



Winter 2018
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LIGHT

KINGDOM • CULTURE • MISSION



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SPEAKERS

RUSSELL MOORE | JACKIE HILL-PERRY | JENNY YANG

JON WARD | MIKE COSPER | JEN WILKIN | GARRETT KELL

DEAN INSERRA | ERICK ERICKSON | VANCE PITMAN

ERIC TEETSEL | MICHAEL WEAR | AND MORE

A Call for Christian Congruence

As we were preparing for this issue, American Christianity lost a cherished sage with the death of pastor and author Eugene Peterson. In the days that followed his passing, I found myself pulling many of Peterson's books off my shelf, looking at tabbed pages and highlighted sentences in a visual reminder of how much I had learned from this man.

One passage that struck me particularly was in the opening pages of one of Peterson's last books, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*. As Peterson reflected on the life of a man who had taught him much, the word that came to mind was "congruence." It was also, Peterson noted, the word that summed up what he most needed in his pastoral work

Congruence. The life defined by this word would, Peterson offered, demonstrate "no slippage between what he was saying and the way he was living." He wrote:

The Christian life is the lifelong practice of attending to the details of congruence—congruence between ends and means, . . . the congruence of the Word made flesh in Jesus and what is lived in our flesh.

Peterson identified congruence in everything from a child lost in play to an athlete in motion. And he saw it in the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins that notes the congruence of created nature—kingfishers, dragonflies, and falling stones—between identity and action. The poem ends, of course, with those majestic words: "Christ plays in ten thousand places, Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his, To the Father through the feature of men's faces."

"But what kingfishers and falling stones do without effort requires development on our part, a formation into who we truly are, a becoming in which the means by which we live are congruent with the ends for which we live," Peterson wrote.

It seems to me that this is precisely the challenge of this and every hour on this pilgrim path we walk together. Market-driven

evangelicalism has led to a crisis of well-earned cynicism. Ugly revelations have become all too common: doctrinal aberration, political idolatry, and cover-ups of the most awful forms of abuse. Many ask whether Christianity is just a cover for a national identity, political movement, or worse, a scheme for power. Christianity seems more Darwinist than Darwinism.

In this, Christ calls us to congruence, however halting or imperfect, with the life of Christ revealed in Scripture and lived in the Spirit. Such congruence will require distance from cultural expectations of Christianity—whether those of secular culture or the "Christian" subcultures that wish to oppose secular culture while mimicking it. This entails a commitment to forming the conscience that is painful. Carrying a cross always is, and that's what Jesus has called us to do.

But that sort of cross-shaped congruence is the only place where we find freedom from our "roles" as consumers, constituents, voting blocs, and audiences. We find our humanity in those who have been created for something more: to "conform to the image of Christ, that he may be the firstborn of many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). In that, we will find that authenticity is not just more real than artificiality, that genuineness is more compelling than pretense, but it is the only exit from the exhaustion and alienation of this present darkness.

Only with the lives of congruence, of holiness, of Christ-conformity, will we find joy and rest and life and peace. Only there will we see clearly that Jesus is Lord, and that his lordship is not just a multiplication of the sort of dour and miserable power we see in the would-be lords all around us. Christ plays in 10,000 places.



RUSSELL MOORE
PRESIDENT, ERLC



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LIGHT

Light Magazine

Volume 4, Issue 2

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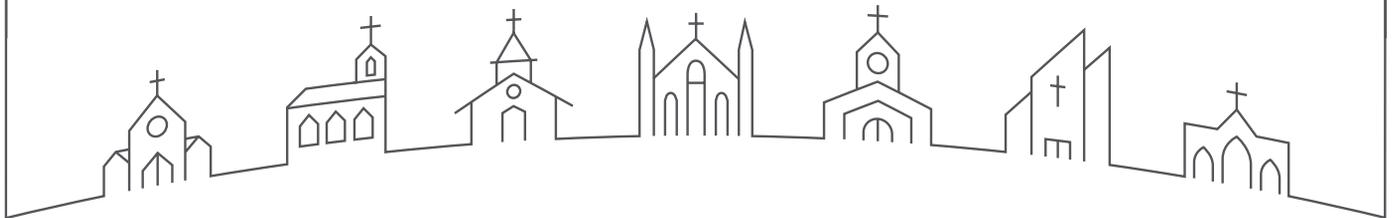
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The Gravity of Leadership

Every day it is your job to wake up and see how you can make my life better.”

Yes, those were words actually spoken by a pastor for whom I worked early in my ministry. At the time, it seemed kind of weird, but I was young and didn't know what I didn't know. Looking back, I realize this leader led with fear and more than a bit of narcissism.

As I've reflected on that season of my life, I've been struck, not just by the way that man's leadership had the potential to damage those he served, but by the temptation I've had in my own leadership to behave the same way.

This is what the Apostle James was getting at when he was writing to the first-century church. In James 3, we're reminded of the gravity of leadership. We are still instructed soberly by his words today. We should not seek leadership lightly (3:1), we should be aware of the ways in which we stumble (3:2), and we should understand the power of our words (3:3-12).

Sadly, there are too many Christian leaders today who are not taking James seriously. Hardly a week goes by that we don't learn of another leadership failure, in the church or in other institutions. Every fall hurts and should cause us to look inward and ask God for grace in our own lives, ministries, and families.

The appearance of a poisoned leadership epidemic is why we put together this issue of *Light*. We are in a necessary moment of reflection in evangelicalism, and we need help to move forward with integrity. So, we gathered thinkers who are both humble about their own struggles and honest about some unhealthy trends in the church and the world.

You might notice that we have changed quite a few things in this issue of *Light*. We have revamped the design to aid in readability, aesthetics, and overall quality. Each issue has been expanded by a few articles in order to provide you with more content that will help you engage the culture with the unchanging message of the gospel.

Russell Moore writes about the purifying power of Judgement Day, and Beth Moore discusses the necessity of accountability. John Perkins, the civil rights hero, calls for bold believers. Jared Wilson talks about what to do when we fail, while Phillip Bethancourt highlights the urgent need to address sexual abuse. And the outgoing governor of Tennessee, Bill Haslam, shares from his leadership experience.

The need is urgent, and God is calling on believers to lead with the humility of Christ (Phil. 2). His character is on display through his people, and we dare not defame his holiness. At the same time, we run freely to the foot of the cross when we do. We hope this issue both encourages and challenges you, whether God calls you to lead a church, run a business, manage a home, or disciple young children. “Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Jos. 1:9).

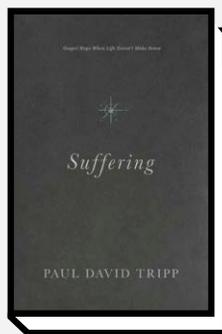
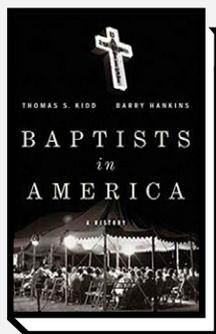


DANIEL DARLING
EDITOR, *LIGHT* MAGAZINE



EVERY FALL HURTS AND SHOULD CAUSE US TO LOOK INWARD AND ASK GOD FOR GRACE IN OUR OWN LIVES.

Books



1 Baptists in America

by THOMAS KIDD & BARRY HANKINS

In 1651, Obadiah Holmes received 30 lashes because he had been found guilty of preaching the faith of the Baptists. In 1976, Jimmy Carter, a Baptist, would become president-elect. From minority, radical fringe group to cultural insiders and brokers, Baptists have a long history in America.

This book's core is its recognition of the diversity within the Baptist tradition. Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins show the larger trajectory of the movement while also providing a close inspection of key moments and figures. The authors do not avoid hard questions or give easy answers. Even if this book does not seek to persuade you to be a Baptist, it does offer a compelling narrative of this important tradition and its contributions to the religious landscape of America. —ALEX WARD

2 Suffering

by PAUL DAVID TRIPP

I've read a decent amount of books on the topic of suffering, but few have touched my soul as deeply as Paul David Tripp's recent book, *Suffering*. Tripp is no stranger to the topic, having endured intense physical suffering over the past few years, including multiple surgeries that have left him physically weak. He addresses several areas where Christians might be tempted during seasons of suffering (fear, doubt, envy, denial, and discouragement), and offers words of advice for navigating the potential temptations.

The second half the book is dedicated to seeking out the rich comforts God offers during times of trial. My favorite thing about this book is that it reads less like theological treatise and more like a letter of deep encouragement for weary souls. Tripp writes *Suffering* with the heart of a pastor, speaking from the trenches. This tender book will serve the church well for decades to come. —CHELSEA SOBOLIK

3 Spiritual Leadership

by J. OSWALD SANDERS

This book is decades old and yet is as durable as any leadership book on the market. The insights are deeply biblical and profound. J. Oswald Sanders probes into the heart of a pastor/shepherd in ways that few modern leadership books can do. I always urge church leadership teams to go through this book. One of the most penetrating insights for me is Sanders's encouragement for leaders to step into their calling.

Leaders can fail in two ways: seeking unhealthy power and shrinking back from leadership. *Spiritual Leadership* urges leaders to avoid both and charts a path for men and women of God to lead well. —DAN DARLING

The Frailty of Our Future Leaders

A REVIEW OF *THE CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND*

Chris Martin

The *Coddling of the American Mind* by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt is, in the authors' own words, "about wisdom and its opposite" (p. 1). The book focuses on three "Great Untruths" that have grown in popularity the last few years and are particularly potent on college campuses today. This book is full of important observations and timely applications for parents, pastors, educators, and others, despite not being a Christian volume. Let's examine the book through the lenses of the three Great Untruths on which it is based.

1. THE UNTRUTH OF FRAGILITY

This untruth is expressed as, "What doesn't kill you makes you weaker." The authors cite the work of statistician and stock trader Nassim Nicholas Taleb. In his book *Antifragile*, Taleb breaks everything down into three basic categories: fragile, resilient, and antifragile (p. 23). A glass vase is fragile because it can be easily damaged or broken when put under stress. A plastic sippy cup is resilient because it can be

thrown on the floor by a toddler every night at dinner and not be damaged. Human muscles are antifragile because resistance, challenges, and moderated stressors actually make them stronger.

Humans are meant to be antifragile beings, say Lukianoff and Haidt, and their case is strong. Their claim is that the coddling of America's young people, or the constant pursuit of not only their physical safety, but also their mental and emotional safety, is actually doing more harm than good.

2. THE UNTRUTH OF EMOTIONAL REASONING

This untruth is expressed as, "Always trust your feelings." Right away the authors tackle one of the most common buzzwords on college campuses (and on social media) today: "microaggressions." In short, microaggressions are common verbal, behavioral, or otherwise social interactions that communicate bias, privilege, or other negative messages, whether intended or unintended. The problem with microaggressions, say Lukianoff and Haidt, is that people often unintentionally offend others simply because of their life experience, and that does not line up with the meaning of "aggression."

They write, "Aggression is not unintentional or accidental. If you bump into someone by accident and never meant any harm, it is not an act of aggression, although someone may misperceive it as one" (p. 40). What people intend has taken a back seat to how their act made someone feel, regardless

of what the "aggressor" intended. The authors contend, "A faux pas does not make someone an evil person or an aggressor" (p. 44). The best way to summarize this section is in the authors' own words, "Discomfort is not danger" (p. 51).

3. THE UNTRUTH OF US VERSUS THEM

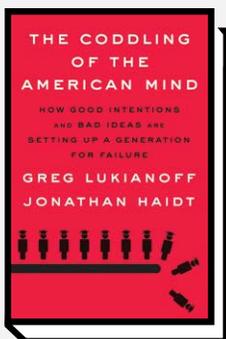
This untruth is expressed as, "Life is a battle between good people and evil people." In this section of the book, the authors break down the phenomenon of identity politics, showing that it is not a new phenomenon but acknowledging that it has evolved and has been transformed into "call-out culture" (p. 71). The authors continue, "One gets no points, no credit, for speaking privately and gently with an offender—in fact, that could be interpreted as colluding with the enemy. . . . This is one reason social media has been so transformative: there is always an audience eager to watch people being shamed, particularly when it is so easy for spectators to join in and pile on" (p. 71-72).

A BRIEF CONCLUSION

America's young people are in a moral crisis, but it's not as simple as it seems. It is not simply a moral crisis of making poor decisions. It is a moral crisis that is turning the basis of morality upside down. Lukianoff and Haidt provide a thorough analysis of this phenomenon.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who engages with young people in any capacity. Whether you're a student pastor, a parent, a college administrator, or otherwise, this volume will give you a complete perspective on why America's young people seem so fragile today. Remember, however, that this book is not a "Christian" book. So, while the authors provide sound counsel and advice throughout, it will be up to you to make connections to the truth of the Scripture and how you practice biblical parenting and ministry. ★

Chris Martin is the managing editor of *LifeWay Voices*.



THEIR CLAIM IS
THAT THE CODDLING
OF AMERICA'S
YOUNG PEOPLE IS
ACTUALLY DOING
MORE HARM
THAN GOOD.



Staying in the Fight

HOW THE GOSPEL BRINGS HOPE FOR JUSTICE John M. Perkins

I'm often asked this question: "John Perkins, why did you stay in the fight for social justice? Why didn't you give up?" Most people would say I was committed to justice, probably because my first book was *Let Justice Roll Down*. But as I have grown in my faith it's been more than that. I wanted to keep it within the gospel, trying to fill those holes up that we pulled out. We're asking questions now that should never be asked: "Does life

matter?" What are you talking about? All life matters!

My father's life mattered, even though he didn't know how to read or write and had to put an X on the grocery bill. My brother's life mattered, even though he was killed. And my mother's life mattered, even though she died of pellagra. When I wanted to quit, my memories of them wouldn't let me. Their memories stay with me and drive me to work for a holistic gospel.

IF WE BELIEVE THAT GOD'S VISION FOR THE CHURCH IS ONE UNIFIED BODY, LOVING ONE ANOTHER WITH THE SAME LOVE THAT JESUS AND THE FATHER SHARED, THEN WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE ENEMY HAS BEEN HARD AT WORK TO DESTROY THAT VISION.

And I think that when the Lord puts fire in your belly and a call on your life, quitting isn't an option. But if we're able to stand and to remain committed, it's because of His grace. We can't claim credit for it. He does it in us and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our part is to just do what He tells us to do.

I love the book of Hebrews. It's full of encouragement. The writer calls the roll of believers who God used to accomplish His purposes. They were the vessels who moved the story of Scripture along: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. The common ingredient for each of them was faith. They were bold enough to take God at His Word and to trust Him to fulfill it. They give meaning to James's argument that "faith without works is dead." And they challenge those who think that faith is something that you hold in your head without acting on it.

We all need to take God at His Word and believe that He is engaged in the effort to bring His Church together as one. The persons in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews were set apart from everyone else because they chose to trust in God. For many of them, their faith put their lives at risk. For others, like Noah, their trust in God saved their own life and the lives of many others.

Over the course of history there have been a lot of folks God used to move the issue of reconciliation forward. Their stories of great faith are an encouragement to keep fighting and never give up. One of those individuals was William Wilberforce. When we saw the movie "Amazing Grace" we were thrilled by his life. Now that was a picture of commitment!

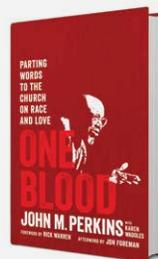
John Wesley wrote a letter to Wilberforce on February 24, 1791, just six days before Wesley passed away. In that letter

he said, "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? O be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it."

Wilberforce was elected to Parliament in 1780, but he sensed God calling him to fight against slavery on Easter of 1786. This is what he said about that call: "So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did the trade's wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for abolition. Let the consequences be what they would: I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition."¹ I like that! This is God's amazing power at work in the lives of people who will answer the call.

By 1805 Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson had introduced twenty resolutions to end slavery. Each one was defeated. Wilberforce came under attack again and again, but his efforts finally paid off in 1807. Parliament finally abolished the slave trade in the British Empire. Wilberforce continued working to make sure the slave trade laws were enforced and the trade was finally abolished. He became a prominent member of the Clapham Sect, a group of devout Christians of influence in government and business. I think about what it must have taken for him to keep on keeping on, year after year, defeat after defeat. I don't think it was anything but faith in God and believing that He could do the impossible.

READ MORE



One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love

JOHN M. PERKINS
(Moody Publishers, 2018)

If we believe that God's vision for the church is one unified body, loving one another with the same love that Jesus and the Father shared, then we must acknowledge that the Enemy has been hard at work to destroy that vision. If we didn't know the end of the story, this could be discouraging, depressing news. But we know that in the end God wins. His purposes prevail. We will be the church that God intended from eternity past. That's good news!

So let's persevere and continue the march toward true biblical reconciliation in the church. In the words of an old spiritual, "God don't want no coward soldiers." These words remind us that a soldier must be brave, must be courageous—because we are in a battle. . . . The time is urgent. We've lost a lot of ground for the kingdom because we were asleep on this crucial issue. But we must fight while it is still day. And, I don't know about you, but I'm not tired yet. And I'm not giving up on what God has called me to do. ★

John M. Perkins is a minister, author, and civil rights activist.

Adapted from One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love by John M. Perkins with Karen Waddles (©2018). Published by Moody Publishers. Used with permission.

¹ "Wesley to Wilberforce," *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-2/wesley-to-wilberforce.html>.



Who Do You Love?

AVOIDING PITFALLS AS YOUNG LEADERS

Steve Timmis

Leadership is risky—the world, the flesh, and the devil all conspire against us. So we start listing the dangers, and then we compile lists of antidotes and advice. These words of wisdom aren't bad; they are usually very helpful (and I plan to offer a few here, myself). But the gospel offers us more. The gospel offers a life of faithful, joyful

service springing not from lists of what we should and should not do, but out of love more abundant than we can imagine (John 15:12-17).

The reality is that regardless of age, experience, maturity, spirituality, theological aptitude, or insightful exposition, faithfulness in ministry is rooted in love for God, which necessarily and inevitably

overflows in love for others.

Conversely, unfaithfulness springs from love for ourselves, which both expresses and fuels that most foundational of sins: pride. It might sound simplistic, but it's true: Whether a young pastor fruitfully thrives or withers on the vine is determined by one thing: Who does he love?



THE REALITY IS THAT REGARDLESS OF AGE,
EXPERIENCE, MATURITY, SPIRITUALITY,
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AND INEVITABLY OVERFLOWS IN LOVE FOR OTHERS.

LOVERS OF SELF OR LOVERS OF OTHERS?

I sometimes observe the meal-time behavior of potential leaders. I'm not talking about the social niceties or etiquette, or even whether he leads a solid and sound "grace" at the beginning. But does he wait to serve others before helping himself? Does he get up to help clear away the dishes? Does he express gratitude? Does he take a spot at the sink to help with cleaning up?

And when we have church functions, who is helping with the unseen, often unpleasant jobs? Who is sweeping the muck under the toddler table, emptying the garbage, folding chairs, scraping plates? This observation extends to our gathered worship as well: Who is making an effort to speak to newcomers? Who is quick to arrange chairs to make room for a wheelchair? Who is standing up and moving over so someone else can sit?

Much of this is simply common courtesy, but it reveals something vital about the heart—is this person acting out of love for others, or love of self? Is his concern for those around him, or to preserve his own physical or social comfort? I don't consider a young man to have potential as a leader in God's church until I see that he is acting out of love for his Savior in loving service for God's people. Of course,

the ability to teach the Word of God is essential. But as God tells us through Paul, the most gifted and eloquent Bible teachers are nothing but resounding gongs or clanging cymbals without love.

So with that foundation laid, how do we keep alert to some common pitfalls which young leaders face as they seek to serve God's church? Where are we tempted to live by pride (which is love of self) rather than love for God? I think the dangers fall into three main categories:

1. IDENTITY

It is all-too-easy to slip into the belief that *who we are* is defined by what we do, how we appear, or what people think of us. Perhaps the demands of ministry accentuate this risk because there will always be a heightened level of judgement from others—sermons are critiqued, interpersonal skills are analyzed, and family choices scrutinized.

Some trademarks of mistaken identity include feeling more important than we are and wanting proper acknowledgment of all we do. For example, continual overwork reveals that we have forgotten that we are mere creatures. Fear of what people think of us reveals that we have forgotten that it is what God thinks that counts. Being overbearing reveals that

we have forgotten that we ourselves are sheep before we are shepherds, while timidity reveals that we fear people more than God. All of these reveal basic forgetfulness about our identity in Christ and a deep seated, self-loving belief that we have what it takes.

But the truth is that our value and glory is eternally secure because of the union with Christ that has been won for us and gifted to us. This identity is absolutely unshakeable and impregnable. When we wallow in identity amnesia, we turn again to slavery. Remembering who we are in Christ, however, gives beautiful gospel color, texture, and flavor to our lives and work.

2. ECCLESIOLOGY

It is possible to view the church in a mercenary way. Rather than brothers and sisters for whom Christ died and for whom we are willing to lay down our lives, they can become those who consume a Sunday sermon, fund our salaries, and cause us pain and hassle. "Ministry would be great if there were no people" is a well-known tongue-in-cheek complaint. We might chuckle, but deep down we sometimes believe it. This is nothing more than pride, and needs swift repentance.

Young leaders, don't go along with that seed of complaint about God's people. The gospel compels a real affection and love for the church; this is Christ's body, a temple built upon the solid foundation. This is the Bride being prepared for her husband, and you are part of and belong to her. There is no place for looking down upon the church. Love, serve, rebuke, and correct her when needed—but always cherish her.

One symptom of wrong ecclesiology is keeping ourselves aloof. We try to protect ourselves from our church when we don't trust our church family. Choose to trust them! Don't prioritize friendships with those who merely like you and who are similar to you, as comfortable

as that is. Our pride is what whispers, “But these people really understand me,” or, “I deserve some down time.” Leaders set the culture, so set a culture of gospel intentionality in your own friendships.

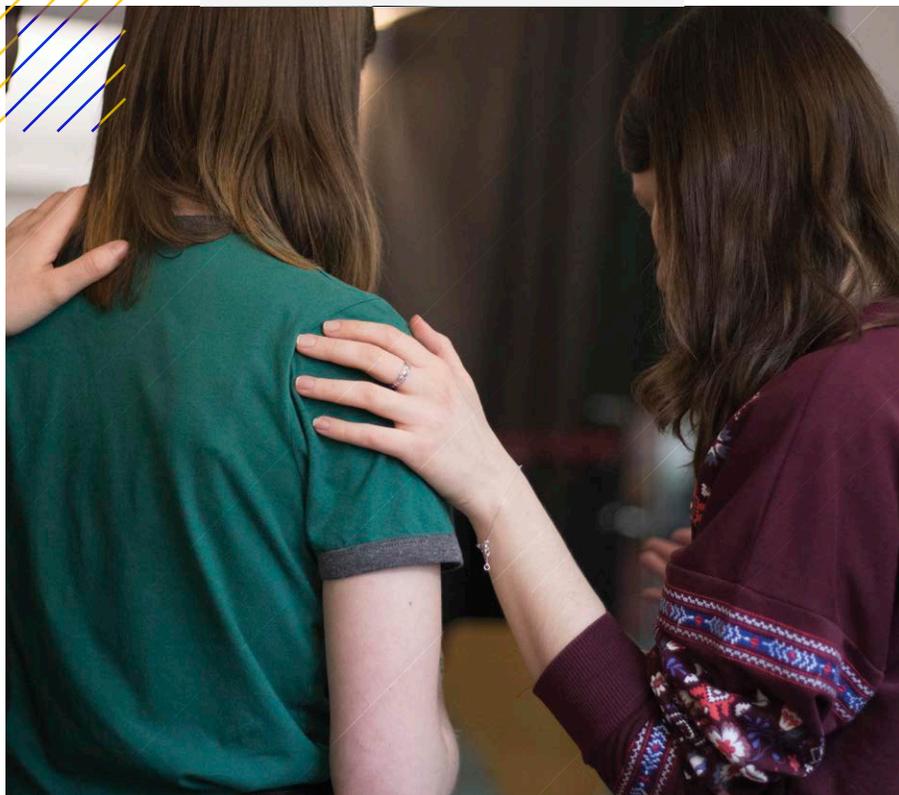
Also, despite all western convictions to the contrary, “family time” is not sacred. The corrective is a proper understanding of family in the Bible. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are our family, so work to nurture those relationships. Open your home. Don’t allow your pride to hinder hospitality. Visit those who are suffering, even for 10 minutes to pray with them. Ask for help, counsel, and prayer from your home group. Seek accountability—not just with the like-minded pastor from across town, but with the awkward college student in your church family as well.

As you foster warm affection for your brothers and sisters, with all of their human idiosyncrasies and awkwardness, you are employing one of the means of grace to build a safeguard against many pitfalls of self love.

3. SUCCESS

Young leaders can easily be distracted and wooed by the world’s definition of success—numbers, power, influence. It’s hard not to feel successful when we are commended, when our church is growing, when we’re busy doing important things, and especially if we receive some renown. The misuse of power and authority can flow from this, because if “success” is really all about me, then ministry becomes all about me, too.

But for the Christian, success is defined by one thing: faithfulness in and out of season. And faithfulness happens insofar as we are devoted to our Savior. Furthermore, our faithfulness depends upon Jesus. This is a blow to pride. If the church is growing, it’s God’s work. If my preaching is effective, it’s God’s blessing. If the church is financially stable, it’s thanks to the Spirit-inspired generosity of others. If my heart is soft to the Lord, it’s his



kindness. Anything good that we are or do—*anything*—is a cause for gratitude to God alone. Young and old must continuously bow before the Lord, the giver of all good gifts, in repentance for the ways in which we try to grab glory that belongs to him alone.

LOVERS OF GOD AND OTHERS

Paul reminds young Timothy, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). This is love which flows from the love of the Father and which we offer back to him in gratitude. The gospel is the glorious reality of something completely other, something fully outside of us—God, who is love. It’s the love of the Father, through Christ and applied by the Spirit that sets us free from slavery to sin and the punishment our sin deserves. This gospel is all we can offer, and this gospel is all we need. Considering God’s love levels our pride into the dust. We must cling to it!

Young leaders, to live faithfully out of God’s love you must dwell on it long and often. Use the means of grace: God’s Word, prayer, and God’s people. Consider Jesus. Meditate on God’s character. Be silenced in worshipful awe by the Trinity. Be stunned by the Incarnation. Worship the great God we cannot even begin to fathom, who makes himself accessible to us through his Son, tenderly enlivening our hearts by his Spirit. Fix your thoughts on the Resurrection and the New Creation to come.

The gospel is the good news of all that God has done for us and all he has for us in Christ. Our brief lives are to be expended proclaiming it and enjoying it with God’s people until we are called home to eternal glory. What could be better? This is a love story to capture our hearts; the greatest love story of all. Why would we make it about ourselves? ★

Steve Timmis is a church planter in Sheffield, England, and CEO for Acts 29.

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When Loss Means Gain

A PASTOR LEARNS TO TRULY LOVE GOD AND HIS FAMILY

Lindsay Nicolet

Nathan Velasquez remembers it like it was yesterday. His dad, using the Lord's words in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," re-enacted the scene to share the gospel. He went to their front door, knocked, opened it, and came in, demonstrating a picture of salvation to his four-year-old son. The Spirit used his dad's illustration, and he trusted in Christ.

Velasquez's dad has been a pastor in Venezuela for 47 years and has been extremely involved in other evangelical organizations. Although he grew up in a Christian home and was around ministry, he wasn't interested in following in his father's footsteps.

"As son of a pastor," Velasquez said, "I was sure I would never be a pastor."

But he couldn't resist the call of the Lord. After surrendering to ministry, he obtained his theology degree at 20 years old and married his wife Karina. They started out as missionaries in a Venezuelan church, which led to them serving in four different churches over their 20 years in South America.

ACCOMPLISH BIG THINGS . . . FOR WHOM?

As a go-getter and the son of a man active and influential in ministry, people

expected big things from Velasquez. In 2008, he became the senior pastor of the 450-person Immanuel Baptist Church in Caracas. The church was doing incredible things—they were involved in social work in the community, preached the gospel to their neighbors using various methods, and even had a TV program.

In addition, Velasquez was elected as president of the Venezuela Baptist Convention, where he served for three years, and was also the vice president of the Council of Evangelical Churches in his country.

By 2013, the church had grown to 1600-1700 people. Velasquez was involved in a lot of great things and saw himself spending his life on the good work of ministry. He, too, believed that God's calling coincided with the big expectations others had of him.

"The only thing I didn't have time to do," he said, "was take care of my wife and daughters."

BIG THINGS, BIGGER PROBLEMS

Although it looked like he was in the prime of his ministry, his lack of focus on his family was an indication that not all was right in Velasquez's life.

"When the enemy wants to take you

out, and he knows you are someone who loves Jesus," he explained, "He won't ask you to do bad things. He won't ask you to sin . . . but he will ask you to do a lot of things for God without the calling of God. And that will burn you out."

Velasquez considered himself a super minister who could do everything with God's help. But, in reality, he was doing a lot of things in his flesh, relying on his experience and talents—and was doing them because people wanted him to. And even as he was serving God, it was without truly loving him—he was merely following orders and habit. The only reason he didn't fall into grievous sin during this time, he said, is because he was taught to fear God early on.

Meanwhile home was a place he would just come to rest.

"I was getting some sleep," Velasquez said, "and waking up another day to save the world," though he didn't recognize what he was doing was wrong at first. "I thought because I was never involved in a big sin, that I was doing good . . . [My wife] didn't have a right to be mad at me."

Though she always showed her husband grace, Velasquez's relationship with his

wife became cold. Over time, he began to notice emptiness and suffering in his wife's eyes while also realizing that he never had time to be with his two daughters. Troubled, he started asking God, "Why? If I am doing good, why am I feeling this?"

"That experience was my breaking point," he recalled. "I realized I had one life, and I was selfish. Everything I was doing was for me—to be accepted, to be loved, to make people happy around me."

Everyone except his wife and daughters.

THE INTERVENTION OF AN EVEN BIGGER GOD

The Holy Spirit soon helped him understand that God had never asked him to do a lot of the ministry tasks he was heavily involved in.

"One night, I was in the middle of my personal crisis, and I was thinking of taking my own life," Velasquez shared. "I could not accept that I was a failure. Even though everyone could see I was a good pastor, I was empty inside."

With his family out of town, he fell down on his knees and prayed. By God's grace, he came to the realization that he was wrong, though he was full of fear to accept the truth and to have to explain to those that relied on him that he needed to start over. In those moments, Velasquez knew that his relationship with God had been focused on what he had been doing.

"My mother and father taught me to serve and fear [God]," he said, "but I never learned how to love him."

In the deepest parts of his heart, Velasquez felt that the next step in a new relationship with God was to show his wife and daughters that they were more important than ministry. The only answer was to quit everything.

"When I did," he recalled, "every single person who loved me, started hating me," he said. "They would ask me questions about the church, and I would say, 'I don't know. But if it is from God, he will take care of it.'"

Velasquez could only be concerned about doing what was right before the Lord and for his family.

LEARNING TO LOVE

One of the bright spots during those years was the incredible mercy his wife displayed. She showed Velasquez "the true face of the love of Jesus." Through her care in particular, he learned how to love God.

After his crisis in 2013, an opportunity to come to the States and continue his studies opened up. He now lives in the Nashville area and is pastoring a small church while also serving at a supporting church in the area. His family is involved in helping their community and is trying to plant a new church in a nearby area. He's also teaching at two Bible colleges and finishing his master's degree. Everything he is doing, though, is now with the help of his wife and daughters.

And although his family has been blessed with a new start in the United States, Velasquez says he's still healing.

"Even after [receiving] the mercy of my wife, daughters, and God, I wake up sometimes and still fight [on the] inside because I can't believe how stupid I was," he said.

His continued struggle is a constant reminder that he needs to guard his heart in ministry.

But the experience has made him feel closer to the Lord and his family. He's been able to spend quality time with them, and now that his first daughter is off to college, he has come to the realization that all the things he left behind are not worthy of the time he gets with his wife and daughters.

LESSONS FROM THE LOSS

Velasquez has learned that these painful moments are what God often uses to mature us.

"I feel like a new person," Velasquez said, "Without that experience, I [had] never felt the true love and mercy of God. . . . Now I know."

He has several lessons to share with Christians, especially pastors, after what he has walked through.

"Ministry as we have been taught is not necessarily what God is calling you to do,"

he said. "God never said we have to have big churches or make money. Whatever he is calling you to do, make sure you are in the center of the will of God."

Furthermore, regardless of where or how we serve, Velasquez said, "There are no small people in ministry. Every single person who is serving is big in the eyes of God. Never let the devil try to convince you [that you] are small."

He also encourages young men in ministry to allow a senior pastor or friend to be involved in their lives.

"You need to be reporting to someone with more experience," he admonished.

And, perhaps the hardest learned lesson of all is that, "Your first ministry is family," Velasquez said.

His time leading a church in Venezuela taught him that sometimes the church wants to be the "wife" of the pastor.

"The church is the wife of Jesus, not mine. . . . Now, before I have to decide what to do, I realize that God will take care of the church."

At the same time, he calls for responsibility in caring for the church, while facing your limits.

"I am not Jesus or the Holy Ghost," he said, "I am just a human trying to serve him, and I have limitations. I know what they are, and I can live with that."

CONCLUSION

Velasquez has learned the true meaning of the passage his dad so winsomely acted out when he was just a boy. He has now come to love and treasure the God he grew up primarily fearing and serving.

As a result, after all he's seen and been through, he doesn't look back with longing.

"I don't miss the big things I did in the past. I learned a lot of good things, but I wouldn't change being close to God and to my family. I have things in the correct order now." ★

Lindsay Nicolet is the managing editor of content at the ERLC.



A silver microphone is positioned in the upper left corner, pointing towards the center. Below it, a portion of a globe is visible, showing blue and green colors. The background is a light beige, textured surface.

MAINTAINING CHRISTIAN INTEGRITY IN LEADERSHIP

**THE EXAMPLE OF
GOVERNOR BILL HASLAM**

Interview with Russell Moore and Gov. Bill Haslam



A

s the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, the ERLC engages a number of elected officials across the country. Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam is one of those leaders the ERLC has been privileged to work with over the years.

During his two terms as Tennessee's governor, Haslam has presided over significant moments for religious liberty, ushered in protections for people of conscience, and conducted himself in a way that should serve as a model for Christians in public service. Russell Moore recently had the opportunity to interview the governor at The Gathering conference in Miami, Florida, to talk about what Haslam has learned about leadership, service, and the current nature of our political climate. With the permission of The Gathering, this interview has been transcribed and lightly edited for clarity and length.

Russell Moore: How do you as a Christian [elected official] deal with navigating that pull toward the approval of people as opposed to finding your identity in Christ?

Gov. Bill Haslam: I feel like people know more about you and less about you than ever before if you are in political office because there is information available everywhere. I think one of the advantages of actually having been in office for a while is you get used to that; you get used to people saying things about you that you don't think are true or you don't think are fair, and you kind of grow accustomed to that and learn it's okay. There are going to be some people that don't like me, and I have to be okay with that.

RM: When you think about your role right now and the life that you have had even before this as a business leader, how do you navigate ambition as a good thing? Sometimes people struggle with that because Jesus tells us whoever will

save his life must lose it and yet, they are obviously godly ambitions. How do you personally navigate it?

BH: Think about the verse, "do nothing out of selfishness or empty conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." How does that translate into an election where you are saying, "I'm the guy. I'm the one that can solve the issue?" I hope the church at large gets a sense that one of the really legitimate ways we are called to serve is in government. Luther said, "Send your ablest not to preach but to government. In preaching, it is the Holy Spirit doing the work, but in government, you are dealing in a world where you have to reason with ambiguity and uncertainty, and so the difficulty is higher. . . ."

If you ever want to find out who you really are, go run for office. People are saying things about you. You are trying to remember why you were running. It is a physically grueling process, but underneath all that has to be this idea that this is what I am called to do. It's

no different than being called to preach or called to lead an insurance agency or anything else.

RM: Every day is unpredictable and filled with really momentous sorts of decisions. I think there are a lot of people who struggle when they are in the whirlwind of their lives whether in business or a minister, government or whatever. How do you maintain personally a walk with Christ in the middle of all of that?

BH: I would argue that it is no different than anyone. I'd say for me, there are a couple of answers. One, I have to carve out some time to begin the day to pray and to study Scripture. I think the second part is I need people around me who have freedom to speak into my life in strong ways. Until I moved to Nashville, every Friday morning for 30 years, I had the same group of guys come up in my driveway at 6 a.m., and we literally shared our entire lives. When I came to Nashville, one of the first things I did was to seek out a group of guys just like that. I found I need somebody asking me hard questions because I can convince myself of things really easy that aren't true.

RM: You mention politics as a vocation. One of the things I've noticed is that if I'm dealing with a group of older evangelicals, normally what I'm having to hammer is Christ crucified, not generic "God and Country." When I am dealing with younger evangelicals, I often have to do the exact reverse, which is to say God wants some of you to run the school board, and God wants you specifically engaged. How would you encourage younger people who are kind of skeptical because of the way they've seen politics and faith used as a political wedge to be actively involved without losing their souls?

“I HAVE AN EVEN GREATER APPRECIATION FOR THE ROLE THAT BELIEVERS PLAY IN OUR SOCIETY SINCE I HAVE BEEN GOVERNOR.”

-Gov. Bill Haslam



BH: I think that's a great question for the entire church right now because I do think there are either folks that see politics as the answer—if we can just elect enough people who believe the right things, then our country will end up in the right place—or there are those folks who say I have totally given up, I don't care, I can't imagine how that would be relevant.

For the second group I would say this: it is pretty clear how Scripture talks about the role of government. God is not

in favor of anarchy. In the state of Tennessee, we have 37,000 employees, a \$37 billion dollar budget, and we are like a huge service organization. We help people that want to adopt children. We help those that are addicted to opiates. We run prisons. We educate four-year-olds and Ph.D. students. We build roads. It is our responsibility to provide the very best service that we can at the very lowest cost. I think what has gotten lost in this idea is that people say politics is

about where you are on pro-life issues or how you feel about marriage, but it is really about providing service to folks that they can't get from somewhere else, in most cases.

RM: Cynicism is one of the things that worries me most right now, especially among younger evangelicals because they have seen people who care about a political agenda and partisanship—and Jesus is sort of the way to get there. What you have managed to do, which is sadly rare, is to be able to be a committed Christian who is in the political arena, but no one senses that you are somehow claiming Jesus as your brand in order to advance. How would you advise someone who is a Christian that wants to be in the public arena?

BH: The temptation is to use God instead of being used by God. So, it comes back to that sense of being called. I [try to] remember, if we are called, we are not called to be about ourselves; even the Son of Man came not to be served but to give his life as a ransom for many. That is the foundation below the call and why the call exists to begin with.

RM: We are living in a time where people often choose a tribe, imbed in that tribe, and then find whatever facts support whatever your group holds to. How do you navigate that reality that we are living in right now, maintaining your personal integrity and what you believe to be true? Have there been times where you have had to sort of make decisions as governor where you thought this is not going to be popular with my people, but it has to be done?

BH: Yes, so, I'll give you an example. Every context is different everywhere, but several years ago Vanderbilt, which is private and based in Tennessee, set



up a deal that they called an “all-comers” policy for all student groups. This meant that every student group had to take whoever wanted to be a part that had equal access. So, if you are in InterVarsity on campus and someone who had different beliefs maybe wanted to be the president, they had to be able to do that. A lot of Christian groups said there are certain things we believe we are not going to give up on, and Vanderbilt said, “You can meet but you just can’t be on campus.”

Our legislature, a fairly conservative legislature, said, “We are not going to let them get away with that; we are going to take away Federal money, or any state money that goes to Vanderbilt because we don’t want them to restrict religious freedom that way.” They passed a bill basically saying that the state will fund Vanderbilt hospital through Medicaid

and some other things, but we are going to restrict all state monies to Vanderbilt.

I ended up vetoing the bill, and I had calls from a lot of friends and people I respect saying, “Don’t you understand if Vanderbilt does this, then pretty soon everybody is going to do it, and we are going to lose who we are?” But I also felt like there was another principle: do we really want the state telling private institutions what they can do? Because there will be a day when the shoe is on the other foot. I just felt like that principle is a hard one.

RM: The legislature also passed a bill proclaiming the Bible as the state book, and you vetoed that as well. I bet that’s a hard day.

BH: I did.

“Honey how was your day?”

“I vetoed the Bible.”

And to this day, I still have people say they don’t understand it. But I know this: when we combine state and the church, the church is the one that loses long term. Look at Europe as an example, where the church and state were combined, and now the church is just kind of a semblance of what it should be. So I actually believe that we don’t use the state to establish our Christian belief. That’s not the state’s role.

And so the legislature said, “We are passing it because of historical significance; that’s why it will be the state book.” That’s how they kind of got around the Constitutional question.

I said, “Well that’s fine, but to me that Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is not an historical book full of great stories. And so we are either going to say we are going to ignore the

Constitution, or we are going to act like the Bible is something that it is not." I just didn't feel like that was a great path.

RM: You know, it is a really bleak time in many ways. I know people will often say, "Well, we've had contentions in political environments going all the way back to Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton." But something feels different now, both in terms of decorum and norms from political leaders, but also just looking at social media and seeing the ways that people are arguing. People tend to change their positions not because they come to some different conclusion but based upon just whatever their political party or favorite political leaders hold. How do we get out of this? What's the way forward?

BH: I think the reality is all that has been exacerbated by how we get our news today. Everybody gets to filter and screen their own news, a lot of which no longer comes through an editor because it is coming to you through social media, or you are watching Fox which is giving you one exact set of facts and then CNN doing the other.

The first thing I would say is make certain that you yourself are not setting up filters for how and where you learn the truth. The second is to come back to: 1. electing the right people is not what's going to save our country; and 2. on the other hand, it is really clear that who we elect matters. As believers, of all people, we should be the ones that can get that balance right, who can understand both the ability that should come from us as believers but also the sense of there is such a thing as truth.

RM: When you think about trying to move from now, to being in elected office, to the next year, what do you see is your

calling in this coming crisis?

BH: I've been the governor for seven years and eight months. In less than 17 weeks, I lose my job. I have loved being in public office, and if I never get a chance to do it again, I will be really sad. I honestly don't know what will come next, but I will stay engaged in what I think are some of the bigger policy issues one way or the other. I think it really does matter, and I'd say this to the church at large: We live in a world where people are giving up on institutions, period. They are giving up on government, they are giving up on the church, they are giving up on media. I think the one way we can get folks' attention back is by literally living out the gospel.

RM: I was talking to someone in political office who talked about his frustration with the church because he said that at his church he is seen as whatever his office is. So he is not able to find the kind of community he needs because everything he does or says is viewed through that lens. So, what do political leaders need from their churches?

BH: The obvious is prayer and encouragement. It is a lonely road because there is always somebody mad at you, and no matter what you say, you tend to hear those voices louder than the people saying, "Hey, you did that well." So, encouragement and prayer is incredibly important. Also, particularly if it is somebody you actually know, the willingness to step in and say, "Hey, I know this is a

"I THINK THE ONE WAY WE CAN GET FOLKS' ATTENTION BACK IS BY LITERALLY LIVING OUT THE GOSPEL."

-Gov. Bill Haslam

hard one; if it helps any here, I'd be more than glad to sit down and talk with you on that."

I do want to say this: I have an even greater appreciation for the role that believers play in our society since I have been governor. I just see so many who have been instrumental in working for the common good, and I would say don't stop. I'll give you an example. Memphis has the first or second highest poverty rate in the country and historic racial issues that, to this day, drive the city. But if you go down there to Memphis, the one thing that really is bringing life to that city is the church.

I can just tell you that whoever is the mayor of your city or the governor of your state, they may or may not have an appreciation for what you are doing, but I will say this: the feet and hands of Christ that you are being in your communities is so, so important. On behalf of all of us that get to do this, thank you, because I can't imagine what it would be like without the church. ★

Russell Moore is the president of the ERLC.

Bill Haslam is a businessman and politician serving as the 49th governor of Tennessee.



FEAR, FAITH, AND THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD



*HOW THE GOSPEL
EMPOWERS US TO LEAD*

Charles W. Smith Jr.



We live in an age that is simultaneously fascinated by and fearful of leadership. An endless barrage of conferences, books, blogs, and podcasts testify to a growing interest in the subject and yet, so few seem to be converting their interest into anything that resembles leadership.

Scripture reminds us that both our fascination and fear have everything to do with who we are. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we see God calling his people to lead in various ways. For example, in the New Testament we see leadership as a spiritual gift (Rom. 12:8), leadership as a husband's responsibility (Eph. 5:22-33), leadership as a pastor's duty (1 Pet. 5:1-5), and what could be called leadership as Christian identity: God's call for every Christian is to take initiative for the glory of God and the good of others. Unlike the previous three categories of biblical leadership, this fourth category applies to every Christian and is not limited by gifting, marital status, calling, gender, or age. All of us are called to take initiative for the glory of God and the good of others. We are called to lead.

From Genesis to Revelation, we see God calling his image-bearers to lead as he has led. We see him inviting us to step into the unknown and create space for others to flourish; to step toward the needy and hopeless; to fight for justice and equality; to proclaim Christ crucified to a broken and hostile world. Indeed, taking initiative for the glory of God and the good of others is central to our identity as sons and daughters of God. That is why we are fascinated with leadership. In the words of authors Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, you and I are "designed to lead" (*Designed to Lead*, 5).

THE QUESTIONS LURKING BENEATH OUR FEAR

Unfortunately, the universality of God's call to lead does not make it any less

frightening. Think about the last time you took initiative and exposed yourself to meaningful risk. Maybe you followed God's call to plant a church or start a new business. Perhaps you led a small group despite that nagging fear that you would fail. Maybe you overcame your fear of rejection and shared the gospel with your lost neighbor. Or perhaps you finally gathered the courage to repent to your spouse. That queasy feeling you felt as you stepped out is called fear.

Our fear is often driven by the reality that leadership exposes us to potential embarrassment, loneliness, and even pain. In his book *Change the World*, University of Michigan leadership professor Robert Quinn notes that the origin of the word "leader" literally means to "go forth and die." He writes:

"Leadership authors do not understand that leadership means 'Go forth to die.' If they did understand it, they would not be enticed to write about it—because people do not want to hear this message. Most people want to be told how to get extraordinary results with minimum risk. They want to know how to get out-of-the-box results with in-the-box courage" (*Change the World*, 179).

Quinn is right. The willingness to step toward need and the associated uncertainty, risk, and exposure is at the very heart of leadership.

It turns out that beneath our fear and uncertainty are deeply ingrained insecurities. Both secular and sacred leadership theorists suggest that as we consider engaging in meaningful leadership we often ask ourselves powerful questions like: Will this hurt me? What will this cost me? Will this expose my weaknesses? While many leadership theorists agree that these powerful questions guide if and how we lead, many disagree

on how to overcome their immobilizing effects. In fact, in a very real sense, every leadership book is yet another attempt to answer the powerful questions lurking beneath our fear.

SIMULATING LEADERSHIP

In response to our fear of the unknown, many forgo leadership altogether or worse, engage in what author Andy Crouch calls “simulated risk.” In his book *Strong and Weak*, Crouch helps us understand what happens when we succumb to our fear of leadership: “In response to our fear, our temptation is not total disengagement, but

All of us are called to take initiative for the glory of God and the good of others. We are called to lead.

powerful and rewarding simulations of engagement. The real temptation for most of us is not complete apathy but activities that simulate meaningful action and meaningful risk without actually asking much of us or transforming much in us” (*Strong and Weak*, 82). Crouch has put his finger on a real and pervasive problem. Many of us are too scared to lead but too proud to appear disengaged. Stuck in the middle, we simulate leadership.

This helps explain why many of us are tempted to tweet instead of engage in meaningful dialogue with those with whom we disagree. It explains why we boast about living “on mission” without actually talking to our neighbors. Ultimately, we fear what might happen if we do.

WE DON'T NEED A STRATEGY. WE NEED A FATHER.

So how should Christians respond to our fear of leadership? According to secular leadership theorists, we should remember how desperately we are needed, or we should find inspiration in more experienced and courageous leaders. While these strategies often work for a season, they are incapable of fueling the depths of leadership God is calling us to. This is because our fear and anxiety is first and foremost a deeply spiritual reality. Long before we wonder if leadership will cost, hurt, or expose us, we wonder who we are and what implications our identity has on how we engage the world around us.

Matthew 3-4 offers a profound window into the relationship between our identity and leadership. Shortly before Jesus walked into the desert to be tempted by Satan, he stood in the Jordan to be baptized by John. Matthew tells us that “when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Matt 3:16-17). Do not miss the connection between

the baptism and temptation of Jesus. Our elder brother entered the wilderness with this message still ringing in his ears: You are the son of the living God. Jesus knew exactly who he was and what that meant for how he, and we, are to live.

As Jesus entered the wilderness, Satan tempted him to question his identity and inheritance as the Son of God. In his book *Tempted and Tried*, Russell Moore reminds us that the temptation to turn stones into bread was another way of asking, “Will your Father really provide for you?” Similarly, the temptation to throw himself down off the temple was another way of asking, “Will your Father really protect you?” Finally, the temptation to prematurely inherit all the kingdoms of the earth was another way of asking, “Will your Father really exalt you?” In all three instances, Satan sought to undermine God’s promise to care for his son.

NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD

Satan’s strategy was not new. Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has worked to distort and discredit God’s love for his children. He desperately wants would-be Christian leaders to question God’s promise to provide, protect, and care for his sons and daughters. He wants us to doubt God’s commitment to be with us, even to the end of the age. He wants us to tremble, wondering if God really has overcome the world. He wants us to shrink back from leadership, wondering if he will ever leave or forsake us. Satan will do anything he can to keep you from acting on your faith.

But faith is just what we need.

As we reflect on the temptation of Christ, we learn that our fear should be replaced by faith in the steadfast love of the Father. He sent his only begotten son into the wilderness to shut the mouth of Satan once and for all. His perfect obedience and sacrificial death paid the



penalty for our sin, and his resurrection declared our victory over Satan, sin, and the grave. In Christ, we have entered into God's family, becoming objects of the Father's eternal provision, protection, and care. Though now we only experience shadows of these heavenly realities, in God's good timing we will experience the full measure of his glory.

Only the unshakable bedrock of the gospel can inspire and sustain the courage we need to take initiative for the glory of God and the good of others. It is upon this truth that we can confidently say with the Apostle Paul,

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:29-39).

Yes, God is calling us to follow him deep into the wild and restless world around us. But his Word reminds us that we are not there alone. He has gone before us and promises to go with us. He will surely give us everything we need to accomplish his will. ★

Charles W. Smith Jr. is the vice president for institutional relations at *Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*.



When Godly People Do Ungodly Things

THE NECESSITY OF

I'm hoping against hope that each person who [reads] this will have the maturity and insight to understand and not misappropriate what I'm about to say: If we're going to get fortified against the devil's schemes in an ever-increasingly wicked world, to some wise extent we're going to have to get into other people's business and let them get into ours.

There. I said it. Help me, Lord, not to regret it!

Check out parts of Hebrews 10:24–25: “And let us consider and give attentive, continuous care to *watching over one another* . . . and all the

SEE-THROUGH

LIVES

Beth Moore

more faithfully as you see the day approaching” (emphasis mine).

Some Christians are so watchful of others that they don't watch over themselves. They see specks in other eyes and miss the planks in their own. That's not the kind of thing the writer of Hebrews is talking about. He's talking specifically about “studying how we may stir up (stimulate and incite)” one another “to love and helpful deeds and noble activities.” His exhortation is about love, helpfulness, and nobility between believers. These verses are about encouraging one another

and watching out for one another, not bulldozing down appropriate boundaries.

Since you and I and all future believers will need one another all the more as the day approaches, we need to grow in our trustworthiness and in purity of heart and motive. We have a responsibility to one another—which means we have a responsibility to become the kinds of persons who can help one another responsibly.

I'd like to suggest two ways we can help one another more responsibly:

1. Develop and practice godly discernment from a broader base.
2. Develop and practice deliberate accountability from a narrower base.

A NARROWER BASE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

[H]elping one another responsibly involves developing and practicing a narrower base of accountability. If we're going to be fortified against seduction, you and I urgently need a small group of people who we invite to hold us accountable to the pursuit of godliness. Accountability partners mean individuals we invite to see through us.

Everyone from the pastor to the church "door-keeper" needs accountability, but none of us can be forced into it. The structure can be placed around us and the process even demanded of us, but how transparent we are with others will always be a choice. Transparency for the believer is a wise choice. Only those who are willing to be vulnerable will experience the protection accountability can bring.

My present purpose in this chapter is not to outline structures for accountability groups. I want rather to encourage you as I've been encouraged to allow several other people of spiritual maturity, godly integrity, and discretion to really know you and hold you accountable to the pursuit and practice of godliness.

Our accountability partners are so important that we want to choose them prayerfully and soberly under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We may find that the best accountability partners are not necessarily our "best" friends because sometimes we need more objectivity than close friends can provide. Those we ask to hold us

If we're going to get fortified against the devil's schemes in an ever-increasingly wicked world, to some wise extent we're going to have to get into other people's business and let them get into ours.

accountable should be people we deeply respect and who have proved trustworthy over a length of time. (Beware of instant intimacy with anyone!)

Although I am very public about general confessions of sin, weakness, and fault, God calls me to be far more specific with the handful of people He has placed around me for accountability. I laughed with someone the other day in the ministry office about the fact that we hold each other so accountable, no one can even sneeze around there without someone asking what got in her nose. That's OK with me!

I find tremendous comfort and relief in tight accountability. I lived behind a mask for so long that once I got past the painful transition, I began



to love the freedom of transparency. I also like the security of knowing that several of those around me have made serious commitments to me, this ministry, and God to alert me (and my board of directors if necessary) to things I may be too blind to see. Particularly things in me.

Posted plainly in our ministry suite are instructions for staff members and volunteers in the event of any questionable behavior in me. Several staff members and directors on our board as well as my husband and a personal friend know everything there is to know about me. The good, the bad, and the ugly. They have open access to question me about absolutely anything. How I thank God for them! Only heaven will prove how they

Some Christians are so watchful of others that they don't watch over themselves.

have aided and abetted my pursuit of godliness and my protection from the evil one.

WHAT WE LEARN FROM PAUL'S TEACHING

The apostle Paul taught volumes about good accountability partners because he assumed that role with his young churches through his epistles. In fact, our key verse for this book implies several descriptions of the kind of godly accountability we need in the increasing wickedness surrounding us.



Please notice a critical element in Paul's accountability approach: his desire was their devotion to Christ—not their devotion to him.

“I am jealous of you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2–3).

Paul left no doubt in his letter to the Corinthians. He intended to hold them accountable to godliness. He had a godly jealousy for their best.

Please notice a critical element in Paul’s accountability approach: his desire was their devotion to Christ—not their devotion to him. God-ordained yokefellows are jealous for us to be God’s, not theirs. Godly accountability is never codependency.

Paul demonstrates another wonderful characteristic in a godly accountability partner. He had the ability to recognize and acknowledge strengths in his companions in the faith while still discerning risks. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul commended their sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Who wants an accountability partner who does nothing but point out weaknesses and spout warnings? I don’t! I need a little encouragement sometimes, and so do you. Surely something is worth commending in us from time to time! If not, we need more than an accountability partner! The last thing Paul wanted was for the Corinthians to lose heart (2 Cor. 4:1).

On the other hand, Paul was not blinded to the risks their present weaknesses heightened. He didn’t just fret over the fears he had for them. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he spoke plainly and lovingly. They heard whether or not they heeded.

See-through lives. That’s what we need. Whether we realize it or not, you and I are desperate for people who can see through our lives. With their help, we can begin practicing lives of inside-out veracity that anybody can see through. What freedom! What peace!

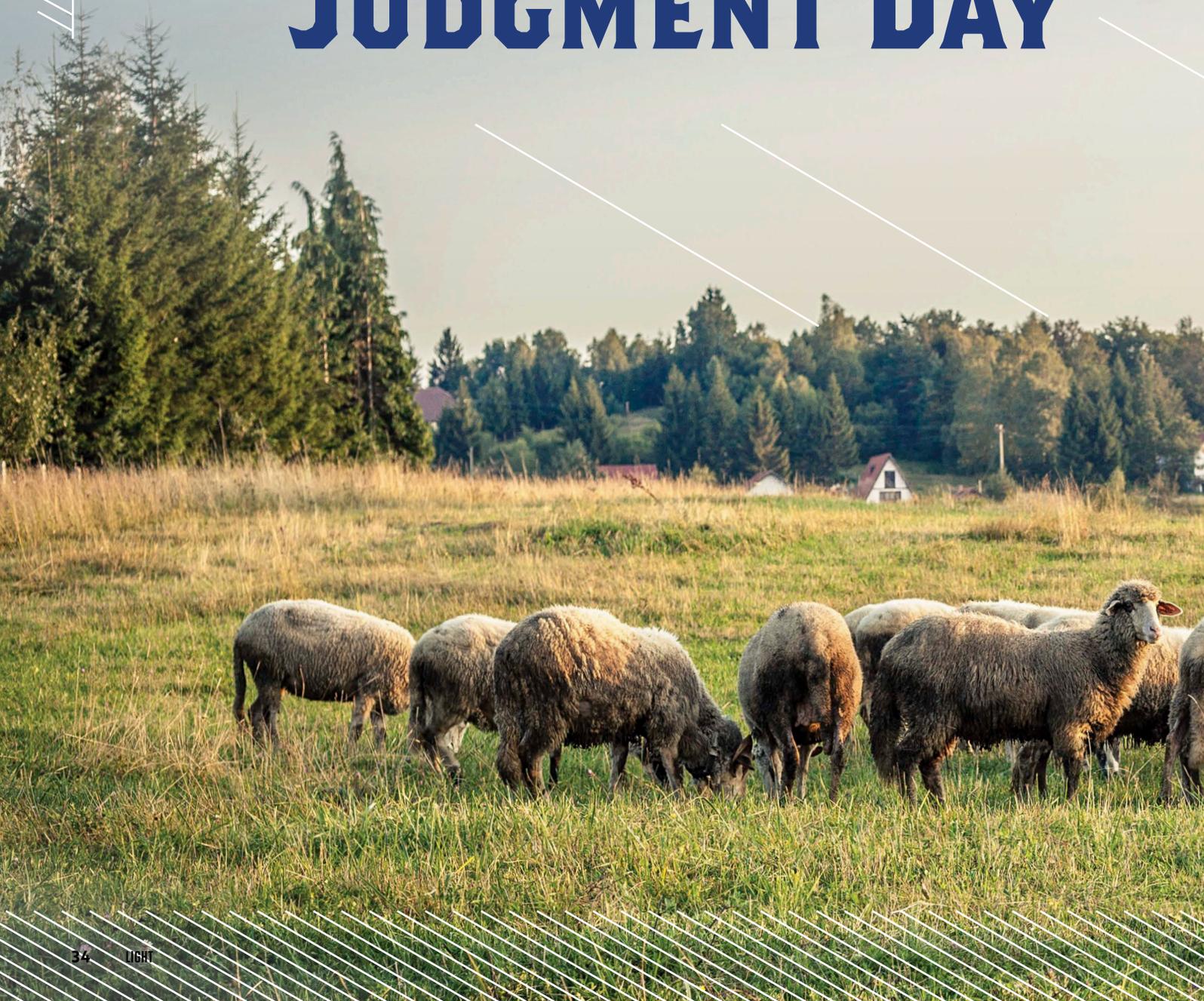
Take it from a former Cover Girl . . . and I don’t mean the pretty kind. I mean the kind who writes “Keep Out!” across her forehead in permanent marker and keeps herself covered no matter what the cost. Well, the cost is inestimable. [And] oh, what joy those days stole from me! ★

Beth Moore is an author, Bible teacher, and the founder of *Living Proof Ministries*.

Excerpts used with permission. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things: Arming Yourself in the Age of Seduction*, B&H Books (April 1, 2002), pp. 135-136, 140-143.

How

REFLECTING ON JUDGMENT DAY

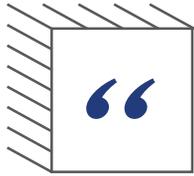


Can

SAVE YOU FROM SIN TODAY

Russell Moore





THIS WAS YOUR LIFE,” IT SAID, AND THAT SCARED ME HALF TO DEATH.

I WAS A CHILD, AND CAME ACROSS A FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIAN

EVANGELISTIC TRACT, DRAWN IN A COMIC BOOK STYLE. AS A Hardcore FAN OF ALL THINGS

SUPERHERO, I ASSUMED THIS LITTLE BOOKLET WOULD TAKE ME TO THE SAME SORTS OF

IMAGINATIVE PLACES MY SUPERMAN AND JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA AND X-MEN BOOKS

DID. INSTEAD, IT TOOK ME TO A CARTOONY VERSION OF THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST.

The tract pictured a dead man on Judgment Day standing before the throne of God. As he stood in judgment, a film was shown about the man, in front of the assembled crowd of friends, neighbors, key biblical patriarchs and prophets, and, of course, Jesus. Everyone was watching all the secret sins he had ever committed, great and small. The man would squirm in embarrassment, but he couldn't deny any of it. "This was your life," the angel beside the throne said.

Gulp.

What would my parents think when they saw the things I had done? What about my Sunday school teachers? Maybe if I died early enough, I could go through the film before they could get there to see it? But, even so, there would still be Jesus. And I'd be exposed as a fraud. Nothing could be worse, it seemed. I even wondered, briefly, if hell might be even better. At least I could hide from the shame of having to watch that film.

Looking back, I now find that tract had a certain degree of power because it detailed graphically something that I intuitively knew was true about God and about myself, namely that "no creature is

hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). But I also find that it skewed the biblical vision of what the Judgment Seat is for those who are in Christ. As a matter of fact, a reflection on the Judgment Seat of Christ is, it seems to me, precisely what we need in order to find the freedom and joy to follow Jesus in the present. In fact, spending more time looking forward to the Judgment Seat of Christ just might save your life.

HOW THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS JUDGMENT DAY

Yes, the Scriptures warn the unrepentant of coming judgment. That's an essential part of the preaching of John the Baptist, of Jesus, of the Apostle Paul. At Mars Hill in Athens, for instance, Paul asserted that, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). To the governor Felix, Paul "reasoned about righteousness and self-control and

the coming judgment," to the point that Felix was alarmed and changed the subject immediately (Acts 24:25).

That, it turns out, is the universal reaction of unregenerate humanity. God has embedded in the human conscience an awareness of his law and of sin in a way that points people toward "that day when God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:16). Left to ourselves, though, we "suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18). Instead of an awareness of judgment, we then follow the path of our own inclinations, convincing ourselves otherwise, until all that remains is usually a kind of inchoate angst, a fear of death (Heb. 2:15), and an intuitive "fiery expectation of judgment" (Heb. 10:27).

The gospel changes all of this for us, though. When we are united to Christ, we are not to cringe before Judgment Day. This is because we have no case to make for our own innocence. God has already revealed our guilt, at the cross, and we have already agreed with his verdict, in our confession of sin and our ongoing repentance of it. Judgment Day happened for us, in a very real sense, already, at the Place of the Skull outside the gates of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.

Judgment Day, then, is not some foreboding pending assessment of whether God is for us or against us. As the Spirit has said to us, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?” (Rom. 8:33-34). The good news of the gospel tells us now of our Judgment Day: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

As I look back, it was not punishment of my guilt, but exposure of my shame that terrified me. For Christians, the Judgment Seat frees us from such shame. The Judgment Seat reminds us that God sees everything about us, that God knows everything about us. There is nothing hidden that will not be exposed on that day (Luke 8:17; 12:2-3). But there is also nothing that Jesus, our judge, will learn about us on that day that he doesn’t already know, that he hasn’t known since long before he gave himself up for us.

This is the startling truth of the Jesus in the Gospels. Not that he forgives, but that he is not shocked by what they are hiding, for good or ill. Jesus reveals how much he knows about a seeming stranger when he tells the Samaritan woman at the well that he knows about her sin: “You have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband” (John 4:18). Jesus knew this already when he offered her the living water of life.

FREEDOM FROM SHAME

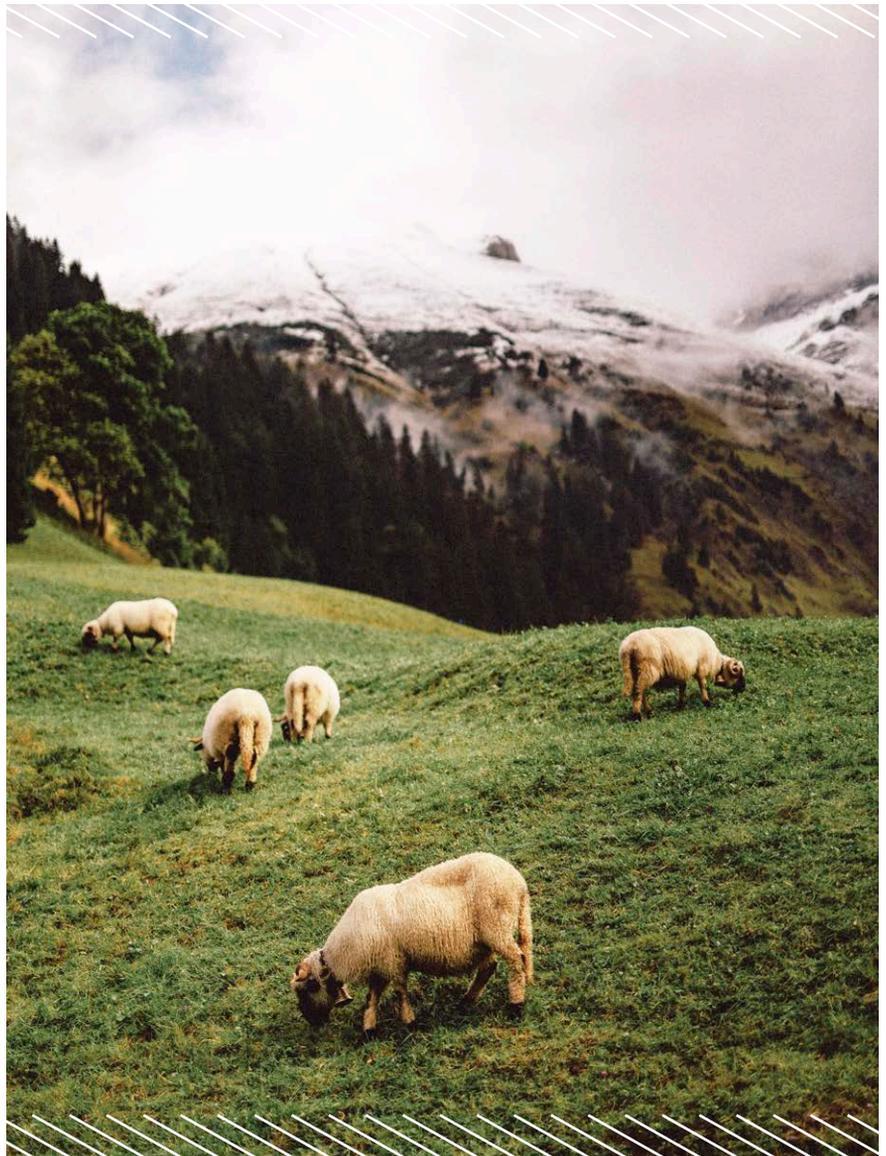
Judgment Day frees us from shame because, through the gospel, we no longer try to hide from God, as our prehistoric ancestors did before us. That voice “Adam, where are you?” that once drove a sinful humanity to hide in the vegetation still goes forth. But Jesus, a faithful and obedient humanity, answers confidently, “Here I am, and the children God has given me” (Heb. 2:13). We are free to confess our sin, boldly, knowing that Jesus forgives us, intercedes for us, and is not one bit shocked by us.

That reality, rightly understood, doesn’t lead to presumption but to accountability. We do not hide our sins and vulnerabilities. Darkness is, in fact, where these evils latch onto us. We shine light on our own darkness, confess our sins to one another and to God, and seek help for others to bear our burdens with us. Knowing this about ourselves helps us then to free ourselves from judgmental attitudes toward the sins and struggles of others.

Paul asked the church at Rome, “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise

your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, ‘as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother” (Rom. 14:10-13).

Knowing we will be judged along with everyone else gives us compassion.





A reflection on the Judgment Seat of Christ is, it seems to me, precisely what we need in order to find the freedom and joy to follow Jesus in the present. Spending more time looking forward to the Judgment Seat of Christ just might save your life.

FREEDOM FROM A SENSE OF MEANINGLESSNESS

The Judgment Seat also frees us from a sense of meaninglessness. The Judgment Seat not only divides the redeemed from the damned, but also evaluates our lives in light of eternity. The Judgment Seat shows us that what matters is not what seems to matter in this fallen universe obsessed with power and prestige. In Jesus' teaching on the Judgment Seat, the "sheep" are known not by their visible impressiveness (the "goats" have that), but because they recognized Jesus in the naked, the poor, the imprisoned, the starving: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40).

Our lives given over to the vulnerable take on a renewed significance precisely because they do not meet the criteria for the "judgment seats" of this present era. Jesus said, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14).

The *New York Times* columnist David Brooks famously distinguished between "resume virtues" (our accomplishments in career or with money or fame) and our "eulogy virtues" (those more important

aspects of character that people will remember us by when we die). Jesus would show us that more important than our resumes or our eulogies is a Judgment Seat proclamation: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:23). Reading backward from that, we can see what in our lives really matters, and what doesn't.

FREEDOM FROM THE NEED FOR APPROVAL

A focus on the Judgment Seat also frees us from our need for the approval of people, and from our fear of their disapproval. The apostle Paul wrote to his critics: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court . . . It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore I do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God" (1 Cor. 4:3-5).

The Judgment Seat reminds us that we are not seeking the approval of man, but of God (Gal. 1:10). Conscience and integrity and holiness are far more important than the commendation of whatever crowd is around us. And, even if we must stand alone sometimes, we do so without fear. Jesus did not flinch at Pontius Pilate's "judgment seat" (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13) because he knew the real Judgment Seat was yet to come, and that the roles there would be reversed.

FREEDOM FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH

The Judgment Seat in our prospective vision also frees us from the fear of death. The fear of our own finitude and morality leads to all sorts of immorality and misery in ways that don't seem to have anything to do with death. Most of the people I've known who have destroyed their families with an adulterous affair weren't looking for the experience of orgasm but rather to reclaim the feeling of being young. The "sneaking around" with a new romance promised to kindle for them the illusion of their days in high school or college, before they had all the responsibilities of spouse or parent or caregiver or breadwinner.

The Judgment Seat is not the end of something, a wrapping up of one's history back when one was "alive." Quite the contrary. The Judgment Seat is the beginning of something. Jesus says to his disciples on Judgment Day: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21). As C.S. Lewis put it in *The Last Battle*: "You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And, of course, it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream."

So, Christian, walk away from the siren song of temptation. Stop checking your approval ratings in the eyes of those around you. Love people the world finds invisible. Stop worrying. Exult in the freedom of the Lord. It's beginning to look a lot like Judgment Day. And Jesus is the Judge on the seat before us. That means there's nothing left to fear, nothing left to hide.

This is your life. ★

Russell Moore is the president of the ERLC.

STAYING

how

ENGAGED IN

institutions

COOPERATIVE

keep us

MISSION

faithful

J.D. Greear



a

A lot can be lost in a single generation. Ronald Reagan famously admonished Americans that they had to teach the principles of freedom to a rising generation or those principles could be lost. The writers of Scripture often warned the leaders of Israel that unless they rehearsed the works of God to their children and grandchildren, a generation would arise that “knew not the Lord or his ways.” Read the pages of Scripture and church history, and you’ll find a troubling reality: It is far too easy to begin well and end poorly.

Southern Baptists have a lot to pass on to the next generation, and one of the most important principles is the concept and practice of cooperative mission. Our cooperative mission strategy has yielded one of the greatest gospel movements in history. If we are going to remain faithful as a denomination, then we will only do so by remaining fixed on the mission Christ commissioned for us.

PASSING THE TORCH OF MISSION IN THE SBC

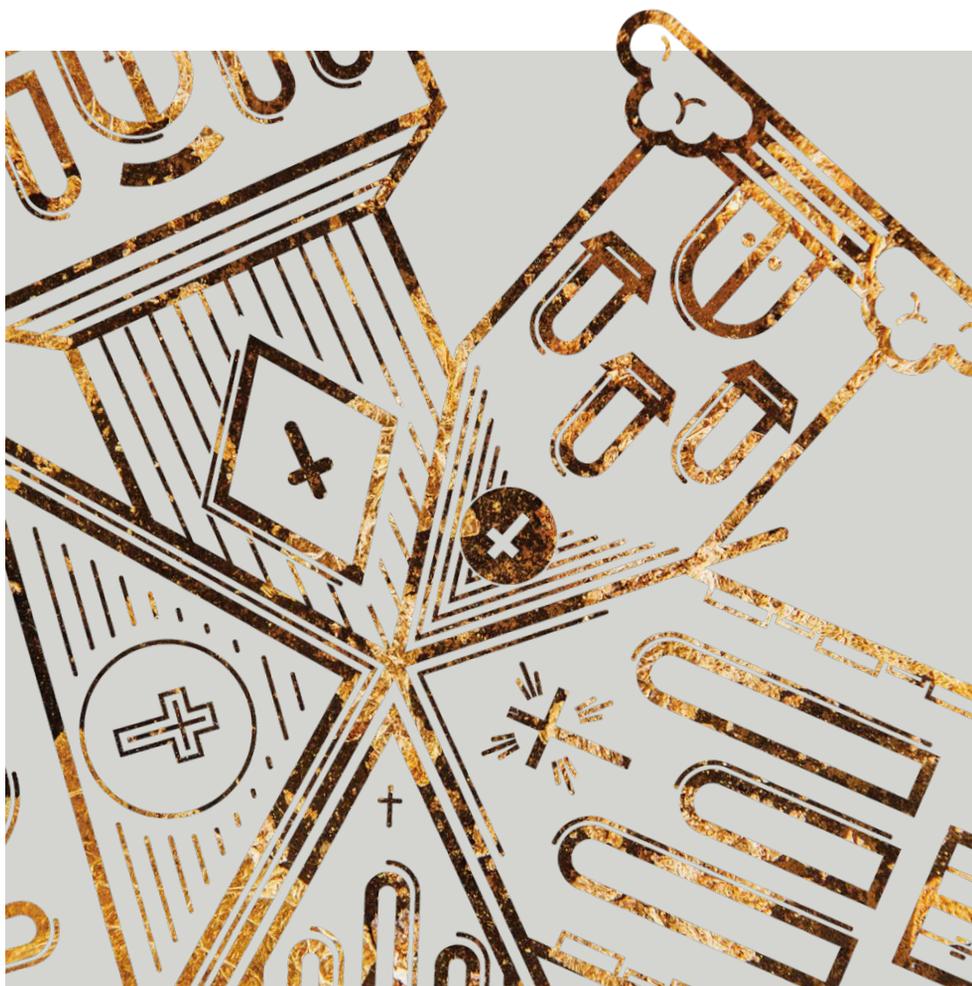
Cooperation between churches for the sake of mission is what drives the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Of course, Baptists didn’t invent the idea of missional cooperation. All throughout the New Testament, we see churches partnering together to advance the mission. Paul mentioned giving—from one church to another—in several of his letters (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8-9; cf. Acts 11:27-30). Interestingly, when Paul mentioned the gift given by the

Macedonian Christians in Romans 15, he called it “*koinonia*”—literally, “fellowship.” Chad Brand, in his online article, “Cooperative Ministry in the New Testament,” goes so far as to say that financial sharing for the sake of the mission is the key element of fellowship for churches in the New Testament.

The church I pastor, The Summit Church, has “fellowshipped” with the SBC since our birth. It is a partnership that has greatly enriched us. For instance, the SBC enables and equips us to send our people out in ways that we could not do alone. We currently have more than 200 people serving overseas, most of whom are with the International Mission Board (IMB). That’s an enormous investment, and we are incredibly grateful to stand with Southern Baptists in support of all our missionaries.

Closer to home, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) has been a crucial partner in all of our 43 domestic church plants. Then there’s the world-class training provided by our SBC seminaries, which has equipped a huge portion of our staff. And I can’t ignore the *personal* debt I owe to the SBC as a two-time seminary graduate and former IMB missionary! I could go on—retirement benefits, community outreach, mission trip coordination, representation in Washington, D.C., local and state church planting partnerships, aid in work among refugees and immigrant communities, and many other crucial projects.

All of that (and quite a bit more) is made possible by something that the younger generation finds uninspiring—a commitment to our institutional structures. More specifically, our mission opportunities are a result of our cooperative giving. When we give through the Cooperative Program (CP), Annie Armstrong, or Lottie Moon offerings, we are giving to a powerful and proven method for supporting the Great Commission. This is what the SBC has always been about.



It’s hard for many people to get pumped about giving to an institution. We love hearing stories of life change and success in missions. We rarely hear (or tell) stories of the support structures that made those stories possible. Perhaps we should.

A RISING TIDE RAISES ALL SHIPS

One of the biggest challenges for the SBC in the next two decades will be increasing the engagement of a new generation of churches in our Convention. Much of this is specific to the SBC, but the broad strokes of these ideas apply, I believe, to all churches in the United States. If we keep our focus on the mission, we have to do what we can to continue funding the mission. God has given us what we have, not to make us more comfortable, but to make us more effective in mission.

I see our engagement increasing in three key ways:

1. All churches ought to be giving more to the Cooperative Program.

That may seem obvious, but it’s worth repeating. At The Summit Church, our Great Commission Giving (i.e. all giving to SBC entities) has always been high (last year totaling 19 percent of our undesignated receipts). Over the last few years, however, we have made a concerted effort to increase our traditional CP giving as well (currently 2.4 percent of undesignated receipts). That’s worth celebrating. But I recognize that there is still a great need for more money to go through traditional CP structures. We aren’t where we need to be yet.

And, candidly, neither are most of the churches in our Convention. I’ve heard it said that if 100 percent of the members of any one church *just* tithed, then most churches would more than triple their available funds. The same is true across

*Both movements
and institutions
need each other.*

*Institutions
without movements*

lack vitality. But

movements without

institutions lack

staying power.

our denomination. Our institutional structures have allowed the mission to go forward, so we should feel no shame in calling each other to keeping the mission going.

2. Since CP giving goes through the states, we should encourage state conventions to do as much as they can to get money to the field.

CP money is given for the sake of mission, particularly overseas mission among unreached people groups. As much of that money as possible should be directed toward that aim. I appreciate the conventions like Florida and Texas (among many others!) that have led the way in this, giving more of their money away to the field than they keep. Our own executive director-treasurer, Milton Hollifield, has talked about doing this in North Carolina, too. We are grateful for

the many kingdom-minded leaders in our local and state conventions.

3. We should celebrate all Great Commission giving.

Some churches will choose to give cooperatively but not through the traditional CP structures. We recognize that churches have the freedom to give in various ways; however, I don't want to see us go back to "societal giving"—where everybody gives only to their favorite entity. Overly-specified giving is not healthy in a local church, and it wouldn't be for the Convention either. We have elected leaders, and we should trust them to steward the money. If we're not happy with those leaders, we should vote them out. But as Paul Chitwood, former executive director-treasurer of the Kentucky Baptist Convention (and huge CP advocate) and newly-elected president of the IMB, has put it, cooperation means more than mere CP percentages. A rising tide, as they say, raises all ships; the more we celebrate all of the Great Commission giving we see in the SBC, the more we'll see giving toward the CP rise, too.

MOVEMENTS NEED INSTITUTIONS

As I look to the future of the SBC, I am reminded of the need for both *movements* and *institutions* in the kingdom of God. Movements are exciting—they are grassroots level initiatives that feel spontaneous, Spirit-prompted, and generate a lot of buzz, enthusiasm, and participation. Institutions, by contrast, have the reputation of being fixed, firm, and sometimes boring and bureaucratic. But both movements and institutions need each other. Institutions without movements lack vitality. But movements without institutions lack *staying power*.

For example, if you look at some of the most robust movements of church planting networks in the U.S.—many of which are doing excellent work—you may be disappointed in the actual numbers. Very few of these charismatic

movements are churning out more than 100 new church planters a year. Most are sending out far fewer.

Compare that with the number of SBC graduates from last year—2,000. Even if you wanted to eliminate half of those (as underqualified or not headed into pastoral ministry), that still leaves 1,000 qualified graduates every year. Together, as Southern Baptists, we have nearly 4,000 missionaries serving overseas, in almost every nation in the world. Because of our cooperation, they have training and care structures, and a multi-million dollar budget to support them.

None of that would be feasible without the machinations of the SBC institutions. It may be easier and more exciting to jump on board with a nimble movement, but the long-term impact is not nearly as substantial. The cumbersome nature of institutions can be maddening, but there's really no arguing with their strategic importance.

We need the institutions of the SBC. And we need the next generation to get involved in all of them. I've heard it said that decisions in our Convention, at every level, are made by those who choose to show up. For those of us who have led the SBC in mission, it's time for us to encourage others to "show up" in our Convention.

More importantly, for all of the passionate, missions-minded, and movement-oriented people who are eager to see advancement in the SBC, I want to say: Show up. Stick it out. Stay involved. You need this institution, and just as importantly, this institution needs you if it's going to stay faithful to its mission. You will always have institutions with you, but you won't always have movements. Don't buy the lie that you've got to pick between the two; instead, be the movement that these institutions need! ★

J.D. Greear is the pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, North Carolina, and the 62nd president of the Southern Baptist Convention.



WITHOUT A VISION THE FAMILY WILL PERISH

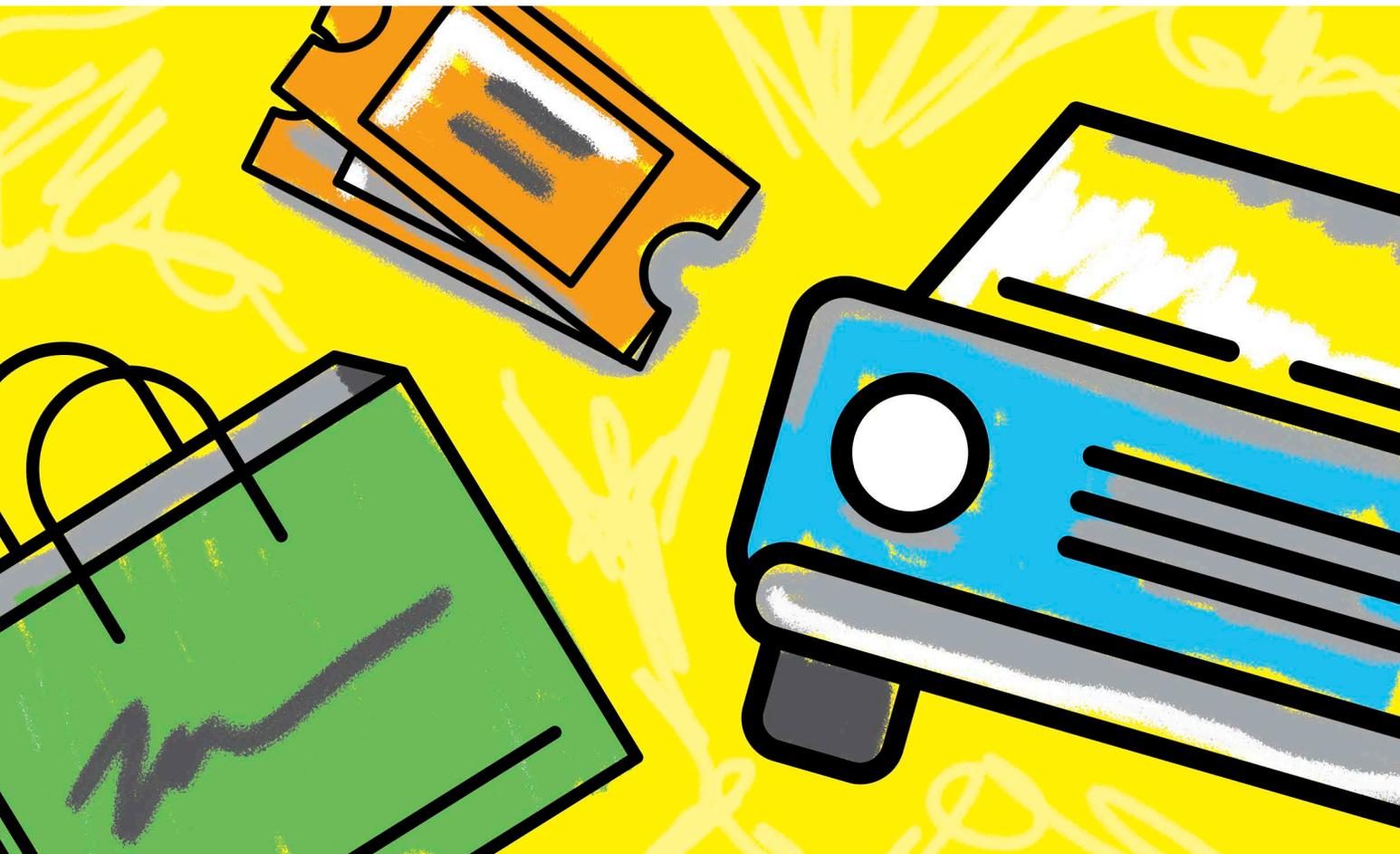
PROTECTING YOUR MARRIAGE
AND CHILDREN IN THE MIDST
OF MINISTRY

John Onwuchekwa

I've been a pastor about as long as I've been a husband. I got engaged in the spring of 2007, started pastoring in the summer, and was married by winter. For the past 11 years, I haven't known one without the other, but I *have* been better at one than the other.

I have found that in trying to balance marriage and ministry, there are many ways to ruin both. There are some that travel down the backroads of scandal and arrive at misery's doorstep. However, the highway of subtlety can lead right to that same door step. I've almost wrecked my marriage and ministry at least three times through means that were more subtle than scandalous, yet could have been every bit as disastrous.

In 2011, a year and a half into our first church plant in Atlanta, my wife and I were in counseling to work through our diagnosis of "unexplained fertility." I was a 27-year-old pastor who was angry and



resentful, but didn't know it. I was upset with the fact that my wife couldn't move past our infertility like I had (or thought I had). It felt like a distraction from ministry, and she felt alone through the process of grief as I was busy trying to pastor everyone else.

Then, my brother died in April 2015. The church I currently pastor was set to launch six weeks later, and I was intent on keeping that timeline and not "letting anyone down." I stuffed my emotions and masked my pain because I believed beginning the church was the most important thing. The next 18 months became a prolonged period of depression and darkness that my wife carried in a unique way.

Finally, in 2017, after 10 years of trying, we had our first child. We adopted a baby girl born two months premature. She came home from the NICU in April, and by June I was back in ministry full swing, pastoring, writing, traveling, and

speaking. I left home for a 10-day stretch doing "ministry" while my wife was home with our daughter.

Every few years, I'd find myself in a place where I'd feel burdened, weighed down, depressed, full of shame, and asking myself, "How did I get here? How did we get here?" I was following all the instructions: regular date nights, taking vacations and time off, remaining faithful to my spouse, confessing sin to others, managing our finances well. Yet, none of it protected me from always feeling hopeless. So I blamed everything and everyone—my circumstances, employers, spouse, God (for all the problems he caused), and church members I pastored.

I blamed the storms of life until Ecclesiastes 10:18 gave me new perspective: "Because of laziness the roof caves in, and because of negligent hands the house leaks." The truth hit me hard. Crisis often overtakes us, not because of external

Crisis often overtakes us, not because of external circumstances but **internal complacency.**

Excellence is our
faithfulness in
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responsibilities,
in their order of
importance.

circumstances but internal complacency. My feelings had to do with my laziness. Everyone faces hard times, but the wise are prepared and know that relationships, especially marriages and families, need maintenance. I didn't want to set my family up for a scenario where the roof would cave in, and I realized something had to change.

ESTABLISHING A VISION FOR YOUR FAMILY

Often, when we think about where to start in protecting our families, we begin with instructions: things I need to do, steps I need to take, guardrails I need to put up. We move too quickly to corrections aimed to challenge and instruct, skipping right over the very thing that will fuel the protection—a clear and compelling vision.

My main problem was that I had no vision for my marriage and family, at least not in comparison to the way I did for my ministry. I was passive with my family, avoiding scandalous sin, but absent when it came to leading my family to their purpose. I learned that the best way to protect my family, however, is to live as if they are my first and most foundational ministry.

The Bible begins with a vision for the unique role of family in God's plan. He creates a world, gives Adam a mission to fill the earth with his glory, and determines the primary way he will show himself to the world is through family. The apostle Paul builds on this concept in Ephesians 5. After giving detailed instructions on marriage, he lets the church know that those aren't the most important thing. He was concerned that the church saw the vision behind it: "This mystery is profound but, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (v. 32). Our families are for displaying the most important truth in the universe—God's unconditional love, commitment, and desire.

What's your vision for your marriage? How is your family a part of your ministry? Do they know their potential?

Do they realize how God wants to use them? Maybe the best way to protect them is to remind them that our family is too precious to God's plan of displaying himself to the world to be left on the sideline or tucked away behind glass.

So, here are a few practical ways to do this:

Prioritize your family. Some of the best pastoral advice I've received is this: "The church can get another pastor, but [your] wife can't get another husband, and [your] daughter can't get another father." Spend time knowing the particular ways that your family needs you to serve them in each season. Families grow, kids grow, and change is necessary, but your family will always need you to serve them.

Redefine excellence. For example, if you're in seminary preparing for ministry while serving at a church with a wife and kids, excellent may not always look like getting an "A." Learn your Bible, do the best with what you have, and be okay with a few C's in the classroom. Being present at dinner and bedtime may be more important. If you're done preparing for ministry and are already in the middle of things, the same rules apply. Do your work early, be diligent, and love your family enough not to make them suffer because of distractions. Work hard, but don't work so hard that all you have to give your family are the leftovers of your mind, body, and soul. Excellence is our faithfulness in fulfilling all our responsibilities, *in their order of importance.*

Let them feel the benefit of your presence. Spend time with your family, and take initiative spiritually, even if they are annoyed. Growing up, I remember being so annoyed that my family was habitually late, but never rushed in time with the Lord; it has been one of the things that has shaped me most. What good is your theology if you don't come alongside your family and show them what it looks



like in everyday life? Shepherd them in the good works that are meant to accompany what you believe.

Pray for your family. Let your prayers for your family match your pulse. Like Paul instructs, pray without ceasing. Prayer also helps you remove any distractions. Although marriage and family are good gifts, anything other than Jesus that finds itself at the center of your family life needs to be replaced; prayer is a great starting point to that end. One way to do this is to make the commitment to “pray today” as opposed to “pray every day.” It may just be semantics, but it’s helped me to move past my lack of discipline in previous years and give myself to fully investing in prayer in the present.

Enjoy your family. They are a blessing, not a burden. Make sure they feel it. Learn what they love, and do what they love. My wife and daughter love outside, and I dislike it. But having a compelling vision for your family has a unique way of motivating us to step outside our comfort zones by putting our personal preferences in their proper place—the background.

And make sure your family enjoys you. Do they get, for the most part, the best of you, your time, emotional health, energy, and spiritual leadership?

B.B. Warfield was a family man who was a model of being intentional with what was right in front of him. Shortly after marrying his wife, they were caught in a violent thunderstorm. She suffered trauma she’d never recover from and became increasingly incapacitated. Warfield would be his wife’s constant caregiver, confined to his home as well. One author describes the unintended consequences of his devotion to his family like this:

In the mysterious providence of God, it was the nature of his wife’s illness and his devotion to her, that ironically provided the greatest impetus for his massive literary output. Personally vital and energetic, “he did not allow” his wife’s illness “to hinder him in his work. He was intensely active with voice and pen” (Allis, “Personal Impressions of Dr Warfield,” 11). Thus his creative energies were focused in two directions: his writing and the classroom. As

caretaker for an invalid wife, Warfield spent many hours each day in the confines of his study.¹

Warfield’s vision for his family shaped how he cared for his sick wife, which in turn shaped his ministry, which eventually shaped the world! Warfield couldn’t have imagined how difficult it would be to devote himself to his wife, but in the same vein, he couldn’t imagine how God would use that difficult devotion to minister to her and reach beyond the confines of his home.

I pray that I will be more like Warfield, prioritizing my family and trusting the Lord with the reach of my ministry beyond that. May we be people whose families long reflect the vision we’ve instilled intentionally. And when it’s all said and done, may our spouses and children be able to say they were the ministry we did best. ★

John Onwuchekwa is the pastor of Cornerstone Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

¹<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/warfield-one-productive-life-and-one/>

FROM

*#MeToo Moment
to Movement*

EQUIPPING CHURCHES TO ADDRESS SEXUAL ABUSE

Phillip Bethancourt



A Pennsylvania Catholic priest raped a young girl, got her pregnant, and arranged an abortion. Bishop James Timlin wrote a letter of sympathy after this traumatic situation, saying,

“This is a very difficult time in your life, and I realize how upset you are. I too share your grief.”

But the bishop’s letter was not directed to the traumatized girl. It was actually sent to the priest.

This and many other horrific stories have recently emerged in the wake of a wide-ranging 884-page grand jury report that documents hundreds of cases of sexual assault and abuse by Catholic clergy in Pennsylvania since the 1940s. Not only that, but the latest news stories seem to be filled with example after example of prominent leaders, actors, or politicians who have been accused of sexual abuse or sexual assault.

Unfortunately, this issue has not escaped the church. The #MeToo moment has drawn significant attention to an issue that has too often flown under the radar for many churches. The statistics are overwhelming.

- One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old.
- One in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives.
- One in three women and one in six men experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.¹

The most common places sexual predators search for victims is in youth activities such as school, sports, and church. This is not just a problem “out there” in the culture. It has impacted people in our pews and people we are trying to reach with the gospel.

The Need to Address Sexual Abuse in the Church

In 2018, Southern Baptist Convention president J.D. Greear announced the formation of a Sexual Abuse Presidential Study Group. The purpose of the study group, according to Greear, is “to consider how Southern Baptists at every level can take discernable action to respond swiftly and compassionately to incidents of abuse, as well as to foster safe environments within churches and institutions.” As I have led this effort for the ERLC, we have discovered eye-opening insights

from survivors, advocates, pastors, and churches. What is clear from this study group is that churches desire to get this issue right but often don’t because they lack confidence or competence.

Furthermore, churches lack confidence to address sexual abuse because they don’t feel equipped to address it. While 58 percent of pastors say the #MeToo movement has made their congregation more aware of how common domestic and sexual violence is, only about 55 percent of pastors say they are familiar or very familiar with domestic violence resources in their community. And half say they don’t have sufficient training to address sexual or domestic abuse.²

If a predator came to your church in hopes of grooming a child to sexually abuse, how confident are you that your church’s policies, procedures, and personnel would successfully deter him? If an incident of sexual abuse or assault occurred in your congregation, how positive are you that your church would be able to respond and minister well in the aftermath? If a woman from your community came forward to a staff member or lay leader in your church and confided that she still faces trauma from the rape she experienced in college, how sure are you that he or she would be ready to minister well to her?

How can the #MeToo moment that the culture is facing be turned into a movement that results in lasting change in the church? It is important for churches to review policies, improve procedures, train personnel, and minister to people. But the need is more foundational:

Churches need to understand why this issue matters in light of the gospel and how this issue should be addressed in light of the gospel. Specifically, we need to embrace a clear understanding of how the gospel shapes our approach to sexual abuse in five significant ways.

First, churches must care for survivors. Sexuality was created by God for our good. When it is practiced within the boundaries of marriage, it leads to true human flourishing. Understanding the beauty of what God designed should lead us to understand the devastating effects of sexual abuse on victims. For example, one victim abused as a child by a priest “was so violently raped when he was [seven] years old that he suffered injuries to

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his spine. [He] became addicted to pain medication, and eventually overdosed and died.”³

The lingering effects of sexual abuse cannot be overlooked or minimized. The trauma experienced by a survivor of sexual abuse should drive us to compassionate ministry. Many survivors have never told anyone before, so when they do, they need to be met with support and care that assures them they are not alone. Because it is often hard to share, we must be sensitive to vague, delayed, or partial disclosures.

When a victim does share, we should listen to a victim’s story and respond calmly, while avoiding questions that might shame the victim. There is no quick fix to trauma, so we will need to walk patiently with him or her, allowing time for grief. Failing to appropriately respond can bring greater pain to a traumatized individual. Unless we approach issues of assault and abuse by prioritizing the care of victims in our churches, we will not be able to effectively address the issue.

Second, churches must confront sin.

We must call sexual abuse sin. Since we understand God’s design for sexuality, it would be sad if the world were more willing than the church to name and address the atrocity and brokenness of sexual abuse. Because of the Fall, we should not be naïve or shocked by sexual abuse. Moreover, the original intent in creation and the hope of redemption should keep us from ignoring or covering sexual abuse. Instead, both should allow us to confront it.

Our testimony is at stake: properly dealing with sin reflects our theology of God and the gospel. Sexual abuse is not just an issue related to sexuality; it is fundamentally rooted in the misuse of power. Authority for selfish gain is never appropriate in the eyes of God, especially when it comes to sex. When leaders or celebrities offer remorseful, half-hearted, non-apologies for their actions, it provides a backdrop for churches to discuss what genuine repentance and sincere apologies should look like.

Confronting sin also means being honest when something goes wrong in the church. A church must evaluate what went wrong when abuse occurs in order to make appropriate changes, report the abuse, own their errors, and apologize appropriately.

Even if the incident occurred years before, it is never too late to do the right thing.

Third, churches must seek justice. Abuse is not just sin. It is also a crime. Consider these startling statistics I heard at a recent Ministry Safe Summit:

- A child on average has to tell seven adults before one actually makes a report to authorities.
- Only two to five percent of allegations are false.
- Only three percent of abusers are ever prosecuted.

The comprehensive report on child abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in Pennsylvania demonstrates the injustice of a systematic cover up by church leaders of the extensive abuses. Attorney General Josh Shapiro said, “The cover up was sophisticated. The church protected the institution at all costs.”⁴ The main concern was with avoiding scandal. The problem included a broken system that empowered and protected predators. And children suffered grievously as a result.

Churches need to be more concerned about dealing with sexual abuse in a way that demonstrates justice and care for victims than with lawsuits or the damage that scandal might produce. We should not wait to investigate allegations as a condition of reporting. When in doubt, report. Reflecting the God of justice, the church must seek justice for victims of sexual abuse. We must take sin seriously and recognize sexual abuse is a sin issue *and* a crime that needs to be dealt with in the legal system.

THE ORIGINAL INTENT IN
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Fourth, churches must protect the vulnerable. As we embark on our efforts to address this issue, we must have an unwavering commitment to protect the vulnerable and never tolerate any form of abuse. Many churches now require criminal background checks and have a child-check-in system. These are great first steps in addressing the problem, but more needs to be done.

Churches can protect the vulnerable by requiring sexual abuse awareness training, thoroughly screening church staff and volunteers, considering the specific context of the church, continuing to monitor and give oversight to their programs in this regard, and by improving strategies and ministry for future incidents.

These steps may make it harder to give volunteers a name tag, but even if it deters some volunteers from serving, protecting the vulnerable is worth a small inconvenience. The call for church leaders to shepherd the church certainly entails protecting the children from the potential of sexual predators.

Fifth, churches must equip the saints. The previous four steps take sexual abuse seriously and also demonstrates to a congregation that the church is a safe place—both in preventing abuse and in getting help for those abused. In addition to this, the church should teach members how to respond when a friend from small group or a child in AWANA shares they were abused. An individual traumatized by sexual abuse will likely tell someone close to them who is trusted. That may be a counselor or a pastor, but it will often be a friend.

As a result, we need to train the people in the pews who will likely have the first conversation with a victim. They need to know how to care well for each survivor. Help first responders know how to model empathy and action. Their first instinct should be to take the stories of victims seriously. We have a God who cares for the most vulnerable and hears their cries; his people should be characterized by this as well. The church should be the place where victims of sexual assault find help and hope in their time of desperation. Training on how to identify sexual abuse and respond to survivors will help church members navigate a difficult topic in a Christ-centered and compassionate way.

Churches need to actively address sexual abuse by caring for survivors, confronting the sin of sexual abuse, seeking justice, protecting the vulnerable, and equipping the saints.



One church recently made a bold move in addressing sexual abuse in their congregation. Although there were no known instances of abuse in their church, they hired an independent investigator to see if there were abuses they were unaware of. They knew that the church had to respond to this #MeToo moment in a way that brings about lasting change.

The pastor of the church stated in an interview, “The Church in America has been so afraid of ‘being attacked’ by our culture that we cover up anything that doesn’t make us look good.”⁵ He continued, saying, “We want to be a safe place for people, both a place for those who have experienced abuse, but also a system that prevents it in our context.” This pastor understands that the church doesn’t need to cover up sexual abuse to maintain God’s reputation. In fact, addressing sexual

abuse gives us the opportunity to proclaim we are great sinners in need of a great Savior and demonstrates the character of our God to a watching world that is taking the brokenness of sexual abuse seriously. ★

Phillip Bethancourt is the executive vice president of the ERLC.

¹ <https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics>

² <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/09/18/pastors-more-likely-to-address-domestic-violence-still-lack-training/>

³ https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6060525/Pennsylvania-report-details-300-priests-sexually-molested-1-000-children-70-years.html?ito=social-twitter_dailymailus

⁴ <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/taking-action/press-releases/attorney-general-shapiro-details-findings-of-2-year-grand-jury-investigation-into-child-sex-abuse-by-catholic-priests-in-six-pennsylvania-dioceses/>

⁵ <https://relevantmagazine.com/issues/issue-96/itstime/>



HOW TO FALL IN MINISTRY

*(and what to do
when it happens)*

Jared C. Wilson

The scenario is depressingly common by now—word of another ministry leader having his hypocrisy and hidden life exposed. An addiction here. An affair there. An abusive exercise of power and narcissistic exploitation of position. I don't know if pastors fall at a higher rate today than they did, say, 30 years ago, but our social media age certainly makes it seem that way.

Each time it happens, we get less adept at incredulity, less inclined to outrage and distress. We're not happy about it, of course, but we are, sadly, getting used to it. Then the backward troubleshooting begins, the diagnosing of sicknesses long after the deaths. Ministry post-mortems tell us so much, but it would be great if we could see the falls coming.

But can't we?

HOW YOU CAN FALL IN MINISTRY

Looking back over the wreckage of so many disgraced pastors and failed ministries, what are some common denominators across the landscape of impurity in the pastorate? If you wanted to fall, what would you make sure you'd do?

First, you'd let the power of success (or just the position itself) go to your head. You don't have to be a glad-handing type-A leader to fall into the rut of egocentrism; you only have to be a pastor who enjoys approval and accolades. You could be a small church guy who enjoys being your congregation's functional messiah—available 24/7 for the needs in your church and open to their every religious whim or command. Before you know it, you're stressed, tired, and feeling either a little entitled or a little resentful (or both). And this combination of fatigue, stress, and stewing bitterness, over time, is a recipe for moral failure. Pushing yourself to these limits makes you extremely vulnerable for increasingly serious temptations from the evil one.

Secondly, you'd stop investing in your marriage. For pastors blessed to have families, one of the quickest ways to vulnerability in temptation is nurturing neglect of your wife and justifying it at the same time as “the demands of ministry” or something else similarly self-aggrandizing. After a while, you may even come to see your wife not as your primary ministry but as an obstacle, an impediment, a preventer of your ability to flourish in ministry. The bitterness takes root. She doesn't understand you, she doesn't “get” you. And then guess what happens when you come along someone who does—or at least seems to?

Thirdly, you'd isolate and obfuscate yourself. This is a surefire way to sabotage your ministry. Ministers have a variety of ways of removing themselves from real companionship and the accountability that often comes with it. You may find the best way is to exploit the leadership structure of your church or even tamper with it so everybody answers to you, and you answer to nobody, or nobody but “yes-men.” Or, you simply retreat further and further away from team dynamics whether emotionally or physically.

Almost every one of the pastors I've known personally who lost their ministries to moral failings would say later that they had no real friends. Nobody knew them. This has implications for accountability and also general emotional wellbeing. Not every lonely pastor falls morally, but they are all vulnerable to it.

But for those who don't feel isolated from others in structure or position, there is still the real danger of obfuscation. In other words, they aren't honest or confessional. They arrange things so no hard questions about their lives can be asked, and if they are, they just lie. The truth is seen as more costly. But nothing is more costly than investing in your not being known until the truth busts out through the debris of a moral train wreck.

Finally, you'd make a routine of neglecting communion with Christ.

This really sets a course for moral failure. Out of all the traits common to pastoral falls, this is in my estimation the most common of all—neglect of devotional life. Falls are different and so are the routes taken to them, but as soon as you commit, even if unintentionally, to not nourishing yourself in the Word and boasting in the weakness of prayer, you are deciding you are smart enough and strong enough to do life by yourself. This is a great way to plan for a spectacular failure.

When Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, he fought the enemy off with Scripture, and he was ministered to by the Spirit and the angels. If Jesus needed that wisdom and protection, who do you think you are that you don't?

So now you've put all the plans in place. You've bought your own hype or acquiesced to cultural or programmatic demands to center the ministry on yourself. You've sacrificed your family on the altar of success. You've isolated yourself emotionally and spiritually from others, living a life of hidden struggles and sins among others. And you've gone stale in your devotional life, pouring yourself into things more readily efficient or immediately practical.

Then you crash and burn.

Now what?

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FALL

Well, pastor, once you've fallen, *stick the landing*. And by that, I mean that once you're laid low, *stay there*. For a long time. No, not in your sin. Not in self-pity or wallowing. Repent of your sin and all the excuses for it and whining over it, but don't jump back up to pretend everything's fine. Listen to those you've hurt. Submit to those who know you. Remember that vocational ministry is an honor, and it's nobody's right. You are

not entitled to a ministry position.

And what about grace, you say? Well, grace means that a repentant sinner can be restored to the fellowship. And grace also means that no fellowship should be subjected to unqualified leadership.

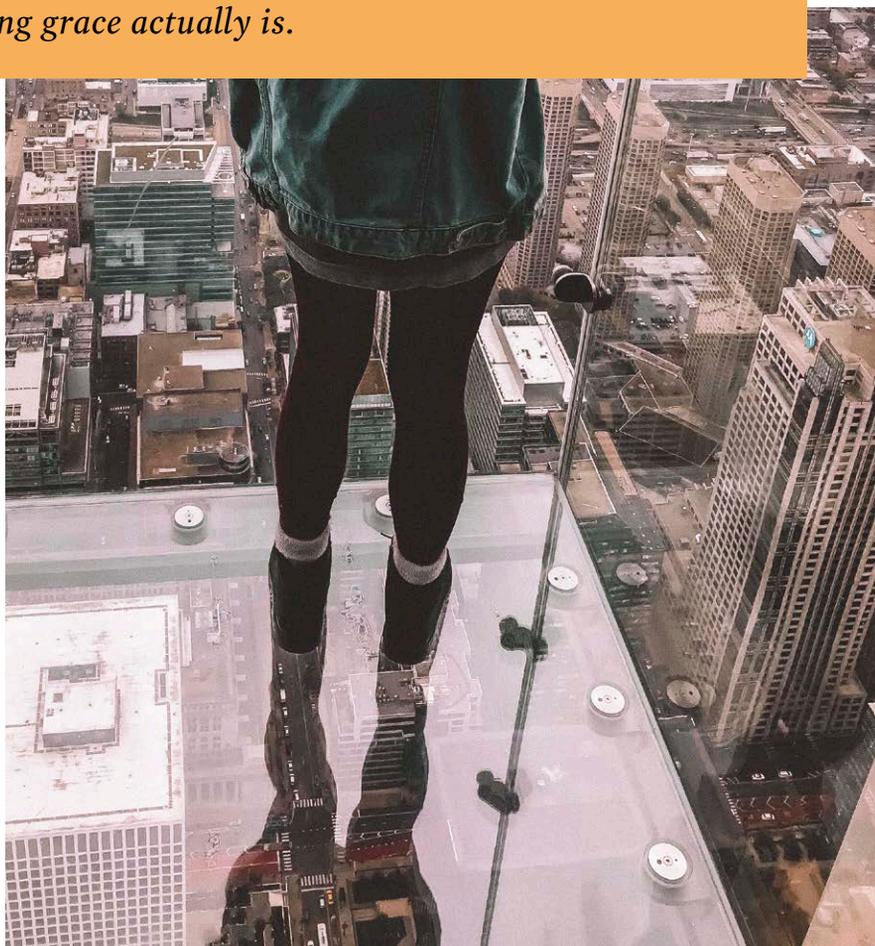
Can you ever be restored? Perhaps. I take from Christ's restoration of Peter that it's not just to the fold but to the feeding that fallen shepherds can be shepherds again. But I do not take from Christ's personal restoration that haste would be prudent. We read in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5 that pastors must be qualified. In those qualifications we see nothing of the aspiring pastor's ambition or preferences. We see character issues, spiritual aptitudes, and well-developed reputations for relational and communal integrity. These do not exist for the pastor who has disqualified himself. It does not mean they can never exist again, but they cannot exist *right now*.

You cannot tell if someone is a good manager of a household the first time you meet him. You see the witness of his family life over time. Similarly, when a guy cheats on his wife, you don't determine he's a good family man soon after the revelation. It will take more time, given the offense, to see him walk in repentance, to gain that reputation back.

This is the case with any point of disqualification, although some levels of discernment can occur more quickly than others. It is not an immediate thing for a pastor disqualified for a long pattern of verbal abuse or coarse jesting to gain a reputation as a gentle, peaceful man. It is probably less still for a pastor disqualified for a pattern of alcohol addiction or sexual immorality to gain a reputation as sober-minded or a "one-woman man."

This is parallel to the biblical qualification of "not being a new convert." Obviously we are speaking to a (presumably) Christian

If you will stay low, humble yourself, and serve Christ and his church from the shadows of obscurity, you will discover just how satisfying grace actually is.



person who is newly repentant, but the underlying principle is the same. Repentance is an immediate re-entry to the fellowship, but re-entry to the pastorate takes the testing of time.

This is not graceless. It is how Christ protects his church *and*, incidentally, how he protects repentant sinners from rushing too soon back into the same pressures that revealed their undeveloped character to begin with.

So what you do, pastor, is lay low. I know it is difficult; I know it is embarrassing. But Christ and his church are bigger than you and your aspirations. The kingdom will not perish without your leadership—and, though it's hard to face, neither will you. If you love

Jesus and want to serve his church, do so out of the spotlight. Detox from the need for power and approval. Walk daily with Jesus in quiet ways over a long period of time. Let qualified shepherds feed you.

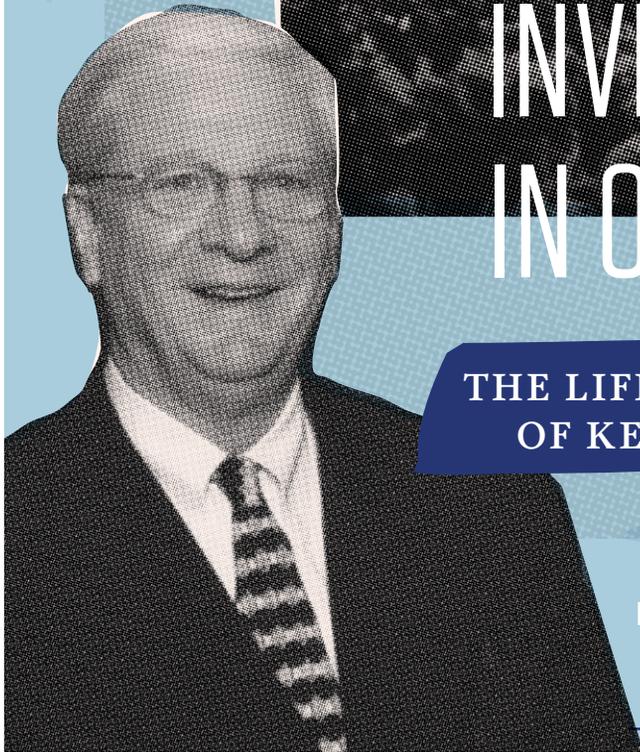
You may imagine that the bigness of grace is shown in the rushing of a fallen minister back to ministry, but the opposite is true. If you will stay low, humble yourself, and serve Christ and his church from the shadows of obscurity, you will discover just how satisfying grace actually is. ★

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FINISHING STRONG & INVESTING IN OTHERS

THE LIFE AND LEGACY
OF KEN HUBBARD

Pat Hood



The Bible is full of examples of heroes of our faith who finish strong. They are men and women who poured their lives into younger generations so that the work of the gospel could continue. Elijah poured into Elisha. Moses invested into the life of Joshua. Paul took young Timothy under his wing and taught him the ropes. These are but a few examples of God's leaders finishing strong by being more intent on building God's Kingdom than their own.

A LESSER-KNOWN HERO

Dr. Ken's name isn't in the Bible, but he is one of my spiritual heroes. He didn't just start strong as a pastor; he stayed strong and finished well.

In 1993, I was wrapping up my seminary adventure and looking for a ministry position. After a lot of interviews and prayers, we were certain that God was leading us to First Baptist Church, Smyrna, Tennessee, to serve as the student pastor.

There were churches that offered more money, but we knew God's will wasn't in the amount of the paycheck. There were

also churches that were bigger, but we didn't want the American Dream to trick us into believing that bigger is better.

There were many reasons we could have chosen a different church, but there was one clear reason God put a strong desire in our heart to move to Smyrna—Ken Hubbard.

A MENTORING SERVANT

Ken felt God's call to be a pastor at an early age and began preaching when he was a teenager. By the time I arrived in Smyrna, he had served as a missionary in Africa and a pastor to several churches in Tennessee, for a total of over 40 years in ministry.

The first time I met Ken, I immediately knew he was different than any pastor I had ever met. He was humble, yet determined; experienced, yet willing to learn; meek, but far from weak. And he was more interested in God's glory and

the deacons and key leaders about you." He continued, "We want to put a succession plan in place that would make you my co-pastor. I don't know exactly when I'll retire, but our leadership wants you to be the next lead pastor, and I can't agree more." So, for the next two years, Ken and I served as co-pastors until he retired. We shared all responsibilities of the church. No decision could be made without us both signing off on it.

I'll never forget the last sermon Ken preached. He wore a specially-made mantel around his neck as he preached on how Elijah passed the mantle to Elisha. At the end of the sermon, he asked me to stand up, and he passed it from his neck to mine. He looked at the congregation and said, "This is my pastor. Don't ever let me hear you say a negative word about my pastor. I believe in him, and I will follow him."

HE WASN'T WEAK-WILLED
WHEN IT CAME TO REACHING
PEOPLE FOR CHRIST.

agenda than his ego. I knew he could lead me, and I wanted to follow him.

When we arrived, the church had an average attendance of about 500 with about 30 students. Ken noted, "This community is about to explode with young families, and I need some young leaders to help me know how to reach them." So, we began to make hard but needed changes to reach the culture God had placed us in. We were dumbfounded by the skyrocketing numbers of people God was bringing to the church.

We began a third worship gathering to handle the rapid growth, and Ken asked me to preach one of the services each Sunday. He didn't want to wear himself out and wanted to fan the flame that he knew was burning within in me. As things progressed, Ken asked me to add the title of associate pastor to my responsibilities, tasking me with leading key meetings, and even casting vision to the church.

About two years later, Ken and I were in Memphis. While eating BBQ, Ken said, "Well, son, I've been meeting with

I still get emotional thinking about it. Ken Hubbard's leadership has marked me for life. He wasn't just my pastor and mentor; he was a father in ministry to this young Timothy.

AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW

Ken continued to be a part of the church until, sadly, he died from Alzheimer's Disease in 2005. He was an amazing example of what it means to finish strong. I could fill a book with the principles I've learned from his example, but I'd like to focus on the few I've already mentioned in his story.

First, finishing strong will require a humble determination.

At the end of his ministry, when he could've been focused on making sure people remembered his name, Ken was more concerned that people knew God's name. He wasn't worried about losing influence or doing damage to his legacy. He was worried about setting the church up for success. As a result, Ken increased his influence and respect beyond

comprehension. People are still talking and writing about it today. I believe it's because God opposes the proud and exalts the humble (James 4:6).

Ken was also humbly determined. Many pastors reach a point in their ministry where it is easier to be comfortable until they retire. Ken was determined not to get too comfortable and to go out with his boots on. We were still making radical changes to reach people with the gospel when he retired. It would have been easy for him to relax and not create tension, but Ken was more interested in people knowing Jesus.

A year after he retired, I asked Ken to come back and serve as our senior adult pastor. He didn't hesitate. He had been a senior pastor, my boss, for 40 years. But, he was humble enough to serve in a staff position and call me his boss. Some might say that was a demotion, but, if you ask our church, Ken never stood taller and never had more influence. Because of his humble determination, Ken could say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

Second, you are never too old to learn.

Many pastors with Ken's experience would have been quick to point out that they had forgotten more about ministry than I had learned. But he lived Proverbs 19:27, "Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge." He knew that no matter how much experience he had, he needed to learn more about this culture and generation.

I think being a missionary in Kenya helped Ken understand that what works in one culture doesn't work in another. He was wise enough to know that the culture he was living in was radically different than the context he was educated in. Ken finished strong because he wasn't just focused on teaching the next generation of leaders; he was also committed to learning from them.

Third, embrace a meek strength.

God commanded Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9). Ken took this passage to heart. He was the consummate shepherd. He loved, served, cared for, and listened to his people. He was meek, but he wasn't

weak. For example, one of the changes we made to reach our culture was in music style. When we put drums on the stage and began singing songs that were younger than me, some people didn't like it. There were those who told Ken, "Either change it back, or we're leaving."

Ken didn't want to see people leave—no pastor does—but he also wanted to reach people. So, he stood in the pulpit one Sunday and clearly communicated why we were changing our worship style. Then, he said, "This is what we're going to do. If you don't like it, fire me. I'll go to Florida and play shuffleboard." He wasn't weak-willed when it came to reaching people for Christ.

Fourth, you must care more about God's glory and agenda than your ego.

Ken was in the twilight of his ministry. His people loved him. His church was growing. He was a denominational leader with wide-ranging influence. He could have finished his last few years by making sure people praised him for his years of service. But, he was the embodiment of John the Baptist's words, "He must increase and I must decrease" (John 3:30). And he followed the example of Jesus,

who sought the glory of the Father in all he did (John 7:18).

In his final years, Ken made sure the spotlight was on Jesus. I'd love to think that his passing the baton to me was because he loved me so much, but, I know it was deeper. It was because he loved the church and wanted the church to keep growing, reaching people, and discipling them to become like Jesus.

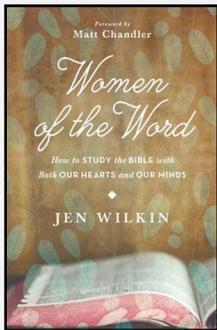
As a result of Ken's selfless passion for the glory of God, the 108-year-old church he pastored is now stronger than ever. We are now averaging thousands and currently have five campus, three that are local and two that are international. Thousands have been baptized and hundreds of families saved. Missionaries have been sent all over the world because one pastor was so committed to finishing strong that he cared more about God's glory and agenda than his own, and because he believed God's name is more important than his ever was. ★



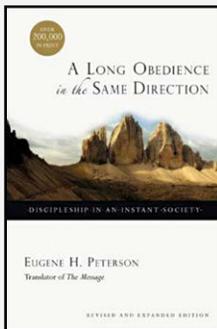
Hood considered his mentor, Dr. Hubbard, a spiritual father.

Pat Hood is the senior pastor of LifePoint Church in Smyrna, Tennessee.

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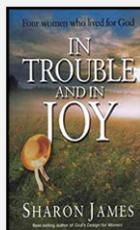
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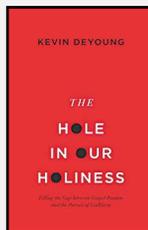
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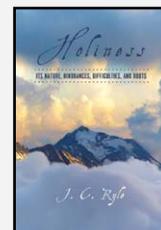
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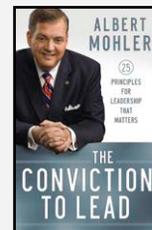
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