer?

WILCOX: The vast majority of Americans today aspire to

lifelong love. Marriage still provides young adults, even today, with the highest hope of realizing that goal. Married couples are happier, more stable, and more financially secure than unmarried couples.

You have to be very clear and frank with young adults concerning marriage. Marriage is difficult. It is challenging. It is hard work. The most successful marriages are ones where spouses die to their selfish desires and put the welfare of their spouse and their kids above their own. Fostering this other-centered marriage is going to be challenging, but it is the best hope of enjoying long-term dividends of a lifelong love.

Even a difficult marriage stands as a sign to the community of God's undying love for the Church. I hope that couples in a difficult or unloving marriage can see how their commitment to the marriage is a powerful witness to their children that it is about more than simply the happiness of the adults who are party to it.

MARQUARDT: Marriage is how you give your child the gift of your child's father. Marriage is how you give a child the gift of the child's mother. Marriage calls you outside yourself and puts you into a bigger story that is an adventure. You can have low times and you can have high times, and you can look back and be glad you did it that way. 📖

Note: Photographs accompanying this article are used for illustrative purposes only. Individuals shown are models and have no connection to concepts, behaviors, or events referenced in the article.



Equipping Believers to Engage a Scientifically-Savvy World

by James T. Bradford
*General Secretary of The General Council
of the Assemblies of God.*

W

hen many of us hear questions on science and how it's applicable to our faith, the knee-jerk reaction is often "No, it doesn't" or "I really don't want to talk about it." It can be a tricky thing to successfully navigate a conversation we feel ill-equipped to discuss. And sometimes science can be seen as a threat to faith.

"Today's pulpits need informed and intelligent ministers of godly passion on scientific matters, whether astronomy, medicine, creationism, or other. Parishioners are often scientists, medical doctors, engineers, and trained analytical thinkers. They hunger for pastors and spiritual leaders who can intelligently and scripturally divide the Word of truth as it herein relates."

-- Joe Girdler,
*Kentucky district superintendent,
attendee of first
Faith & Science Conference*

However, science and faith do not necessarily contradict each other. In fact, science often beautifully resounds God's nature and character in the created world. So the question for us pastors is: "How can we help ourselves and our congregations navigate those scientific conversations?"

That's why we are hosting the 2014 Faith & Science Conference in Springfield, Missouri. The theme, *Genesis and Genetics*, will help equip pastors and laypeople with the information they need to address issues of science in the context of faith.

Additionally, engaging young people in these conversations is very important to their spiritual formation. The Barna Group is discovering that many young people see the church as antagonistic toward science. They need a safe place to discuss these topics—work out their faith—and understand that God can work through the created, orderly universe as well as through the miraculous and supernatural.

This year, we are excited to have John Lennox as a distinguished speaker. Dr. Lennox is a renowned Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford and Pastoral Advisor at Green Templeton College, Oxford. He has the unique ability to communicate even the most complex theories and subjects on a personal and understandable level. The opportunity to engage with Dr. Lennox and other respected leaders from places like FermiLab and the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture on the topic of faith and science is extraordinary.

Join us June 23-25, 2014 at Evangel University for the 2014 Faith & Science Conference, open to both church leadership and congregants.



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Families to*

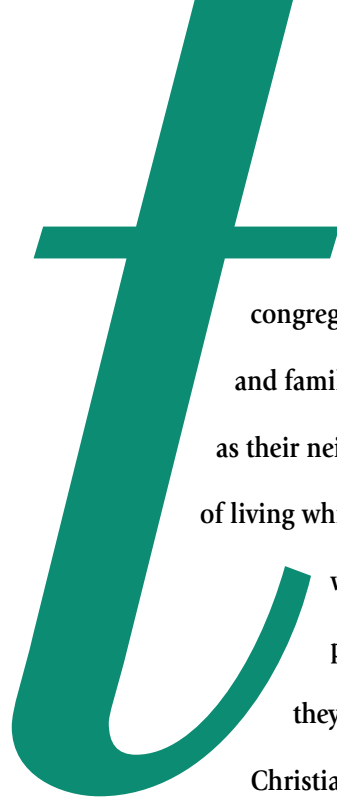
LIVE FAITH

Together

By **Diana R. Garland**

By helping Christians become family for one another, the church points to the good news that “in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”





he term *family ministry* often serves as a catchall for congregational programming. Large American congregations build family life centers, and family ministry is everything that happens there. Some use family ministry programs as their neighborhood outreach. People may attend a course that addresses the stresses of living while they will not come to a worship service. They may come to a Pilates class when they will not come to Bible study. Some churches sense that if we can hook people with resources — recreational and educational programs — they perceive they need, we can hold onto them to give them the resources we perceive they need — Christian discipling and membership in the community of faith.

I define *family ministry* as any activity that directly or indirectly (1) forms families in the congregational community; (2) increases the Christlikeness of the family relationships of Christians; and/or (3) equips and supports families for the work to which God called them together.

Family ministry includes everything a congregation does that has an impact on the formation, development, and ministry of families. It may include programs that address family issues. More broadly, however, a congregation engages in family ministry, indirectly and sometimes unintentionally, as leaders and members worship, conduct their business, pursue their mission, and live in community with one another.

FORMING FAMILIES

According to the above framework, a congregation is responsible to nurture the founding and growth of families who have

committed themselves to follow Jesus and to be family for one another, whether or not they live in the same household or are legally or biologically related to one another. By helping Christians become family for one another, the church points to the good news that “in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith” (Galatians 3:26).

Congregational members need a shared language for understanding

the nature of family in the lives of Christians. Then they can see and name the family relationships that already exist. Congregations seeking to help members support and develop family relationships can do so by studying together what it means to be family: naming existing relationships, providing opportunities to form relationships that may become family, and using the foster-adopt model to enfold the alone and lonely.

Study What It Means to Be Family

Becoming a child of God means being given a family with siblings and parents, like the beloved disciple and Jesus’ mother whom Jesus gave to each other as they stood below the cross (John 19:25–27). Studying together the life and teachings of Jesus can ground a congregation in a foundation that paves the way for recognizing and supporting family relationships.

Margery Williams defines what it means to be real in her children’s book, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1983), in a way that transfers to what it means to be a family. In the story, a wise old toy horse is explaining family to a stuffed toy rabbit that came in a little boy’s Christmas stocking. Lying on the playroom floor, the rabbit asks the wise horse, “What is real? Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

The horse explains: “Real isn’t how you are made. It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with but really loves you, then you become real. ... It doesn’t happen all at once. You become. ... Generally, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out, and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are real you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

The horse explained what family is — it isn’t how God made

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us or what parts we have; it is how we love one another over time, despite what life throws at us. It is not whether we are an intact nuclear family; it is about loving and being loved.

A young mother was raising a 5-year-old alone after divorcing her husband, who was in the penitentiary for writing bad checks. She divorced him to survive financially. She is proud of the fact she is working and making it. She was able to purchase a mobile home instead of living with her parents. But she told me when she goes to church, she knows members think of her as a broken family. She said, "I don't feel broken; I feel whole." Instead of being a source of hope and wholeness, the church labeled her as "broken." Consequently, the subtle message the church was sending is that divorced, single mothers are less than ideal.

The church must begin by helping Christians recognize and come to terms with the biblical concept that the structure of the family one lives in is not as significant as allowing God to work through the family in whatever state it finds itself.¹ The ideal is (1) living faithfully within the context God has placed us, and (2) from that place — whatever it is — using our family relationships for the sake of God's purposes.

Naming Relationships

Giving names to relationships provides identity. Once people have had opportunity to study and talk together about what family means in the lives of Christians, they begin to see family relationships they had not previously recognized. And the naming strengthens these relationships. Families sometimes create language to undergird and give definition to the family and family-like relationships that are not biological or legal — Granny C, "godmother," "momma," (an aunt raising a nephew), "son-in-love" (son-in-law) — or simply "sister," "mother," and other names that identify how people function in our lives. Research literature has named these as "social" family members, to distinguish them from biological relationship.

Congregations can encourage families to claim and use family

Education and Support for Family Living

Educational groups and seminars

can help families deal with the processes that shape family life regardless of their different composition or life circumstances. These opportunities can include marital couples and biological parents, but leaders must be clear that all families, whatever their composition, are welcome. Some of the processes that shape all families include:

- forming attachments.
- caregiving.
- problem-solving.
- disciplining and encouraging.
- managing conflict, hurt, and anger.
- reconciling.
- celebrating joys and mourning losses.
- negotiating intimacy and autonomy.
- serving others.

Finding our way through these processes is part of what it means to live

as Christ followers. Congregational leaders can provide the educational content through sermons, Bible study groups, seminars, and family retreats.

Families also need support from other families who share their life situation — parents of teenagers, caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease, mentors of single parents, parents of young adults who are troubled by substance addiction, grandparents raising their grandchildren. Together, families learn from and support one another. Churches may formalize this support through a group, or it may develop a more loosely structured network of families who are in touch with one another. The role of the church leader is helping families find and link with one another, and helping them identify resources that can help them. The families themselves provide any leadership needed for their group or network, although professionals can help equip them and support them in this role.

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language. Naming and celebrating these relationships provides a powerful way of supporting families in the community of faith. Developing names and rituals for otherwise unnamed family relationships will strengthen family bonds and encourage greater commitment and entitlement as family members.

Provide Opportunities for Relationships to Form That May Become Family

Even those families people already recognize as family in our culture — nuclear and traditional — choose to be family, according to the Christian definition of family. Mary chose to follow Jesus; and, in so doing, she *chose* to be a member of His family, building on the choice she made earlier to submit to the will of God and be His biological mother. Households who were baptized together — such as those of Lydia and of the jailer in Acts 16 — were still households, but through their

choice to follow Jesus together, they became families.

The greatest challenge for American congregations is helping persons choose and live as family when they are not biologically or legally related or even living in the same household. Some persons are alone in the congregation because they either have no family or because their biological/legal family does not share their faith. In addition, the church enriches the lives of all families — even those who are living in nuclear and extended families — by nurturing the development of ties to family members, like Paul's tie to the marital couple Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3–5).

Two ways congregations can support the development of family relationships are: (1) encourage persons of different ages and life circumstances to participate in the life of the congregation together, and (2) offer programs specifically designed to encourage relationships to develop.

One significant way to help faith families form and to undergird existing family relationships in a community of faith is to encourage persons in the same family and persons of different generations and life situations to participate in community life with one another, benefiting from one another's gifts, and caring for one another's needs. Family and cross-generational groupings are ideal for what we are trying to accomplish in community life — caring for one another, ministering to others, worshipping God. Both children and adults learn best about God's love by being loved by God's people, about being a child of God by belonging in a family,

about worship by worshipping with all God's people, and about ministry by serving in partnership with others.

The church can serve as a matchmaker of sorts, providing the context where potential family members in different generations and life situations can meet and learn to care for one another. Like blind dates, pairing senior adults with children for an activity program, or any other such pairing of persons, can be a way to allow congregants to meet persons they might otherwise not have the opportunity to know. Friendships do not form every time, of course, but sometimes they do, and friendships can become family over time and life situations.

INCREASING THE CHRISTLIKENESS OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Families are one of the most significant contexts in which we form Christian disciples. Learning with family members to live justly and lovingly, to forgive and to be forgiven, to remain steadfastly present to one another year after year, through joys and sorrows, is an ongoing and ever-changing challenge of Christian discipleship.

When congregational leaders successfully take a family ministry perspective in shaping the life of the congregation, much of what happens in a congregation can help families live joyfully, faithfully, and redemptively, even in the midst of the problems they face. Families find the church to be a place where they learn about and become more skillful in the disciplines of family life — listening and communicating, forgiving and



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Service-Learning

Service-learning, which includes short-term mission trips, involves families in learning about opportunities for service:

(1) studying what the Bible has to say that is relevant to those opportunities and how the church responds; (2) learning the knowledge and skills needed for service; (3) engaging in service; and (4) reflecting on these experiences.

Service-learning often begins with short-term projects in the community or on mission trips. Congregational leaders need to be sensitive to the fact service-learning activities may be more disruptive than helpful in many service settings. Congregational groups who go to a homeless shelter to serve a meal one time means that the director must alert or turn away regular volunteers for the day, staff must be ready to assist those who are unfamiliar with the routine, and they must take care to help church members

understand how they can be helpful. The goal of service-learning, then, is to teach church members about community needs and to provide opportunities for further service.

A sign of effective short-term service projects is the willingness of families to take on commitments to serve beyond a one-time event. A family may commit itself to a diversity of tasks: visiting and “being family” to a church member in a nursing home, or taking care of an elderly neighbor's yard, or serving together in a neighborhood children's club. Sometimes families take on these commitments through the sponsorship of their congregation; at other times, families may find these opportunities for service through other channels.

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repenting, handling anger and problem-solving, balancing intimacy and autonomy, disciplining and loving one another, and ministering inside and outside the family's boundaries.

The fundamental and essential method of family ministry is developing a supportive and nurturing community. Community life is particularly important as a context for helping families deal with specific stressors and situations, whether these life stressors and situations are common to all kinds of families or are specific to some.

EQUIPPING AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES FOR WORK TOGETHER

God created humanity with a purpose, a mission of caregiving for the world. God recognized this was not something for persons to do in isolation; they needed companions in the work, and so God created the partnership of the family. God did not create the first man and woman simply to be companions, but to be companions *in the work* (Genesis 1:26–28). Families have a purpose, a calling from God, to be on mission together. The ultimate goal of family ministry is to have families in ministry. Family ministry equips, encourages, and supports Christians to use their families as channels of ministry to others, whether by opening themselves to fold others into their family, or finding ways to be neighbor to those around them. Congregations can help foster this ministry by supporting, encouraging, and commissioning families for ministry. Many families seek opportunities to live their faith where they work and play. Each family must discover what God created them to be and how God is calling them. People cannot determine this by any program or structure — it comes out of individual and shared relationships with Jesus Christ.²

FAMILY MINISTRY AS PERSPECTIVE

At its foundation, family ministry is looking at persons and their relationships anew. Family ministry sees persons as fragments of families, parts of a larger whole. We cannot care for persons without understanding the families in which they live, just as we cannot define islands without including the sea that connects them. It is the relationship between family members that define a family.

Many church programs view families as a collection of individuals at different places in the developmental process — children, youth, young adults, middle adults, senior adults. As a consequence, churches label age-graded programming *family ministry*, and it is. By caring for individuals in the different age brackets, we are caring for the families whom they represent. Even more important, however, family ministry should also attend to the relationships between the individuals in a family group — to that which holds people together in human covenants that signify our covenant as a people with our God.

Family ministry encourages the development and transformation of families so all members of the community of faith have a family. Family ministry also strengthens families

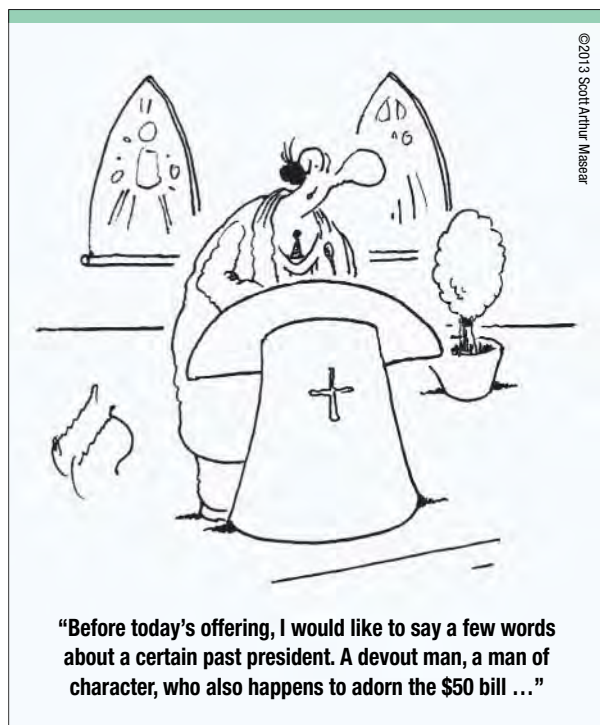
so they can be more effective witnesses to the love of God. Finally, family ministry develops faithfulness in families and its members as the family ministers within and beyond its own boundaries. Families need the support of a community of faith to sustain them and to which they can contribute. Family ministry is not just a set of programs; it is a perspective, a set of 3-D glasses we put on to look at everything the church does. Ministering with families does not mean simply developing a system of support services and programs; instead it means reviewing every aspect of congregational life to determine its impact on and support of families.



DIANA R. GARLAND, Ph.D., dean of the School of Social Work, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. She is author, coauthor, or editor of 18 books, including *Inside Out Families: Living the Faith Together* (Baylor Press 2010) and *Flawed Families of the Bible: How God Works Through Imperfect Relationships* (co-authored with David Garland, Brazos Books, 2007).

Notes

1. The book *Flawed Families of the Bible: How God Works Through Imperfect Relationships* (David and Diana Garland, Brazos Press, 2009) provides opportunity to examine some of the most difficult family stories in the Bible and explore how they can inform our lives. Designed for adult Bible studies.
2. My book *Inside Out Families: Living the Faith Together* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010) provides guidance for equipping families



"Before today's offering, I would like to say a few words about a certain past president. A devout man, a man of character, who also happens to adorn the \$50 bill ..."

the
modern
family
AND THE
FAMILY OF GOD

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A Lighthouse of Love:

CREATING A PRO-MARRIAGE CULTURE

By **Susan** and **Dale Mathis**

A Christ-centered marriage is more than a covenant agreement made before God to live together, serve one another, and remain faithful. It is God's plan to make a couple all He intends them to be.

m **arci dreamed of this day.** At 28, she was finally going to be the bride of her childhood fantasies. She had worked hard to make this day perfect — finding the right venue, the right dress and hairstyle, bridal party, food, photographer, and flowers. She even looked forward to walking down the same aisle she walked as a child when she became a Christian.

But as she counted the days until that big day, Marci realized that the differences and disagreements between Chad and her were becoming commonplace, so they simply avoided talking about their future together. Though they had met with the pastor who would do their ceremony, much of the conversation revolved around the details of the wedding — not the years that would follow. They only had a vague idea of what a Christian marriage might look like, and they

were unaware of all the challenges that marriage would bring. Hardly a day went by that they did not struggle in their relationship as their wedding day drew closer, but they did not know what to do.

As Marci and Chad addressed their wedding invitations, they realized that, though they had talked about the wedding a lot, they had not planned much of their life together past their honeymoon. They needed help, but where would they start?

A Lighthouse of Love: Creating a Pro-Marriage Culture

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CAST A VISION

What kind of marriage vision could you give Marci and Chad? Marriage is the legal, social, and spiritual contract between a man and woman. But a Christ-centered marriage is so much more. It is even more than a covenant agreement made before God to live together, serve one another, and remain faithful to each other.

Sex before marriage, cohabitation, and divorce are nearly as rampant with Christian couples as in the secular world. We must face this reality and give couples a vision for a better way.

A Christ-centered marriage is His plan to make a couple all He intends them to be. This vision of marriage can provide an atmosphere of accountability, safety, and grace in which couples strive to leave their selfish tendencies behind and become more like Him. We need to provide a higher vision of marriage for not only couples like Marci and Chad, but also our entire church.

Today's culture places little value on marriage. The media — movies, television shows, and pop music — along with the prevailing attitude on college campuses and society in general, convey the idea that marriage is temporary — even irrelevant.

Unfortunately many Christian couples “test the waters” with premarital sex or live together before they marry. Some even divorce after marriage. As we counsel couples, Dale and

I have discovered that sex before marriage, cohabitation, and divorce are nearly as rampant with Christian couples as it is in the secular world, so we must face this reality and give couples a vision for a better way.

We need to remind the singles in our churches that sex before marriage and cohabitation is not just a sin — it is false intimacy. It distorts our view of the other person, and it hinders the development

of a deep, emotional, trusting, and intimate relationship necessary for a successful lifetime of marriage.

In our culture, everything seems disposable — even relationships. Everything seems like it is based on what makes us feel good or is convenient for us personally. But we must articulate — and model — that God's plan is so much bigger than that. Just as He has never left us or forsaken us, even in

our worst sinful state, so He wants us to know and enjoy the permanence of an intimate relationship with our mate.

Today's culture also views marriage as a place to make us happy. Couples think they can create their own rules and way of life — however it suits their desires. We need to instill in them that selfishness will make a poor marriage and that

marriage requires teamwork, sharing, sacrifice, and growing together every day.

Yet, a choice like this goes against our culture of individualism. Every day our culture challenges couples to make difficult, unselfish decisions. If couples can learn this early on, it will keep them from undermining their relationship along the way.

We must create a church culture that gives couples a higher vision of marriage and shows them that commitment is more than just signing a contract. In our noncommittal world, we need to impart the truth that covenant promises such as marriage are unconditional. And though we might think our church family knows all this, many do not.

CULTIVATE AUTHENTICITY

To create such a church culture, we must be authentic in our own marriages. But how do we teach couples to have godly, open relationships?

The popularity of reality TV and YouTube is teaching reality, but they have corrupted the way we see reality and openness. We see couples duking it out, yelling at one another, divorcing, breaking up the family, and moving on with apparent happiness and freedom. Couples fight for their rights, rail at each other, and mock marriage.

Christian couples are also falling into the “let it all hang out” trend by devaluing marriage with snarky comments and bad attitudes. We hear sermons that make marriage out to be dull duty rather than a privilege and blessing. Though we want to be authentic and real with others, what message does this send to those who are looking toward marriage — or are in a crisis marriage?



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Authenticity works best when people share their faults, failures, and God's redemption in close relationship with others. Personal connections are most effective because they show rather than tell. Rhetoric, whether positive or negative, does little to provide practical resources or helpful tools.

The Bible is clear about the relational failures of Bible characters such as Adam and Eve, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, David, and others. Their stories portray the consequences of sin and selfishness on marriages and show how far man has strayed from God's plan for marriage. We can learn much from the lives of others — those in the Bible and others we know — who have blown it but also saw that God can lead them where He originally meant them to be.

But at its best, marriage is living out God's redemptive plan and becoming more like Him every day. When couples catch this vision, marriage becomes about more than meeting our individual needs. It's about seeing our mate grow through the love, grace, and forgiveness we freely give him or her, while that person also allows us to grow, even through our mistakes. Marriage becomes more about giving, helping, serving, trusting, forgiving, caring, learning, and living through the ups and downs of life than about our own desires. This is what our couples need to see.

MODEL MARRIAGE

Modeling Christian marriage is an important component in accomplishing this vision. It provides a stark alternative to the often temporary, fly-by-night relationships the world offers.

When mature Christian couples choose to serve younger couples and model marriage well, they can visibly show God's plan for great relationships, no matter how imperfect, and they can become a safe place for others to grow together. When we live out our commitment to unconditionally love and serve one another in marriage, the body of Christ can become lighthouses of love that can show the world a better way.

Herein lies a problem. In this fractured society, how can younger couples see this if they only hang out with other young couples? Our culture, Facebook, and mommy-blog phenomenon often glorifies peer-to-peer connection over intergenerational relationships. Instead of looking to those who are older and wiser, many of the younger generation look to each other for advice on marriage and parenting ... a sort of blind leading the blind. We must change this trend, and fast.

Hopefully, we know couples who have been married for decades and are happy, despite the challenges they have faced through the years. Our friends just celebrated 55 years together. They love each other dearly, are the closest of companions, and deeply committed to each other. These kinds of couples can disciple younger couples, give them hope, and become incredible mentors for others. They just need us to invite them to intentionally connect with younger couples.

A church-wide marriage ministry can model to couples love



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Getting Started

Your marriage experts — those who can mentor and disciple couples — are likely right under your nose. They are the survivors, the thrivers, and the overcomers who can show other couples that marriage can be a living, breathing witness to God's power and promise. These couples can provide a safe place, acceptance, understanding, love, honest communication, support, and education. They just need you to invite them into the adventure of serving as facilitators and mentors in your premarital ministry and other pro-marriage ministry initiatives.

- Who are your young married couples who stayed pure through their single lives and can give that vision to teens and young adults?
- Who in your church have journeyed through the first years of marriage or remarriage and can facilitate a premarital ministry?
- Who in your church have had a long marriage and can authentically serve as marriage mentors?
- Who in your church have struggled in their marriage and can encourage other couples?

SUSAN AND DALE MATHIS

relationships that are authentic, and it can demonstrate how commitment brings security and happiness beyond a couple's wildest dreams. When people have this kind of vision and modeling, marriage can change individuals into the people of character that God intends them to be as they learn to be unselfish, sacrificing, and loving — like Christ modeled for us.

MAKE A PLAN

Just as we teach the foundational principles of the faith precept upon precept, we can no longer assume that our people are assimilating biblical relational principles and know how to do marriage well. Broken or dysfunctional marriages and families fill our churches, so the church has a great opportunity to provide the tools for changing this culture.

To make this a reality, an all-church, pro-marriage plan

A Lighthouse of Love: Creating a Pro-Marriage Culture

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is essential. A pro-marriage plan starts with casting vision and then creating a church culture that is pro-marriage. This includes teaching couples to live a lifestyle of authenticity and openness, to encourage marriage modeling and mentoring, and to provide tools for couples to serve as part of the ministry. But how?

The youth pastor needs to impart a pro-marriage culture to hormone-driven teens. The singles pastor will need to passionately pass it on to his or her lonely singles. The family minister will need to articulate and model it to young marrieds, parents who are raising children, and even to our empty nesters and seniors. And practically speaking, that plan must start with preparing couples to marry well.

The U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Health Statistics say that 43- to 50-percent of marriages will end in divorce, and the statistics for Christian couples are virtually the same. But couples who participate in premarital education report a 30-percent higher level of overall marital satisfaction and better communication.¹

Unfortunately, less than 30 percent of churches have any kind of premarital program other than a prewedding chat with the bride and groom. Since over 70 percent of couples marry in the church, we can and should help couples prepare for the rest of their lives, ensuring that those who marry in our churches are informed and ready to be biblically committed to one another.

Yet instead of being proactive, all too often we respond to couples only *after* they get in trouble. We staff our churches with counselors who wait for the calls of couples who are in crisis rather than imparting wisdom on how to not get into crisis in the first place.

A marriage retreat, weekend workshop, or conference, now and then, is a great extra for your pro-marriage plan. But lectures can never replace the power of doing life together in relationship with others or of providing practical ongoing education that will prepare them to tackle their marriage issues instead of waiting until they are in trouble.

PROVIDE TOOLS

In addition to casting vision, creating a culture of authenticity, and encouraging marriage mentors, every church needs to provide tools that will give couples practical education and lifetime learning. Start with a premarital ministry to lay a firm foundation for the journey ahead.

While there are several premarital resources, *Countdown for Couples: Preparing for the Adventure of Marriage* and *The ReMarriage Adventure: Preparing for a Lifetime of Love & Happiness* are both designed to intentionally impart a biblical view of marriage as well as provide practical education for the journey. Both are easy-to-read premarital guides that will give pastors, counselors, small groups, and/or premarital classes an all-encompassing way to prepare couples for the adventure of marriage and/or remarriage. The 12-chapter

format means that leaders can divide the premarital ministry into four, six, or 12 sessions with individual couples, small groups, or classes. Interesting sidebars and discussion questions at the end of each chapter make it effortless for pastors, counselors, or laypeople to easily facilitate a premarital ministry with these books.

The PREPARE inventory by Life Innovations, Inc., helps premarital couples identify relationship strengths and growth areas. Add this inventory to the above resources, and your church can have a ready-made premarital program that will lay the groundwork for successful marriages.

For your married couples, dozens of marriage resources are available. Check out myhealthychurch.com, CBD.com, or your local Christian bookstore, and you will find a wealth of topics on marriage. Create a culture where couples are lifetime learners, and provide resources for them to use. Encourage your couples to invest in their marriage through small groups, book studies, and serving as mentors, facilitators, and authentic married couples who change the marriage culture in your church.

It is more critical than ever to lay the foundation for successful, fulfilling, and godly marriages. Make it important, even popular, as a church family to be involved in regular marriage education. Give your people opportunity to both receive *and* give. As you provide a unified and godly vision for marriage, create a culture of openness and grace, and encourage couples to model and serve as a way of life, your church will give hope for the future and a lifestyle to emulate. ■



DALE MATHIS, M.A. coauthored, with his wife Susan, *Countdown for Couples: Preparing for the Adventure of Marriage* and *The ReMarriage Adventure: Preparing for a Lifetime of Love & Happiness*.



SUSAN MATHIS, founding editor of *Thriving Family* magazine. Dale and Susan have worked with couples in premarital counseling and are mentors and facilitators for the Woodmen Valley Chapel Premarital class.

Note

1. Jason Williams, "Talk Before Tying the Knot," *Psychology Today*, July 1, 2003. Found at <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200308/talk-tying-the-knot>. [Accessed 25 June 2013.] Full article only available with subscription to *Psychology Today*.

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S HABITS *of Christlike Marriages*

By **Robert S. Paul**

As you teach and preach on healthy marriage, and as you counsel couples needing to build strong marriages, look for ways to share these key characteristics.

Great marriages rarely happen by accident. There may be a few exceptions; but, in general, we achieve marital greatness by skillfully and faithfully investing time and energy into our marriages. Our Lord desires all married people to have meaningful and fulfilling marriages. He is a relational God, existing in a perfect triune relationship.

Jesus stated that He came so we can personally experience life to the full (John 10:10). In a relationally broken culture, what could be more meaningful than for the church to show the world how fullness can extend beyond the individual into a committed, God-honoring marriage?

People hope we have answers and want to see evidence of us walking our talk and see us personally experiencing the fruit of our relationship with Christ. They want to see the truth of our words. And what we have to offer is far more than just idle words and empty hope.

In this article I offer eight characteristics, approaches, and

attitudes that characterize meaningful, satisfying, God-honoring marriages. These ideas are proven; and, fortunately, reasonably easy to use in ministry as well as apply to your own marriage. As you teach and preach on healthy marriage, and as you counsel couples needing to build strong marriages, look for ways to share these key characteristics.

8 Habits of Christlike Marriages

(continued from page 65)

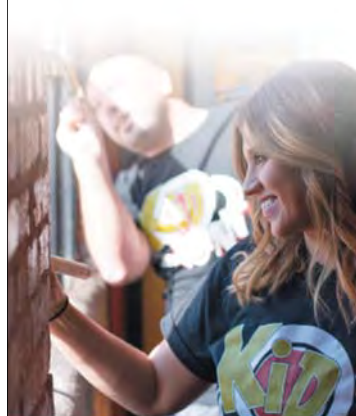
I define a great marriage as one where *both* spouses love their marriage and are thrilled with the direction the marriage is headed. In addition, a great marriage is possible when both spouses share Christ's love and glorify Him. To qualify as a great marriage couples do not even need to love their marriage for the same reasons, as long as they both love their marriage. This will come as a great relief to many who feel as if they are too different from one another to succeed in marriage.

1 RESPECT/HONOR DIFFERENCES

Differences have the potential to create challenges in any relationship, especially in marriage, and these differences are plentiful. We come into marriage with different personalities, from different families, with different hopes, dreams, expectations, and preferences. In fact, marriage in many ways is fundamentally a cross-cultural experience. As a result, when these differences bump into each other, they can easily seem like a genuine problem. In reality, differences are not normally the problem in marriage. God created differences between a husband and wife on purpose, with purpose, and He intends for us to honor and utilize them, not eliminate them (1 Corinthians 12).

In a God-honoring marriage, spouses know how to express appreciation and value not only for what the other does, but also for what the other is. An ongoing opportunity exists to help each other see things about themselves that God purposely created, values, and loves; which each spouse may have trouble seeing. It is usually not hard to see the problem spots, but it can be harder to see the eternal value God designed into each of us. Identifying, encouraging, and calling out the good is more likely to help build a relationship than pointing out the bad.

The church often inadvertently hinders the growth of successful and satisfying marriages in the subtle implication that once married, the marriage becomes more important than the people in it.



Jane Shimura

2 DEMONSTRATE GENUINE INTEREST IN EACH OTHER

A gradual loss of interest, or taking each other for granted, is a common characteristic of marriages in decline. Many people miss the simple fact the essence of true romance is fascination and interest in each other. When couples initially enjoy that exciting stage of infatuation, they are captivated by each other. They hang on every word and enjoy the process of getting to know each other. In fact, a helpful definition of intimacy is the journey of knowing and being known. Being deeply interested in someone, and having that person be interested in you, makes you feel good, cared for, and loved.

To keep romance and passion alive in a marriage couples need to remain committed to getting to know each other. After being together for a period of years, it is easy to succumb to the illusion that there is really nothing left to discover. However, the truth is our Creator amazingly and intricately designed us, and one lifetime is not nearly long enough to ever fully know any human being.

I have been married to my wife for over 32 years, and I constantly learn new things about her. And just to keep things interesting ... she keeps changing. But that's great news since the essence of true romance is a lifelong fascination in my wife. Sometimes she confuses me to

no end. After all, she is really different from me. Yet, I have learned to keep our flame burning by intentionally staying interested in her and searching for ways to let her know I find her captivating.

3 FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

In this fallen world, there will never be a shortage of negatives and problems. An imperfect, work-in-progress spouse can often frustrate your best-laid plans and create a continual recipe for disappointment. However, with limited time available each day to think, how you invest that time will materially impact your experience and feelings.

Let's say you have 2 hours per day available to think about your marriage and your spouse. If you invest three quarters of that time thinking about the things that bother you and only one quarter on the things you like and value, what will you feel? Probably three times more negative than positive.

I am not suggesting you ignore the negative, but you

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decide how you invest your thought assets. The way you invest what God has given you will significantly affect what comes to you in return. People who enjoy their marriage generally spend a larger amount of time thinking on what they like, love, value, and appreciate in their spouse and their marriage (Philippians 4:8).

4 INVEST IN THE PEOPLE

One area where the church often inadvertently hinders the growth of successful and satisfying marriages is in the subtle implication that once married, the marriage becomes more important than the people in it. To live a Christ-honoring life, as well as have a Christ-honoring marriage, involves sacrifice. However, the growth, development, and well-being of the individuals are critical.

Marriage does not exist apart from the people in it, and the marriage cannot be healthier than the individuals represented. When two people get married, they each remain fully responsible to become all that God created and called them to be. In marriage, they have merely added an entity (the marriage) which they now also need to nurture and grow. In fact, the eternal parts of the marriage are the individuals, not the relationship (Matthew 22:29,30). If we mistakenly make the marriage *more* important than the people in it, we encourage them to focus more on the temporal than the eternal.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with your whole being, and to love others as yourself (Matthew 22:36–40). A great marriage encourages people to find a healthy balance between the wholeness and well-being of each individual, and the health and well-being of the relationship, while noting how each will support the ultimate purposes of God.

5 LEARN TO COMMUNICATE WELL

Struggling couples cite poor communication more than any other cause of marital problems. Given the inherent complexity of verbal communication, what could make more sense? Add strong feelings to the high stakes game of marriage, and communication only becomes more complicated.

Couples who report a high degree of enjoyment and satisfaction in their marriage usually say they enjoy talking to each other and talk frequently. One effective way to increase the feeling of closeness involves sharing your hopes and dreams, joys and victories. And since real intimacy also includes knowing someone is there for you and with you, it requires sharing your disappointments, hurts, challenges, and setbacks.

Good marital communication is always respectful and careful. Remember your hearts are involved and God commands us to guard our hearts above all else (Proverbs 4:23). Speaking with tenderness while slowing down can be a great asset. This requires patience *and* taking turns. In the most basic sense, there should always be one speaker and one listener at a time, allowing both to demonstrate this type of interest and care for one another.

Making Healthy Marriages a Core Value in Your Church



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At the National Institute of Marriage pastors tell us how overrun they feel by marriage ministry needs. To respond to all these needs would occupy every minute of their day. Our enemy knows that failing marriages unravel the fabric of the church. We highly recommend making healthy marriage a core value in your church by:

- investing in the health of your marriage and the marriages of your staff.
- finding ways to communicate and educate your congregation about keys to growing and maintaining healthy relationships through sermons, classes, workshops, video presentations, seminars, etc.
- having sound Christ-centered counseling options available. If you can't, don't want to, or shouldn't do the counseling yourself, have referral options. Good lay-based options often are great first-response alternatives.

The National Institute of Marriage is dedicated to being a resource to pastors and church leaders. Use us as a teammate in your cause. Our total focus is on saving marriages and inspiring couples toward greatness; all to promote the kingdom of God. A thriving church is critical to the cause of Christ. If there are ways we can help support you, contact us at www.nationalmarriage.com or (417) 335-5882.

8 Habits of Christlike Marriages

(continued from page 67)

Whereas learning to speak clearly is very important in good communication, often learning to be a good listener is harder. Many communication breakdowns occur when the listener only poses as a listener, but is really a speaker-in-waiting. Rather than listening to what the speaker is saying, the other is planning a rebuttal or trying to figure out how to show the speaker the errors of their way. That approach will *never* communicate love and care. It actually does more to break down a relationship than build it up. Good listening requires a focus on hearing, understanding, and caring about the speaker; both what he is saying *and* feeling, while communicating that his thoughts and feelings matter to you.

6 OPERATE AS A TEAM

One great device of the enemy is getting couples to take their eyes off Satan, the true enemy, and see each other as adversaries. When we engage in power struggles, seeking to win (or not lose, which is essentially the same), we have played into his hands. Scripture states that a house divided against itself cannot stand (Mark 3:23-25). I never recommend fair fighting rules. I don't want to fight with my wife; she is not my enemy. I want my house to be a no-fight zone.

Marriage is a team sport. Couples need to address differences. But *how* they approach each other with their differences makes the difference. Satan wants us to believe there could actually be a winner and a loser in a marital disagreement. However, when you are part of a team, you either win as a team or lose as a team. The idea of a win-lose outcome is an illusion from the pit of hell.

Instead, successful couples adopt a no-losers policy, and make it unacceptable for either spouse to walk away feeling like a loser. They work as teammates with the Lord and allow God to help them find solutions they both love. They overcome differences in ways that allow them to feel a sense of divine peace and victory.

Sometimes God even leads people to outcomes that did not seem humanly possible. Amazingly, by God's grace we do not need to limit ourselves by what seems humanly impossible. Our Lord is devoted to our personal well-being *and* to unity. He will bring us together with Him if we let Him.

7 CREATE THE IDEAL MARITAL ENVIRONMENT

God has designed us to long for a deep and profound intimate connection. No relationship is capable of scratching that itch better than marriage. Satisfying intimacy is

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always about knowing the other person and being known. This requires a high degree of openness and vulnerability, and that takes courage.

Loving someone enough to open your heart makes real the possibility of being hurt. We have all been hurt in relationships. As a result, we try to create intimacy from a guarded and protected posture. We put on various types of armor to keep from getting hurt further. Unfortunately, to connect in a deeply intimate way requires us to be open; in our original state of being naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25), and unafraid.

To relax and be open enough to bond intimately requires us to feel genuinely safe physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. First John 4:18 states that, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." Couples who want to grow and experience the most satisfying and meaningful depths of intimacy understand this, and make creating a safe environment top priority. They take time to understand what that means for each other and work individually, and together, toward that end.

8 UNITE IN GOD'S PURPOSES
God designed marriage to be a symbolic representation to the world of the marriage between himself and His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:32). He intends for marriage to be permanent, just as His commitment is to us. Certainly our loving and devoted Lord wants marriage to bless us, but even more important He desires that marriage provide a positive reflection of Him. Therefore, at its core, marriage is fundamentally purposeful — a vehicle to accomplish God's purposes.

Married couples who thrive will intentionally look for how they can use their marriage to serve God. Since Jesus bought our lives with a price, personal happiness and fulfillment cannot be the ultimate goal. However, one of the most profound mysteries of our faith is how our sacrificial posture as bond servants connects to the heart of a loving Father who desires wonderful things for us. Searching together for how God wants to use us to accomplish His goals and objectives, both individually and as a couple, allows us to discover a deeply satisfying Christ-centered meaning for our marriage; one that extends far beyond *just* feeling happy.

Our Lord, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, does not only love, He *is* the essence of love (1 John 4:8). He ultimately wants nothing but the best — personally *and* relationally — for His people. In Him our deepest longings and desires are fulfilled. And the greatest hope we have to offer a lost and hungry world is proof of what we claim is possible with Christ. As we allow Christ to fill our lives, our very beings reflect Him, and His light shines through us. We thus provide a glorious testimony of Christ for all to see. Can you think of any more powerful draw to Christ than people truly witnessing the freedom,

joy, power, and peace we know are possible with our Lord?

At the same time our culture of marital brokenness is rapidly losing hope that a lifelong, fulfilling marriage is even possible. We meaningfully serve God with our spouse when we work with Him to create an amazing marriage. Together we give further testimony to who God is and what is possible with Him. By allowing God to capture our hearts and help grow our marriage, we actually invest with Him in growing His kingdom. Walking together with Christ in marriage provides the ultimate win-win-win.

To help facilitate a church of healthy, Christ-centered marriages and families will create a counter-cultural testimony that will get some serious attention. Where else are marriages thriving? No where. People come to us for help and hope. By God's grace we have a direction, we have opportunity, and we have both help and hope to offer. ■



ROBERT S. PAUL, copresident and lead intensive marriage counselor, National Institute of Marriage, Branson, Missouri

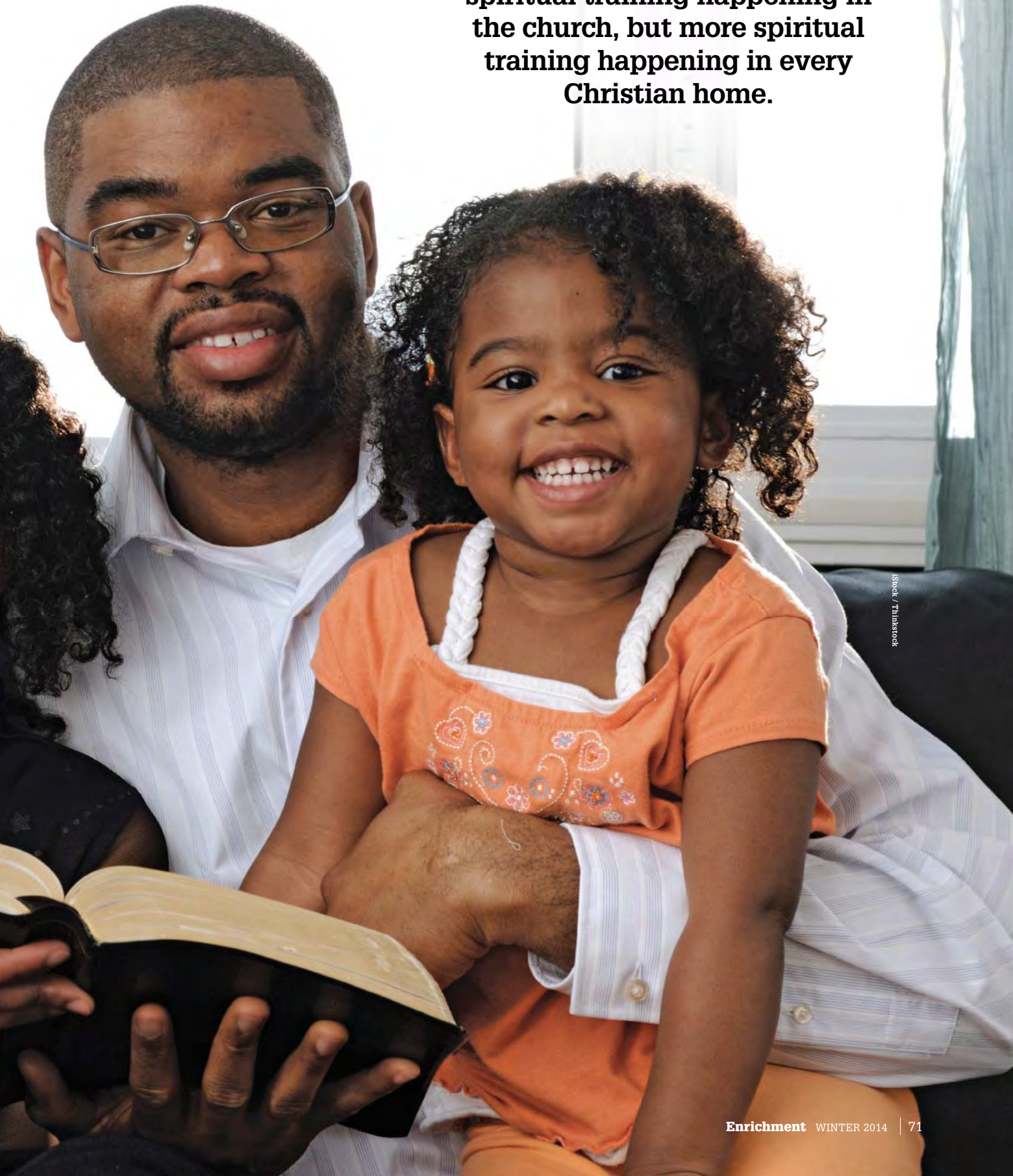




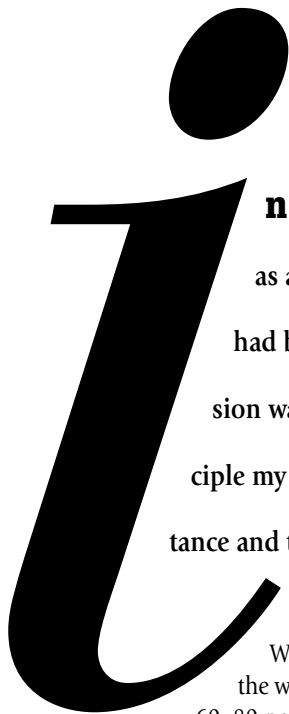
**FAMILY
WORSHIP:**
The Heart
**OF THE
CHRISTIAN
HOME**

By **Rob Rienow**

The heart of a Bible-driven family ministry is not more spiritual training happening in the church, but more spiritual training happening in every Christian home.



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In summer 2004, God brought me to a place of brokenness. I had served as a youth pastor for 10 years. Amy and I had been married for the same amount of time, and God had blessed us with four children. The problem was that my heart was at work, not at home. My passion was to make disciples of the children and youth at church. But I had no vision and no plan to disciple my own children. I was a spiritual leader at church, but passive at home. God brought me to repentance and turned my heart to my most important ministry — leading my family to love and follow God.

The church in North America faces a crisis. We are losing the majority of our children to the world. According to a range of studies, between 60–80 percent of children growing up in our churches today are leaving the faith when they become adults.¹ How could this happen?

For many, the first response to this crisis is an urgent call to improve the youth and children’s ministries in our churches. But in reality we have the biggest and best children’s and youth ministries the world has ever seen. We have paid church staff, caring volunteers, Christian education rooms, great curriculum, and more. The fundamental problem is not the church, but rather the Christian family. Up until the early 20th century people commonly understood that the spiritual training of children was the responsibility of parents and grandparents in the home.

LOVING GOD BEGINS AT HOME

In Matthew 22, Jesus pointed to the most important commandment in the Bible: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and

when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 6:5–7, ESV²).

Immediately following the Great Commandment, God focused our attention on family life. He spoke specifically to parents to live out their love for Him by doing all in their power to pass their faith to their children. Are we serious about loving God? Then we must be serious about diligently teaching God’s Word to our children. This is the

first mission God gave us after the most important commandment in the Bible. This is the purpose of parenting and grandparenting: to impress the hearts of our children with a love for God. At the heart of the Great Commandment is family discipleship, with parents being the primary spiritual trainers of their children.

Family Worship in History

In the 1600s church leaders regularly visited the home of each family in the church to assess whether or not the parents were discipling their children through the regular practice of family worship. In 1647, believers in Scotland published the *Directory for Family Worship* in which they wrote: “The assembly requires and appoints ministers to make diligent search and inquiry, whether there be among them a family or families which neglect the duty of family worship. If such a family is found, the head of the family is to be admonished privately to amend his fault; and in case of his continuing therein, he is to be gravely and sadly reproofed by the session; after which reproof, if he is found still to neglect family worship, let him be, for his obstinacy in such an offense, suspended and debarred from the Lord’s Supper, until he amend.”

Family worship was a major issue of church discipline. Why did these churches take it so seriously? Why did they invest so much time going from home to home to encourage and ensure that family worship was taking place? Family worship was a top priority because churches were passionate about the Great Commission. They wanted, more than anything, to see the gospel of Christ advance locally and globally. They knew that the Great Commission to make disciples began with their sons and daughters. They knew God had spoken clearly in the Bible that parents and grandparents were to take the lead in the spiritual training of their children and grandchildren. For them, a church could not be serious about the Great Commission if it was not serious about family worship.

In the late 1800s, Charles Spurgeon was deeply concerned about the changes that were occurring in Christian culture. He saw parents increasingly delegating the spiritual training of their children to the church, rather than taking the lead at home. In his article, “The Kind of Revival We Need,” he wrote:

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“We deeply want a revival of family religion. The Christian family was the bulwark of godliness in the days of the puritans, but in these evil times hundreds of families of so-called Christians have no family worship, no restraint upon growing sons, and no wholesome instruction or discipline. How can we hope to see the kingdom of our Lord advance when His own disciples do not teach His gospel to their own children? Oh, Christian men and women, be thorough in what you do and know and teach. Let your families be trained in the fear of God and be yourselves ‘holiness unto the Lord’; so shall you stand like a rock amid the surging waves of error and ungodliness which rage around us.”

Spurgeon’s message is desperately needed today. Godly men and women in growing churches receive the constant call to get involved in ministry. Often ministry is synonymous with “volunteering at a church program.” For the sake of the generations to come, we must return to the biblical vision that ministry begins in our homes.

Family worship is rare in Christian homes today. In the family conferences I do at churches, I regularly ask the attendees how many of them grew up in a home that practiced some sort of family worship or family devotions. The response is



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consistent: 10 to 15 percent of adult Christians in our churches today experienced family worship when they were growing up. In a scientific survey, George Barna found that “fewer than one-twentieth of church households ever worship God outside of a church service or have any type of regular Bible study or devotional time together during a typical week.”³

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Your Church Can Equip Families

Here are some practical ways your church can encourage and equip parents to disciple their children at home through family worship:

Provide parents with the primary sermon text for next Sunday, along with a worship song that you will sing in next week’s worship service. Encourage every family to read that portion of the Bible and sing that song together during the week. Not only will this encourage more family worship, but it will spiritually accelerate the minds and hearts of both children and adults for the coming worship service. Children who experience family worship at home become trained and equipped to engage in corporate worship at church.

Don’t send home follow-up papers/e-mails to parents after Sunday School or children’s church. Instead, send “take the lead” papers/e-mails. Following this same principle, tell parents what is coming *next week* and ask them to *take the lead* in reading the key portion of Bible and praying with their children at home.

Take this lens of “home first, church second” and apply it to every one of your current next-generation ministries. You may be surprised how quickly you can make key changes that can begin to create a culture of family discipleship in your church.

Does your church have adult classes or small groups? What if those adult discipleship times ended with the leader saying, “Okay, now here is the first challenge I want to give you. Take the Scripture we studied today, and what you learned from it, and share it at home with your children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.”

The heart of a Bible-driven family ministry is not more spiritual training happening in the church, but more spiritual training happening in every Christian home. If you equip the homes of your church to be filled with regular, faithful, and genuine family worship, you will see the gospel advance for generations to come.

ROB RIENOW, D.Min.

Family Worship: The Heart of the Christian Home

(continued from page 73)

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Many habits and practices can spiritually enrich and strengthen your family. Share meals together. Serve your neighbors. Volunteer at church together. Participate in short-term family mission trips. But these are icing on the cake. For the icing to “stick” you first have to make a cake.

One practice forms the essential foundation for the Christian home.

“[You] shall talk of them when you sit in your house” (Deuteronomy 6:7, ESV).

God calls heads of households to bring the family together in the home for what Christian history referred as family worship. “*You shall talk of them [the Word of God] when you sit in your house*” (ESV, emphasis mine). Family worship is the time when a household gathers for prayer, Bible reading, and spiritual conversation. Families eat physical food together to nourish their bodies. Family worship is a spiritual meal to nourish their souls.

In 2004, I faced the reality that my schedule did not allow for regular family worship in my home. This plain instruction from God convicted me that the schedule I had chosen was causing me to sin, and was preventing me from practicing the first specific thing God has

required of me in response to the greatest of all His commandments.

Family Worship 101

Many of your families may see the need to have family worship but do not know how. Have them consider mixing and matching these five elements as they grow in the practice of family worship.

1. Activity. Some of the best times of family worship in our home are when we put some energy into preparing a simple activity that helps us get into our Bible reading. This is particularly helpful for younger children. We often play Bible charades. Invite someone to act out a story from the Bible while others try and guess what it is. Look for simple object lessons that explain spiritual principles. If families have children with a wide range of ages, have them ask their older children to plan an activity for the younger ones.

2. Singing. When we sing we draw close to God and to one another. You do not need to be musically gifted. Put in a worship CD or DVD and sing along. If you begin singing with your children when they are young, you will grow into a family that sings together for generations to come.

3. Bible reading. This is the heart of family worship. What

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your children need more than anything else is to see you open God's book and read it with a believing heart. Some days you may simply read a single proverb. Other days you may read a few chapters from a Gospel. The Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). The Word of God is able to make you wise unto salvation (1 Timothy 3:15). The enemy will do everything he can to keep your family from reading the Bible together. This is where the power is to transform your hearts and renew your minds.

4. Discussion. Talk about the Scriptures you read. What truth did you learn from God's Word? How does that truth apply to your life? Some parents are afraid their children will ask questions to which they do not know the answers. Do not worry. Encourage all kinds of questions. Take them to your pastor. Take them to the Lord in prayer.

5. Prayer. My favorite part of the day is when our family of six gets on our knees around our coffee table (our prayer table). We confess our sins. We thank God for His goodness and faithfulness. We pray for those who are sick and suffering. We pray for those who are lost, for them to repent and trust Christ. We pray for God to use our family and our church for His glory around the world.

Consider using the high-low method of prayer. Invite each person in the family to share a high point of the day. After he/she has shared, ask someone to pray and thank God for those good things. Then invite people to share their low point of the day. What was the hardest thing they faced? After sharing, ask someone to pray and lift those difficult things up to the Lord, asking for His grace and strength to face them.

JUST START

Encourage parents not to wait to start family worship in their homes until they become better Christians. Parents should not wait for their schedules to become less chaotic or for their children to be a little older. Encourage them to take action to increase the prayer and Scripture in their homes.

True change begins with true repentance. If parents have not been leading their families and their children spiritually, encourage them to confess that to the Lord and receive His forgiveness through Christ. Have them ask God to turn their hearts to the ministry of their children. Instruct them to ask God to make it the No. 1 mission of their lives to impress the hearts of their children with a love for God.

Encourage them to also confess to their families. Tell them how God has convicted them and called them to grow in the practice of family worship. Share with them your fears and anxieties. Invite them to follow you, as you seek to follow Christ.

Launch Your Family

God desires to use family worship time as the launching pad for families to impact the world for Christ. When parents put first things first in their homes, God will transform their hearts and they will increasingly:

- take action to reach out to neighbors who need prayer, support, and salvation.
- share their hearts with one another during meal times.
- give their money to those in need and causes that they believe in, rather than the next thing.
- spend more time helping and blessing grandparents.
- use some vacation time for service and missions.
- forgive one another, rather than boil with anger.

There are hundreds of ways God may use families to build His kingdom. But we do not get first things by putting them second. God's first call for families is to worship Him together. As families increasingly worship God at home, He will bless them for generations to come. 📖



ROB RIENOW, D.Min., Wheaton, Illinois, serves as the founder of Visionary Family Ministries (www.visionaryfam.com), and as a pastor at Gospel Fellowship Church. He is the author of six books, including *Visionary Parenting* and *Unlimited Kingdom: Uniting Church and Family in the Great Commission*.

Notes

1. Rob Rienow, *When They Turn Away* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011).
2. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, copyright © 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
3. George Barna, *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* (Ventura, California: Regal, 2003), 125.





DIVORCE
RECOVERY

Ministry to Families in the Wake of **DIVORCE**

By **Jane D. Richard**

Here are some best practices by churches that are reaching out to the divorced.

i asked my friend how her church was responding to the news of her impending divorce. She lamented, "When I walk into church, I feel like the modern day Hester Prynne. However, rather than wearing a scarlet 'A', I feel like I have a big 'D' on my forehead. Few people know how to respond to me. I feel pitied by some, ignored by several, and rejected by many. I don't know what to say, and neither do they. I may have to look for a new church, or I will just have to stay away from church for awhile until I figure all this out."

How heartbreaking to learn that she was feeling rejection from the very place where she should be receiving healing and hope. Counselors often hear similar sentiments from their clients. Diana Garland writes, "Instead of finding the church to be a place where they can share their burdens with others, some families believe the most painful burdens of their family life ... are shameful and thus must remain hidden from the congregation. Congregations do sometimes shoot their wounded rather than care for them. Married couples going through divorce ... may find it more comfortable to leave the church than to seek support and care there."¹

Church should be the first place hurting people run to, rather than the place they want to quietly leave.

Ministry to Families in the Wake of Divorce

(continued from page 77)

David and Lisa Frisbie write, “Churches probably don’t intend to send this message. Nevertheless, divorced persons may immediately feel as if they don’t fit in anymore.”² People widely recognize divorce as one of the most stressful life events, yet many churches are not taking advantage of this opportunity to share the love of Christ, who said, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

According to Elizabeth Marquardt, the church reaches out to families of divorce in only about 25 percent of cases.³ This means that thousands of churches are missing the opportunity to minister to countless hurting people, both those currently within the church, as well as those who are not. Ministry to the divorced is a mission field ripe for harvest (John 4:35).

How can churches reach out to individuals and families who are hurting as they experience the heart-break of divorce? Here are some best practices by churches that are reaching out to the divorced.

DRAW FROM YOUR CONGREGATION

Draw from experienced members of your congregation. Recruit spiritually strong members who have walked through and healed from the pain of divorce, either personally, or as parents of children who have divorced, or as children of parents who have divorced. Encourage and train them to walk beside and befriend those who are newly experiencing divorce. Often

it is one person who makes a tremendous difference in the life of a divorcing person — he or she becomes the turning point toward a new direction. Implement and cultivate a 2 Corinthians 1:4 environment: “[He] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

Churches can accomplish this one-on-one, formally or informally, or in groups structured to provide support. For one-on-one care,

How churches treat and respond to their parents during a divorce greatly influences how children view and embrace the church when they become adults.



Stephen Ministries⁴ provide training for laypersons to help others who are experiencing a crisis. Divorce care is among the areas they address. Implemented in more than 11,000 churches, Stephen Ministries also train leaders for small-group programs.

For group support, another successful program is Celebrate Recovery,⁵ now implemented in over 19,000 churches worldwide. Celebrate Recovery groups encompass a variety of issues, including dependency on alcohol or drugs, low self-esteem, depression, anger, and recovery from broken relationships. Such groups take advantage of the giftedness of the laypeople in your congregation and provide them with a place to serve.

DEAL WITH REALITY

Deal with the emotional needs that accompany divorce. Come alongside individuals and families in the confusing and erratic shift of emotions — anger, abandonment, depression, disorientation, betrayal, rejection, worry, despair, guilt, and shame. Invite them to share

their stories and feelings, individually and in groups. Establish an environment of compassion among members. Make your church a safe place for the separated and divorced, allowing them to be vulnerable with their thoughts and feelings. Deal with the reality that infidelity is a key component of many divorces.

Do not dilute discussions by avoiding uncomfortable topics. Do not be afraid to engage in conversations about the taboo subject of sexuality and the single person. People who have become single again certainly struggle in this area.

Timothy Keller says that singles desiring to walk the path of chastity “need a Christian community. ... They should be in a community with singles who don’t use the world’s standards — physical beauty and wealth — as a basis for making partner choices. ... Another mark of this community should be free and open discussion about how the Bible’s perspective on sex plays out in life and relationships. The more often singles and married Christians reflect on the biblical teaching about this, the more support singles will feel for abiding by it.”⁶ Be prepared to give direction and encouragement to help them make God-honoring choices in a sex-saturated culture.

DEMONSTRATE THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). Do you have bridges or barriers in place when it comes to showing

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agape-love? Demonstrate the love of Christ as the divorced move past their pain. The Frisbies assert, "Having access to an objective listener can mean the difference between stagnation and growth, between being stuck in the past, and moving confidently toward the future."⁷ Be willing and available to listen and let them tell their story. "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). As pastors, recognize and acknowledge from the pulpit the unique ways anyone touched by divorce may be hurting, especially during holidays traditionally spent as a family (Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, Father's Day). Being sensitive to those times will let them know you have not forgotten about their pain.


DESIGN PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

Devote time and resources to address the emotional needs and insecurities of the children affected by divorce. Most divorces involve children. "Overall, 1,100,401 children, or 1.5 percent of children in the United States in 2009 lived in the home of a parent who divorced in the last year."⁸ In Matthew 18:5, Jesus says "whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me." Garland writes, "Older children and adolescents are helped by knowing about the grief process, and that they are not alone. ... Recurring themes for children include anxiety and anger; sadness and a secret longing for parental

reconciliation; diminished self-worth and blaming themselves for the nonresident parent's minimal or total lack of visiting; guilt because they believe they might have caused the divorce; divided loyalties; excitement and anxiety about a parent's dating; competition with parents' new partner(s); outrage when the new partner tries to take an active parental role; and confusion and role dislocation when there is a new marriage. Caring adults and peers in the community of faith can provide a refuge, a place to express feelings, find support and put boundaries around the familial pain so that play and normal child/youth activities can be restored. This support can come informally from friends or through participation in regular church programming with sensitive adult leaders. It can also be directive, through divorce support group programs for children and adolescents."⁹

How churches treat and respond to their parents during a divorce greatly influences how children view and embrace the church when they become adults. Elizabeth Marquardt, Amy Zietlow, and Charles E. Stokes, authors of *Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?* offer the following recommendations for pastors, youth ministers, and youth sponsors:

- Create safe space for children of divorce.
- Listen and allow children of divorce to question and struggle for meaning when it comes to faith.



Meet the Needs of the Divorced

Deliver assistance to individuals in areas where there is the greatest need. Note: These services apply to many other situations within the church as well (e.g. single parents, grieving families, older adults, or those affected by disability/illness). Those who are experiencing divorce, however, do not necessarily fit into any of these categories and thus churches often overlook or ignore their needs. Address their needs in practical

ways — financially and tangibly. Consider providing the following services as individuals make the transition to being single, and are without the skills, time, and/or resources their spouses once provided. While providing the service, teach the recipients how to become self-sufficient, where feasible.

- Minor household repairs/maintenance
- Painting — interior and exterior
- Lawn care/mowing/trimming
- Leaf cleanup and removal
- Snow shoveling and/or plowing
- Meal preparation for the most difficult days
- Moving assistance
- Automobile repair/tune-up
- Oil changes/fluid checks (Some churches make this part of an outreach ministry on a Saturday, combining it with programs or activities for children.)
- Child care to provide time for parents' appointments, errands, etc.
- School supplies (throughout the year, rather than just the beginning)
- Homework/tutoring help
- Mending/sewing
- Tax return preparation
- Budgeting/money management/financial advice
- Job search/application and resume preparation
- Basic job skills training for those who must reenter the workforce
- Prepare and offer a referral list of resources. This could include books, websites, and the names and numbers of local Christian professionals (legal, financial, counseling, etc.).
- Provide a resource library of books and workbooks for adults, teens, and children. Include devotionals and journals that specifically address divorce.

Ministry to Families in the Wake of Divorce

(continued from page 79)

- Be a faith role model.
- If married, be a marriage role model. The young people you serve are watching how you interact with your spouse and live out your marriage promises.
- Divorce shapes the life story of a person. A person should address divorce in discussing his or her life story and when writing a confession of faith.
- Be genuine and listen.
- Know that acknowledging the trauma or wound of divorce in a young person's life can be a prophetic role that opens a space for healing and hope.¹⁰
- Devote efforts to establishing a ministry to blended families and the distinctive challenges they bring.

DETERMINE TO BE OUTWARDLY FOCUSED

Develop opportunities for those who are on the road to recovery to participate in ministry, recognizing that one of the best ways to heal is to serve others. Divorced people further along in their recovery can find purpose and fulfillment in helping others navigate the path they have traveled. Design programs for the journey.

Divorce recovery is more like a marathon than a sprint. Recognize that recuperation is a long process. It most likely takes a minimum of 2 years until individuals feel they have "stabilized." These types of programs take patience and

perseverance. Teach and remind individuals about the hope Paul describes in Romans 12:12: "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Perhaps one significant component of any divorce-care program is the capacity to use it as an outreach to the unchurched, to the larger community. Many individuals who would not consider attending a worship service are willing to go to a church for a support group, especially if they know church membership is not a prerequisite to joining the group. Once there, churches have the unique opportunity to make them aware of other activities and programs, to invite them to attend worship, and most important to share the love of Christ with them and their children. Mike Clarendau writes, "There's a mission to consider. Jesus went to a Samaritan well wanting more than idle conversation. He showed love to the woman at Simon's house so she could engage in relationship with her Creator. ... The love He demonstrated catapulted good news to the front page and made the healing lines more than miracle dispensers. Love was the message, and love was the life-changer."¹¹

DEFUSE CONFLICT, ENCOURAGE RECONCILIATION

Attempt to neutralize conflict in couples who are in the process of divorcing or are contemplating it. Work with the initiator of the divorce to emphasize the potential, possibilities,



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and positivity of reconciliation. This means tackling one of the thorniest choices for each person affected by divorce — forgiveness. This is one of the most difficult challenges, but perhaps the most important and rewarding. When counseling couples who are struggling to stay together, help them see that while working out their differences can seem like a daunting task, so is the process of divorce. As long as each person has to work on their own issues, whether or not they divorce, why not encourage them to try to work out their issues in counseling prior to choosing to divorce?

DEPEND ON THE LORD

Depend on God to guide and sustain your divorce-care ministry: “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain” (Psalm 127:1). Enlist members to pray regularly — individually and corporately — for the ministry. Encourage spiritual growth through discipleship programs and small groups. Dependence on the Lord is the key to any recovery.

One of the most widespread programs in use today is DivorceCare®,¹² a program developed by Steve and Cheryl Grissom. Over 14,000 churches worldwide have used this program. The 13-week class features videos that address emotions, new relationships, finances, parenting, single sexuality, forgiveness, reconciliation, and how to move on from divorce. The program is Christ-centered and applies biblical principles throughout its material. Led by laypeople, it provides teaching through videos featuring Christian experts in the field of divorce care and recovery. For a fee, they provide a kit with the materials needed to begin a DivorceCare® ministry. Your church provides the lay leadership and the facilities. Money to fund the rest can come from a nominal charge to participants to cover the cost of their workbooks. They also offer a companion curriculum called DivorceCare for Kids® for children ages 5–12.

No matter what size your church, ask the Lord to show you now where you can begin to minister to the divorced within and outside your church. Strive to respond in the way that Jesus did — intentionally and lovingly. Divorce is devastating, but you have a choice. You can ignore it, or accept the reality of it and demonstrate the unconditional love of Christ. ■



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Notes

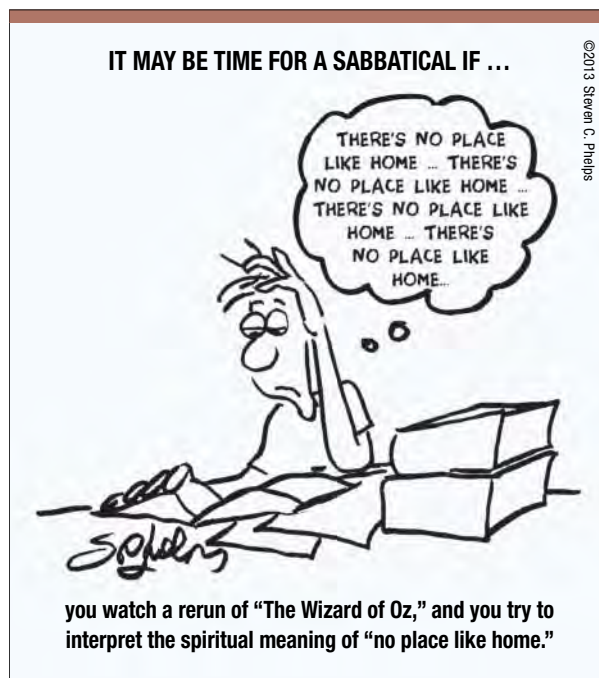
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- www.churchinitiative.org
- www.dc4k.org
- www.beforeyoudivorce.org
- www.centerformarriageandfamilies.org
- www.stateofourunions.org
- www.familylife.com
- www.stephenministries.org
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- www.celebraterecovery.com

Note: Photographs accompanying this article are used for illustrative purposes only. Individuals shown are models and have no connection to concepts, behaviors, or events referenced in the article.





Equipping
BLENDED FAMI
for Healthy Christian

By **Ron L. Deal**



LIES *Living*

Lane Simmons

Stepfamilies, sometimes called blended families, are quickly becoming the new traditional family in America. Here are eleven practical ministry suggestions that smart pastors can use to equip blended families for healthy Christian living.



Churches are getting smarter. After serving

and consulting with congregations for nearly 25 years in the areas of youth and family

ministry, it seems churches

are finally getting a full picture

of American family life. Church

leaders are learning more about the families

that comprise their congregations and communities.

Even more important, smart churches are doing a

better job of helping families get smart as well.

A healthy church is comprised of healthy families — of all types. Stepfamilies, sometimes called blended families, are quickly becoming the new traditional family in America. According to 2002 data, only 23 percent of U.S. households consist of a first-marriage couple with their biological children, what we used to call the *traditional family*. By contrast, stepfamilies, whether formed after the death of a spouse, divorce, or an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, comprise around 40 percent of households with children in the U.S.¹ Approximately 30 percent of weddings create stepfamilies, while 100 million Americans today have a steprelationship of some kind (a stepparent, stepsibling, or stepchild).²

After hearing these stats one pastor said, “Okay, there are a lot of stepfamilies. Doesn’t our marriage and parent ministry address these families just like everyone else’s?” No. Even though marriage education and marital therapy have the goal of strengthening all marriages, in truth we rarely practice it. For years solid research has suggested that the history and context of remarriage and/or stepfamily living makes it distinctively different from first-marriage families.³

While some dyadic (interaction between two people) and external marital dynamics are similar to first-marriages, others are different — extremely different. For example, blended-family couples are usually embedded in a complex stepfamily system that often sabotages the dyadic-focused interventions of most marriage-enrichment programs. Stepfamily enrichment requires a triadic (if not quadratic — interaction between three or four people) and multisystemic educational model that examines the intersection of parenting, stepparenting, coparenting between homes, grief reactions, loyalty conflicts, and marital dynamics.

Research conducted by the Couple Checkup Research Team headed by marital researcher David Olson, Ph.D. confirmed this understanding. The team — including Peter Larson, Ph.D., Amy Olson-Sigg, M.A., and myself — conducted two studies of over 100,000 married and remarried couples (each study was of 50,000 couples) and published two books summarizing our findings. *The Couple Checkup* and *The Remarriage Checkup* report on the top strengths of each marital situation and what predicted high-quality, satisfying relationships versus poor ones. Our research confirmed that first marriage and remarriage couples do have many dyadic similarities, but that some of the top predictors of success are different, as are the stumbling blocks. Seven of the top 12 stumbling blocks for remarried couples (issues on which couples disagree significantly), for example, are related to former relationship dissolution, fear of another breakup, or the complexity of their stepfamily. Remarriage poses challenges for couples that

first-marriage couples do not face in the same way.

Traditional marriage ministries address only half of what it takes to beat the two-thirds stepfamily divorce rate. Likewise, the typical premarital counseling program does not come close to preparing couples for the added challenges of stepfamily living nor does a standard parenting program address what it means to be a stepparent. Once savvy church leaders understand this, they want to know how

to equip blended families for healthy Christian living.

THE IDEAL VERSUS THE REAL

“But stepfamilies are not God’s ideal for the Christian home,” someone might object. “Doesn’t stepfamily ministry lessen what God intended?” What this person is really asking is can the church be a spiritual hospital without giving blessing to the “ill” that brought them there. I sure hope so. After all, the church is in the redemption business.

The “married for life” nuclear family is God’s design for the home — it is Plan A — and it truly is the most optimum environment for intimate marriage and childrearing. There is no question about that — and we should encourage marital reconciliation of a first marriage whenever possible. But the reality of God’s people from the beginning has included plenty of Plan B homes. Abraham’s home did not meet God’s ideal. He had multiple wives who stepparented his children by other women (with resentment and jealousy), as did Jacob, David, and many other heroes of the faith. Their homes were not as they should be, but God extended grace to these less-than-ideal people and families. He even used them for His purposes. When Jesus met the woman at the well (John 4), she was a cohabiting five-time divorcee. In a matter of minutes, He not only affirmed her acceptability to God and importance (something no one else offered her unless it was accompanied by a marriage proposal), He turned her into an evangelist. The next thing we see is her returning to town and telling everyone that grace is available no matter what your family story. And people came to Jesus.

Grace has the audacity of grabbing you where you are and then nurturing you back to faithful living. First it redeems, then it transforms. But then, smart churches have known this for years and have designed ministries to facilitate and communicate God’s redemptive power to people from a variety of backgrounds. These churches offer divorce recovery programs knowing that it does not condone divorce; they offer post-abortion and ex-gay ministries and walk people out of darkness into light and hope. In fact, churches across America are celebrating recovery on a weekly basis without ever believing they are celebrating addiction. Can’t we have the same attitude about stepfamily ministry for families formed after sinful divorce? Not all stepfamilies are formed by personal transgression — many are formed after the death of a spouse — but for those born from sinful choices, stepfamily ministry offers healing, grace, redemptive hope for the future, and practical tools for faithful living.

PRACTICAL MINISTRY SUGGESTIONS

1. **Become educated about the unique dynamics of stepfamily living and learn the essential elements of blended family ministry.** Suggested resource: *Ministering to Stepfamilies DVD*, Ron Deal, available at FamilyLife.com.

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2. **Communicate messages of hope and determination.** The “wilderness wanderings” can be long and frightening, but there is a promised land of marital fulfillment, interpersonal connectedness, child well-being, and spiritual redemption. Remind them not to give up (divorce) but to endure the journey to reach the promised land.
3. **Maintain an outreach (evangelistic) mentality.** You may have only a few stepfamilies in your congregation, but you have a lot surrounding it. Educate your leadership and staff to consider stepfamily ministry as an outreach effort. Design your classes (titles, meeting times, etc.) with the unchurched in mind.
4. **Start a small group or Bible class for stepfamilies.**

- Recruit a well-adjusted stepfamily couple and a nonstepfamily ministry couple to lead the discussion group. Equip them with *The Smart Stepfamily DVD Small Group Resource* (Ron Deal) and/or *The Remarriage Checkup* small group curriculum (Ron Deal and David Olson) to share with the group. These and other resources are available at FamilyLife.com.
5. **When a stepfamily visits your congregation:** a) Educate your welcome team not to ask too many questions about why their last names are different. Asking probing questions may feel like an “inquisition” and may lead to more spiritual guilt and shame over a past they cannot change. Without confidence that they can trust the church, most stepfamilies come to church already leery

Key Steps to Stepfamily Success

Pastor, here are some key steps as you work with blended families. Help these families understand these key steps. Doing so will help ensure their success.

1. STEP DOWN your expectations of how quickly your blended family will bond and find harmony. The average stepfamily needs between 5 to 7 years to form a family identity. In movies, love between adults and bonding with children happens quickly; in real life, it happens gradually.

Be patient with yourself, your marriage, and the children as they find their fit as family members. You cook a stepfamily slowly in a Crockpot, rather than mix them forcibly in a blender.

If still dating, slow down on a decision to marry. Kids need more time than adults to get used to the idea of a wedding.

2. TWO STEP. The couple’s relationship is by far the most important in the stepfamily home, yet it is often the



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weakest link. Make sure your marriage does not get lost in the blender.

Declare your marriage the new foundation for your home and balance it with a strong commitment of time and energy to your children.

Become a ghost buster. Identify and deal with any painful ghosts from a previous marriage, so they do not affect trust in this relationship.

3. STEP IN LINE as a parental team. Stepparents must focus on relationship building with stepchildren, and ex-spouses should learn between-home cooperation.

Ex-spouses who communicate well and cooperate on behalf of their children are also making success for the new blended family more likely. Put your differences aside and focus on being good parents for your children.

Early on, biological parents should continue to be the primary disciplinarian to their children while stepparents build relationship, trust, and respect with stepchildren.

4. SIDE STEP common pitfalls. Children need for stepparents to acknowledge their grief and understand it is processed throughout their lifetime. A child who says, “You’re not my mom, I don’t have to listen to you” is telling you about their sadness that mom isn’t here.

Maintain traditions when celebrating holidays and special days as appropriate while the new stepfamily creates some of their own unique traditions.

Money matters can be confusing. Discuss how you will balance being responsible for previous individual financial obligations while combining assets for the new family.

5. STEP THROUGH the wilderness with trust and determination. Remain dedicated to gradually forming a family identity over time, and everyone will be blessed. Remember, there is a honeymoon for couples in stepfamilies; it just comes at the end of the journey, not at the beginning.

6. STEP UP your faith. Spiritual resources help stepfamily members find grace for each other and strength for the journey. Also, a community of faith can support you along the way.

RON DEAL

of judgment; don't call out their past without first proving your church has a posture of grace. b) If you have a discussion group, let them know about it once they offer information about their stepfamily, but don't require they attend. Many will find it a comfort to connect with other stepfamilies, others will not want to be pigeonholed. Initially, let them hide their past if they need to.

6. Sensitize your Bible class teachers to stepfamily complexities.

For example, during Father's Day activities give children the option of making two cards for dad and stepdad (but only if the child wants to). On Mother's Day encourage stepmoms in their role and sympathize with their struggles. Most stepmoms will tell you Mother's Day is the worst day of the year for them to attend church because of the anxiety around their role (to be honest, most skip it). Use language from the pulpit on Mother's Day that acknowledges stepmothers. For example, when you welcome everyone say something like, "Of course today is Mother's Day and we welcome all our moms. If you are a mom, a stepmom, a foster mother, an adoptive mother, a grandmother, or a woman who is mentoring a child not her own, please stand so we can thank you for all you do." This acknowledges the presence of different family types and affirms the role these people play in the lives of children. Finally, because some parents coordinate visitation exchange at church, find out who is authorized to pick up the kids after Bible class and who is not. The custodial parent should put this in writing for the teachers.

7. Student ministries need to be sensitive as well.

Biological parents should sign medical releases; stepparents generally do not have the legal right to provide consent for medical treatment.

- If traveling with youth, chaperones should carry phone numbers to both sets of parents (i.e., both households) in case of an emergency, not just the church member parent.
- Class curriculum should include case studies that deal with common adolescent struggles. For example, how to honor stepparents in view of Ephesians 6:1–3, conflicts with stepsiblings, and uninvolved biological parents. Teens need a place to talk about such matters with youth leaders who understand their experiences.
- Youth staff should develop counseling skills to help custodial parents when their child leaves to live with the other parent. This happens frequently during the teen years and can bring much grief to the parents left behind.

8. Discuss stepparenting and remarriage pressures when doing general marriage and family enrichment classes or sermons.

I have found that sidebars, as I like to call them, are an effective method of speaking to the diverse family situations that all of us experience these days. A sidebar is when you pause your regular presentation and speak for a few moments to a particular subgroup within

your audience, usually to point out how the principle you just shared works differently for the subgroup. For example, when speaking to couples about how a strong marital commitment helps stabilize their home and provides a backbone for parenting, you might sidebar and say, "For those of you in stepfamilies, please know that in the early years of your marriage expressing marital commitment to your spouse, hugging him or her in front of the children, or even going on a date actually increases insecurities in your children because they may feel pushed out. They have already had a number of losses in their life, and your marital commitment to a new spouse may feel like another loss to them. Furthermore, they are not as invested in your new marriage being successful as you are — at least not in the beginning. Despite these reactions in your children, a strong commitment to your marriage is very important. You just need to expect some resistance to it. Long-term, though, there is a reward. While it might not start out this way, eventually most children do come to appreciate your commitment to your spouse." This quick sidebar recalibrates the principle you just taught for the stepfamily couples attending allowing you to then go back to your general marriage teaching.

9. Pre-stepfamily counseling should educate couples and children about stepfamily dynamics.

Notice I included children in the process. To educate just the couple and not the children will shortchange the effectiveness of the premarital program. Couples need to know that "coupleness" does not necessarily equal "familyness." These are two separate dynamics with two separate trajectories we must attend to (I discuss this in depth in my book *Dating and the Single Parent*). Children need perspective on how life will change when a stepparent (and perhaps stepsiblings) move into the house. Some of the topics to address include:

- Dealing with losses (children and adults)
- Realistic and unrealistic expectations
- How to cook for a stepfamily
- How bonding takes place
- Establishing the relationship after remarriage
- Parenting and stepparenting roles
- The ex-files: Coparenting issues after divorce
- Loyalty issues
- Establishing traditions and rituals

Sessions might include:

- 1) Bring stepfamily adults and children together to discuss expectations, roles, authority, and how children will refer to their stepparent;
- 2) Have an ex-spouse session to negotiate coparenting responsibilities;
- 3) Schedule 6-month and 12-month follow-up sessions to gauge progress and coach them through difficulties.

A complete discussion of pre-stepfamily counseling can be found online at SmartStepfamilies.com/view/counselor.

- 10. Sponsor a community event.** Host a stepfamily seminar, sponsor a stepfamily retreat, or offer a short course for stepfamily adults. This communicates your awareness of stepfamilies in the community and extends a welcome to them.
- 11. Offer competent pastoral counseling.** When couples are hurting, they will seek help from their church. For years I have had to undo poor counsel from well-intentioned pastors who did not do their homework on stepfamily dynamics. To be helpful you must be able to provide good information related to their present situation. This requires a good understanding of stepfamily dynamics. To get started in understanding stepfamilies, read *The Smart Stepfamily*. If you lack adequate training in counseling, find a competent marriage and family therapist in your area and make a referral. Keep in mind that most therapists have no specific training in stepfamily therapy and may cause more harm than good. Ask questions to see if they have had any training in stepfamily therapy. If not, you can always refer couples to me for a marital therapy intensive. See *SmartStepfamilies.com* for details. 📧



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Notes

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Note: Photographs accompanying this article are used for illustrative purposes only. Individuals shown are models and have no connection to concepts, behaviors, or events referenced in the article.



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Stumbling Blocks of Couples Creating Stepfamilies¹

1. They expect difficulty dealing with complex stepfamily issues. (88 percent)
2. They believe having children from previous relationships will put an additional strain on their marriage. (86 percent)
3. Creating a stepfamily puts more stress on their relationship. (85 percent)
4. Having different patterns of childrearing in their birth family can be problematic. (82 percent)
5. They expect stepfamily adjustment to be difficult. (78 percent)
6. They don't have a specific plan for money management. (73 percent)
7. They have concerns over unpaid bills, debts, or settlements. (66 percent)
8. They see their partner as too stubborn (65 percent)
9. One or both of the partners goes out of their way to avoid conflict with the other. (63 percent)
10. They have a fear of another marital failure. (63 percent)
11. One or both partners feel responsible for their problems when they argue. (61 percent)
12. One or both partners have not yet worked through the issues and hurts from previous relationships. (58 percent)

Notice how many of the stumbling blocks pertain to the complexity of marriage in a stepfamily and the couple's past. Four of the top five issues specifically deal with stepfamily concerns. One of the two money issues is related to the couple's past and two additional issues (the fear of relationship failure and resolving hurts from the past) also relate to previous relationships. In all, seven of the top 12 specific issues for remarriage couples relate to the resolution of their past or the complexity of their present stepfamily. This makes it clear that overcoming these issues is a critical part of a couple's success.

RON DEAL

Note

1. Taken from *The Remarriage Checkup: Tools to Help Your Marriage Last a Lifetime* by Ron L. Deal and David H. Olson (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2010), 29,30. Used with permission.

THE OTHER FACE IN THE PICTURE:

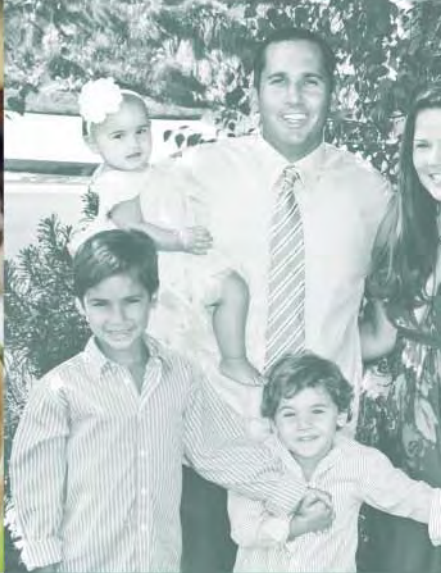
Ministering to Single-Parent Households

By **Mark E. Strong**

The single-mother household is a present and growing reality, and the church must be prepared to minister to this family unit. Here is how.

***a* n 1888 German postcard called the “Young Woman — Old Woman” provides a famous optical illusion.**

The first time I saw the picture I was with a group of kids gathered around a small table. While gazing at the picture with unswerving focus, these phrases bounced around the table like a pinball: “I don’t see her. I see her. Can you see her now?”



The Other Face in the Picture: Ministering to Single Parent Households

(continued from page 88)

Within the picture is the image of a young woman and an old woman. On cursory glance, one believes he is only looking at a picture of a young woman wearing a bonnet; however, the young woman is not the only image filling up space on the page. On closer inspection, one can also see the image of the older woman.

Look at Genesis 21:8–21 with the eyes of the children around the table. Take a penetrating look so you can see both women in the picture.

The first woman is easy to see. Her name is Sarah, and she is full of joy because God has just given her the desire of her heart. After many years of infertility and barrenness, she has given birth to her own son, Isaac. In her portrait, laughter filled her heart and home as she experienced the fulfillment of God's promise. She has a family that consists of her husband, Abraham, her son, Isaac, and the blessing and presence of God.

The other woman in the picture is a little harder to see. The second woman is Hagar. Hagar and her son, Ishmael, are not in the mainstream. Theologically they are from the wrong side of the tracks. They do not represent the ideal. So according to Sarah, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." (verse 10). Therefore, in moments, Hagar became a single mother without a support system.

Abraham thrust Hagar and her son out of his family with a backpack of food and a jug of water. The chapter ends with Hagar and Ishmael in crisis crying out to God for help, and God giving them the help they needed. This picture is not the ideal, but it is a reality.

When it comes to the family, the church has an ideal. We believe that a family structure comprised of a husband, wife, and children is not only ideal, but also biblical. Our conviction for this ideal causes us to invest our resources and use every means at our disposal to strengthen the family. We want our families to thrive and be healthy. However, we

cannot look solely at the family ideal in the picture. The single-mother household is a present and growing reality, and the church must be prepared to minister to this family unit as well.

THE RISE OF SINGLE PARENTING

We are aware that society is stretching out traditional marriage on the cultural chopping block. Changing societal views and attitudes on marriage,

same-sex marriage, divorce, cohabitation, and other forces render debilitating blows to the institution. We see the cultural impact on marriage by this decline.

Marriage rates have fallen among whites, blacks, and Hispanics over the past 50 years, but the drop has been most pronounced among blacks. In 1960, 61 percent of black adults were married. By 2008, that share had dropped to 32 percent. Among whites, the marriage rate dropped from 74 percent in 1960 to 56 percent in 2008. The trend in marriage rates among Hispanics has tracked more closely with that of whites. In 2008, 50 percent of Hispanic adults were married.¹

Synonymous with the decline of marriage is the rise of children born into single-mother homes.

Changes in marital patterns have had a major impact on the lives of children in this country. Many no longer consider marriage a prerequisite for parenthood. Over the past 50 years, the share of children born to unmarried mothers has risen dramatically — increasing eightfold from 5 percent in 1960 to 41 percent in 2008. This trend has contributed to the decrease in the number of children under age 18 living with two married parents — to 64 percent in 2008 from 87 percent in 1960.²

This essentially means that four out of 10 children born live in single-parent homes. Depending on the ethnic group, the percentage is even higher. Equally startling is the fact roughly 44 million children have no male presence in the home, period.³

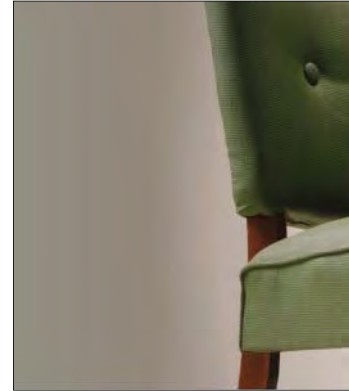
Women become single mothers in numerous ways. While it is important to understand how they got there, it is more important to understand who they *are* and where they *are going*. These realities should rouse us to loving action as church leaders and pastors. We cannot just focus on an Abraham-and-Sarah model of family. We need to look at our ministry landscape and see the Hagars and their children who are crying out to God for help, and then help them.

THE NEEDS OF SINGLE MOMS

Genesis 21:16 says, "Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, 'I cannot watch the boy die.' And as she sat there, she began to sob." Hagar's cry was a plea for life. Encapsulated in each teardrop was a plea to God for her and her son's needs. We may not see the tears, but they are flowing down the hearts and cheeks of many single moms.

The needs of single mothers vary; you cannot assume one need fits all. However, here are some common needs and issues.

Financial pressures. Leslie is a great single mother and



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a leader in the community. When I asked her about some of the issues she faces as a single mother, at the top of her list was financial pressure. She said when she became a single mother, her credit went down the tubes. Facing the daily decisions — am I going to pay my heating bill, or feed my daughter — were a way of life. The choice to feed her daughter meant no heat in the house and a mark on her credit score.

Financial constraints determine the quality of health care

THE CHILDREN'S NEEDS

God not only saw Hagar's tears, but He heard the cry of the boy as well (Genesis 21:17). Children of single parents have the same needs as children of two-parent households. However, they lack the father that the Bible says is responsible to help meet those needs. In my book, *Church for the Fatherless*, I identify nine biblical responsibilities that fathers are to fulfill to meet the needs of their children:



Over the past 50 years, the share of children born to unmarried mothers has risen dramatically — increasing eightfold from 5 percent in 1960 to 41 percent in 2008.

and education they will receive. They create a greater susceptibility to other social problems and ills.

Decision making. In a two-parent home, spouses have the blessing of talking over issues and praying about them together. The mothers I talk with express the frustration of having to make all the decisions for their household and children alone. This responsibility weighs heavy on them, especially those who do not have an adequate support system.

Me time. Single moms are on call every moment of the day. There is no help driving to doctor appointments, no other parent to send to teacher conferences. Many single moms would treasure just a little time for themselves, unplugged from the responsibility of single-handedly running their household. Also, they can lack the time and resources for personal growth and development.

Talking to their boys. Single mothers express the frustration of not being able to talk with sons about man stuff. They do the best they can; however, they still feel inadequate giving the fatherly talks. Providing the discipline all the time is not pleasurable either.

Domestic assistance. Fran raised her kids as a single mother. She said it was frustrating not knowing what to do when the roof was leaking, not knowing if the auto mechanic was overcharging her, or having someone to play ball with her son.

This list is by no means comprehensive. However, as you take time to listen to the hearts of single mothers in your church and ministry, you will discover the issues that are perplexing to them. Not only do single mothers have tears; their kids do too.

1. The need to feel treasured and loved. The need for emotional security and well-being.
2. The need for moral upbringing and guidance.
3. The need for a sense of identity and belonging, to be a part of a loving family and community.
4. The need for provisions flowing out of a relationship with a father who is accessible and present.
5. The need for instruction and teaching to develop life skills.
6. The need to be taught about God so they can develop their own relationship with God the Father.
7. The need for boundaries and accountability.
8. The need for a tangible godly father (male) role model.
9. The need for security and the benefit of having both a father and mother in the home.⁴

I would like to highlight #3: the child's need for a sense of identity and belonging. Even if a child has the greatest mom in the world, there is still the deep longing for a father's validation. Jesus, the Son of the living God, received validation from His Father at His baptism. God spoke from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). If Jesus needed affirmation from His Father, how much more children from homes where no father is present need affirmation.

As we consider the issues and the reality of a growing number of single mothers, we need to view their situations through redemptive lenses and see them as opportunities the church has to minister grace to families that are close to the heart of God.

The Other Face in the Picture: Ministering to Single Parent Households

(continued from page 91)

Here are some ways churches can facilitate ministry to single mothers and their children.

MINISTRY PRAXIS FOR SINGLE MOTHERS

Remove the negative stigma surrounding single mothers and their children

Most single mothers already carry a sense of guilt and shame whether justified or not. It's hard for them to be in a church where people view them as lepers. As pastors, we can contribute to the stigma, not only by what we say, but also by what we do not say. I have been guilty of contributing to that guilt and shame by only acknowledging married couples and families and not expressing God's love for the single mother and her children. We must validate our single mothers and children as much as we do married two-parent households.

At times I address single moms in my sermons and let them know they are doing a good job and simply encourage them

to keep going. The simple recognition alone helps break down debilitating stigmas; it helps create an accepting atmosphere toward them. They feel a part of the story of the church. We should strive to make our church a stigma-free zone for single mothers and their children.

Create ways for them to develop supportive and nurturing relationships

We have tried to create supportive relationships for single moms through small groups. Our Sisterhood Group is for single mothers of all ages. The group provides a safe environment where moms can share the pains, joys, and frustrations of single motherhood. The group gives moms the chance to exhale and breathe in the fresh air of God's love and strength.

Also, you can pair up single mothers in your church with women who can help them and support them through their difficult times. Chabre' Vickers, a young single mom at our



Christas / Thinkstock

Single fathers make up 15 percent of single-family homes in the United States.¹ While the proportion is not as pronounced as households headed by single mothers, there are fathers who are alone at the helm. While the single father population at our church is small, there are ways we have been able to support these courageous men.

Many single fathers need a place to heal. Men become single fathers usually as the result of some traumatic life-altering event. They may experience a divorce, a spouse dies, or for

another reason. Therefore, single fathers need a safe place to vent their anger, share their fears, frustrations, and pains. Many times men are working to come to a place of forgiveness so they can communicate with the child's mother on a civil level. They may be upset, but they realize the children need their mother in their lives as much as possible.

Our men's ministry has been a place for single dads to heal. The small intimate setting of our men's group is a great place for single fathers to open up and share their hearts. The peer support

lets a father know he is not by himself and that he has other men standing with him to help carry the load. A group for single dads will greatly benefit them and their children.

Like single mothers, single fathers feel the stress of responsibility overload. The daily grind of work, taking care of the children, paying the bills, and never being able to come up for air is a problem single fathers face. The church can help resuscitate these weary dads by providing times of respite. This would allow the dads to have some much needed time for themselves to play, rest, and recharge.

Finally, praying for single fathers is essential. Single dads and their kids need our prayers. Placing single dads and their children on the church's prayer list is a way the church can bless the lives of single fathers.

MARK E. STRONG, D.Min.

Note

1. The National Fatherhood Initiative, *Father Facts*, 6th ed. (Germantown, Maryland, 2011), 18.

church, told me of a time when she was discouraged. She ended up talking with another single mother in our church named Marci. Marci was able to encourage her and motivate her to keep moving forward. These interactions can occur by God's providence, but churches need to intentionally facilitate these relationships for long-term and effective ministry to single mothers and children.

Provide mentoring for their children

Children in your church long for a father's love. Almost every Sunday, before or after service, some little tike wants to give a big hug and hold me hostage for a few minutes. These kids long for a father figure in their lives. Mentoring gives us an opportunity to meet that need.

Mentoring need not be complicated. The kids are not looking for geniuses, but for someone who will just be there. Mobilize your men's group to do activities with children of single parents. One church in our community holds a breakfast for youth and children. They place an older man at each table. They allow the kids to ask or talk about any subject.

Encourage the men in your church to simply *take two*. If he is taking his sons or daughters to an outing, take a child of a single parent along too. A number of people in our church mentor kids in and outside of the church. Mentoring enriches their lives as much as it helps the children.

Help them to grow in their faith

Build the spiritual lives of single mothers and children. Help them to grow in the Word of God and deepen their relationship with Christ. Encourage them to fulfill God's call and purposes for their lives. Encourage them to serve in ministry and bless the lives of others. We have some single mothers in our church who are pillars. They did not come through the doors that way, but over the years their lives have blossomed. Disciple them, pray for them, and love them.

A CHURCH THAT SAW BOTH FACES IN THE PICTURE

Bob Macgregor pastors City Harvest Church in Vancouver, Washington. Bob grew up in a single-parent home with a mother who suffered from schizophrenia. His story is a testament to the power and grace of Jesus. His journey has produced a passion within him and his church to minister to single-mother households.

1. They built a database. City Harvest Church collected all the names of single mothers in their church. Then they hosted a free oil change day for single mothers and collected the names of all the mothers that participated. They then intentionally reached out to the families on that list.
2. They offer 12 weeks of parenting classes for single mothers. They eat and share their stories and grow in community, faith, and love.
3. They do an event called "Mommy, It's Your Turn." They bring the kids to the church for a carnival while

mom goes to buy something for herself with a gift card furnished by the church and the store.

Once these moms come to faith in Christ, the church assigns a Christian family to come along side them and to assist them and their children.

City Harvest is a church that has seen the other woman in the picture. We now see both faces as well. By God's grace, we can help wipe away the tears of single mothers and their children, and make a difference in these precious families that are a part of God's family and ours. 🙏

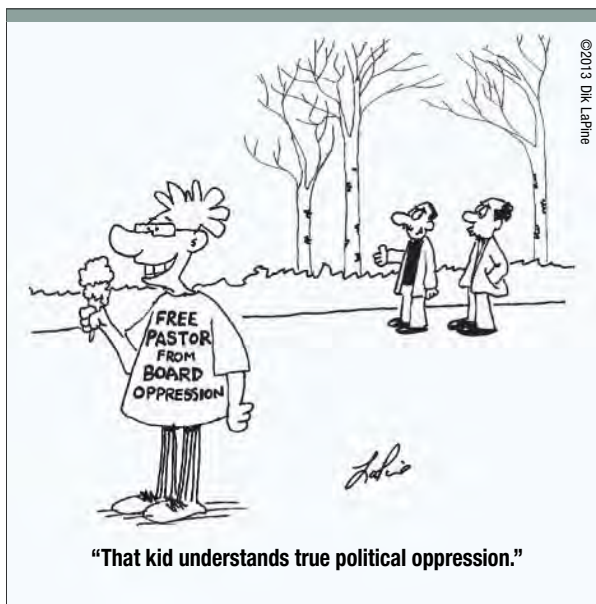


MARK E. STRONG, D.Min., is senior pastor, LifeChange Christian Church, Portland, Oregon.

Notes

1. The Pew Research Center, "The Decline of Marriage and the Rise of New Families," November 18, 2010, page 9. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/11/pew-social-trends-2010-families.pdf> (accessed April 16, 2013).
2. *Ibid.*, 2.
3. The National Fatherhood Initiative, *Father Facts*, 6th ed. (Germantown, Maryland, 2011), 18.
4. Mark Strong, *Church for the Fatherless: A Ministry Model for Societies Most Pressing Need* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 97.

Note: Photographs accompanying this article are used for illustrative purposes only. Individuals shown are models and have no connection to concepts, behaviors, or events referenced in the article.



“Family-ing”

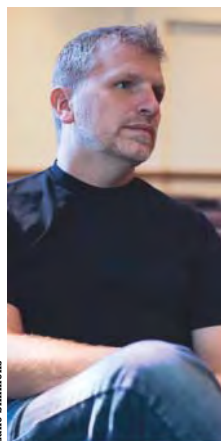


Pastors
have a unique
opportunity
to attract and
positively influence
single adults.

SINGLE ADULTS



By **Dennis Franck**



BOB'S EXPERIENCE — WILL HE RETURN?

bob arrived at church 10 minutes before the service began hoping to connect with someone to ease the butterflies in his stomach. It had been 3 years since he stepped into a church, but his recent separation and impending divorce helped him recognize his need to develop some sort of spiritual life. A few people in the lobby laughing

together noticed him but seemed preoccupied.

Bob quietly slipped into the back row hoping someone would speak to him. Others around him looked straight ahead as if they were in a trance ... or were they just afraid to speak to someone they did not know?

The service began: "Welcome to First Church. Let's stand and sing about the love of God." After a few songs and prayer, the leader asked people to say hello to each other. Bob turned to someone in front of him, but that person was already talking to someone else.

After an awkward 10 seconds, a man and woman next to him said, "Are you new here? Did you come alone or is your wife here, too?" The word *wife* stirred feelings that were difficult for Bob, and several questions ran through his mind. The men's retreat promotion didn't help either. The speaker mentioned the retreat was only a month away and that wives should be happy their husbands will come back better equipped to strengthen their marriages. Feelings of loneliness and emptiness flooded over Bob. He didn't choose to end his marriage; his wife left him for another man.

Bob hoped the sermon might offer some encouragement to help deal with his impending divorce. The essence of the sermon — family and marriage are God's desire for us — caused him consternation and pain. His marriage was over.

The pastor concluded his message by asking couples and families to stand for prayer. Bob noticed many adults didn't stand, and he assumed they were either single or without their spouse that day. Nothing was said about those who didn't have a spouse present. Bob didn't enjoy the service and wondered if/when he would ever return.

“Family-ing” Single Adults

(continued from page 95)



Lane Simmons

SANDY'S EXPERIENCE — SHE'LL RETURN

Sandy went to church as a girl, but it had been 14 years since her last visit. A persistent uncomfortable feeling caused her to visit church one Sunday. When she entered, a man and woman greeted her. “My name is Don and this is Mary. What’s your name?” Being single, Sandy noticed they were not wearing wedding rings and thought it was great a single male and female were serving as greeters.

“I’m Sandy. I’m just visiting today.”

“Wonderful,” said Mary. “We meet lots of new people and are glad you are here. Would you mind if we sat with you?”

“Well, no ... I guess that would be okay. Thanks.” Sandy thought it was nice that people who didn’t know her would sit with her.

Don and Mary seemed to sense Sandy’s confusion at certain points in the service and offered short, simple explanations why people got excited, lifted their hands, and prayed out loud.

“Whether you are new to the area or live here, married, remarried, single, or single again, we welcome you. You are part of the family of God, and we will do everything we can to help you feel a part of it.”

That sounded nice, Sandy thought. I really need to feel part of a family since mine is 500 miles away.

After the service, Don and Mary asked Sandy to go to lunch with them. “Some of us single adults have lunch together on Sundays,” Don said. “We almost always have new people and would really like you to join us.”

Wow, thought Mary, Sunday afternoons are kind of lonely anyway. “Yes, I’ll go. Thanks.” Sandy met 15

other single adults and learned they meet weekly for discussion and friendship, and one or two social events every month. She sensed this could be a group where she might develop healthy friendships. Sunday was a good day for Sandy.

BY THE NUMBERS

Single adults of all ages and types are in every

community. Let’s consider the varied types of single adults living in our neighborhoods. The Census Bureau reveals:

- 64.5 million never-married adults — 27.5 percent of all adults.
- 25 million divorced adults — 10.6 percent of all adults.
- 14 million widowed adults — 6 percent of all adults.
- 31 million adults live alone — 27 percent of all households in 2010, up from 17 percent in 1970.
- 15 million single-parent families with 24 million children under age 18.
- 55 percent of children are reared in nontraditional families (without birth mom and dad).
- 43 percent of first marriages end in divorce.
- 60 percent of second marriages end in divorce.
- 65 percent of remarriages with children end in divorce.

— America’s Families & Living Arrangements:
2012 U.S. Demographics¹

People representing these statistics struggle with marriage and rearing children; they wrestle with unemployment and fear; they close their garage doors quickly after entering to keep neighbors from seeing into their hearts and lives. Many of them have abandoned hope that life will ever get better. These individuals desperately need the church to show the love of God to them if they are to be a part of the church family.

YOU MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Your church can make the difference by showing God’s love to others. Bob’s story portrays an experience far too common in many churches today. As a single adult, Bob needed to feel included and part of a family. Bob needed to be “family-ed.”

“Family” is more than a noun; it is also a verb. Christians need to family each other, especially those who may not have a family due to death of a spouse, death of a marriage, relatives many miles away, or other reasons.

Churches want everyone to become part of a church and feel included. Accomplishing this, however, requires more than hope. Single adults need the church to realize not all adults are married, and not everyone has family nearby. The church needs to understand that single adults want/need people to accept them, maybe even more than married adults who have each other. The church needs to know single adults benefit from meeting other single adults with whom they share common interests and needs. The unmarried benefit from church leadership using inclusive language that recognizes and affirms individuals representing the many types of marital status: married, remarried, never-married, formerly married, separated, single parent, etc.

How can your church — the hands, feet, and voice of Christ — help single or single-again adults feel included? How can your congregation help them come to the knowledge of the truth of the gospel?

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Myths — What Do You Believe?

- **Single adults are lonely.** It is true some are lonely, but it does not take being single to be lonely. Some married adults are also lonely.
- **Single adults want to get married.** Some do want to marry. Many, however, are happy being single and enjoy their flexibility with time, money, and choices. I would rather they look for a mate in the church than in the world.
- **Single men are irresponsible.** Some are; some are not. Some married men are also irresponsible.
- **Single adults are sexually frustrated.** Due to death of a spouse or death of a marriage, many are now learning to live a celibate life. Is your church helping these people adjust?

- **Single adults have fewer problems than married adults.** Not really. Just different problems. Singleness and marriage both have a set of problems.
- **Single adults have more time than married adults.** Again, untrue. Single adults have the same household tasks but with no spouse to help.
- **Single adults are afraid of making a commitment.** This statement attempts to explain why many people have not married. It is basically untrue. Single adults postpone marriage for a myriad of reasons.
- **Single adults are a threat to married adults.** This is almost always unjustified. It is usually a married adult who feels this and may, as a result, alienate the single adult.
- **Single adults are not complete until they are married.** Because of emphasis on marriage and family single adults may feel like a half person. Marriage does not complete anyone. “We are complete in him” (Colossians 2:10).
- **Single adults have more money than married adults.** Only a few have good incomes. Young adults are not into their income-producing years yet. Divorced women usually experience a loss of income; single parents struggle. Many widowed adults live on a low, fixed income.

DENNIS FRANCK

Note

1. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Suggestions for Everyone

Here are basic suggestions:

- Use single and married greeters. Single adults deserve a warm welcome by other single adults at the forefront of their experience in a church.
- Do not assume someone is married. Being alone does not necessarily mean one’s spouse is absent, any more than being with someone of the opposite sex means the two must be married.
- Express interest in others by asking about their life, work, interests, family, etc. If they seem to be alone, ask if you may sit with them. If they are single, introduce them to other single adults. Unmarried people crave healthy friendships.
- Do not assume someone is accustomed to your church’s worship and style. Explain parts of the service that could possibly be threatening to visitors.
- Invite an unmarried visitor to go to lunch, and include other single adults with whom that person could possibly build friendships.

Suggestions for Married Adults

Families in many churches tend to network well with one another, but the connection between single adults and married adults is usually weak or even nonexistent. Commit to bridging the divide between married and single adults.

Consider these suggestions:

- Resist the temptation to suspect a single adult wants your spouse. Unmarried adults want and need to see a healthy marriage.
- Do not suggest a match for single adults or ask questions such as, “Why isn’t a talented person like you not married yet?”
- Pray for single adults and let them know you are praying for them.
- Reject cruel myths such as: single adults have fewer problems, single adults are on the prowl, single adults are lonely, single adults are rich, etc.
- Assist single parents with home repairs, childcare, hospital visits, etc. This shows them married adults care.
- Invite single adults to your home during holidays.

“Family-ing” Single Adults

(continued from page 97)

Suggestions for Pastors

Pastors have a unique opportunity to attract and positively influence single adults. Here are specific strategies pastors can employ to build a single-adult friendly church:

- Use single adults to testify how the church or the Lord has helped them.
- Encourage single adults to serve in all ministries the church offers. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:8 that he was single (for at least part of his ministry). In verses 26–35, he explains it is actually better for ministry to be single because singleness affords greater flexibility of time and resources than marriage. A single adult does not have to obtain agreement from a spouse to tithe, give to missions, go on a missions trip, teach a class, etc.
- Show the video, “Reaching Single Adults in Your Community,” found at www.singles.ag.org.
- Have married adults and single adults pray for each other and highlight the fact Jesus was the greatest single adult who ever lived.

These actions will greatly help a single adult feel included in marriage and family-focused churches and help them become part of the family of God. Help “family” single adults who may not have family close by or have family members at all.

Form Specific Groups

Every church has some single adults. Who are they? How many are there? What are their ages and single status? A church may already have a database containing this information. If not, a short, written survey completed on a Sunday morning

Christians need to *family* each other, especially those who may not have a family due to death of a spouse, death of a marriage, relatives many miles away, or other reasons.

will quickly identify all adults by age, marital status, number, ages of children, etc. This information will influence whom to target and also benefit other ministries.

Some churches have the resources to begin a targeted ministry to single adults of a specific age group (18–29 yrs.,

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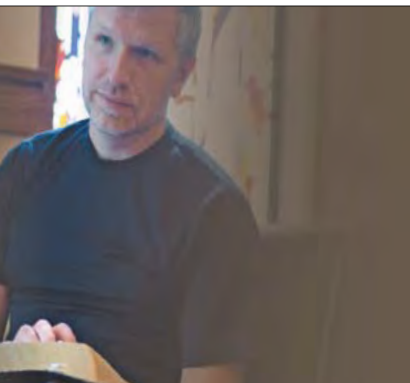


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30–40, 50–60) or life-issue group (widowed adults, single-parent families, divorced adults, etc.). Adults have more in common with others of similar age and life issues. For more information, see chapters 4 and 5, *Reaching Single Adults — An Essential Guide for Ministry*, Baker Books, 2007 (www.singles.ag.org).



Not all churches will choose to begin a specific ministry for single adults. Most churches, though, can help meet some of the spiritual, social, educational, and relational needs of the unmarried, and many can begin by planning a few specialized ministries for them. One or more of the following events will attract and interest single adults.

- a weekly teaching and discussion group
- a monthly social activity
- a quarterly seminar
- one community outreach every 6 months
- an annual retreat

THE VERY MINIMUM A CHURCH CAN DO

Understanding and utilizing the four principles below will help single adults feel part of the church family and bring acknowledgment, encouragement, and value to the never-married, divorced, widowed, and single-parent individuals who usually comprise 30 to 50 percent of the adults in any church.

Acknowledge single adults in teaching and preaching. Statements such as the following give value to single adults. “Whether you are married, remarried, single or single-again, there is a place for you in our church. Jesus lived an effective life as a single adult, and we want to help you do the same.”

Provide examples of single adults in Scripture. Jesus, Paul (1 Corinthians 7:8), John the Baptist and Jeremiah were unmarried. Ezekiel was a widower. Mary, Martha, Anna, the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene, Hagar, Dinah, Miriam, Naomi, and Vashti were either single or single-again.

Provide support and material and financial help for single-parent families. Free vehicle oil changes, home and car repairs, free childcare at special events, occasional financial help, a Christmas party with gifts, etc. are excellent ways to show Christ’s love.

Allow single adults to attend a single-adult ministry in another church, while supporting your church as their home church. Approximately 20 percent of all churches have a ministry for single adults. Many single adults would attend a single-adult ministry in a different church,

while still supporting their home church. Single-adult ministries that have single adults attending from other churches should regularly articulate, “We are not trying to have you join our church. If you are part of another church, please support it this weekend with your prayer, involvement, and offerings.”

Inspire your church to reach, minister to, and help single adults learn to serve. The single-adult population is too large to ignore, and their abilities and talents are too valuable to waste. The talents and creativity of single adults can bless the church by serving in every area. However, the church that ignores single adults undermines its present and mortgages its future. ☒



DENNIS FRANCK, director, Single Adult/Young Adult Ministries, The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

Note

1. America’s Families & Living Arrangements: 2012 U.S. Demographics. Found at: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>. Accessed 3 April 2013.



the
modern
family
AND THE
FAMILY OF GOD

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FOSTER-CARE MINISTRY *Matters*

By **Jay Mooney**

Church leaders must lead the church to own its biblical responsibility to redeem the fatherless. Here is how.

When Bill invited Jenna, a foster child, to help him with a project in his woodshop, it did not seem logical. Jenna did not have a background for woodworking. In fact, some were surprised to learn of her interest. But a seemingly unconventional invitation unlocked a heart and opened a door to a child in need.

Jenna began to carve a pen from olive wood. The pen would have two wooden shafts to contain the remaining components. Bill talked to Jenna out of his fatherly wisdom and made Jenna feel safe. At times he spoke about a Carpenter from Nazareth and how He likely worked with olive wood in his family shop. Jenna was intrigued. They talked about the Carpenter's life and His unconditional love for others. They talked about His power to make things from nothing and fix them when they were broken.

Finally, they had cut and polished the wooden shafts and were ready to assemble them. Jenna fastened the components and exclaimed, "I'm not a failure. I can do something right!"

Jenna suffered from multiple forms of abuse that affected the confidence and hope of her beautiful life. Simply building a pen changed her course. Not only did she come to trust Bill's leadership in the woodshop, she trusted in the Carpenter whom Bill had spoken of as the hope in his own life.

What we do for a foster child matters.

There are more than a million so-called *modern orphans* in the United States. Over 400,000 children and youth are in the stressed American *foster-care* system. The estimated remaining children and youth — runaway, trafficked, and abducted kids — are outside an exacting measurement system.

FOSTER CARE IS A BIBLICAL VALUE

The Bible recurrently declares God's jealousy for the orphaned or fatherless. The Old Testament paints a broad picture of God's love for the orphaned. Deuteronomy 10:18 says, "[God]

defends the cause of the fatherless." Moses was a foster child. Pharaoh's daughter, the foster mother, even paid Moses' mother to nurse her own son. Esther was an orphan before she was a queen. God had a redemptive destiny for her and her people.

Psalm 82:3 declares: "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless" (ESV¹). Among the 43 references to the orphaned or fatherless in the Old Testament, all are in the context of mercy or justice.

The New Testament uses the Greek word most often translated as "orphan" (ὀρφανός) only twice. First, Jesus references it in John 14. Jesus promises the coming Holy Spirit. In verse 18 He exclaimed, "I will not leave you as *orphans*." "Though He would soon leave earth and men would not see Him, another would come from the Father so we would not be orphaned.

Foster-Care Ministry Matters

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Second, James (Jesus' brother) speaks to it in James 1:27. Jesus' brother explained that a pure practice of Christian faith includes care for the orphan.

Strong's Greek Dictionary describes the word *orphan* as "one who is bereft of parents or of a father." This describes many foster children. They need a loving family. They need a Christian family. They need an encounter with the redeeming love of Jesus Christ.

Scripture recurrently echoes a compassionate and redemptive call for the fatherless and fragmented of the world. This world is in the backyards of American churches.

FOSTER-CARE MINISTRY CAN THRIVE THROUGH THE CHURCH

Foster-care ministry is deep in the heart of Timberline Church in Fort Collins, Colorado, under lead pastor, Dary Northrup, and missions pastor, Mark Orphan. They call this ministry Welcome Child, and a foundation called Finally Home supports it.

Kari Stewart is a foster mom and volunteer leader in Welcome Child. The community of faith represented in the church provides a framework for effective foster-care support. The spiritual, educational, emotional, and social supports are fitting. Tenets of faith that forge acceptance, forgiveness, grace, love, trust, and hope are fertile ground for effective foster-care ministry.

Christians are often among the better foster-care providers, according to multiple social workers and government leaders who influence a growing movement for foster-care ministry. The community of faith can be supportive and understanding for such caring families. Foster-care ministry in the

church can be as simple as an affinity group of foster families, and as synchronized as age or gender-based programs. The church helps make the government system work.

God's Word does not speak to government's responsibility for the fatherless or orphan; it speaks to the church's responsibility.

Some describe the current foster-care crisis as threefold:

- Capacity — There are not enough homes in which to place all those in the foster-care system.

Foster families surrounded with a church community of faith tend to succeed in ways that more isolated foster families otherwise struggle through.



- Stability — Approximately one in three foster-care children and youth will move through an average of three homes this year.
- Quality — Not every foster-care-home is adequately trained, equipped, or supported to succeed. Does the child receive an adequate witness of God's redeeming love?

The church is uniquely qualified to provide a solution to the national foster-care crisis. The current 3 million Assemblies of God adherents represent 5 percent of the 60 million evangelicals in the United States. With more than

400,000 children and youth in the daily foster-care system, would it not be reasonable to conclude that God should expect the Assemblies of God Fellowship to care for at least 20,000 of the foster-care children in need?

We can do more than nod at the need; we can act.

Some churches embrace orphan ministry at the local level. In context to what we call the *Law of the Diffusion of Innovation*, these are *innovators* and *early adopters* of a growing movement. Historical parachurch orphan ministries and these local church orphan ministries are forging a new road of harvest that is flipping the current challenges toward a better future.

MANY FOSTER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STRUGGLE IN FOSTER CARE

The American welfare system is broken. It struggles to keep up with the need, and it does not address the root of the problem, which is spiritual. The system provides monetary support to the approved foster family for the care of a foster child. In many instances, it averages around \$500 per month per child. We can liken it to a modern version of the government paying Moses' mother to nurture him for a while.

The American foster-care system started as a cottage industry 70 years ago and now is an estimated "\$23 billion a year industry of the federal, state and local government bureaucracies."²

It is a complex and stressed system that money does not and cannot resolve. Thousands of Christian families faithfully serve as foster and adoptive families. They are heroes to children whose lives would otherwise be without Christ-centered, compassionate care. Foster care may not be easy, but the outcomes are eternal.

Foster children are often broken of trust, frightened, and hopeless. The complexities of prenatal drug use, abusive homes, absent fathers, and other maltreatment can lead to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and Reactive Attachment Disorder in children. These injustices can be a challenge for foster-care families and ministries.

But how can anyone blame the struggling children? They never signed up for abandonment, an absent father, or a

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Visit *Enrichment* journal on Facebook

missing mother. They did not ask for brokenness. These kids long for a stable home, and most foster children prefer to be with their maternal mother and paternal father. If they cannot be with their biological parents, then they prefer to be with a couple who will be their foster mother and father, and perhaps adoptive parents. This is the beginning of success for them. Successful foster parenting must have care for the child at heart. Unfortunately, not all endeavors do.

Some foster parents are not principally motivated on behalf of the child. Per diem payments from the government motivate some foster parents. It is not inherently wrong to receive government assistance, but it is wrong when it is the principal motivation. Just to be a parent is the principal motivation for others. It is not wrong to want to be a parent, but it is wrong to place the desire to be a parent above that of parenting a child. The motive to foster parent may include the desire to parent, but parenting a child must be above and beyond it.

Many in the same-sex marriage movement are motivated toward foster parenting as means of family building. Again, the matter of need is not about adults; it is about children. Fortunately, social workers place many children in homes where the child's needs motivate their desire for becoming foster parents.



**Assemblies of God
Family Services Agency**
(AGFSA) rebranded to do

business as COMPACT™ Family Services. Last fall the agency commissioned and completed an unprecedented Assemblies of God National Foster Care Study to measure the Fellowship's appetite and readiness to do more in the arena of foster care. The results encouraged AGFSA to expand its foster-care offerings. It is a sizeable task but covenant agreement can meet the favor of God. The vision is moving forward in faith to partner, support, and resource efforts nationwide through the Assemblies of God fellowship.

An emerging relationship between COMPACT™ Family Services and a strategic foster-care partner is endeavoring the task. Together the partnered organizations aim to resource Assemblies of God churches to better foster care children and families.

To learn more about the outcomes of the AG National Foster Care Study, foster-care ministry, or other ministries of COMPACT, visit AGFamilyServices.org.

JAY MOONEY, Hot Springs, Arkansas

What kinds of homes do most of America's foster children and youth find? What sets apart the better homes?

Foster families surrounded with a church community of faith tend to succeed in ways that more isolated foster families otherwise struggle through. Too often couples venture into foster care ill equipped for the task. Pure-hearted motive needs to be met with good information, training, and support for success. When we do not adequately train and support foster families, foster parents feel ineffective or become heartbroken and resign to any future in foster care.

God's heart for foster children is more than one of social justice. He has a design for their soul and spirit. It is good for children to have safe, stable, and quality care. Yet, Scripture evidences God's longing to give children a witness of the love of Jesus Christ too. God wants a relationship with them.

FOSTER CARE IS A PATHWAY FOR ADOPTION

It is beautiful to see faith and family forged through foster care. In a number of cases it leads to permanency — adoption.

If the court removes the rights of parents who are repetitively guilty of child maltreatment, the affected children can become adoptable. More than 100,000 — approximately 25 percent — of foster children and youth are adoptable. Many await a permanent adoptive dream.

An oft-unknown value in adoption through foster care is that adoption does not suspend monthly per diem support. In essence, the government pays the family to adopt. The government deems it more valuable than the alternative. Furthermore, some states provide scholarship programs that will pay for an adopted foster child to obtain a college education.

When a couple believes God has called them to adopt, they are not limited to overseas adoption or even newborn avenues. They can look in the backyard of their own community.

FOSTER-CARE MINISTRY IS A GREAT MISSION

Scripture is ripe with calls to care for the underdogs — the orphan, widow, sojourner, poor, crippled, and beyond — as worthy of the social care among the people of God. Jesus often taught the value of looking after those who need help.

In Mark 9:33–37, the disciples are arguing about greatness, specifically “about who was the greatest.” Mark records Jesus' response: “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.’ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me’ ” (verses 35–37).

In essence, Jesus said, “If you want to be great, this is how you do it.” And He embraced a child.

God has a way of making the least the greatest. He called us to embrace the modern orphan, unwed pregnant teen, widow, and sojourner. It would be wise for churches to concentrate on

Foster-Care Ministry Matters

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doing what God calls them to do. Churches will find His favor and growth in return.

In John 15:16, Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit — fruit that will last — and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.”

Perhaps we should advertise less to the community and reach out more to it. In turn, God may give us the trust and favor of our community because we touched the needs that were there.

It is estimated that up to 30 relationships surround the average foster-care child in need. There are family members, friends, social workers, advocates, lawyers, judges, doctors, and other professionals connected to the child in need. Caring for a child could extend a loving reach to dozens more.

THE CHURCH SHOULD ACT NOW

Every generation has its share of fatherlessness. The Holy Spirit provides power for God’s people who minister to the needy. “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Every child has a destiny designed by God found in an identity with Him. What do you see when you look into the eyes of a fatherless or fragmented child? Do you see what God sees?

What if you did not have a name? Even if you did, what if you did not have a grip on your identity because you never belonged. As God’s people, what we do with His directives matter.

The Holy Spirit is calling the American church to address its biblical mandate to care for the fatherless. Compassion without action is empathy. “Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out” (Mark 1:41, NLT³).

As church leaders, we must do more than nod in agreement that the redemption of the fatherless and fragmented is important. We must lead the church to own its biblical responsibility to redeem the fatherless and fragmented. We must be “salt and light.”

Foster care is a vehicle for the empowered church to redeem the fatherless and fragmented community. So what can pastors and church leaders do? Here are several pathways for the local church to consider:

- Recognize the foster-care community in your congregation.
- Educate yourself through resources available on the subject.
- Investigate and identify the foster-care need in your community.
- Consider contacting a licensed child-placement agency in your state, preferably a Christ-centered agency, for assistance with foster-family approvals and child placement with prospective couples in your church.
- Present the foster-care need to the congregation.
- Support foster-care ministry and the broader modern orphan need.
- Pray for God’s favor with the growing movement and work in the cause.

God wants His church to serve as a stream of redemption for the social ills of local communities. The span of foster-care ministry stretches across families, churches, child-placement agencies, social workers, legal services, advocacy, camping ministry, and beyond. Perhaps, the most heroic are the more permanent caregivers — chiefly adoptive and foster families. These people are redeeming the modern orphan.

God is growing His heart for the modern orphan in many Assemblies of God churches. Pastor Chris Beard and People’s Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, is collaborating with other pastors to redeem fatherless children in their community. Pastor Charles Sanderfur and New Vision Fellowship, Knoxville, Tennessee, has been changing the lives of foster children for over a decade. From coast to coast the tide is rising in the body of Christ for the modern orphan.

Hundreds of churches are reaching out to America’s fatherless and Christian foster families. Local and state governments have grown to favor some of those leaders and their churches.

Steve and Sandra Hogue, of Calvary Christian Center, Ormond Beach, Florida, have fostered more than a dozen children. They have a growing voice for foster-care ministry that rings across their church, community, and state. But it rings loudest in their seven adoptive children who now call them *dad* and *mom*. What about you, your family, or your church?

One may ask, how can the effort of one heart, one family, one church, or one fellowship make a measureable difference to meet the growing needs of today’s modern orphans?

Proportionately it matters to each foster child — children with names like: Rebecca, Brian, Nelson ... Faith, Alex, Michael ... Wayne, Samantha, Samuel ... Ari, William, and Dakota. ☒



JAY MOONEY, director, COMPACTSM Family Services, Hot Springs, Arkansas

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1. The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, copyright 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
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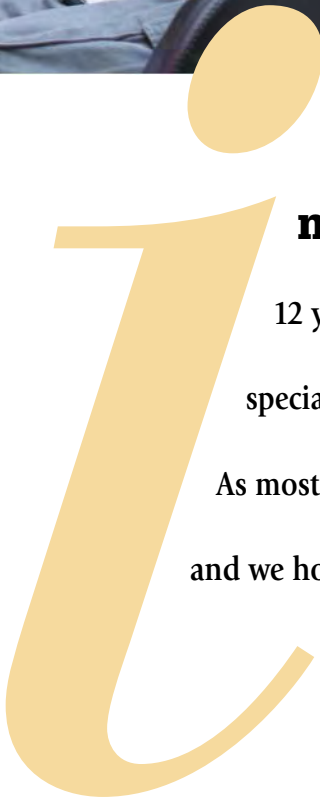
By **Joe N. Butler**



Leane Simmons



By assessing three key areas of your church — your place, your people, and your programs — you can help make your church accessible for families with disabilities.



I never noticed people with disabilities until about 12 years ago when my son, Micah, was born. Prior to having a child with special needs, I associated disability with old age and unfortunate circumstances. As most Christian parents do, my wife and I prayed over our child in the womb, and we hoped for and expected a healthy child.

Ministering to Families With Disabilities

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I assumed if we did everything right (i.e. pray, pursue God, follow doctor's orders), everything would turn out okay. I planned to take my son to ballgames, walk 18 holes on the golf course, and see the family name carried on. But God had other plans. Plans that stretched but eventually strengthened our family.

Something else I never really noticed, prior to having a child with special needs, was how inaccessible most churches are to those with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities can send their children to school five days a week but have a difficult time finding a church that will embrace them one day a week. With a willing spirit and an intentional effort every church can become accessible to families living with disabilities.

THE PROBLEM OF DISABILITY IN AMERICA AND THE CHURCH

Before Micah I never would have guessed that disability impacted so many families. On average, disability affects approximately 20 percent of individuals in any given community. According to a 2010 U.S. Census Bureau report "of the 62.2 million children under the age of 15, about 5.2 million, or 8.4 percent, had some kind of disability. Half of children with a disability were classified with severe disabilities (2.6 million children)."¹ The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability "as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment."²

My son, Micah, is on the autism spectrum. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions, "autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. Developmental disabilities are a diverse group of severe chronic conditions that are due to mental and/or physical impairments. People with developmental disabilities have problems

with major life activities such as language, mobility, learning, self-help, and independent living. Developmental disabilities begin anytime during development up to 22 years of age and usually last throughout a person's lifetime."³

The problem of disability in America, the definitions and statistics, can be overwhelming. Without Christ, the church family, and a biblical worldview, parents can only hope for their child to be cured or

educated enough to function in society. Sadly, not unlike secular society, the majority of churches have failed to notice families with children with disabilities. In his book, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, Erik Carter says, "Numerous faith groups have acknowledged their failure to respond to people with disabilities in ways that reflect their calling to be caring, loving, and responsive communities."⁴ According to one study that queried parents of children and youth with disabilities, "fewer than one-half of children and youth with autism, deaf-blindness, intellectual disabilities, or multiple disabilities had participated in religious activities at any point during the previous year."⁵

This is the state of disability in America and the church. The definitions and statistics can be overwhelming. If we ignore them, nothing changes. When we are made aware of them and understand that we live in a fallen world, but God is still in control, we gain a new perspective on God's purpose and design. God does not make mistakes. God made each person in the Imago Dei, to bring glory to Him.

IMPACT OF DISABILITY ON THE FAMILY

We received the diagnosis of Micah's disability while I was a student at Valley Forge Christian College. I was pursuing a degree in pastoral ministry. To say Micah's medical issues threw a wrench in things is an understatement. Most parents visualize their newborns sleeping through the night, or at least a few hours, and spitting up at a minimum. If Micah slept 2 hours straight, it was a good night. He wasn't able to breast-feed and went through several formulas — due to acid reflux — before we found one he could digest. I had a full schedule of classes while working nights and weekends. My wife, Jen, had the full-time job of parenting a 2-year-old and a newborn with special needs. Among other things, she was responsible for juggling Micah's multiple weekly therapy appointments, which were critical in teaching him to walk, talk, and use fine and gross motor skills. We often felt abandoned in the journey.

Studies indicate that "living with a child with a disability can have profound effects on the entire family — parents, siblings, and extended family members. It is a unique shared experience for families and can affect all aspects of family functioning. On the positive side, it can broaden horizons, increase family members' awareness of their inner strength, enhance family cohesion, and encourage connections to community groups or religious institutions."⁶ However, it can also negatively affect family functioning in the areas of time, financial costs, physical and emotional demands, and logistical complexities.

Most parents are thrust into caring for their child with special needs with no prior training or understanding of disability. As parents, you do what comes naturally — you love your child and get to know him; which takes time. Unfortunately, many families of children with mild to severe disabilities do not have much time left to invest in their marriage or other children. Studies indicate "that having an infant with a serious

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health condition or health risk increases the likelihood that parents divorce or live apart.⁷⁷ Parents of children with disabilities may experience increased guilt and blame, and reduced self-esteem. Another study found “that parents with disabled children have lower rates of social participation than parents without a disabled child.”⁷⁸

THE BIBLICAL MANDATE FOR THE CHURCH TO COME ALONGSIDE FAMILIES WITH DISABILITIES

When I think about the biblical mandate for the church to come alongside families with disabilities, the image that comes to mind is the body of Christ. When a part of our physical body is inactive or rejected, it affects the complete body. The same is true when the church fails to include each part of the body of Christ, especially the “weaker” parts, which may be people with and without disabilities. The Bible is clear that



Ability Tree reaches out to families impacted by disability through recreation, education, support,

and training (R.E.S.T.). We partner with individuals and organizations to raise awareness and build support networks to strengthen and grow able families. We envision families impacted by disability being accepted and supported in their local community; we envision individuals and families enjoying healthy relationships in their neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and churches.

Ability Tree fulfills its mission through a variety of holistic programming in the church and the community. Joe and Jen are available for speaking, training, and special needs ministry consulting in churches. Ability Tree also coordinates retreats for individuals and families affected by disability. Ability Tree builds relationships with families in the community through Ability Tree Centers that offer after school, art, music, respite, and support programs and events for individuals and families, while teaching volunteers how to interact with kids and adults with disabilities and their families.

Joe and Jen's lifetime vision is to see an Ability Tree Center in every county across the U.S. Currently Ability Tree operates programming in Arkansas, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Ability Tree's home office, as well as its model Ability Tree Center, is located in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. For more information about Ability Tree or to contact Joe or Jen Butler, visit www.abilitytree.org or call toll-free 1-855-373-6033.

“all members are equally included and valued.”⁷⁹

First Corinthians 12:22–26 says, “[T]he members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (NRSV¹⁰).

Theologian Amos Yong states, “A biblically informed and inclusive pneumatological ecclesiology emphasizes both that the church is liberated from whatever disabling barriers might exclude certain of her members from full access and participation and that the ‘weaker’ members are accorded more honor by God and therefore are more central to the identity of the body of Christ.”¹¹ Yong goes on to say, “[T]he Holy Spirit ... is actually the one who acts as the champion and advocate of all people, especially the poor, the ‘weak,’ and the oppressed, and who initiates them into the body of Christ. The result is or should be a kind of hospitality in which us/them barriers are overcome”¹² Too many well-meaning churches today are ministering out of their own strength instead out of Christ’s power. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 12:10, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Christ’s Great Commission does not differentiate between those with disabilities and those without; it clearly states the church’s missionary task is to reach all nations. People with disabilities need Jesus just as much, and sometimes more, than those without disabilities. We must evangelize them by coming alongside them and sharing the gospel in word and deed.

INCLUDING AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES INTO THE COMMON LIFE OF THE CHURCH

When it comes to finding a church home, for a family affected by disability, the process can be scary and choices can be slim. Much like new parents, the majority of churches do not know what to do with children with disabilities or how to come alongside such families. The bottom line is families are just looking for a place to belong.

So how do churches enfold and support families with disabilities into their common life? It’s not rocket science, but churches do need to be intentional. The most important quality in becoming an accessible church is creating a welcoming environment. Jesus socialized with people from all walks of life and welcomed those whom society rejected. The saying is true, “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

By assessing three key areas of your church — your place, your people, and your programs — you can help make your church accessible for families with disabilities.

Ministering to Families With Disabilities

(continued from page 109)

Your place. There's nothing more frustrating for a person or a family with a disability than not being able to get into the front doors of the church, the sanctuary, or the classroom. Borrow a wheelchair for a day and take a spin around the outside and inside of your church to see how accessible your church is for wheelchair users. Are there enough accessible parking spaces near the front entrance? Are there curb cuts to get onto the sidewalks? Is there an elevator, ramp, or lift to access all areas of the church? If not, what kind of signal are you sending to your community? Make modifications where necessary.

Your people. Just because families with disabilities can get into your church does not mean your church is accessible. Does your leadership team and congregation know how to welcome and address individuals and families with disabilities? One way you can do this is by having a Disability or Special Needs Awareness Sunday to help your church learn how to interact with people with disabilities and their families. Share about the need to reach out to and include people with disabilities in the body of Christ, talk about people-first language where you address the person first, before the disability (e.g., the boy with autism versus the autistic boy). And, encourage fellowship among congregants and families with special needs. God meant the church to be a community where we share one another's joys and burdens.

Your programs. When it comes to your programs, it's not as much about starting a "disability ministry," as it is about changing your philosophy of ministry. I suggest mainstreaming individuals with special needs into your existing programs whenever possible. Kids tend to accept each other's abilities best when they are familiar with one another. You will begin to notice things like kids without disabilities, who develop a heart for those with disabilities.

For years, public schools have been using individualized education plans (IEP) to set goals and implement learning strategies for students with special needs. The church can learn something from the way the school system operates. By communicating with the parents of children with special needs in your church, you can discover how best their child learns, what they like and do not like, what they know and do not know about God, how best to keep them on task, and how best to divert and deal with an incident. Modify or develop an intake form for families that includes a question that asks if you can review their child's IEP with them, so you can best include their child with special needs into the church.

Families with children with disabilities are a necessary part of the body of Christ. But, because we naturally fear the unknown, we can tend to ignore such families in our local and church community. Ministry, in general, is risky, but the reward is well worth the risk. Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Bundy tell us "that when a church fails to welcome the disability community there's a high price to pay — Jesus said, 'I

tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me' " (Matthew 25:45).¹³ ☒



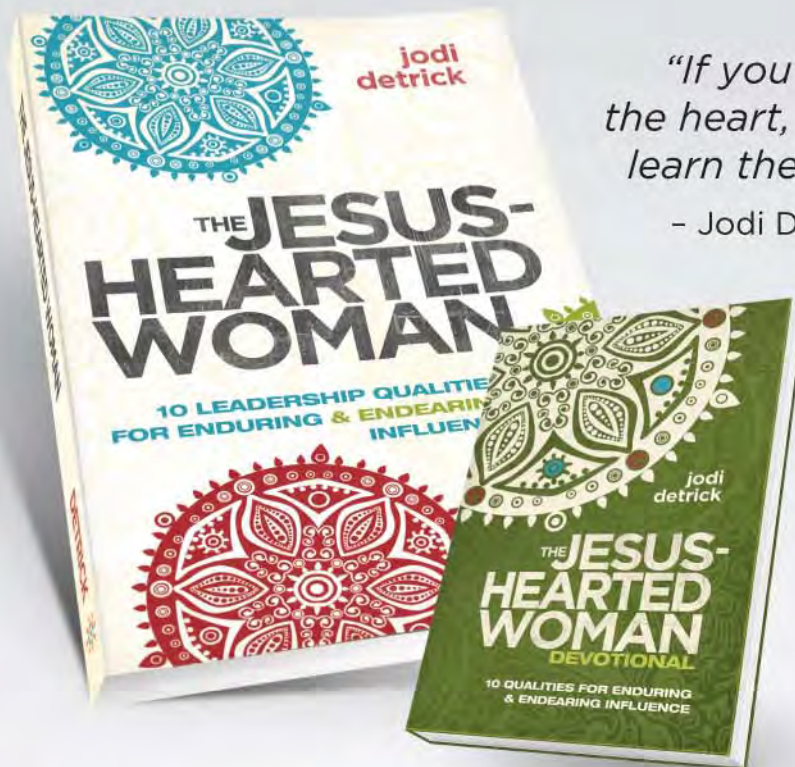
JOE N. BUTLER, Assemblies of God U.S. missionary to persons with disabilities and their families. Joe and his wife, Jennifer, founded Ability Tree.

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Healthy Women Shine
Healthy Women Change the World
Healthy Women Are Authentic/Dynamic
Healthy Women Move Mountains



*"If you have
the heart, you can
learn the skills."*

- Jodi Detrick

Beyond denominational divisions and class distinctions, beyond the failings of our own humanity, there is the radical, transforming power of God's grace.

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**Could it be
that our
convictions
are well
placed, but
our methods
are ineffective?**

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SERVE, DON'T SHOUT:

Ministering to LGBT Families With Love and Compassion

Interview with **Rick Cole**

***h**omosexuality is a controversial issue in both American society and Christian churches. Ministering to LGBT-identified individuals, their partners, and children presents very real, unique, and challenging opportunities for the Pentecostal church. In this Enrichment interview, Rick Cole, senior pastor of Capital Christian Center, Sacramento, California, shares valuable insights he has learned while on his journey of ministering to the LGBT community. His practical insights on this sensitive subject will help Pentecostal ministers better speak about and lead on this important issue.*



Tell us your and your church's experience with people who have LGBT backgrounds.

COLE: I experienced what I would call a revelation in how I view my responsibility in ministry to the LGBT community about five years ago. I was approached after church one Sunday by one of our members who shared a concern she had at her workplace. She was working as a nutritionist at an organization called CARES (Center for AIDS Research, Education and Services). There were a number of clients being served who were in advanced stages of HIV/AIDS, and they did not have anyone to provide spiritual guidance or prayer in their last days. I immediately responded that I would love to offer any help that I could.

She set up a tour for me at the facility. As she introduced me to physicians, pharmacists, psychologists, and other leaders, I was struck by the surprise on their faces when they learned that I was the pastor at Capital Christian Center. Though HIV/AIDS is not a gay-only disease, most of those interested in helping were from the LGBT community. I was known in our community for being anti-gay; thus their confusion at my presence in their facility.

I returned to my office that day troubled and convicted. Why were there no faith leaders involved in helping people with HIV/AIDS? Why did there seem to be so much compassion and love flowing from the gay community and only judgment and anger from the Christian community? If the gospel of hope and everlasting life is for all sinners, what can I do to remove the barriers I have built in communicating that hope to the LGBT community?

I have such a strong commitment to declaring the truth of God's Word as I understand it. The louder, the better. Could it be that my convictions are well placed, but my methods are ineffective? Has my heart grown hard toward those whom Jesus weeps over?

Days later I was in a church service where a minister was talking about how his family always prays over their meals and shares a Scripture before eating. With the intent of being humorous in order to break the ice with the crowd, he shared how his favorite verse was John 11:35: "Jesus wept." Now they could eat. Everyone laughed while those words sunk deep into my spirit. When I think of LGBT people, what

emotion do I feel — anger, disgust, disdain, and ridicule? Luke 19:41 tells us, "As he [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it." Jesus was about to suffer and die for their sins and rebellion, yet He was moved with compassion and sorrow for their condition. These thoughts felt like Spirit-inspired revelation, and I began to wonder what would happen if I stopped shouting at the gay community and started serving them with compassion and love.

That week I received a call from the leaders of CARES asking if I would be willing to serve on a committee they had developed to address the spread of HIV/AIDS in our community. The "Are You The Difference?" campaign was designed to educate regarding early detection of the disease and the treatment that is available to virtually eliminate the spread of HIV/AIDS. I told them I would be honored to serve.

When one of their board members saw my name on the agenda for approval to be added to this committee, he protested loudly and threatened to quit the board if I was allowed in. As a gay activist, he was sure I was his enemy. The leaders encouraged him to at least have a meeting with me and then make up his mind.

We met downtown for coffee, and he came on strong in opposition to my involvement. I told him that if my presence would not be helpful to the cause, I would willingly withdraw from the process. He softened up a bit, and an hour later we were friends.

We continue to meet about once a month to learn more about one another and how we can make a difference in our community. After being raised Catholic, he became an atheist and had not set foot in church in over 30 years. He has now come to our church three times and told me recently he moved from being an atheist to an agnostic. The end of the story has not been written, but I know God loves him. And I know I love him, too.

What are the spiritual needs of people with LGBT backgrounds?

COLE: There are needs that are certainly common to all people, regardless of their sexual orientation. The need for salvation and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit are the same for them as for anyone in the world today. However, I do see other needs that are unique to their experience. They have the need to be humanized and not objectified. They have the need to be loved and not hated. They have the need to be embraced and not shunned. They have the need to be invited and not picketed. They have the need for a gentle conversation and not angry shouting.

One Sunday, in the middle of my message, I decided to try an experiment. I explained how it is in my power to sway the thinking of people by what I say and how I say it. For example, I said, "Let's talk about the homosexual community."

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I began to raise my voice with greater intensity: "One day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord! And on that day, many will be turned away to eternal darkness. All of those homosexuals are going to pay for their sins. They are going to burn in hell!"

At this point, half the crowd began to applaud. I lowered my voice and said with sadness, "You just proved my point. There is no rejoicing in heaven over those who perish. Why would *we* rejoice at that thought? We should be moved with sorrow and compassion for all people."

I think the biggest need of people with LGBT backgrounds is to be seen as important, worthy of love, filled with potential, and valued. When we see them that way, the message of the gospel has a chance to touch their hearts and bring change.

A gospel-centered ministry involves saying "yes" to sinners and "no" to sin. What does this yes-no dynamic look like when you're ministering to people with LGBT backgrounds?

COLE: The man I mentioned earlier who has moved from atheist to agnostic is an administrator of a local hospital. He is very thoughtful and quite knowledgeable regarding the Scriptures. Our conversations often move to discussions about the Bible and trying to understand who God is. Our main challenge in these conversations is that he has dismissed the Bible as the authoritative and inerrant Word of God.

I said to him one day, "I know you don't believe the Bible to be God's Word, so sometimes it is difficult for me to know how to explain things. I do believe the Bible to be God's Word. That being the case, I find myself with a great responsibility to do my best to represent His Word to others. So, even though there are only a handful of places in the Bible that speak directly to the issue of homosexuality, those references are there. I don't want to misrepresent what God has said. I have a great love for you, and I feel the responsibility to say that the practice of homosexuality is addressed by God as sin. How do you feel about that, and how does that



““ If the gospel of hope and everlasting life is for all sinners, what can I do to remove the barriers I have built in communicating that hope to the LGBT community?”

make you feel toward me?"

I was quite surprised at his response. He said, "I've never thought of it like that before. I see the dilemma you have. You want to be true to God and yet express your friendship and concern for me. I can appreciate your position. I still don't see it the same as you do, but it doesn't offend me that you see it that way."

We continue to have these kind of straightforward conversations, but they are immersed in genuine compassion, thoughtfulness, and conviction. We are still engaged in the journey of spiritual discovery, and it is my prayer that he will come to full faith in Jesus by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

We don't seem to have the same emotional response to those who have been divorced, who are involved in heterosexual promiscuity, who are filled with pride, who are fraudulent and

filled with lies, who misuse alcohol or drugs, or who are filled with anger and lack self-control. We offer them hope and the opportunity to receive grace. We welcome them into our houses of worship with open arms.

It is definitely a delicate balance to find the path of conviction and love, to find the path of absolute truth and grace for those who have not yet believed. It requires intense prayer and study. But it is worth the effort. Souls are hanging in the balance. God has not written them off. Neither will I.

How does your church reach out to people with LGBT backgrounds?

COLE: We do not have LGBT-specific ministries. We do our best to provide an atmosphere of love and compassion and make it known that our spiritual journey is open to anyone who has a desire to explore it with us. We make no distinction of who is welcome and who is not. All are welcome. Jesus said to go out into the highways and byways and compel them to come in (Luke 14:23). We are doing our best to build bridges, not barriers.

We have a ministry for special needs families in our church. Highly trained workers minister to the children with special

Serve, Don't Shout: Ministering to LGBT Families With Love and Compassion

(continued from page 115)

needs so their parents can attend church with confidence their children will be well cared for. The word spreads in the community of special needs families and has attracted many new people.

One Sunday a man brought his special needs son to the class. The leaders engaged him in conversation and discovered that he had heard about this, and he wanted to drop his son off for class. He would be back after going out for brunch. The next week he came again, and the leaders encouraged him to stay for church. He let them know he didn't think he should because his partner was waiting for him in the car. He was encouraged to bring his partner in with him. He politely declined and returned again after brunch. After three or four weeks of this exercise, he was finally convinced that maybe he really was welcome in the church service. He and his partner ventured in the door that day and discovered a welcoming and loving atmosphere. They were moved by the worship and challenged by the teaching. They began attending regularly. They have never tried to flaunt their lifestyle in any setting. You could pass them in the hall and not know they were partners. They are not trying to push any gay agenda. They are genuinely hungry for the presence of God in their lives.

On a recent Sunday, one of these men was sitting with one of our pastors in the café area in our lobby and began to express how he was feeling like he may need to make a change in his lifestyle. He was feeling convicted by the Holy Spirit that celibacy was a lifestyle choice he needed to follow. We are walking this out with him to assist in making godly decisions and following the message and person of Jesus. Love wins.

How does your church disciple people coming from LGBT backgrounds?

COLE: We approach discipleship of those coming from LGBT backgrounds on an individual basis. Every situation has some unique elements and requires sensitivity and careful guidance. There is no one-size-fits-all. We also exercise



“When my heart was touched with love and compassion for those who identify as gay, I stopped shouting at them and started serving them.”

submission to God's Word as long as it takes. When we start setting rules, we display the spirit of religion that is comfortable for us but harmful to those who are seeking help.

What are the unique spiritual needs of children being raised by parents with LGBT backgrounds?

COLE: This is very new territory for us. I think we are in the midst of discovery regarding their unique needs. One thing I have discovered through research is that children of gay parents are no more prone to being gay than children of heterosexual parents. In that light, one of their greatest needs is to be treated like we would treat any other child.

I don't have a systematic answer for this question because of its uniqueness and newness. I would simply encourage not singling them out for special treatment, and if they initiate questions, we would seek the wisdom of God and the wisdom of others who may have traversed this field before us.

What can the church do to address these kids' needs?

COLE: The best thing we can do is embrace them, love them, and inspire them to fulfill their God-breathed purpose in life.

Ministry to Gay-Parented Families: a Checklist for Pastors and Leaders

- Approach gay-parented families with compassion, healing, and truth in the doses they can receive, just as Christ did.
- Assume homosexuals are always in our midst and avoid all homophobic speech, i.e. inappropriate remarks.
- Make sure you have policies and discipline in place to counter bullying.
- Be sensitive to your staff and volunteers by asking, "How's it going? Are the children (of gay parents) integrating and connecting with the other children?"
- Dialogue as needed for sticky situations. Families may come to the pastor or associate for help. Lead in with questions.
- When preaching or teaching on a passage that mentions homosexuality, always speak the truth in love.

GINGER HAAN



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Homosexuality is a controversial issue in both American society and Christian churches. What is the best way, in your opinion, for Christian ministers to speak about and lead on this issue?

COLE: The principle that has shaped my thinking and approach on this controversial issue is the Great Commission. Jesus made no distinctions concerning whom we should reach out to with the good news of His love and grace.

I have a history of declaring doom and judgment on the gay community. I don't remember seeing any fruit from that approach. When my heart was touched with love and compassion for those who identify as gay, I stopped shouting at them and started serving them. I have seen remarkable fruit from that shift in my spirit and methods.

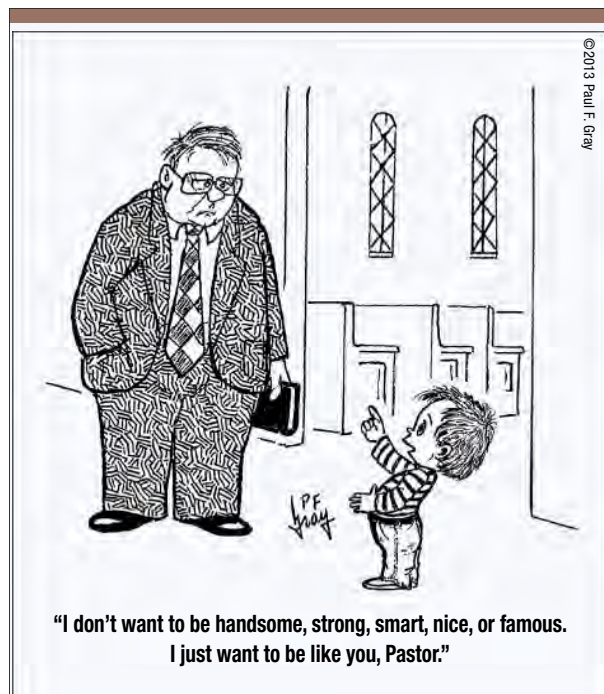
We have a tendency to view those who are not Christ followers as our enemy. I am brought back to my senses through the truth of God's Word: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).

People are not my enemies. They are precious in the sight of God. He loves them as much as He loves me. He wants me to love them, too. "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

I have discovered a respect for those who are gay. I respect the precious value of their souls. I am not mad at them. I am for their well-being.

I believe we are most effective in achieving our God-given mission when we are known in the community we serve for what we are *for* instead of what we are *against*. 🙏

Note: Photographs accompanying this article are used for illustrative purposes only. Individuals shown are models and have no connection to concepts, behaviors, or events referenced in the article.



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Postmodernity tends to strip the meaning of spoken words and prioritizes the hearer's interpretation of those words. Intent and meaning get lost in the shuffle, but recent research about word usage provides some clarity and hope that words are not as meaningless as some would suggest. Google has produced a database of 5.2 million books published between 1500 and 2008.¹ You can do word searches and see how frequently certain words are used. A study done, using the Google database, researched the usage of individualistic words between 1960 and 2008. It became clear that people used words such as "self," "unique," "I come first," or "me" more frequently

than words that were communal: "community," "share," "common good." It also becomes clear that people used moral terms such as "virtue," "decency," and "conscience" less frequently during this period. In fact, 50 words usually associated with moral virtue were found nearly 75 percent less frequently as the period studied progressed.

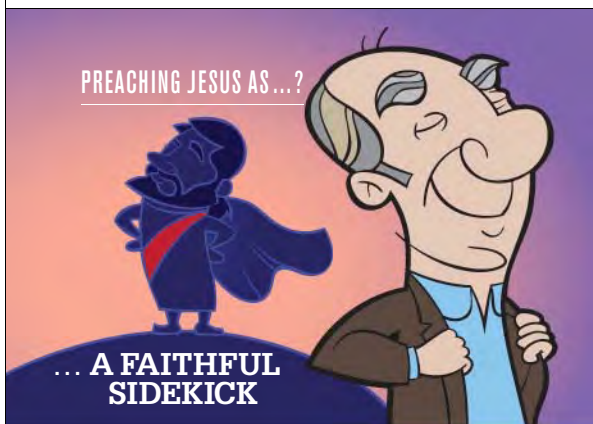
It does not take much observation to note that over the last half century

our nation has become much more individualistic and less morally aware. When people live by their own rule, there is social breakdown. It is increasingly obvious that the way people relate to one another and the moral basis by which those relationships occur has lost much of the fabric that knit together our society in the past. It also confirms Jesus' words that "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).

— **BYRON D. KLAUS, D.Min., president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri**

Note

1. David Brooks, "What Our Words Tell Us" *The New York Times*, May 20, 2013 http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/21/opinion/brooks-what-our-words-tell-us.html?_r=0. [accessed 2 July 9, 2013].



David Bates

The main idea: Jesus did it and He will help you do it.

The problem: This reduces Jesus from the central character of the story of our salvation to the silent partner who simply helps us live right. He is nothing more than the greatest tool in your toolbox. One more metaphor: Jesus gets the assist, but I get the goal. The gospel is not that He helps us get it right but that He got it right in our place. Big difference.

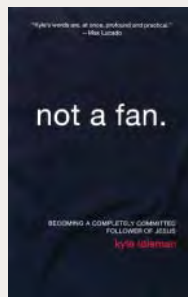
The result: You may get teenagers fired up, but you may also make them self-reliant and filled with unhealthy expectations. If they think that all they need is a boost from their buddy Jesus to be okay, then they may not understand the depth of their own depravity. Grasping — on a profound level — how lost we are, is the starting point to encountering Jesus.

— **DAVID HERTWECK, Clay, New York**

BOOK IT!

NOT A FAN?

When I saw the title *Not a Fan*, I assumed this was another book telling us why people don't like Christians or the church these days (a popular topic) and decided to ignore it. But on my son-in-law's recommendation, I took another look, and was pleasantly surprised.



Kyle Idleman, pastor of Southeast Christian Church, a megachurch in Louisville, Kentucky, has written a thoroughly engaging and thoughtful challenge to believers. Idleman's thesis is that Jesus wants followers, not fans, and he masterfully explains the difference.

Modern Americans are experts at being fans. We proudly wear the colors and logos of our favorite teams, music groups, and more, letting the world know of our allegiances and alliances. We proudly support our favorite televised talent contestants, download favorite songs and shows, and devour the latest offering of a popular novelist. But as rabid as fans may seem, they can quickly lose interest and turn their attention elsewhere.

Sadly, we take that same approach to our faith and the Savior. The book's subtitle announces its goal: *Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus*. Idleman does much more than diagnose the problem; he presents a powerful challenge and practical solution. This is an easy read and would make an excellent resource for sermons and small group studies: *Not a Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

— **DAVE VEERMAN, Naperville, Illinois**

COMPASSION

SIMPLE DECISION WITH HUGE IMPACT

is not only an effective means of addressing poverty, but it has become the fourth largest segment of philanthropy. Research by Bruce Wydick, an economist at the University of San Francisco, has demonstrated that an extremely large and statistically significant impact exists in the educational outcomes for sponsored children.¹

While the data from this research is compelling, the real core of what this research discovered is that the patient nurturing of self-worth, self-expectation, dreams, and aspiration are a critical part of helping children escape poverty. The key to ending poverty resides in the ability of people to shape a view of their own capacity to move into the future where they are not victims, but are capable of shaping their own destiny.

The American value of helping the impoverished is well-known. There is also a parallel cynicism that sometimes looks at child-sponsorship programs as scams. While donors need to be diligent in knowing the organizations they are investing in, the generalized "scam" factor seems to have been neutralized by this research. In the Assemblies of God, Latin America ChildCare (<http://lacc4hope.org/>) is a sponsorship program for children in Latin America and the Caribbean that has a 50-year track record of changing the outlook on life for hundreds of thousands of children. The belief that the power of the gospel can change an individual life that can impact an entire community now has substantial statistical evidence.

— **BYRON D. KLAUS, D.Min.**, president,
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

Note

1. Bruce Wydick, "Want to Change the World? Sponsor a Child," *Christianity Today* 57, no. 5 (June 2013): 20 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june/want-to-change-world-sponsor-child.html> [accessed 2 July 9, 2013].

JUST BEFORE THE OFFERING

As you give this morning, your gifts will bless many people here and around the world. But, more than that, your giving also benefits you. You ask, "How can giving benefit me?" Giving makes us more like God, but giving also draws us closer to God.

Giving is also the antidote to materialism. We live in a world controlled by the desire for stuff. Giving breaks the power of stuff in our lives.

This morning, I encourage you to enjoy the benefit of giving today — by using giving as an antidote to the materialism of our culture.

— **GLENN REYNOLDS**,
Hampton, Virginia



AN ENCOURAGING WORD

A Weapon Against Self-Doubt

At the 2013 Golden Globe Awards, Anne Hathaway received a best-supporting actress award for her role in *Les Miserables*. Holding the envied trophy in her hand, she expressed her gratitude to the Hollywood Foreign Press Association for the award.

"Thank you for this lovely blunt object that I will forever use as a weapon against self-doubt."

As I heard Ms. Hathaway's remarks, it occurred to me that the Cross is a similar blunt object that accomplishes the same thing. It is an object that reminds us we have worth and that God deeply loves us. It is a symbol that minds us we matter

to the One who made us when we are tempted to despair of our value. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In Hathaway's case, the tangible reminder that provides her a point of reference is something she obtained because of her own performance. In the case of the Christian, the Cross is a tangible symbol that reminds us that we base our worth and value not on anything we have done but on what Jesus performed on our behalf on the Cross.

— **GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS**, Mercer Island, Washington

Pastors Urged to Pay Attention to Children of Divorce

An extensive Institute for American Values report

from a team of family scholars urges clergy to pay more attention to children of divorce if they want their churches to remain relevant. The report, "Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?"¹ is based on 13 commissioned papers from top religion and family scholars. The conclusion is that despite widespread changes in family dynamics in recent decades, U.S. churches have given strikingly little attention to the experiences of those who grow up without married parents.

One in four of today's young adults is a grown child of divorce. In addition, out-of-wedlock childbirth rates continue to climb. How these young people approach questions of moral and spiritual meaning — and what choices they make regarding religious identity and involvement — will influence broader trends in the church, the report predicts. Lead investigators of the Lilly Endowment-funded project were Elizabeth Marquardt, Amy Zietlow, and



istock / Thinkstock

Charles E. Stokes.

The report states that when children of divorce reach adulthood, compared to those who grew up in intact families, they feel less religious on the whole and are less likely to be involved in the regular practice of faith. While more than a third of people whose parents are married attend services regularly, only one quarter

from divorced families do.

Among those young adults who regularly attended church during the time of their parents' divorce, two-thirds indicated that no one — either from the pastoral staff or congregation — reached out to them. The report says children who experience a disruption of their home can experience a "second silent schism" in their lives if they feel disconnected to God. Conservative Protestant adult children of divorce are three times as likely to leave religious practice altogether as those whose parents stay together.

The study also found that adult children who had been raised in "happy,

intact marriages" were more than twice as likely to attend church services compared to those whose parents had a "good divorce." Likewise, children of divorce were more likely to have a negative view of God.

"The health and future of congregations depend upon understanding, reaching out to, and nurturing as potential leaders those who have come of age in an era of dramatic social changes in family structure," the report cautions.

One million children in the United States experience the divorce of their parents each year. More than half of children born to women under age 30 currently don't have married parents. By the time they turn age 15, four in 10 children in the United States will witness the dissolution of their parents' marriage or be a child of a cohabiting relationship.

The report recommends that pastors be more engaged in allowing children of divorce to question and struggle for meaning when it comes to faith.

"Know that acknowledging the trauma or wound of divorce in a young person's life can be a prophetic role that opens a space for healing and hope," the study says.

Note

1. www.centerformarriageandfamilies.org/shape-of-families/

EVANGELICAL WATCHDOG SEEKS TOUGHER PAY STANDARDS

Beginning in January 2014, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability will implement new policies for setting compensation for top leaders of its member organizations.

The new standard states that ministries with higher paid leaders will be required to perform minimum due diligence to ensure reasonable total compensation. Under the revised guidelines, related-party transactions must be conducted in a manner that demonstrates "integrity and propriety."

The ECFA bases its "Seven Standards of Responsible Stewardship" on Scripture. The move comes after the conclusion of a 3-year congressional investigation into spending practices of half a dozen well-known Christian broadcast ministries.

In December 2012, a special interfaith commission created by the ECFA issued a report recommending that pay for nonprofit leaders should be "reasonable." Michael E. Batts, president of the ad hoc Commission on Accountability and Policy for Religious Organizations, said a relatively few number of organizations are involved in "egregious financial misconduct."

The panel, which included leaders from virtually every major

faith group in the country, objected to efforts to implement new federal laws on ministry oversight and suggested that self-regulation would be a better course of action.

"We cannot allow the behavior of a few outliers in the religious and nonprofit sector to threaten the freedoms of those who are not the problem — those who are doing the good work," Batts said.

The panel advised nonprofits to make the policies for setting compensation available to donors upon request as a demonstration of appropriate accountability.

"When a nonprofit organization provides compensation and benefits that are perceived by the public as excessive, the credibility of the organization and its leadership is undermined," the commission stated.

U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) conducted a 3-year investigation into six ministries that yielded mixed results. Grassley said Joyce Meyer and Benny Hinn had made "significant reforms" to the financial practices of their ministries as a result of the probe. But Grassley reported that he received incomplete or no responses when trying to find out more about the compensation practices and board structures of the ministries of Kenneth Copeland, Paula White, Creflo Dollar, and Eddie Long.



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MOST AG CHURCHES RETAIN AG IN NAME

More than two-thirds of U.S. Assemblies of God congregations self-identify as part of the denomination, according to an analysis of the Fellowship's 12,722 houses of worship.

In all, 8,539 of the Fellowship's congregations have the word "Assembly of God," "Assembly," "AG" or "Assemblies" as part of the legal entity or doing business as name. This includes Spanish or other non-English language derivatives. The sum represents 67 percent of those U.S. churches affiliated with the denomination.

By far, the most popular moniker for an AG church is "First Assembly of God," so designated by 1,241 congregations. An additional 807 plain "Assembly of God" congregations are scattered around the nation, many in sparsely populated places where no other notation is necessary.

The next most common designation for churches within the Fellowship is New Life Assembly of God, at 168 congregations. Following that is Calvary Assembly of God (141 churches), Faith Assembly of God (129), Bethel Assembly of God (90), and Trinity Assembly of God (65).

Other popular titles include: Glad Tidings Assembly of God (59), Lighthouse Assembly of God (56), Cornerstone Assembly of God (51), New Hope Assembly of God (49), Victory Assembly of God (46), and Abundant Life Assembly of God (44).

While the majority of AG churches see the importance of identifying with the denomination as part of the title, a growing number of congregations are opting for such identifiers as geographic location, biblical place names, theological themes, or certain people groups (such as deaf, cowboy, or biker).

Various churches choose to be recognized with a biblical place or name, including: Corinth Assembly of God, Gethsemane Church, Jehovah Jireh Community Church Assembly of God, Moriah Assembly of God, Noah's Ark Assembly of God, Promised Land Assembly of God, Sea of Galilee Pentecostal Temple, Smyrna River of Life Assembly of God, Solomon's Porch of the Assemblies of God, The Carpenter's Shop Church, and The Upper Room Church.

Likewise, several churches are focusing on biblical or theological themes in their designation: Arise and Shine Assembly of God, Endtimes Revival Gospel Assembly, Faith and Hope Church, Jars of Clay Assembly of God, Once Lost Now Found, Remnant Worship Center, Salt and Light Community Church, Shield of Faith Assembly of God, and Standing in the Gap Assembly of God.

For some churches it's all about location, even when amusing. Those with a geographical place in the title include Fossil Creek Community Assembly of God, Haw Hill Assembly of God, Green Acres Assembly of God, Hungry Horse Chapel, Meat Camp Assembly of God, Rambo Assembly of God, Simmons Bottom Assembly of God, Superior Assembly of God, Tuba City Assembly of God, Tuxedo Assembly of God, and Turtle Mount Worship Center.

Some newer congregations are choosing one- or two-word titles to convey their message: Clarity, MarketPlace, Simplicity, The Cause, The Journey, The Well, and Vital Church.

Among the more interesting church names are Cloud 9 Worship Center, Exciting First Assembly of God, H2O Church of the Assemblies of God, Happy Home Assembly of God, My Friend's House, Power Point Church, Revolution Fellowship, The Answer Church, That Church of the Assemblies of God, Silent Assembly of God, and The Farmhouse Church.

MOST PASTORS, CHURCHES ENGAGED WITH INTERNET

Four out of five congregations have a congregational Facebook page, while more than nine out of 10 churches incorporate a freestanding web page for information about the church, according to a survey by the Religious Institute, a multifaith group based in Westport, Connecticut.

Churches use freestanding web pages to disseminate congregational news (97 percent of congregations using social media), links to denominational resources (86 percent), newsletters (77 percent), and sermons (64 percent), the survey reported.

Far fewer congregations are using other social media. Just 27 percent have a blog, while less than one in four is on Twitter and one in five has a YouTube channel. Only 29 percent of congregations use social networking for prayer requests.

Nearly all clergy — 96 percent — reported that they have a personal Facebook page, with two-thirds of them on the site daily. Four out of 10 pastors told the Religious Institute they have a Twitter account and 37 percent write a blog.

While 62 percent of clergy say they follow a religious leader on social media, only 5 percent of the general population does so. Likewise, 70 percent of pastors have joined a spiritual group online, versus just 6 percent of the overall population.

Among clergy, 19 percent say they worry about spending too much time on Facebook while 17 percent admit to surfing the web too often.

The survey indicated many pastors have provided counsel on a wide range of Internet sexuality issues, including Internet-related couples counseling (35 percent), infidelity (32 percent), sexting (22 percent), and teen sexual use of the Internet (18 percent).



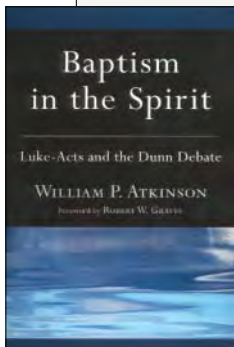
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Books

BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT: LUKE-ACTS AND THE DUNN DEBATE

WILLIAM P. ATKINSON (*Pickwick Publications, 154 pp., paperback*)



In this defense of the classical Pentecostal articulation of Spirit baptism, William Atkinson rehearses the history of the debate between James Dunn, prolific NT professor emeritus of Durham University, and Pentecostal scholars. Atkinson turns immediately to the well-worn citation of Dunn's unwavering position first published in the monumental *Baptism in the Spirit* in 1970. Concerning Lukan pneumatology, Dunn states: "for the writers of the NT the baptism in or gift of the Spirit was part of the event (or process) of becoming a Christian ... it was the chief element in conversion-initiation so that only those who had received the Spirit could

be called Christians" (7). Who could have guessed that these words and related arguments would launch a near half century debate?

Atkinson serves as the director of research and senior lecturer in Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies at London School of Theology and writes as a longtime researcher of the Dunn discussion. Three of the five chapters were published as far back as 1995 in various Pentecostal journals. To his credit, Atkinson brings these essays up-to-date and adds two further essays concerning more recent developments.

Atkinson begins with a brief history and synopsis of Dunn's work and the major Pentecostal respondents: Roger Stronstad, Howard Ervin, David Petts, James Shelton, and Robert Menzies. In the second and third chapters, Atkinson leads readers through the varied criticisms of and responses to Dunn by these scholars. The author also devotes considerable attention to Max Turner, a former Pentecostal and nuanced proponent of Dunn, as an important middle voice.

In chapter four, Atkinson addresses the significance of Pentecostal responses for Luke's unique pneumatology in the NT canon. He recounts the debate surrounding two non-Lukan passages, specifically 1 Corinthians 12:13 (the only NT reference to baptism in the Spirit outside of Luke-Acts) and John 20:22. He then proceeds to investigate both Pauline pneumatology and the oft-forgotten, yet weighty pneumatological emphases of John. Given the increasing emergence of canonical criticism, Atkinson's

analysis surely indicates that Pentecostal scholars must pay further attention to this matter. If Pentecostal (and other Lukan) scholars have essentially won the debate concerning Luke's credibility as a theologian, what might one say about the diversities between Lukan, Pauline, and Johannine pneumatologies (and theologies) or the arrangement of the canon, particularly the insertion of John's gospel between the third Gospel and Acts? Atkinson concludes with a final chapter that summarizes the debate and offers a pastoral defense of Spirit baptism for a Pentecostal audience.

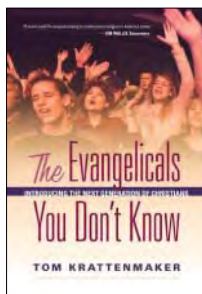
Like Atkinson, many others and I undoubtedly recognize that the rise of Pentecostal scholars in the academy is in part due to the appearance of Dunn's monumental work in 1970. The debate remained passionate, heated, yet cordial, whether oral or in print, and helped Pentecostals articulate their views against a highly visible scholar. This debate, however, has become rather tiresome. Since Dunn maintains unwavering resistance to adopt Luke as a theologian, his position lags grossly behind not only Pentecostals with whom the initial debate began, but among many biblical scholars. Forty plus years of significant hermeneutical, theological, and exegetical shifts leave Dunn's contributions on this matter wanting. (I must add that this is in no way an indictment of his entire body of scholarship. For example, Dunn's *Unity and Diversity in the NT* not only revolutionized my understanding of the NT, but also many of my students.)

I recommend *Baptism in the Spirit: Luke-Acts and the Dunn Debate* for specific audiences. On the one hand, Atkinson provides a helpful history of interpretation, particularly for students, pastors, and scholars — Pentecostal or otherwise — interested in the spirited theological battle fought by Pentecostal scholars in defense of a cardinal doctrine. On the other hand, I believe it is time to put the Dunn debate to rest; case closed. Pentecostal students and scholars must forge ahead and engage new questions concerning Luke's story and pneumatology. Successful defense against Dunn does not conclude discussion concerning Spirit baptism and Lukan pneumatology. Indeed, numerous Lukan scholars including Pentecostals (Frank Macchia, Martin Mittelstadt, John Michel Penney, Matthias Wenk, Amos Yong) leave Dunn behind to address new questions concerning exegetical import and experiential relevance concerning the Spirit of whom Luke writes.

— Reviewed by Martin W. Mittelstadt, associate professor of New Testament, Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri.

The Evangelicals You Do Not Know

TOM KRATTENMAKER (*Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 232 pp., hardcover*)



In *The Evangelicals You Don't Know*, Tom Krattenmaker introduces progressive readers to "the next generation of Christians" and urges them to work together on issues of common concern. In the process, he reframes America's culture wars. "At the level that matters, the quarrels that vex American society are not between Christians and non-Christians, between religionists and atheists,

between evangelicals and everyone else. ... The line that matters now is the one separating the 'we're always right/you're always wrong' arguers from unity-seeking, goodwill-mongering action takers of whatever religious persuasion, or none, ready to go to work to address a society's aching needs." What divides America, he seems to be saying, is not *what* you believe but *how* you behave — how you put your beliefs into practice.

This focus on behavior instead of belief explains why Krattenmaker profiles whom he does. Mostly, he profiles community organizers (e.g., Kevin Palau), activists (e.g., Stephanie and Shoshon Tama-Sweet), artists (e.g., Tony Kriz, Dan Merchant), and writers (e.g., Gabe Lyons, David Kinaman, Jonathan Merritt), though he does profile an ex-evangelist (Jim Henderson) and cites theologians (e.g., N. T. Wright, Paul Louis Metzger).

What is missing from his presentation of next-generation Christians are church leaders whose work includes matters of belief: conversion, spiritual formation, and things related to building up Christian community, the Church.

On the one hand, this is understandable. The majority of evangelicals live the majority of their lives outside the church, and it's important to see how they do so. Specifically, it's important to see how their faith helps them navigate in the sea of an increasingly secular culture, and do so with integrity.

On the other hand, Krattenmaker's description of "the next generation of Christians" is tendentious because he ignores the processes by which people become and remain evangelical. An almost-exclusive focus on what happens outside the church walls is as lopsided as an almost-exclusive focus on what happens inside them. Surely, one cannot describe the new breed of evangelicals without some attention to both.

Further, I am somewhat surprised that in a book that explicitly eschews a "we're always right/you're always wrong" mentality, the author cannot seem to find anything right with the religious right. Krattenmaker does have many good things to say about *evangelicals*, at least certain evangelicals, and at least to the extent that they are cooperating with progressives on community issues or moderating their tone. By the same token, while he takes his fellow progressives to task for their tone, he never seriously questions their ideas.

Even with these criticisms in mind, however, I think reading *The Evangelicals You Don't Know* is a valuable exercise, especially for evangelicals.

First, it is a reminder that orthodox theology and political conservatism are not necessarily identical. (Nor necessarily contradictory.) If you believe that the GOP is "God's Own Party" (or that Jesus would have registered as a Democrat), you are engaging in anachronistic, self-serving, partisanship, not honest inquiry.

Second, the book helps readers engage in self-criticism. Evangelicals have a bad reputation with non-Christians and need to understand why. Sometimes, the reputation arises from the unavoidable conflict of moral visions. Other times, it arises from evangelicals being wrong about an issue, or from being self-righteous, hypocritical, and uncaring. Progressives also need to engage in self-criticism, for they sometimes have the same "totalitarian" (his word) mentality that they critique in the religious right.

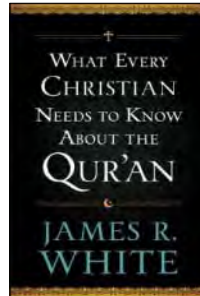
Third, the book points out that there are issues pertaining to the common good on which people of competing moral visions can nevertheless cooperate. For example, Kevin Palau (evangelical) and Sam Adams (former gay mayor of Portland, Oregon) were able to agree to cooperate in addressing the city's homelessness problem. And even where evangelicals may not be able to cooperate, they may find that there is a better way to talk about the divisive issues.

America is riven by competing moral visions. Some of these conflicts are irresolvable because they touch on core principles, on moral absolutes. But as *The Evangelicals You Don't Know* suggests, there are situations where both sides can cooperate, and even when they disagree, they can always speak and act with civility and respect toward one another.

— Reviewed by **George Paul Wood**,
director of Ministerial Resourcing for the Assemblies of God
and executive editor of *Enrichment Journal*, Springfield, Missouri.

What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an

JAMES R. WHITE (*Bethany House Publishers, 287 pp., paperback*)



Vince Lombardi, former coach of the Green Bay Packers, said, "The way to win is to know the other team's defense."

The Church today has a far greater challenge than a championship football game. There are 1.5 billion Muslims in the world who need the gospel. To some, it seems the religion of Islam and its followers, Muslims, are marching onto every continent, including North America. While Islam is rapidly growing, this challenge presents the

greatest opportunity to engage Muslim peoples in the history of the Church. Many Christians are ignorant of Islam and primarily its holy book, the Qur'an. James R. White's *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an* is an excellent book to understand the Islamic faith and the belief system of Muslim peoples. White is an apologist and director of Alpha and Omega Ministries.

I have served in global Muslim contexts for 22 years. From my experiences there are important historical and theological areas that need study and that are foundational to understanding Islam so Christians may respond with Spirit-empowered intelligence. White correctly discusses key areas of Islamic teachings that point to the differences between orthodox Islamic and Christian teachings.

Chapters 1–3 inform the reader about Islam's prophet Mohammed and the historic context in which he said he received the "recitation" of the Qur'an from the "angel Gabriel." These chapters also include information about Islam's belief commonly included in Christian books about Islam. White diverges from the norm by directing the reader to what the Qur'an says about the Trinity, Jesus, the Islamic understanding of salvation (which is vastly different than the Bible's), the belief that Jews and Christians altered the biblical text God originally inspired, and the prophecies about Mohammed found in the Bible (chapters 4–8). Such knowledge helps understand the "other team's defense."

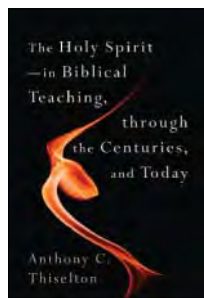
The book concludes with discussion of "The Perfection of the Qur'an" (chapters 10,11). Most popular books do not reflect on the parallels found in the Qur'an and the Bible. White enlightens readers to the similarities of each religion's respective sacred text. This content is helpful as places of commonality for discussion when sharing with Muslims. Another area of awareness for the Christian reader is the extra-biblical sources the Qur'an contains that most Muslims believe are orthodox Christian belief. This information will assist the Christian to better comprehend the divergent teaching that Islam ascertains to be historic Christian doctrine.

White's book empowers the Christian reader to become familiar with the "other team's defense." This leads to effectively engaging Muslim peoples with the Bible's proclamation of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The text is relevant for the missionary going to an unreached people group in Pakistan or a parishioner reaching out to Muslim neighbors in Pennsylvania.

— Reviewed by **Mark A. Hausfeld, D.Min.**,
international director, Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples,
Springfield, Missouri.

The Holy Spirit: In Biblical Teaching, Through the Centuries, and Today

ANTHONY C. THISELTON (*Wm. B. Eerdmans, 579 pp., paperback*)



Anthony Thiselton has recently released a major work on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. One of his intentions in writing this work is to initiate dialogue with the Pentecostal and renewalist movements. Drawing from his academic expertise, as well as his experience in helping guide the Anglican Church in its response to charismatics, Thiselton has produced a massive and impressive tome that Pentecostals should take seriously, even if

they may not agree fully with him.

The first section offers a brief discussion of the state on pneumatology in the Old Testament and within Judaism before providing a more in-depth study of the Holy Spirit through the New Testament. Thiselton illustrates throughout this section why he calls the Holy Spirit “the Beyond who is within.” (21) He stresses the “self-effacing” nature of the Holy Spirit who does not call attention to himself, but to Jesus. Thiselton repeats this theme throughout the book, believing it is a needed lesson for at least a minority within the Pentecostal, charismatic, or renewalist movements. He also spends considerable space on the meaning of various spiritual gifts, focusing especially on those gifts that have become a point of contention in the renewalist world (e.g., divine healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues).

Part two covers the historical development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, beginning with the Apostolic Fathers and continuing through the 18th century. He offers four rich chapters on the patristic period, two chapters on the Middle Ages, one chapter on the Protestant Reformers, and a final chapter on the 17th and 18th centuries where he briefly discusses the pneumatology of Puritan and Pietist theologians, the Quakers, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. Throughout this section, he again highlights teachings on the Spirit that he believes can help Pentecostals and charismatics better reflect on their own traditions.

While it is understandable that no one volume with this scope could mention every significant figure in the development of pneumatology, the absence of some key individuals is surprising. For example, including a discussion of theologians who developed their own doctrine of Spirit baptism — such as the 10th century mystic, Simeon the New Theologian, or the radical reformer Thomas Munzter (mentioned in this work only as a contrast to Martin Luther) — would seem appropriate considering Thiselton’s interest in Pentecostal self-reflection.

Thiselton spends considerable space on modern pneumatology in the third, and longest, part of the book. Beginning with 19th-century theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher and moving to the 21st century, he provides a wonderful introduction to those scholars whose contributions to pneumatology should be studied by any Christian leader interested in the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Thiselton is broad enough to include representatives from every major Christian tradition,

but he seems especially interested in charismatic and Pentecostal scholars. In fact, the attention and weight he gives to their scholarship testifies to his respect for worldwide Pentecostalism.

Thiselton praises a number of recent Pentecostals, especially Frank Macchia, for their willingness to critically reflect on their own tradition. This praise, however, feeds into his larger critique of individuals within the classical Pentecostal movement who have been dismissive of genuine dialogue with other traditions. He takes issue with scholars such as Roger Stronstad and Robert Menzies who see biblical narratives as paradigmatic for believers and argue for what Thiselton considers too sharp a distinction between Lukan and Pauline pneumatology. He offers familiar objections that Pentecostals would be safer taking their theology from Paul, and that they should not label a post-conversion experience as “baptism in the Spirit.” Nor does he expect that all believers could have such an experience of the Spirit. Thiselton makes his own position clear early on in the book when he writes that “Luke agrees with Paul that ‘baptism with the Holy Spirit’ applies to ‘becoming a Christian,’ not to some subsequent experience.” (55)

This reviewer strongly disagrees with Thiselton’s criticisms regarding classical Pentecostalism and questions his Eurocentric selectivity in the literature he discusses to make his points. However, there is much in this impressive survey of biblical and historical pneumatology that Pentecostals can learn from and even affirm. Thiselton ends his work by singling out issues requiring further dialogue with renewalists, including the need for discernment in the matter of prophetic declarations and an understanding of how to teach divine healing in light of the reality of death. As both a scholar and former pastor in the Pentecostal movement, this reviewer found Thiselton’s work to be a valuable resource that will be referenced again and again.

— Reviewed by **D. Allen Tennison, Ph.D.**,
associate professor of theology, **North Central University**,
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

A Better Way: Where Least Is Most

DAVID ZACHARIAH GLOVER (*CrossBooks, 306 pp., paperback*)



In A Better Way: Where Least Is Most, David Glover passionately and pointedly compels the church to reach out to individuals and families living with disability. Glover attempts to redefine people with special needs or disability by removing the negative labels and giving them a positive image that better reflects their true identity as a creation of God. He renames them PURE people. PURE stands for: Perfectly created by a loving sovereign God, designed

for His purpose; **U**nique in his or her own gifts, blessings, talents, desires, and contributions; **R**eceptive and responsive to our communication, touch, and acts of love; and **E**ternal, because there are no disabled souls in God’s eyes.

The author writes out of his experience as a grandfather of a PURE person, an ordained minister, and the president and founder of PURE Ministries. After the death of his first grandson, Zachariah, at age 4 ½, God

opened Glover's eyes to see PURE people as never before. After founding PURE Ministries, he expected the demand for churches to get involved to be overwhelming, but it was the opposite. Most pastors and churches were uncomfortable with the unknown and afraid to get involved.

In *A Better Way*, the author challenges the church to be proactive in the lives of PURE people and their families. There are over 50 million Americans with disabilities; one out of six families is affected by disability. Glover says, "Unless you walked through a very, very unique church, you saw less than 1 percent PURE people." Families of children with disabilities constitute the largest unreached people group by any method of measurement. He goes on to say, "Despite the overwhelming statistics and the virtual absence of significant numbers of PURE people

in the church, the church in America has essentially never purposefully sought after PURE people in any organized way."

Glover proposes a revolutionary idea, PURE ministry on purpose. Instead of waiting for people with disabilities to find you, be proactive in seeking them. If this sounds familiar, it is probably because that is the way Jesus ministered. He did not wait for people in need of healing (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual) to come to the temple, instead, He went where they were. Glover sums it up in one word: relationship. Relationship with PURE people is not just at church, but also in your neighborhood, workplace, and school.

— Reviewed by Joe N. Butler, M.A.,
father of a PURE child, AGUSM, Founder of Ability Tree

"BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN ...": ESSAYS ON JOHANNINE LITERATURE IN HONOR OF PROFESSOR BENNY C. AKER

CRAIG S. KEENER, JEREMY S. GRENSHAW, and JORDAN DANIEL MAY, editors (*Pickwick Publications, 296 pp., paperback*)

The name Ben Aker is synonymous with Pentecostal passion and Johannine literature. Throughout Aker's academic career at Central Bible College, California Theological Seminary, and Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, he has touched countless students with his knowledge of God's Word and his desire for academic and Pentecostal excellence. As a result, several of his former students, colleagues, and friends have produced this *Festschrift* in honor of his enduring legacy.

After the first chapter outlining Aker's life and his role in mentoring others, chapter 2, "He Will Guide You Into All the Truth," is a fitting opening for one who always sought to open the truth of God's Word to his students. Other chapters highlight important passages from the Johannine corpus. "John's Doxology: The Trinitarian Passion for the Glory of God" examines how each person of the Trinity manifests God's glory. We see this especially through the atoning work of Christ. Chapter 7, "Episodes of Personal Encounter," examines the personal encounters Jesus had with groups and individuals. More than simply providing narrative, John is providing a Christology and an insight into the awareness Christ had about His identity.



"A New Look at an Old Problem: A Narrative Approach to John 7:37–39" (chapter 8) provides insight into John's use of water and how that comes to a climax in this passage. In chapter 9, "Born of God: The 'Virgin Birth' of Believers in the Fourth Gospel," the author relates what he believes is John's statement concerning the Virgin Birth (John 1:14) with verses 12 and 13, describing how people come to become children of God.

Chapter 10, "Seeking Peace With Justice: Toward a Christomorphic Pneumatology," examines what it means to be a Spirit-filled peacemaker and how that might impact our lives, our church, and our society.

Chapter 12, "The 'Antichrist' Speaks: A Message to the Community of 1 John" provides a unique, possible response to John's message in this epistle by those who have left the Christian community. Robert Berg's creative epistle reminds us of those today who might elevate their message (supposedly from the Spirit) as opposed to the teachings of God's Word.

While most of the chapters deals with aspects of John's Gospel, six chapters examine passages and concepts from the Book of Revelation. The author of chapter 13, "Chose Your Own Adventure: Teaching, Participatory Hermeneutics, and the Book of Revelation," likens studying Revelation to the Chose Your Own Adventure genre of books. This creative approach of participatory hermeneutics causes readers to see the repetitions, interruptions, and recapitulations of the text to open its meaning. This approach is different from the linear reading approach used by many. The other chapters speak to the prophetic nature of Revelation. John, indeed, was Pentecostal. The Book of Revelation speaks of Spirit-inspired witnesses and prophetic insight. Some will probably disagree with some of the authors' views on Revelation 11 and the two witnesses, but these authors do give emphasis to the prophetic role of the church.

The last chapter, "The Vocabulary and Phraseology of Revelation," will appeal to those who do linguistic studies.

Those interested in Johannine literature and Spirit-empowerment will find this book a valuable resource. Some chapters drew me in and I want to do further study in the biblical text to mine some of the concepts presented in these chapters. This book is a wonderful tribute to a man who influenced hundreds of students in their academic journey. He influenced me as a student, and continues to influence me as a friend.

— Reviewed by Richard L. Schoonover, associate editor, *Enrichment Journal*, Springfield, Missouri.

Training Young Ministers

Assemblies of God Trust (AGTrust) provides scholarships and grants for future leaders.

Adam Wood, a recipient of the Ralph Riggs General Superintendent's Scholarship, is a student at Evangel University in Springfield, Mo. "I want to express my gratitude for this scholarship," he says. "I am so happy to be a part of the Assemblies of God, and grateful that AGTrust honors education from a godly Christian point of view."

Assemblies of God Trust is helping train future generations of leaders like Adam by making available four types of scholarships and grants for students attending one of the 16 Assemblies of God colleges and universities. They include the Ralph Riggs Scholarships,



TIBBS

Making THE Difference Scholarships, J. Robert Ashcroft Scholarships, and AG Next Generation Grants. AGTrust has awarded 541 scholarships and grants totaling more than \$1.5 million to students and graduates since 2009. For more information on these scholarships, go to www.AGTrust.org.

Eythian Tibbs, a theology major at Southwestern Assemblies of God University in Waxahachie, Tex., is a recipient of the Making THE Difference Scholarship. "It is God-sent programs such as yours that allow students to continue a healthy, Christian-based education in such a demanding economy today," says Eythian.



FINSAAS

Jenna Finsaas, a recipient of the J. Robert Ashcroft Scholarship, attends Trinity Bible College in Ellendale, N.D. "I am so grateful for the generosity of AGTrust members," she says. "Because of the scholarship I received, I was able to attend my first year at Trinity debt-free. I am working toward a degree in business administration with a minor in youth ministry."



JOHNSON

Michael Johnson, a recipient of the AG Next Generation Grant, graduated from Southeastern University in Lakeland, Fla., with a B.S. in pastoral ministry. He serves as a youth pastor at First Assembly of God in Saline, Mich. "Attending an

AG university to specifically study pastoral ministry and the Bible has been a blessing to my ministry," says Michael. Thank you, AGTrust donors, who gave to help with this awesome grant."

The Network for Women in Ministry Website

The **Network for Women in Ministry website** (www.wim.ag.org) provides regular, original content to help women ministers grow spiritually and professionally. The website is a ministry of *Enrichment* journal. A team of women ministers coordinates the content that develops new theme material to be posted bimonthly. The articles, interviews, videos, and other resources are directed to those in traditional and non-traditional ministries, bivocational ministers, and those preparing to enter ministry. Some of the content is also available in Spanish.

Also offered is a biweekly e-newsletter, *Women in Ministry Mobilized*. The e-newsletter delivers fresh stories from women in various ministry fields, including pastoral and missional, with news items of interest to all women ministers.



A ministry mentorship program, "Meaningful Connection," is also available through the site. Those interested can fill out a form on the website and be connected with a mentor-for-a-month.

To subscribe to receive site update and event notices, and to receive the biweekly e-newsletter, go to <http://wim.ag.org>.



December 8: Assemblies of God Bible Sunday

Every year on the second Sunday in December churches across the nation celebrate Bible Sunday. They designate part or all of their offerings to Assemblies of God Bible Alliance to help provide the *FireBible* — a Pentecostal study Bible translated in

various languages — for overseas pastors and laypersons.

The Bible Sunday theme this year is *WE CHOOSE TO GO to the tribes, to the nations, to the people*. Assemblies of God Bible Alliance based this theme on Revelation 5:9: "You purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation."

The Bible Sunday goal of Bible Alliance on December 8 is to raise enough funds to provide the *FireBible* for tribes and people groups in six languages: Hmong, Karen, Lingala, Lisu, Nepali, and Tsonga.

The *FireBible*, now available in 40 different editions, is the most widely translated and distributed study Bible ever produced, according to international Bible societies.

Plan now for your church to participate on Bible Sunday. Every

Need help?

Confidential phone counseling
is available free to all AG ministers and their families
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Monday - Friday, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. Eastern Standard Time

\$10 gift assists in providing a *FireBible* for an overseas pastor or a layperson in a language they can read and understand.

To order your free Bible Sunday theme DVD, brochures, and other materials, visit www.BibleAlliance.org or call 1-800-532-0440.



Dr. Carl Gibbs teaches a block course to Angolan pastors based on the Discovery Series course *Abundant Life in Christ: A Study of Salvation*.

Training Ministers in Africa Through the Discovery Series

Across Africa, Bible schools and extension training centers are using Discovery Series courses to train Assemblies of God pastors and ministers to lead and disciple a continent-wide AG Fellowship of more than 17 million members and adherents and nearly 70,000 churches.

Life Publishers is helping Africa's Hope produce the Discovery Series, a set of 37 Bible school level courses written for ministry training in the African context, according to Jeffrey Dove, director of Life Publishers. Already, 21 of the 37 Discovery Series courses are available and being used as curriculum for training. The national churches in Angola, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Namibia, Sudan and Tanzania are some of the biggest users.

In Angola, 127 Angolan pastors from across the country attended block training sessions at the Bible school in the capital city of Luanda a few months ago. Dr. Carl Gibbs, veteran missionary with Africa's Hope, taught the Discovery Series course *Abundant Life in Christ: A Study of Salvation*.

After taking this class, one Angolan pastor said, "This course has changed my life and my ministry. I have been teaching a wrong gospel to the people in the churches I pastor. I have implied to them that their salvation depends on their performance of good deeds and works to get to heaven. I was wrong. I must stand before my congregations and ask their forgiveness."

"The growing church in Angola [and across the continent of Africa] demands trained leaders, and the continuing provision of Discovery Series courses is vital to that training," says Harry Osland, a veteran Assemblies of God missionary and academic dean of the Bible college in Angola.

For more information regarding the international ministry of Life Publishers, visit www.LifePublishers.org.

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New Wineskins

The golden age of the idyllic TV family of the 50s and 60s stands in sharp contrast to many of the images we see in today's popular network programs. The evolution of the American TV family over the past 60 years is emblematic of the societal and cultural changes seen over the same period.

Television families over the past six decades are deeply rooted not just in the portrayal of fictional families but also in reality of the way life was and is.

The iconic Ward and June Cleaver, in the "Leave It to Beaver" series, typified the traditional American middle-class suburban ideal romanticized by TV audiences everywhere. The Cleavers of the 50s and 60s segued to the 70s blended family of the Bradys in "The Brady Bunch." The 70s and 80s also gave rise to two popular single-parent TV families: The Partridges and Romanos ("One Day at a Time").

And who can forget the Taylors ("Mayberry R.F.D."), the Cunninghams ("Happy Days"), the Huxtables ("The Cosby Show"), the Bunkers ("All in the Family"), the Keatons ("Family Ties"), and the Seavers ("Growing Pains")? Though some of these earlier TV families represented less-than-ideal family structures, there was still a common thread of decency and orthopraxy in all of them.

Fast forward to the 1990s and 2000s when American audiences were introduced to dysfunctional families, such as the Conners, ("Roseanne"), the Barones ("Everybody Loves Raymond"), the Osbournes, the Bluths ("Arrested Development"), the Kardashians, and the Pritchetts ("Modern Family"). Audiences of these programs were and are more apt to be exposed to copious discussions about single motherhood, gay marriage, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, nonmarital cohabitation, adultery, and other sexually-charged innuendo — conver-

sations that would cause our grandparents and patrons of the faith to turn in their graves.

The emergence of these varied family types over the past several decades has brought into question the definition of "family." The regression of the family from the historic nuclear model many of us grew up with leaves us wishing we could turn back the clock to relive earlier days. Unfortunately, we cannot relive a second, minute, day,

or a single year of our lives. A return to America's traditional, healthy, two-parent family model is a vestige of the past.

Many God-fearing families and individuals feel threatened by the changing paradigm of the family, and rightly so. Today's Christian families, especially our children and youth, are being sucked into a vortex of family change that promotes a variety of undesirable consequences: relativism, agnosticism, atheism, rebellion, promiscuity, isolationism, narcissism, suicide, voyeurism, and spiritual nakedness, to name a few. With such unwelcome consequences, is it any wonder families express little hope for bright and sustainable futures for their children?

No government action or impressive erudition can reverse the trends in family construction or return America to the historic nuclear model upon which it was built. Therefore, the requisite role of the Church in such uncertain times becomes increasingly important. The Church must not only strengthen what remains, it also must find compassionate avenues of ministry to meet the spiritual needs of today's "modern family."

In Matthew 9:14–17, Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples that new wine should not be poured into old wineskins. Why? "The skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined." He said new wine should be poured into new wineskins so both will be preserved.

Our churches mustn't overlook the underlying message of this passage. Will our wineskins of the past be sufficient to hold the new wine needed to minister to the needs of the "modern family"? Will we be so married to the past that we are unable to engage America's changing future? Will our churches remain so locked into old attitudes, mindsets, and biases that they cannot be the compassionate servants Jesus called them to be? Or will our churches adapt new methodologies of doing ministry that address the growing dysfunctions inside and outside the church, all the while proclaiming the unchanging message of the gospel? I trust we will choose the latter.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our churches must look to develop a biblical theology of the family that runs as a deep, flowing river through all of our existing ministries. Our churches must find creative ways to strengthen what remains so that the faithful feel secure and better prepared to meet the challenges of an increasingly hostile world. If we do our job well, the biblical moorings upon which believers in Christ build their lives will stand the test of time and eternity. ■

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