

**Wilfredo De Jesús: *Amazing Faith***

SUMMER 2013

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of ideas,  
concepts, and  
thoughts 66**

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victory over sinful,  
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## Spiritual **WARFARE**

**CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER THE WORLD,  
THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL**

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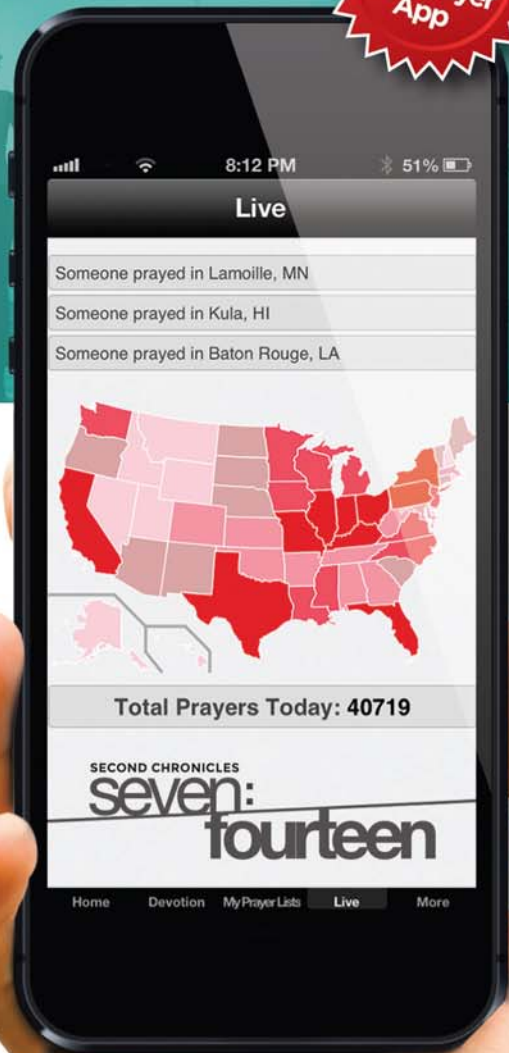
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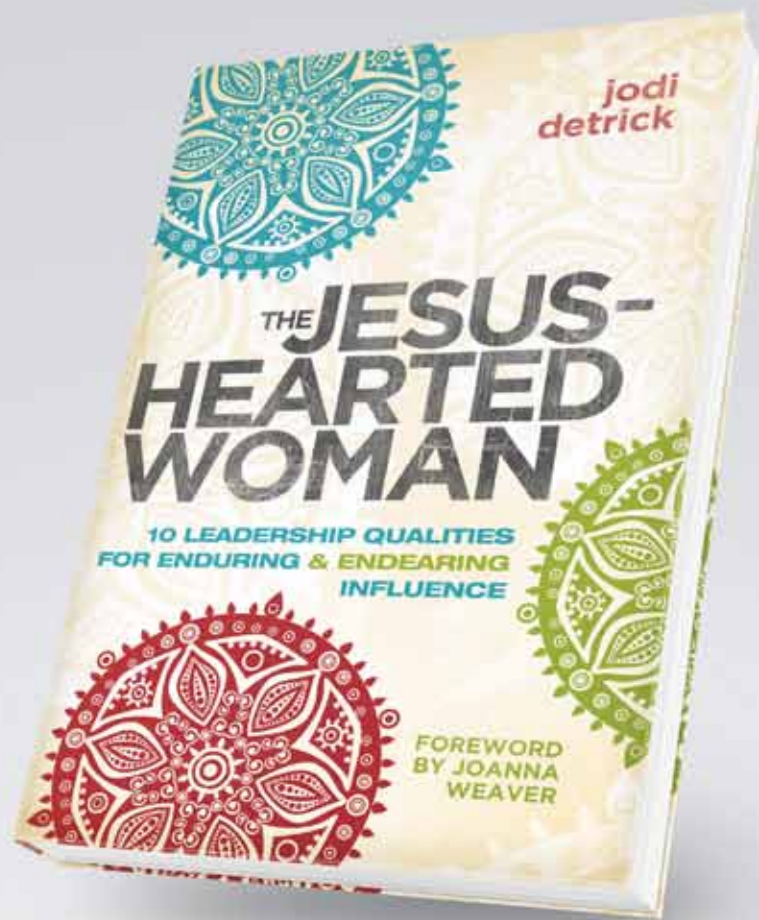
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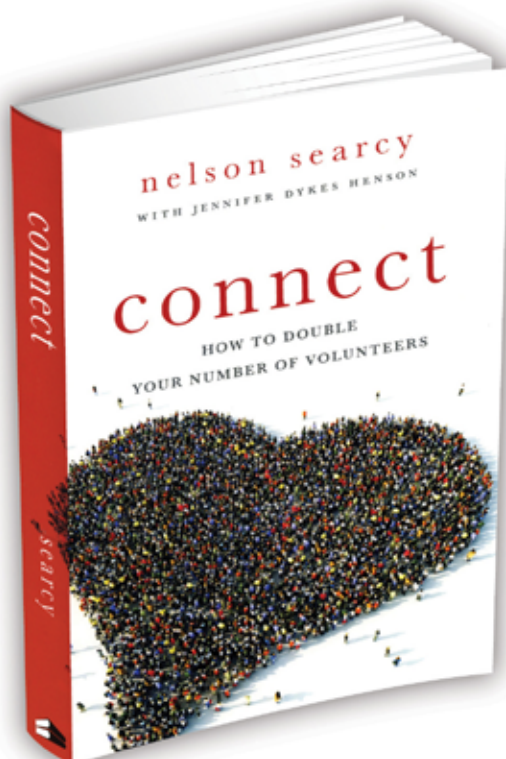
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**NELSON SEARCY** is the founding and lead pastor of The Journey Church. Started in 2002 in New York City, this ground-breaking church sees the majority of its growth coming from new believers and currently meets in Manhattan, Queens, San Francisco, and Boca Raton, Fla. He is the author of over 75 church-growth resources and 10 books, including the brand-new books *Connect: How to Double Your Number of Volunteers* and *The Greatness Principle: Finding Significance and Joy by Serving Others*. Nelson is also an experienced church planter, coach, and church-growth strategist. Before founding The Journey, he served as director of Purpose Driven Community at Saddleback Church. He is also the founder of ChurchLeaderInsights.com, the Church Leader Training Ministry of Nelson Searcy and The Journey Church.

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HELPING HEARTS AND HOMES

# SEX ON THE WEDDING NIGHT

**S**ex on one's wedding night has lost its anticipation and mystique for many couples today. Increasingly, this is becoming less common due to couples having sex before marriage. No longer is it a special experience for those committing themselves to a lifetime, legal, loving commitment.

- **In a survey of 3,876 newly married people, the percentage of those who spent their wedding night in nonconubial activities:**

- More than half of 40 + year-olds
- One third of 18–24 year-olds

—Barry Sinrod, social trend researcher,  
Boca Raton, Florida

- **“One third of all ages spend their wedding night opening gifts, sleeping, counting cash presents, partying with friends.”**

—TheKnot.com, wedding-planning website

- **“The wedding night has lost its mystique. It's sad in a way.”**

—Deborah McCoy, wedding planner/  
owner, Elva's for the Bride,  
Boca Raton, Florida

- **“Only 20 percent of women and 15 percent of men go to their bridal beds as virgins these days.”**

—Edward Laumann,  
University of Chicago sex researcher

- **The primary reason for couples not “becoming one” physically on their wedding night is cohabitation.**

**Growth of cohabitation:**

- 2010 — 14.8 million people
- 2000 — 11 million people
- 1990 — 5.7 million people
- 1980 — 3.2 million people

- **Over half of all marriages today are preceded by cohabitation.**

—America's Families and  
Living Arrangements: 2011

## Suggestions:

1. Teach the spiritual, social, physical, and relational benefits of abstinence to youth and unmarried adults.
2. Teach the realities of cohabitation. Seventy-five percent of cohabiting relationships break up before or after marriage.
3. Have adults who have had a premarital physical relationship share their regret and hurt.
4. Have married adults who were virgins before marriage share their views on why and how they kept themselves pure.

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

UTHTRAX

## NO TIME TO BACK UP

**T**here is a weird reaction in parents when their little girls and boys start to turn into women and men. They back up.

They stop kissing; stop hugging. The “I love yous” are further apart; the wrestling stops.

All the while, the child is still a child. Though their bodies are screaming, “I’m an adult,” their minds and hearts are still immature at best.

It is during this uncomfortable season that parents need to invest instead of divest.

This is where you come in.

During this adolescent time parents look to the youth worker or youth pastor to step up and fill in this gap that makes them squirm. This space, though, is not yours to fill. As one wise person said, “Even the best youth pastor makes a bad parent.”

Encourage parents of teens to push past their insecurities and barriers. Host special nights or weekends for fathers/sons and mothers/daughters. These times can bond often-strained relationships. They can also be great opportunities to help students in your group who do not have an engaged dad or mom find a dad or mom who will step up and fill in this space. Introduce Bible studies and books for parents to use with their students; encouraging them to take responsibility for the discipleship of their own children. You are not trying to replace yourself, just adding another dimension to building the foundation of faith in the student's life.

As a youth investor, I have come to realize that when the boyfriend breaks up, the bully wins at school, or coach cuts his list, I am rarely there. When the student dons his or her cap and gown and walks across the stage, my time usually comes to an end. Not so with the parent. The more we empower parents to be the faith builder in the life of their child, the more we all win.

— LYNN COWELL,  
Charlotte, North Carolina

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## AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

# Megachurches

**W**ith a larger percentage of church attendees frequenting a smaller percentage of churches, the American megachurch again seems to be an object of both curiosity and influence in American religion. More than half of all American churchgoers attend the largest 10 percent of churches.

While there have always been megachurches in American life, the current impact of megachurches is increasingly viewed as one of the leading indicators of how American Christians exercise their faith. Researchers at the University of Washington found that participation in megachurches is not a function of consumerist religion, but self-reported by participants as a source of significant spiritual growth.

These researchers concluded that the influence of megachurches is not evangelical revivalism. Rather, it is a new hybrid form of Christianity that is mutating and separate from all the traditional institutions with which we usually affiliate Christianity. Using a come-as-you-are atmosphere, contemporary music, and multisensory experience of visuals, megachurches create emotional significance and a heightened sense of spirituality. Researchers observed that megachurches promote a conventional moral standard focused on a being a decent person, taking care of family, and forgiving enemies and yourself; in short a general encouragement that “things can get better, you can be happy.”

The acknowledged “unknown factor” in this current reality is what happens when more people attend fewer churches? What is lost and gained in this new form of American Christianity?

— **BYRON KLAUS, D.Min.**, president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

### Note

1. See [washington.edu/news/2012/08/20/god-as-a-drug-the-rise-of-american-megachurches/](http://washington.edu/news/2012/08/20/god-as-a-drug-the-rise-of-american-megachurches/)

MORE  
THAN  
**1/2**  
OF ALL  
AMERICAN  
CHURCHGOERS  
NOW ATTEND  
THE LARGEST  
10 PERCENT  
OF CHURCHES.

— **PETER KELLEY**,  
“GOD AS A DRUG:  
THE RISE OF  
AMERICAN  
MEGACHURCHES”

## BOOMERS TO ZOOMERS

### A DIFFERENT WORLDVIEW

**B**eloit College in Wisconsin has developed a “mindset” list<sup>1</sup> for the last 15 years identifying the key life experience indicators of college freshman entering the fall semester. The 2016 class has some interesting indicators:

- Their lives have been measured in the fundamental particles of life: bits, bytes, and bauds.
- They have never seen an airplane “ticket.”
- They watch television everywhere but on a television.
- A significant percentage of them will enter college already displaying some hearing loss.



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The 2016ers in the church (though increasingly fewer of them attend church) have no knowledge of the historical markers and experiences that have shaped most of the senior pastor’s life experience. This has implications for more than just selecting the right cultural references when he or she preaches. These indicators, among many other things, have shaped their worldviews so significantly that they think, act, and dream based on these “truths.”

A commitment to reach them and disciple them to walk with God will have to be done within a set of realities that make sense to them. Learn their ways, thoughts, ideas, dreams, and translate the gospel into words and experiences that can transform their lives.

— **RANDY WALLS, D.Min.**, director of continuing education, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

### Note

1. Visit [www.beloit.edu/mindset/2016/](http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/2016/) to view the full list of 75 indicators.

THE HIM BEHIND THE HYMNS



## The God of the Impossible

**O**scar Eliason grew up on a farm in Cook, Minnesota, and attended Northwestern College in Minneapolis. After graduating in 1929, doctors hospitalized Oscar because he had tuberculosis. He became seriously depressed as the doctors held out little hope for his recovery.

After reading divine healing accounts in the *Pentecostal Evangel*, Oscar asked a Presbyterian pastor to pray for his recovery. As the nation reeled from the stock market's crash, the spirits of this young Bible college graduate soared. God healed him of tuberculosis.

Following his healing Oscar became an itinerant evangelist and an Assemblies of God pastor. In 1931, while reading the Minneapolis newspaper, he saw an advertisement for a construction company in the Twin Cities that included a memorable slogan.

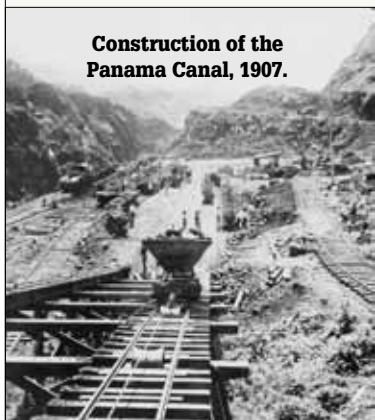
"Got any river they say is uncrossable?  
Got any mountains that can't be cut through?  
We specialize in the wholly impossible,  
Doing things 'nobody ever could do'."

As Oscar read it, he recalled how God had recently done the impossible in his life by doing what doctors couldn't do. He felt inspired to tweak the words a bit and change the "we" to "God" and then wrote a melody.

Oscar later learned the slogan in the writers of the newspaper ad had extracted these words from a poem by Berton Braley called "At Your Service: The Panama Gang," written decades before. This poem celebrated the ingenuity and persevering attitude of the construction workers who dug the Panama Canal.

— GREG ASKIMAKOPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington

Construction of the Panama Canal, 1907.



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# ASSEMBLIES OF GOD U.S. MISSIONS SEVEN WINDOWS TO AMERICA

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## Blessed Assurance

**M**ountain Grove Cemetery in Bridgeport, Connecticut, is the final resting place of Phineas T. Barnum, the famous circus promoter of the 19th century. The circus king's tombstone is an imposing monolith rising an impressive 20 feet in the air. Such a marker celebrates the successes and popularity of the one who is credited with creating "the greatest show on earth."

Just a stone's throw from Barnum's tombstone is the place where the hymn writer Fanny Jane Crosby is interred. In stark contrast to the circus king's mountain of granite, Crosby's simple grave has these words engraved on a small marble marker: "Aunt Fanny — She Hath Done What She Could."

Suffice it to say that what she could was more than amazing. Blinded as an infant as a result of negligence on the part of a doctor, this remarkable woman went on to write more than 5,000 hymns including *To God Be The Glory*, *Rescue the Perishing*, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus*, and *Blessed Assurance*. She lived to be one month shy of 95 years of age. But relatively few Americans knew of her prolific pen compared to the heralded heroics of Mr. Barnum.

During the years both individuals lived, Barnum was unquestionably more popular and influential than Crosby. His press clippings and honors far exceeded the little known gospel poet. Crosby's enduring (and endearing) contribution to culture would only be realized and celebrated years later.

A century after Fanny's death, her legacy has far outdistanced the circus king. Though sightless, she was *not* blind to the matchless value of faith. With pen in hand, she raised

our level of understanding of a God we cannot see while giving us a vocabulary of praise. Refusing to be bitter for her plight of endless night, Crosby accepted her cross as a privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

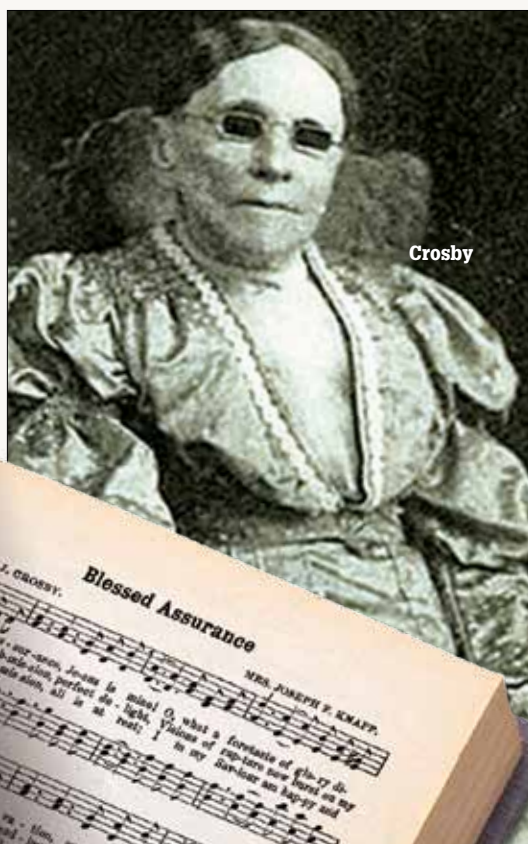
For her, faith continued to be the assurance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen (Hebrews 11:1). Crosby died not fully realizing the impact her rhyming words would have on individuals long after she was buried in her simple grave. Like those mentioned in the concluding verses of Hebrews 11, she too would not experience the reward she was due. But the hymns she penned bore witness to the blessed assurance known by the heroes of the faith who died with the confidence that God was aware of their contribution to the Kingdom.

— GREG ASKIMAKOUPoulos

From *Finding God in It's a Wonderful Life*,  
by Greg Asimakoupoulos.  
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Barnum



Crosby

Next time in  
*Enrichment*

## BELIEVING GOD FOR GREATER THINGS

**T**he theme of the 2013 General Council of the Assemblies of God is *Believing God for Greater Things*. As our Fellowship enters its second century of ministry, our leaders are calling on us to believe God for greater things in the days ahead. In keeping with that call, we have asked the six executive leaders of the Assemblies of God to share what they are believing God for in the future.

We are also pleased to publish excerpts from five new leadership books that will be featured at General Council: *Four Faces of a Leader* by H. Robert Rhoden with Dean Merrill; *Against the Wind: Creating a Church of Diversity Through Authentic Love* by J. Don George; *The Jesus-Hearted Woman: Ten Leadership Qualities for Enduring & Endearing Influence* by Jodi Detrick; *Pentecost: This Story Is Our Story* by Robert P. Menzies; and *Relentless: Pursuing a Life That Matters* by Dave Donaldson and Terry Glaspey.

As editors, we trust that these articles will inform and inspire you, and lead you to trust God for greater things in your own ministries.

MATTERS OF FAITH

# Pentecost: The Fourth Feast of the Lord



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**I**n my spring 2013 E-Short, I mentioned the first three of the seven feasts of the Lord that are historical — reminding the Jews of their history with God — and prophetic — pointing to future events. The first three feasts occur

in the spring, then there is a 50-day break until the fourth feast: Pentecost. The last three feasts occur in fall.

The Feast of Pentecost — also called the Feast of Weeks — occurs on the 50th day after Passover. Many Christians are aware of the events that took place on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Many, however, do not realize Pentecost was an Old Testament

feast. God instructed the Israelites to keep the Feast of Weeks in Leviticus 23:15,16.

Jews believe that on Pentecost God gave the Torah (Law) to the people through Moses on Mount Sinai. They call it Matin Torah or the "giving of the Law."

On the Jewish calendar, Pentecost occurs on the 6th of Sivan. Jews associate it with the "latter firstfruits" or the wheat harvest.

Prophetically, Jesus ascended the 40th day after His resurrection, and the Holy Spirit descended on Pentecost 10 days later.

FEAST	HISTORICALLY	PROPHETICALLY
Pentecost	Giving of Law	Pouring out of the Spirit (Acts 2)

Like the first three feasts, Jesus fulfilled Pentecost at His first coming. The remaining three feasts will be fulfilled in His second coming. We will look at the final three feasts in fall 2013.

— DIANNE E. BUTTS, Pueblo, Colorado

## ENRICHMENT JOURNAL RECEIVES RECORD NUMBER OF AWARDS

**E**nrichment journal received high honors during the recent Evangelical Press Association annual convention, held in Nashville, Tenn., May 1-3, 2013. EJ garnered a total of seven awards, the highest number it has received during an annual convention.



**George Paul Wood**  
Executive Editor

The EPA awards contest honors the best work in Christian publishing during the 2012 calendar year. EPA divides the awards contest into two categories: *Higher Goals in Christian Journalism* and *Award of Excellence*.



**“I am proud of Enrichment’s editorial staff, writers and illustrators, whose hard work EPA recognized this year. Whether we receive awards or not, however, we’re committed to making sure that each issue of the journal is characterized by excellence in both content and design.”**

— George Paul Wood

EPA's Higher Goals competition honors individual aspects of a publication: reporting, column writing, critical review, interview, design, illustration, et al. The prestigious Award of Excellence competition honors overall excellence when compared to peer publications.

*Enrichment* received six higher goals awards:

- two first place awards in Article Series and Standing Column;
- a second place award in the Cartoon category;
- third place in Cause of the Year: Extreme Poverty;
- fourth place Original Art: Traditional; and
- fifth place in the Biblical Exposition category.



**Rick Knoth**  
Managing Editor

*Enrichment's* highest award was the Award of Merit (runner-up) in the Award of Excellence competition. The Evangelical Press Association is a professional association of some 300 Christian magazines, newsletters, newspapers, and content-rich websites from throughout North America. EPA's purpose is "to strengthen evangelical periodicals through inspiration, instruction, and networking." A key member benefit is the annual conference, which brings together leaders in the industry for a time of training, networking, and encouragement.

## FROM BOOMERS TO ZOOMERS

### "AUNT SUSAN"<sup>1</sup> AND THE GROWING RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

**T**ensions over religious conviction are nothing new in our nation, but what is unique is that physical violence, to date, has been minimal when compared to other countries with significant religious diversity. Author Robert Putnam has suggested that the growing expression of religious tolerance in the U.S. is related to what he calls the "Aunt Susan effect." Putnam observes that more than half of all Americans are married to someone who comes from a different religious or faith tradition. His conclusion is that it is hard to vent your anger on people of a different religious perspective when you have someone like that in your own family. Stereotypes tend to get blurred when you know and love a person.

Putnam also suggests that this growing religious tolerance is tied to the loss of religious belief. While biblical illiteracy is apparent in all walks of life, the connection between growing religious tolerance and loss of religious belief needs much more investigation to come to Putnam's determinative conclusion. But what is clear is this: it is hard to demonize people when you genuinely care about them.

Relationships are the key to living together peaceably in an increasingly diverse and polarized nation. The Book of James clearly offers the dual emphases that give us direction: pure religion combines deep compassion for people and clearly defined lines of conviction (James 1:26,27).

— **BYRON KLAUS, D.Min.**, president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.

#### Note

1. See Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us* (Chicago: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

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### Why I Believe God Still Heals

By **Ada Brownell**



Why does God heal some and not others? An honest look at Scripture can teach us valuable lessons concerning healing. Journey with this author as she discovers some lessons on healing.



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### Isolation

By **Paul Church**



Pastors can feel alone because they believe they do not have anyone with whom to share their struggles. Paul Church explores why pastors isolate themselves and the dangers in doing so.



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### Leading People Through Change Without Losing Them

By **Deanna Shrodes**



Change is not always easy, even for the pastor's wife. How you communicate and make changes can determine if people will accept these changes and follow you as you lead into new territory.



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### Organizational Change and Strategic Thinking

By **Norm Edwards**



Being strategically led and being Spirit-led should go hand in hand. Why not evaluate where you and your church are today and, being led by the Spirit, use strategic thinking to plan your future.



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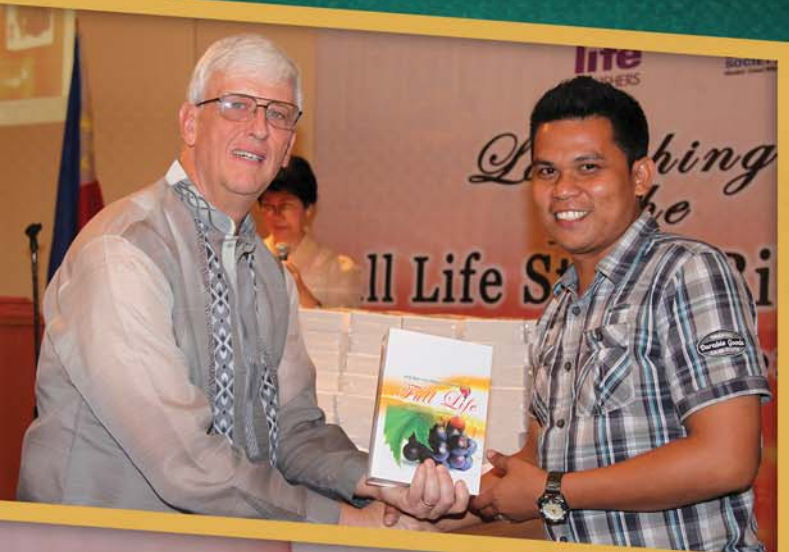
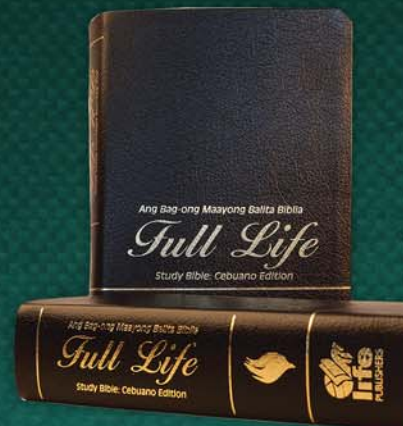
### Leading a Turnaround Church: Critical Considerations

By **Donald E. Ross**



Donald Ross knows firsthand what it takes to pastor a turnaround church. He candidly shares what it takes to move a declining church into a church making an impact.

# Thank you, friends of the Fire Bible!



“As far as I know, this is the only Cebuano Bible in print written for Pentecostals. This study Bible — with its commentary, 77 articles, cross-referencing system, concordance and many other features — make it an ideal tool, especially for pastors and lay leaders who can’t get to Bible school or afford a large library.”

— DAVE JOHNSON, ASSEMBLIES OF GOD  
MISSIONARY TO THE PHILIPPINES AND  
COORDINATOR OF THE CEBUANO FIRE BIBLE  
PROJECT (PICTURED FAR LEFT)



  
*Fire Bible.*



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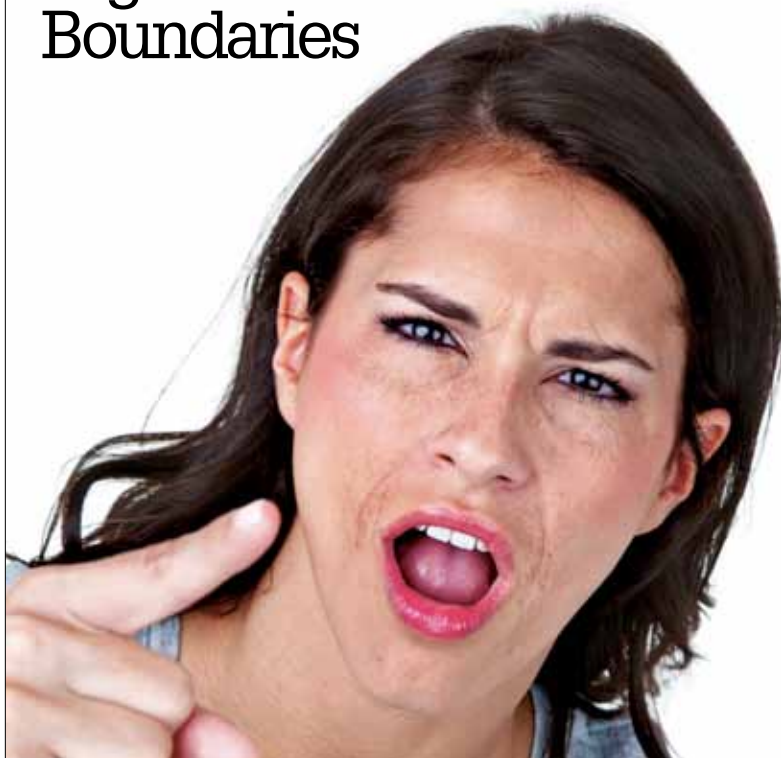
*Assemblies of God Bible Alliance is a  
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**Rejoice with us!** The Cebuano *Fire Bible* was recently presented to 468 evangelical pastors and church leaders attending two public launches in Cebu City and Davao, Republic of the Philippines. Cebuano is the dominant language in central and southern Philippines, where pastors and lay leaders will now have access to this one-book Pentecostal library.



## High-Maintenance Boundaries



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BY GABRIELE RIENAS

**Q** I am having a problem with a woman at our church. She approached me for friendship/mentoring soon after we came to this church 3 years ago. It was great at first: she seemed loyal to our church, eager to learn, fun, helpful, and generous with our family. However, things have gotten complicated. She makes constant demands on my time and attention, gets her feelings hurt regularly, and becomes resentful of time I spend with anyone else. She openly sulks and shares with others how hurt she is by the way I treat her. Talking does not seem to solve anything and the tension is escalating. The last straw was when she went off on me in the crowded foyer last Sunday because I did not sit with her. I want to run the other direction when I see her coming.



The overly needy church woman is a difficulty many pastors' wives face.

**A** You are describing a difficulty that many pastors' wives face — the overly needy church woman. Let me call her Emma. From a friendship perspective alone, Emma is a huge challenge. In spite of the fact the relationship started out on positive footing, she is clearly trying to get her needs met in ways that take away your freedom. The situation becomes even more difficult if you have a spiritual calling to reach out to vulnerable people. In a perfect world you would be able to help her with liberal amounts of love and patience. But with Emma, and women like her, you are dealing with some serious relational immaturity, if not a significant amount of brokenness. Keep this in mind to avoid taking too much responsibility for the ongoing drama.

Let me talk about what makes Emma's antics so difficult. God has called believers to love one another. Loving includes helping people in distress, and Emma's distress is clearly evident. If it is your nature to be high in mercy and compassion, you will be even more impacted by her pain. When she implies to you or others that you have failed her, it strikes right at the heart of that desire to minister to others with Jesus' love.

I notice that she did not reveal all of her relational angst at the beginning. In fact, she came across in a positive way that drew you in. Gradually, the intensity of her expectations has increased. This is a common dynamic with people like this. Two factors contribute:

1. People's brokenness is most present under stress. Under normal circumstances they present their best side and better manage the negatives. As the relationship progresses, tensions inevitably arise and the broken side begins to emerge.

2. People with a history of chronic relational difficulty are very good at manipulating relationships to get what they want. Emma was good at drawing you into friendship. Maintaining it is more of a challenge as she ends up resorting to more desperate ways to get what she wants. You are not the first person who has faced these challenges with Emma, and you will not be the last.

Now that this has emerged, Emma's neediness can become like a bottomless pit that no one can satisfy and which robs you of your freedom. The truth is this: No matter what, you cannot *do* enough, *say* enough, or *be* enough to satisfy the desire she has to be perfectly loved. If you try, it will quickly begin to feel stifled, overwhelmed, and restricted. Remember that God has not called anyone to be everything to anyone else. That is His job.

Whatever your definition of biblical love, it must include doing what is best for the other person. Emma would like to define what is best; but, in this case, she is mistaken. If you give in to her desires, it would not help her personal growth and health. It would contribute to her success in manipulating others to rescue her instead of growing personally.

God has not called us to save everyone from all pain and discomfort. Sometimes it is necessary to let people face the challenges of life, the consequences of their actions, and the pain of their wounds so they can grow. When people are deprived of the consequences of their mistakes, they are deprived of learning. This is true in relational maturity as well. From an early age, consequences for bad relational behavior leads to growth and can become the foundation for the way we approach interactions throughout our lives. If you overcompensate for Emma's bad behavior, you are indirectly furthering the problem.

Even though she does not see it, Emma's expectations are unrealistic. As a guideline, there are some specific expectations that a healthy relationship never *demand*s and therefore we should not meet these demands. If Emma applies pressure, firmly decline both verbally and by your actions.

### UNHEALTHY EXPECTATIONS

The following are some unhealthy expectations. They include:

- Being a closer friend than we are prepared to be.
- No limits on the amount of time spent together.
- Unlimited emotional energy to explore every challenge, hurt, and frustration.
- Absolute loyalty above any other friendship or any other person.
- Total affirmation and agreement without question or challenge.

God has  
not called  
us to save  
everyone  
from all  
pain and  
discomfort.

- Perfect empathy, understanding, and validation.

Drawing the line with Emma requires courage and wisdom because she will not likely respond positively. Do it anyway. Be prepared to set consequences for unacceptable behavior and follow through. Be clear and direct with her about what you are willing to offer in friendship and what you consider to be inappropriate on her part. Refuse to be guilted into giving more than you can afford to give.

Do not let this Emma-drama deplete your energy, enthusiasm, and stamina for ministry any longer. By all means, be compassionate and loving, but do not hesitate to place limits when necessary. In the end, you will take back the freedom you have to be yourself and to pursue friendship and ministry with passion and wisdom. 📖



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"Sometimes being a pastor and a judge is confusing. Today I sentenced the congregation to 5 years of hard labor."

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# WAX ON... WAX OFF:

A Word to  
Young Leaders  
Who Feel  
They Are Being  
Held Back



BY SCOTT HAGAN

**N**ever before has Egypt fought so diligently to name our young. A baby in a basket was pulled from the Nile; he was named by Egypt. His temporary identity came from Pharaoh's house. Yet, something inside Moses became agitated as he grew into manhood. His origin came calling. His purpose pushed to the surface.

Egypt named him; his mother nursed him. Taught him. Her investment came first.

Egypt and her allures were powerful, but the nursing rights prevailed over the naming rights. Moses was created Hebrew. That seemed all but lost save his few moments of intimacy upon his mother's breast, but



How do you  
sell young  
leaders on  
the idea of  
*repetitions*  
before  
*reputation*?

somehow that early and secret investment and his designed purpose prevailed over the second offer of Egypt's royal clothing.

Leadership grows like tree bark. It takes time. Choosing purpose over the palace is not a question; it's a debate. For us who have passed through far less dramatic portals than Moses on our journey toward leadership, we can affirm that long droughts without measurable progress is more the norm than the exception.

So how do you sell young leaders on the idea of *repetitions* before *reputation*?

Or help them see that the meaningless little leadership behaviors they begrudge most are the secrets to meaning and influence? Many young leaders are losing heart and defaulting to the call of culture rather than the call of God. Anything that requires time in a speed-first world is in itself an enemy. But leadership is not simply time sensitive; it is time consuming. And therein lies the challenge for most emerging leaders.

King David was first *kid* David. He was part of the sheep police. He medicated his boredom with target practice, hand plucking his bullets from the still waters without a single set of eyes there to notice. Killing trees was a tough way to kill time, especially when you have a passion to kill giants. We all know that the tree would one day become much more; but, at the time, who could blame the guy for an enthusiasm drop?

I have watched new leaders roll their eyes when asked to do things that feel fake. In Bible college, the homiletics syllabus said I had to preach a canned sermon to pass the class. So there I stood, sick and sweaty before a fake congregation. In keeping with the motif of the moment, I asked for a fake response when I was finished. It was an exercise in make-believe. Two years later I graduated and found my way onto a church staff where the pastor quickly assigned me to the 8 a.m. service. My job was to give announcements. This amounted to greeting 100 or so tired-faced folks and then welcoming mythical visitors to a service totally void of visitors. I was certain the whole thing was a waste of my valuable time and talents. I wanted to preach for real instead of experiencing more of the same.

*Wax on ... wax off.*

I needed *Mr. Miyagi* as my mentor.

My punkish little *Daniel-san* attitudes raged. I did not realize that my public speaking muscle was slowly but surely developing. I was learning how to communicate in a Petri dish. God was growing a piece of me in a safe and sterile environment. But it still felt like my passion was in prison. I wanted to say real things to real people. Instead, I was back taking snaps against the scout team.

It was my season for killing trees, not giants.

Had it not been for those brief years of waxing on and off, I never would have developed a skill set for connecting as a communicator. Here is some free advice when someone you respect tells you it is time to *wax on and wax off*.

Do not blow it off.

Grab every opportunity you can, even when it feels puny. Because living idle and pessimistic while waiting for the phone to ring with your big break is a bad strategy. Negativity is never the road map to greatness.

Leadership  
is not simply  
time sensitive;  
it is time  
consuming.



Go after small assignments to speak, communicate, and write — no matter what it is.

Do it for free.

Take the stuff nobody wants.

And smile big while doing it ... like you know something nobody else in the room does. If there is one shred of activity tucked inside the assignment that smells like the future, take it.

*Mr. Miyagi*, our global leadership mentor, nailed it.

For *Daniel-san*, waxing the car become waxing the Cobra Kais. For David, the tree-bully got a bullet between the eyes. The same shifts await every one of us in leadership. Sooner more than later it all turns very real.

So do not despise small things (Zechariah 4:10). Even passion requires practice. ■



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

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"Where's Pastor? He's late for his sermon."

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## Sticks and Stones and ... Words Can Hurt You

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BY CAL LEMON

**I**f you are reading this column, you are a spiritual leader. And leaders, since time clicked off that first second, have always been convenient targets.

Have you heard these zingers? “Why don’t you turn up the heat in this sanctuary?” “We are not growing because your sermons are putting people to sleep.” Or the coup de grace, “With what we are paying you, a phone call would have been nice when I was in the hospital last month.”

Words, critical words, scouring words, painful words wound us, and they do hurt.

I am convinced how we emotionally handle and verbally respond to criticism can be the worst and best indicator of our spirituality.

### WAKE UP AND SMELL ... THE COFFIN

Dietrich Bonhoeffer caught my attention early in my ministry with his seminal work, *The Cost of Discipleship*. His words, accented by his subsequent death at the end of a swinging strand of piano wire in a frigid Third Reich prison, continue to reverberate through my spirit, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”

We think we have “died a thousand deaths” when we announced the wrong date for an annual business meeting or cannot remember the name of a person we just baptized last Sunday. We preach about dying with Christ, but that theology makes no claim on us until we have experienced the cost of standing in and speaking for the Son of God.

Does the message of the Cross have any implications for how we respond to members of our spiritual communities who make the accumulation of wealth the ultimate proof of one’s worth? Does the message of the Cross



How we emotionally handle and verbally respond to criticism can be the worst and best indicator of our spirituality.

impact our response to child abuse, even though the abuser may be a prominent parishioner? And, how does the message of the Cross craft our reply to overt racial discrimination in our community and/or congregation?

If we genuinely believe our soteriology (the theology of salvation), we will also continuously be in tension with the spirit of the age.

The biblical models of Moses, Elijah, Miriam, Jeremiah, Stephen, and Dorcas portray gutsy spiritual leaders who openly embraced the liabilities of speaking for divinity while clothed in their humanity.

If our faith requires us to speak for Christ, we must be prepared to become the object of someone’s criticism.

### THE DIVERSITY OF THE DISAGREEABLE

Criticism in the church comes in a panorama of pain. Specifically, there are three forms of accusatory statements that people usually direct toward pastoral leadership.

First, they do not focus this criticism on a person; rather, their target is the reputation of the worshipping community.

Spiritual leadership may hear, “The church has a long history of being dysfunctional. I guess we really cannot expect much more than mediocrity in the future.”

The intent of this critical approach is to paint, in wide brush strokes, the impossibility of God, or any other divinity, to change the pathetic course of a congregation’s history. The best anyone can do is “hold on until Jesus comes.”

Second, passive-aggressive behavior is the foundation for these critical comments because they usually conclude with, “Well, I pray for you every day in your new approach to worship. But I can tell you, we would have sung twice as many of the old hymns 7 years ago before you became our pastor.”

Notice, passive-aggressive statements leave innuendo in their wake. These often leave the spiritual leader speechless, confused, and even resentful.

The third approach to dispense criticism is the full frontal attack. It is important to note a third party needs to be present to guarantee the effectiveness of this diatribe.

So, be prepared. Those who use this criticism will broadcast it in a church staff meeting, the annual congregational business session, or even the church foyer, preferably

when fellow parishioners are exiting after Sunday morning worship.

Users of this criticism base their attack on the premise that faultfinding is much more impactful if triangulation is present. Triangulation is when the criticizer and the person who is the object of the criticism are in the presence of other people. These other people provide the emotional energy and sociological cover needed by the criticizer to make his or her point.

### SKILLS FOR THE SKEWERED SERVANT

It is important to note the following are skills, not communicative tricks. People can easily flag tricks as disingenuous, but skills always translate into genuine care for the other person and the situation.

Therefore, the first skill set addresses the appropriate emotional response to an emotionally laden criticism.

If you heard from someone in your ministry, "I was confused by your sermon today. It seemed to me you were not adequately prepared," what are you feeling right now? What are your emotions if you are on the receiving end of this evaluation of your sermon? Angry? Frustrated? Resentful? Self-deprecating?

Move past these emotions. Respond with, "Tell me more about what I did or did not provide in that sermon that would lead you to believe I was not prepared?"

There are three interpersonal skills you just used with that response. First, you maintained emotional equilibrium by not duplicating the emotion of the speaker. Second, you asked a question instead of making a declaratory statement. And, third, you asked for specific data to know how to improve in the future.

The second skill set is giving status to the resistance. This skill would sound like this, "You know what? As I think about it, Sunday's sermon should have provided you with more clarity."

Notice those words affirm only the issue of clarity, but did not confirm you were not prepared.

When you give status to the resistance the end result is always some form of agreement. But, the agreement must be genuine. If you patronize someone with, "You know what? You are exactly right. I am the worst preacher who probably ever stood behind our pulpit," you will lose your credibility.

If our faith requires us to speak for Christ, we must be prepared to become the object of someone's criticism.



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Responding with a quick, one-liner sarcastic comeback is beneath your calling and your professionalism. Even if you are amazing with instantaneous, caustic retorts, do not use them.

The final skill is one you already know.

Let's go back to the public setting for the comment about your preaching. If you are in the presence of other people or if it is just you and the criticizer, ask for time to frame your response.

You might say, "It sounds like you have strong feelings about my ability to communicate God's Word. I will need until tomorrow morning to work through my thoughts and feelings right now. I would like to get together with you at 9 a.m. for coffee. Will that time work for you? And, thank you for your honest observation."

My conclusion to this column is a statement I made in the fourth paragraph: I am convinced how we emotionally handle and verbally respond to criticism can be the worst and best indicator of our spirituality. ■



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

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Pastor Davis asks the church board for a small salary increase.



## Why You Can't Overlook Social Media As a Ministry Tool

BY JUSTIN LATHROP

**I**t is easy to dismiss what we do not understand. It is natural, in fact. A wife who does not understand football finds it easy to dismiss her husband's love of the game as frivolous and silly. A child who does not understand his dad's love for jazz considers his father behind the times for listening to it. And those who do not understand social media easily shrug it off like it's a phase the world is going through. *They'll grow out of it*, they think.

The problem is social media is not a passing craze. Facebook's popularity soared in 2012, as users climbed over 1 billion, including 600 million mobile users (those who check from their smart phones). Of the crowd, 23 percent admit to checking their account as much as five times per day.

Since its inception, Twitter has seen 163 billion tweets. In 2012, a million accounts were added to the site each day.

Social media is not going away — for now. It is the primary form of communication for a generation of people who need to know the love of Jesus. As ministers, desperate to connect the world with the love of Christ, we better get good at using it.

### HOW DO I GET STARTED USING SOCIAL MEDIA?

Learning to use social media is like learning anything. It happens over time. I cannot tell you everything you need to know in one article; and, as you start, you will make mistakes. Be patient.

Do the best you can and ask questions when you do not know what you are doing.

You will find social media experts all around you, digital natives who have not had to work



Those who do not understand social media easily shrug it off like it's a phase the world is going through.

hard to learn the culture and customs of online communication. They have been born into it.

I find these people are always happy to share what they know.

To get you started, here are a few basic principles about the most popular social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter.

### FACEBOOK BASICS

First, if you do not have a personal Facebook account, get one.

With a personal Facebook account (as opposed to a page for your church or organization) you can interact personally with people and pages.

Signing up is simple, and the payoff is immediate. You can share pictures with friends and family (set your privacy settings to your liking), reconnect with old friends and colleagues, and share thoughts.

Once you have your account, do not wait for people to reach out to you. Be the first to make the connection.

Here are three things to remember for those new to Facebook.

- 1. Facebook is meant to be personal**, but not too personal. Think of it as inviting people over to your house. You want them to see your living room, which you cleaned in anticipation of their arrival, but not your bedroom.
- 2. Facebook is a way to connect with friends.** While Twitter is an appropriate venue to connect with people you do not already know, keep your Facebook page a place where you connect with those you do know, at least loosely.
- 3. Facebook is interactive.** Do not let it become a one-way street where you shout out your thoughts and then forget about it. When people post on your wall, reply to them. Respond to comments. Read through your news feed and comment on things that interest you.

### Using Facebook pages

In addition to a personal Facebook account, your church needs to have a Facebook page that connects to your website. The purpose of this page is to connect with, inform, and encourage church members during the week.

Here are a few examples of things you might post on your church Facebook page.

- A picture of baptisms that happened at your church on Sunday.

- A picture of an event that occurred during the week with a caption explaining its significance — how many people participated, and how it benefitted the community.
- A request for volunteers for an upcoming event.
- Prayer requests and needs in the community.
- A question to ponder regarding the pastor's message.
- A quote or Scripture that will encourage or uplift.

These are examples of ways you can engage your community during the week with very little investment.

## GETTING THE HANG OF TWITTER

Like Facebook, Twitter is another platform where you will benefit from having a personal account as well as an account for your organization or ministry.

From your personal account you can follow:

- Friends or family.
- Leaders or thinkers in your field.
- Authors or speakers who interest you.
- Members of your congregation or others who follow you.

If Facebook is your living room, think of Twitter as your office or local coffee shop. Twitter is a great place to connect with people you have never met, to make business connections, and to exchange information within your field. It is an appropriate place to share your passing thoughts, and a venue for you to promote the thoughts of others you respect.

Do not just profess your opinions to the world, but share the thoughts of others and engage in conversation that is taking place.

## Learning the language

Just like learning a foreign language, becoming familiar with Twitter lingo will not happen overnight. To get started, you need to learn the basics.

**Timeline:** Your timeline is what you see when you log onto your Twitter account. It is the compilation of tweets from the people you follow. Like the name suggests, it will always display in the order messages were sent.

**#Hashtags:** A hashtag looks like this (#), and you use it to organize and categorize types of information. Runners, for example, might tweet something about their daily routine, or a running tip that has helped them, and



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include in the tweet something that looks like this: (#running).

If I searched Twitter for "running," I would see the most recent tweets including this hashtag.

**@replies:** An "at reply" (@) is the symbol you use when you want to talk directly to one person on Twitter. At replies are not private messages. Every follower who follows you *and* the person you are talking to can see what you are saying.

Followers who only follow you, or only follow the person you are talking to, will not see your message in their timeline, but could access the message if they looked on your profile.

**Direct Message (DM):** DM stands for direct message and is the only way to message someone privately on Twitter.

**Retweet (RT):** A retweet is like giving an endorsement to what someone else says. It takes a tweet from your timeline and shares the tweet with your followers.

## Twitter for your church/organization

Think of a Twitter account for your church or organization like the lobby of your church. When visitors walk in, what do you want them to see or feel? What kind of experience do you want them to have? What do you want them to walk away knowing?

Here are a few things that are appropriate to tweet to your followers on Twitter as an organization:

- Links to blog posts if you have them.
- Updates about what's happening in the community.
- Promotions for your events or other events in the community.
- Quotes, thoughts, or encouragements.
- Requests for help, prayer requests, etc.

Even when it comes to your organization's Twitter account, do not let the experience be a one-way street. Be the first to reach out to others in the community, connect with them, and help them promote their events.

Your social networking experience will be what you make it. 📱



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# One Size Fits All?

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BY DOUG GREEN

**W**ho is better: you or me? Recently this thought occurred to me: *Although we believe in the same doctrine, we do not believe in the same methods, especially when it comes to preaching.*

Of course, I think the way I preach is the best way. So do you, right? Many of us think our preaching style is better than the next person's preaching style, finding allies whenever we can. The funny thing we do is measure each other based on our own biased and elevated preferential viewpoints.

All of this begs the question: Is there a right way and a wrong way to preach? Yes and yes, for when it comes to preaching God's Word, some things are up for grabs (and God allows you to choose what works for you) and some things are *never* up for grabs.

## THE NEGOTIABLE ITEMS

**Local use of the English language.** If your congregation prefers the faster pace of the Northeast, speak faster. If your congregation likes folks who drop their gs and slow it ... waaaay ... down, do so. If you have a church that needs surfer talk, do it, dude. If you have a sanctuary full of Ph.D.s who adore preachers who never end their sentences with a preposition, do not tell them where it is at. However you and your folks communicate, do it unto



Is there a right way and a wrong way to preach? Yes and yes.

the Lord, but do not think the other guy or gal is any less God's instrument because he or she does it in a way you do not. Leave room for local dialect. Know your folks and preach like they talk. God, by the way, does not have a preferred version of English. He hears the heart.

**Volume of the speaker.** Shouting does not always mean passion and holiness. It can, but it can also just be learned behavior. Using your library voice in the pulpit does not always equal special sensitivity. Whether you shout and pace the stage or speak softly and stay behind the pulpit, it probably has a lot to do with your mentoring, not your spirituality. Someone told me, for example, to preach in the same voice I use to order a hamburger. Thus, I speak conversationally, but this does not make me better than anyone else, just comfortable in my style, hoping the Holy Spirit uses me to point listeners to Jesus.

**Preaching styles.** Some preachers are dramatic, using large gestures and lots of secondary voices. Some preachers are a bit more subdued, relying on word choice to relay their take on biblical matters. Some preachers are funny; some are dry and witty. Some are compassionate, often led to tears. Some preach like a motivational coach speaking to his team before kickoff. All of these methods are right, as long as the technique helps the audience understand the Bible — "fleshing out" an eternal truth. Your way is not better than my way. God uses all of us.

**Other options.** Your choice to use the King James Version, the New International Version, the English Standard Version, or *The Message*

is a reflection of your preference, not God's. Your choice to preach in a suit and tie, an untucked shirt and a pair of jeans, or a pair of shorts and sandals is not about right or wrong, but about your own indigenous culture. You will probably attract people like you. You can use props, PowerPoint, three points, or fill-in-the-blank handouts. You can preach while the organ is playing; you can show movie clips. All are choices you make and offer to God as a sacrifice of praise.

### THE NONNEGOTIABLE ITEMS

**Telling the truth.** Preachers need to tell the truth, especially when their content is a reflection of a God of integrity, incapable of dishonest speech. However, every preacher knows about the temptation to make the story a bit bigger than it really is. Therefore, for the most part, I try to tell stories that happened to me sometime in the last 7 days (since the previous weekend). Why? (1) They are current. (2) I have never told it before (obviously). (3) They are local and, thus, relevant. (4) Most important, they are true. (It is more difficult to stretch the truth in a week's time.)

**Lifestyle of the preacher.** It is never okay to live one way in the pulpit and another way out of it. It matters what you do with your heart outside the space of public performance. God cares as much about your *preparation time* (which happens in the study, the kitchen, the bedroom, the television room, the sports field, the gas station, the ... you name it ... you are preparing for the pulpit wherever you are) as He does your *preaching time* in any given church service. You preach what you are, *not* you are what you preach.

Whatever your style of preaching is, it ought to be an act of worship unto God, not a cover-up to what is really going on inside. Preachers who live what they preach delight the heart of God.

**Basis of the sermon.** I heard a "sermon" based on a leadership story from the past. All three points came from a historic account. The preacher based his big idea on the military commander at the center of the story. Although the preacher used Scripture texts to illustrate the points of the ... um ... speech, they were clearly not necessary because the genesis of the thoughts were not Scripture but self-help leadership principles.

A sermon must, without compromise, be

Pulpits in America do not need better, flashier ideas; they need an unashamed abandonment to the ideas of Scripture.

based solely on the ideas of Scripture. The main point of the sermon ought to be the main point of the biblical text. Anything less is an unfortunate use of holy, sacred time. Pulpits in America do not need better, flashier ideas; they need an unashamed abandonment to the ideas of Scripture. Do not get me wrong; I like history and leadership principles just like you, but history and leadership principles should not be a substitute for faithfully unpacking God's Word.

God cares about issues of the heart. He can do more with a bad sermon and a good heart than a good sermon and a bad heart.

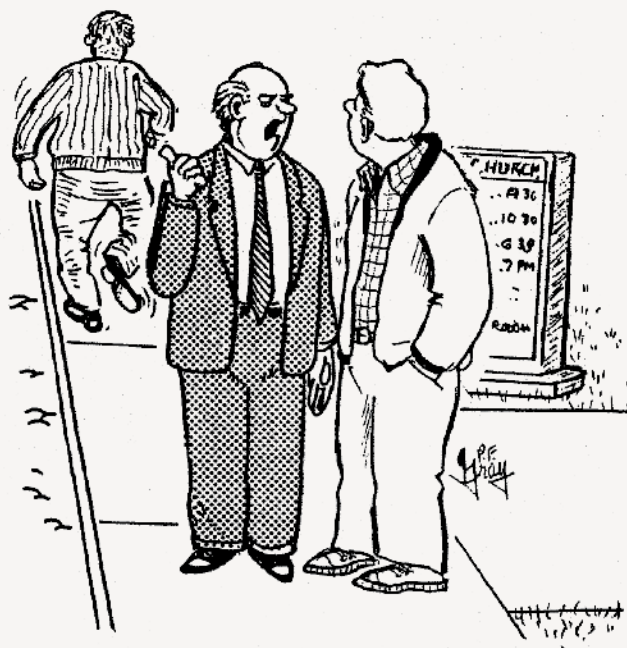
Remember, God uses us, but He does not necessarily depend on us. That is why it is not good to ever ask whose sermon is better — yours or mine. Only God knows what He is doing with all we offer to Him.

So, who is better? You are. I am. We are. He is. ☒



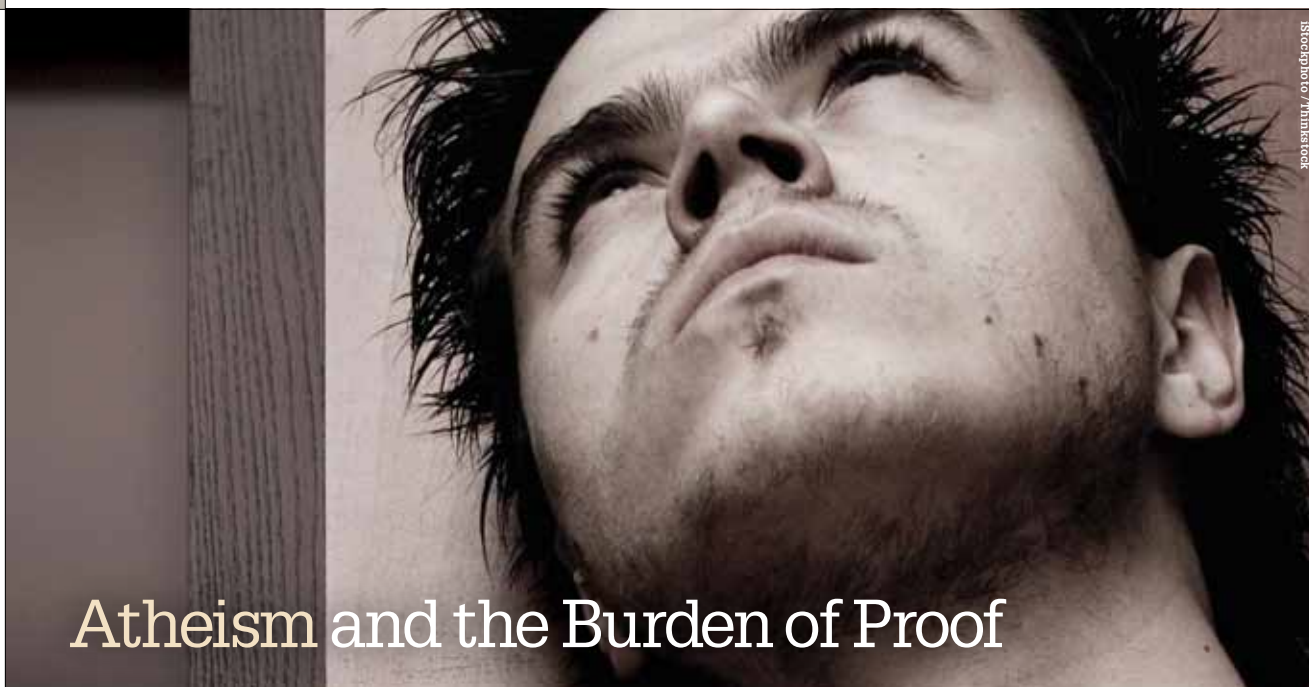
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"Blanton said he couldn't pay anything on his 'faith pledge,' but said we could double the amount of his pledge."



## Atheism and the Burden of Proof

BY PAUL COPAN

**I**n conversations with atheists, they may challenge us: "You're claiming that God exists. Therefore, the burden of proof rests on you, not me. So ... where's your evidence?"

Atheist Michael Scriven insists "we need not have a proof that God does not exist in order to justify atheism. Atheism is obligatory in the absence of any evidence for God's existence."<sup>1</sup> Or perhaps someone has told you that belief in God is just like belief in Santa Claus or the tooth fairy. Where do we begin to respond to such assertions?

**First, define your terms — especially *atheism*.** Understand the terms you are using. You can clear up a lot of confusion here and keep the conversation with a professing atheist on track. Ask your friend, "How do you define *atheism*?" According to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the historic definition of "atheist" is one who "maintains that there is no God, that is, that the sentence God exists expresses a *false* proposition."<sup>2</sup>

The late atheist-turned-deist philosopher Antony Flew defined atheism as "rejection of belief in God" — not merely the absence of belief in God.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Julian Baggini, in his book *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction*, asserts that atheism is "extremely simple to



Must theists produce irrefutable evidence to back their belief in God?

define." It is "the belief that there is no God or gods."<sup>4</sup> By contrast, central to theism is that an infinitely good, wise, self-existent, and powerful personal Creator brought into being a creation separate from himself, though He sustains all things in being. This creation is comprised of things visible and invisible. And God uniquely made human beings with distinctive moral, spiritual, intellectual, and relational capacities.

**Second, the atheist also bears the burden of proof in making the claim, "God does not exist."** Keep in mind: The atheist is actually making a claim to knowledge *just as the theist is*. So rather than shrugging off any burden of proof, the atheist should understand that *both* claims needs justification, not just the theist's. If you make a claim to know something, you should be able to justify that claim when challenged. The atheist — if he or she is a true atheist — says that God does not exist. But we can ask, "Why think this? What positive arguments are there for this claim?"

To date, there just has not been any argument coming close to showing how this is so. Some might say, "Arguments for God's existence do not work." But that is not enough. You need to show why God does not exist (more on this below). In my experience, the "atheist" more often than not turns out to be an agnostic.

**Third, look out for the "atheist's" slide into agnosticism, from claiming *disbelief* to mere *unbelief*.** True agnostics affirm they do

not know whether God exists or not. By contrast, atheism is a strong claim and is actually a fairly difficult position to defend. As noted, many professing atheists are not true atheists — that is, one who *disbelieves* or *rejects* belief in God. Rather, they are more like “agnostics” — *unbelievers*. What they mean by “there is no God” is more like “I lack belief in God.”

In April 2001, I was speaking at an open forum at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Massachusetts. A student told me during the Q&A, “The reason I am an atheist is because the arguments for God’s existence do not work.”

I replied, “Then you should be an agnostic, not an atheist. It is logically possible that God could exist even if the available arguments for God do not work. So, you should be an agnostic, in that case. You have to do more than say the arguments for God do not work to be an atheist. You have to show why God *cannot* exist. You see, *the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*.”

The person who claims to be an atheist but simply lacks belief in God is blurring the historic distinction between agnostic and atheist.<sup>5</sup> We should gently press him on this question: “What makes your position different from an agnostic’s?”

**Fourth, distinguish between the two types of agnostics — ordinary and ornery.** You have seen the bumper sticker: “Militant agnostic: I don’t know and you can’t know either.” Notice what this agnostic’s position is. He is not simply confessing, “I just don’t know if God exists” (and perhaps he would like to know). This is the *ordinary* agnostic position. No, he is taking the *ornery* agnostic position. He is confidently claiming to know something after all — that *no one* can know if God exists.

I was at a local philosophical discussion recently (I am organizer and moderator of a Socrates Café),<sup>6</sup> and one participant exclaimed, “You can’t know that God exists.”

I gently replied, “But how do you *know* that you can’t know?” I then pressed him: “I can understand that you obviously speak for yourself about not knowing if God exists. But how can you say that no one *else* can truly know that God exists? That just sounds presumptuous to me.” The militant agnostic speaks for all people, claiming to know that *no one* can know God exists. But how can he support the claim to know this? Like that atheist, the militant agnostic must justify his claim as well.

We do not need 100 percent certainty to truly know. After all, we cannot show with 100 percent certainty that our knowledge must have 100 percent certainty.

**Fifth, distinguish between “proof” and “good reasons.”** In the past, Christian philosophers and theologians have talked about “proofs” for God’s existence. To many, however, this suggests *100 percent, absolute, mathematical certainty* — with absolutely no wiggle room for other explanations or alternatives. I have met plenty of people who claim that, even if an alternative to a “God-answer” is logically possible, then they do not have to take God seriously. “It is logically possible that the amazing finely tuned, life-permitting, life-producing, and life-sustaining universe came about by nonconscious, material, unguided processes.” Do we make important decisions or judgments in any *other* area of life on the basis of the slimmest of possibilities? Just because something is possible does not mean it is even remotely plausible. I have talked to skeptics, agnostics, and atheists who seem willing to risk everything based on the remotest logical possibilities — a very thin thread to hang everything on. It is logically possible that the universe is just an illusion too, but so utterly counterintuitive and implausible. Clearly, plenty of alternative possibilities need not detain us from taking seriously more substantive explanations.

Here is the point: We do not need 100 percent certainty to truly know. After all, *we cannot show with 100 percent certainty that our knowledge must have 100 percent certainty*. We believe lots of things with confidence even though we do not have absolute certainty. In fact, if most people followed the “100 percent rule” for knowledge, we would know precious little. But no one really believes that.

Now, if our only options were *either* 100 percent certainty or skepticism, then we would not be able to differentiate between views that are highly plausible, on the one hand, and completely ridiculous, on the other. They would both fall short of the 100 percent certainty standard and so both should be readily dismissed. But that is clearly silly. We know the difference. And what about those who seem to know with 100 percent certainty that we cannot know with 100 percent certainty. Interestingly, skeptics about knowledge typically seem quite convinced — absolutely convinced — that we cannot know.

Also, we know some things even without evidence — say, that the earth is older than 15 minutes and that other minds exist. These beliefs are, as some philosophers say, “properly

basic.” They simply arise from our experience, and we have no reason to doubt them. We cannot show that the earth is older than 15 minutes or that other minds exist. Now it is logically possible we could be wrong, but we can know these things quite confidently, even if we do not have absolute certainty.

**Sixth, we have good reasons for belief in the biblical God, but not in mythical beings like mermaids, elves, unicorns, the tooth fairy, or flying spaghetti monsters.** When people say that belief in God is like belief in the tooth fairy or Easter bunny, this is a philosophical blunder, a misguided comparison. These cases are quite different. We have *good reasons* for thinking tooth fairies or Santa Claus *do not* exist. For example, we *know* that parents typically replace their child’s extracted tooth under the pillow with some surprise; we *know* where Christmas presents under the tree come from — and it’s not the North Pole. By contrast, belief in God is far different, and today we live in an age in which arguments for God’s existence are being taken seriously and are ably defended. (View the many debates of Christian philosopher William Lane Craig at [www.reasonablefaith.org/media](http://www.reasonablefaith.org/media)).

While the evidence for God’s existence may appear to be *lacking* for some, that is different from saying we have evidence He does not exist (which we do for the tooth fairy and Santa). *Having reasons for rejecting the existence of something is different from not having evidence for something.* Outright denial of God’s existence is what happens when we do not distinguish between (a) not believing in the existence of something (as in the case of God) and (b) believing that it does not exist (as in the case of unicorns).<sup>7</sup>

What about Richard Dawkins’ suggestion that maybe a “Flying Spaghetti Monster” is responsible for the universe? (i) *Physical objects like flying spaghetti monsters would be part of the physical universe. The one true God transcends the empirical world; spaghetti monsters do not but are embedded within it.*<sup>8</sup> (ii) *This “objection” proves nothing. It only reminds us that philosophical arguments about the nature of the Creator cannot get as specific as those from special revelation.* However, the universe came into existence a finite time ago apart from previously existing matter, energy, space, and time; so we can still legitimately conclude that what brought the universe into being

Having reasons for rejecting the existence of something is different from not having evidence for something.

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must be personal, powerful, immaterial — unlike a spaghetti monster. (iii) *This objection does nothing to undermine the very legitimate conclusion that the finely tuned universe was designed by a remarkably intelligent being.* (iv) *There is no reason to think that the Flying Spaghetti Monster is a necessary being — one that necessarily exists in all possible worlds.* Either something is *necessary* (it exists by its very nature without relying on something outside of it), or it is *contingent* (it depends on something else for its existence and does not exist by its very nature). Does the Flying Spaghetti Monster’s nature require that it necessarily exist? We have no reason to think so. (v) *Why suggest a Flying Spaghetti Monster at all? Where does this idea come from, and why should it be taken seriously? How are the phenomena of the universe and human experience specifically connected to this entity? How does it do a better job of explaining these features of reality?*

For those who want to read about some of the evidences for God’s existence, I mention some of these in an earlier *Enrichment* essay, “Is Naturalism a Simpler Explanation Than Theism?”<sup>9</sup> ([http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201201/201201\\_108\\_Naturalism.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201201/201201_108_Naturalism.cfm)) Indeed, there is much to be said in support of God’s existence.<sup>10</sup>

**Seventh, we should distinguish between two types of ignorance — innocence and culpable — and the agnostic would be quite culpable of refusing to seek.** When a Western tourist travels to Cambodia, she might not be aware that exposing the sole of her foot or bottom of her shoe is insulting and offensive. The tourist may offend someone out of ignorance of this cultural taboo. But this ignorance is *innocent*.

There’s another kind of ignorance. What if you are driving down a highway and not paying attention to speed limit signs? An officer may stop you and ask why you were speeding. You cannot rightly say, “I didn’t know what the speed limit was — or even how fast I was going. So you shouldn’t give me a ticket.” Obviously, if you are driving, you are responsible for paying attention. Ignorance is no excuse. It is *blameworthy* rather than innocent.

Likewise, to say “I do not know if God exists” may reveal a failure in my responsibility to seek God (“I do not want to know”). In this case, I would be at fault. The Christian

Geneticist Francis Collins of Human Genome Project fame said he was an agnostic in college. Yet he confesses that his “I don’t know” was more an “I don’t want to know” attitude — a “willful blindness.”<sup>11</sup> This agnosticism eventually gave way to outright atheism — although Collins would later come to faith in Christ. He began reading C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*, and Collins realized his own antireligious constructs were “those of a schoolboy.”<sup>12</sup>

Because the existence of God is a massively important topic, we cannot afford not to pay attention — especially in an age of so many diversions. Philosopher Tom Morris points out that sports, TV, restaurants, concerts, cars, billiards, and a thousand other activities can divert us from the ultimate issues of life. As a result, we don’t “tune into” God. And when a crisis hits (death, hospitalization, natural disaster), we are not really in the best condition to process and make accurate judgments about those deep questions.<sup>13</sup> The person who says, “I do not know if God exists,” may have *chosen* to live by diversions and distractions and thus to ignore God. This is not an innocent ignorance; this ignorance is the result of our neglecting our duty.

So the theist, atheist, and militant (ornery) agnostic all bear a burden of proof; the theist does not have a heavier burden since all claim to know something. Furthermore, even the alleged ordinary agnostic still is not off the hook. For one thing, one *cannot* remain neutral all his life; he will make commitments or hold beliefs all along the way that reflect either an atheistic or theistic worldview. He is either going to be a practical atheist or practical theist (or a mixture of the two) in some fashion throughout his life. But he can’t straddle the fence for long. Also, the ordinary agnostic may say, “I do not know,” but this often means “I do not care” — the view of an “apatheist.” Refusing to seek out whether God exists or not; refusing to humble oneself to seek whatever light about God is available; living a life of distractions rather than thoughtfully reflecting about one’s meaning, purpose, or destiny leaves one *culpable* in his ignorance, not *innocent*. ■

#### Notes

1. Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 102.
2. Paul Edwards, ed., “Atheism,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 1:175.

Because the existence of God is a massively important topic, we cannot afford not to pay attention — especially in an age of so many diversions.

3. Antony Flew, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 28.
4. Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.
5. See also J.P. Moreland, *Does God Exist?* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 1993), where Moreland rightly states that “the usual understanding of atheism” is “the positive assertion that God does not exist” (223).
6. See [meetup.com/Socrates-Cafe-in-West-Palm-Beach-FL/](http://meetup.com/Socrates-Cafe-in-West-Palm-Beach-FL/).
7. Scott Shalkowski, “Atheological Apologetics,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (Jan. 1989): 9.
8. Eric Reitan, *Is God a Delusion? A Reply to Religion’s Cultured Despisers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 83, 4.
9. Paul Copan, “Is Naturalism a Simpler Explanation Than Theism?” in *Enrichment* 17, no. 1 (2012): 108–11. Found at [enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201201/201201\\_108\\_Naturalism.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201201/201201_108_Naturalism.cfm). Accessed October 9, 2012.
10. I lay out some of these reasons in a number of my books. A good place to start is *Loving Wisdom: Christian Philosophy of Religion* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007); there are other popular-level books, scholarly books, and articles on this topic (see [www.paulcopan.com](http://www.paulcopan.com)). One large-scale defense of God’s existence is found in William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).
11. Frances S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 16.
12. *Ibid.*, 21.
13. Thomas V. Morris, *Making Sense of It All* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 34.



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“Reading the Sunday funnies ‘religiously’ does *not* count as worship.”

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## Environmental Ethics: Tending the Garden for Our Health

BY CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL

**S**ummer brings opportunity to grow fruits and vegetables for my family through a small garden plot. Gardening improves my health through exercise and my state of mind through the tranquility found in the great outdoors. While not everyone cultivates food in his or her backyard, we all tend a shared garden — the earth. Our choices, both individually and collectively, affect the environment. For example, one careless act by an individual can cause a forest fire. The choice as a society to develop land near the edge of a forest can alter forest-management practices, leading to rampant fires during droughts. Destroying tropical rainforests can result in eliminating species of plants containing potential cures for diseases. The loss of beautiful natural spaces increases



Our health directly depends on the health of our environment.

the stress in modern life, diminishing health.

Pastors will encounter people who feel that Christianity contributes to environmental problems when it emphasizes the dominion of human beings over the rest of creation. This perception can hinder a person's receptiveness to the gospel. Other people will downplay the role of the environment in human health and miss opportunities to apply biblical principles of stewardship. By teaching a biblical framework for addressing environmental issues, pastors can equip their congregations to make wise decisions on matters that impact everyone's health and remove any stumbling blocks to receiving spiritual truth.

### FINDING A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK

In Genesis 2:15, the Lord established gardening as mankind's first profession: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." By tending the Garden, mankind would fulfill the admonition in Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." The dominion given in Genesis 1 came alongside the responsibility for good stewardship.

The New Testament sheds light on the concept of biblical stewardship. In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus taught that good stewardship means taking action (Matthew 25:14–30). Simply preserving the resources given to you falls short of good stewardship. The servant who hid the one talent he received to preserve it and avoid the risks associated with investment failed his master. The faithful servants not only preserved the resources their master gave them, but they used those resources for the benefit of their master. Thus, our challenge in tending our earth is to bring benefits from the resources God has given us without losing those resources in the process.

### SOLVING HEALTH ISSUES

Our health directly depends on the health of our environment. Clean air and water prevent both infectious diseases and illnesses such as cancer. Many environmental toxins started out as helpful substances that people did not realize posed a danger to health. For example, ancient Romans widely used lead for plumbing and for sweetening beverages. Lead acetate (known as sugar of lead) produces

lead poisoning in individuals who regularly consume it. Ancient Romans created this compound by boiling grape juice in lead pots to make sweet syrup. In time, people discovered the correlation between the artificial sweetener and lead poisoning and abandoned its use. However, some companies still use the toxic compound in lipsticks and hair dyes in certain countries.

The ethical challenge occurs when scientists determine that a useful substance has harmful properties. In modern times, paint manufacturers used lead as a paint additive to make paint more durable. However, the sweetness of lead made consuming peeling paint tempting to children. In 1904, doctors linked lead poisoning in children to lead-based paints. Baby crib manufacturers often painted cribs with bright lead-based paints, and infants would chew on the rails, ingesting the paint. In 1922, the League of Nations banned the use of lead-based paint, but the United States opted not to adopt this rule. Finally, in 1971, the Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act phased out lead-based house paint in the United States.

### **PRESERVING MEDICAL RESOURCES**

Sometimes our health depends on resources we discover in the natural environment. For example, in 1961, the National Cancer Institute commissioned USDA botanists to collect samples from plants in a search for natural compounds with anticancer activity. In 1962, botanist Arthur S. Barclay collected bark from a single Pacific yew tree, *Taxus brevifolia*, in a forest north of Packwood, Washington. This sample began the research that led to the isolation of taxol, a compound (eventually renamed paclitaxel) used to treat patients with lung, ovarian, breast, and head and neck cancer.

In the tropical rainforests of Madagascar, an island off the east coast of Africa, the rosy periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*) grows. The plant with pretty pink flowers provides two very important cancer-fighting medicines: vinblastine and vincristine. Vinblastine has contributed to increasing the chance of surviving childhood leukemia from 10 percent to 95 percent. Doctors use vincristine to treat Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer that can arise in young adults.

Seventy percent of the 3,000 plants identified by the National Cancer Institute as having anticancer activities come from tropical rainforests. However, researchers have only

While the primary focus of churches must remain saving people, congregations can learn to be kind to the environment.



examined one percent of the known plant and animal species in the tropical rainforests for their medicinal properties. Covering only six percent of the earth's surface, tropical rainforests contain at least half of all known species. Yet, agricultural development and the logging industry are destroying tropical rainforest ecosystems at an alarming rate. Because rainforest trees have very large canopies, the loss of a few trees can lead to the collapse of the entire ecosystem in the surrounding area.

Land once occupied by rainforests seldom makes suitable land for farming in the long term. Once the soil can no longer support crop growth, farmers must clear further stretches of the rainforest to create more agricultural land. Yet, we must meet the economic needs of people who turn to the rainforest to find farming land. The answer may be sustainable development that finds ways to meet present needs without destroying the gift of biodiversity within the rainforests that promises to bring health to future generations.

### **SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE**

Jesus called Christians to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13,14), setting a good example for others. While the primary focus of churches must remain saving people, congregations can learn to be kind to the environment. A common misperception is good environmental practices are expensive. However, many environmentally friendly ideas reduce costs. Recycling, reducing unnecessary use of paper, and using native plants when landscaping are simple steps every church can take that will save money as well as help the environment.

Within most congregations, pastors can find parishioners with awareness of good environmental practices willing to lead the way. By extending teaching on good stewardship to include care of our environmental resources, pastors can influence people to make wiser choices for their own health and the health of future generations. In caring for creation, we honor the Creator. ■



**CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL, Ph.D.**, an ordained minister, author, medical writer, and research scientist trained at Harvard Medical School and Harvard University. She speaks in churches and conferences nationwide and addresses faith and science issues at [questionyourdoubts.com](http://questionyourdoubts.com).

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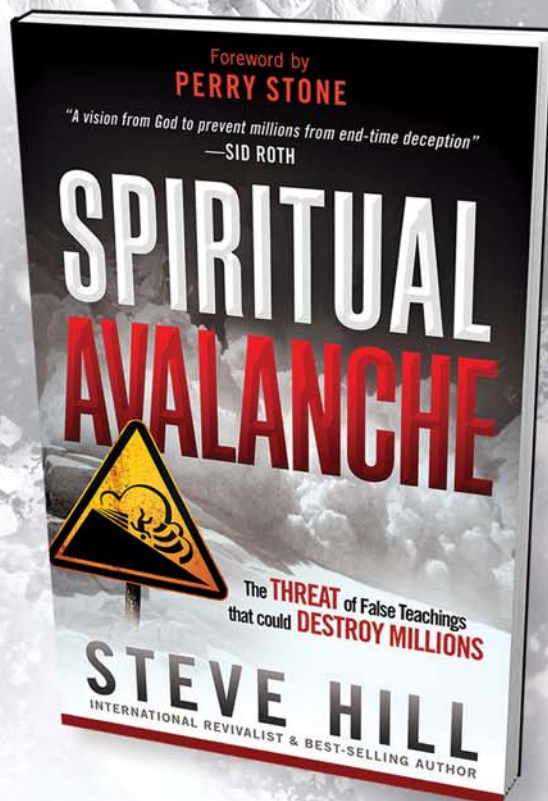


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# HAND TO THE PLOW

Chicago Pastor Named  
to *TIME*'s 100 List  
Keeps Gaze Fixed on Poor

| By CARA DAVIS |

**A WEEK** after landing on the cover of *TIME* magazine, and  
days before being named to the *TIME* 100, Assemblies of  
God pastor Wilfredo De Jesús boarded a plane to speak to just 44 people gathered in

a small church in Nebraska. Given his recent notoriety, such a small gathering may seem like an odd choice for the senior pastor of one of America's largest churches. But not to Pastor Choco. "It's not about numbers; it's about people. It doesn't matter if it is 10,000 people in Miami or 44 people in Nebraska. When God calls, I go. I am always humbled and honored when I'm invited to spend time with men and women of God wherever they are."

In his first book, *Amazing Faith* (Influence Resources), De Jesús shares his life story and message: “No one is too lost, too evil, too wounded, or too hopeless,” he writes. “No one is beyond the transforming power of God’s love. When we let Him, God fills our hearts with His love, strength, and purpose, and we become complete.” That message and his humble spirit may be at the core of why Pastor Choco finds himself in the media’s spotlight.



“THERE’S A LOT  
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CAN ONLY SPEAK  
LIKE THAT WHEN  
I’VE ESTABLISHED  
A CREDIBILITY  
WITHIN OUR  
COMMUNITY TO  
BE HEARD.”

## It Takes a Movement

De Jesús is senior pastor of New Life Covenant Ministries, one of the fastest-growing churches in Chicago, and the largest Assemblies of God church in the nation. When De Jesús became pastor of the church in July 2000, it averaged 120 attendees per weekend. Today, New Life has 17,000 people through four church campuses and church plants and boasts more than 130 ministries reaching those in need within the community.

While he has been senior pastor for 13 years, it’s only been in the last 3 that word has spread about what’s happening there. “For many years I was in Chicago, and no one knew about me, and yet we were the largest church in the Assemblies,” he said. “And I was fine with that.”

A few years ago Tommy Barnett, senior pastor of Phoenix First Assembly of God, one of the fastest-growing churches in America, encouraged De Jesús to invite George O. Wood, the general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, to visit his church. “He was the one who told me, ‘You need to call Dr. Wood. He needs to see this.’ That’s when people started to take notice.”

Dr. Wood became a mentor and “spiritual father” to De Jesús. “I love him and respect him dearly,” De Jesús said. “He’s been very instrumental in shaping me, and also helping me to be a better pastor. Seeing how he loves the Assemblies of God helps me love my city and care for the poor.”

When De Jesús became aware of the potential *TIME* magazine coverage, Dr. Wood was the first phone call he made. “I wanted him to hear it from me,” he said. “My relationship with Dr. Wood only continues to enhance my relationship with the Assemblies of God. It’s through him that I’m able to expand and grow. I appreciate the Movement and what we’re trying to do around here, around the country, and around the world.”

De Jesús is quick to point out that growing a megachurch and obtaining national and international media attention isn’t anything he sought. “Know that this isn’t something I asked for,” he said. “If pastors who are ministering want to grow big churches and grow megachurches, my advice is, ‘Don’t get into it for that.’ I never wanted to be a megachurch pastor. I never wanted to be in

the limelight because of the responsibility.”

However, now that the light is shining on him, De Jesús recognizes that with the new media exposure comes added responsibility. “I don’t let myself focus on the media, per se, because that comes and goes,” he said. “But it’s shifted my perspective — I understand that I bear upon my life the responsibility to represent the interests of the people, the Assemblies of God, the Hispanic community, and my family.”

## The First Ministry

De Jesús, 48, feels his first responsibility is to his family, which he calls his “first ministry.” “I’ll be celebrating 25 years with my wife Elizabeth on June 11,” he said. “No doubt Elizabeth has been very instrumental in assisting me and shaping me to be a father, husband, and pastor. My three kids — Alexandria, Yesenia, and Wilfredo, Jr., — they were my first ministry and now all three of them serve the Lord and are involved in church out of their own free will. I just want to praise God for them and their support. My family has always been there — and my family the church, New Life Covenant — they’ve always embraced what God has placed in my heart, so I’m really appreciative of the church and my staff for their support through all these years. It takes a team to achieve a dream.”

De Jesús has extended the church beyond the four walls and into the community. Outside of the church’s thriving youth group and children’s ministry — New Life operates an affordable private school (Salem Christian School), a free residential program for at-risk youth (Axis Teen Center), and an intensive discipleship program for college-age students (Chicago Master’s Commission). Under De Jesús’ direction, New Life has launched several nonprofit entities that help those who are hurting in a practical, tangible way. Among these are the Chicago Dream Center, New Life Family Services, Camden Dream Center, New Life Foundation, and others. These organizations operate

## LEADING WITH GRACE by Wilfredo De Jesús

**Billy was born to be a leader.** His desire to lead started at a young age. He went from being an altar boy to joining the church youth club and the high school letterman club. He was the founding member of an African-American fraternity in college and he wasn't even African-American. Billy's drive to lead compelled him to push through any obstacles. When he focused his mind on something, everything else vaporized. As a young man, he poured most of his time and energy into community activism — so much so that he was kicked out of college for failing grades. That didn't stop him from chasing his dreams and finishing college.

Sometimes you're on a mission to pursue your purpose in life, and you realize you've taken a wrong turn that's leading you nowhere. No matter how much fame, fortune and education you may have, you can still hit a plateau or glass ceiling where you stop advancing. You realize that you've lost sight of what's most important

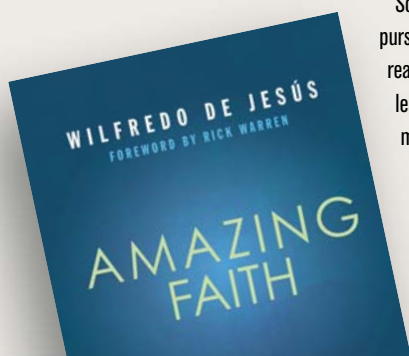
— your relationship with God. You've taken yourself as far as you can go from an earthly perspective. Now it's time to let God lead you where you never dreamed of — to reach your divinely ordained full potential.

When Billy surrendered his heart, life, and dreams to God, he no longer allowed others to control his choices. He trusted God with all his heart. He no longer felt like Saul, but more like a transformed Paul. He learned about true leadership, and he teaches those powerful spiritual truths at our church's Men's Retreat. He learned that leaders must have the courage to change. He teaches other men that embracing the truth gives them the courage to express their convictions and press through expected obstacles.

A godly leader always takes the narrow road and inspires others to do the right thing. Leaders with a godly vision and unshakeable faith must exhibit humility and passionately pursue their mission.

Once you've awakened from a self-induced spiritual slumber and found your purpose, you must act on it, shed the heavy weights from your life that hold you back, and lastly but most importantly, put on Christ. He's our strength to press on and fulfill the purposes God has for our lives.

— Excerpted from *Amazing Faith: How to Make God Take Notice* (Influence Resources)



### HAND TO THE PLOW (continued from page 35)

multifaceted programs: food and clothing pantries, transitional shelters, residential recovery and job training programs, mobile soup kitchens for the homeless and shut-ins, gang and at-risk youth intervention, human trafficking advocacy, world missions and humanitarian relief, after-school tutoring and sports programming, mentoring, prison outreach, immigration advocacy, and much more.

#### Engaging Powers, Establishing Credibility

The key to expanding ministry, he said, is to establish credibility within the community. "The

pastor will always engage powers in the local community," he said. "Your voice only gets stronger when what you do for the community begins to resonate with people. In other words, what gave me credibility in Humboldt Park in the city of Chicago was that I adopted 15 schools and gave 6,000 book bags to children. That gave me credibility to speak into government bodies and social issues that had nothing to do with the church but had everything to do with how my community was being mistreated."

He continued, "There's a lot I do that's outside of the pulpit, but I can only speak like that when I've established a credibility within our community to be heard. Then elected officials and the other agencies and institutions say, 'Okay,

this is Pastor Choco, let's hear what he's got to say because not only does he have a large church, but he does a lot for our community.'"

#### In Due Time

De Jesús has advice for small-church pastors and church planters. "To those pastors who have mission churches or ministries that are just starting and beginning to get off the ground, put your hand to the plow and continue to help those whom God called you to serve. Just do the ministry. Don't worry about anything else. Always operate in faith and God will honor your faith based on how you move within your city. Love the people you are serving, and God in His due time will honor His servants." ■

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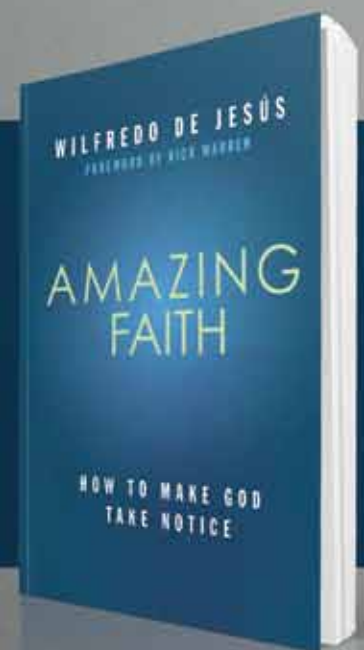
**CARA DAVIS** is editorial director for Floodlight Strategic and the former editorial director for Relevant Media Group. Her writing has appeared in *Charisma News*, *Q Ideas*, *The Huffington Post* and CNN.

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MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

# GO BEYOND WORDS... TAKE ACTION

*"IN AMAZING FAITH, AG PASTOR WILFREDO DE JESÚS, BETTER KNOWN AS 'PASTOR CHOCO', SHARES THE TESTIMONIES OF ORDINARY PEOPLE WITH EXTRAORDINARY FAITH... GOD WANTS TO USE AND RECYCLE THE PAIN IN YOUR LIFE TO HELP OTHERS, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO BE OPEN AND HONEST ABOUT IT. IF YOU KEEP YOUR HURT TO YOURSELF, YOU'RE WASTING IT." -PASTOR RICK WARREN*

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# HIRING FAMILY MEMBERS:

## BUILDING **a cohesive and productive pastoral team** is an ongoing

challenge for lead pastors. They cast a big net to find the right person for the right job. They look for calling, character, competence, chemistry with the staff, and culture match with the church. Using objective tools — resumes, references, interviews — pastors narrow the field, while praying that the Holy Spirit will give them a subjective affirmation in their hearts as to the best possible choice.

This selection process gets more complicated when a lead pastor is considering a member of his or her family for the staff position. Anecdotal evidence abounds that hiring the pastor's loved ones can result in powerful and effective ministry. But the reverse is also true. Sometimes hiring family members has been disastrous, resulting in division, hard feelings, and wounded hearts. Bringing family on staff certainly presents unique challenges and risks.

Many nonprofits have sought to mitigate the risk by insulating the leader from his or her hired family members by requiring someone else to supervise them. But in most churches, staff pastors report directly to the lead pastor, even if they are family members. So this

one-step-removed approach rarely works for pastoral teams. But if the pastor will take a few simple realities into account, the pastoral team can still function with effectiveness, and the rewards will far outweigh the risks.

Both writers, Cal and Warren, reflect their own positive experiences in hiring family. "For most of my 36 years in ministry, I (Cal) have served with my immediate family — my father, wife, and son-in-law." "I (Warren) was honored to have my father serve with me in my first pastorate." Nevertheless, both have observed the disruption in churches when they did not negotiate this prickly issue of nepotism with wisdom and grace. Here are some observations to consider.

TO NEGOTIATE THE PRICKLY  
ISSUE OF NEPOTISM WITH  
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TO CONSIDER.

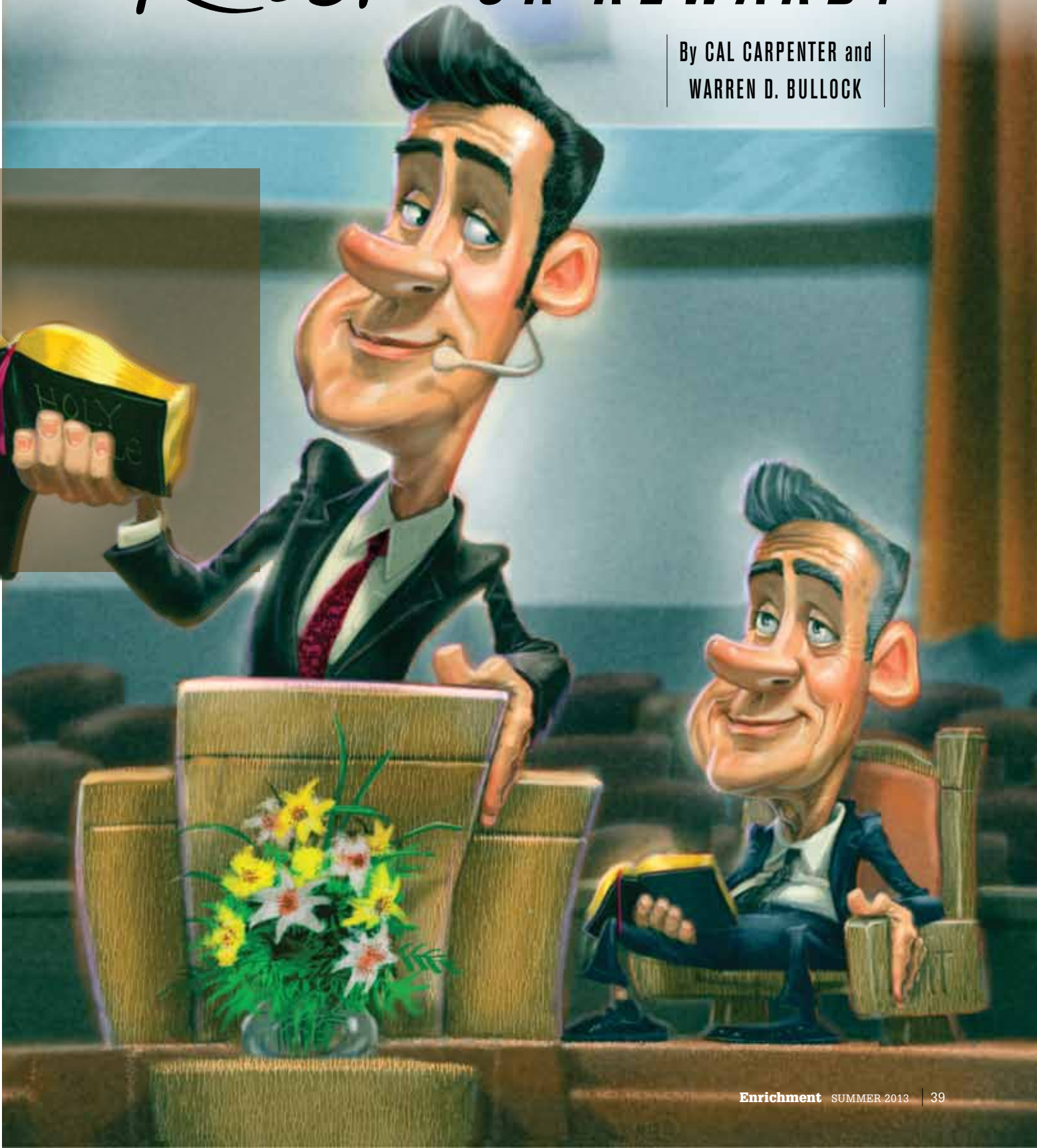
### The Church Is Not a Family Business

The church does not exist to provide employment for our family and us. Serving as the lead pastor or as a staff pastor is a privilege, not an entitlement. No one owes us anything, including hiring our family. The church is not an arena for exerting family influence to get our way. Family members serving as staff dare not demand favored treatment, or by their attitudes suggest they are above correction. To have people call us "Pastor" is a high honor. God has privileged us to serve in this way. That a church would trust us to lead it is a blessing. If God's will includes teaming with those we love as family members, this doubly blesses us. Together we honor the Lord's call and humbly accept the church's trust.

Illustration: Gary Locke

# *Risk* **OR REWARD?**

By CAL CARPENTER and  
WARREN D. BULLOCK



## HIRING FAMILY MEMBERS: RISK OR REWARD? *(continued from page 38)*

### Include Others in the Hiring Process

Hiring family is not a decision the leader/pastor should make unilaterally. Others should recognize the pastor's family members for their call, ability, and leadership. It is not uncommon for church leaders or congregants who know

enables them to complement his or her ministry through their own gifts.

- They will be unswervingly loyal.

These qualities and others may be prime motivators for pastors to bring loved ones onto the pastoral team.

have changed. For the past 12 years he has served on my pastoral staff and our relationship is still growing stronger."

"I (Warren) and my father, R.A. Bullock, were alike in that we were process leaders, so we wanted clear definition of our respective

roles through written job descriptions. In addition, Dad would give me a regular written accounting of his pastoral care work. But he would also do anything I asked him to do, even when it was not in his job description. He wanted my success more than his own. He gave me advice only when I asked

for it, which was often. Our personal relationship grew stronger, perhaps because of all of the staff meetings at the local donut shop."

When husband and wife are on staff together, they must learn when to take their "church hats" off and put their "family hats" on, and vice versa. At home they are not fellow pastors, but husband and wife. They are parents to their children, not pastors. Sometimes it takes a conscious effort to stop talking business and concentrate on family life, but it must be done for the sake of healthy relationships.

### Hired Family Members Should Expect a High Level of Accountability

Church members sometimes have higher expectations of the pastor's family than they do of other staff members. While that may seem unfair, church members expect family members to be major contributors to the success of the church and the pastoral team. When family members do not seem to carry their portion of the responsibilities, it becomes a point of contention, if not division. The result

WISDOM IS ESSENTIAL IN NAVIGATING A  
COURSE THAT MAINTAINS CHURCH UNITY  
AND PROTECTS THE FAMILY MEMBER FROM  
UNWARRANTED NEGATIVE COMMENTS.



members of the pastor's family to suggest that the church consider them for open positions on the pastoral team. When others take the initiative in acknowledging the strong ministry gifts of a family member, it lays a good foundation for future long-term effectiveness.

Considering a family member does not mean that the church should not interview other qualified candidates. In fact, it will strengthen the selection process if the church performs due diligence finding the best possible candidate. This can strengthen the position of both the candidate and the pastor if others assist with the interviews. Then, if the selection committee sees the family member as equal or better than his or her peers, the pastor can advance confidently through the approval process.

The advantages of having family as staff members include:

- They understand the burden and passion of the pastor.
- They see the pastor's and church's success as their success too.
- Knowing well the pastor's gifts and skills

### Clearly Delineate the Distinction Between Family Relationships and Ministry Functions

The family relationship never changes, i.e. father and son will always be father and son. But ministering together adds another dimension to the relationship because each has specific job responsibilities. When these two different roles are indistinct and confused, it can cause havoc in the family and frustration in the ministry.

"When I (Cal) worked with my father, Dale Carpenter, of course he was my dad, but he was also my boss. We developed a clear understanding that I needed both. As my boss, it was essential that I respect his authority and position and that I serve him to the best of my ability, not taking advantage of our relationship. As a son, I needed a dad to mentor, encourage, and love me. My father was a great boss, but an even better dad. To his credit, I always knew when he was the boss and when he was my dad. Our relationship grew stronger through our serving together. Now the roles

can be a heightened level of criticism, not only for the staff member, but for the leader as well. Failure to address the contentious issues can compromise long-term effectiveness.

As family, it is natural to want to shield one another from criticism and accusation. We want to avoid the pain that such criticism causes. But the leader cannot immediately leap to defend the family member, especially when the criticism may be justified. He or she first needs to clarify the facts, evaluate the criticism, consider the criticism's source, and talk directly with the staff member about it. Wisdom is essential in navigating a course that maintains church unity and protects the family member from unwarranted negative comments.

Sometimes a kernel of truth is at the heart of the issue. If so, the leader and the family member must humbly accept it and use it to improve their ministry. A healthy church environment allows the church to raise legitimate concerns with its pastor about a family member.

While the church may have higher expectations for family members than it should, the pastor must not have lower expectations of them than other staff members. The pastor should treat all staff the same. Family members do not get special treatment when it comes to job performance. The pastor needs to hold every staff member to the same level of accountability.

**Tools that can help.** The following are suggested tools that may assist in steering clear

of potential pitfalls in family/staff issues.

**1. Provide clear written job descriptions.** Spell out specific responsibilities. Outline reporting relationships. Agree on the extent and limits of authority.

**2. Include others in setting the salary.** If the church has established a salary scale, then use that to determine pay levels. If not, the pay should be commensurate with the responsibilities and on par with what the church is paying other staff members. Also, if the church has an employee manual, it will set forth the types of benefits that are available to all employees. Develop a written compensation agreement, and in most cases the board should approve it.

**3. Initiate regular job evaluations.** These should be face-to-face meetings with the results in written form for the staff member's personnel file. In some cases, ask the employee to do a self-evaluation to compare with the employer's assessment of his or her job performance. At the least the pastor should do these evaluations annually.

**4. Develop a written policy approved by the church board that outlines the process by which the church may discipline and/or terminate an employee, including a family member.** In some cases job evaluations may signal the need for change, but in other cases egregious behavior may be the cause. When the pastor needs to administer such discipline or termination, wisdom dictates that he include another person, perhaps a trusted board member, in the process. Also he needs to take carefully written

notes of each meeting with the employee. He will need to give thought as to what, if anything, he will communicate to key leaders and the congregation regarding the discipline/termination.

**5. Maintain open communication with your family member/employee.** When things get tense at work, you need to be able to talk openly about it. Productive conversations relieve tension, but also affirm the relationship. Long after you stop working together, you will still be family. So do not let job issues create a fissure in your relationship. Talk it out.

**6. Recognize that not all family members are emotionally wired to work together.** While working with family in ministry is a nice ideal, it is not always realistic in practice. Having a great family relationship does not always translate into a harmonious ministry team. And that's okay. Do not force it.

Admit it. Some family members drive us a little crazy. So why would we want to hire them? The good news is that we do not have to. We save ourselves a lot of grief by recognizing ahead of time that such a hire would be potentially disastrous.

Ministering with family is one of the most meaningful opportunities for growth and connection, but pastors must never take this for granted. Hold these opportunities loosely. Often it is only for a season. Churches that allow family members the privilege of working together are gracious and supportive. They ensure that the rewards for the church, the pastor, and his or her family far outweigh the risks. ■

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**WARREN BULLOCK** serves as prayer pastor at New Life Church in Renton, Washington, and is executive presbyter for the Northwest Region.

# IMPROVING YOUR *Interest Rate:* The Irresistible Power of a Great Question

By ROBERT C. CROSBY



AMONG THE ESSENTIAL SKILLS OF  
EFFECTIVE PASTORS AND LEADERS  
IS THE ABILITY TO TURN A GOOD  
QUESTION INTO A GREAT ONE.

DAVID could  
predict

his daughter's response. The  
daily dull ritual frustrated  
something deep within him.

When picking up his 12-year-old daughter at school every afternoon, this caring dad wanted one thing — to simply engage his daughter in some meaningful conversation. Somehow, however, it was becoming even more difficult to get one started.

"So, honey, how was your day today?"

"Okay."

"Did you have a good day?"

"Hmm . . . I guess."

A tedious quiet entered the car at this point and enveloped them both the rest of the way home — day after day, week after week. David hoped his questions would have inspired something more than this. Precious moments were passing. When he shared his dilemma with me, his pastor, he wanted to know: Was the problem that he could no longer relate to his almost teenage daughter or had he simply chosen the wrong topics to talk about?

I was convinced it was none of the above. The problem was not generational, but conversational

— a mistake often made by parents and pastors. It was not a matter of the topic he chose, but more so the tone and technique. While his questions were well intentioned, they were falling flat. My advice to David at first may have sounded a bit more financial than parental:

"You need to improve your interest rate."

David's brow furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"Instead of asking a general question the same way you may ask it of a hundred people you pass in the hall," I said, "think of a simple way to make the question more interesting and intriguing. Before you ask, give a little more thought to what she might like you to ask her or how. Sharpen the edges of your question and see what happens."

The next day, instead of asking his daughter for the umpteenth time the all-too-predictable,

"So, how was school?" question, David asked a sharper-edged question: "Sweetheart, what was the *best* thing that happened to you at school today?"

The results were immediate. When he told me, he was ecstatic. The first time he asked his daughter this question, her response was enthusiastic. In fact, he told me she was still talking with him about it for several minutes after they got home. This was a big win for this dad. As a result of this new approach, their relationship was energized and renewed. David had discovered the secret of turning a *good* question into a *great* one.

### Questions — a Powerful Tool

Questions are one of the most powerful, and perhaps underused, tools in a pastor's (or parent's) toolbox. Just 5 minutes of expressing

interest in others will do more to build your relationship than 5 months of trying to get him or her interested in you.

Questions are invitations. As clearly as an invitation opens the door of your house to a friend to attend a birthday party, bridal shower, or backyard barbecue, questions invite people in. They evoke response. Questions engage. Effectively formed and sensitively placed, they construct an atmosphere of interest that draws on the hidden resources, potentials, and needs of a person's soul.

Jesus consistently utilized great questions and, as a result, spent much of His time asking them. He interspersed no fewer than 14 questions in the Sermon on the Mount alone (Matthew 5–7). Some of His questions in the Gospels included:

- "To what shall I compare this generation?" (Matthew 11:6).
- "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).
- "What would you have me do for you?" (Matthew 20:32).

Questions have a way of cutting through the busy debris of life and drawing on what really matters. Effectively posed from pastor to parishioner or parent to child, I have watched great questions relieve emotional loads, open closed minds, and brighten faces with renewed excitement and interest.

### Great Questions: Eight Characteristics

Great questions carry certain characteristics. Among the essential skills of effective pastors and leaders is the ability to turn a *good* question into a *great* one. This involves understanding what makes a great question truly great. The right question asked of the right person at the right time can do much to draw out fresh

#### UNQUESTIONABLE BENEFITS OF ASKING YOUR **TEAM** GREAT QUESTIONS

- Asking great questions helps your team *reflect more deeply*, to focus and stretch their minds.
- Asking great questions *challenges your team's assumptions and misconceptions* that could otherwise hinder their growth and development.
- Asking great questions can *lead to breakthrough ideas* on your team.
- Asking great questions can *enable your team to gain a better view* of the situation.
- Asking great questions can *open otherwise closed minds* on your team.
- Asking great questions can *help your team think more deeply and strategically*.
- Asking great questions *ignites discussions that move people* from individual ideas to collaborative ones.

— Adapted from Michael Marquardt, *Leading With Questions: How Leaders Find the Right Solutions By Knowing What to Ask* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).



## IMPROVING YOUR INTEREST RATE: THE IRRESISTIBLE POWER OF A GREAT QUESTION *(continued from page 43)*

and meaningful insight, initiative, and creativity. The wise pastor will use questions to challenge and inspire his or her team to greatness.

Asking rather than telling, questions rather than answers, has become the key to leadership excellence and success in the 21st century. Peter Drucker, considered the leadership guru of the 20th century, notes that “the leader of the past may have been a person who knew how to tell, but certainly the leader of the future will be a person who knows how to ask.”<sup>1</sup>

Imagine the potential open doors and new ideas latent within the minds and hearts of your church members, board members, and pastoral team. Many are just a question away. Understanding what makes a great question truly great is a big step toward strengthening your effectiveness as a leader.

What characterizes truly great questions? What sets them apart? Effective leaders recognize that great questions are:

**Fueled by genuine interest.** The apostle Paul said: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3,4). In other words, it’s time to improve your “interest” rate.

Refreshing your interest in the lives, thoughts, ideas, and opinions of the people around you requires a bit of wonder on your part. Take time to wonder about other’s thoughts and experiences. Ask yourself:

- I wonder how their day went?
- I wonder what their greatest joys are? Their greatest challenges?
- I wonder what ideas and dreams they hold?
- I wonder what they fear or worry about?
- I wonder what they are hoping for?
- I wonder what question they most need me to ask?

These questions and others work wonders when it comes to getting us out of ourselves

and interested in others. These questions enliven our sensitivities and create an intrigue that inspires great questions and motivates great question asking. They inform our topics and inspire our tone.

**Not answered merely with a yes or no.** Nothing will slow down a conversation much more than a pastor or leader who asks questions that a person can answer with one word. Such questions are not just simple; they are simplistic. They merely search out facts while failing to engage the personalities, minds, or opinions of another. The best questions are open-ended ones that inspire sentences of response.

**Razor-sharp.** Great questions effectively elicit a response. Vagueness will shut down openness and cut off responsiveness in communication. The best questions do more than

seek information; they seek specific information. If you were a youth pastor, for example, which of the following questions would you most want your senior pastor to ask you:

“So, what’s your vision for this youth ministry?” or “If you and your youth group could do one thing to serve this community and be guaranteed it would succeed, what would you like to do?” (Notice how this question removes any concern of fear or failure that may hinder thinking.)

Great questions are provocative. They are thoughtfully, specifically, and strategically designed to draw out the heartfelt ideas, opinions, notions, feelings, concerns, dreams, issues, and perspectives of the person you are asking. Few things are duller than a dull question. Keep them sharp by being specific.

### UNQUESTIONABLE BENEFITS OF ASKING YOUR **CHILDREN** GREAT QUESTIONS

- Asking great questions shows your child that you are *genuinely interested* in him/her.
- Asking great questions *cultivates your child’s own social skills* by modeling.
- Asking great questions allows you to examine just how much of *your teaching is taking root* within your child.
- Asking great questions allows you as a parent to *bring focus to your together time* with your child, rather than wasting those moments.
- Asking great questions greatly assists you as a parent in *accurately discerning the real emotional and spiritual needs* of your child.
- Asking great questions *cultivates intimacy* between a parent and child.
- Asking great questions *brings your child’s dreams and desires closer* to the surface for you to affirm and encourage.

— Adapted from Robert Crosby, *Conversation Starters for Parent & Kids* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family Publishing, 2007).



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Usually not begun with the word *why*. Too often we tend to ask “why” questions much too early in a conversation. (It is often one of the first questions we ask our parents as toddlers – *Why?*) Like a submarine suddenly electing to dive straight to the ocean’s floor without adjusting the cabin pressure, why questions tend to go for too much too quickly. They tend to suddenly overwhelm instead of carefully inquire. They storm into places where angels fear to tread, without thought or consideration of the readiness or responsiveness of the individual being asked.

For example, a husband may abruptly ask his wife, “Why are you so uptight?”

However, if he is wise, he may ask: “You seem to have a lot on your mind. Would you like to sit down, have a cup of coffee, and talk about it?”

It is clear which of these would garner the best response.

**Sometimes followed by a pause.** Do not be afraid if the person initially meets your question with silence. Sometimes a pause precedes the most honest answers. (Some sociologists call this the “pregnant pause.”) Instead of hurriedly interpreting quietness as nonresponsiveness, give the question a chance to sink in a bit. The pause may mean they need a moment to think before responding. Perhaps your question is a penetrating one.

To hurriedly or nervously interject follow-up questions may short-circuit the genuine initial responses that you need to hear. Ask, and then

wait. You may be surprised at what you hear.

**Not leading questions.** Great questions are invitations, not cattle prods. Inquiry does not mean interrogation. It is easy to fall into the trap of using questions to compel a person to come to our conclusions, instead of genuinely getting a sense of what he or she is thinking and feeling. Teams, however, can often tell when you are driven by preconceived intentions. Such an approach used too frequently is disingenuous at best, and often intimidating.

**Drawn from great motives.** Before you ask a team member a question, first ask yourself: *What is motivating me to ask this question of this person right now?* More often than not, the tone of a question is even more important than the topic. What is fueling the question? Curiosity? Boredom? Anger? Interest? Suspicion? Hope? Concern? Frustration? The motive behind a question colors the tone in which you ask it.

“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Proverbs 25:11). In other words, asking the right question of the right person at the right moment with the right tone for the right reasons can produce something amazing.

**Provocative.** Great questions provoke us to think and to action. There is a story of Steve Jobs, a young CEO, who was trying to build his executive team in the early days at Apple Computer. When he met with one executive from PepsiCo he had his eye on, he struggled to find a way to convince the well-paid corporate leader to make a midlife career change. A

little desperate, Jobs asked, “John, do you want to spend the rest of your life making sugared water, or do you want to change the world?”

What a question: specific, provocative, and challenging. Jobs did the work of turning his good questions into a great one. As a result, he found himself with a new team member.

## Ask Yourself

David’s frustration with his daughter’s monosyllabic answers led him to ask a question. This question was not for her, but one he needed to ask himself: *What would be a better way to ask my daughter a question? What would be a more intriguing way to word it for her?*

Effective church leaders not only ask their teams and families great questions; they ask themselves great ones. Here are a few great questions for starters:

- What is the best question I have asked my team this week?
- What question does my team most need me to ask today?
- Which question has my wife/daughter/son responded to the best recently?
- How could I make my questions to my team and family even more effective?

And, while you are at it, remember, leaders do not just tell; they ask. ■

## NOTE

1. Michael Marquardt, *Leading With Questions: How Leaders Find the Right Solutions By Knowing What to Ask* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 23, 24.

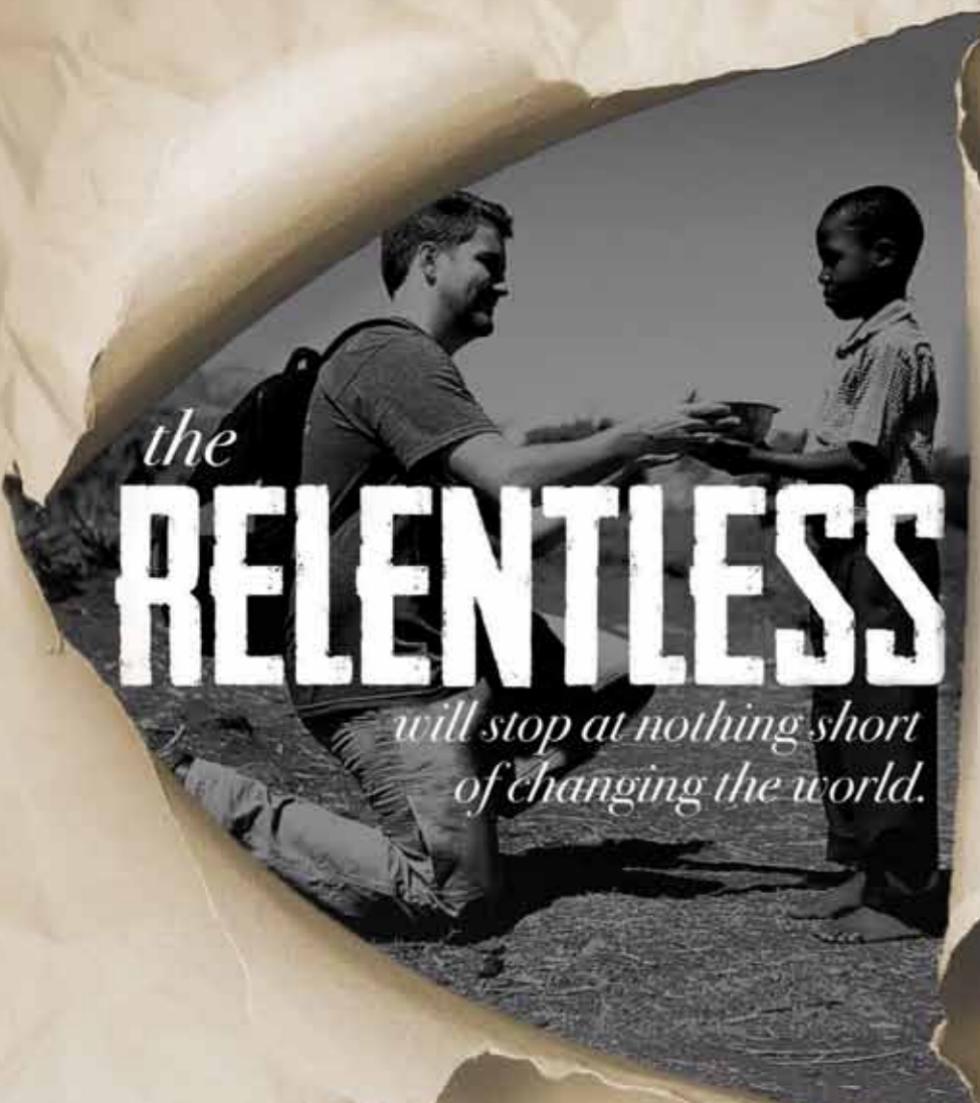
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INTRODUCTION

# Spiritual WARFARE

## CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL

By **George Paul Wood**



**piritual warfare is a controversial topic** among Christians.

*Understanding Spiritual Warfare*, a recent book from Baker Academic, outlines the contours of the controversy by surveying four models of spiritual warfare that Christian authors have developed in the last two decades.<sup>1</sup> The editors of that book label those

models the “world systems model,” the “classical model,” the “ground-level deliverance

model,” and the “strategic-level deliverance model.”

Each of these models focuses on a different enemy against whom Christians wage spiritual warfare. The world systems model focuses on the ideologies and institutions that oppress human beings. The moral conflict against the flesh by the Holy Spirit within the individual is the central theme of the classical model. The other two models identify demonic entities as the enemy. The ground-level deliverance model focuses on the demonic oppression and deliverance of the individual. The strategic-level deliverance model, on the other hand, adds to this a concern for the identification and exorcism of “territorial spirits.”

The editors organized *Understanding Spiritual Warfare* as a debate among proponents of these four models. Each of the proponents offers a case for his or her model, then the proponents of the other models critique that case. The book is a fascinating read, which I highly recommend.

And yet, I wonder whether we can so easily limit our understanding of spiritual warfare to one or another of these models. If you asked

the biblical writers to choose what humanity's greatest enemy is, my guess is that they would have answered, “All of the above.” Unjust systems, unholy desires, and the host of hell all are our enemy, not one or the other, and not one more than the other. In biblical terms, we go to war against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Understanding how that unholy troika works and how to defeat it is the theme of this issue of *Enrichment*. As you read these articles, I pray that you will lift up your voice and pray to the Lord — in the immortal words of Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*: “from all the deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil, deliver us!” And then, get back in the battle. ☩

**Note**

1. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).



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# THE **ARMOR** OF GOD

## **A Meditation on Ephesians 6:10–20**

By **George O. Wood**

We must exercise power  
in spiritual warfare  
with great caution,  
making sure that we exercise  
it in the right manner  
and against the right enemy.  
Here is how.





**G**rowing up as a missionary kid in northwestern China, near the Tibetan border, I heard my fair share of stories about the uncanny. One of the most memorable involved my mother, Elizabeth Weidman Wood, her sister, Ruth Weidman Plymire, and a frightening night in a Chinese inn.

Mom and Aunt Ruth had gone to China as single missionaries. Upon their arrival, they enrolled in language school and boarded at a nearby inn. Their room had a Buddhist idol in it. That first night they couldn't fall asleep. They felt an enormous evil presence in the room. Their bed levitated. The evil presence was so oppressive they could barely speak. Indeed, all they could enunciate was Jesus' name, but that was enough. The evil presence fled, and the Holy Spirit comforted them.

In modern parlance, Mom and Aunt Ruth experienced a *power encounter*. Through faith in Jesus Christ, they exorcized an oppressive spirit from their room. The ministries of Jesus (Mark 1:39), the Twelve Apostles (Mark 3:14,15; Acts 5:15,16), and the apostle Paul (Acts 16:16–18; 19:11,12) all included exorcism. And exorcism continues to be part of spiritual warfare today.

But while spiritual warfare involves power encounters, those encounters do not always take the form of exorcism. In Ephesians 6:10–20, the apostle Paul connects power, spiritual warfare, and the development of God dispositions and disciplines.

#### **FINALLY ...**

Ephesians 6:10–20 begins with the word *finally*. This word indicates that what follows is the culmination of Paul's teaching so far, not just the last topic in his letter. To understand what he says about spiritual warfare, we need to keep in mind what he has said in the preceding chapters of his letter.

Years ago, Watchman Nee noticed that we can articulate the message of Ephesians in three key words: *sit*, *walk*, and *stand*.

*Sit* describes "our position in Christ": "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (2:6). Our being seated with Christ at God's right hand is God's action, arising out of His "love," "mercy," "grace," and "kindness" (2:4,5,7,8). Just as when you sit on a chair, you place all your weight on it, so when God seats us with Christ, you place all the weight of your salvation on God's grace.

*Walk* describes "our life in the world": "I ... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (4:1, ESV<sup>1</sup>). Christians are not throne potatoes. Grace does not promote passivity; it enables active obedience to God's command: "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (2:10, ESV).

## The Armor of God

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Finally, *stand* describes “our attitude to the enemy”: “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (6:11). The Christian walk is not a walk in the park. Ephesians 6:10–13 makes it clear that the Christian walk is the long, hard slog of battle against evil. And in a battle, the goal is to stand your ground: to fall is defeat, but to stand is victory.

Keeping this sit-walk-stand outline of Ephesians in mind, we see that spiritual warfare, far from being the extraordinary activity of a spiritual elite, is the ordinary life of every Christian whom God has saved by grace, sanctified in obedience, and sent to proclaim the gospel to a lost and dying world. To be a Christian, then, is to be at war.

### HIS MIGHTY POWER

Fighting that war, however — let alone winning it — is far beyond the capacity of human beings. Victory belongs to a power greater than us. This is why Paul exhorts us: “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (6:10). Only God can win this war. Victory belongs to Him — and to us — but only if we are in Him.

The language of divine power pervades Ephesians. Paul prays in Ephesians 1:19,20, that believers might experience God’s “incomparably great power for us who believe.” He says further, “That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.” This power is implicit in 2:6, where the words *raised* and *seated* describe our salvation by grace. In 6:10, the verb “be strong” and the phrase “mighty power” echo the words of 1:19,20. Also, Paul prays for believers that God might “strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith” (3:16,17); and that believers “may have power ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know the love that surpasses knowledge” (3:18,19).

Lord Acton famously observed, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” His observation does not apply to God, obviously, who combines in himself both absolute power and absolute goodness. But it does apply to sinful human beings, even Christians. As sinners, we are apt to misuse and abuse power, even when we are ostensibly using it in God’s name and for His purposes.

This is why, like Paul, we must always connect the exercise of divine power to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Through His power, God vindicated the life, message, and atoning death of Jesus Christ by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in glory. And through His power, God saved us by grace and called us to live a holy life that attains “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). To engage in spiritual warfare, then, is to be filled with the power of love that animated Christ’s ministry. If we have not grasped and do not manifest the width and length and height and breadth of that love, then we have lost the battle.

Consequently, we must exercise power in spiritual warfare with great caution, making sure that we exercise it *in* the right manner and *against* the right enemy.

### POWERS OF THIS DARK WORLD

Ephesians 6:12 identifies the enemy in spiritual warfare: “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.”

There are two elements in this identification:

First, our enemies are not “flesh and blood.” In other words, our enemies are not people. We should never demonize those whom Christ came to save (1 Timothy 1:15; 2:4). No matter how anti-God their belief, no matter how immoral their behavior, no matter how deeply they despise and diligently they attack us, we are not fighting *against* people. We are fighting *for* people so that they might be “rescued ... from the dominion of darkness and brought ... into the kingdom of the Son” (Colossians 1:13), just as we have been.

Second, our enemies are “rulers,” “authorities,” “powers,” and “spiritual forces of evil.” Paul also speaks of “the devil’s schemes” (6:11) and “the evil one” (6:16). We are fighting against the demonic realm.

Demons have disordered personalities. Created to serve God, they instead willfully reject Him. In rejecting Him who is Ultimate Reality, they lose touch with all reality. Their minds are not ordered to truthfulness, and their actions are not ordered to godliness. Jesus teaches that the devil is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Peter writes, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Wherever the demonic is present, deception, disobedience, and destruction wreak havoc.

The demonic manifests itself in a number of ways. At the individual level, it manifests as possession, where the demonic controls an individual’s personality. Think of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1–10). Before his exorcism, he was alone, naked, and physically out of control. His name was the name of his possessing demons: “Legion.” After his exorcism, his neighbors saw him “sitting there, dressed and in his right mind.” A Spirit-filled Christian cannot be possessed in this way.

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The demonic, however, can manifest in the lives of believers and unbelievers in other ways. Like Jesus himself, people may be “tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1; cf. 6:13; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). Through unrighteous behavior, especially anger, they can “give the devil a foothold” in their lives (Ephesians 4:27). The demonic can manifest itself as, in Paul’s words, “a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me” (2 Corinthians 12:7). The purpose here is to cause a person, especially a believer, to doubt the sufficiency of God’s grace for them (12:9).

At the social level, the demonic can manifest itself through institutional systems of deception, disobedience, and destruction. Revelation chapters 12 and 13 speak of three gruesome creatures: “an enormous red dragon” (12:3), “a beast coming out of the sea” (13:1), and “a second beast, coming out of the earth” (13:11). John identifies the dragon as “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (12:9). The devil gives the first beast “power and his throne and great authority” (13:2). The second beast “made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast” (13:12). Many commentators interpret the beasts as the social institutions of politics and religion, respectively. God created these social institutions to promote human flourishing: “the one in authority is God’s servant for your good” (Romans 13:4). But just as the demonic brings disorder to the life of an individual, so the demonic brings disorder to the life of a society.

People are not our enemy — not atheists or Muslims, not abortionists or gays. Their unbelief and immorality are anti-God, but God is never antipeople. And neither should we be. Spiritual warfare is the mission God gives us in this age, a mission to disenfranchise people from the deceiver and destroyer of their souls. We use God’s power on their behalf. We fight for them.

### THE CHRISTIAN’S ARMOR

When we understand the nature of our enemy, we see why Paul exhorts us to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (6:10). The demonic realm is stronger than we are but not stronger than God. Therefore, Paul exhorts us to “put on the full armor of God” (6:11,13). Only thus arrayed will we be able to “take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (6:11). The armor of God describes the manner in which we are supposed to engage the enemy.

Scholars commonly say that Paul described the armor of

God using a Roman soldier’s armor as his inspiration. This is not implausible, for Paul wrote Ephesians from jail (6:20) and was surrounded by Roman soldiers. Paul’s description of the armor, however, alludes to passages in the prophet Isaiah that describe God and His Messiah dressed in similar armor. For example, Isaiah 11:5 says of the Messiah: “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” Isaiah 52:7 speaks of the beauty of “the feet of those who bring good news.” And Isaiah 59:17 depicts God putting on “righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head.” In other words, the armor of God is first and foremost His own armor. It is the way He engages in spiritual warfare.



Proclaiming Christ’s victory on behalf of His mission requires spiritual battle against collective spiritual authorities and evil powers.

Consequently, as God fits us with His own armor, we engage in spiritual warfare the same way He does. The various pieces of armor Paul lists metaphorically describe moral virtues and missional practices. When we read about “the belt of truth” (6:14), for example, we should focus on “truth,” not “the belt,” which is only a metaphor. The way we fight the devil — the way God fights the devil — is through moral virtues such as truth-telling, righteousness, and faith and through missional practices such as gospel-readiness, salvation-focus, and proclamation of the Word of God.

In other words, the manner of spiritual warfare is as much about *who we are* (moral virtues) as *what we do* (missional practices). Fighting demonic powers is not merely a matter of exorcizing them. At best, exorcism is an opening skirmish in the war. To switch metaphors and borrow an image from one of Jesus’ parables (Luke 11:24–26), exorcism chases the devil out of our house, but the goal is not merely to have a house that is “swept clean and put in order.” Rather, the goal is to turn our house into a home where Jesus Christ dwells day in and day out. Christlikeness is the goal of spiritual warfare, the essence of victory, and it comes about only through the ordinary work of evangelism and discipleship.

In my opinion, too many Pentecostals and charismatics get hung up on the exorcism of demonic spirits, whether at the “ground level” of the possession of an individual or the “strategic level” of possession by a “territorial spirit.” They make the further mistake of reducing spiritual warfare to exorcizing, “binding,”

## The Armor of God

(continued from page 51)

and “rebuking” evil spirits. Exorcism is certainly a component of spiritual warfare, if only because some people are possessed by demons. But once they have been delivered, then what? That’s when the long hard slog of spiritual warfare really begins.

No person can grow into Christlikeness without evangelism and discipleship. This is true not only in the passive sense that we ourselves need to be evangelized and discipled. It is also true in the active sense: We need to evangelize and disciple others. To be clothed in God’s armor is to have “your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace” (6:15). It is to wield “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (6:17). Evangelism and discipleship are the “cutting edge” of spiritual warfare.

Who we are and what we do — moral virtues and missional practices — are mutually dependent and reinforcing. We cannot evangelize someone else with good news that we ourselves have not experienced. We cannot proclaim deliverance from the devil to others if he still has a foothold in our own lives through unrighteous anger. Similarly, we cannot walk in obedience to God’s commandments if we ignore Christ’s final commandment to His followers: “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). As we become Christlike, we do what Christ did. And as we do what Christ did, we become Christlike.

### FEARLESSLY

Paul concludes his discussion of spiritual warfare with an exhortation to intercessory prayer: “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” (6:18). He asks for prayer for “all the Lord’s people” (6:18) as well as for “me” (6:19). Specifically, he asks the Ephesians to pray for his evangelistic endeavors: “Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel” (6:19).

This call to prayer is a fitting end to any discussion of spiritual warfare, for three reasons.

First, prayer animates the implements of spiritual warfare. In and of ourselves, we cannot produce moral virtues or missional practices. They are God’s work in us. Prayer opens our hearts to God so He can both sanctify us for himself and empower us for mission.

Second, prayer is a call for God to act. Our power in spiritual warfare is God’s. The armor with which we are fitted out is God’s. To try to engage evil powers without invoking divine aid is a fool’s errand. “The battle is the LORD’s” (1 Samuel 17:47).

But, third, His battle is ours. Because He has given us power, because He has clothed us in His own armor, we can fight and do so fearlessly. In his soul-stirring hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” Martin Luther sized up the devil and wrote:

The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.”

As my mom and Aunt Ruth discovered one night so long ago, that little word is *Jesus*. Against the powers of hell, let us go forth fearlessly and conquer in His name (Romans 8:37). ☞



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### Note

1. I am using the ESV instead of the NIV 2011 in this paragraph because the ESV consistently translates *peripatēō* as “walk,” while the NIV 2011 inconsistently translates it as “live,” “do,” and “walk.”

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Keep on Praying for  
All the Saints:

# **Intercession and Spiritual Warfare**

By **James T. Bradford**

Spiritual warfare is not won through conflict resolution or strategic planning. It is won by the foundational activity common to every victory in the unseen realm — prayer.



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**S**amuel Chadwick claimed, “**The one concern of the devil** is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

One great mystery of the relationship between Christ and His church is that He involves us in His purposes. He has chosen to work through us rather than around us. This is how we understand prayer. The release of His power comes as we partner with Him, around His will, in prayer and intercession.

## Keep on Praying for All the Saints: Intercession and Spiritual Warfare

(continued from page 55)

Unfortunately, many spiritual leaders are more known for their external activity than their internal prayerfulness. We pray too little and work too much. Paul's concern at the end of his letter to the Ephesians is the same daunting issue that faces today's church — our capacity to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" to "stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:10,11). Paul asserts that our real enemy is not people who annoy us, oppose us, or even kill us. We transact our real war in unseen realms against sinister forces, "against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (verse 12).

We do not win wars such as these through conflict resolution or strategic planning alone. As helpful as those activities are, they do not engage the power structures resident in spiritual realms. Taken alone, they are about as effective as attacking armored tanks with pea-shooters. So the apostle Paul exhorts the Ephesians to "put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground" (Ephesians 6:13).

Paul then links each piece of armor to essential gospel realities such as salvation, truth, righteousness, faith, Word, and readiness (verses 14–17). These pieces of armor function through the power of the Holy Spirit and, taken together, this armor "of God" is spiritually potent — both offensively and defensively.

But Paul is not done. He then imbeds "putting on" our spiritual armor into an "all occasions" assignment: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (verse 18). What is it that harnesses the spiritual potency of each

piece of armor? What ties each piece together into a potent, unified, wearable whole? What is the one foundational activity that is common to every victory in the unseen realms? It is prayer — "in the Spirit," of "all kinds," and on behalf of "all the saints."

A.C. Dixon, pastor of Spurgeon's Tabernacle, observed, "When we rely on organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely on education, we get what education can



do; when we rely on eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. But when we rely on prayer, we get what God can do."

It is ultimately "what God can do" that gives us any hope of standing our ground in the spiritual battle around us and against us. Paul's Ephesians 6:18 assertion is that we *can* prevail if our circumstances, experiences, conflicts, and struggles are all bathed in ongoing, "on all occasions ... for all the saints," prayer.

Paul is specifically calling us to "intercessory" kinds of praying. This is praying that is engaged "in the Spirit" but focused on the needs of "all the saints." Intercession is taking up faith-filled prayer on behalf of others, as if calling out to God in their stead. Remarkably, God actually postures himself to respond to that kind of "proxy" praying. Intercession thereby paves the way for God's intervention in other people's lives and circumstances.

I had a taste of the power of intercessory prayer when I was a college student. My junior year I transferred to the University of Minnesota to study engineering. I started attending a small Chi Alpha ministry on campus. By the end of that year I had become the leader, more or less by default. A year later I had shrunk the group from a dozen down to three. My calling into engineering seemed confirmed.

But one day Steve, one of the two other students, said, "Maybe we should pray and fast." That would seem to be the logical thing to do. But when he said those words, something happened in my spirit that, to this day, I have trouble describing. It was like God gripped my heart and started squeezing it. For the next several months I was overcome by with a life-consuming hunger for God. At times it would take my hunger for food away for days. Instead, I was driven to prayer, whether it was between classes, during meals, or late at night.

Sometimes all I could do was lie on my face on the floor and groan. I was 21 years old and had never experienced anything like this before. Today it seems clear that I was in some small way experiencing the groaning of God's heart over the spiritual darkness on that campus. The intensity of that season lifted somewhat after several months, but a hungry prayerfulness continued on in me for the next year and a half. Our student group also grew back up to 12 or 15 people during that time, but mainly with people who wanted to pray.

Then the breakthrough came — overnight and without warning. It was a normal Tuesday evening Chi Alpha service, halfway through the fall semester of my second year of graduate school. I was expecting to see about a dozen students show up that night. Instead, there were over 60. They came in small clusters

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of friends from different places, but all on the same night.

More important, the Spirit of God came powerfully in that meeting. God did what I was unable to do in all of my best efforts. Soon the group was nearly 100 in size. I can trace my own journey into full-time ministry after graduating 3 1/2 years later back to the breakthrough that God gave us that night. Intercessory travail led to the birth of a whole new season of God's purpose.

Intercessors understand God's seasons and promises and heart. They also understand that spiritual conflict demands a prayerful fight. Intercessory prayer is the act of yearning for God's intervention and calling forth His life-giving power in the places where the enemy has brought destruction and loss. So Paul calls us to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions ... for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18).

### MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT INTERCESSORS

Unfortunately, stereotypes and misconceptions abound when it comes to intercessory people. Paul's intention in Ephesians 6 was for *every* believer to "pray in the Spirit ... for all the saints." But the 21st-century church in the West has tended to marginalize such people. We often brand people who do intercede a lot in the Spirit as emotional, mystical, and unstable. They can seem like "spiritual oddities" in a world full of "naturally normal" Christians. So we tend to label and compartmentalize such people, all the while exempting ourselves from the potential of a deeper life in prayer and weakening our defenses against the enemy.

A misconception is that intercessors always feel like praying, or at least find it easy. It is true that the more we pray, the more we will want to pray; and the less we pray, the less we will want to. It is also true that there are times, like the one I described during my senior year in college, when God gives unusual ability to pray in very traving, connecting ways.

But the act of praying "for all the saints" is a command we must follow and a choice we must make, even though it is not always easy. Because prayer brings us into the arena of spiritual conflict, it is not uncommon to experience significant resistance, fatigue, and discouragement as we engage in prayer. True intercession can also take its toll on us both physically and emotionally, even though it strengthens us spiritually.

Obviously, it is the *decision* to pray that is crucial, not feeling like it, or finding it easy. Neither is it hypocritical to pray if we do not feel like it. God is there regardless of our emotional condition. He is faithful even when we feel weary or unengaged. He is not weakened by what weakens us. Nothing of Him changes. The issue is not how we feel, but what His Spirit can do to engender in us faith and hunger for Him as we simply, by choice, give ourselves to intercessory prayer.

### GUIDELINES FOR INTERCESSION

Here is a short list of things I have found helpful for growing in intercession.

## A Pattern for Intercessory Prayer

**When Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down** and its gates burned with fire, he wept and fasted for days. The essence of his prayer, as recorded in Nehemiah 1:5–11, models for us a practical pattern for intercession.

### Praise

Nehemiah did not begin his prayer with a request, but with an expression of praise. In doing so, he focused on those attributes of God he would need to rebuild the walls. He started with the dimensions of God greatness rather than the dimensions of his problem.

### Repent

Approaching God's presence inevitably makes us aware of our own sinfulness and unworthiness. Yet repentance clears the way and, in the words of John the Baptist, prepares "*the way of the Lord*." So Nehemiah confessed both his own sins as well as those of his nation.

### Ask

Prayer is not twisting the arm of a reluctant God, but touching the heart of a willing God. Nehemiah made his request for rebuilt walls by appealing to God's promises. God's promises express God's willingness. Nehemiah quoted God's Word, stood on His promises, and, in doing so, humbly asked for God's intervention and help.

### Yield

Nehemiah knew that sometimes the Lord calls us to be part of the answer to our own prayers. He closed his prayer by personally surrendering to God's purposes and yielding to God's strength. Rather than saying "amen," he simply yielded to and said "yes" to God's favor.

JAMES T. BRADFORD, Ph.D.,  
Springfield, Missouri

## Keep on Praying for All the Saints: Intercession and Spiritual Warfare

(continued from page 57)

**Give God time.** More than anything else, God needs us to give Him time — time to be before Him and enough time for Him to give us His heart. On many occasions I have begun times of prayer not feeling very spiritual or motivated. Rather than crumpling under pressure or guilt, I would simply begin praying in tongues, letting the Spirit pray through me. Or I would take Scripture and begin praying it back to God. Or I would deliberately start to pray for specific needs. With time God's heart would begin taking hold of my otherwise cold heart. It sometimes felt like I was starting "in the flesh" only to end up "in the Spirit." But it takes time. Start small and let it grow from there. Time with God will lead to our hearts being bent to His, yielding the inevitable desire to spend even more time with Him.

**Stand on the merits of Christ's blood alone.** Often at the heart of our spiritual insecurity is self-condemnation, afflicting us with a debilitating sense of unworthiness. Often people find that this feeling becomes more pronounced as they move deeper into effective intercession. It comes with spiritual warfare and is totally contrary to the gospel. I have frequently asserted by faith, in spite of my feelings, that I base my standing before God solely on Christ's shed blood, not my impressiveness or self-righteousness. In Christ (not me) "we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12).

**Focus on the Spirit's help.** A friend once described his journey into intercession this way: "I used to start praying by first looking inside myself for the desire and strength to pray. It only pulled me down. But I decided to start my times of prayer by looking upward instead of inward, asking the Holy Spirit to come and teach me to pray. It changed everything."

The Holy Spirit can, indeed, teach us to pray, and we have the privilege of listening to the Holy Spirit as we do pray. This is not all up to us. No wonder Paul calls us in Ephesians 6 to pray "in the Spirit."

**Keep prayer God-centered rather than problem-centered.** Starting prayer with praise is so important. For a season I avoided extended prayer because I did not feel the energy to revisit all the discouraging circumstances and situations that needed prayer. I was focusing on the greatness of the problems rather than the greatness of God. I would finish 30 minutes of prayer more depressed than when I started. But prevailing intercession focuses on God's promises and provision, by faith, more than it concentrates on how overwhelming the need is. Great intercessors often spend more time adoring God than asking Him for things.

**Blend specific requests with spiritual travail.** Keep a prayer list and have a prayer journal to record specific requests and answers. James 4:2 reminds us that the lack of specific answers is often the result of overly generalized praying. However, intercession sometimes takes us past prayer-list praying and into heart-gripping encounters with the grief, passion, and love of God's heart. The result may be interceding in tongues, weeping, and even groaning in spiritual travail. Be open to this, praying through to God's heart and

allowing His Spirit to pray God's heart through you. At this point in intercession for others, we may also find ourselves actually pushing back against demonic powers and their purposes as they have attached themselves to the people and situations we are praying for.

### GRASS ON OUR PATH

Intercessory prayer "for all the saints" is incredibly potent, and we must reclaim it as a top priority. At the 2010 Lausanne III conference in South Africa, a Pentecostal pastor from Kenya told the story of the East African revival of 50 years ago. During that time people would walk well-worn pathways to prayer huts and places of intercession in the forest. When Christians slipped away from prayer, their friends would notice by the condition of their paths and gently encourage each other: "Brother, I see grass is growing on your path."

As God's people, engaged in spiritual battle, may the grass never grow on our pathways to prayer. ■



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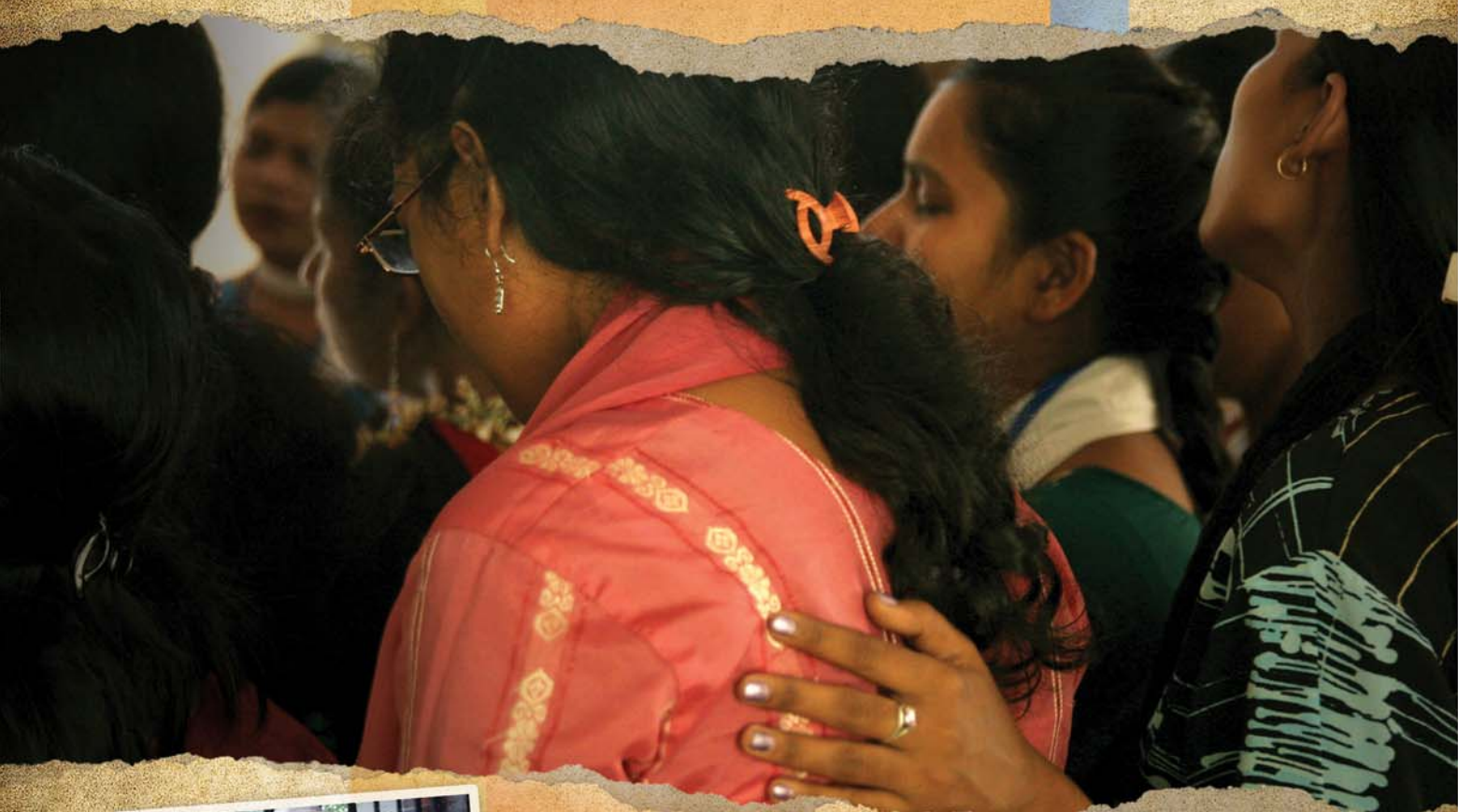


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THROUGH POWERFUL INTERCESSION.**



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*David and Beth Grant, Founders of Project Rescue.*

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# Proclaiming Christ's Victory Over **Unjust Social Structures & Practices**

Believers attempting to set the captive free can find themselves blindsided and forced to fight systemic spiritual battles they are ill equipped to fight. We must reckon with communities and systems corrupted and controlled by sinful forces. Here is how.

By **A. Elizabeth Grant**

**ather, may this place  
which has been  
known for great**

**darkness** become known

as a place where the light of Jesus

shines most brightly — in salva-

tion, deliverance, joy, and the

transforming work of the Holy

Spirit. May Your will be done, may Your kingdom

come to Kamatapura for the glory of Your name." —

Prayer in a red-light district church, Mumbai, India.

## Proclaiming Christ's Victory Over Unjust Social Structures & Practices

(continued from page 61)

From out of the darkness the child wandered into the back door of the Bombay Teen Challenge red-light district church following her mother. Petite, beautiful, and terribly thin, this 4-year-old daughter stood by the end of the back pew as her mother slipped into a seat with a man. Dressed in colorful clothes, little sandals, and with charcoal-dark eyes, the child had gotten into her mother's makeup like little girls everywhere, and her small hand had used it liberally.

But what took my breath away was this fragile daughter's demeanor and the attitude of her small body as she waited. Her posture, her position, the jaunty protrusion of her hip, and turned-out foot projected a chilling mirror image of her mother and the thousands of other women who nightly line Falkland Road waiting for "customers." The community of darkness was already grooming this little 4-year-old girl.

### THE EFFECT OF OUR INDIVIDUALISTIC WORLDVIEW ON OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Most of us born into traditional American or Northern European cultures are enculturated from birth into a very strong value on the individual. As a result, we tend to be strongly individualistic, independent, and proud of it. The good and interest of the individual unquestioningly takes priority over the good and interests of the family, group, and community. This strongly held worldview colors the lens through which we view not only the world around us but Scripture, theology, the practice of our faith — and even our approach to spiritual warfare.

The strength of this cultural value is that those who hold it strongly believe in the value of one life, one person, one separate individual. Every person, every life matters as they do to God. The weakness of a strongly individualized view of the world is an under-appreciation or even blindness to the strength, connectivity, and influence of community and group systems as a context for everything that happens to an individual — whether for good or evil.

In Romans 5:12, Paul refers to sin entering the world (*cosmos*) through one individual (Adam) resulting in judgment and death. Similarly, God gave the gift of grace, justification, and life to the many through Jesus Christ (verses 15–17). While God's created world was good, the world marred by Adam's sin has become the creation of fallen humankind desperately in need of redemption. It includes religious, social,

economic, political, legal, and kinship systems that grow out of the soil of Adam's disobedience and are integral parts of the "world" that God will judge (Romans 3:6). The effects of sin on humanity — including deception, rebellion, violence, exploitation, greed, lust, selfishness, and injustice — characterize these world systems. They are generally integrated and mutually reinforcing. This *cosmos* with its embedded systems, opposes God (John 15:18), resists Christ's redemptive work (John 7:7), and is under the control of the prince of darkness (1 John 5:19).

In the case of a red-light district, which is a glaring microcosm of the *cosmos* ruled by the evil one, extreme exploitation, injustice, spiritual darkness and demonic power characterize the local community's economic, social, religious, legal, and even kinship systems. Missional believers shaped by an individualistic worldview who attempt to set the captive (the individual) free can find themselves blindsided and suddenly forced to fight systemic spiritual battles they are ill equipped to fight. We must reckon with communities and systems corrupted and controlled by sinful forces.

*Why was I so taken back by the little girl in the red-light district?* Though she was only 4, the destructive complex network of social, economic, and spiritual systems in which she was embedded was already disturbingly apparent. When well-intentioned believers try to touch this child's life with Christ's love, they suddenly find themselves face to face with demonic forces that control the child through an insidious destructive system. Whether or not the child prays the sinner's prayer, life-changing victory requires spiritual warfare on both individual and systemic levels to break the chains that keep her physically, emotionally, and spiritually captive.

### A PERSONAL LESSON IN SYSTEMIC SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Several years ago I was in a women's retreat during a time of intense intercessory prayer. There was an overwhelming sense of God's all-powerful presence and an accompanying prophetic word describing the might of the Lion of Judah. My prayers went immediately to the thousands of women and children within the shadow of Project Rescue-affiliated ministries who desperately need freedom from sexual slavery and new life through Jesus Christ.

God spoke to my heart reminding me that like a lion can cripple its prey by breaking its back and bringing it down, the mighty Lion of Judah is the only One who can break the back of the evil systems that control sexual exploitation in India and around the world. Human efforts alone cannot disable these destructive systems without the supernatural intervention of the King of kings who has all power and spiritual authority. It was not enough to pray for individuals to be released from slavery, but as a ministry team we must simultaneously pray that the Lion of Judah will break the back of these evil systems that control and perpetuate this injustice.

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Several months later we were back in Mumbai with Devaraj and his ministry team during intercession in the red-light district outreach center. The Holy Spirit strongly urged me to share the challenge regarding strategic intercession for God to bring down the evil systems that control sexual slavery in that district. Suddenly staff members, who are transformed former madams, began to proclaim with tears that God must bring down the crushing systems of darkness they knew all too well. They knew exactly where the power brokers were centered in the city — and of course it was nowhere near the horrific violence and filth of the district — but in one of the most luxurious affluent areas in the city. As we all began to storm the gates of hell in the Spirit in a small room in the middle of Kamatapura, prostituted women on the street began to quietly knock at the door and enter asking for prayer. Since that day, we persevere in intercession for God to bring down the evil systems in that city so all in their grip can come to the One who died to give them new life.

against evil structures with Christ's personal that-none-should-perish mission, Devaraj and his team do not practice selective compassion. They reach out boldly in love like Jesus to the whole community caught in Satan's destructive schemes — to madams, pimps, corrupt policemen, local government officials, customers, as well as to the women and children these people exploit. Their impact is evident. The strongest workers in the red-light district ministry today are former madams and their sons and daughters whom God delivered — body, mind, and spirit — years ago. Some have heard a pimp temporarily turn away brothel customers because the BTC outreach team was conducting a Bible study there for women hungry for God. Devaraj dares to proclaim the supremacy of Christ where Satan rules, and men, women, and children are finding Jesus there.

### **A call for Spirit-inspired proclamatory prayers**

God's people must pray proclamatory prayers claiming



Project Rescue

Proclaiming Christ's victory on behalf of His mission requires spiritual battle against collective spiritual authorities and evil powers.

## **PROCLAIMING CHRIST'S VICTORY OVER UNJUST SOCIAL STRUCTURES/PRACTICES**

### **A call to acknowledge the reality of the battle**

We must recognize that proclaiming Christ's victory on behalf of His mission requires battling against collective spiritual authorities and evil powers. Some are visible, some invisible as referred to by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:12, "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." Our mission, God's mission, is that men and women bound by these powerful systems find freedom and deliverance to become strong men and women of God. Spiritual warfare is unavoidable for victory.

### **A call to spiritual warfare against systems while extending Christ's love to individuals enslaved in the system**

Thankfully for the little girl in the red-light district church in Mumbai, the director of Bombay Teen Challenge (BTC) understands both her individual need for Jesus and the need to proclaim Christ's authority over evil systems for the sake of every person enslaved by them. In this biblical integration of intercession

Christ's victory over religious, economic, and political systems that perpetuate injustice. Systems are a tool of Satan to destroy not only individuals, but communities and generations of people around the world.

A pastor in Asia known as a man of prayer leads his congregation in daily, weekly, monthly, and annual cycles of fervent Pentecostal intercession. During one of the monthly all-night prayer meetings with thousands of believers, he began to publicly pray a prophetic prayer worthy of the Old Testament prophets. The pastor was not pleading with God. He was proclaiming Christ's authority through prayer as he discerned in the Spirit God's destiny for his city, nation, and continent.

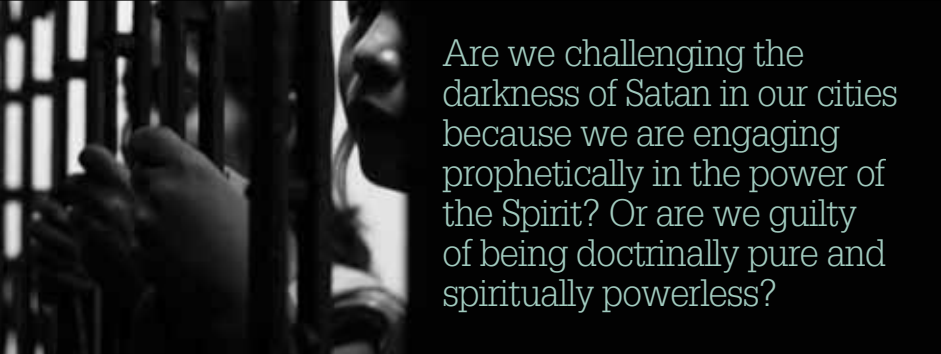
"Father, may the pagan idols in this nation be brought down and melt into the seas. May the cross of Christ be proclaimed from north to south, from east to west. May this pagan continent become a Christian continent."

His bold, proclamatory prayer was appropriate for the greatness of our omnipotent God and reminiscent of the prophetic ministry God spoke over Jeremiah. "I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:9,10). The community of faith in the city has

## Proclaiming Christ's Victory Over Unjust Social Structures & Practices

(continued from page 63)

grown to over 10 percent, and the church is casting a shadow for Christ's kingdom across the continent. The God who does not change still uses men and women in the same prophetic way to pray proclamatory prayers that can change cities, nations, and even our 21st-century world.



Are we challenging the darkness of Satan in our cities because we are engaging prophetically in the power of the Spirit? Or are we guilty of being doctrinally pure and spiritually powerless?

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### A call for spiritual humility to grow in spiritual warfare

Over time, men and women of God have walked in spiritual authority as they heard God's voice and responded in intercession and proclamation for cities, nations, and against systems of injustice. Some have been theologically sound; some have not. In some cases, we may observe in the same minister aspects of spiritual warfare on the corporate level that are sound and other areas of practice we question. But we must take caution to not throw the baby out with the bath water. Instead we must ask ourselves uncomfortable questions.

Our theology and doctrine may be sound — but what spiritual impact are we personally and corporately having on the tsunami of evil sweeping our cities and nation? Are we challenging the darkness of Satan in our cities because we are there engaging prophetically in the power of the Spirit? Or are we guilty of being doctrinally pure and spiritually powerless? Are we more experienced in judging how others are doing "spiritual warfare" than we are at doing "spiritual warfare" ourselves? Like the disciples who came back to Jesus having dismally failed in dealing with demonic power (at least they tried), we also have room for growth (Mark 9:17–29). May God grant His people of the Spirit the humility to learn from one another across denominations and affiliations. If our ears and hearts are open, God can teach us valuable lessons on spiritual warfare through other men and women of God, sometimes in unexpected places.

### A call for prophetic voices against injustice and for God's redemptive justice

Ruth\* and her husband Thomas\* confront systems of evil every day. Six years ago God called them to minister in a red-light

district of a very dark city. God's anointing was on them, and the ministry among prostituted women and their children began to grow quickly. Within 5 years, over 100 children of women in slavery were released into safe homes where they were receiving Jesus, being disciplined to follow Him, receiving an education, and becoming young men and women of God. The couple had earned the confidence of many in the community who came to receive prayer and help. They began a Sunday service in the community for prostituted women to begin their spiritual journeys. These are miracles in a city of over 1 million people that has a long documented history of paganism and violent opposition to any Christian influence. The forces of evil have infiltrated every level of society that holds power, and they oppose every step of faith taken to challenge the darkness.

Ruth is an irrepressible courageous woman of intercession. She has repeatedly received court summons instigated by those who have a stake in seeing rescued young girls sent back into "the business." The healthier and happier the little girls become in their new lives in Christ, the greater their street value to pimps, madams, "fathers," corrupt policemen, and even desperate enslaved mothers. Unfortunately, powerful political, religious, and economic systems collaborating in their unjust cause control the red-light district.

On one occasion officials summoned Ruth to court because the director of the Woman and Child Welfare Society was attempting to close the ministry by bringing charges of child abuse. Ruth's family and colleagues covered her in intercessory prayer as she appeared in court to respond to this powerful woman. When called to testify, she sensed such a powerful anointing that she challenged the official, who had never visited the ministry homes, to come and see before pressing her case. With the public invitation and revelation that the woman had never seen the ministry she was accusing, she accepted Ruth's invitation. This woman of influence visited the ministry sites, saw the work, dropped the case, and ultimately became an advocate in an unjust system for the Christian ministry. Through anointed intercession coupled with bold Spirit-empowered action we can proclaim Christ's victory and disarm the enemy's schemes.

Until Jesus establishes His kingdom on earth, the spiritual warfare is constant and unrelenting through systems of injustice. On another occasion, Ruth and Thomas managed to convince a prostituted woman to release her beautiful 7-year-old daughter in the brothel into the aftercare ministry home for children. Their goal is to get little girls out of harm's way before pimps sexually exploit them and force them into sex slavery by 11 and 12 years of age.

After much prayer and effort by Ruth and Thomas, this mother released her daughter into the couple's care where she received Christ's love, education, and safety. The child

\* Names changed



Project Rescue

## Points of Intercession for Proclaiming Christ's Victory and Kingdom Over Unjust Social Systems

**Here are some strategic points for spiritual warfare** when God's people face systemic injustice in fulfilling the Great Commission.

- For **God-given favor and prerequisite relationships** with government officials, agency leaders, local people of authority, pimps, madams — anyone who controls systems of injustice on local, regional, and national levels.
- For the **salvation of men and women in high places** who are perpetuating systems of injustice.
- For **bringing down political, economic, legal, and physical strongholds** that control thousands in our cities whom Christ came to set free.
- For **supernatural protection over believers** called to bring Jesus to those whose lives are controlled by organized crime and evil systems.
- For **discernment for godly leaders** to be Spirit-led, strategic, and anointed to proclaim Christ's victory over specific bastions of darkness in their cities.
- For **a growing army of courageous men and women of God** who will be led of the Spirit in spiritual warfare and unflinchingly obedient to proclaim Christ's victory.

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flourished. Tragically, under threats from those who control the system of injustice of which the mother was herself a victim, the mother returned to Ruth and Thomas and insisted that they release her daughter to her to return to the red-light district. In spite of tearful appeals to this enslaved, prostituted woman, she took her daughter back into the world of darkness where men gang-raped the girl, and she died an unimaginable death. There are no words to adequately express the horror and carnage of Satan's systems of evil. The only consolation is that this child went to be with the Jesus she had learned to love and has a safe home forever with Him.

Because Ruth and Thomas are ministers of Christ's compassion and have learned to do spiritual warfare against forces of evil while loving individuals for whom Christ died, they chose to minister to the grief-stricken mother who was mentally and emotionally tormented by her daughter's death and her own part in the tragedy. They offered her Christ's love and forgiveness, knowing that she too can receive Christ's freedom, forgiveness, and redemption for a new life. The mother is now in the healing process so she can be with her daughter in heaven one day.

### BEYOND WEEPING TO WARRING TO TRIUMPH

There is no more powerful image of intercession in the face of Satan's evil strategies against God's redemptive mission than that of Jesus agonizing in Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46). But the battle was not complete in the Garden of intercession. Calvary's cross had to follow where the epic battle against Satan's schemes and systems were defeated on a criminal's cross. And in God's mysterious ways, an empty tomb will forever represent Jesus' resurrection life and victory over sin, death, and Satan. Jesus defeated every evil system and structure at Calvary along with the archenemy who devised them.

The success of the kingdom of darkness in our cities, nation, and world is inevitable — if God's people avoid, shirk, ignore, or timidly refuse to engage in spiritual battle against Satan's systemic schemes. But victory for the kingdom of God in our cities is divinely ordained if God's people discern His strategic purposes, intercede against systems of injustice, and boldly proclaim Christ's victory over evil. The Lord of the battle prophesied, "I will build my church and the gates (or schemes) of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). May His kingdom come. 🙏




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# The Battle of **Ideas,** **Concepts,** and **Thoughts**

By **Paul Alexander**

We sometimes feel as though there is a menacing dark cloud on the horizon threatening to bring a storm on us that will swamp dearly held convictions and threaten our faith.



Spiritual warfare often takes place in the realm of ideas, concepts, and thoughts. So how do pastors and Christians in general meet this battle with confidence? Here are three ways to engage these expressions of spiritual warfare.

## **The new century has brought many changes.**

For Christian leaders the most significant are not new technologies or worship styles. They are the shifts in how people think. Moral absolutes no longer exist, and societal structures that have served us for centuries are being eroded. We view the legislative agenda of government with incredulity and question our politicians' decisions relative to issues of social and fiscal policy. Commentators from all sides of the political spectrum question whether our representatives are in tune with the needs of their electorate. It is possible to feel at times that there is a growing agenda that is not friendly to Christian life and belief.

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## The Battle of Ideas, Concepts, and Thoughts

(continued from page 67)

These changes represent a new kind of spiritual warfare: a battle of ideas, concepts, and thoughts. There is no visible enemy to curse, no sulphur-breathing demon to cast out, and no manifestation of evil spirits to bring down. These ideas, concepts, and thoughts have invaded our educational system and drive our social sciences. Some call this *secular humanism*, but it is more complex than that. It is a postcolonial, post-superpower, and postmodern-worldview driven by the popular media. It imposes itself on all aspects of our lives — our churches, youth groups, and colleges.

New expressions of pluralism provide evidence of this spiritual warfare. It is not uncommon to find a hybridized religious worldview in many who attend our churches. The paradox of embracing a Christian spirituality and a secular morality at the same time does not seem a challenge to them. Classrooms, media, and coffee-shop discussions — rather than worship, preaching, and Bible teaching — increasingly forge views on marriage, sexuality, debt loads, loyalty, or how to manage the environment. The consequence is a mishmash of ideas and values that often results in good people struggling to make sense of their lives.

Pastoral ministry is at the forefront of this battle. Dysfunctional living is epidemic. Social pressure and increasing regulation by legislative authorities make it difficult to confront issues as forthrightly as our theology suggests we should. This pressure forces us to walk cautiously while dealing with the many issues people face, lest we create opportunity for some form of litigation against us. Pastors have sued churches for dismissing them on moral grounds based on what someone does in his or her private life that has nothing to do with employment. No wonder we sometimes feel as though there is a menacing dark cloud on the horizon threatening to bring a storm on us that will swamp dearly held convictions and threaten our faith.

This battle is an ancient one. Although the expressions of this warfare have changed, the primary force behind them is evil. Paul, the apostle, speaks about hollow and deceptive phi-

losophy taking people captive (Colossians 2:8). He reminds us that our battle is against arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5). People most often cite this passage in terms of spiritual warfare.

In my view, we can sometimes be in danger of misusing the New Testament in our defense of a certain view of both the theology and praxis of spiritual warfare. Let me explain.

Central to Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 10:3–6 is the issue of loyalty in the church at Corinth. Certain "super-apostles" were disseminating alternate ideas and conflicting theological perspectives (2 Corinthians 11:5). These were often accompanied by personal attacks on Paul, the founding apostle of the church. As a result, the church lost some confidence in Paul and opened themselves to a myriad of concepts and ideas that were creating spiritual uncertainties and internal warfare. Paul's admonition was to take captive every thought and to make it obedient to Christ. He also made clear that they should tear down strongholds by God's power. While we can never exclude the activity of demonic forces, a contextual exposition of this passage reinforces the position that spiritual warfare often takes place in the realm of ideas, thoughts, and concepts.

Allow me to suggest some of the arenas in which this battle is taking place around us:

### THE CULTURAL ARENA

Culture is complex and difficult to define. It has multiple subsets, but it is nevertheless possible to identify overarching structures that define how a society works. The total of language, values, norms, and behaviors contribute to defining a culture. Overwhelmingly, the forces of globalization forge the 21st-century culture. As the world began to rebuild after the devastation of World War II, colonized nations and people — whom the exploitative aspirations of Western nations had disempowered — began to assert their rights to independence and freedom. The scramble for nations was over and now the agenda was driven by human rights, civil rights, and the passion for self-realization. The continuation of racial practices in many parts of the world, the devastating effects of regional wars such as the Vietnam War, and the rapid development of technology that allows us to send graphic images around the world in seconds, molded these complex forces. Who can forget the image of the young Vietnamese girl running naked from a napalm attack or the atrocious police brutality against innocent township dwellers in Sharpeville, South Africa? By the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, these forces emerged as coherent attacks on the status quo. The Civil Rights movement had significant success; the pro-choice movement won in the courts and changed society globally.

Into this radically different world millennials were born. As a result, they have grown up with a mindset that rejects big stories. To them, those who have all the answers sound like the warmongers of the 20th century. They have a hermeneutic of suspicion and, just like the Corinthians, have low trust levels and reject the claims of those who say one thing and do another. A battle is going on. No longer can Christian leaders enjoy an authority of position. Having a title or a leadership responsibility does

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not impress a large cross section of our society. The church is not molding thoughts and ideas. Rather, a society that questions everything, chooses values randomly, and believes it has a right to act in any way it chooses molds today's thoughts and ideas. The reality is that an entire generation is predisposed to a skeptical view of the Christian faith and all we hold dear.


As a Bible college president in the United Kingdom, this reality confronted me almost daily. Young people recruited from churches, claiming a Christian testimony, and receiving pastoral references, arrived for their freshman year with serious levels of biblical illiteracy. A comprehensive biblical worldview was largely absent. They had a widespread view that love was the only prerequisite for sex. Debt burdens that would cripple people's choices for decades were completely acceptable; and, if default took place, it was not their fault. The government or the big banks were to blame. Same-sex relations were not really an issue. Paradoxically, these same young (Bible college) students had a strong commitment to the environment and were offended if recycling rates were not increasing. The good news is that not all students had this worldview. Through engaging this spiritual battle in classrooms, chapels, and mission trips, the majority graduated with a passion for Christ and a love for His Word.

The point is that we should not be ignorant of the current cultural milieu and the level of spiritual warfare it creates. We must meet this battle with confidence. The suggestions at the end of this article should help confront it.

onslaught. Civil liberties seldom have to do with protecting individual rights; they are vehemently opposed to any expression of Christianity. Thus government is removing any vestiges of our Judeo-Christian roots from the public square. In recent years, despite clear majorities voting in favor, officials are removing plaques containing the Ten Commandments from almost every public space. The raging battle over what the Founding Fathers meant when they insisted on the separation of Church and State has taken on forms that the founders could never have imagined. People now take it to mean the eradication of *all* faith from the public arena. No founding father ever imagined that.

And it does not end there. Any church board trying to take new initiatives in its vision for positively impacting a community knows the invasiveness of legislation on employment, gender issues, and other things our father's generation never had to deal with. Having spent the past 8 years living and working in Europe, I have seen this post-Christian and secular agenda played out in ever more blatant ways. The church has been marginalized and secular humanism has become the new religion of a once Christianized Europe.

This is not a new phenomenon. Professors in university classrooms as early as the 1930s were laying out the tenets of secularization, pluralism, and the broader philosophical system we now identify as postmodernism. A Lausanne committee identified these factors as dominant trends in a secularizing society nearly 30 years ago. What is different now is that these



Social pressure and increasing regulation by legislative authorities make it difficult to confront issues as forthrightly as our theology suggests we should.

### THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ARENA

The recent presidential election in the United States signifies huge socio-political shifts in a population that has historically been center-right and relatively conservative. Demographic changes have occurred at a rapid rate. Mainstream news channels are increasingly partisan, and society is now distinctly post-Christian.

Again, this represents a subtle form of spiritual warfare. It is more than an uncooperative city official or a difficult member of the local planning authority. Rampant secularism with its high priests in organizations that are increasingly respected by larger and larger groups in our society drive this socio-political

ideas, concepts, and thoughts have entered mainstream and now dominate the social structures of our societies.

It would be naïve to presume this is just some legislative agenda mildly out of control. I have no doubt that wickedness in high places, demonic forces, and subtle anti-Christ agendas drive these changes. As a result we must confront them for what they are. We will not resolve them through the ballot box but through concerted prayer, deeply committed fellowship, and a willingness to give our lives for the cause of Christ.

### THE MORAL ARENA

Although all that I have written thus far has obvious moral

## The Battle of Ideas, Concepts, and Thoughts

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implications, it is worth mentioning that the battle of ideas, thoughts, and concepts has invaded the core of our society's moral fiber. Society has almost entirely relativized morality so everything is acceptable as long as it feels good. This has produced an individualized morality that is tolerant of almost everything and brings with it the chaos of an unraveling society that judges everything from getting rid of an unborn child to euthanizing the weak and feeble in pragmatic ways.

For pastors this means that ministry is now in a context where they can presume nothing. Marriage is not as valued, relationships are often shallow and graphic, sensual images have become a part of everyday life for many. It is senseless and shortsighted to state that this is just the natural development of our society. Pornography is destructive, degrades women, and damages those families where there is a dubious commitment to moral standards.

Perhaps even more destructive is the way our society has undermined morality and made what was unacceptable the new normal. For those in ministry this introduces a whole new level of spiritual warfare. Guarding our hearts, caring for our marriages, and leading our children is more complicated than it was a generation ago. This is spiritual warfare in a violent form. Keeping a commitment to purity of life, avoiding damaging images from getting into our minds, being committed to responsible lifestyles, and loving God in such a way as to impact every area of our lives is a battle we must engage. And, engage it we must or else we will lose the battle little by little, opposing ideas will win the day, and our mission as salt and light will become of little effect.

Let me suggest four areas in which to engage these expressions of spiritual warfare:

### Be committed to a biblical worldview

A biblical worldview is much more than believing that the Bible is God's inspired Word. It is developing a deep commitment to the overarching value system described in the Bible. It is having an imagination birthed from the narrative of hope, justice, and a future that is in God's full control. It is also a deeply ingrained understanding of redemption. Put another way, the hope of God as revealed through the work of Christ in His death and resurrection is now among us. He works in us; He changes lives; He heals; He restores hope. A biblical worldview gets rid of dualistic views that allow us to believe one way and act another. Word and deed become consistent. We are what we are by the grace of God and this impacts everything, absolutely everything 24/7 and 365 days of every year.

### Have an experienced spirituality

The New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit acting as a down payment of what is to come. This means that our faith has an experiential dimension. We can and should expect a deep reassurance of our salvation. It might seem a simple proposition, but a deep and internal experience of God's assurance of salvation and the future He has planned should condition

everything about our lives. It should make us alert to the work of the devil (1 Peter 5:8), determined to withstand attacks (James 4:7,8), and confident we can be more than conquerors through Him who gives us strength (Roman 8:37).

### Be a part of a committed community

A careful reenvisioning of our churches should form a part of our determination to win in this spiritual war. There is nothing quite as powerful as a community of committed Christ followers who are determined to be God reflectors in their world. In these communities, redemption finds its fullest expression. People care for each other, serve each other, and stand alongside each other in every battle. This is possibly why the apostle Paul was so forthright in addressing the Corinthian church. A church that loses its redemptive purpose becomes powerless in the attacks people face every day. It loses relevance to the next generation. Should this article spark a renewed interest in the spiritual warfare encapsulated in ideas, thoughts, and concepts, it should equally spark a renewed engagement with the church of Jesus Christ.

### Develop a love for the poor

To state this slightly more theologically, a strategic element of our spiritual warfare must be a well-developed understanding of justice. A condescending lip service to mission leaves us powerless. Making mission the central focus of our lives emboldens us, strengthens us from the inside, and equips us to deal with spiritual onslaught in a more informed way. God's love for widows, orphans, and the poor should inform every aspect of how we live. This, in turn, will alert us to the spiritual world in a way that is not easy to replicate elsewhere. The most spiritually alert people I know are those with a well-developed commitment to the poor. They are more alert, better equipped for spiritual warfare, and clearly more victorious as Christ followers.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

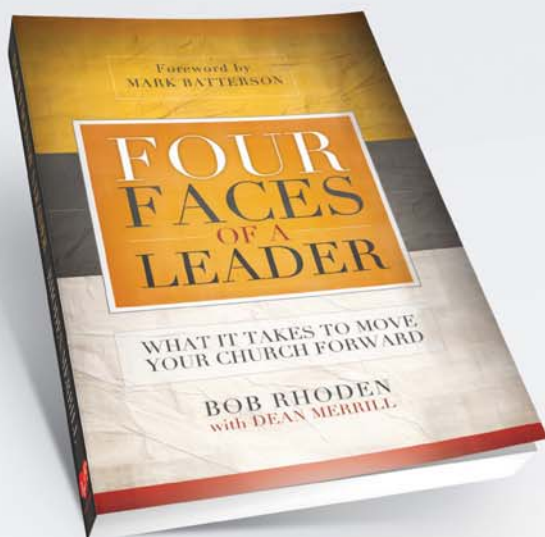
I hope this article will broaden the discussion on spiritual warfare. We are encountering sinister spiritual forces on every front. Leaders, pastors, parents, and Christians in general must educate themselves in the use of our weapons which are not, as God's Word reminds us, carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4) 📖



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Proclaiming Christ's  
Victory Over  
**Sinful,**  
**Personal**  
**Desires**

By **Gary J. Tyra**

Here are four spiritual warfare habits that are essential to keeping in step with the Spirit and proclaiming Christ's victory over sin.

## Fully aware of the importance of the company

**I keep** (see Proverbs

13:20), I admit there

is a person in my life

who is no good for me. When I allow him to influence me, I think, say, and do things that displease God and prove hurtful to me and others. I hate the fact this person wields so much power over me, yet I keep yielding the reins of my life to him. Perhaps you think I should just break off this association and have nothing to do with this problematic person. Easier said than done. You see, this person stares back at me every time I gaze into a mirror. This person, who too often entices me to think, say, and do things I later regret with all my heart, is *me*.

Can you relate to this honest admission? Have you ever thought of yourself as your own worst enemy? Does the term *self-sabotage* ever occur to you? Do you hate the fact you seem to possess what psychologists refer to as a *shadow self* who thinks, says, and does things that have the potential to ruin more than your reputation as a fully devoted follower of Jesus?

What psychologists call a *shadow self*, the apostle Paul refers to as our *flesh*. The rather consistent teaching of the New Testament is that a Christian's *flesh* can serve as a very

serious impediment to his or her walk with Christ. This article is about what must occur if we are to avoid spending our lives as church-going, church-leading Christians who nevertheless keep allowing our *flesh* to cause us to act in ways that are not only self-destructive but also detrimental to the cause of Christ. The bad news is we all possess the kind of *flesh* this article is about. The good news is that there is hope. Because of what Christ has accomplished through His flesh, and is doing now through His Spirit, our *flesh* does not have to rule (and ruin) our lives.

### WHAT THE FLESH IS

From the outset we must do our best to correctly understand the way the New Testament uses the term *flesh*. In his letters, the apostle Paul's normal practice was to employ two different Greek words (*soma* and *sarx*) when referring to his readers' "physical bodies" on the one hand (*soma*), and their "flesh" on the other (*sarx*). Though Paul could use *sarx* in a more general sense, there was often an *ethical dimension* to his use of *sarx* or "flesh" that was missing when he was simply talking about a person's physical body.<sup>1</sup> This is why the New International Version (1984) often translated *sarx* with the phrase "sinful nature." In other words, the context of many of Paul's references to his readers' *sarx* or "flesh" makes it apparent that what he had in mind was not their physical bodies but an *unregenerate* or *sinful nature* that still resided in them despite their conversion to Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Though Paul seems to embrace the traditional Hebraic idea that our bodies are not in and of themselves evil, he also held that Christians continue to possess an inherited, deeply ingrained propensity toward sin that often manifests itself through our bodies (Romans 6:13,19; 7:23). Though our physical bodies are not evil per se, a sin principle is at work within us (Romans 7:20) that can cause us to allow the members of our bodies to function as "instruments of wickedness" rather than "instrument of righteousness" (Romans 6:13). Paul wrote often about the need for Christ's followers to be proactive about dealing with this issue. According to Paul, it is impossible to live a victorious Christian life without learning to engage in spiritual warfare with respect to a resilient sinful nature he referred to as the "flesh."

### THE CONFLICT BETWEEN FLESH AND SPIRIT

In Galatians 5:16–26, the apostle Paul portrays our *flesh* (i.e., sinful nature) as a serious enemy to our walk with Christ. Paul presumes that his readers knew what the flesh is. Thus, he proceeded straightaway to comment on what the flesh does. In a nutshell, the problem with our flesh is that it is in constant conflict with the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in our lives. Paul put it this way: "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want" (Galatians 5:17).

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Having drawn attention to this debilitating “conflict of influence” at work in the lives of his readers (cf. Romans 8:5–8), Paul proceeded in Galatians 5 to list some attitudes and actions that people produce when their flesh is in the driver’s seat and they yield themselves to its unholy influence: “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Galatians 5:19–21).

Was Paul implying that at least some of these behaviors were still occurring in the lives of his readers? I believe he was. Thus the strident warning we find in the remainder of verse 21: “I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:21, NIV, 1984).

Such a bold exclamation makes it clear that this is a serious discussion. At the least, Paul aimed to warn how inappropriate and unnecessary it is for professing Christians to continue to have their sinful nature influence their day-to-day behavior. He has already asserted that there is an alternative to allowing their flesh to control them: “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

It is this crucial alternative that explains why, having highlighted the earmarks of being controlled by the flesh, Paul lists the God-pleasing and Christ-imaging attitudes and actions produced in the lives of Christ’s followers when they yield themselves to the influence of His Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22,23).

Paul concluded this discussion of the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit’s work in the lives of his readers with this brief but powerful exhortation: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let

us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other” (Galatians 5:24–26).

Based on Galatians 5:16–26, it is safe to say that it makes a huge difference whether those who have become Christ’s followers continue to yield the control of their lives to the influence of their flesh (sinful nature), or, having crucified the flesh, go on to learn what it means to “keep in step with the Spirit.” The big question then: Precisely how do we perform these two moves? What did Paul have in mind when he spoke of *crucifying the flesh* and *keeping in step with the Holy Spirit*?

### EXPERIENCING CHRIST’S VICTORY OVER THE FLESH

Biblical scholars have discerned that when writing about the Christian life Paul routinely emphasized two themes: the *indicative* and the *imperative*.<sup>3</sup> Roughly speaking, the indicative involves that which is true about Christ’s followers — i.e., that which Christ has accomplished on their behalf and the blessings that accrue to them “in him” as a result (e.g., see Ephesians 1; Colossians 1). The imperative, on the other hand, has to do with the manner in which Christ’s followers can and should live out what is true of them “in Christ” (e.g., see Ephesians 4–6; Colossians 3,4).

With respect to the issue at hand, Paul’s bold teaching was that living by the Spirit rather than flesh (the imperative) is possible precisely because of the victory over the flesh Jesus Christ accomplished for all of humanity by virtue of His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father (the indicative).

In Romans 5:12, Paul portrays Jesus as a second Adam whose life of righteous obedience, which included His vicarious death on our behalf, has effected a potential healing of our humanity, making it possible for those who are in Christ to escape the tyranny of their sinful flesh (and the death it precipitates) and live lives of righteousness instead (cf. 1 Peter 2:24). In Romans 5:17, Paul, comparing the first



If we tragically flawed human creatures are to live holy lives before God, says Paul, we need more than an external set of moral standards to strive toward in our own strength.

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Adam with the second (Jesus), announces this good news: "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup> Then, in Romans 6, Paul elaborated on the significance of Christ's victory over the sinful flesh for His followers. At the risk of oversimplifying, Paul's message in Romans 6 is this: Because of our association with the death and resurrection of Christ as sincere believers baptized into Him, we now, like Him, possess the power to say no to sin and yes to righteousness. Because of Christ's birth and vicarious life, death, resurrection, and ascension, there is no longer a reason for the tyranny of the flesh in people's lives.

Instead, we need a real, faith-produced, trust-based relationship with the risen Christ that instills within us a new source of spiritual and moral competence. In short, we need nothing less than the Spirit of Christ himself working deep within us, empowering us to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law (Romans 8:4–14).

Thus, when Paul spoke of the need for Christian disciples to crucify their flesh, he was not encouraging an ascetic mistreatment of their physical bodies (cf. Colossians 2:20–23). He was calling them to make a bold decision to abandon a futile attempt to earn their salvation and/or achieve sanctification by means of religious rule keeping and ceremonial observance. In other words, to crucify the flesh is to make the huge decision to give up trying to be righteous in our strength on the basis of the

We should take seriously the call in Ephesians 5:18 to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

It is this wonderful indicative, echoed early on in Paul's letter to the Galatians (e.g., Galatians 1:3,4; 2:20; 3:14,26–29; 4:4–7) that makes the imperatives prescribed by Paul in Galatians 5:24–26 possible. So, again, we ask the crucial question: What did Paul have in mind when he counseled the Galatian readers to crucify the flesh and instead keep in step with the Spirit?

First, we need to acknowledge that the larger context in which Paul embeds Galatians 5:16–26 suggests that he meant to encourage his original readers to reject the idea presented to them by some false teachers (Galatians 4:17; 5:1–12; 6:12,13), that the key to living in a God-pleasing manner is to carefully keep the rules and observe the ceremonies prescribed in the law of Moses. This critique of religious legalism/ceremonialism explains Paul's clarifying comments regarding the role and limits of the "Law" scattered throughout this letter (Galatians 2:15–21; 3:1–3,5,24; 4:4,5,21; 5:3,4,14,18,23). The same critique shows up in Paul's letter to the Romans where he makes it clear that it is precisely because of the *sinful nature* resident in all human beings (i.e., the *flesh*) that the law of Moses, *by itself*, simply cannot succeed at enabling the kind of righteous living God desires for and from us (Romans 8:3). If we tragically flawed human creatures are to live holy lives before God, says Paul, we need more than an external set of moral standards to strive toward in our own strength.

Law. Rather, we should choose to "live by" the righteousness-enabling help of the Holy Spirit made possible by the victory over the flesh accomplished on our behalf through Christ's vicarious life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father.

Unfortunately, however, many biblical theologians and commentators conclude the discussion here, focusing their attention on the indicative to the neglect of the imperative. Thus, even though many Christians understand that, *theoretically*, we do not have to follow the dictates of the flesh, *practically* speaking we continue to allow the flesh to control our day-to-day attitudes and actions rather than the Spirit. This is why it is important to note that, having encouraged his readers to crucify the flesh and "live by the Spirit," Paul proceeds to exhort the Galatians to "keep in step" with the Spirit as well (Galatians 5:25). I contend that this kind of language argues for a practical rather than merely theoretical understanding of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.<sup>5</sup>

So, what does it mean to "keep in step" with the Spirit? In my book, *Christ's Empowering Presence*,<sup>6</sup> I argue that at the heart of Christian spirituality is the cultivation of a moment-by-moment mentoring relationship with the risen Christ (see Colossians 3:1–4). Simply put, we really do live differently when we sense that, through His Spirit, Jesus is with us each

moment, eager to provide us with the empowerment we need to say yes to righteousness and no to sin (Colossians 3:5–17). This is a biblically informed understanding of how the Holy Spirit actually influences us toward righteous living. He does what Jesus promised He would do: *He makes the risen Christ real to us* (see John 14:15–18, 25, 26; 15:26; 16:12–15). This rather crucial idea that one of the main aims of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus real to the people He indwells shows up in several places in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:13, 14, Paul seems to suggest that at the very beginning of the Christian life, having embraced the message of the gospel, it was the Spirit who actually “included” us in Christ. This is why, in other passages, Paul indicates that if his readers are going to grow in their

ongoing surrendering of our lives to Jesus’ lordship. Psalm 51:1–12 and Acts 2:38, which seem to connect the acts of repentance and surrender with the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, support this conviction. Thus, to be continually filled with the Spirit calls for a daily, if not moment-by-moment, resurrendering of ourselves to Jesus. No wonder Paul encouraged the Ephesian readers to be continually filled with the Spirit of Jesus.

Second, we should take seriously the encouragement in Ephesians 6:18 to *pray often in the Holy Spirit*. The context in which Paul locates this exhortation suggests that he meant for his readers to understand praying in the Holy Spirit as a powerful and important act of spiritual warfare (cf. Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; Romans 15:30; Jude 20).



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awareness and experience of Christ in their lives, it will be the Spirit who accomplishes this. Paul’s own experience of coming to understand the significance and power of Jesus was through the work of the Spirit (Ephesians 3:4, 5). This explains why Paul was so keen on praying that this same kind of revelatory dynamic might occur in the lives of his disciples (Ephesians 1:17; 3:14–19).

I suggest that essential to keeping in step with the Holy Spirit are four habits, each of which enjoys tacit support from the New Testament as a whole and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians in particular. For what it is worth, each habit is also validated by my nearly 40 years of personal and pastoral experience.

First, we should take seriously the call in Ephesians 5:18 to *be continually filled with the Holy Spirit*. Fairly well known is the fact the tense of the Greek verb Paul utilized in this passage implies a continual action. This would seem to indicate that Paul had in mind ongoing infilling experiences with the Spirit rather than a once-for-all indwelling. Not only can we cite passages such as Acts 4:8, 31; 13:9 in support of this interpretation, it only makes sense given the way Paul connects the Spirit with the already converted Christian’s ability to keep growing in his or her experience of the life-defining presence and power of Jesus (Ephesians 1:17; 3:14–19). Furthermore, my personal and pastoral experience has been that such ongoing infilling experiences of the Spirit require an

One reason why I think this is so is because such prayer constitutes an invitation for the Spirit to, over and over again, make the empowering presence of the risen Christ real to us. James 4:7, 8 makes it crystal clear that the most effective way to deal with the devil is not by going against him toe-to-toe, but by deliberately, reverently drawing near to the presence of God instead. Each semester I deliver a lecture in which I explain to my freshman students why my normal practice is to spend time praying in the Spirit every day. I indicate that a huge reason for this spiritual discipline is that my experience has been that it really is a powerful act of spiritual warfare precisely because it strengthens me in my pursuit of Christ’s empowering presence.

Third, when (not if) it becomes apparent we have, by giving in to the influence of the flesh, grieved the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), we must *repent of the specific sin(s) involved and, once again, resurrender ourselves to His loving leadership, trusting the Spirit of Christ to be as forgiving as Jesus is*. We have already established the fact continued infillings of the Spirit require repeated acts of surrender to His leadership in our lives. A fresh act of surrender does not always have to include an expression of contrition with respect to some moral misstep we have made; but, quite frankly, if you are anything like me, often it does. Would it not be wonderful if we could believe that each time

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we address the Spirit, expressing genuine sorrow for having behaved in a way that frustrates His sanctifying work in us, this experience of contrite surrender might actually increase rather than decrease His ability, going forward, to do His work in our lives? Based on my experience and passages such as Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2, I'm convinced that such a belief is justified.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, we should *involve ourselves in a community made up of at least a few fellow Christ-followers who will prayerfully support us in and hold us accountable for our Spirit-enabled pursuit of the empowering presence of Christ, and for whom we will do likewise*. Another major theme of Paul's letter to the Ephesians has to do with the Spirit's role in creating and maintaining Christian community (see Ephesians 2:18–22; 4:3–6, 29–32; 5:18–21; 6:18). This might suggest that it is impossible to keep in step with the Spirit while at the same time attempting to function as a lone-ranger Christian.<sup>8</sup> However, this is only part of the equation. It is not simply that a serious involvement in a genuine Christian community is *appropriate* for someone endeavoring to keep in step with the Spirit; it is *necessary*. Paul hints of this fact in Ephesians 5:18–20 and Colossians 3:16, 17. Both passages, paralleling each other the way they do, emphasize the crucial importance of a mutual ministry occurring between members of the body of Christ. Indeed, a nuanced understanding of the way these passages are grammatically structured in the original Greek reveals the startling truth that a mutual ministry of the Word of God to one another is not only the result of the infilling of the Spirit, it is the way we maintain such an infilling. The upshot is that it is simply impossible to keep in step with the Spirit without being seriously engaged in a genuine Christian community where a mutual encouragement to stay at the pursuit Christ's empowering presence is taking place.

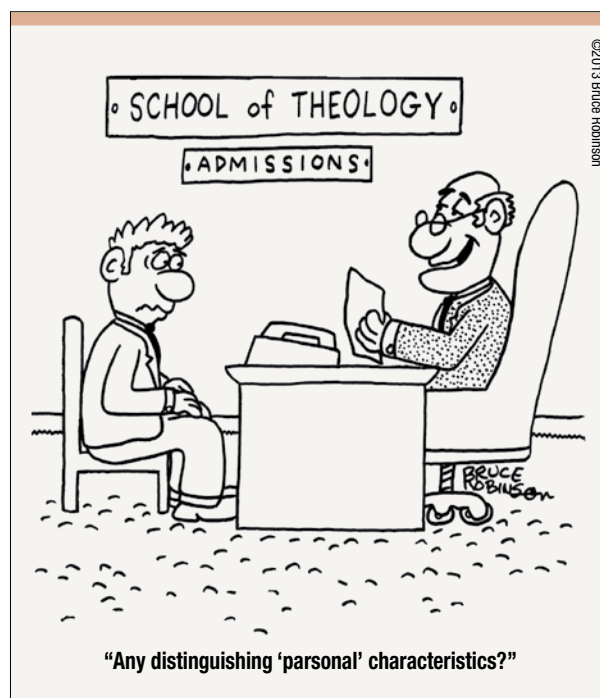
I do not want to give the impression that I have mastered what it means to keep in step with the Spirit. Still, I have experienced enough of Christ's empowering presence through the Spirit to know that it is possible to do so. So, here is the good news: Because of what Christ has done and the Spirit is doing, it is possible to win the war against our flesh. It is possible to just say no to that person in the mirror. ☒



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### Notes

1. See George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 511, 12.
2. See Ladd, 512.
3. For example, see Ladd, 536, 37, 563, 565, 568, 69.
4. We find a similar comparison and contrast between Jesus and Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:45–49.
5. See Ladd, 517 for a focused discussion of the indicative and imperative aspects of the Christian's victory over the flesh.
6. Gary Tyra, *Christ's Empowering Presence: The Pursuit of God Through the Ages* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2010).
7. In my book, *The Holy Spirit in Mission*, I make the point that while the Scriptures speak of the controlling (Romans 8:6), compelling (Acts 2:37; 20:22), and inspiring (Matthew 22:43; 1 Corinthians 12:3) effects the Holy Spirit can have on people, they also indicate that the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force (as in Star Wars) but a divine person with whom we can and must relate in an interpersonal manner. The fact the Holy Spirit is personal and seeks to interact with us in an interpersonal manner means that His sanctifying work in our lives is anything but automatic. Instead it is contingent on a personal response. While the Spirit can be: followed (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1; Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18), fellowshipped with (2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1), lived by (Galatians 5:16, 25), lived according to (Romans 8:4, 5, 13), kept in step with (Galatians 5:25), and learned from (1 Corinthians 2:13), He can, unfortunately, also be: lied to (Acts 5:3); tested (Acts 5:9); resisted (Acts 7:51); rejected (1 Thessalonians 4:8); quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19); and even insulted (Hebrews 10:29). We need to take Paul seriously, therefore, when he speaks in Ephesians 4:30 of the possibility of grieving God's Spirit. This is the bad news. The good news is that, while grieving the Spirit of Jesus is a terrible possibility, God's grace is greater than our sin. My experience has been that a sincere expression of sorrow over having done something to grieve the Spirit, accompanied by a fresh surrender to the Spirit's leadership in my life, has made the relationship stronger. See Gary Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), 32, 33.
8. As I point out in my book *The Holy Spirit in Mission* (29, 30), not a few theologians view the Holy Spirit as the eternal personification of the eternal love that exists between the eternal Father and the eternal Son (see Romans 5:5). It should not surprise us then to read in Galatians 5:22 that Paul's listing of the fruit of the Spirit's influence in the life of the fully devoted Christ-follower includes attitudes and actions that contribute to, rather than destroy, Christian community.

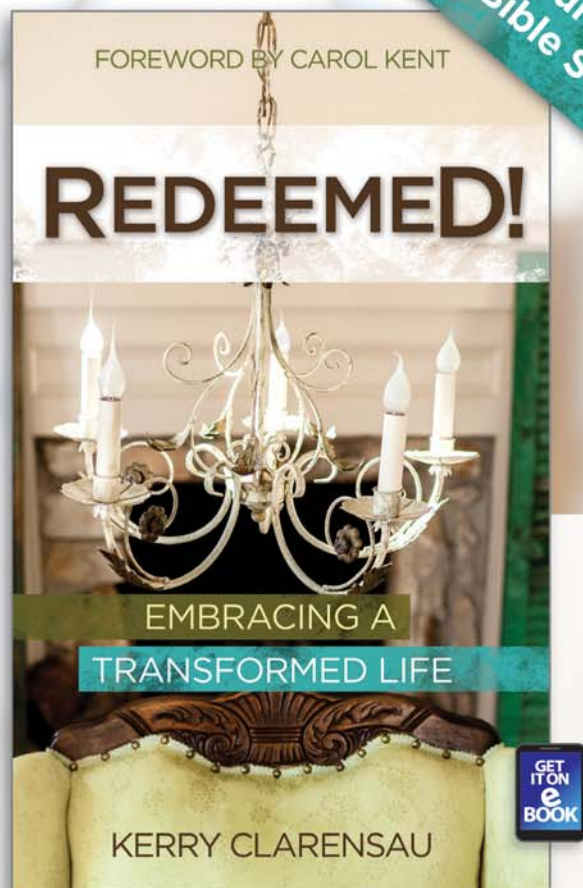


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# Beware of Satan's Thorns.

## Seven Ways the Enemy Weakens Pastors

By **Stephen Lim**

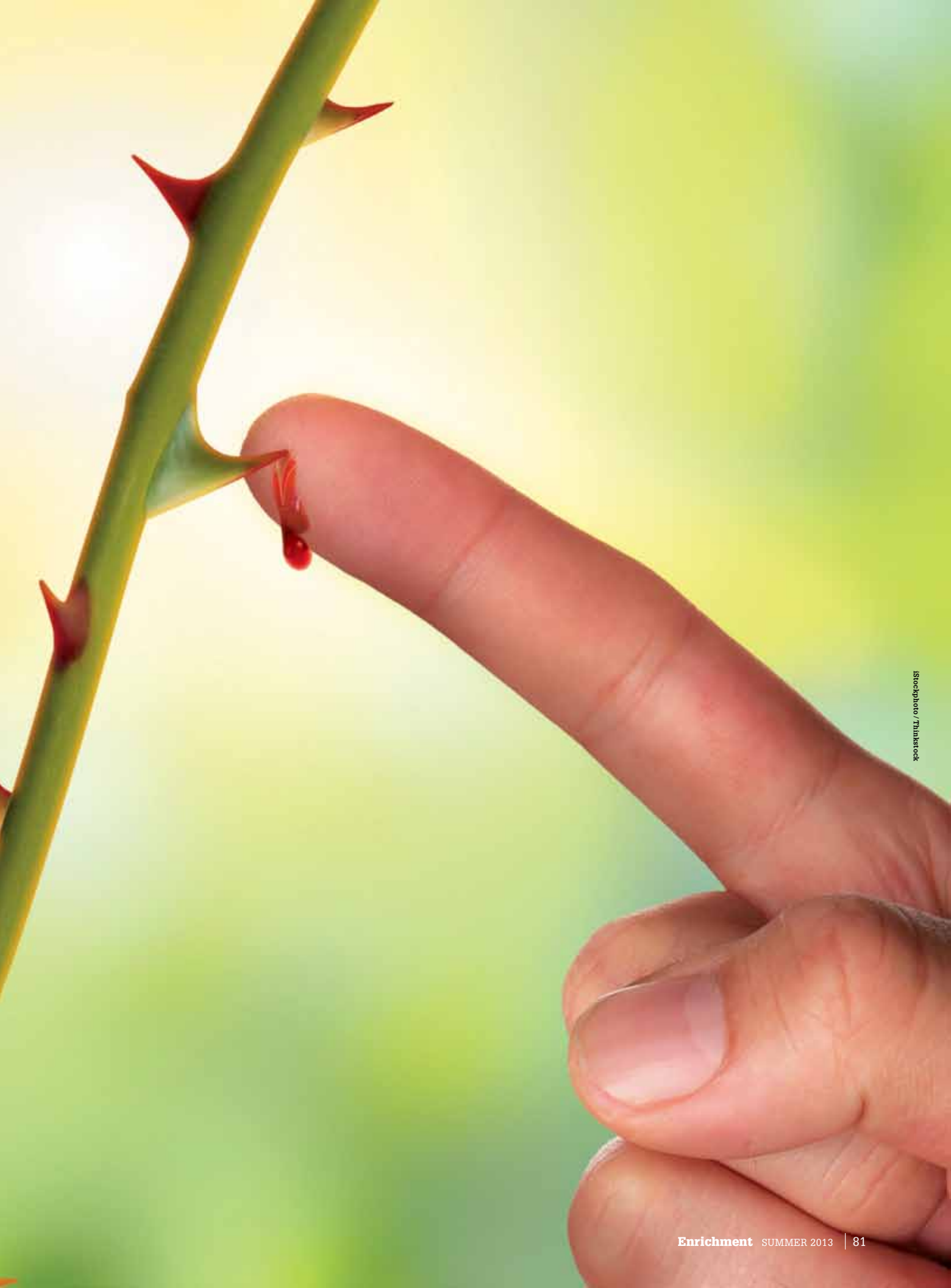
Here are ways to avoid strategies  
Satan uses to distract, harass, weaken,  
and destroy pastors.

**W** *hy do certain  
members of my  
church disagree  
with my position on this issue?  
After all, I am spiritually more*

*advanced, I defensively thought. This led to an energy-  
sapping clash in the church. Looking back, I now realize  
I had allowed one of Satan's thorns to jab me.*

As Satan opposed Jesus' work on earth, he and the  
"spiritual forces of evil" oppose our efforts for God  
(Ephesians 6:12). He especially targets pastors. For in  
weakening them, he weakens the Church.





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## Beware of Satan's Thorns: Seven Ways the Enemy Weakens Pastors

(continued from page 81)

### BE AWARE OF ENEMY STRATEGIES

As spiritual warriors, Paul urges us to stand “against the devil’s schemes” or strategies (Ephesians 6:11). To do so, we must first become aware of them (2 Corinthians 2:11). From the Bible, we discern four primary strategies the enemy uses against God’s people: attack, demonic influence, deception, and thorns (2 Corinthians 12:7). By these strategies, he seeks to distract, harass, weaken, or destroy believers.

This article focuses on seven thorns Satan uses against pastors. The sidebar, “More Enemy Strategies Aimed at Pastors,” summarizes three other strategies.

### THORNS DISTRACT AND WEAKEN

Biblical scholars offer a wide range of interpretation for the meaning of Paul’s “thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, sent to torment me” (2 Corinthians 12:7). These include: depression, religious opponents, hazards of ministry, or a physical affliction such as an eye problem or epilepsy. One scholar suggests that the Bible may have purposely left the meaning undefined, so Christians can apply the concept to their circumstances rather than limit it to Paul’s particular problem.

The Old Testament indicates that “thorns in the sides” caused “trouble” for Israel (Numbers 33:55) and describes thorns as “painful” (Ezekiel 28:24). From

our experience, when a thorn jabs into our flesh, it diverts our attention away from what we are doing. It causes pain and may diminish functioning. Accordingly, we understand a thorn in a pastor’s flesh is something Satan causes that can do one or more of the following: *distract* the pastor from God’s calling, *cause pain* in his or her body, or *weaken* his or her ministry.

Here are seven thorns and how to avoid them.



From the Bible we discern four primary strategies the enemy uses against God’s people: attack, demonic influence, deception, and “thorns.”

### SPIRITUAL SUPERIORITY

In 2 Corinthians 10–12, the apostle Paul speaks of the danger of spiritual pride that can arise from spiritual pedigree, the amount of suffering for Christ, and the revelations we receive from God. Other sources for pride include: our spiritual gifts, our ministry status, the successes God provides, and even our character. Assemblies of God pastor Richard Dortch admitted to pride because he possessed superior integrity.<sup>1</sup>

The following symptoms warn us of this thorn of spiritual superiority:

- Looking down on others we perceive as less spiritual, successful, or competent.
- Having little time for “little people,” preferring to hang around “important people.” After all, we are one of them. In contrast, Jesus had time for children, the nobodies of first-century culture.
- Using our position to use people to satisfy our ambitions — sanctified, of course, by calling them God’s will.
- Refusing to tolerate healthy disagreement or collaboratively seek God’s will. “Since I am spiritually superior, my vision is the correct one. End of debate. Besides, who are they to oppose God’s anointed?”

Spiritual pride results in factions and fights when others resist our supposedly superior wisdom. Loss of morale and commitment also occur, as people no longer feel the leader cares about them. Neither do they feel ownership of the vision that has become “the pastor’s goal” rather than “our God-given dream.” A sense of superiority also blinds us to our weaknesses. We all know pastors who have fallen as a result.

Avoiding the thorn of spiritual superiority requires *spiritual humility*. First, we have nothing except what God has given us — whether abilities, spiritual gifts, opportunities, or spiritual harvest (1 Corinthians 4:7). Second, we must recognize we cannot function without others (1 Corinthians 12). Third, Paul instructs, “In humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Finally, the Son of God modeled humility for us in His incarnation, suffering, and death (verses 6–11).

Shortly after I became the academic dean at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, I led the annual Faculty Retreat prior to the start of the school year. There, in my first statement to the professors, I said, “I’ve been dean for 6 days now. In

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this time, have I suddenly become smarter than you?" I wanted them to know that I did not plan to act from a position of superiority, but as a servant leader.

### SELF-SUFFICIENCY

In our culture, pastors may possess abundant resources. Rather than relying on God who provides them, we can easily rely on our own resources instead. We may depend on personal assets: education, personality, experience, intelligence, communication and relationship skills, and leadership. Furthermore, we may have available dedicated members, skilled staff, a strong organization, finances, and state-of-the-art facilities and other resources upon which to depend. These give us the

appearance of success, but they produce little of eternal spiritual value. Only as we truly abide in Jesus, fully dependent on Him, can we "bear much fruit" (John 15:4,5).

With few resources, however, we must rely on God. We see the explosive growth of the church in many parts of the majority world. There, churches often have minimal assets but great faith and dependence on God. They show us why we must avoid the thorn of self-sufficiency.

Paul prayed three times for God to remove his thorn. Yet God allowed His servant to continue suffering from a thorn of Satan. Why? So Paul would continue to depend on God. He told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:8,9). Self-sufficiency so limits the

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## More Enemy Strategies Aimed at Pastors

**Besides spiritual "thorns," Satan may employ against pastors** he also uses three other strategies against believers.

### Attack and Destruction

First, the enemy seeks to attack and destroy. Peter warns us that he "prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus

says He "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Paul describes these attacks as "flaming arrows" (Ephesians 6:16). As a minister of the gospel, Paul endured multiple imprisonments, beatings, and whippings, and even survived a stoning. Attacks may also include discrimination, harassment, seizure of property, and death. All the apostles except John died for their faith. Pastors and believers in many countries today regularly suffer persecution and attacks. Only God's enabling through prayer enables them to endure.

### Demonic Influence

Second, the enemy influences Christians to the degree they permit through disobedience or spiritual carelessness. As spiritual beings, either the Spirit of God or alien spirits influence us. When we limit the leading of the Spirit in our lives, evil spirits gain greater influence. We see two striking cases of leaders who succumbed in King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14; 18:10; 19:9) and Judas, whom the devil "prompted ... to betray Jesus" (John 13:2). Let's keep full of God's Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) and minimize the influence of other spirits.

### Deception

Third, Paul warns that Satan "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Those he cannot attack or influence to sin, he tempts them to take actions that appear to be harmless, good, and even noble, but which are contrary to God's will and purposes. For example, Jesus' first two temptations in the wilderness appear reasonable and even scriptural, but were contrary to God's will (Matthew 4:1-7).

To avoid such deception, we need to: immerse ourselves in God's Word, walk closely with Him, seek the gift of discernment, and make ourselves accountable to a small group of believers who know us well.

### Overcome

Aware of enemy strategies, pastors can overcome by putting on "the full armor of God," taking "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," and praying "in the Spirit on all occasions" (Ephesians 6:11,17,18).

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## Beware of Satan's Thorns: Seven Ways the Enemy Weakens Pastors

(continued from page 83)

work of God in our lives that Christ may allow us to experience a thorn so we can avoid something more harmful.

Let's take a brief look at other thorns.

### SUPERMAN SYNDROME<sup>2</sup>

"As pastor, it's up to me to meet all the needs of my church. Furthermore, I must do everything I can to reach as many lost people as possible. So I must keep pushing myself." With these attitudes, for over a decade I arose at 4:50 a.m. each morning without adequate sleep, so I could have devotions at 5 a.m. and put in a few hours of work before breakfast. Often, however, I spent unproductive days due to drowsiness.

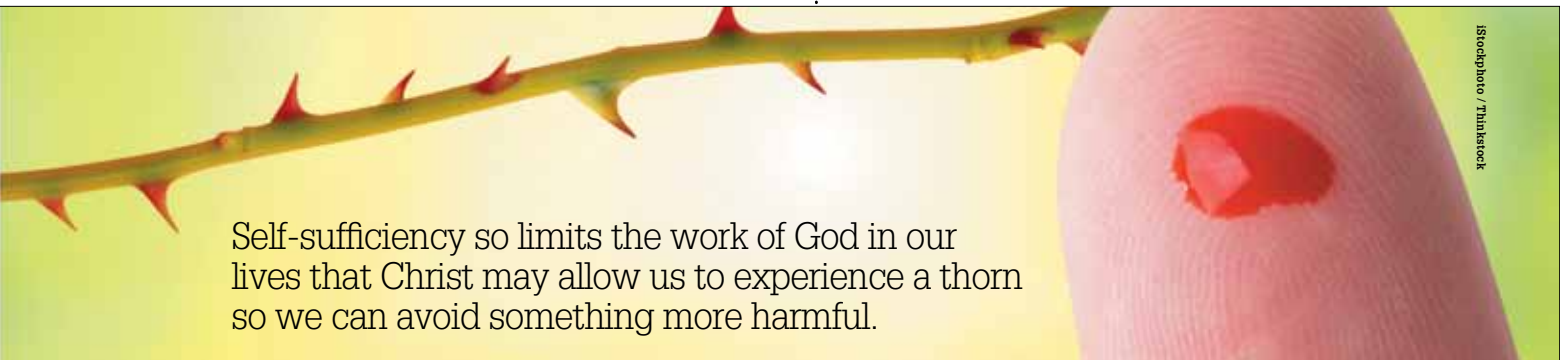
While emergencies may require grueling hours, we function more effectively and creatively with adequate rest. My problem? For spiritually unhealthy reasons, I had taken on myself the responsibility of God's ministry. He calls us to cooperate with His mission, not to assume its ownership and burden.

### SOCIETAL SEDUCTION

In his third try to tempt Jesus, Satan offered Him all the power, wealth, and glory of the world. All Jesus had to do was bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:8–10). The world also seeks to seduce us with its values and riches. The enemy tempts us to compromise. Sometimes we even have good motives. After all, we reckon, it will help God's work if we have a greater position or reputation or building. In some cases this may be God's will. However, are we allowing society's values of higher, bigger, and more to seduce us out of God's will for our ministries?

### CURSE OF COMPARISON

The thorn of comparison is the opposite of spiritual superiority and even more common among pastors. Frequently it leads to discouragement and loss of enthusiasm and energy for ministry. We pour our hearts and efforts into the mission to which God has called us. Inevitably, we see others who have accomplished so much more. "He has a congregation of thousands. My church has only 200 members. Her facility has



Self-sufficiency so limits the work of God in our lives that Christ may allow us to experience a thorn so we can avoid something more harmful.

I finally heard God say, "Lighten up. You don't have to save the world. Only My Son can do that. You are not the Savior; you are not even Superman. So take off your cape."

I suffered from the thorn I now call the Superman Syndrome. Symptoms include fatigue and irritability, which grows into resentment — and eventually burnout. This results in our simply going through the motions in ministry or quitting entirely. Meanwhile we alienate our families by neglecting their needs along with our own.

During His ministry, Jesus never appeared stressed or anxious. He accepted the limits of the human part of His nature and appreciated the need for rest and restoration. He slept in a boat during a severe storm. Often He secluded himself for extended times of prayer. He also spent time with His friends: Lazarus, Martha, and Mary.

If Jesus realized His human limitations, how much more should we realize ours? To avoid the Superman Syndrome, we must remind ourselves of our humanness. Also we must remember that God calls us to cooperate with Him in His mission, not to take it over.

30,000 square feet of space, 10 times the size of mine." Comparison breeds or aggravates a sense of inferiority and leads to discouragement.

God tells Philip the evangelist to journey for days on a desert road leading to Gaza. Putting ourselves in his sandals, imagine what we might have thought upon arriving, *Hmm, I don't see any stadium in which to hold an evangelistic crusade. Where are the crowds? There's nothing here but wilderness. I left a thriving spiritual harvest in Samaria to come here? What a waste of my time!*

Finally, Philip comes upon an Ethiopian on the road and leads him to Christ. He may have wondered why he traded hundreds of conversions for just one person.

The Ethiopian returned to his country. He shared the gospel with his family and friends. Gradually they, too, came to faith. In turn they shared the gospel with others. This occurred through months and years, then generations and centuries. As a result, millions of Ethiopians are now followers of Christ. Philip had no access to the Internet, television, or even daily newspapers. Most likely he never realized the results of his obedience.

Philip's story tells us that God calls us to faithfulness, *not* to compare ourselves with others. Some He calls to gospel-resistant places for years of hard plowing and limited fruit. Others He calls to fields ripe for harvest with little effort on their part. On judgment day who will receive the greater commendation?

In Jesus' Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30), the servant who invested the two talents entrusted to him by the owner and gained two more received the commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (verse 23). Note that the servant who received five and gained another five earned the *same* praise (verse 21). No doubt, if the one who received one talent had invested it to gain another talent, he would have received the same commendation and reward as the others.

We need to reject the curse of comparison. This thorn demoralizes and weakens us. Let us faithfully obey God's calling and leave the results to Him.

### FAKE FRUIT

A basket of plastic fruit decorates my kitchen table. It looks like the real thing, but please do not try to eat it. Pastors often settle for what looks like real spiritual fruit but isn't. The church at Sardis had "a reputation of being alive," but they were spiritually dead (Revelation 3:1). Lasting conversions and believers growing as mature disciples are the important fruit of ministry (Matthew 28:19). Falling short of this, leaders often substitute the easier goals of adding attendees, programs, buildings, and increasing giving. These give us a reputation of fruitfulness, but they may not produce the eternal fruit God desires.

Pastor Walt Kallestad led his church to over 12,000 in attendance at weekend services. Finally, he admitted that they had success in "competing for market-share," but failed in their mission because they "weren't creating empowered disciples."<sup>3</sup> He determined to change his focus toward God's missional call.

Settling for fake fruit enhances our reputation, but it leaves us empty-handed on judgment day. To avoid this thorn, we must focus on fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

### EXECUTIVE EXCEPTION

If pastors are not careful, the greater the success they enjoy — the larger their congregation, and the louder the applause — the more they begin to think the rules do not apply to them. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then covered it up by having her husband killed. Three of our past nine presidents had serious moral failures. Every few months the media publicizes the moral failings of another prominent pastor. Each of these individuals had apparently granted themselves an executive exception from God's law.

To avoid the thorn of executive exception, pastors must first commit themselves to honor God's law and act with integrity in every area of their lives. They will need the help of trusted

others to discover the temptations to which they are most vulnerable. Also, they need to open their lives to these individuals and become accountable to them.

### BEWARE SATAN'S THORNS

The thorns I have discussed do not exhaust all the possibilities. Rather, I have exposed common ones that can distract pastors from God's calling and wound their ministries. I confess I have allowed each of them to weaken my pastoral ministry. Thankfully, God's Spirit has matured me through the years, and I have learned to beware of Satan's thorns. With God's enabling, we can resist every thorn of the enemy. 📖



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#### Notes

1. Richard Dortch, *Integrity: How I Lost It, and My Journey Back* (Green Forest, Arkansas: New Leaf Press, 1992), 312.
2. Adapted from Stephen Lim, "Overcoming the Superman Syndrome," *Ministry International Journal for Pastors*, May 2002.
3. Walter Kallestad, "Redefining Success," *Fuller Theology, News, & Notes*, Fall 2006, 6. Originally published in *Leadership Journal*.





# Demonization and the Christian Life: How the Devil Influences Believers

By **Doug Lowenberg**

Scripture authenticates the reality of the spirit world, including angelic friends and demonic foes. But Western Christians, including evangelicals and Pentecostals, struggle to explain and address this transempirical dimension of reality. A misdiagnosis could prevent finding the cure for one who is struggling.

**S**ome may question theologically<sup>1</sup> and practically if spiritual warfare is real and relevant to their lives and ministries. Missionary to the Islamic world, Sobhi Malek, claims, "There is a relentless conflict between God's kingdom and the temporary rule of Satan, the prince of this world, who is assisted by demonic forces under his command."<sup>2</sup>

## Demonization and the Christian Life: How the Devil Influences Believers

(continued from page 87)

Psychologist Richard Dobbins states, “I believe in the realities of a spirit world as revealed in the Scripture.”<sup>3</sup>

Theologian Edgar Lee notes, “The Bible clearly teaches the existence of an unseen enemy devoted to the destruction of humanity.”<sup>4</sup>

Cultural anthropologist Charles Kraft asserts, “Scripture clearly portrays human life as lived in a context of continual warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.”<sup>5</sup>

Immediately after the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus to begin His public ministry, Jesus experienced a personal confrontation with Satan (Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12,13; Luke 4:1–13). Later He declared, “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28<sup>6</sup>). Peter summarized Jesus’ ministry stating, “He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38). The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian church, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

### WESTERN WORLDVIEW AND THE SPIRIT WORLD

Scripture authenticates the reality of the spirit world, including angelic friends and demonic foes. But many Western Christians, including Pentecostals and evangelicals, struggle to explain and address this transempirical dimension of reality. A Western worldview, traditional theological assumptions, and a predetermined biblical-theological vocabulary make it difficult to discern and deal with a vast array of spiritual realities that operate beyond people’s sensory perceptions.

Since the Enlightenment, the West has adopted a rational, humanistic, scientific orientation that tends to skew spiritual discernment. Confidence in the rational and logical mind, humankind’s ability to problem solve, and science’s ability to penetrate to the depths and structures of what is real make

it difficult to detect, confront, and harness a hostile spirit realm.

The Western tendency to fragment life leaves limited ideological space for acknowledging spirit beings. Westerners tend to place spirit beings in some small subcategory of theology, safely siloed from education, technology, economics, agriculture, nature, and entertainment. The cognitive domain for considering demons is in a thin sliver

of one’s spiritual considerations removed to a vault, like a computer virus, where only minimal influence by demons from outside a person can occasionally arise. Many evangelical Christians have concluded that their salvation experience immunizes them from the devil and demons. For Pentecostals, their initial baptism in the Holy Spirit encounter does the same. Thus, once saved always saved — at least from demons. Theologians propose that Jesus has bound Satan as far as the possibility that his evil powers can enslave a believer.<sup>7</sup>

Some Pentecostals are functional theists believing in the triune God who rules with unlimited power from His heavenly throne. He engages in the world of humans and nature to provide salvation and to do occasional miracles. But theists give minimal consideration to the realm occupied by God-created spirit beings. For Pentecostal theists, reality consists of God, humans, nature and outer space, laws of nature that govern life and the world, and occasional supernatural interruptions by the Holy Spirit to save, baptize in the Spirit, perform miracles of healing, and deliver reprobate sinners from demonic control.

Paul Hiebert critically describes this perspective as “the flaw of the excluded middle”<sup>8</sup> — ignoring the significance and vitality of the spirit realm that exists between the transcendent God and the world of humans and nature. Tragically, Christianity that emphasizes individual, soul salvation is ill-prepared to address hostile spiritual powers at work under God’s supreme sovereignty. This type of Christianity has limited ministry effectiveness for people, especially in the majority world where multitudes believe spirit beings influence all aspects of life.

The majority world operates from a power orientation where spirit beings including God, Satan, angels, demons, and ancestral spirits control all dimensions of life. The minority world of the West, likewise power-oriented, locates power in education, politics, finances, positions of authority, social systems, and technology and inserts humans at the center of their worldview. And in the West, whether the motivation is the desire to avert accusations of sensationalism or irrationality, or due to a suspicion of overly spiritualizing abnormal human behaviors and events, Westerners usually limit their diagnoses to medical and psychological impairments or dramatic “acts of God.” Fearing the extremes — “the devil made me do it” along with “demons are under the table” to “demons are mythological creations of overactive, premodern imaginations” — people find safety, healing, and academic respect in the secular sciences.

### CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Christian anthropology — the study of the nature of human beings — can further complicate our understanding of spiritual warfare. Christian anthropology assumes people are

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tripartite creations consisting of body, soul, and spirit. An integrated whole — following Hebrew beliefs expressed by the authors of the Old and New Testaments — acknowledges the external, visible body and an internal, complex spiritual nature. According to the Hebrew worldview, humans consist of three dimensions (see Deuteronomy 6:5): the inner, invisible life called the “heart” (*lebab*); the external body or the entire human person known as the “soul” (*nepesh*) as created by God (Genesis 2:7, KJV); and all of one’s life endeavors, accomplishments, and commitment to Yahweh called “strength” (*me’ od*). The Western mindset shaped by Greek philosophy divides humans into component parts that seem to operate independently of each other. Many Western believers refer to the three dimensions of humans: physical body; emotions, mind, will, and feelings; and the spirit, the inner sacred abode reserved for God or Satan. For example, Dobbins explains that the spirit is the deepest part of a human and becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit on Christian conversion. The spirit remains “involute throughout Christ’s residence there.”<sup>9</sup> Yet he admits, “The spiritual component of health is the area of man’s greatest ignorance and Satan’s most profound expertise.”<sup>10</sup>

used Greek word in the New Testament, as *demonize*.<sup>14</sup> In all cases, Bible translators translate this word “demon possessed.”

The term *demon possessed* describes extreme demonic control in the life of a person where a demon expresses itself through the body and personality of the individual on an occasional or regular basis. This implies that demons dominate a person and manipulate the individual’s body, mind, and spirit for their purposes. Because this manifestation of evil is so extreme, Christians assume the presence of God and demons cannot coexist in a person’s physical body. Dobbins, for example, states that the Holy Spirit will not share His habitation with the spirits of demons.<sup>15</sup> Others claim “God’s presence guarantees that there is no power present that is not subject to His will.”<sup>16</sup>

The belief is that Christ dwells within the believer and occupies spirit, soul, and body. No demon possession can occur where Jesus is Lord. It is an “all or nothing” understanding of the body and of Lordship. If this perspective is accurate, it is difficult to explain how the serpent entered the sinless Garden of Eden where God ruled (Genesis 3); how Satan could use Peter to become a stumbling block<sup>17</sup> in the presence of Christ (Matthew 16:23); how Satan could invade Judas, who had just



Some may question theologically and practically if spiritual warfare is real and relevant to their lives and ministries.

Christians who acknowledge spiritual assaults against God’s people while maintaining a tripartite anthropology explain that demons attack only from outside the person as “external foes.”<sup>11</sup> Should evil spirits gain some influence or inflict bondage, at worst it is located in the body or soul, but never the human spirit.<sup>12</sup> This explanation, however, seems artificial when it limits temptations and spiritual enemies to locations outside the believer or to supposed impenetrable inner barriers between soul and spirit. “Temptation comes to us through our thought realm. ... Satan entices through thoughts planted lavishly by the culture and worldly activity around us.”<sup>13</sup>

### WORDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Vocabulary limits one’s understanding of spiritual realities. For example, one could translate *daimonizomai*, a frequently

participated in the Passover Seder with Jesus (John 13:2,27); and why Paul would prohibit Corinthian charismatics from feasting in pagan temples which were the locus of demons (1 Corinthians 10:14–22).<sup>18</sup> Gordon Fee comments, “What most Western Christians need to learn is that the demonic is not as remote as some of them would wish to believe.”<sup>19</sup>

Alternatively, Werner Foerster claims that the word can mean to suffer from a demon.<sup>20</sup> Edgar Lee observes, “The New Testament does not have a word that means literally ‘demon possessed.’”<sup>21</sup> He explains that demonize could mean “to have some demonic affliction ... not necessarily to be demon possessed.”<sup>22</sup> He adds, “No scriptural evidence warrants the assumption that an evil spirit can invade the soul but not the spirit.”<sup>23</sup>

While using etymology to define words can be misleading, at times it can provide beneficial insights. Based on the components of the word (*daimon-iz-omai*)<sup>24</sup> the verb could mean



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EVERY TRIBE  
AND LANGUAGE  
AND PEOPLE  
AND NATION"

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## Demonization and the Christian Life: How the Devil Influences Believers

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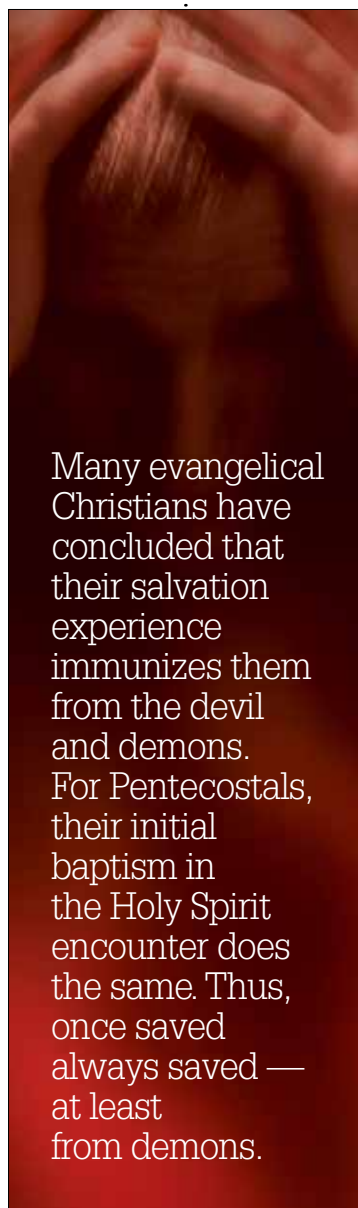
being made passive by a demon or living under some degree of demonic control. The first syllable, *daimon*, refers to a demon. The second syllable, *izo*, usually appears in verbs indicating a causative action. The subject is causing something to happen. The third syllable, *omai*, is the typical ending of a passive verb where the action is not done by the subject of the sentence but is done to the subject. One could summarize that the subjects of the sentences, in the cases where the biblical writers used *daimonizomai*, have been made passive or caused to be in a passive, controlled state, by a demonic power. The degree of passivity on the part of the subject is not indicated: it could be minimal or complete.

Consider a few biblical examples from Matthew where he used *daimonizomai*. In Matthew 4:24 and 8:16, others brought demonized people to Jesus, and He healed them. Matthew gives no details of their condition except to record that others brought them to Jesus. In Matthew 8:28, two men who were demonized approached Jesus. These men were violent having superhuman powers and superhuman discernment, having knowledge of the true identity of Christ and their own ultimate destiny. With a single word from Jesus, "Go!" (verse 32) they departed and the men were made normal.

In Matthew 9:32, people brought Jesus a "man mute demonized" (my woodenly literal translation). "And after the demon was cast out, the mute spoke" (translation mine). The demon seems to have made the man mute. After Jesus cast out the demon, this man's behavior was normalized, and he took the initiative to speak.

The Canaanite mother said of her child, "My daughter is badly demonized" (Matthew 15:22, translation mine). The woman came to Jesus without her child. According to the mother's faith, Jesus healed the daughter at a distance.

In summary, only in the case of the Gadarenes (Matthew 8:28) does Matthew clearly portray the demonized in our category of "demon possessed," completely dominated and maneuvered by demons. It is interesting to note that Mark's description of this same incident reports "a man with an unclean spirit" (Mark 5:2, my translation), avoiding altogether the use of the verb *demonized*.



Many evangelical Christians have concluded that their salvation experience immunizes them from the devil and demons. For Pentecostals, their initial baptism in the Holy Spirit encounter does the same. Thus, once saved always saved — at least from demons.

Timothy Warner notes, "A Christian may be attacked by demons and may be affected mentally and sometimes physically at significant levels, but this does not constitute possession or ownership."<sup>25</sup>

### COMPLEXITY OF A HUMAN BEING

Rather than an all-or-nothing view regarding the demonic in the life of a Christian, it would be helpful to first consider the complexity of the nature of a human being. People are far more intricate than a one-room house where Christ occupies all or nothing. One might visualize closets and rooms where unconfessed or unaddressed sins and evil spirits are hiding. As an illustration, an individual could invite Christ to enter as Savior into the living room and kitchen of his or her home without allowing Him to occupy and cleanse all. For some people, cleansing and freedom are a process that continues relative to their cooperation. For others, Lordship is instant and complete.

### INFLUENCES OF DEMONS ON A CONTINUUM

When people become Christians, they confess their sin, ask Jesus to forgive them for their rebellion, and invite Him to enter into their lives as Lord. This forms a new covenant; they make a new commitment; and establish a new loyalty. The process of transformation and sanctification begins. But it seems apparent and part of our common

experience that perfection and purity are not instantaneous. Some attitudes, values, and habits are slow to change.

For Christians who have surrendered control of their lives to Christ, demon possession cannot occur. Demon possession refers to a person where one or more demons inhabit the individual and exert complete domination periodically over the individual's thinking and behavior. In those moments, the individual is a tool of the devil, manipulated by evil powers for destructive purposes. We should view demon possession as an extreme case of demonic control noted only among those resistant to the lordship of Christ.

Is there any middle ground between the perfected saint and the demon possessed? And, is there a place on a continuum between full sanctification and demon possession where

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## Demonization and the Christian Life: How the Devil Influences Believers

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carnality gives way to sinfulness and sinfulness to some degree of demonic control we can distinguish from demon possession? The majority world is unruffled by such carnal Christians who have demonic powers at work within their lives. They simply pray, cast out the demons, and incorporate the believers into discipleship programs that practice prayer, Bible study, fasting, and accountability. In the middle are Christians who have plateaued in their spiritual growth; they may live carelessly and inconsistently in seeking the will of God and in avoiding carnal temptations. At the other extreme are those who are demon possessed. Between the carnal Christian, somewhere in the middle of the continuum, and the demon possessed *could* be those who *could* be demonized. When they came to Christ, they may have kept back areas of their inner life from His cleansing. Or after coming to Christ, they may have grown careless and surrendered a “place” within their affections<sup>26</sup> for the devil to control such things as greed, anger, lying, lust, and hunger for power. Christians can sin willingly<sup>27</sup> and lower their defensive shield against temptations and the fiery arrows of Satan (Ephesians 6:16). While the Spirit of God promises to provide a way of escape from every temptation, some believers ignore the opportunity to flee (1 Corinthians 10:13). James admonishes believers to “resist the devil and he will flee from you” (4:7). But some believers put up little resistance.

in the present tense of “our struggle,” himself included, which is not against humans but against evil spiritual powers masterminded by a scheming devil (Ephesians 6:11,12). To the Corinthian believers, he warns not to be outwitted by Satan (2 Corinthians 2:11). He admonishes the Ephesian Christians to “give no place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27). The command implies it is possible to give place or room to the devil, be it in one’s thoughts, attitudes, behavior, or interpersonal relationships. Writing to the converts in Rome, Paul instructed them: “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (Romans 6:12). He continued, “Do not offer any parts of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness ... offer every part of yourself to him [God] as an instrument of righteousness. ... When you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey” (Romans 6:13–16). A reverse reading suggests that Christians may allow sin to *reign* in their bodies; they can *offer parts* of their bodies to be used for sinful purposes, becoming *slaves* in certain aspects of their lives. The apostle’s admonition is to surrender all to God and have Him reign supremely over all dimensions of one’s life including the heart (inner thoughts, motives, emotions, and values); the soul (the body and outer behavior); and strength (all of one’s life endeavors and accomplishments).

Peter described preachers living among the saints who “have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our



We should view the influences of demons on a continuum.

The preponderance of biblical warnings to Christians about alertness, preparation, and active resistance against Satan — described as a roaring lion seeking to devour God’s people,<sup>28</sup> — demons, principalities, and powers should sensitize believers to the reality of the battle and the possibility of casualties. The force and frequency of these warnings seem to caution believers to be alert and prepared to battle the satanic realm.

Pentecostal ministers cannot afford to be careless or arrogant assuming their immunity to demonic powers. If Satan repeatedly confronted Jesus (Luke 4:13), Christ’s representatives should expect no less. The New Testament calls Christians to alertness and persistent spiritual warfare against Satan and his dominions. The New Testament does not indicate that there is a truce, demilitarized zone, or immunity. Paul speaks

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome” (2 Peter 2:20). He asserted, “People are slaves to whatever has mastered them” (2 Peter 2:19). While not using the word *demonized*, could Peter’s references to “entangled,” “overcome,” and “enslaved” serve as legitimate synonyms? How would we chart their demise on the spiritual health continuum?

### WINNING SPIRITUAL BATTLES

Winning daily spiritual battles requires discernment and balance. While in the process of sanctification, Christians are still human, carnal, and fleshly. Paul instructs them to “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desire of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Walking according to the flesh is like leaving garbage

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around one's house that attracts rodents and pests.<sup>29</sup> Unadressed carnal garbage can create a vulnerable place for attack.

Warfare blends human responsibility and spiritual influences. God's Spirit assists to remove sins that entangle and provides power to walk in obedience to His will. Satan's lures cause further surrender to lies and momentary pleasures while numbing the conscience through rationalizations and excuses. Our moral decisions result in growing freedom or bondage. Satan constantly probes for weaknesses. But one's active resistance through the aid of the Spirit and commitment to preserving a holy mind, body, and interpersonal relationship with others will overcome Satan's schemes.

Entertaining temptations can lead to carnal thinking and behavior that eventually become habits. Habits lead to addictions, and addictions can result in growing degrees of bondage. If left unchecked, one can slide toward greater spiritual tyranny. Does one instantly lose salvation? Usually believers do not instantly abandon Christ. A slow drift, however, can terminate the vitality of the relationship with Christ while the grip of the enemy, like a python, gradually squeezes out what spiritual life remains. Believers lose their joy and freedom. Demonization or varying degrees of demonic control can ensue. To gain freedom and experience deliverance, one must recognize that the problem is greater than carnality and requires spiritual intervention that includes confession and

prayerful assistance from Spirit-filled believers confronting the demonic in the name and authority of Jesus Christ.

Christians must take the offensive and proclaim Jesus as Lord among those who have never heard. Christians must invade and occupy the domains of darkness. While advancing, they must avail themselves of the armor provided by God (Ephesians 6:10–18) and engage in three types of battles.<sup>30</sup> The battles include allegiance, truth, and power encounters.

Followers of Jesus must constantly renew their allegiance to Christ and be sure that He is Lord of all dimensions of life. This seems to have been the issue in the city of Ephesus when people who had already believed<sup>31</sup> recognized a divided allegiance and the need to cleanse their homes of paraphernalia used in sorcery (Acts 19:18–20).

Christians must seek truth and truthfulness found in Jesus, His character, deeds, and words in the battle against lies and false doctrines. They must subject doubts that undermine their confidence in the goodness of God and in His truth revealed in Scripture (2 Corinthians 10:5).

When necessary, Christians should be confident to engage in power encounters. They should emulate Jesus when, by the Spirit, He confronted Satan. He overcame the devil's temptation by declaring the truths of God's Word, safeguarding His relationship with the Father through obedience, and by remaining humble and dependent on God's provisions,



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timing, and ways. Jesus has given power and authority to His disciples to drive out demons, heal sicknesses and diseases, and preach the kingdom of God (Mark 16:15–18; Luke 9:1,2). Studying God’s Word, praying, praising God,<sup>32</sup> and fasting can bolster one’s dependence on and confidence in the Lord to set people free. Pray for spiritual discernment to make the proper diagnosis and then apply the right solution. Allow the Holy Spirit to help you know if you are dealing with a person who is spiritually fatigued, carnal in his or her thoughts and behavior, demonized, or possessed.

There will be occasions when one discerns that resistance in a person to the gospel is coming from “the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).<sup>33</sup> We may observe demonic controls over people through the manifestation of widespread tribalism, racism, idolatry, religious fanaticism, immorality, and certain prevailing sins. Confronting such spirits requires individual and corporate prayers, gospel proclamation, exorcisms, and ambassadors of Christ who make long-term commitments to live and witness for Christ among the people of these regions.

The metaphorical armor described by Paul (Ephesians 6:13–18) includes the “belt of truth.” Cinched around the center of one’s being must be truthfulness, honesty, and integrity. We must protect our affections with the “breastplate of righteousness” — made upright and doing what is right in the eyes of God. Proper footwear ensures that one is ready to instantly go wherever God directs and verbally declare the conditions of peace with God, others, and self. Gripping the “shield of faith,” holding securely to God’s biblical promises, allows Christians to ward off and suffocate the attempts of the devil to bring destruction and death. We need to encase our thoughts in the “helmet of salvation” — salvation that is holistic, transforming mind, emotions, body, and relationships. The weapon is a small, wieldable sword, described as the “word of God,” which drives back the oncoming powers of evil. We must spend time in advance in study, meditation, memorization, and a contextual understanding of God’s Word to use it effectively in the crisis moment. Clothed in armor and holding a shield and sword, God’s representatives enter the fray “praying in the Spirit” — not limited to praying in tongues but including being filled with and sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and dependent on Him for strength, endurance, and the ability to stand.

## CONCLUSION

As a Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered minister, it is necessary to be on guard both for oneself and for the flock. We need proper discernment to diagnose, defend, and deliver (when necessary) people who look to their pastor as their loving and protective shepherd.

Christians are engaged in the war, like it or not, but they know that the One in them is greater than the one in the world (1 John 4:4). As well, they know that the weapons of

warfare are not of the world but have divine power to demolish strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4).

We have the assurance of ultimate victory through Jesus Christ who has conquered the world, the flesh, and the devil. 📖



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## Notes

1. We must base our theology on an accurate interpretation of Scripture, although human fallenness and human cultural worldview flaw all exegesis. Theological constructs should be verifiable by experience. Apologists for Pentecostalism take this approach when it comes to explaining and defending the unique experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as distinct from salvation (according to Luke’s writings). The study of Scripture has led to the Pentecostal doctrine verified by ongoing experience. Experience did not establish the doctrine but confirms its validity and contemporary relevance. In the same way, one’s theological understanding of spiritual warfare must be consistent with all of Scripture as intended by the inspired authors and be verifiable by experiences today. For further discussion on the verification of theology, see Roger Stronstad’s *Spirit, Scripture, and Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Baguio City, Philippines: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press, 1995), 53–78.
2. Sobhi W. Malek, “Islam Encountering Gospel Power,” in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, eds. Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), 189.
3. Richard D. Dobbins, *Can a Christian be Demon Possessed?* (Akron, Ohio: Emerge, 1973), 5.
4. Edgar R. Lee, “Spiritual Warfare,” in *Signs and Wonders in Ministry Today*, eds. Benny C. Aker and Gary B. McGee (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1996), 99.
5. Charles H. Kraft, “Spiritual Warfare: A Neocharismatic Perspective,” in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1091.
6. Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)).
7. General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, “Can Born-Again Believers be Demon Possessed?” (Springfield, Missouri: General Council of the Assemblies of God, May 1972), 4. Found at [ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position\\_Papers/pp\\_downloads/pp\\_4176\\_possested.pdf](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4176_possested.pdf). Accessed 12 October 2012.
8. Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology* 10 (1982): 35–47.
9. Dobbins, *Can a Christian be Demon Possessed?*, 5.
10. Ibid.
11. General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, “Can Born-Again Believers be Demon Possessed?” 4,5; Dobbins, *Can a Christian be Demon Possessed?*, 27, 30.
12. Dobbins, *Can a Christian be Demon Possessed?*, 21.
13. General Council of the Assemblies of God Commission on Doctrinal Purity, “Thought Life.” Found at: [ag.org/top/Beliefs/topics/charctr\\_07\\_thought\\_life.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/topics/charctr_07_thought_life.cfm). Accessed 12 October 2012.
14. *Daimonizomai* and its cognates are found in Matthew 8:28,33; Mark 5:15,16; Luke 8:36.
15. Dobbins, *Can a Christian be Demon Possessed?*, 27.
16. General Council of the Assemblies of God, “Spiritual Warfare (Attacks of Satan),” Found at: [ag.org/top/Beliefs/topics/sptlssues\\_spiritual\\_warfare.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/topics/sptlssues_spiritual_warfare.cfm). Accessed 12 October 2012.

17. When Peter objected to Christ's plan of providing salvation through suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection, he was operating from his own human, self-centered, and selfish perspective. But his resistance was motivated by more than his own carnality. Craig Keener claims, "He functioned as an agent of the devil ... he spoke Satan's lines." See Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 433,34. Donald Hagner observes that Peter's response was inspired by Satan. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 480. Peter aligned himself with Satan as recorded in Matthew 4:8,9 when the devil offered Jesus the Kingdom without the Cross. Jesus' direct rebuke to Satan (4:10) parallels His command to Peter (16:23). Jesus calls Peter "Satan" (*Satana*) and uses the same reprimand found in 4:10 for His disciple, "Depart" (*hupage*). One must wonder as to the powers that were at work in Peter during this dialog.
18. Just as partaking of the Lord's Supper involves a spiritual partnering with the Spirit of God and fellow Christians, feasting in the pagan temples was a covenantal communion and sharing with demonic spirits. Christians today must avoid any forms of idolatry because idolatry is the habitation of demons. For detailed discussion see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 462-75.
19. *Ibid.*, 475.
20. Werner Foerster, "Δαίμων," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 19.
21. Lee, "Spiritual Warfare," 111.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. Literally, the demon causes (*izo* describes a causative) passivity (*omai* indicates the verb is passive where the subject receives the action).
25. Timothy M. Warner, *Spiritual Warfare: Victory over the Powers of This Dark World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1991), 80.
26. Place (*topos*, Ephesians 4:27) is another term that is restricted in its meaning by some. It is translated as place, territory, land, sanctuary, a place that one can occupy. See Helmut Köster, "Τόπος," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8, ed. Gerhard Friedrich; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 187-208. Theological presuppositions that eliminate the possibility of demons gaining a place or foothold in the life of a believer lead to restricting the meaning to an "opportunity" or "chance." Assuming Paul used "place" (*topos*) with its normally implied meaning, Christians can give space to the devil within their inner beings and in relationships making themselves vulnerable to carnal bondages such as lust and greed in their personal lives and susceptible to anger, unforgiveness, and disharmony through unresolved interpersonal conflicts (note the context of Ephesians 4:20-5:12). Andrew T. Lincoln comments, "The writer thinks in terms of a personal power of evil, which is pictured as lurking around angry people ready to exploit the situation. ... Despite what he said about believers having been seated with Christ in the heavenly realm, he deems it necessary for them to be on their guard against the devil." See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 303.
27. General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, "Can Born-Again Believers be Demon Possessed?" 4.
28. A lion's roar can be heard as far away as 5 miles and has an average duration of 36 seconds. Roaring is one way lions communicate among themselves and is used frequently to mark their territory. Normally while stalking and hunting, lions are silent. See P.E. and Jean Stander, "Characteristics of Lion Roars in Etosha National Park," *Madoqua* 15 (1986): 315-18. Peter warns the Christian to be sober and watchful, rather than overly confident and triumphalistic, in the face of a sly and powerful enemy who claims this earth as his domain.
29. See Charles H. Kraft, "Spiritual Warfare: A Neocharismatic Perspective," 1095.
30. See Charles H. Kraft, "Spiritual Power: A Missiological Issue," in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena: William Carey, 2005), 361-74.
31. The word Luke uses is "believed" (*pepisteukotōn*) which is in the perfect verb tense meaning a past action with ongoing significance. They had and continued to believe in Christ as Lord but persisted in safeguarding objects of evil magic until the power encounter occurred. The demonstrated power of God and demons made it imperative for them to make a total break from their allegiance to their former life. See Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 582,83;
32. Denny Miller comments, "When we praise God, His presence and power enter our circumstances." See Denzil R. Miller, *Power Ministry: A Handbook for Pentecostal Preachers* (Lomé, Togo: Africa Theological Training Service, 1998), 71.
33. Lee observes, "There is some evidence for the existence of powerful geopolitical angelic beings." See "Spiritual Warfare," 102; and consider Ephesians 6:12 and Daniel 10:12-21.

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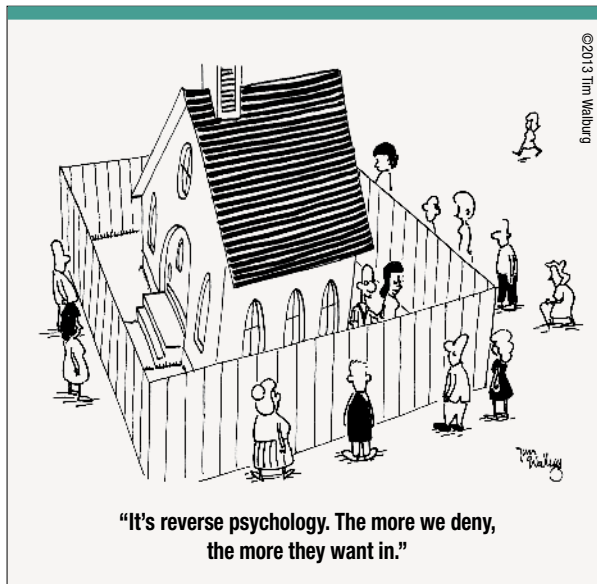
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# Worldviews

## and the Unseen World

By **Terry Hanna**

A misshaped worldview is dangerous and susceptible to demonic deception. However, a well-formed worldview, grounded on biblical truth, enables believers to recognize demonic activity and influence reactions to the unseen world.



**Living at the home** of a longtime Pentecostal church member, I saw him waving for me to come to the backyard. From there he escorted me into the house through the rear door, explaining that a *taotaomona* had moved into the tree in the front yard, and he did not want to make it upset. According to tradition, *taotaomona* are spirits of ancient Guamanian ancestors residing in Guam's jungles. This man was a faithful church member and my first instinct was to think,

How could he be this superstitious? We prayed and I left, not convinced he was less fearful.

As I reflected on this over the years, I realized his fear came from a worldview that included an animistic remnant he never confronted biblically in a way that penetrated his deep-seated worldview perceptions. At the same time, my worldview perspective, influenced by Western rationalism, drove my initial dismissive attitude relegating his concern to superstition. We both experienced an event through worldview lenses not totally aligned with the biblical worldview addressing bondage to the unseen world.

This experience underscores the danger of worldviews that are not biblically grounded. Adversely, it reveals the necessity of a well-formed biblical worldview to counter competing worldviews and how they influence reactions to the unseen world.

## Worldviews and the Unseen World

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### THE POWER OF WORLDVIEWS TO SHAPE HOW WE VIEW THE SPIRIT WORLD

Worldviews are how we make sense out of the world. We describe them as “what we look with, not what we look at.”<sup>1</sup> Worldviews are like looking through a pair of glasses that clarifies what we see and makes it understandable. Each person’s worldview is unique, although it may resemble his or her family’s view because worldview formation begins at home, as he or she absorbs parental attitudes, values, and cultural beliefs. Further development occurs through experiences, religious encounters, media influences, and relationships. The major factor in individual worldview formation, however, is the predominant way our home culture views the world. Although my friend was not an animist, the old animistic traditions that dealt with the unseen world were still present and influenced his personal view. How North Americans view the unseen world influences their personal worldview. Models of worldviews that impact our personal worldview include the following:

**1. Naturalist worldview.** This is a major Western worldview that denies the existence of the spiritual world, insisting that only the material exists. With this worldview people base naturalism on rational, scientific methods, and we cannot rationally validate the spirit world. Naturalism separates the “supernatural from natural reality, God from nature, and religion from science.”<sup>2</sup> It views the material world as a soulless machine, devoid of God, without any divine cause or purpose, and humanity is just a part of nature, equal to the animal world.<sup>3</sup> Because of its disbelief in the spirit world or afterlife, humanity becomes the arbiter of any moral judgments. North American and European secular worldviews are an outgrowth of this naturalistic conception of reality.<sup>4</sup>

**2. Animistic worldview.** This influenced my friend’s view of the unseen world. Animism usually has some type of central creator god, but the emphasis is on myriad spirit entities that populate the world and interact with humanity.<sup>5</sup> These spirits, according to folk traditions, cause good or bad fortune, afflictions, and illnesses.<sup>6</sup>

**3. Biblical worldview.** North American evangelicals and Pentecostals generally indicate that the appropriate view of life is through the lens of the Bible. In a general sense, the term *biblical worldview* describes how the Bible is God’s revelation of himself, His trinitarian nature, creation, His incarnation and redemptive plan, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Pentecostalism adds a

hermeneutical lens through which we understand the biblical worldview in a deeply personal way. In the specific sense, we want our personal worldviews to start aligning with biblical truth from the moment we are born again.

Biblical truth confronts our old worldview as God reveals himself to us, which challenges preexisting worldviews in a process Richard Niebuhr describes as a state of “permanent revolution.”<sup>8</sup> Biblical truth challenges our assumptions, and we respond by aligning our perceptions to biblical revelation, assisted by the Holy Spirit who guides “into all the truth” (John 16:13). So, when we talk about well-formed worldviews, we are talking about personal worldviews that we ground on biblical truth. This is an ongoing process as new biblical truth becomes deeply ingrained in our worldview perceptions.

**4. Hybrid worldview.** The worldview issues encountered by my friend and me were the result of areas we had not fully confronted on a worldview level. His Christian view of the world had remnants of the old way of viewing the unseen world, causing bondage to fear. I fell back on the rationalism of North American secular worldviews, and rationalized my friend’s concern to superstition. A well-formed worldview is the remedy to this confusion, while a misshaped worldview fails to recognize the need or respond with biblical certainty, leaving people in bondage.

### MISSHAPED WORLDVIEWS AND DEMONIC ACTIVITY

People with misshaped worldviews are easily deceived concerning the nature of demonic activity and tend to seek help from wrong sources because of Satan’s deceptive nature. Satan is a liar, the father of lies, and lying is his “native language” (John 8:44); demons are “deceiving spirits” (1 Timothy 4:1). David Naugle writes of how dominant cultural worldviews can facilitate demonic deception: “Since Satan and the demons can manipulate men and women only to the extent that they are deceived, what better way to achieve this than by the promulgation of fallacious conceptions of reality through the conduit of the spirit of the age.”<sup>9</sup>

A graphic example of how misshaped worldviews interpret events in ways that contribute to demonic deception came from a husband whose wife believed the spirit of a dead man from the local cemetery mentally tormented her for 6 years. The doctor could find nothing physically wrong as she lost weight and remained childless, and there was no counselor to see what other issues might be at play. The husband and his family were nominal Christians, but his worldview influenced



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a response based on traditional knowledge and not biblical truth. In response, he opened the grave of the man he thought was the offending spirit and attacked the bones with a knife while screaming threats to destroy the skeleton if it did not stop bothering his wife. This husband's worldview influenced his deception about the nature of his wife's problem, as well as the response from nonbiblical sources.

worldviews regarding the demonic world? The church must take "seriously a trinitarian understanding of God, who is continually involved in His creation by His providence, presence, and power. ... It must take Satan and demons seriously, for they are fallen angels seeking to keep people from turning to God in repentance, faith and obedience to Him."<sup>13</sup> The church must be aware that misshaped worldviews make people susceptible to



People with misshaped worldviews are easily deceived concerning the nature of demonic activity and tend to seek help from wrong sources because of Satan's deceptive nature.

This story is from an island country in the Pacific basin. Some might say that happened there, but it could never happen in the United States. While the animistic-based response might not occur here, seeking help from nonbiblical sources could. A 2006 report underscores that openness to nonbiblical sources is a growing North American problem. The study examined 4,340 teenagers between 13 and 19 years of age, and found that 19 percent strongly agreed that people can communicate with the dead; 10 percent said they personally communicated with a dead person; 73 percent believe in a supernatural world; 35 percent used Ouija boards; 79 percent looked at their horoscope; 30 percent consulted a palm reader.<sup>10</sup> Part of this may be a product of the inquisitiveness of youth, but it also shows the kind of nonbiblical information inundating young minds. The media presents alternate ways of dealing with problems through exposure to television, movies, video games, and books that present ghosts, demons, witches, werewolves, and vampires, as sympathetic characters helping humanity.

Another factor contributing to worldviews susceptible to demonic deception is a growing theological illiteracy in the United States. A 2010 Barna report found that biblical illiteracy is a growing trend, and that "the theological free-for-all that is encroaching in Protestant churches nationwide suggests the coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency."<sup>11</sup> This is in line with another survey covering 20 years (1991 to 2011) that discovered a downward shift of belief that the "Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches," from 46 to 38 percent.<sup>12</sup>

Secular and other worldviews will fill the gap as the United States struggles to grasp the unseen world. How do we expect our children and teenagers to handle these types of things if there is no theological teaching or basis for them to form

demonic deception and bondage, but well-formed worldviews recognize the true source of help.

#### **WELL-FORMED WORLDVIEW ALIGNS US WITH BIBLICAL TRUTH**

Well-formed worldviews respond to the spirit world through the biblically grounded responses that reveal the nature of the kingdom of God. George Ladd describes the reality and power associated with God's kingdom by stating the Kingdom "has already broken the power of death, defeated Satan, and overthrown the rule of sin."<sup>14</sup>

Luke demonstrates this in a story about a woman with a chronic affliction causing deformity in her spine (Luke 13:10–17). Although Jesus referred to the cause as a "spirit of infirmity" (verse 11, ASV<sup>15</sup>), He does not deal with it as a traditional demonic encounter, nor is it a typical healing story. Also, the synagogue setting links this story with Jesus' great proclamation of the Kingdom (Luke 4:18,19), and it is a prelude to His teaching about the Kingdom in Luke 13:18–21.<sup>16</sup> Through this story, we see contrasts between a biblical worldview and others. When people influenced by a secular worldview look at the woman, they concentrate on the disease and want to know the kind of disease, its origin, and possible treatments. The animistic-influenced worldview wants to know what spirit caused the problem. Did she offend the spirit of an ancestor and did she try to appease it? However, we find another worldview in the story. Jesus' kingdom response tells us His focus was on the woman in bondage and simply said, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity" (Luke 13:12). His response indicates that the nature and source of the infirmity were not His central focus. His focus was the person in bondage and His desire to bring the Kingdom's "freedom for the prisoners

## Worldviews and the Unseen World

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and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18).

A conversation I had with a Pacific Island Pentecostal illustrates this biblical view. He underwent a dramatic conversion and worldview transformation a few years earlier when he saw his sister delivered from what he said was years of demonic bondage. She would thrash on the floor, talk incoherently and in another voice, and try to harm herself. From the family's worldview perspective, an evil spirit possessed her, whereas someone with a secular-influenced worldview might consider her in some type of seizure. However, their Pentecostal uncle arrived during one of her episodes. When he prayed for her, he commanded demons — not spirits of the dead or a natural mental malady — to leave and never return. The brother said the change was immediate and permanent. Because of this, the entire family turned to Jesus. The brother said to me, "I believe in God and the gospel and it changed my point of view. It changed my life, and I do not have to be fearful of spiritual forces. I believe that they have absolutely no authority or power to interfere in my life." In this case, both the animistic and secular influenced worldviews were irrelevant to this

woman's despair. The uncle, with a transformed worldview, recognized her bondage through a discerning spirit, and she gained Kingdom release.

### TRANSFORMING OUR WORLDVIEW

Recently I was involved in a research project designed to identify factors contributing to transforming worldviews in believers, especially in the area of the unseen world. Five factors emerged with global significance. (1) A strong spiritual component involving conversion and Spirit baptism, along with a disciplined devotional life; (2) Learning God's Word; (3) Godly mentors helped by teaching, encouraging, and exhibiting appropriate behavior in front of them; (4) Relationships were sources of encouragement and reinforcement for what they learned and experienced; (5) Practical ministry experience enhanced what they learned.

It was clear that churches were an indispensable part of the holistic process. Churches help develop biblically grounded worldviews when they:

- Are spiritually sensitive to the Holy Spirit's presence and practice Pentecostal worship and distinctives, which

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are conducive to change.

- Teach biblical theology on life's issues, including a theology of the unseen world and the kingdom of God. This was Paul's instruction to Timothy, "Command and teach these things" (1 Timothy 4:11) and Titus, "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1, NIV 1984).
- Mentor people using godly and pious believers who have a commitment to developing a biblical worldview. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos to their home and "explained to him the way of God more adequately" (Acts 18:26), helping him transform his view of Pentecost.
- Enable relationship building. Relationships encourage people (Hebrews 10:24,25). Early believers built transformational relationships as they shared worship, meals, prayer, and even their possessions (Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-37).
- Provide practical ministry opportunities that reinforce and consolidate people's changing worldviews. Jesus involved the Twelve (Matthew 10:1-16; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-9) and the Seventy-two (Luke 10:1-10) in ministry.

## CONCLUSION

Misshaped worldviews are susceptible to demonic deception and cause people to seek help from the wrong sources. However, well-formed worldviews, grounded on biblical truth, enable believers to recognize demonic activity and to perceive others in bondage to bring Kingdom release. The church is vital to holistic transformation involving spiritual activity, teaching, mentoring, relationship building, and practical ministry.

In the introduction, had my friend and I viewed what was happening through a more biblically centered worldview lens, he would have realized he did not have anything to fear from the unseen world and would have stood firm because of his worldview perceptions of the kingdom of God. I would have better understood his bondage of fear of the unseen world and been more proactive in bringing Kingdom release. This drives home the point of Paul's transformational admonition: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2, NIV 1984). 📖



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## Notes

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# Discerning Best Practices in Spiritual Warfare

**I**n the Pentecostal movement,  
many spiritual-warfare  
practices have biblical roots.

Some, however, draw vocabulary from the Bible but have a tenuous biblical foundation. How do we sort out good spiritual-warfare practices from bad ones? To answer that question, George Paul Wood, Enrichment journal executive editor, interviewed members of the Assemblies of God World Missions executive committee: Greg Mundis, executive director, and regional directors Omar Beiler (Eurasia), Mike McClaflin (Africa), Dick Nicholson (Latin America/Caribbean), Paul Tremontozzi (Europe), and Russ Turney (Asia Pacific).



BEILER



McCLAFLIN



MUNDIS



NICHOLSON



TREMENTOZZI



TURNNEY

**I**n the Preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis writes: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves [meaning the devils] are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." Western culture tends to be materialistic. Majority-World culture tends to be magical. How does culture shape a person's interpretation of what the Bible says about spiritual warfare?

**MUNDIS:** Secularism and our materialistic worldview have permeated our culture. This worldview tends to skew us in regard to the spirit world. We have to overcome this prejudice when we go into other contexts and other cultures.

**McCLAFLIN:** The cynicism of the West does not exist in most cases in Africa. Therefore Africans can be easily misled. However, once they know the truth, they can be easily led and disciplined. The distance between any African and the supernatural, the mystical, or the spiritual is very short. The umbilical cord of who they are is deeply rooted in the mystical.

The gospel is so penetrating because the receptive heart sets the stage to believe in something spiritual.

**TURNEY:** In Asia, most of the cultures have an animistic foundation. Asia is probably close to Africa, in the sense that people are in tune with what they see as the spirit world. I was in Vietnam at General Council when an evangelist asked 150 pastors, "How many of you have cast out devils?" He was expecting a few hands. Every hand went up. In that culture, casting out demons is normal. They deal with it and move on.

**NICHOLSON:** I saw a video clip of a movie called *The Enemy God*. The producers interviewed people from the Yanomamö tribe, an indigenous tribe in the Amazon rainforest of Venezuela. Bautista Cajicuwa, the shaman — the priest of the tribe — believed there was a conflict. In a trance the spirits told him there is a God, but He hates you.

"The missionaries," he said, "are telling us there is a God, but He loves you. So whom do we believe?"

That gets to the heart of it. In most of the world, especially in spiritistic and animistic cultures, there is no question about whether there are spirits. The driving question is, "What do I have to do to appease the spirits?" The fear factor is so powerful. People tend to lapse into a default mode of fear of the spirits, even if they have seen the light on other issues.

**First John 3:8 describes the ministry of Jesus this way: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." When Jesus' ministry is applied to the life of the individual in destroying the devil's work,**

**does it take place instantaneously? Is it a process, or both?**

**TREMENTOZZI:** It is both instantaneous and a process. I remember what Dick Dobbins said years ago: "If we give it a pill and it goes away, it's not the devil."

In the European mind, the process is important because it is an intellectual process. They contend that if we cannot reason this thing through, then maybe something else is going on.

**NICHOLSON:** The Bible uses two words to describe demon activity: *cast out* and *healing*. "He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38). There is a casting out. There is a word that brings light. It is healthy for people to believe that in this moment God has done something great for them.

But it is counterproductive if nothing else happens. The Bible teaches that demons that are cast out will attempt to come back (Matthew 12:43-45). Healing is a process by which we experience a work of grace to close the gaps and no longer give place to the devil. Learning to engage in that healing process is important for any believer.

**McCLAFLIN:** Fear is a huge controlling factor. But Jesus indicates that, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

I ask Africans after conversion, "How do you feel?"

They say, "I'm free."

We specifically ask this for emphasis.

We do not go to Africa to get people saved; we go there to get them to heaven. We draw a distinction between the initial act of redemption and the discipling process. They will be instantly saved — they will feel instant relief — and then the devil goes to work. The process of building disciples and the cultivation process is arduous in that cultural context.

**BEILER:** Pat and I lived in Moscow for a few years and traveled throughout Russia, where Shamanism and Buddhism are common. I was invited to speak at Bethany Church, the largest church in Russia. I met with the pastor prior to the service and asked for instructions. He said that after the sermon and altar call, I should sit down, and the deacons would take over.

I was curious and pressed him a little more. He said, "Because of the shamanistic background and lifestyle of appeasing spirits, the people tend to bring that into their Christian walk, and now they are just trying to appease God."

The deacons were trained to first cast demons out of people who responded to the altar call. The deacons did an exorcism deliverance prayer to take advantage of the moment and to break the demonic powers. Then they led each person to faith. This was an instantaneous act to break the bondage.

This church is strong in discipling. When people come to the big tent and have the devil cast out of them and receive

## Discerning Best Practices in Spiritual Warfare

(continued from page 105)

Jesus, the church immediately connects them with a home group where a strong discipleship process takes place.

**The English Bible translates the Greek word *daimonizomai* as a “demon possessed person.” Some believe that word might be more accurately translated as “demonized.” In that case, possession is an extreme form of demonization. If possession is the most extreme form, what other tools does the devil use to influence Christians?**

**McCLAFLIN:** Fear is a strategic tool the devil uses in Africa. Africans are always looking for a safe harbor. Safety for them is anything that makes sure they have insurance against the things they do not understand. Fear is always at the surface.

When Maasai come to the Lord, we do not have to say anything about dress or things they do in their heathenistic culture. They immediately go to their homes and remove the things that relate to the Maasai culture. The criticism they experience because of fear from the rest of the village over what might happen to them is huge.

Fear drives so much of what we do. It causes some good Christians to want a little bit of insurance. They will keep a remembrance of the past “just in case.” This disappears with knowledge of the Word, and as believers become maturing disciples. But in the early stages of their spiritual journey it is very critical.

**TURNERY:** The things of the flesh are not the influence of the Spirit. They’re the influence of the world. Scripture tells us that Satan is the controller of the world, even of the nations. The demonic is influential in our lives because we live in a fallen world. That doesn’t mean, however, we’re demon possessed. It does mean that there is an influence we have to overcome, and it happens on every level of life, whether we live in the U.S., Europe, or Africa. The realities are the same.

**MUNDIS:** In the Old Testament, idols were in homes. As Paul states, an inanimate object is not necessarily god-like or devil-like. How I view that object is what matters. What is the object exercising on me?

In Serbia, especially among the gypsies, a shamanistic understanding of the spiritual world prevails. During a revival in Serbia, a group had received the Lord. The first thing they did was go back to their village, take out their magic books, their idols, and publicly burn them. It was

a sign of freedom for them. By doing this they exorcised things that had control over them — whether it was real or perceived.

Scripture is clear — “Perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18). That love begins in the cataclysmic process of the initial salvation experience. As believers learn to grow in love with Jesus, that fear is driven out.

**John Wimber popularized the term *power encounter*, which refers to the diagnosis and cure of demonization. How do you distinguish when a person’s problem is caused by a demon as opposed to a medical or psychological problem?**

**TREMENTOZZI:** I’ve actually seen this in my background in counseling. In one particular session, the person was determined she was demon possessed and was going to show me she was. She literally got down on the ground and started barking and spitting. She then sat back in the chair as if to say, “See!”

I looked at her and said, “God just told me you’re not demon possessed.”

She said, “I’m not?”

I said, “I just had a revelation from God, and you’re not demon possessed at all.”

She said, “Oh, thank goodness.”

I think sometimes we are too quick to jump to conclusions because the behavior is so radical.

In many respects, it is easier to cast out demons than it is to deal with other issues of demonization. For the demon-possessed person, you can pray for deliverance and the demon is gone. But when it is the flesh imbedded in the habits of one’s life, it is like a muscle that has not been worked for a long time — it is much more difficult to handle and get rid of.

**TURNERY:** Any time our national church has an atmosphere of great worship and the presence of God is overwhelming and powerful that is when demonic influence in someone’s life will usually manifest. The closer the church gets to Jesus, the more we can make the distinction. Demons are uncomfortable in God’s presence.

**MUNDIS:** Pentecostals must deliberately and intentionally move closer to understanding the spirit world. God has given us through the Holy Spirit the gift of discernment. We need to push back the secular materialistic understanding we default to and move closer to Christ. When we do, the Holy Spirit helps us understand what is going on. We need this discernment.

**If we agree that a Christian can be demonized — meaning having devilish influences working on him or her — can a Christian actually be demon possessed?**

**McCLAFLIN:** There are varying degrees of demonic control, but I do not believe a Christian can be demon possessed. The

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Spirit of God resides in our soul; He owns us. But we still have our mind to deal with. What the devil can do to confuse the mind, to influence us in certain circumstances, indeed is a demonizing process.

**TREMENTOZZI:** I don't believe Christians can be demon possessed. The Bible says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). You can argue that the terminology "filled" means the same as "possessed." You can be dominated — controlled — by the Holy Spirit. As believers, we are to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

A demon-possessed person is a person who is completely controlled by a demon(s). A demonized person is a person who is influenced by a demon. That is an important distinction. I don't see how a person can be completely controlled by a demon if the Spirit of God is in him or her.

**MUNDIS:** The blood of Jesus Christ is so powerful and all encompassing that light and darkness cannot dwell in the same vessel. The blood of Jesus washes away every sin and restores us. How can demonic powers cross the bloodline?

**NICHOLSON:** God created our human spirit as a place for the Holy Spirit to dwell. The devil's intent is to occupy the human spirit and try to replace God.

Demon possession takes place when the devil gains full control of a person's life. A person cannot easily become demon possessed. I do not believe demons can cross the bloodline and occupy or possess the human spirit once a person is truly a child of God.

**C. Peter Wagner popularized the concepts of territorial spirits, spiritual mapping, and strategic-level spiritual warfare. Are territorial spirits real? Is it a Christian's job to engage in spiritual mapping and strategic level spiritual warfare?**

**TREMENTOZZI:** This is an example of what the devil does. He gives you truth, and then he pushes it so far that it becomes absurd. It becomes a negative testimony on the kingdom of God. Scripture is clear that Satan is the "ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). What does it mean? I don't know that we can understand it completely. There are spiritual agents and activity going on of which we know little.

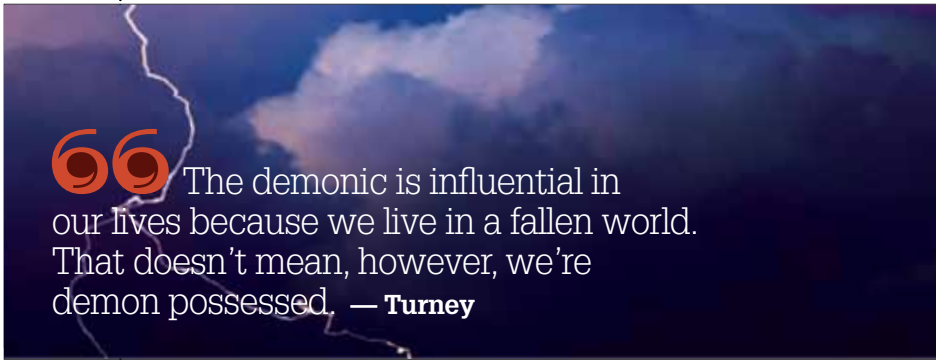
In Daniel 10, God heard the prayer from the moment Daniel prayed. But it took 21 days for his prayer to be answered because a battle was going on between the messenger and the prince of Persia. People want to understand this, so they begin to reason and think about theories and spiritual mapping. I think it's beyond our human capacity to fully understand. Nor

do I think it's productive and a good use of our time.

Scripture is clear that there are spiritual strongholds. But why do we try to bring it into the physical realm when there is a metaphysical, spiritual world that we will never completely understand this side of heaven? I do not think we have the capacity to map.

**McCLAFIN:** Battles are taking place in the unseen world, but God and His archangels are taking care of them. As believers our primary responsibility is to make sure our lives are pure before God.

Some fights are ours; some are not. Activity in the spiritual world is beyond our comprehension, so we should let the Lord fight those battles. Let us not assume responsibility for battles that are not ours to fight. We fight the battles that confront us daily by praying that the Lord gives us the strength to do so.



66 The demonic is influential in our lives because we live in a fallen world. That doesn't mean, however, we're demon possessed. — Turney

**TURNEY:** The largest Pentecostal, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches in the world are in South Korea. South Korea is a nation of Christians who pray. Prayer has led to tremendous breakthroughs in individual lives. Miraculous things happen when they pray.

But from my perspective, it is not so much that their prayers have been against the principalities of their nation. Rather, their prayers have brought tremendous breakthroughs in individual lives.

The praying Christians of Korea are not praying vague prayers. They are specific in praying about people and families and individuals in specific situations. When there is a tremendous amount of prayer focused the right way, God does amazing things.

**Comment on the terms *binding and loosing*. Do Christians have the power to bind and loose devils?**

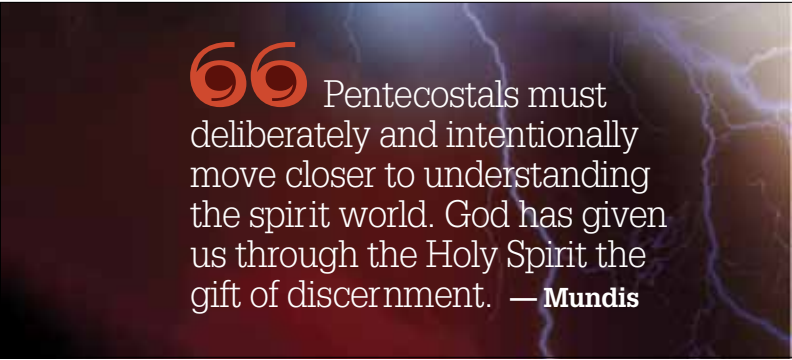
**MUNDIS:** I was teaching in a revival at a church in southern Austria. A group from another country was heavy into spiritual warfare, binding and loosing, spiritual mapping, and territorial spirits. I would wake up every morning to hear them binding and loosing the spirits on this city. After 5 days, I said

## Discerning Best Practices in Spiritual Warfare

(continued from page 107)

to them, "You have bound these spirits for 5 days now. Who in the world is loosing them?"

Sometimes we have more spiritual pride than we should have concerning binding and loosing and what we think we can do. We have a tendency to market an experience and try to replicate it. That is where we run into danger.



**66** Pentecostals must deliberately and intentionally move closer to understanding the spirit world. God has given us through the Holy Spirit the gift of discernment. — Mundis

**TREMENTOZZI:** The context in Matthew 16 and 18 has nothing to do with the binding and loosing of demonic spirits. A lot of teaching about binding and loosing is completely out of context. When used together in Scripture, the terms *bind* and *loose* refer to authority those in leadership have to forbid (bind) and permit (loose) certain practices or behaviors.

Dr. W.E. Nunnally of Evangel University has written an excellent article on this subject. You can read it on EJ's website ([www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200901/200901\\_112\\_theo\\_Enrichment.cfm](http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200901/200901_112_theo_Enrichment.cfm)).

**BEILER:** I have been in services and situations where I have seen people trying to bind and loose whatever. What concerns me is when everybody models it and makes it the norm in every meeting. Suddenly, we have this new formula for binding and loosing.

It concerns me when you go a place and they are binding and loosing everything under the sun. There are appropriate times and prophetic moments when God comes on the scene and does the miraculous. But I do not buy into the idea that Christians can bind and loose devils.

### What are your thoughts on generational curses?

**McCLAFLIN:** The word *curse* creates a dilemma here. We are adding something that I do not think the Bible sustains.

**TURNERY:** I see generational influence, habits, and patterns that have to be relearned, and God has to set people free in their mind.

**TREMENTOZZI:** Sometimes it is not hard to understand how some people embrace the idea of generational curses when

they see certain sins taking root in families and continuing from generation to generation. Regardless, I do not embrace the idea of generational curses.

**MUNDIS:** Many know my family's history. Divorce, divorce, divorce. Some people might want to call that a curse. I don't, but it's certainly a pattern. It's a lifestyle. It's something that's seen and modeled, but it is not a generational curse.

**In Mark 9, the disciples failed in their attempt to exorcise a demonized person. Jesus replied: "This kind can come out only by prayer" (verse 29). What is the rest of the world doing that the West is not, seeing that spiritual vibrancy is being experienced in other regions of the world but not here?**

**McCLAFLIN:** What is happening in Tanzania is beyond comprehension. Tanzania has become a nation of prayer. The people pray *all the time*. Everything we see happening in this nation can be attributed to the fact they have decided that prayer is the way to go. It has worked for them.

**TURNERY:** Great revivals come when people pray. The Korean church is a praying church. The Koreans helped bring the Filipinos to another level of prayer. God does unbelievable things when people pray. Prayer changes us. It changes our perspective of God's Word. We get a whole different viewpoint when we focus on prayer. We are not always praying that God will change the situation. He changes us. In the process, the situation changes.

**MUNDIS:** God created this relationship with man, not as monologues, but dialogues. Synergy develops when we dialogue. God enriches us as we dialogue with Him. We have compared the supernatural and the mystical, but that overflow then causes us to become the answers to prayers.

The prayer that beats on my heart, of course, is, "Pray therefore, to the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth workers." When we see candidates, we understand that people outside of America are praying and seeking God for somebody to come and share the gospel.

**TREMENTOZZI:** Prayer speaks of the relationship God wants to have with us. If prayer is not something that makes a difference in the world, it is an exercise in futility. Prayer is an exercise of partnership with God.

We do not understand spiritual warfare. A lot of spiritual agents are out there. God has given us one clue. We are going to do it together. We need to stand in the gap. If we do not, then some things God wants to get done are going to have to wait until someone else stands in the gap. I believe prayer makes a huge difference, and I think spiritual warfare is the essence of everything we do. ■

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## ENGLISH LESSONS FROM THE PEW



### LET US AGREE

**We know that the subject and verb must agree** in tense. Or do we? There are some tricky sentences.

- Everyone wants more cake.
- Nobody cares about calories.

Easy, right? *Each, either, neither, one, everyone, everybody, no one, nobody, anyone, someone, and somebody* are usually singular and need a singular verb. But when a phrase comes between a subject and verb, watch out.

- Every one of the students deserves an A.

“Students” is not the subject but is part of the prepositional phrase. Those pesky prepositions again.

*Some, all, and most* may be singular or plural depending if they refer to a quantity (singular) or number (plural).

- Some of the money was lost.
- Some of the books were lost.

*Several, few, both, and many* are plural. *None* and *any* can be singular or plural depending on the speaker’s intent.

— KARA BETH HUDDLESTON,  
Atlanta, Georgia

## STUFF THAT MATTERS

### TOXIC CHARITY

**R**ecently our church sponsored a daylong event that focused on reaching out to the needy in our community, giving to those less fortunate. We had shelves lined with food and school supplies, nutritionists to give advice, and dentists and doctors ready to give free exams. We also offered haircuts, massages, and counseling. Everything was free. I served as an advocate, and my role was to shepherd a guest through the process.

I enjoyed the day, and I know we helped 200 people. But I overheard some of the guests commenting on where they could get meals, clothes, and food from specific churches and agencies. I wondered if, for many, our church had just become another stop on their handout circuit. Then I discovered the book *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* by Robert D. Lupton. This opened my eyes even further.

I have known Bob for many years, and I have seen his work as the director of FCS Urban Ministries in Atlanta, Georgia. He’s the real deal.

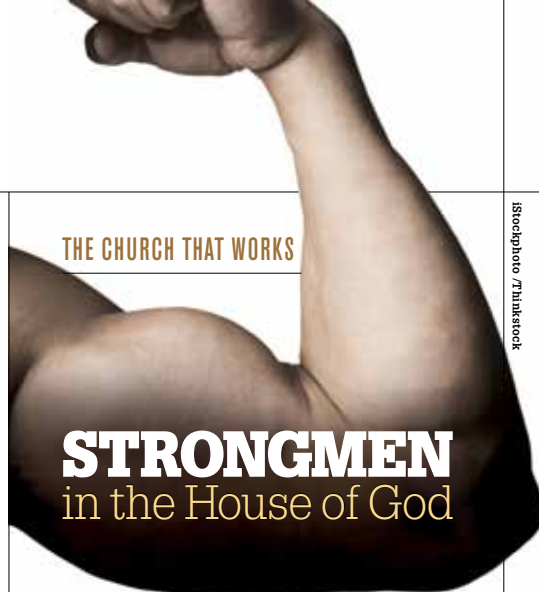
Lupton makes the case that give-away programs can hurt the poor more than they help because a crisis response to a chronic need creates dependency and doing for others what they can do for themselves destroys a work ethic. In a recent newsletter, Bob asks, “Isn’t community service to be about helping the needy, not just making church members feel good?”

Lupton’s book also proposes answers with sound and practical solutions for churches and others who truly want to make a lasting impact in their communities. *Toxic Charity* is a good read for pastors and lay leaders. It would make an excellent group study.

— DAVE VEERMAN, Naperville, Illinois



## THE CHURCH THAT WORKS



### STRONGMEN in the House of God

**J**esus said it best, “No one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house” (Mark 3:27). He was talking about His power over Satan, but the principle is true in any household.

Pastors are the strongmen and women in the house of God. When they are strong in the Lord, strong in truth and righteousness, and strong in their anointing, the devil has a hard time disrupting the church. The only way he can spoil it is to bind pastors. Members should make certain he does not use them to do it.

The ministry of “pastors and teachers” is fourth on Paul’s list (Ephesians 4:11–14) of offices Christ has placed in His church to equip and nurture individual Christians. “Pastor,” means “shepherd,” the one who leads, feeds, oversees, and protects the flock. Pastors carry a staff, not just to prod the sheep, but also to fend off predators. Likewise, they are the strongmen for the local church’s health and stability. They are to maintain order and discipline.

Pastors also walk among the sheep for comfort. They stay with them through storms. Their character and faithfulness soothe and reassure. They do not stand in their own authority but in the authority Jesus gives.

Pastors bless their flock with growth as they study the Word and pass it along. They are the strongmen in the house, leading, directing, feeding, and protecting so each member can be and do all God intends.

— MEL SURFACE, Crowley, Texas,  
and RICK DUBOSE, Hurst, Texas.  
Adapted from *The Church That Works*  
by Rick DuBose and Mel Surface.

UPSIDE-DOWN PERSPECTIVE

## Letting God Choose

**D.L. Moody** once said, “Spread out your petitions before God and then say, ‘Thy will, not mine, be done.’ The sweetest lesson I have learned in God’s school is to *let the Lord choose for me.*”

It is amazing how we are tempted to allow our religious traditions to overrule the direction of the Holy Spirit of God in our church services. It nearly happened to me.

I was invited to be the guest singer at a Sunday morning service. Whether it was the teaching of traditional church protocol or my own narrow belief system, I began to look for a slow, worshipful song. I had been taught that we sing slow songs in the morning and upbeat songs in the evening services.

For this particular service, I sensed the Lord directing me to sing a fast song. Though I struggled with the choice, when Sunday morning came, I sang the song the Lord directed. I noticed the organ player weeping and after the service asked her if she was all right.

“Yes,” she explained. “My teenage daughter ran away from home several months ago.

We prayed for God to bring her home. This morning our daughter called and said she was on her way back.”

She continued, “This morning you sang an unusual song, but it was God’s way of telling us that He had heard and answered our prayers.”

The name of the song: *Set Another Place at the Table for the Rest of the Family’s Coming Home.*

— **PATTI ANN THOMPSON**, Kansas City, Missouri



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“Everyone who thinks we should use the budget surplus to repair the parking lot, raise your hand.”

TECHNOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

## ARE YOU A GOOD STEWARD OF YOUR MEMBERSHIP DATA?



**CHURCHES HAVE NOT EXCELLED AT PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS.**

**T**he business world recognizes data as a valuable asset.

Though the debate continues as to whether ministry should incorporate business practices (and how), data is clearly a strong contender. Data is a “digital reflection” of the extended congregation. Data understood is information, and we can use quality information for many Kingdom purposes.

Quality is key. There is only one thing worse than a lack of data, and that is having data you believe to be accurate, but is not. Traditionally, churches have not excelled at processes and systems. In fact, some of the most progressive churches in America will admit that their databases are a mess.

To ensure data integrity, a strategy for how to capture and keep accurate data is vital. It is imperative that there be a single, authoritative data source and that all ministries agree and work together with consistent terms and accountability. With reliable processes, data can be truly lifesaving.

For example, a large church used its data to reach out to all the households in the foothills of the Rockies to offer aid to anyone affected by the wildfires sweeping through the suburbs of Colorado Springs. That is proactive congregational care impacting the community.

Another church partner told us that because of its new data collection processes, a suicide note slipped to the pastor after service on Sunday led to a hasty database search. There they found the needed information to reach out to a fairly new visitor and stop him from ending his life.

Storms devastate thousands of homes and families annually; even in places not always expecting them, such as Hurricane Sandy. Churches with accurate household data can pinpoint relief efforts and provide that “personal touch” for people who have engaged with that congregation.

How well are you stewarding your data?

— **JEFF HOOK**, ACTIVE Network  
(www.activenetwork.com), San Diego, Calif.

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## JUST BEFORE THE OFFERING

# BECOMING MORE LIKE GOD

**A**s 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 my own life?"

Well, giving makes you more like God. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son." God so loved the world that He gave. He didn't give His seconds — He gave His best.

When you give your best to God, you become more like God because God is a giver.

So, this morning, I encourage you to enjoy the benefit of giving today — becoming more like God.

Let us pray.

— **GLENN REYNOLDS**,  
Hampton, Virginia

## CARING FOR YOUR OWN SHEEP

**E**very pastor is concerned about the size of his or her church. So while I am looking for God to grow Gages Lake beyond our average of 80 a week, my friend with the church of 3,000 is sweating the next level in his church's growth.

This is good. Churches overly satisfied with their level of activity tend to stagnate and eventually die. When there is no movement upward, outward, or forward, there is no life. And yet, an outsized preoccupation with growth can be a distraction that turns into a temptation that hurts the life of God's people.

I constantly battle this temptation. It is too easy to focus most of my thoughts on getting people inside the doors than on the people who are already committed to my church and are in need of pastoral care. It is tempting to give the best of myself to potential church members and leave the scraps for my congregation.

This is why a seemingly inconsequential phrase in 1 Peter 5:2 can keep us centered. Peter says "shepherd the flock of God *that is among you*, exercising oversight" (ESV<sup>1</sup>, emphasis added). I sense in Peter's words a mild rebuke. Your first shepherding responsibility is to those among you.

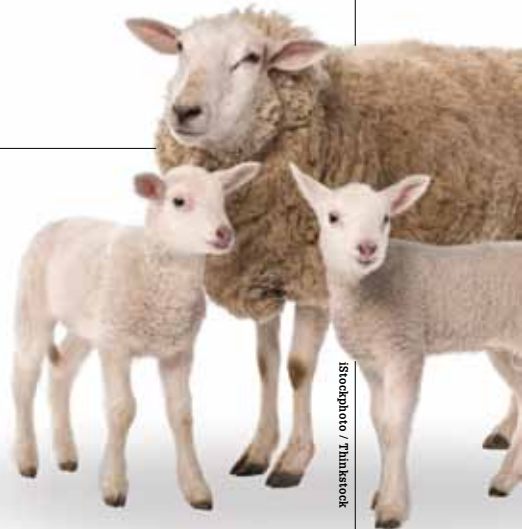
In other words, dream and plan about getting more people in the doors. But your first responsibility is to those you already have among you. This is a simple, but far-reaching principle. It helps set the pastor's priority: sheep before potential sheep.

I do not always get this right. But Peter's words call me home, reminding me that my first vocational title, before anything else, is shepherd.

— **DANIEL DARLING**, is author of *Teen People of the Bible*; *Celebrity Profiles of Real Faith and Tragic Failure*. Visit <http://www.danieldarling.com>

### Note

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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## IN THE RED ZONE

### CONQUERING EVANGELISM FEARS

**T**imid football players do not make much headway. Neither do timid believers. For many Christians, the fear of a fumbled attempt to share their faith may even surpass the fear of death. Exposing the nature of this anxiety, and offering assistance to eliminate it, can help Christian coaches (pastors) lead their teams forward on the evangelism field.

I (Kent) learned this unforgettable lesson years ago while on UCLA's football team. My friend, Carl, died in a tragic car accident. I felt awful that I had never told him about Jesus. He might be spending eternity in hell.

While wondering why I had not said anything, I realized: I did not want to offend him. I did not want him to reject me. I had never learned to explain what I believe.

These disturbing thoughts showed me the self-centered nature of my anxiety. I had not really cared about the best for my friend. I should have been more concerned with the long-term benefits of eternal life than with what he might think of me.

Carl's death motivated me to help believers overcome their fears by focusing on a Christ-centered love. This is why I designed my book, *In the Red Zone: A Game Plan to Share Your Faith* for small groups. Interaction with peers helps even the most timid believers grow in their love for people as they practice the skills necessary to build confidence. Then, when they meet someone in the red zone, they will know how to help him cross the line of faith.

— **KENT TUCKER** and **PATTI TOWNLEY-COVERT**, cowriters,  
*In the Red Zone: A Game Plan for How to Share Your Faith*.  
See [howto shareyourfaith.com/](http://howto shareyourfaith.com/).

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## LEADERSHIP LESSON FROM OLYMPIANS

## ADVERSITY CAN BE TURNED INTO ADVANTAGE

**Writer Napoleon Hill said:** "Every adversity carries within it the seed of equal or greater benefit." That truth is clearly seen in the life of Hungarian pistol champion Karoly Takacs. In 1938, Takacs was serving in the Hungarian Army and was the top pistol shooter in the world. He planned to participate in the 1940 Olympics where people expected him to win the gold medal. Those hopes were dashed one day when, during a routine military training exercise a grenade exploded in Takacs' right hand. This blew his shooting arm off. In the hospital, Takacs experienced deep depression over the loss of his right hand and his Olympic dreams.

However, Takacs took on his greatest challenge deciding he would relearn how to shoot with his left hand. For months Takacs practiced by himself. Not even his closest companions knew what he was doing because he did not want any negative voices discouraging him. In spring 1939, he showed up at

the Hungarian National Pistol Shooting Championship. Other competitors greeted Takacs, offering condolences as well as commending him for coming to watch them shoot. "I didn't come to watch," he explained. "I came to compete."

Participants were shocked and then stunned when he won the competition. Though the Olympics were cancelled in 1940 and 1944 because of war, Takacs continued to train. He won gold medals at both the London (1948) and Helsinki (1952) Olympics. Ironically, pistol competitions do not receive much attention, but Takacs' triumph over adversity generated great interest and enduring inspiration.

— VICTOR M. PARACHIN, Tulsa, Oklahoma

## UP WORDS

## The Stubbornness of Hope

**S**omeone said that people can live 40 days without food, 3 days without water, 8 minutes without air, but only 1 second without hope. No matter what we are facing, we all need hope.

How does one stay positive in a negative world? Even the little stresses of life — broken appliances, flat tires, and unruly children — can come at us from a dozen different directions. How can we offer hope to others when we sometimes struggle to have it ourselves?

I am thankful that hope is stubborn. Many times I have listened to the whispers of failure. I have allowed the voice of disappointment to become louder than a scream. But with the predictability of a *Hallmark* movie, hope stands quietly waiting, popping to the surface, penetrating my protests with the undeniable assurance that *it is going to be okay*.

Abraham learned this truth about hope. He arrived at that place requiring him to "hope against hope." God had given him big promises, but they were accompanied by big delays. These delays stretched him, pushed him to the edge, and disheartened him. But in spite of all the waffling doubts he kept hoping. "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed" (Romans 4:18).

The stubborn nature of hope arose every time he looked at the night stars. When he walked in the endless desert sand he was reminded that God said, "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth" (Genesis 13:16). Hope bound him to the Word of God and yielded an immovable faith. It will do the same for us. Against all hope we will hope in God and His Word.

## God Thoughts

**O**ne million one, one million two. As I counted, I surveyed the area around me — a beautiful sandy beach that stretched for miles and miles. I finally threw my hands in the air and shouted, "I give up." There were not hours enough in the day or days enough in my remaining time on earth to count all the grains of sand on this one beach.

Did I really count 1 million grains of sand? Not a chance. However, a Scripture came to mind as I surveyed the sandy beach my husband and I were vacationing on: "How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand" (Psalm 139:17,18, NLT).

The Psalmist tells us that God's thoughts toward us outnumber the grains of sand on the seashore. Someone once determined that there were approximately 9,497,952 grains of sand in a bucket. That is a lot of thoughts in just one bucket. God, who created you and numbered all your days, is thinking about you all the time. And they are not thoughts of condemnation and judgment, but thoughts of unconditional love and delight.

The next time you are standing on a beach, reflect on the fact there is more sand than will fit into one bucket. Then try to imagine the innumerable grains of sand on the bottom of the ocean, and on other beaches throughout the world. Then remember: God's thoughts about you outnumber them all.

— PATTI ANN THOMPSON, Kansas City, Missouri

## Note

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"Your thoughts  
...outnumber  
the grains of  
sand"

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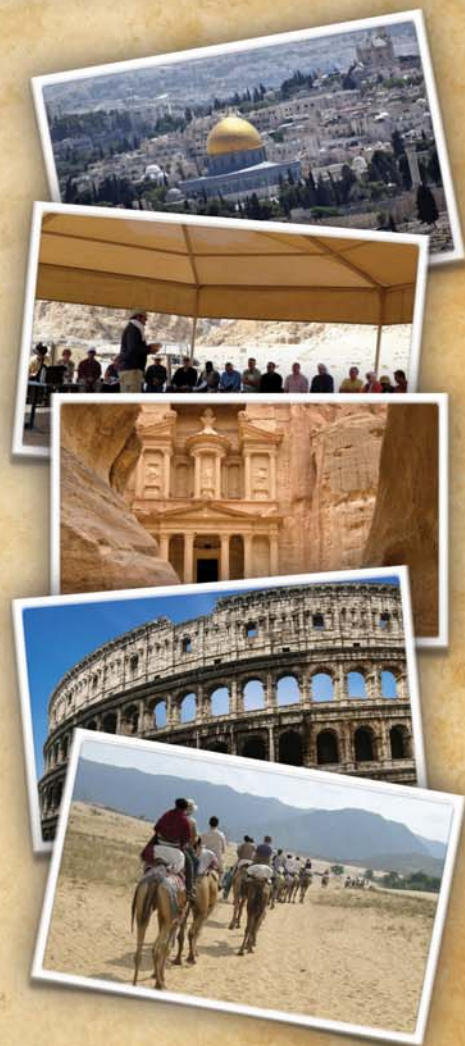
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## Americans' Religious Involvement Continues to Dwindle

**A**lthough the United States remains one of the most religious countries in the world, there are no signs that Americans are becoming more spiritual, according to Mark Chaves, professor of sociology, religion, and divinity at Duke University.

At a recent lecture at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Chaves noted that more than four out of five Americans believe in life after death, nearly two-thirds are convinced that God exists, and seven out of 10 pray regularly — all statistics that have changed little in the past 40 years.

However, the number of Protestants, primarily due to losses in liberal denominations, has dropped from two-thirds of the population to half in just the past two decades. Simultaneously, those individuals claiming no religious affiliation have doubled to 20 percent of Americans.

While 40 percent of people claim they attend church every week, in reality the figure does not exceed 25 percent, according to Chaves, author of *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*.

"Fewer and fewer people are growing up in religiously active households," Chaves said. "This is the harbinger of the future."

Chaves remarked that Americans have become more accepting and appreciative of religions other than their own. Seventy percent of Americans — including even a majority of evangelicals — now believe that a religion besides theirs can lead to eternal life, he said.

"Even in the midst of high levels of religious participation, there is a declining confidence in the special status of your own religion," Chaves said.

Deeply ethnically diverse

congregations remain rare, but there is a gradual decrease in the number of all-white churches (totaling 14 percent in the latest survey).

The average age of the typical Protestant churchgoer is 5 years older than the general population, Chaves said.

Chaves draws his data from the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, as well as the National Congregations Study, the latter of which he directs. Chaves expects the decline in spiritual practice to continue, albeit slowly, as the number of unaffiliated climbs.

"There is no indicator that traditional religious belief or practice is increasing," Chaves said. "Any claims of religious revival are not supported by any evidence of attendance."

40%

PERCENTAGE  
OF AMERICANS  
WHO CLAIM  
WEEKLY  
CHURCH  
ATTENDANCE

25%

PERCENTAGE  
WHO  
ACTUALLY  
ATTEND

## MOST WOMEN CONTENT WITH CHURCH OPPORTUNITIES

**M**ost women are satisfied with the ministry opportunities at the church they attend, but a sizable minority are frustrated by the lack of leadership outlets available to them and say they feel undervalued by church leaders, according to a recent Barna Group study.

On an encouraging note, 73 percent of women in the survey report they are making the most of their gifts and potential, while 72 percent believe they are engaged in meaningful ministry. And 59 percent say they have substantial influence in their congregation.

However, nearly one in three women admits to being resigned to low expectations when it comes to church. One in five women feels underutilized, and one in six says opportunities at church are limited because of gender. One in eight says she feels underappreciated by the church, and one in nine believes she is taken for granted.

While the ratio of disgruntled female worshippers may seem insignificant, the fact there are 70 million adult women attending U.S. churches means there are millions of women not fully satisfied with their ministry options. As has been the case for decades, women comprise a larger share of churchgoers, volunteers, and Sunday School teachers than men.

Rather than describe themselves as a Christian leader, more females self-identify as a servant. Women say they do embody this role by praying for others (46 percent), encouraging others (24 percent), helping the needy (24 percent), sharing the gospel (23 percent), volunteering (21 percent), donating money (17 percent), and giving time to a nonprofit (9 percent).

Despite all that, most Christian women say they experience guilt for not doing enough. Three-fourths report that they can and should be doing more to serve God, according to Barna.

In the survey, 24 percent of women say their church does not allow a female to be on the pastoral staff, and 11 percent say their congregation forbids women serving as church officers. Three percent say their church prohibits women from teaching men, and 2 percent say a woman is not allowed to teach anyone.



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## MOST OKAY WITH PULPIT RESTORATION AFTER ADULTERY

NAE adopted a code of ethics to provide professional guidelines for evangelical pastors. Among the principles outlined is one urging ministers to “avoid sinful sexual behavior and inappropriate involvement.”

Although the vast majority of evangelical leaders polled on the question favor restoration, many advised that there be limitations on whether the offender return to the same post or even community. Nearly all recommended a minimum length of time ranging from 1 to 3 years to refrain from ministry, plus a ban on returning to the church where the pastor served when the adultery occurred. Other safeguards suggested include submission and accountability to a council of overseers and restorative counseling.

“With the strong agreement that restoration is possible for pastors guilty of adultery comes strong agreement that the restoration process is an extremely difficult one,” Anderson says.

In the Assemblies of God, if conditions are met as established by the Credentials Committee, a minister may be restored after a minimum of 2 years of rehabilitation. During the first year, there is a total cessation of all vocational ministry; and, during the second year, the district superintendent must approve ministry activities. A rehabilitation program can, however, be extended for longer than 2 years or a 1-year cessation of ministry. Each case stands alone.

The backing for reinstatement is not universal. Samantha Nelson, cofounder of The Hope of Survivors in Omaha, Nebraska, says her organization helps around 100 people a year who have been abused by someone in spiritual authority.

“They have forfeited their right to care for the flock of God because they have betrayed a sacred trust,” Nelson says.

However, David Zailer, founder of the sex-addiction recovery program Operation Integrity in Monarch Beach, California, says pastors can learn from their mistakes.

“Pastors have a calling that is not necessarily rescinded when sexual problems arise,” Zailer says.

**V**irtually all denominational leaders surveyed by the National Association of Evangelicals agree that a pastor guilty of adultery eventually can return to a pastoral position — given the proper restoration process. Just 5 percent believe infidelity should disqualify someone from ever again holding a pastoral position.

“Evangelical leaders are adamant that the grace of God extends even to ministry leaders who commit adultery,” says NAE President Leith Anderson. In 2012, the

## ATTENDING A MEGACHURCH IS A HEADY EXPERIENCE

**T**he number of megachurches across the Protestant spectrum has been growing the past 40 years and shows no signs of abating. James K. Wellman Jr., University of Washington associate professor of American religion, thinks he knows why: the experience is addictive.

Wellman, assisted by graduate students Katie E. Corcoran and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk, authored the paper, “God is Like a Drug: Explaining Interaction Ritual Chains in American Megachurches.” The typical megachurch Sunday morning service features sensory pageantry, charismatic leadership, and an upbeat vision of Christianity that provides congregants with a powerful emotional religious encounter, according to the researchers, who analyzed 470 interviews and 16,000 surveys from a dozen representative congregations.

A megachurch is defined as a congregation with 2,000 or more attending weekly services. There are 1,250 Protestant megachurches in the nation. More than half of American churchgoers attend the largest 10 percent of congregations. Typically, they are theologically conservative. Music is “upbeat, loud, contemporary, and reminiscent of a rock concert,” creating a “multisensory mélange of sensory input.”

“Megachurches are successful interaction ritual venues and powerful purveyors of emotional religious experience,” the study states. “Megachurch worship services are intentionally orchestrated, complete with elements from pop-cultural sources, which are both entertaining and sensually stimulating.” Participants come hungry for emotional energy and leave celebrating, feeling as though they belong, the report declares.

Because so many people are simultaneously sensing a heightened spirituality in such services, it contagiously produces a shared emotional mood, according to the researchers. Cameras that pan the sanctuary — capturing congregants worshipping with eyes closed, crying, and singing — and project those images on large screens help reinforce the feeling of an “oxytocin cocktail.”

Lead pastors at these churches characteristically tend to be intellectually, emotionally, and/or spiritually attractive, the report indicates. They form a dynamic bond with churchgoers by being transparent, informal, telling an occasional joke, and intermittently referring to their own imperfections. “They are masters at evoking emotions that influence and effect change in the hearer,” the study suggests.

“Interviewees overwhelmingly praised their senior pastor for his authentic and godly character, biblical preaching, and loving dedication,” the investigators wrote.

Duke University sociologist Mark Chaves says among Protestant denominations the Assemblies of God has the largest ratio of megachurch attendees: one in four adherents.

## Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament

KENNETH BERDING and JONATHAN LUNDE, eds.  
(Zondervan, 256 pp., paperback)



**Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament** presents Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Darrell L. Bock, and Peter Enns' perspectives on how the authors of the New Testament interacted with and used the Old Testament in their writings. Although all three contributors agree that Jesus is the central aim and focus of Scripture, they disagree on how the process of interpreting the Old Testament for

the New Testament communities took place. In addition to presenting their own perspectives, each contributor applies his method to specific biblical texts and also receives a thorough critique from the other two contributors.

In the introduction, Jonathan Lunde states that the central aim of this book is to understand the relationship between the original meaning of the Old Testament texts and the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New Testament. To more fully explain his perspective, each contributor also addresses the functions of 1) *sensus plenior*, 2) typology, 3) literary and socio-historical contexts, 4) Jewish exegetical methods, and 5) current replication of exegetical and hermeneutical approaches used in the New Testament in his approach to understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

Kaiser takes a literalist, promise-fulfillment approach to argue that the Old Testament and New Testament have one unified meaning. He believes that the Old Testament authors understood both the present and future meanings of their prophecies and that the New Testament authors did not go beyond the authorial intent of the Old Testament authors.

Bock asserts that each Old Testament text has one specific meaning that may apply to multiple New Testament contexts in a variety of different ways. The singular meaning of the Old Testament text is still at work and developing in such a way that, once its interpretation is made clear, the New Testament may bring a fresh and deeper understanding of the Old Testament.

Enns argues that the historical context of each passage, whether Old Testament or New Testament, must be taken into consideration because God revealed himself in the concrete, everyday life of the ancient Semitic and Hellenistic peoples. By allowing each text to speak within its original context, the current hermeneut gains a deeper understanding of the text, which also provides boundary markers for the interpretation of Scripture. The New Testament then provides a fuller, more eschatological meaning of the Old Testament texts because Jesus Christ has come and inaugurated the final stages of God's ancient purposes.

Berding concludes the book with an analysis chart of these viewpoints that summarizes, compares, and contrasts all three contributors' perspectives of *sensus plenior*, typology, context, exegetical methods, and replication. He also presents one benefit of each view,

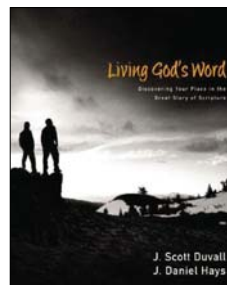
one potential problem with each view, and one probing question for each contributor.

This insightful book serves as a great tool for understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments from an evangelical perspective. Readers will find themselves agreeing with some assessments and disagreeing with others, which will inevitably help them develop their own perspective on the usage of Old Testament texts in the New Testament.

— Reviewed by **Alaine Thomson Buchanan**,  
Regent University Ph.D. candidate, Ewa Beach, Hawaii.

## Living God's Word: Discovering Our Place in the Great Story of Scripture

J. SCOTT DUVALL AND J. DANIEL HAYS  
(Zondervan, 317 pp., hardcover)



In **Living God's Word**, Duvall and Hays provide an educational survey of the Old and New Testaments.

The authors' easy-to-read style guides the reader to discover how his personal story fits into God's story in Scripture. The authors structure their book like a textbook, but they also write with a pastoral heart. For example, Duval and Hays write, "It's not a

stretch to say that the story you choose to live by becomes the most important choice you will ever make. And sadly, when you give no thought to your guiding story, then you are simply being swept along by the most powerful currents of your culture. We wrote *Living God's Word* to help you understand and make a wise choice about your guiding story" (20).

Each chapter 1) begins with a story or illustration to introduce the topic of the chapter, 2) gives reading assignments, 3) provides an overview of the content of the given part of the Bible, 4) shows how this part of the Bible relates to the whole Bible, 5) presents ideas about how to live out the message of the particular section of Scripture, 6) summarizes the chapter, and 7) gives personal assignments, a memory verse, and additional recommended reading from scholarly sources.

*Living God's Word* is limited in scope due to the brevity of academic analysis of each book in the Bible, and the lack of serious engagement with critical issues of biblical scholarship. However, college or seminary students, and those who desire to know more about the Bible can still benefit from the authors' systematic and canonical approach to understanding the Bible.

The authors note that many Old and New Testament surveys leave the student with an ambiguous picture of how the various books in the Bible relate to one another, as well as the overall message of Scripture and how it is relevant to their lives. Thus Duvall and Hays organize their book with a coherent and concise presentation of Scripture that highlights the following themes: "Creation and Crisis" (chapter 1), "Covenant" (chapter 2), "Calling Out" (chapter 3), "Commandments" (chapter 4), "Conquest and Canaanization" (chapter

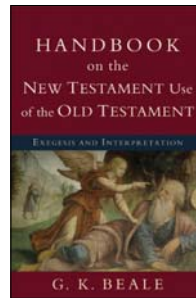
5), "Creation of the Kingdom" (chapter 6), "Communion and Common Sense" (chapter 7), "Crumbling of the Kingdom" (chapter 8), "Captivity and Coming Home" (chapter 9), "Christ" (chapters 11–15), "Church" (chapters 16–19), and "Consummation" (chapter 20).

Overall, *Living God's Word* is an excellent resource for both intellectual and spiritual growth. The authors help readers identify and trace concepts such as the mission of God, social justice, charismatic spirituality, and how faithful believers navigate pain and suffering throughout Scripture. The authors generally take a theologically neutral stance on many topics, which guides the reader to discover his or her own theological positions. This makes it an excellent introduction to studying God's Word for young and old believers to work through together.

— Reviewed by William Molenaar, M.Div., special projects coordinator, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, Missouri.

## Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament

G.K. BEALE (Baker Academic, 173 pp., softcover)

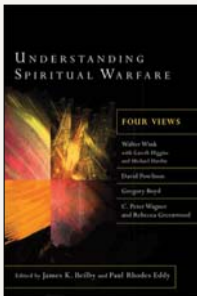


**Many years ago, as a young preacher,**

I picked up a copy of Merrill Unger's *Commentary on the Old Testament*. I was surprised that this longtime Dallas Theological Seminary professor apparently saw no theological or ethical value in the text as it stood, but only in its typological value — often becoming allegorical — in relation to the New Testament. Since I was preaching from Old Testament texts that had

## UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL WARFARE: FOUR VIEWS

JAMES K. BEILBY and PAUL RHODES EDDY, eds. (Baker Academic, 240 pp., paperback)



**In Ephesians 6:12, Paul writes,** "[O]ur struggle is ... against ... the powers of this dark world." The nature of those "powers" and the "struggle" against them is the topic of *Understanding Spiritual Warfare*, a debate about four models of spiritual warfare.

Walter Wink presents "The World Systems Model" (Chapter 1). Writing from within the liberal Protestant tradition, the demythologization of the New Testament has shaped Wink's understanding of spiritual warfare. He identifies Satan with "the real interiority of a society that idolatrously pursues its own enhancement as the highest good" (56). The outward form of Satan is "the Domination System," "the alienated and alienating reality

that seduces humanity into idolatry: the worship of political power as divine" (63). The antidote to Satan and the Domination System is "intercession," the "spiritual defiance of what is, in the name of what God has promised" (61).

David Powlison presents "The Classical Model" (Chapter 2). Writing from within the Reformed evangelical tradition, Powlison uses Ephesians 6:12–20 as a lens through which to view spiritual warfare. He defines spiritual warfare as "the moral conflict of the Christian life" (92). "To win this war is to know God and consciously serve Him" (98). Spiritual warfare "looks like the Christian life" (98). He argues that "repentance," not exorcism, is the key to ministry to persons "involved in the occult" (101–103) or with "an addictive bondage to sin" (103–104).

Gregory Boyd presents "The Ground-Level Deliverance Model" (Chapter 3). Writing from within the perspective of Open Theism, he defines spiritual warfare as: "God battles cosmic powers and humans to establish His will 'on earth as it is in heaven.'" Boyd argues that, "while it's certain God will eventually triumph over His cosmic and earthly foes, much of what comes to pass does not reflect God's benevolent will but rather reflects the will of agents working at cross-purposes with God" (129).

Finally, C. Peter Wagner and Rebecca Greenwood present "The Strategic-Level Deliverance Model" (Chapter 4). Writing from within the Third-Wave/Charismatic Christian tradition, they define spiritual warfare as "an invisible battle in the spiritual realm involving a power confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness" (178). It occurs on three levels: (1) ground level: "breaking demonic influences in an individual"; (2) occult level: "resistance to a more ordered level of demonic authority"; (3) strategic level: "power confrontations with high-ranking principalities and powers ... assigned to geographical territories and social networks" (179). Warfare at the strategic level involves: "spiritual mapping," "identificational repentance," "prophetic

decrees," "prophetic acts," and "power encounters."

Here are a few conclusory opinions:

First, we cannot reduce spiritual warfare to the Christian's struggle with only one of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We need deliverance from world-systems, fleshly temptations, and the depredations of the demonic realm.

Second, while Wink's attention to the systematic character of the world's evil is a salutary rebuke to individualistic understandings of it, his theology is heterodox. He uses the terminology of the Bible and Christian tradition, but he invests it with suspect meanings.

Third, while Powlison's essay helps us understand how best to fight the flesh, and while he argues against reducing the world-flesh-devil triumvirate to any one of the three members, I feel he has done precisely that, reducing all spiritual warfare to resisting the flesh.

I am sympathetic to Boyd's "cosmic-conflict model," though I have serious reservations about Open Theism. Boyd has underemphasized the sins of the flesh. Nevertheless, his essay offers both a compelling picture of spiritual conflict and a persuasive brief against the naturalistic worldview.

Finally, the essay by Wagner and Greenwood is an embarrassment. Its exegesis is thin, and its conclusions unrooted in the precedent of church history. It uncritically cites other advocates of strategic-level spiritual warfare. And it is largely anecdotally driven, without recognizing how problematic the anecdotes are.

*Understanding Spiritual Warfare* is an excellent presentation of the debate among Christians from across the Protestant spectrum of the nature and practice of spiritual warfare. I recommend it to theologians, students, pastors, church leaders, and church members as an introduction to key thinkers and issues in the debate.

— Reviewed by George Paul Wood, director of Ministerial Resourcing for the Assemblies of God and executive editor of *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri.

## Books

good application without resorting to typology, I rejected his approach.

Unfortunately, it became clear that what I rejected in Unger's approach (and still do) New Testament writers at times practiced this approach. How was I to reconcile what they did under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with my own hermeneutic?

This is the challenge that Beale, Westminster Theological Seminary professor and well-respected author, addresses. In this handbook, he discusses the different hermeneutical approaches to the New Testament writers' hermeneutics. He presents the different theories along with his own proposed solution.

Essentially, he posits that typology is much more than allegory and that there is not really a contradiction between typology and contextual exegesis (i.e., grammatical-historical). He concludes: "Typology can be called contextual exegesis within the framework of the canon since it primarily involves the interpretation and elucidation of the meaning of the earlier parts of Scripture by later parts" (25). His definition also utilizes a type of "fuller sense" of the text without that theory's baggage. He shows how even the Old Testament authors alluded to earlier material to flesh out further meaning.

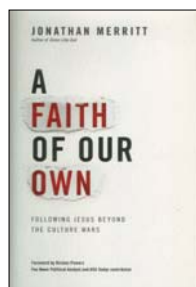
Though I find Beale's approach sound, it is highly technical and a difficult read. If one wishes to sharpen his or her hermeneutical skills and learn how to identify Old Testament allusions and the method by which they are treated, this book will be helpful. More profitable for those who just want to understand Old Testament quotations and allusions in the New Testament would be the volume that Beale and D.A. Carson edited in 2007 (*Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Baker). This work has a good introduction that would be enough for most people as different scholars present each

Old Testament quotation and allusion in the New Testament with commentary.

— Reviewed by Bob Caldwell, Ph.D., theologian-in-residence, Network211 and adjunct professor, Global University, Springfield, Missouri.

### A Faith of Our Own: Following Jesus Beyond the Culture Wars

JONATHAN MERRITT (*FaithWords*, 224 pp., hardcover)

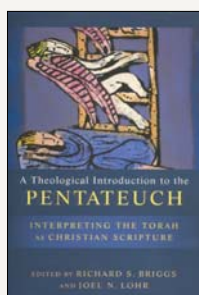


In *A Faith of Our Own*, Christian journalist Jonathan Merritt makes two basic arguments. First, the participation of American evangelicals in the so-called "culture wars" of the last generation has been a disastrous error that undermined the church's moral authority in society, impeded its ability to reach a new generation of Americans with the gospel, and driven many younger Christians to leave the church. Second, if Christians wish to recover the ground lost over the last few decades, they must abandon the power politics characteristic of the past. They must favor a "broadening agenda" that emphasizes engagement with a wide range of socially important issues such as antipoverty efforts and environmental stewardship, rather than focusing exclusively on traditional culture war issues (i.e., abortion, gay marriage, etc.).

There is some validity to the first argument, even if it is not exactly

### A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture

RICHARD S. BRIGGS and JOEL N. LOHR, eds. (*Baker*, 185 pp., paperback)



This is a helpful introduction on the theology of the first five books of the Old Testament. The book concisely summarizes the major scholarly interpretive approaches to the Pentateuch, overviews the contents of each book, presents major theological themes, and illustrates good theological interpretation in relation to Christians today.

The writers' approach is *thoroughly* exegetical and well acquainted with critical scholarship. Their approach is also *thoroughly* respectful of the text as Scripture with a theological message for Christians. I found this both helpful and frustrating. The authors' approach forced me to grapple again with the big issue of how our canon of Scripture is both ancient

human literature and the Word of God. However, at times their British approach is too accepting of some of the critical theories of sources for the Pentateuch and thereby undermining the divine authority of the theological teachings of the text. These writers identify relevant theological exhortations for Christians but only in general terms and with weakened authority.

While the chapter on Genesis by Briggs posed questionable assumptions, he did bring out good theological thoughts from the final form of the text. Like the other writers in this book, Briggs presents most of the major themes of Genesis.

Jo Bailey Wells briefly expounds important themes like holiness in Exodus but could more strongly affirm Israel's overall purpose in God's salvation plan.

My favorite chapter was Joel Lohr's on Leviticus. He does a good job of summarizing the major

conceptual contributions of Mary Douglas to the interpretation of the issues of this book, particularly the rules of clean and unclean. Lohr's emphasis on forgiveness was refreshing.

I felt Nathan McDonald's summary of the theological themes in Numbers inadequately dealt with the major aspects of the theological message. The purpose of journeying as God's holy missionary people to the Promised Land and learning to trust and obey God was lacking.

Finally, Rob Barrett analyzes Deuteronomy and captures most of the important themes. I strongly agree that the laws express theological truths. Barrett makes Deuteronomy very relevant to Christians today.

Overall, I believe this book makes a helpful contribution to evangelicals who want a concise summary of the theological themes and message of the Pentateuch while considering the critical views of scholars on the sources and makeup of these books.

— Reviewed by Roger D. Cotton, professor of Old Testament, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.

original and other authors, including some whom Merritt cites, have more cogently expressed it. There is strong statistical evidence to suggest that the evangelical church has grown older in recent years, and that the church has been less effective at making converts among young people and at retaining young people born and raised in the church. It is not entirely clear, however, whether this is due mostly to evangelicalism's connection to the culture wars, or to a broader cultural drift toward secularism. Many denominations not often connected to a culture war agenda have suffered equal or greater losses among young people as have evangelicals.

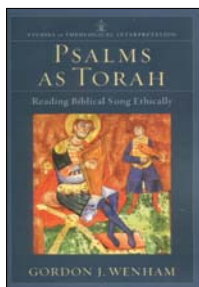
Merritt's second point also has much to recommend, though once again some caveats are in order. American evangelicals have sometimes focused too exclusively on "hot-button" cultural issues that tend to galvanize them to the exclusion of other valid social concerns. It does not follow, however, that all issues are equally important, or that evangelicals (or any other constituency) should not emphasize issues they identify as particularly crucial. Merritt seems to be saying that the priorities of older evangelicals have been wrong, but he does not adequately explain how he would prioritize the issues or why his priorities are better.

Pastors and ministers will find value in this book for its cogent reflections on the changing nature of American Christianity, and particularly the wealth of polling data concerning the evolving attitudes and opinions of younger evangelicals. Much of the same information is readily available from other sources, including online sources, but Merritt does yeoman work in trying to aggregate this information and make sense of it for his readers.

— Reviewed by Matthew J. Hernando, Ph.D., adjunct professor at Ozark Technical Community College, Springfield, Missouri.

### **Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically (Studies in Theological Interpretation)**

GORDON WENHAM (*Baker*, 233 pp., paperback)



**The contemporary church generally reads the Psalms as an anthology** of examples of how to praise and petition God — and perhaps even how to complain when things go wrong, since the collection contains so many laments. Gordon Wenham accepts these reasons, then insists that we should consider the ethical demands that this implies.

The author notes that from the beginning the faithful community chanted or sang these psalms, and that means they memorized them. This exercise engaged not only priest and scribe, but also the ordinary worshipper. This indicates that reciting the Psalms was never about scribal learning; it was about totally absorbing the God-given teaching (Hebrew *Torah*) that defined their God-given culture under their God-given king.

The chapters that form the heart of the book set out how richly the Psalter reflected the ethical demands found in the Scriptures — from Creation and Mosaic law through the historical narratives, prophetic

visions, and wisdom writings. This approach serves up a rich stew of biblical-theological insight that would feed a pastor's soul on Tuesday and nourish his or her congregation on Sunday.

Wenham insists that the praise, petition, and lament imply not only confessional claims (*indicatives*) but also ethical claims (*imperatives*). Praising God for His love and mercy testifies that we know about the ethical duty to show mercy. Complaining about injustice and crying out for divine vindication testifies that we know we should be walking in justice. Praising God for His powerful reign over heaven and earth implies that we do so on the bended knee of a loyal subject. Recounting the history of God's faithfulness despite Israel's faithlessness implies our determination to do better in Christ.

Wenham closes the book with a chapter showing that this is how the New Testament uses the Psalms, from Jesus' teaching in the Gospels through the Epistles until the martyrs' laments and heavenly choruses in Revelation.

Any pastor who reads *Psalms as Torah* will find it like water in the desert. Some will consider rearranging their schedule to make way for some preaching and teaching the Book of Psalms because Wenham brought it newly alive for them.

— Reviewed by Dale A. Brueggemann, director of Distance Research Tyndale House STEP Project, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

### **Renovating Your Marriage Room by Room**

JOHNNY C. PARKER, JR. (*Lift Every Voice*, 192 pp., paperback)



**Renovating Your Marriage Room by Room**, by Dr. Johnny C. Parker, Jr., is a great "catch-all" book on marriage. It's an easy read, and covers the big marriage topics such as communication, forgiveness, cultivating fun, sex, real love, boundaries, etc. chapter by chapter (room by room). Though the chapter topics are broad, and an entire book has been written on each one, the few pages that are

devoted to each theme seem sufficient to get someone focused in a positive direction.

An example is the chapter on sex: "The Master Bedroom: Sex-traordinary Love." This chapter begins with a brief paragraph on our society's obsession with sex, followed by common cultural myths on sex verses God's truths, and then advice on what husbands and wives can do to love one another (sexually) in ways that are typically most meaningful to that gender. The advice given is more in the category of "simple truths" than it is "ground-breaking" material, but is solid none-the-less.

The book is an easy read, and is full of brief stories and illustrations, as well as practical advice, backed by Scripture.

As a marriage and family therapist, who is married to an Assemblies of God pastor, I am always looking for good counseling books to refer to people who want something that is biblically sound and culturally relevant.

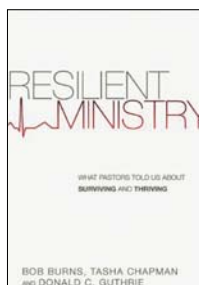
## Books

I would recommend this book to either a pastor looking for some good material on multiple themes in marriage (to use as a resource for sermon preparation or counseling with couples), or to a couple wanting a relational tune-up.

— Reviewed by Trisha Cunningham, marriage and family therapist, Restoration Counseling Services, La Quinta, California.

### **Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving**

BOB BURNS, TASHA CHAPMAN and DONALD C. GUTHRIE  
(InterVarsity, 312 pp., paperback)



**What does it take** for pastors to not only survive but to thrive in fruitful ministry over the long haul? With the alarmingly high rate of people leaving the pastorate, the church has a great stake in the answer. Unlike other vocations, ministry work has no formal arrangement for ongoing learning and development and no requirements for continuing education. So how do pastors pursue learning and growth? Where

do pastoral couples receive mentoring and pastoral care? How do pastors stay current in a rapidly changing world?

The authors base their book on 7 years of research that consists of gathering pastors and their spouses into peer cohorts that met repeatedly in multiday Pastors Summits retreats. *Resilient Ministry* presents the summary and analysis of their heartfelt discussions about the challenges of vocational ministry.

*Resilient Ministry* describes in detail the five themes emerging from these Pastors Summits and presents a transformational-process guide for the individual and/or cohort study. The themes are:

**Spiritual Formation:** The ongoing process of maturing as Christians both personally and interpersonally.

**Self-Care:** Taking care of oneself requires conceding that we are finite human beings with limits.

**Emotional and Cultural Intelligence:** Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage one's own emotions proactively and to respond appropriately to the emotions of others. Cultural intelligence involves an awareness of regional, ethnic, and generational differences and implications of these differences personally and interpersonally.

**Marriage and Family:** This theme focuses on maintaining spiritual and relational health with one's spouse and children.

**Leadership and Management:** Leadership is the *poetry* of gathering others together to seek adaptive and constructive change, while management is the *plumbing* that provides order and consistency to organization.

The authors intend for their book to help pastors understand these five themes and implement them as they walk with others. The suggested implementation process is: First, it is imperative to talk these issues through with your spouse. Second, share them with a close ministry friend who lives nearby and develop a regular meeting

time. Third, consider developing a peer group with other pastors or ministry leaders.

Any pastor and spouse will greatly benefit from a study of this material. It will confirm God's call and presence in their life and ministry, strengthen their ministry skills, and help clarify the roadmap of their ministry journey. *Resilient Ministry* can also be a tremendous book for a pastor/spouse cohort for neighboring pastors and an excellent guide for those couples to mentor other ministry leaders.

— Reviewed by Gary R. Allen, D.Min., former national director of Ministerial Enrichment and executive editor of the *Enrichment* journal, Nixa, Missouri.

### **The Teaming Church: Ministry in the Age of Collaboration**

ROBERT CROSBY (Abingdon Press, 180 pp., paperback)



**All ministry teams need to read *The Teaming Church*.** As soon as I finished reading it, I ordered a copy for each of my team members so we can process this book together.

This is an important book. First, as the subtitle suggests, more pastors are embracing collaboration as they realize that the effectiveness of traditional, top-down leadership is waning. Second, team building is absolutely vital as spiritual leaders seek to build healthy, effective churches.

The author builds the core of his book around the ideas that for teams to be truly effective they need a deeply challenging goal, a creatively empowering leader, and a willingness to collaborate and honor the Bible. Effective leadership skills and the leading of the Holy Spirit are not mutually exclusive; they are both necessary in building strong teams.

Crosby does an outstanding job of developing a foundational theology of relationship and team building. Based on that foundation, he provides practical directions to help leaders build healthy teams within their organizations. The book draws on the best of thought and practice in both secular and Christian organizations.

Interviews with pastors help keep the concepts and principles of the book rooted in the real world of team building. Throughout the book, Crosby weaves a fictional narrative of a conversation between two pastors who find themselves in very different phases of their ministries. The ongoing conversation helps refocus the reader on the truths the author presents in the text. Group discussion questions at the end of each chapter facilitate discussion as teams read the book together.

Crosby writes from personal experience; from building teams as a youth leader, lead pastor, university administrator, and as a mentor to the next generation of leaders.

Read this book. You will find it to be a great training resource and discussion starter for you and your team.

— Reviewed by Tom Jacobs, superintendent, Iowa Ministry Network, Urbandale, Iowa.

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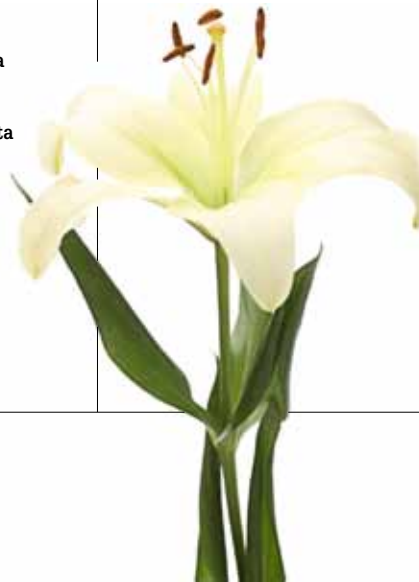
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## SINGLE ADULT MINISTRIES

### SINGLE ADULT MINISTRIES RELEASE FOUR NEW VIDEOS

**Single Adult Ministries has released four, new 22-minute discussion format videos** featuring the national team — single adult ministry leaders from different areas of the United States.

Sessions include:

- Video 1** — Ministry to All Types of People / Teaching Topics / Meeting Diverse Needs
- Video 2** — Misconceptions of Single Adults & Single Adult Ministry / The Meet/Meat Market Mentality
- Video 3** — Recruiting, Training & Motivating Workers & Leaders
- Video 4** — Beginning a Single Adult Ministry / Attracting & Retaining Men

You can use these videos:

- for training workers/leaders.
- to discuss relevant issues of ministry to single adults.
- to discover answers to ministry problems.

View or download these videos at [singles.ag.org/leadership/mediadownloads/video/](http://singles.ag.org/leadership/mediadownloads/video/).

### FAITH CASE: EXTRAORDINARY A•C•T•S



**Continuing on the success of the original *Faith Case: Investigating the Truth* released 3 years ago, and three others since — *Fruit of the Spirit*, *The Beatitudes*, and *Armor of God* — Assemblies of God Children's Ministries has**

released the new *Faith Case: Extraordinary A•C•T•S* resource through *My Healthy Church*.

*Faith Case*, a DVD-driven children's church curriculum, uses Bible stories, object lessons, games, verses, and other activities to engage children ages 5–12 (grades K–6).

According to Scott Berkey, national director for Children's Ministry Agency, "Churches love *Faith Case*. Everyone I have talked with can't wait until the next one comes out!" In this installment of *Faith Case*, kids will be inspired to do extraordinary acts like Jesus promised in John 14:12.

*Faith Case* shows kids what it takes to be extraordinary for God in 10 easy-to-apply lessons from the Book of Acts: "Become Extraordinary," "Unexpected Answers," "Unshakable Faith," "Welcoming Others," "Get Up and Go," "Prayer Works," "Choosing Worship," "One Way," "Overcoming Fear," and "Unending Action."

For more information, visit [faithcase.com](http://faithcase.com). To order, visit [myhealthychurch.com](http://myhealthychurch.com) or call 1-855-642-2011.

## AG TRUST HELPS TRAIN YOUNG LEADERS



**Training young leaders for future generations** is one of the major initiatives of the Assemblies of God Trust, established in 2008. By the end of 2012, AGTrust had awarded \$1.39 million in scholarships

and grants to 527 students attending one of the 18 AG colleges and universities. AGTrust partners with the Alliance for AG Higher Education in selecting scholarship recipients and disbursing funds.

"I am so grateful for the 6,290 individuals, churches, districts, and businesses that are members of the AGTrust family today," says Dr. George O. Wood, AG general superintendent and AGTrust chairman. "They help us set and meet goals for our Fellowship that otherwise would be left undone."

AGTrust makes available annually four categories of scholarships/grants to a select number of students planning to attend or already attending an AG college or university.

AG Next Generation Fund assists AG college graduates with school loan repayment to help them move quickly into ministry. Recipients agree to provide at least 5 years of service in full-time ministry.

J. Robert Ashcroft Scholarships for \$8,000, \$4,000, and \$2,000 are awarded to three outstanding high school seniors. This scholarship honors the memory of Dr. J. Robert Ashcroft, longtime AG educator and leader, and president of four AG colleges.

Making THE Difference Scholarships of \$1,000 each (on average) are awarded to a select number of students at each of the 18 AG colleges and universities.

Ralph Riggs Scholarships are awarded to high school seniors, based on outstanding academic merit and exemplary community service, Christian life, and personal references. Two \$30,000 scholarships and 10 \$5,000 scholarships are awarded annually.

The Ralph Riggs scholarship program is funded through the generosity of donors to AGTrust. To learn more about becoming a member of AGTrust, to see a list of 2012 scholarship recipients, or to complete a scholarship application, go to [agtrust.org](http://agtrust.org).



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## Headmaster Vacancy

Seeking a qualified individual for headmaster at New Covenant Academy (Pre-K through 12th grade, 170 students) a ministry of Church of the New Covenant, Mansfield, Pennsylvania.

For detailed information regarding position description, etc., visit the following link: [cncfamilychurch.org/head-master-vacancy/](http://cncfamilychurch.org/head-master-vacancy/) or call us at 570-662-3311.



## AGUSM FALL 2013 CANDIDATE ORIENTATION AND GO! CONFERENCE

**Biannually, Assemblies of God U.S. Missions hosts a weeklong candidate orientation and GO! Conference** for U.S. missionaries. Candidate orientation prepares candidates for service as nationally appointed U.S. missionaries. During orientation, candidates learn about the ministry of U.S. Missions; how to recruit a support team for their ministry; how to raise their personal and ministry budget; and then begin the support-raising phase of their ministry.

The goals for the GO! Conference are: to recognize missionaries who have raised their budget; to provide additional training for missionaries; and to formally commission nationally appointed Assemblies of God U.S. missionaries. All U.S. missionaries who have been appointed during the 6 months prior to GO! are required to attend.

### Fall 2013 candidate orientation dates:

Candidate orientation: Sept. 21–27, 2013

GO! Conference: Sept. 24–27, 2013

### Spring 2014 candidate orientation dates:

Candidate orientation: March 15–21, 2014

GO! Conference: March 18–21, 2014

For more information on becoming a U.S. missionary, contact Paul Curtis at [pcurtis@ag.org](mailto:pcurtis@ag.org).

## U.S. MISSIONS BANQUET

### Please join U.S. Missions at its General Council banquet

Wed., Aug. 7, 2013, 6–8 p.m.,  
in the Orange County Convention Center. Ticket price is \$50.

The banquet's focus is compassion ministries, with guest speaker Joni Eareckson Tada.

To register for General Council and order tickets for the banquet, visit [generalcouncil.ag.org](http://generalcouncil.ag.org).



Joni Eareckson Tada

# Reach Your Goals

Join us for the 2nd annual AG Coaching Forum  
at General Council, August 5, 2013, in Orlando.

Learn the coach approach to leadership. It's the skill that increases forward movement by helping people put their knowledge into action — because only action brings change.



You'll benefit from the insight of certified professional coach Perry Rhue. With over 30 years' experience, he is passionate about helping individuals and teams understand their unique traits, strengths, values, and blind spots — and then expertly guiding them into effective service.

Register today! Visit [agcoaching.org](http://agcoaching.org) or call 417.862.1447, ext. 3535

We'll help  
you climb  
faster.

**AG Coaching**

## ASSEMBLIES OF GOD BIBLE SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8



**Every year on Bible Sunday**, U.S. Assemblies of God churches partner with AG Bible Alliance to provide the *Fire Bible*, a Pentecostal study Bible, for overseas pastors and laypersons in one or more languages. This year the Bible Sunday goal is to make available the *Fire Bible* in six languages for missionaries and national churches working among the following tribes and people groups.

**The Hmong *Fire Bible*:** The Hmong people group originated in China. Today, they live in China, Southeast Asia, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), the United States, and many other parts of the world.

**The Karen *Fire Bible*:** About 7 million Karen live in Myanmar (Burma) with smaller populations in Thailand, India, and Southeast Asia. Thousands of Karen, who are victims of Myanmar's civil war, live as refugees in other countries.

**The Lingala *Fire Bible*:** Bantu tribes in Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic speak Lingala. In spite of violent war in these countries, the church has survived.

**The Lisu *Fire Bible*:** Vast numbers of Lisu migrated out of

China during the past two centuries. About 380,000 live in Myanmar (Burma) today. One of the earliest Pentecostal revivals in Myanmar took place among the Lisu.

**The Nepali *Fire Bible*:** The vast majority of Nepali speakers live in Nepal, India, and Bhutan. According to recent reports, about 800–900 churches have been opened in Nepal.

**The Tsonga *Fire Bible*:** Tsonga speakers live in South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. Many of them practice Christianity.

The *Fire Bible* is currently available in more than 40 language editions, making it the most widely published and distributed study Bible in the world. Your church can order the free 2013 Bible Sunday theme DVD and other materials at [www.BibleAlliance.org](http://www.BibleAlliance.org) or by calling 1-800-532-0440.

## JACOB'S HOPE



**The vision of Jacob's Hope** is to bring hope to Jacob's children — Jewish people around the world. The vision is becoming a reality.

Jacob's Hope is currently working in Jewish communities in the Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Hungary, Russia, Ukraine, and Israel. In addition, Jacob's Hope is working in a sensitive country

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where the activity of the Jewish community is done largely undercover.

Jacob's Hope provides food, clothing, medical care, and job training to the neediest Jewish people. In addition, Jacob's Hope helps train Jewish believers so they are better able to reach their Jewish communities for their Messiah, Y'shua. In Israel, Jacob's Hope is on track to see almost 20,000 Israelis come into its seven compassion centers this year. Jacob's Hope is desiring to open two more centers this year. Often a simple act of compassion enables workers to give a Bible or even to pray with an unbelieving Jewish person. We are then able to connect them with believers for follow up.

Jacob's Hope also conducts special holy day outreaches where many Israelis come to their Messiah. The Israel team of Jacob's Hope is also available to provide emergency humanitarian aid in times of crisis or war.

For more information, visit [jacobshope.com/index.php](http://jacobshope.com/index.php).

## JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP



**At noon on Fridays, Muslims everywhere gather to pray.** So does Jumaa Prayer Fellowship.

A ministry of Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples, Jumaa Prayer is an organized prayer movement dedicated to intercede for

the Muslim world. Jumaa Prayer Fellowship lays an important foundation of prayer for reaching Muslims and facilitates worldwide prayer every Friday where over 30,000 people in 40 nations pray for Muslims.

Prayer is the key to reaching Muslims. You can have an integral part in Jumaa Prayer Fellowship by joining thousands of believers who fast and pray on Fridays for Muslims.

By becoming a part of Jumaa Prayer Fellowship you will receive a free copy of the bimonthly publication *Intercede*, which includes articles concerning Islam, current Muslim and Christian news, and weekly prayer requests related to Muslim issues. Sign up for Jumaa Prayer Fellowship at [JumaaPrayer.com](http://JumaaPrayer.com).

For more information call: Global Initiative (417) 866-3313; e-mail: [contact@globalinitiativeinfo.com](mailto:contact@globalinitiativeinfo.com); visit [JumaaPrayer.com](http://JumaaPrayer.com); Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer; or Twitter: @JumaaPrayer.

## NETWORK211: USING THE INTERNET TO CONNECT HURTING PEOPLE TO GOD



**"Tonight I asked Jesus into my life; I knew it was a big decision. I have been a doubt-**

ful unbeliever for a long time. To speak out loud into the air and talk to God is monumental," wrote a former Muslim in Iran.

Network211's **Project 10Million** directs hurting people searching for answers online to one of many evangelistic websites,

helping them experience Christ's salvation. But Network211 does not stop there.

By clicking one of Network211's unique website response buttons, people can begin a conversation with one of more than 500 ministry volunteers. Network211's web-based messaging system offers visitors hope, help, counsel, and a connection to a local church.

Project 10Million impacts the world by changing lives one conversation at a time. For more information, contact Network211 at [info@network211.com](mailto:info@network211.com).

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# Middle-earth: The Unseen Realm of the Spiritual

By **Mark Hausfeld**

**M**uch of the church in the West today approaches spiritual warfare in Scripture like Middle-earth

in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*.

Such a textual world is intriguing, fascinating, moving, and even liberating. But here is what happens. Once I close both narratives my senses acclimate to the real world, getting on with whatever my Western, secular, and humanistic-saturated Christian worldview holds for me. When I do that with *The Hobbit* it doesn't matter. However, applied to the inspired Scripture, it makes all the difference in life and ministry.

Sadly, society has dumbed down our orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the biblical narrative. I am reminded of Dr. Robert Webber's book, *Who Gets to Narrate the World: Contending for the Christian Narrative in an Age of Rivals*. According to Webber, there are three narratives calling for the world's attention. First is the narrative of secular humanism (Post-Modernism/Christendom). Second is the voice of fundamentalist Islam and its agenda for the world. Last is the biblical narrative, the Christian story that the world must hear and one that the global church needs to effectively understand, live, and proclaim. Spiritual warfare is a vital part of our biblical incarnational story. Which narrative will the Western church and unreached masses hear?

The first thing we must consider to distinguish nonfiction from fiction is: Who is the author? The answer to this question creates an intellectual and spiritual dichotomy. If the author is Tolkien, then my reading is for pleasure, amusement, and entertainment. If the author is God, then my reading is for information, inspiration, and implementation. As Terry Hanna has helped us in his article, "Worldviews and the Unseen World" (page 98), as

Christ's disciples we need to have a distinctly biblical worldview concerning spiritual warfare.

Yet we struggle in the Western church. How do we fit into a sermon the story about a man filled with a legion of demons that Jesus cast into a herd of pigs who then commit mass swine suicide? What will visitors think? Let's trust God with the inspired text and with the hearts of visitors

as well. This means we, as spiritual leaders, first need to allow the Word of God to speak to us in its entirety. We need to receive the Bible's truth concerning this subject through our own study.

Our responsibility, yes! Our shepherd's duty is to teach and preach God's narrative trumping the secular-humanistic story that has so deeply infected the hearts of our congregations at every generational level. Let's return to the Tolkien concept of Middle-earth. Not in a fictional manner but rather the understanding of a middle that is often excluded by the church of the West.

Doug Lowenberg reminds us in his article, "Demonization and the Christian Life: How the Devil Influences Believers" (page 87), of missiologist Dr. Paul Hiebert's illustration of "the excluded middle." We believe in heaven and hell as real places on one hand and the natural world on the other. However, there is this middle. It is not Tolkien's Middle-earth, but many pastors, teachers, and even missionaries treat the unseen realm of the spiritual like a Tolkien novel. Such words are good for illustration but not implementation. Why? Are we mistakenly treating the inspired text like the Tolkien text? Each reader must answer this question in his or her heart and mind. Middle-earth is fiction; the "excluded middle" in Scripture is more real than the screen or hard copy page you are reading. More real? Yes. Screen and page will pass away; each is of natural creation.

The middle Heibert writes is biblically eternal. The stuff of the Spirit, Jesus, angels, Satan, and demons is now and eternal. Therefore, it is all the more important that we intentionally bring God's middle to our earthly pulpits and practice. How do we do this?

Prayerfully study Scripture. Preach and teach on this truth in a balanced manner. Be discerning in your church and community where the enemy and his schemes are at work. Apply the text by the leading of the Spirit's counsel.

The result? The excluded middle leaves the fiction section and becomes authentically real. ■

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