

ONE LORD ONE VOICE ONE VISION

ONE magazine

OCTOBER • NOVEMBER • 2023

FORGING *Ahead*

A Caribbean Calling

*From Auction
to Altar*

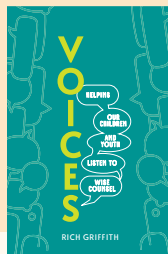
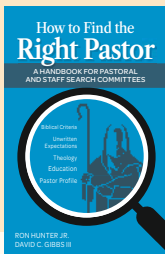
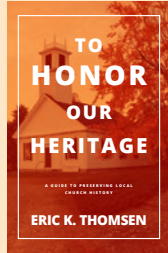
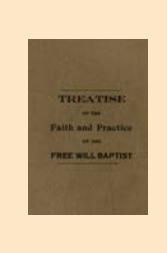
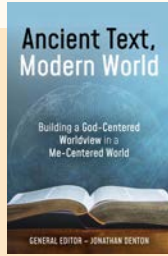
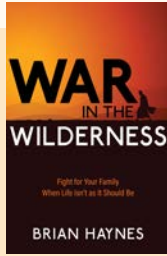
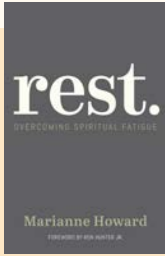
*Up the
Street*

Filling the Spiritual Vacuum

Worry and a Good Word

Just a Minutes!

NEW RELEASES



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of our role in the extension of God's Kingdom*

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We Called Him Doc

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

I honestly thought I might die!

It had been a long week of marathon meetings with other Christian publishers to grapple with the challenges of a shrinking Sunday School market. As we walked out of the final, lengthy session, Alton Loveless, my boss at Randall House and travel partner for the week, sighed deeply. "After all that, I think we need some good German food and a long drive in the mountains."

In retrospect, I should have agreed to the German food but begged off the trip to the mountains.

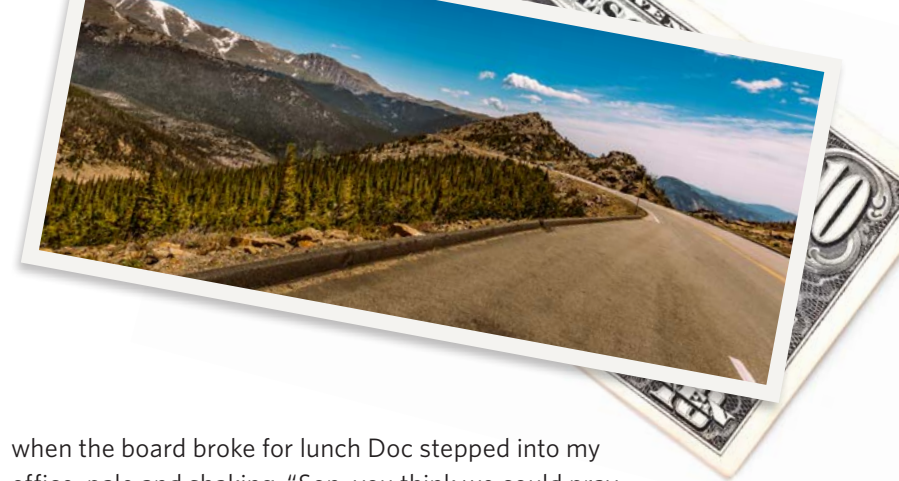
Two hours later, schnitzel and sauerkraut threatened to make a reappearance as Doc (as many affectionately called Dr. Loveless) flew around another curve on the snaky Trail Ridge Road through the Rocky Mountains. Never mind he was driving along the highest paved road in the nation, or that sheer cliffs fell away on both sides. Doc drove with one hand on the wheel, the other pointing off toward this peak or waving toward that valley while he talked incessantly about landmarks visited on previous trips. He didn't watch the road but constantly looked over at me with a broad smile. Obviously, he was enjoying himself.

Heart (and schnitzel) in my throat, I held my breath, prayed, and vowed to myself I would never, ever, ever ride anywhere with Doc again. Thankfully, we survived the trip. While I rode with Doc many times after that, I *always* drove.

Over the decade I worked for him, I came to have a deep admiration, love, and respect for my amiable boss. He taught me many things, from the importance of retirement savings—handing me ten bucks and giving me an afternoon off to open an account—to making work travel enjoyable, never meeting a stranger, and appreciating small pleasures in life. Four things always stood out to me about Doc.

He served humbly. It always made me chuckle to see him in the warehouse packing boxes during busy days. He wasn't fast. His boxes were crooked, the tape too short, and he often got orders wrong. But his presence reminded every employee no job was "beneath" anyone.

He cared deeply. My office at Randall House stood adjacent to the board room. During one tough meeting,



when the board broke for lunch Doc stepped into my office, pale and shaking. "Son, you think we could pray a while?" While the board regrouped, I knelt beside Dr. Loveless in my office as he poured out his heart, asking God for wisdom, guidance, direction, courage, and above all, the ability to discern God's will for our press and the denomination.

He led fearlessly. Doc served Randall House through difficult days. The sudden downturn in Sunday School in the late 1980s led to lean times for Christian publishers. Doc arrived to find debt, outdated equipment, and discouraged employees. In a few short years, he turned the department around financially, led us into the digital age, and staged the publisher to leap forward in the new millennium. I have rarely encountered such a visionary and determined leader.

He loved passionately. His Lord. His wife Delois. His boys and their families. Employees. Friends. Denomination. Life itself. "Make every second count for Christ," he used to tell me. He lived his own advice. Doc squeezed every moment from his time on earth—preaching, leading, traveling, teaching, publishing, and finding new restaurants, especially German restaurants.

I was grateful for an opportunity to spend an afternoon with Doc in June, less than a month before he died. Though in the hospital and in great physical discomfort, he still maintained his sense of humor and sharp wit. Before I left, we prayed together. As I turned to go, his words stopped me. "Son, do you remember that ride through the mountains in Colorado?"

I raised an eyebrow. "Like it was yesterday."

Doc's eyes twinkled through the pain, and he smiled. "I really thought you were going to toss your cookies."

"Me too."

That's where we left our friendship. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Eric K. Thomsen is managing editor of *ONE Magazine*. Email: eric@nafwb.org. Read more about Alton Loveless, page 39.

DAY OF PRAYER 2023

NOVEMBER 7

NAFWB

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NOVEMBER 2023

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November 12 • Abraham Trusted God • Genesis 12:1–9; 15:1–6

November 19 • Choices Have Consequences • Genesis 13–14; 18–19

November 26 • Faith Chooses to Obey • Genesis 22:1–19

DECEMBER 2023

December 3 • Jacob • Genesis 25–35

December 10 • God Is in Control • Genesis 37:1–36; 39:1–6

December 17 • God Provides for His People • Genesis 45:1–28

December 24 • Jesus Is Born • Matthew 1:18–2:12

December 31 • John the Baptist • Luke 1, 3; John 1, 3; Matthew 3, 11, 14



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From **RHETORIC** to **RELEVANCE**

KEYS TO MEANINGFUL MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

BY JIM MCCOMAS

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

“And of some have compassion, making a difference” (Jude 22).

In these passages of Scripture, we see two clear commands. First, stand and proclaim the principles of the Word of God boldly and uncompromisingly. Second, show compassion on those to whom we minister. Because we know the Bible does not contradict itself, neither command can be ignored, and both can and should be carried out by God’s people.

As Free Will Baptists, we have done a fine job of staying true to the truth of God’s Word. (If I didn’t believe that, I wouldn’t be a Free Will Baptist!) However, I don’t think we’ve done a very good job of delivering that message to a needy and hurting world with caring, heartfelt concern and compassion. Instead, I believe we spend much time “singing to the choir” rather than reaching the world around us.

In “Songs That Answer Questions,” Bill Gaither addressed the issue of relevant ministry through a vow that should be the heart cry of every one of our churches:

Don’t wanna spend my life preaching sermons that give answers

To the questions no one’s asking anywhere;

When there’s so much pain and hurting, there’s no time to be searching

For the needles in the haystacks that aren’t there.

I wanna spend my time wearing myself out for Jesus

With the news a cure’s been found to heal our land;

Instead of making lists, inventing creeds that aren’t concerned with people’s needs,

I’ll show ’em how to touch the nail scarred hand.

I don’t believe I am exaggerating the importance of this subject when I say the very survival of our ministries, churches, and yes, even our denomination, may very well hinge on our getting this right. If your church has compassion without biblical commitment, you have a social club. If you have

biblical commitment without compassion, you have dead orthodoxy. However, if you have biblical commitment coupled with biblical compassion, you have the ingredients for church growth, revitalization, survival, and revival.

Considering this, how do we move from rhetoric to relevance in ministry?

CONSISTENCY

First, as a church, corporately, and as Christians, individually, we must be **consistent**.

We must be consistent to the *Scriptures*. No matter the hot-button topic of the day—whether abortion, homosexuality, addiction, or the authority of the Word of God—we must stand boldly, lovingly, and without apology for what the Lord says.

We must be consistent in our *stand*. We cannot stick our finger in the air to see which way the cultural winds are blowing and adapt our message to meet social norms. Despite the pressure to conform, we must lovingly stand without compromising on God's truth.

Finally, we must be consistent in our *scope*. We must be careful to declare the “whole counsel” of God’s Word, not only the parts that get enthusiastic applause from the pews. For example, it’s easy to rant and rave about the sin of homosexuality when *all* sexual sin is wrong, even a church member having heterosexual intimate relations before marriage. Addiction is wrong in all forms, whether addiction to alcohol or addiction to fried chicken. (Ouch!) For folks to respect our message, we must be consistent to teach all parts of the Word of God, not just relying on the easy parts.

CONSIDERATION

The second key to relevant ministry is to be **considerate**. The definition of *considerate* is “showing careful thought.” Quite simply, before we preach, teach, and post on social media and our church signs, we need to **think**.

First, consider our *audience*. Who exactly is the audience to whom we are trying to minister? It is my opinion Free Will Baptists sometimes do a lot of “preaching to the choir” without putting much thought into crafting messages in a way to reach the lost and hurting in our communities. In our sermon preparation, in our lesson planning, as we prepare to post on social media or our church signs, we must consider those we are trying to reach with the gospel.

We also must be considerate in our *approach*. I recently saw a meme that read, “For the logic impaired: Abortion is MURDER!” While most Christians agree abortion is murder, how effective will that post be when it starts by inferring any pro-abortion person is stupid? I am convinced no one’s mind or heart will be changed by such a post, because the creator didn’t stop and think about a proper approach to sharing the truth of God’s Word.

It is one thing to be persecuted for taking a biblical stance for what is right. It is quite another thing to be taken to task for being purposely offensive and argumentative. Let me state this clearly: as Christians, God called us to be faithful. He did not call us to be stupid. Absolutely, we should be biblically consistent, but we can do that with a heart of compassion.

COMPASSION

If we are going to minister effectively today, we must minister **compassionately**. We must be compassionate in our *message*. Yes, preach against sin, and yes, tell folks they are headed to Hell without Christ...but we shouldn’t act like we are happy about it! Difficult biblical truths should always be delivered with a tear in the eye and a lump in the throat. Knowing that people in our pews struggle with the sins we are preaching against should not change our *tune*, but it should change our *tone*.

We also must be compassionate in our *methods*. We can’t just reach the folks who look and act like us. We must be willing to use every means at our disposal to minister to those in difficult situations. Make no mistake about it, relevant ministry is often messy ministry. In those messy moments, remember this challenging quote from Sam Rainer, “If you really believe God’s plan of redemption applies to people of all backgrounds, you’re sinning if you intentionally neglect a group of people because they make you feel uncomfortable.”

Let’s continue preaching the truth of God’s Word to a lost and dying world, but let’s do it with loving care and concern. Only then, as Christians, as the church, and as a denomination, will we move from rhetoric to relevance. **ONE**

About the Author: Jim McComas is the executive director/CEO at Free Will Baptist Family Ministries. The Wooster, Ohio, native lives in Johnson City, Tennessee.

The **ETHICS** of



To help navigate the moral maze of artificial intelligence (AI) and how it affects our churches, three writers join forces in this written panel discussion. Whether this is your first deep dive into AI, or if it causes you to embrace the technology in a creative but ethical manner, we hope you enjoy the conversation. Meet the panelists who combined their experience in this exciting but very new world.

- **Ron Hunter:** minister, publisher, researcher, writer, adjunct professor, leadership guru, and advisor for masters and doctoral students
- **Kendall Ross:** pastor, professor, engineer, researcher, grant writer, and business leader consultant
- **Cato Nester:** researcher, bibliophile, data processor, and tech expert who is currently immersed in AI pretty much 24/7

This article will only scratch the surface, but hopefully it starts a conversation that will continue to grow in the future.

Ron: To be clear, AI is new to most of us, and neither Kendall nor I claim to be experts. However, Cato is certainly an expert. Kendall and I have been using AI for most of 2023. Cato, why don't you start by explaining or defining AI for those less familiar with it, and how the average person can use it.

Cato: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the development of machines and systems that can think and learn like humans, enabling them to perform tasks and make decisions. AI can be used in everyday life through various applications, such as voice assistants, personalized recommendations, smart home devices, virtual assistants, spam filters, language translation, and image recognition, enhancing convenience, efficiency, and productivity.

Kendall: AI is used extensively in software design, research, finance, and healthcare. For example, in the healthcare industry, AI is used in tasks like medical imaging analysis, diagnosis assistance, drug discovery, and patient monitoring systems. Financial analysts use it for trading, fraud detection, risk assessment, credit scoring—even automated customer support. AI is deployed across multiple websites to drive chatbot applications that efficiently handle many inquiries, improve response times, and enhance customer satisfaction. However, in this setting, we will narrow our discussion to areas that affect pastors, Christians, and churches specifically. Ron, how do you see this impacting the publishing world?

Ron: For some time, and often unknowingly, we have used AI in spelling and grammar checks, GPS routing (and re-routing), and auto-fill and word-prompts on texting or emails. Today, we can generate larger numbers of words. Colleges must be concerned with students using AI

to write term papers. AI combines online knowledge with user prompts to find and create an answer by merging material from numerous sources. In other words, when you ask for 300 words on the Trinity, you are unsure where the material originated. Nor can you credit previously published works because AI does not note the source. More disturbingly, the material may be riddled with errors, because AI currently cannot analyze the quality of material it references in its answer. This does not mean we shouldn't use AI. It has been my experience that AI creates new ways to explore an idea, often with better titles and sample outlines. It can also smooth out writing and add more active verb tenses.

Authors may use AI to write books, but the U.S. Copyright Office recently ruled they would no longer issue copyrights for non-human generated works. The office is concerned with the ethics of crediting a person who did not do the work or does not have the expertise. For example, one could ask AI to generate 700 words on quantum physics, but that does not qualify that individual to be a consultant or speaker in that area. But they could read some insightful data. Certainly, you can see the temptation for pastors or teachers to generate sermons, lessons, or Bible studies from AI.

Kendall: In popular culture Uncle Ben is credited with telling young Peter Parker (Spiderman), "With great power comes great responsibility." I argue this principle stems from Jesus' words in Luke 12:48: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Regardless, I am both fascinated and frightened by AI. Much like the Internet did, AI has the potential to revolutionize how we access, filter, and use information. It can help individuals

and companies save significant amounts of time and effort by producing content at a speed impossible for humans to match. And, it learns from each interaction, which means it is constantly improving.

However, it is necessary for us, as believers, to provide oversight for each AI interaction. As Cato mentioned earlier, AI is the development of machines and systems that “think and learn” like humans—humans with a sinful nature. The large and growing core of the AI data set is flawed. It reminds me of a term I first learned in programming: “garbage in, garbage out.” Flawed (garbage) data produces nonsense output.

Consequently, it is the data and the quality of the input that drives the quality of the AI output. Cato, I am told every AI service admits to errors in the output. Is that true, and how can one detect inaccurate information?

Cato: The frequency or percentage of errors in AI output can vary depending on the specific task and quality of the AI system. Error rates can range from low to high. Detecting errors in AI output can involve cross-checking results against ground truth data, performing manual verification, conducting user testing, and employing statistical analysis to identify discrepancies or inconsistencies. Ongoing monitoring, feedback loops, and continuous improvement processes are essential for error detection and mitigation in AI systems.

Ron: Cato, that was a technical answer, but I think you are warning us to be super cautious. Still, in my experience, AI has produced some high-quality output: summarizing books and textbooks that I teach and know very well, analyzing characters from the Bible or literature, and explaining various leadership theories. AI “feels” different from Google which, when prompted, points to other sources for answers. In contrast, AI compiles all online information to create a new answer to the question. What about the second problem we mentioned? Not knowing who to credit for the work, you cannot claim it as your own.

Kendall: This brings up a great point about pastoral plagiarism. This refers to the act of a pastor (or other religious leader or teacher) using someone else’s work, whether sermons, teachings, or written materials, without proper permission or attribution. It is presenting another’s ideas, words, or creative content as one’s own, thereby misleading the congregation to think the content originated from the individual who committed plagiarism. This can happen in many forms. It may involve directly copying sermons from other pastors or paraphrasing and rewording to make it appear as original content. It can even extend to multimedia resources (videos, images, or music) without obtaining necessary permission or giving credit to creators. Consequently, it is crucial for pastors to engage in their own research, study, and quiet time with God and to give credit properly to the original sources. This becomes difficult when using AI as a resource.

Ron: My biggest concern is the absence of the Holy Spirit in guiding sermon and lesson preparations. A computer cannot do your spiritual heavy lifting. Sure, non-human technology can generate some great data, but AI lacks the emotional connection to humans. If pastors do not actively engage with Scripture and study deeply, and if they rely on AI to write their sermons, they will be unable to counsel or guide their congregation effectively. With these cautions in mind, Kendall, how might a church use AI effectively?

Kendall: Churches can use AI to its greatest potential in at least two ways: social media and creating content in multiple languages. Churches now have a unique opportunity to connect with their communities via social media. However, creating high-quality social media posts takes significant time and effort. The key advantage of using AI for social media is the ability to optimize posts for different platforms and different audiences. For example, one can simply prompt AI with data, and it will generate language optimized for each social media platform. Using AI can free up time and resources for other essential tasks, such as ministry or community outreach.

Secondly, I think churches can use AI to create content quickly and efficiently in multiple languages. We have begun this at the university level, and we are seeing great benefits. With the help of AI, churches can break down language barriers and share their message with a broader audience. Ron, how specifically can pastors use AI?

Ron: Pastors can use AI to generate super-creative titles for sermons; overcome writer’s block; rewrite their outlines with cohesion or on a particular theme; find illustrations or metaphors, brainstorm a topic, provide background on Bible characters, or explore a passage to consider it from various angles. AI can repurpose sermons. Pastors put a lot of time and effort into crafting a sermon, but AI can help analyze the sermon and generate new content based on previous work to be used for blog posts, social media updates, or even newsletters. AI also can function as a virtual assistant on your web page or to analyze data for your members, ministry, and community. Cato, considering all the positives I have listed, what are some concerns Christians should be aware of when it comes to AI?

Cato: Here are three main ones:

- 1. Ethical Implications:** Christians should be concerned about the ethical dimensions of AI, including issues related to privacy, data security, potential biases in algorithms, and the responsible use of AI technologies.
- 2. Human Interaction and Authenticity:** Christians should be concerned about the potential for AI to undermine genuine human connection, empathy, and the role of pastors in providing personal care and guidance.

3. Theological and Philosophical Implications:

Christians should be concerned about the theological and philosophical questions raised by AI, such as its impact on human identity and the nature of consciousness, free will, and the ethical boundaries of technology in relation to God's design for humanity.

Kendall: Despite the concerns, I see a huge upside to AI. Christianity has played a huge role in fields such as health-care, education, and the arts. Believers now can be leaders in the ethical, thoughtful use of AI. This technology has the potential to revolutionize how churches communicate with their congregations and the broader community. Ultimately, AI can save time and help reach more people with the gospel. However, we must remember **AI is a tool requiring careful**

human oversight and creativity to ensure the content is appropriate and aligned with the church's mission and values.

Ron and I have generated some prompts and answers to demonstrate the power of AI in the final section of this article. We hope churches and Christians will explore how they can integrate AI into their evangelism strategies and embrace this technology so they can take on leadership roles in guiding and advising others.

Summary: As you can see from discussion on the benefits and concerns of AI, humanity sits on the precipice of a vast new world. Like pioneer explorers Lewis and Clark, all of us seek to observe, learn, and chart the way for those who come after us on this journey.

You may be surprised to learn two humans and one chatbot brought you this article. Ron and Kendall created a fictitious character and revealed their bias by naming him Cato (Latin for *intelligent* and *all-knowing*) Nester (the legendary ruler who helped the Greeks win the Trojan war). Every answer Cato Nester provided was AI generated.

Cato's AI prompts that created the answers in the order they appeared in this article:

1. In 20-30 words describe what artificial intelligence is to someone who has never heard of it. How can AI practically be used in the average person's everyday life?
2. How often, or to what percentage, does AI produce errors in its output, and how can one detect the errors?
3. List the top three concerns Christians should have about AI and describe them in one sentence.

Sample the Potential of AI

The following examples demonstrate both the potential and danger of AI, with well-developed, logical responses that DO CONTAIN TROUBLING THEOLOGY.

Prompt: Write three Twitter or Facebook posts for the purpose of inviting people to attend church based on a Nehemiah sermon series. Emphasize the following themes: first Sunday, Nehemiah (chapter 1) looks at and wants to help solve the needs of the community. Second Sunday, Nehemiah (chapter 4) shows them the enemy was not within and to fight for their families (Nehemiah 4:14). Third Sunday, Nehemiah 8 shows the church experience, and then parents retell the power of the gospel to their kids at home.

Results:

1. Facebook: Join us for an inspiring sermon series on Nehemiah, a biblical leader who saw the needs of his community and took action! This Sunday, we delve into

Nehemiah (chapter 1), exploring how he identified the needs and sought to make a difference. Be part of a community that cares. See you at [Church Name] at [Time]. #Nehemiah #CommunityMatters #SundaySermonSeries

2. Twitter (now called X): Calling all change-makers! Don't miss our Nehemiah sermon series at [Church Name]. On the second Sunday, we dive into Nehemiah (chapter 4), discovering how he rallied his people to fight for their families and overcome internal obstacles. Be encouraged to stand up against the challenges. Join us at [Time]. #FightForYourFamily #OvercomeObstacles #SundaySermon

3. Facebook: Join us for a powerful Sunday service at [Church Name]. This week, we explore Nehemiah 8, where the church experience is amplified, and parents share the power of the gospel with their children at home. Discover the significance of passing down faith to the next generation. Be part of this transformational journey at [Time]. See you there! #PassingFaithOn #NextGeneration #SundayService

Give three themes for the Bible character Esther.

Note: We provided only the short answer for the sake of space.

1. Courage and faith: The character of Esther in the Bible demonstrates immense courage and faith. She risked her life by approaching the king without being summoned and showed her bravery to save her people. Esther's unwavering faith in God's guidance and protection enabled her to take on this daunting task and fulfill her role as a savior for the Jewish people.

- 2. Identity and purpose:** Esther's story revolves around the themes of identity and purpose. Initially known as Hadassah, she was a Jewish orphan who eventually became Queen Esther. Through her journey, she grappled with her Jewish heritage and had to decide whether to reveal her true identity to save her people. This theme highlights the importance of understanding one's purpose and embracing one's identity to make a meaningful impact on the world.
- 3. Divine providence and timing:** The theme of divine providence and timing is prominent in Esther's story. Throughout the narrative, it becomes clear events unfold according to God's plan. Esther's rise to the position of queen, her selection as the instrument of deliverance for her people, and the timing of key events all reflect the providential hand of God. This theme underscores the belief God works in mysterious ways and orchestrates events for His purposes, even when things seem uncertain or dire.

Explain the Trinity (3-in-1) like I am eight years old:

Note: In this answer, it appears AI explains the Trinity using the faulty view of modalism, again illustrating the need for caution.

Of course! Let's talk about the Trinity in a way an eight-year-old can understand. Imagine you have a special gadget that can turn into three things: a car, a boat, and a plane. Even though it can be different things, it's still the same gadget. In the Trinity, we have God, who can be three persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. They are like the different forms of the gadget.

- God the Father is like the car. Just like a car takes us places, God the Father takes care of us and guides us on our journey through life.
- God the Son, Jesus, is like the boat. Just as a boat helps us cross the water, Jesus helps us connect with God and shows us how to live in a loving way.
- God the Holy Spirit is like the plane. Just like a plane helps us fly high, the Holy Spirit helps us feel close to God and gives us strength and comfort.

So, even though there are three parts, they are all God, and they work together just like the different forms of the gadget. They love us and want to be with us, and we can talk to each of them and have a special relationship with them. Remember, the Trinity is a mystery, and it can be hard to fully understand, but I hope this helps you get a basic idea!

Because we wondered how AI answers were controlled, we posed the following: "How would a Christian evangelize a Muslim?"

While there's no one-size-fits-all approach to evangelizing,

there are some general principles a Christian might consider when engaging in conversation with a Muslim. It's important to note sensitivity, respect, and understanding are key when discussing faith with people from different religious backgrounds. Here are some suggestions for a Christian who wants to evangelize a Muslim:

- 1. Develop genuine friendships:** Building a relationship based on trust and understanding is crucial. Show genuine interest in the person's life, values, and beliefs, and be open to learning from their experiences.
- 2. Be respectful and understanding:** Acknowledge and appreciate the similarities between Christianity and Islam, such as belief in one God, the importance of prayer, and the role of religious texts. Recognize that both faiths have a rich history and tradition.
- 3. Be knowledgeable:** Familiarize yourself with the basic tenets of Islam to better understand a Muslim's beliefs and address any misconceptions you might have. It's also helpful to know the differences between the two faiths to avoid confusion or misunderstanding.
- 4. Share your own experiences:** Rather than focusing on theological debates, share your personal testimony about your faith journey and how Christianity has impacted your life. This can be a powerful way to connect with others on a deeper level.
- 5. Focus on Jesus:** Emphasize the role of Jesus in Christianity and explain how He is unique in both Christian and Islamic theology. Muslims regard Jesus as a prophet, while Christians believe He is the Son of God and the Messiah. Share the love, grace, and forgiveness offered through Jesus.
- 6. Engage in open dialogue:** Encourage open and honest conversations. Ask questions and listen carefully to the responses. Be prepared to answer questions about your own faith and be open to discussing any doubts or concerns your Muslim friend may have.
- 7. Pray:** Pray for wisdom, patience, and understanding as you engage in these conversations. Pray for your Muslim friend's heart to be open to the message of Christianity.

Remember, evangelism is a process, not an event. It takes time, patience, and persistence. Be prepared for challenges and setbacks but keep the lines of communication open and continue to show love and understanding.

As you see from these examples,
AI is both promising and terrifying in its
potential. Use it wisely! **ONE**

The Baby Boomer Effect

BY DAVID BROWN, CPA

The Baby Boomer generation represents those born between 1946-1964. When the post-World War II baby boom ended in 1964, the babies born during that period represented 40% of the total population of the United States. For many years, this generation represented the largest segment of the American population. Since the oldest of this generation is now 78 years old, and because some of them have died already, they are no longer the largest generation. However, throughout their lifetimes, they have had a powerful economic influence on our nation.

The baby boom years created many job opportunities for teachers and medical personnel. As a matter of fact, radio public service announcements in the 1940s and 1950s (and later television) encouraged college-age kids to consider teaching and medical careers to service all the children who needed schools and medical care. Most communities pushed hard to build more and bigger schools. Boomer parents are largely responsible for the massive growth of the suburbs during those years.

Consider the automotive industry. In 1964, when the oldest of this generation turned 18, Ford introduced the Mustang, an instant hit. Throughout the rest of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, sports cars continued to sell well as the younger Baby Boomers bought cars, as well. Then, in the 1980s and 90s, minivans and four-door sedans became the best-selling vehicles as Boomers began to have families. Now, as this enormous segment of the population ages, SUVs (much easier for older people to get into) have exploded in popularity.

Many economists have predicted what the aging of the Baby Boomers will mean for the economy. Some suggest



drastically reduced consumer spending. On the other hand, since this generation has never followed the traditions of previous generations, will they slow their spending? Since Boomers are more concerned about their appearance than previous generations, will they just shift their spending to areas that help preserve youthfulness? Only time will tell.

We continue to feel the effects of this generation as they retire in great numbers. The Federal Reserve is doing what it can to tame inflation, but retiring Boomers have left more job openings than available workers. There are not enough younger people to fill their positions. Sometimes, younger people are blamed for the problem, accused of not wanting to work. While this may be true in part, a greater problem is replacing all the retiring Boomers. When there are more jobs than people, wages go up and contribute to rising inflation.

But don't worry. A solution may rest just over the horizon as Artificial Intelligence (AI) gradually begins to fill the vacant positions left by Boomers in the next decade. **ONE**

About the Columnist: David Brown is director of Free Will Baptist Foundation. To learn more about planned giving, visit www.fwbgifts.com.

Who Do You Think You Are?



BY CHRISTA THORNSBURY

I am sure we have all heard the phrase, “Who do you think you are?” Perhaps in a movie when one character feels disgust or experiences frustration with another character. Maybe you have asked this question of a person in your life, whether seriously or sarcastically. This a good question for us to ask ourselves, though, and I fear for many of us, the answer involves the Internet, more specifically, social media.

Certainly, the Internet has brought wonderful things to our society. It is convenient to have easy access to information. It is great to have the ability to stay in contact more easily with friends and loved ones who live far away. We can reach them in a moment through email or social media accounts. (Though, we should ask if we are honestly good at this form of communication. I’m not.)

On the other hand, the Internet also has brought many evil things to our society. The proliferation of pornography and ease of access have wreaked havoc on society, threatening marriages and destroying innocence. The Internet has made it easier for predators to lure victims through dating apps, chatrooms, and fake profiles. Even the way we consume information via the Internet rewires our brains to make us less attentive and more intellectually lazy.

Perhaps the most insidious way the Internet has changed us is in how we allow it to formulate our ideas, and even more serious, our identities. Social media in particular plays an outsized role in the formation of identity, and we who use the Internet regularly would do well to ask

ourselves, “Why do I think the way I think?” and “Who do I think I am?”

It is possible the answers will surprise us, and we will soon realize we have subconsciously adopted thoughts and practices based solely upon our online lives.

Ideas

First, we should consider if our social media feeds have influenced our ideas. Do we hold certain positions because the people we follow hold those positions? Because our culture demands we embrace certain ideas on our own social media accounts? Because we want to conform to a certain online identity group (more on this below)? Because we accept what we are told through Instagram reels, tweets, and Facebook posts is true?

Of course, that’s not to say there aren’t good ideas worth adopting on the Internet and social media. Since Christian teaching and traditional morality have been pushed to the limits by legacy media outlets, the Internet has provided an alternative means through which solid biblical and Christian



teaching and thinking can be widely disseminated. The same is true of conservative social and political views.

Nonetheless, we are prone to simply adopt the opinions and believe the “facts” on our social media feeds, questionable websites, and other digital mediums. We examine claims no further than the video clip or pithy, witty tweet. We allow our emotions to be manipulated by influencers and activists we watch and read and relying solely on these emotional responses to form our views without involving our reason. We then share what we think we have learned with our social circles on the Internet or in real life. I can attest to this personally. Every time I see a Facebook ad for some sort of weight loss plan, strategy, or supplement, that nugget of knowledge about hormones or exercise or calories becomes a part of my weight loss strategy.

Think of social and political hot topics of our time. How much of your opinion about a particular battle in the culture war was formed by claims from a favorite Internet personality? How do you know they did not manipulate the statistics? In our post-truth society, we must remember fallen people in power (political, journalistic, or otherwise) are happy to manipulate studies, misrepresent opponents, and even lie to accomplish their devious ends.

One good example is the debate around abortion. Many Internet personalities and influencers falsely claim conservative abortion laws make miscarriage care illegal, conflate miscarriages and abortion, or accuse pro-life advocates of caring only about birth, and not about the mother and child. Sadly, I have even seen Christian friends give credence to some of these notions. It is crucial to practice discernment and evaluate everything, first through the lens of Scripture, and then through the lens of reality and truth.

Identity

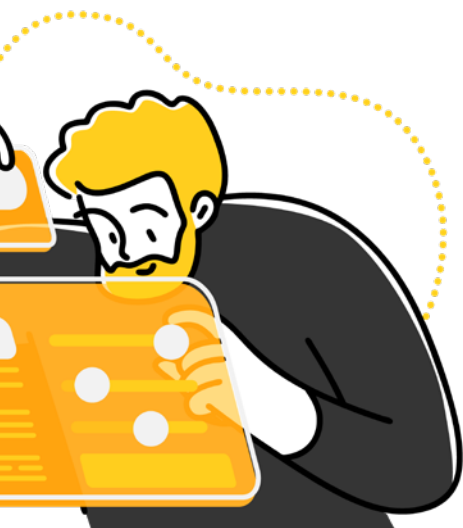
Allowing the Internet to form our ideas is bad enough, but allowing the Internet to form our identities is even worse. Social media algorithms curate content based on what we view online to “personalize” our feeds and “sell” appealing lifestyles. Maybe you consider yourself a young, hip, suburban mom. (I suppose I would fall into this category myself, though I

am most assuredly not hip and maybe not even young, by some standards). You follow Instagram accounts that comport with your social standing. You buy the Stanley cup (not the hockey championship trophy—the new Yeti™ without the Yeti price). You adopt the aesthetic you see for your home and your wardrobe.

Of course, it is not necessarily wrong to glean inspiration from online accounts. But to what extent do your social media feeds determine your decisions or influence what you believe about yourself? For example, many of the young, hip, suburban mom influencers I see on Instagram create content highlighting the endless hardships of motherhood and family life. Young mothers are constantly bombarded with the notion that children are a burden and that husbands are often unhelpful louts, especially compared to you, young mother, who has given so much of yourself to your family that you have lost your true self. (Ironic that a currently popular identity is that of someone who has lost her identity.) Reel after reel presents you with the idea you are underappreciated and do not receive the recognition and praise for the difficult and often unnoticed tasks you perform.

Many young mothers have embraced this identity, adopting this view of themselves regarding the role to which God has called them in this season of life. Obviously, raising children and running households is challenging, particularly for women who also work outside the home. But the identity communicated to us in these social media videos and posts goes beyond a simple acknowledgment of these difficulties. Instead, these laser-focused posts wallow in the difficulties, which ultimately fosters resentment towards husbands and children. If we are not careful, we can begin to view the blessings of motherhood and family life as burdens, to view ourselves as virtuous victims of our circumstances or that nebulous but nefarious “patriarchy.” This identity does not honor God; it elevates self.

Of course, young, hip, suburban mom is only one of many identities we are tempted to form based on online content and may be among the more innocuous ones. Consider many of the newly discovered protected classes in the U.S. that demand absolute fealty from each person to the detriment of what is true and good and beautiful. Much of this identity formation occurs in online chatrooms and through TikTok and Instagram. We are just beginning to see the real-world consequences of such radical identity



formation, with thinking that challenges the foundations of Western Civilization.

When we allow the Internet to shape our identities, we construct an artificial sense of self and who we ought to be based on online content rather than where and when God has placed us. Most importantly, our identity should be rooted in God's Word and what it tells us about who we are, who we should be, and who God calls us to be.

If we are not careful, online identity formation can lead us to reject the biblical heritage we have been given. As a result, we spend our time and energy maintaining the pretense of whatever momentary image we adopt rather than spending time on the daily faithfulness to which God calls us.*

Perhaps the premise of this article is too obvious, too simple, too much of a dead horse beaten too often by too many people. Still, I think it is vital to think carefully and honestly about how the Internet is subtly forming our ideas and identities when we consume content mindlessly or repeat or share things we see online unscrupulously.

All Christians who use the Internet, particularly social media, must examine themselves constantly. Do we hold

certain positions because they are backed up by facts or because they are popular with Internet friends and personalities? Do we behave a certain way because it comports with the place and position God has given us or because we have been influenced by a common archetype seen on the Internet? Are we behaving in certain ways or espousing trendy ideologies to fit in or to be seen as virtuous by others?

If we find ourselves answering "yes" to these questions more often than we would like, let us seek the Lord to guide us in truth and to help us form our identities in Him. **ONE**

** I have been encouraged by the podcast Sheologians to fulfill the daily faithfulness to which I am called: sheologians.com.*

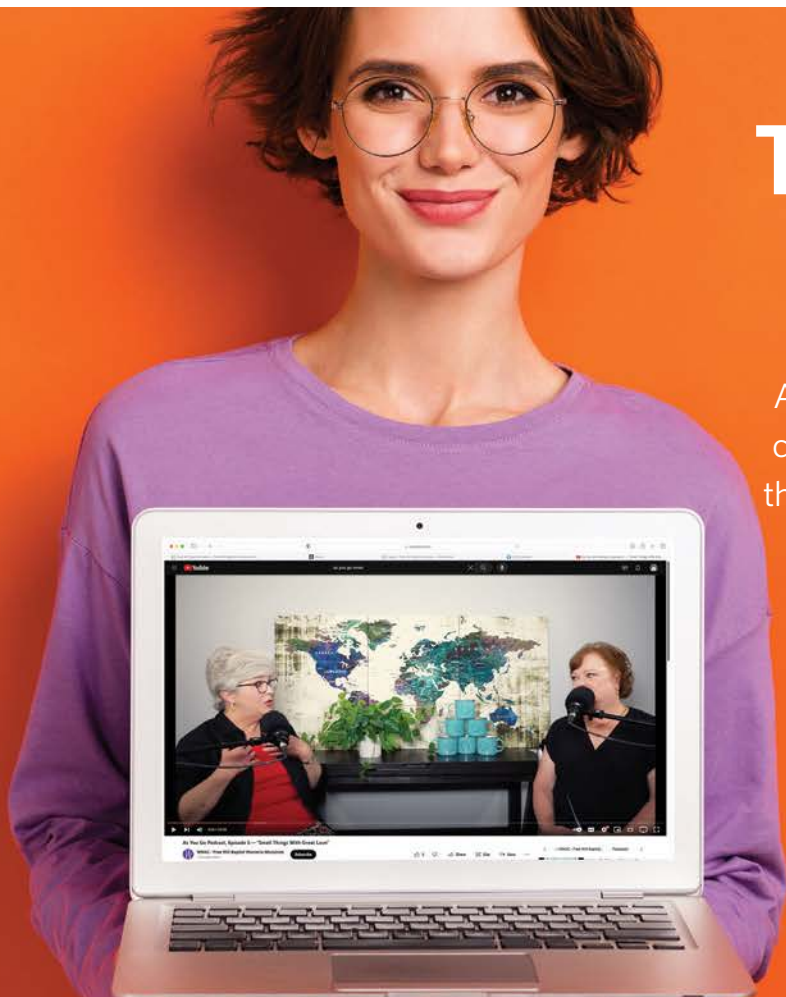
About the Author: Christa Thornsby is the librarian at Welch College. She and her husband Frank have two daughters and attend Immanuel FWB Church in Gallatin, Tennessee.



> If we are not careful, online identity formation can lead us to reject the biblical heritage we have been given.

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Hired! Fired! Rehired!

BY PAUL V. HARRISON

**“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season...”
(2 Timothy 4:2).**

Forty-seven-year-old William Farel looked across at 27-year-old John Calvin, who was passing through Geneva, and his heart leapt. Only months before, Reformation winds had toppled longstanding Catholic structures. The city was now Protestant. Farel, according to Calvin, “burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel” and “strained every nerve to detain me.”

The young man, however, had his own plans. He had just published “a summary of the principle truths of the Christian religion,” which would become arguably the most influential theology book ever written. Such literary work was precisely what Calvin desired. Bashful by nature, he loved the “shade,” not the spotlight. He sought “some secluded corner” where he might “be withdrawn from the public view.”

When fiery Farel realized he was getting nowhere, “he proceeded,” as Calvin put it, “to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought.” Under this passionate threat, the young theologian acquiesced and soon donned a black preaching gown.

With church and state conjoined, Calvin attempted to reform the whole of Genevan society. His agenda impacted about everything. Businesses had to close for church, which eventually met daily at dawn and at later hours, and attendance, to at least some services, was required. The city outlawed dancing. Preachers involved themselves in family squabbles.

Calvin preached through books of the Bible from beginning to end. In time, he delivered 189 sermons on Acts, 174 on Ezekiel, 342 on Isaiah, 159 on Job. He encouraged: “Though the devil on the one hand ceases not to seek to prey upon us and unbelievers bark like mastiff dogs. ... let us hold it as a certainty that we shall never cease to have peace toward our God.” He also warned, “The mind of man has been so completely estranged from God’s righteousness that it conceives, desires, and undertakes, only that which is impious, perverted, foul, impure, and



infamous. The heart is so steeped in the poison of sin, that it can breathe out nothing but a loathsome stench.”

In 1538, after two years of pastoring, tensions reached a fever pitch, and he and Farel were sent packing.

Relocating to Strasbourg, Calvin was again recruited to preach, and his former post faded into a bad memory. But things quickly unraveled in Geneva, and, amazingly, they asked Calvin to return. He confided to a friend that should he return, he would be “completely swallowed up. ...Rather would I submit to a hundred other deaths than to that cross on which one must perish daily a thousand times.” In another letter he wrote, “Whenever I call to mind the wretchedness of my life there, how can it not be but that my very soul must shudder at any proposal for my return?”

Shuddering or not, Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541. He mounted the pulpit from which he had been banished three years earlier, opened his Bible, and said in essence: “I believe we left off in verse eight.” **ONE**

About the Columnist: Paul V. Harrison has pastored Madison FWB Church in Madison, Alabama, since 2015. Previously, he pastored Cross Timbers FWB church in Nashville, Tennessee, for 22 years. He was an adjunct professor at Welch College for 17 years, teaching church history and Greek. Paul is the creator of Classic Sermon Index, a subscription-based online index of over 66,000 sermons, with clients including Harvard, Baylor, and Vanderbilt, among others: classicsermonindex.com.



WHAT IF MUSLIMS,
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES,
AND HINDUS PAID
TO SIT IN A ROOM AND
LISTEN TO YOU TEACH,
PREACH, AND PRAY?



A Caribbean CALLING

BY ANGELA WOOTON

Every Christian missionary (aka every Christian) has the same mission: find seekers and build relationships with them. Sharing the gospel is an all-important and often perplexing task. There may be no better way to reach people from a different culture than by befriending them, building trust, showing hope, and sharing the Source of that hope.

How do we make those initial connections with people? Books, articles, and classes offer tips and advice. Countless ministry discussions and outreach strategies implement new and innovative ways to build gospel-driven relationships. Missionaries have become adept at turning daily life activities into evangelistic opportunities—barista to barber, mechanic to mailman—any small commonality that might spark a conversation and eventually lead to a friendship.

But what if the lost came to you? What if non-Christians made a daily appointment to see you? What if Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hindus paid to sit in a room and listen to you teach, preach, and pray? That is what our daily life is like in St. Croix. *It is so exciting.*

Every morning, we wake up, prepare ourselves for our mission field, walk into our classrooms, turn on our lights and fans, and students pour in. They may not believe in our mission, but every one of our students wears a school shirt with our Christian logo on it, carries a Bible, and hears the truth taught in a Bible class. They hear and sing Christian worship songs in weekly chapel services. But how and why would they come?

The Free Will Baptist ministry in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, started in 1967 when Larry Powell planted a home church in the middle of the island. Over the decades, many faithful servants have lived, visited, and worked here on the island. In time, God gave these leaders a vision to start a Christian school, and for more than 50 years, Free Will Baptist Christian School has been a beacon for Christ on the island.

St. Croix is a magnificent place with rolling green hills and turquoise waters. Almost every day is a beautiful, breezy 85 degrees. One end of the island is a rainforest, the other a desert. This Caribbean paradise is truly breathtaking.

The culture is as diverse as its people, who come in every beautiful shade of brown imaginable. You hear multiple accents, dialects, and languages. You can savor Indian delicacies, African flavors, and barbecue—all from the same food truck! When they settled on the island, each unique people group brought their own worldview, traditions, and religious beliefs. Many islanders could be considered mosaic, believing a little of this and a little of that. Rastafarianism, Catholicism, Islam, Seventh Day Adventism, and Mormonism represent only a few of the many belief systems found here. The Christian church has a presence in St. Croix, as well, but many people are confused about what having a true relationship with Jesus really means.

With all its beauty and magnificence, St. Croix also endures significant challenges. The transient nature of island life makes consistency in business and education difficult. Its struggling economy leaves schools lacking employees and supplies. Many families are seeking a school where children can learn in a safe environment, with caring teachers and a quality curriculum. With the Lord's help, we have been able to consistently provide that.

Free Will Baptist Christian School operates with a mixture of stateside and local teachers and staff. Though the school has endured difficult times financially, the Lord has faithfully sustained us when other private schools have closed or consolidated. He also has seen fit to protect our school's reputation for excellence. In our weaknesses, He has proven Himself strong. This is the reason many non-Christians send their children to our school. We provide that quality education in a caring environment they want for their children.

We've ministered on the island long enough to see generations of students graduate from our school, and we currently have five alumni employees. It is a beautiful thing to watch a student advance through our school, leave for college, and return to serve. Several students and their families regularly attend our church and youth group.

After students graduate, we continue to pray the Holy Spirit would use what they learned in our little school to convict the hearts of those students who have yet to follow the Lord. We look forward to celebrating in Heaven with Caribbean brothers and sisters who attended our school. As we continue to pray for creative ways to reach the lost world around us, we are grateful for the daily opportunities God gives us at our unique Christian school.

What about you? How can the Lord use your church and family to accomplish His mission in your neighborhood? **ONE**

About the Author: Angela Wooton is the middle and high school principal at Free Will Baptist Christian School in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. She and her husband Gene, pastor of the Free Will Baptist church in St. Croix, have lived and ministered on the island since 2014. They have four sons: Gene, Seth, Cole, and Levi.



*Please pray
for us...*

...that the Lord would continue to grant us what we need to continue the ministry in St. Croix effectively.

...that people will continue to answer the call to serve in St. Croix.

...that many souls would come to Jesus because of the efforts of Free Will Baptists in St. Croix, the Virgin Islands, and around the world.



From Auction

to Altar

THE STORY OF
AWAKEN FWB CHURCH

BY JOSH BENNETT

I walked into the dusty, fluorescent-lit warehouse. It was nothing special, just a big open room with old, squeaky bleachers arranged in a U-shape. Pallets of random supplies were scattered across the floor, each finding its way to the auction house by way of a semi-truck wreck. I was 16 years old and found myself attending the auction with a friend and her grandfather. He frequented the auctions, buying an assortment of items to later resell at a local livestock auction. I think it was more of a hobby than a job, but he certainly seemed to enjoy it.

As I absorbed all this place had to offer, from the lady at the door registering attendees and assigning numbers to the auctioneer who rapidly and loudly worked his way through pallet after pallet, nothing seemed remarkable. Memorable, maybe, but not remarkable.

Fast-forward 20 years and I found myself back in my hometown looking, searching, and praying for God to provide a location for Awaken Free Will Baptist Church

to launch. I was shocked, even hesitant, when our real estate agent suggested we meet at the “Old Southern Auction House.” I knew the building, and it was nothing special. I almost canceled the showing, but we were so desperate to find a place that turning down any potential option seemed a mistake.

Then something remarkable happened.

The moment we walked through the doors, time rewound and stood still. My mind flooded with memories of those old auctions. I could hear the auctioneer calling. I could smell the dusty, stale pallets, and I could picture myself sitting in the middle of the room taking it all in.

Suddenly, something shifted, and I saw the room differently. I could see Awaken Church filling the walls of that old warehouse. I envisioned a sanctuary, a café, classrooms, and offices. In that moment, the old auction house became something more, something remarkable.





In the following weeks, God worked in amazing ways on our behalf to provide the means to purchase the building and renovate it to meet our needs.

When I sat on those old, squeaky bleachers at 16 years old, I never imagined that, one day, God would allow me to plant a church in that very building. If you had told me then what the future held, I would have laughed.

But God knew.

I wonder what He thought that day as I took in the unremarkable setting. **He knew the plans He had, He knew the future of the building, and He knew the remarkable things His Spirit would do within those walls.**

Now, each week, I stand on a stage only a few feet from where I sat on those bleachers and share the gospel.

What an amazing God we serve! **ONE**

About the Author: Tifton, Georgia, native Josh Bennett is the lead church planter at Awaken FWB Church. He and his wife Ashley have three children: Sawyer, Finn, and Harper. To learn more about the Bennetts and their work, visit fwbnam.com/bennett.

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70	5.9%	70/70	5.2%
75	6.6%	75/75	5.8%
80	7.6%	80/80	6.5%
85	8.7%	85/85	7.7%
90	9.7%	90/90	9.4%

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UP the STREET

A NEW MINDSET ABOUT COMMUNITY OUTREACH

BY BECKY MCKINNEY

It seems we can finally say we've made it to the other side of the pandemic. This means returning to regularly scheduled church services, youth events, and Vacation Bible Schools. Many churches took a hit on attendance during the pandemic, and sadly, many churches lost people, either to the illness itself or to fear of contracting the illness. By God's grace, now that we are past the worst of it, we need to reconsider community outreach in our churches.

The first obstacle is always mindset. As Christians, we *should* want to share the gospel with as many people as we can. It cannot be overstated: reaching the lost requires meeting the people in our communities face to face. Remember the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:20? "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Jesus lives in us who belong to His Church, and sometimes His knocking may come through our hands. If we are unwilling, some souls may not have the opportunity to answer.

Before the pandemic, our church had the goal of knocking on every door within a mile of our church. My husband

Josh and I went to a house and knocked. A gentleman opened the door and invited us in. It turns out he had been sitting in his living room reading the Bible. He was a recovering alcoholic who had given his life to Christ and was freed from his addiction. That very morning, he had been praying for God to help him find a church to join. Four years later, he regularly attends our church, and we've had the opportunity to minister to him and his family.

In faith, these are the types of opportunities we believe are out there. These moments motivate church members to adopt a mindset to go into harvest fields as plenteous as the Master promised. Outreach is often uncomfortable and unnatural, and three years of pandemic isolation has not encouraged our neighbors to open their doors. It's easier to keep the church in the building and wonder why the community isn't coming. But we must go to them! Find a core of people in your church who believe in the mission to go, and then prayerfully develop opportunities for outreach and growth.



One way to generate outreach opportunities is to minister to community needs. You cannot find a “one size fits all” formula for this. What works for one church might not work for another. It’s best to start by evaluating your church and your community and determining what resources your church can offer. Maybe your church doesn’t have enough volunteers to start a new youth program, but you have the people to start a greeting card ministry to encourage the homebound.

Our church doesn’t have limitless financial resources, but we do have excellent and well-maintained facilities. So, we’ve partnered with nonprofit community agencies to offer services to the people who live nearby. Whatever you identify as an opportunity, the next step is to make sure you have church members willing to volunteer time to sustain whatever new program you decide to implement. It is no use to identify a need without a way to maintain the program.

Once you find a need your church can help meet, consider the community and how the need might benefit potential church attendees. If you have programs ministering to children, and your church is in a neighborhood consisting mostly of young families, figure out how to connect your program to these young families.

If your church is in a lower-income neighborhood, consider hosting a community meal once a month or building a “blessing box” stocked with non-perishable food items. Our church has been operating a blessing box for over a year, and the opportunities it has created for connection with our community (including those who want to contribute) have far exceeded our expectations.

These service ministries create real value for your community. Josh often reminds our church we should operate in such a way that if we ever closed our doors, our community would miss us. If your church could close tomorrow without anyone noticing, that’s a clear indicator your congregation has grown too insular.

Finally, be patient and prayerful about those in the community you are trying to reach. Growth does not happen overnight, but being persistent and faithful always pays off.

If one lost person is reached because of a community outreach program, then that is a huge win for God’s kingdom and well worth all the time and energy.

Angels will rejoice in Heaven, and your congregation will experience the surge of spiritual power that always accompanies redemption. With God’s help, they will become hungry to see Him work, and they will want to continue pursuing the real business of life: seeing souls saved.

To wrap things up, let me encourage you. If a community outreach opportunity has been weighing heavily on your mind, take the steps to evaluate your church and neighborhood. Where possible, push forward to implement the outreach activity. Yes, we must take the time to “feed the sheep” in our congregations and minister to our own families, but churches will only experience a small portion of God’s blessings and power when they focus primarily on themselves.

When you lead your church into the community, I am convinced God’s peace will begin to fill your lives. The anxiety that accompanies new activities will melt away as you realize “neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

God doesn’t require results; He simply wants us to be faithful. Your church will never be fully faithful until you become serious about joining Christ in the harvest fields. Once there, it’s up to God to complete His work, and I know from experience, He is up to the task!

Please pray for us, and we’ll be praying for you! **ONE**

About the Author: Josh and Becky McKinney met in the same church and have been married almost 13 years. They started ministry together by leading the youth group at their home church. Josh has been the pastor of Midfield FWB Church in Kingsport, Tennessee, for over eight years. Becky stays home with their daughter Hazel, who will soon celebrate her first birthday.



Two Ministry Opportunities

BY TERRY AUSTIN AND KEN AKERS

The Chaplaincy

Free Will Baptists can trace our history to 1727, and for almost 300 years we have worked to be faithful to Christ's command to extend His witness and build His Church worldwide. Over time, new and unique opportunities arose for Free Will Baptists in fulfilling this command. Church planting, both at home and internationally; evangelization; Christian education; music ministry; community outreach; and military chaplaincy have all played an important role in making us who we are and helping us build God's Kingdom at home and abroad.

Free Will Baptists have a rich legacy of serving our nation and our fellow man. The founding father of Free Will Baptists in New England, Benjamin Randall, served as a patriot and soldier during the Revolutionary War. He not only performed duties as an assistant commissary, but he also reenlisted in September 1776 as a soldier and served

for a year and a half. His commanding officer commended Sergeant Randall's stellar character as a soldier. He also wrote of Randall's religious duties and obligations, noting Randall visited the sick and provided worship services for other soldiers, which sounds much like the duties of our modern chaplains.

From the beginning of our nation's his-

tory, Free Will Baptists have willingly and faithfully served in the ranks of every U.S. military branch. In 1967, Home Missions, now North American Ministries, endorsed its first minister following God's call to serve in the American

Armed Forces as a chaplain. This was an important step in Free Will Baptist history and a new ministry path for the denomination's future.

As He always does, God provided a trailblazing individual for this most important calling. Gerald Mangham emerged to fill this awesome ministry and went on to become our first Free Will Baptist military chaplain in 1967. It was only the beginning. Following Chaplain Mangham came Chaplains Nedo Eddy, Jim Bishop, Larry Langford, Kerry Steedly, and Bob Cooper sequentially.

Since endorsing Chaplain Mangham, this ministry has continued to grow and expand along with other national agencies that have expanded and followed new opportunities to go into the world and tell the good news of Jesus Christ. As long as our world needs Jesus, our mission field will exist, and workers will continue being called to go.

The military chaplain's ministry will continue to march into the future by expanding and organizing to prepare our ministers to serve God and country as military chaplains. And you can rest assured, based on our world today, we will need our military until Jesus comes for His Church. We will need America's sons and daughters to serve and fight for our freedoms. And, we will need to minister to our military at home and abroad, in times of peace and war.

Are you willing to answer the call?

About the Columnist:

Retired chaplain Terry Austin serves as the chaplain support officer for North American Ministries. Contact Terry or learn more about the chaplaincy: fwbnam.com/chaplaincy.

North American Ministries currently has **13 chaplains** proudly serving our nation and our soldiers, the largest number in our history. See page 26 for a complete list of current chaplains and their stations and learn how you can answer the call.



Operation Restoration Helping a Church Near You

Several years ago, under the direction of then-director Tom Dooley, Master's Men started a program called Operation Saturation. The goal of the program was to assist a church plant by distributing information about the church to the surrounding community.

As a result, many people volunteered, and their involvement added to the success of the new church. And, not only were the new churches helped, but many pastors reported their people would come back and ask, "Why can't we do this for our church, too?"

Earlier this year, Executive Secretary Eddie Moody and I were discussing the emphasis on church revitalization. Through the availability of Rekindle coaches trained by the Executive Office and NAM, numerous churches have begun to take advantage of revitalization possibilities. During our conversation, the subject of physical church buildings and properties came up. Often, when a church is struggling, the church property itself may be neglected.

Recently, the Salem Association in Florida took on the task of helping restore one of its churches. After considering ways they could work together to support the Sneads FWB Church, people from association churches joined with Sneads Church members to work on the needs of their facility. The Florida Mission Board provided financial resources. What a great example of churches working together to help one another!

I suggested to Dr. Moody that Master's Men would love to spearhead similar restoration projects. The purpose and plan of Operation Restoration (as we have decided to name the program) is simple. For any church going through a revitalization program, Master's Men will help recruit volunteers from local area churches to spend a day or longer helping

that church with needed repairs and updates. This could include things as simple as pressure washing, painting, and landscaping but might also include a host of other tasks that could enhance the appeal of the building.

As we launch Operation Restoration, your church may soon hear from us if there is a need in your area. No funds have been budgeted for this project. It will be left to the association, church, or group of volunteers to help with the costs. However, an Operation Restoration fund has been set up through the Executive Office to hold donations should a church or individual wish to contribute.

We should never exhibit a prideful spirit of competition between churches. We all should have the same goal and desire: to see the lost come to Christ. Through Operation Restoration, Free Will Baptist churches can come together to help one another grow and thrive. When we are willing to work together, God can accomplish great things through us for His glory! **ONE**

About the Columnist: Ken Akers is the director of Master's Men and the CFO of North American Ministries and CELF. For more information, email ken@nafwb.org.



Chaplaincy Update

North American Ministries is proud to serve as the endorsing agency for ministers pursuing chaplain ministry. Whether through the military, in Veterans' Affairs, or as first responders, our chaplains serve across the country in many unique places.

Military chaplains serve as pastors to the military, ministering to personnel from all over the world through Bible classes and church services. They also serve families and fellow soldiers in times of sickness, celebration, war, and tragedy.

NAM currently has 12 chaplains and one chaplain candidate who faithfully serve our nation. Please pray for these chaplains and their families as they share the gospel with other men and women in uniform.

Captain Amir Ashoori – U.S. Army Reserve, Selma, CA

Captain Michael Beatty – U.S. Army, Fort Leonard Wood, MO

1st Lieutenant Elliott Deilus – U.S. Army Reserve, Chester, VA

Captain David Dodson – U.S. Army, Niceville, FL

Chaplain Chris Dotson – Secret Service

Major Lee Frye – U.S. Army, Savannah, GA

Colonel Brad Hanna – Army National Guard, Edmond, OK

Captain Shaun Hembree – U.S. Army, Fort Campbell, KY

Lieutenant Hal Jones – U.S. Navy, Imperial Beach, CA

Lieutenant Colonel Tracy Kerr – U.S. Army, Fort Liberty, NC

Lieutenant Commander Mark McCraney – U.S. Navy, Jacksonville, NC

Major Kevin Trimble – U.S. Army, Fort Jackson, SC

Lieutenant Jonathan Truett (Chaplain Candidate) – U.S. Army Reserve, Clayton, NC

Are you interested in becoming a Free Will Baptist military chaplain? Chaplains must meet the following requirements:

- Complete 120 hours of undergraduate study in a college or university ending in a Bachelor of Arts degree, a Bachelor of Science degree, or some other qualified degree.
- Complete at least 72 hours of graduate credit at an accredited seminary ending in a Bachelor of Divinity or a Master of Divinity program.
- Be an ordained Free Will Baptist minister in good standing with the denomination, with two years professional experience



*Captain
Amir Ashoori*



*Captain
Michael Beatty*



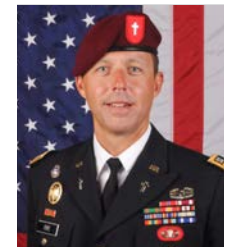
*1st Lieutenant
Elliott Deilus*



*Captain
David Dodson*



*Chaplain
Chris Dotson*



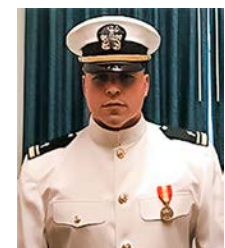
*Major
Lee Frye*



*Colonel
Brad Hanna*



*Captain
Shaun Hembree*



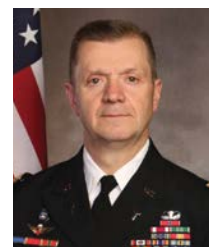
*Lieutenant
Hal Jones*



*Lieutenant Colonel
Tracy Kerr*



*Lieutenant
Commander
Mark McCraney*



*Major
Kevin Trimble*



*Lieutenant
Jonathan Truett*

at a Free Will Baptist church.

- Submit the proper applications to North American Ministries and the desired branch of service.
- Be under 46 years of age, have the ecclesiastical endorse-

ment of the denomination, and pass a physical examination.

If you are interested in learning more about the chaplaincy, please contact Chaplain Support Officer Terry Austin (terry@nafwb.org) for more information. **ONE**

NAM Approves New Church Planters to Oklahoma and Florida

North American Ministries is happy to announce the approval of two new church planting families: Cody and Tori Matlock and David and Lindsey Mitchener.

Cody and Tori Matlock will join the Ardmore, Oklahoma, team working to revitalize Hilltop FWB Church in a joint project with First Oklahoma District, Oklahoma Executive Office, and Bob Thomas Ministries. The Matlocks join lead planters Matt and Becky Hanshaw and associates Luke and Dalanee Sherman. Cody and Tori are currently making the transition from Pensacola, Florida, to Ardmore, Oklahoma. Once established at Hilltop, they will serve in various roles including youth and children's ministry, finance, and music.

David and Lindsey Mitchener are new associate church planters at Connect FWB Church in The Villages, Florida, where they will work alongside lead planters Frank and Debbie Webster. The Mitcheners previously lived in



Cody & Tori Matlock



David & Lindsey Mitchener

Missouri where they served extensively in the areas of worship ministry, discipleship, and marriage enrichment. They have three sons: Silas, Wesley, and Kole. The Villages, Summerfield, and the surrounding areas have large populations, and most residents do not have strong religious ties. This region is a vast, unique mission field desperately in need of true gospel transformation. **ONE**

Hispanic Ministry Launching at 24/7 FWB Church in Sevierville, Tennessee

The 24/7 Church in Kodak, Tennessee, is happy to announce Julio and Marisol Jimenez, along with their sons Samuel and Santiago, will begin a new Hispanic ministry: 24/7 Español. The Jimenez family moved to the U.S. from Colombia this past year with nothing but their suitcases and a passion to reach lost Hispanics for Christ. Julio will be traveling the next several months to raise support. Please consider supporting this worthy family. For more information, or to schedule them for a service, contact Chad Kivette: (865) 765-5580. **ONE**



Julio & Marisol Jimenez

20 REASONS

to Give to the

Mission North America Offering

BY SAM MCVAY

November 19, 2023, is the day set aside for the North American Ministries' annual Mission North America Offering (MNAO). On this day, we come together and focus on giving generously to extend the work of Free Will Baptists in North America. We ask every church to give their congregation an opportunity to participate in this special offering to help underwrite many areas of work in which NAM is involved. Here are 20 great reasons you should consider giving:

1 Your gifts cover the costs of **recruitment, assessment, and training for all new church planters.**

Currently, we have 40 English-speaking church planters. Pray more people would answer God's call on their lives to become church planters and plant Free Will Baptist churches in needy areas of North America.

2 Your gifts cover the cost of **printing directories, maps, and other materials** to promote the ministry of our church planters to Free Will Baptist churches and individuals.

3 Your gifts cover the cost of our biennial **Church Planters Summit**, a time of fellowship, study, prayer, training, and encouragement when all our church planters spend a few days together.

4 Your gifts make it possible to **operate our home office.** The office handles accounting, payroll, receipts, bookkeeping, etc., for all church planters. The NAM office is the hub for sharing information and news of how God is building His Kingdom through NAM.

5 Your gifts help cover the cost of **encouragement to church planters** as NAM directors visit their church plants to offer their time, prayers, help, and counsel.

6 Your gifts **relieve deficit church planter accounts.** Keep in mind all funds that come into NAM designated for church planters go directly to the church planters' accounts as long as they are a part of NAM. NAM does not charge any kind of administrative fee from our church planters.

7 Your gifts cover the costs of **NAM representatives' travel to associational meetings and churches** to share how God is working in church plants and other areas of ministry.

8 Your gifts make it possible to **provide biennial regional training sessions for church planters.** Every other year, this time of assessment, counsel, training, and sharing best practices for church planters occurs in smaller, regional settings.

9 Your gifts help with the expenses of **the Disaster Response Team ministry of NAM and Master's Men**. This growing ministry provides equipment, training, supplies, and volunteers to help those impacted by disasters.

10 Your gifts help cover the costs of **IMPACT projects** every year on the Saturday before our National Convention. IMPACT provides an opportunity for Free Will Baptists to serve churches and ministries in the cities where our convention meets.

11 Your gifts help **provide Bible studies and support for Free Will Baptist men's ministries**. Currently, we offer 21 Bible studies for churches to use in training their men to be godly leaders in their churches and homes.

12 **NAM cross-cultural ministries** benefit from your generous gifts. Currently, we have eight Hispanic church planters and 48 bi-vocational Hispanic missionaries. Not only are we working hard to reach the growing Hispanic population in North America, but we are also partnering to reach other ethnic groups who are now our neighbors.

13 Your gifts help cover the costs of **translating materials into Spanish** as we provide our training materials, social media posts, etc., into the heart language of thousands of Hispanics living in our neighborhoods.

14 Your gifts help cover the costs of **providing training through the Hispanic Bible Institute** currently being relocated to Parkers Chapel FWB Church in Greenville, North Carolina. New classes will begin in January 2024.

15 Your gifts help cover the costs of **providing endorsements, encouragement, support, and oversight for Free Will Baptist chaplains**. We want to come alongside our military chaplains and their families as they serve military men and women. NAM also endorses and provides support to chaplains serving in police departments, sheriff's departments, hospitals, etc., as well as the Secret Service.

16 **Pastor's Boot Camps**, offered both in our Tennessee office and regionally, provide free training to established church leaders. So far, 242 pastors and church leaders have received training through these boot camps, and we have eight regional boot camps scheduled in seven states.


17 NAM partners with the Executive Office and other departments to **provide professional counseling to struggling Free Will Baptist pastors and their families**. Your gifts cover the cost of this valuable and needed ministry.

18 Your gifts help cover the cost of materials, training, assessment, and encouragement for **the revitalization of our struggling churches**.

19 **The National Youth Evangelistic Team (YET)** receives a significant part of their funding from your generous gifts to the MNAO. This group of talented high school students minister in Free Will Baptist churches each summer.

20 Your gifts help cover the costs of **ONE Magazine**. This valuable resource provides the latest news and information concerning the Free Will Baptist denomination.

These are only a few of the many reasons you should prayerfully consider what God would have you give to the Mission North America Offering this year. The MNAO is scheduled for November 19, 2023, but you can make a special gift at any time through your local church, by mail, or online at fwbnam.com/mna.

At North American Ministries, we are praying for our Free Will Baptist churches and individuals to give generously and help us reach our goal of raising \$750,000. As we continue to work together to see His Kingdom built and the gospel taken to the ends of the earth, what will you do to help make that happen? 

About the Author: Sam McVay brings more than 40 years of ministry experience among Free Will Baptists to his role as church relations officer for North American Ministries. Sam travels to churches and various meetings promoting the work of NAM and challenging everyone to fulfill their role in building God's Kingdom in North America and beyond.

Pre-Thanksgiving DAYS of PRAYER

13 MONDAY - Willing to Move

Through the ministry of the NAM Hispanic Bible Institute, over 50 mission works have been started, and 380 graduates are ministering across the U.S. and in Latin America. This January, the institute will move from Bartlesville, Oklahoma, to Parkers Chapel FWB Church in Greenville, North Carolina. Though change can be difficult, we know God is leading us to make this move, and we are willing and excited to follow His direction. Please ask God to continue to guide and provide throughout the moving process. Pray He will prepare the hearts and minds of incoming students and provide vision, clarity, and wisdom to returning and new leaders.

14 TUESDAY - Willing to Change

Statistically, a large majority of churches in the U.S. have plateaued or are declining. Unfortunately, this includes many Free Will Baptist churches. NAM is committed to assisting struggling churches and has partnered with the Executive Office to create Refresh, which includes numerous resources and training opportunities for any interested church. Please pray for struggling churches and ask God to encourage them and provide discernment as they move forward. Pray they will be willing to make necessary changes to reach their communities and grow their ministries into healthy, thriving churches.

15 WEDNESDAY - Willing to Reach

Now more than ever, the “ends of the earth” are right next door. Gone are the days of cross-cultural mission work only taking place internationally. The nations have come to us, and we must reach them with the gospel! Pray for NAM’s newest cross-cultural ministries including new Hispanic congregations in Athens, Alabama, and Kodak, Tennessee, along with South Asian works in Detroit and Canada. Ask the Lord to grow these ministries and pray He will provide needed partners, resources, workers, and opportunities for these churches and groups to grow and fulfill their calling to diverse people groups and cultures.

16 THURSDAY - Willing to Go

Church planting is at the heart of everything we do at NAM. Thriving churches that proclaim the gospel, invest in their communities, and disciple believers bring glory to God and build His Kingdom. Please pray for our newest church planters David and Lindsey Mitchener (The Villages, Florida), Cody and Tori Matlock (Ardmore, Oklahoma), and Julio and Marisol Jimenez (Kodak, Tennessee). Ask God to provide for their needs, encourage them through challenging transitions, and give them joy and peace as they serve Him in their respective ministries. We are thankful they are willing to go wherever the Lord leads.

17 FRIDAY - Are You Willing?

We believe the foundation of a gospel-centered life is a willing spirit. When we possess a willing spirit, God will use our obedience to accomplish great things for His Kingdom. Today, ask God how He is calling you to partner with the work of NAM. Will you commit to *gather* regularly with a fellowship of believers to learn more about walking with the Lord each day? Will you *give* of your time, talents, and resources to reach your community? If called, will you *go* wherever God might lead you for the sake of the gospel? NAM needs new church planters, community leaders, financial partners, and prayer warriors to support our work. Are *you* willing?

Join North American Ministries for pre-Thanksgiving days of prayer, November 13-17.

Use the daily prayer guide below to partner with us in praying intentionally over different areas of ministry each day leading up to the Mission North America Offering on November 19. As you pray, consider how God might be asking you to partner with NAM to *gather, give, or go* for the sake of the gospel.

Video, paper, and digital MNA Offering promotional resources, including Pre-Thanksgiving Days of Prayer materials, are available at fwbnam.com/mna.

Make plans to give to the Mission North America Offering through your local church, by mail, or online. Your gifts enable others to go!

The Greatest Journey

Free Will Baptist churches around the globe participate in packing and distributing Operation Christmas Child (OCC) shoeboxes through Samaritan's Purse each November through January. Some people travel from Free Will Baptist churches in the States to help our works and partner countries distribute boxes. Children (and their families) in Panama, Cuba, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, Ivory Coast, Brazil, and more have benefited from this ministry.

OCC reaches far beyond the Christmas season. Each shoebox provides an opportunity to participate in a 12-week Bible study, taking children on a journey toward faith. Many overseas churches sponsor shoebox distributions and outreaches and follow up with "The Greatest Journey" studies.

On July 13, Ivorian partners (BERACA) reported more than 150 children in Tanda, Ivory Coast, received a certificate for completing "The Greatest Journey."



In Kaspichan, Bulgaria, residents of a children's home completed their journey in May. Eleven children then attended camp in July where three older children accepted Jesus as Savior. These children continue to enjoy weekly Bible club meetings.

Whether providing access in gospel-resistant areas or a positive interaction in unreached, distant villages and towns, the shoebox gifts launch journeys to faith. **ONE**

Pleven Church Celebrates Baptism

Bulgaria—Jonathan and Amy Postlewaite celebrated the baptism of Georgi, who has been part of the Pleven church for almost four years. About 20 church members traveled by bus to a river in Georgi's hometown of Vratsa. There, he publicly declared his desire to commit his life to Christ.

Georgi stated, "I was baptized as a child in the Orthodox church, but I didn't know Christ then. Now, I know Him! I believe He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I am grateful for you all [the church]. Because

of you, I am growing more in Christ, and He is growing more in me."

Afterwards, the group visited places meaningful to Georgi and enjoyed breathtaking parts of God's creation. **ONE**



Snapshots Around the World



Spain—The Alpedrete congregation held a Vacation Bible School July 11-15. The theme, “Twists and Turns,” illustrated the way following Jesus “changes the game, even when life throws twists and turns your way,” wrote Anthony Edgmon.



Cuba—Four men graduated from the Cedars of Lebanon seminary extension classes in Bayamo June 14. Three men received a B.A. in Bible and Ministry; one man graduated with an A.A. degree. The seminary expects 11 students to participate in next year’s classes.

France—In early August, members of the Mosaic Church and non-believing friends took a three-day downhill biking trip in eastern France. The annual event offers opportunities for deep conversations about faith and salvation.



Japan—The New Life Church and Taipei Chapel in Hokkaido hosted a Korean college team July 20 to August 3. For two weeks, these students worked with four area churches. They participated in college outreach, distributed flyers, and hosted two Korean nights. Not only did they see a good turnout for the Korea nights’ cultural events, but also two people who entered New Life Church for the first time indicated they wanted to learn more about Jesus and the Bible.



Brazil—Four people were baptized at the Nova América FWB Church in Campinas Sunday, June 25.



Japan—Emily Petty reported 98 first-time visitors entered the Hope Alive Church in Tokorozawa during the first five months of 2023. The church expanded worship space by tearing down a wall and adding 32 chairs. On June 4, the first Sunday with the larger space, nearly every chair was full. Emily requests prayer for “God to continue to knock down walls in people’s hearts and for new people to continue to show up every Sunday.”

Panama—On July 23, the San Vicente Church celebrated Kid’s Day. The theme “You Are Important to God” provided children with a biblical sense of worth.



New Life. Same Building

BY KATE SPEER

God does not
simply take
old things and
make them new;

He brings
hopelessly
dead things

*back to
life.*

Miharashidai Chapel officially launched at Christmas 1998, led by my parents Donnie and Ruth McDonald. I was nine years old. We lived only a few streets from the church in a neighborhood with many young families. To our delight, a handful of our new friends began attending our services.

New church plants require creative methods, which I witnessed firsthand. To lead the singing and free her hands to do motions, my mom pre-recorded accompaniments to our Sunday School songs on her thrifted electric piano, even including pauses between the songs. God blessed her efforts, and Sunday School became the thriving backbone of the church. I have nothing but fond memories of all the meals, laughter, and music shared in that one-room storefront.

When my family relocated to the Tokyo area, the pastoral baton passed to Nathan Snow. He and his family faithfully served at the church until a Japanese pastor stepped in to lead. Under Sasaki Sensei's leadership, the church experienced periods of both growth and turmoil. As attendance grew, so did discord, as is often the case. Members began to leave due to interpersonal conflict.

By the late 2010s, Miharashidai Chapel's once energetic congregational music turned quiet as its young accompanist moved away to college. When COVID hit in 2020, attendance dwindled down to three people, and eventually, to just one. Sasaki Sensei felt led to move elsewhere, leaving Doug Bishop and his family to navigate a turbulent and lonely season. When the Bishops moved stateside for their scheduled furlough, the doors of the church finally closed.

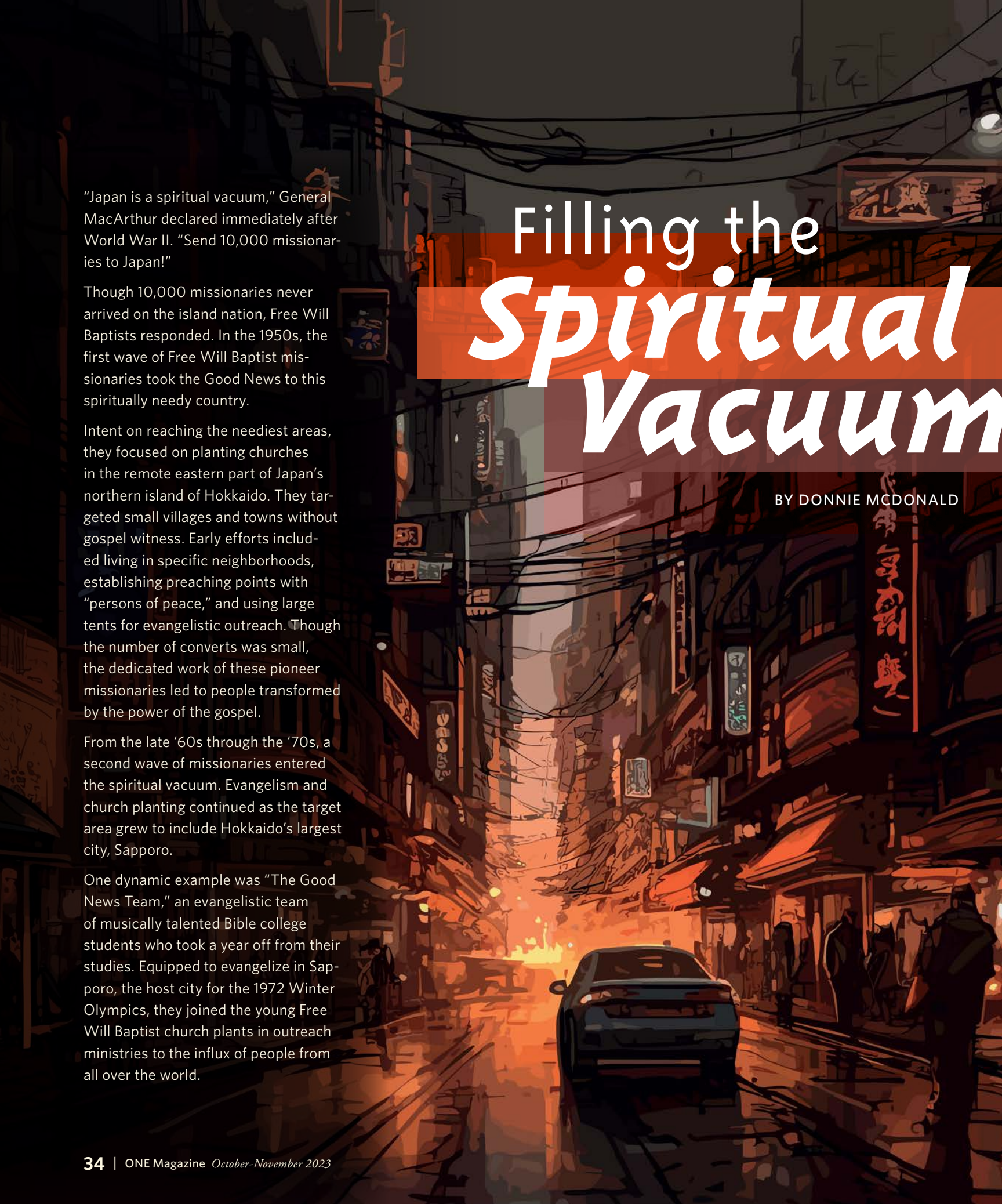
Around this time, my husband and I heard the Bishops share their hearts, including a sentence God used to change the direction of our lives. Doug said, "We haven't had any music in the church in over three years." My musician's heart was heavy. Daniel and I felt God leading us back to Hokkaido, a place in need of much encouragement.

Today, Miharashidai Chapel has an entire team assembled: Doug and Miriam Bishop, Daniel and me, and two interns, Taylor Pate and Hannah Goucher. We also have a "built-in" youth group comprised of our four children and the Bishop's seven.

And we are no longer the Miharashidai Chapel. The church has been renamed New Life Church. With our God, the closed doors of a church (or the death of our Savior) do not mean the end. God does not simply take old things and make them new; He brings hopelessly dead things back to life.

We are praying this for the church, of course, but more for the people who will be led there. May God bring hope to many! Through Doug's preaching of the Word. Through Daniel's guitar playing. Through Miriam, Taylor, and Hannah's work with the children. And through all 11 MKs and the incredible energy they bring. May He give New Life to all who hear as I sing and play my mom's thrifted piano God used to bless many people almost 30 years ago. **ONE**

About the Author: Kate and Daniel Speer are career missionaries to Japan. Learn more: iminc.org.



"Japan is a spiritual vacuum," General MacArthur declared immediately after World War II. "Send 10,000 missionaries to Japan!"

Though 10,000 missionaries never arrived on the island nation, Free Will Baptists responded. In the 1950s, the first wave of Free Will Baptist missionaries took the Good News to this spiritually needy country.

Intent on reaching the neediest areas, they focused on planting churches in the remote eastern part of Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. They targeted small villages and towns without gospel witness. Early efforts included living in specific neighborhoods, establishing preaching points with "persons of peace," and using large tents for evangelistic outreach. Though the number of converts was small, the dedicated work of these pioneer missionaries led to people transformed by the power of the gospel.

From the late '60s through the '70s, a second wave of missionaries entered the spiritual vacuum. Evangelism and church planting continued as the target area grew to include Hokkaido's largest city, Sapporo.

One dynamic example was "The Good News Team," an evangelistic team of musically talented Bible college students who took a year off from their studies. Equipped to evangelize in Sapporo, the host city for the 1972 Winter Olympics, they joined the young Free Will Baptist church plants in outreach ministries to the influx of people from all over the world.

Filling the *Spiritual* Vacuum

BY DONNIE MCDONALD

Four team members, touched by the spiritual needs of the Japanese people, later returned to Japan as career missionaries (Dale and Sandra Bishop, Judy Smith, and Mirial Gainer).

At the same time, missionaries began church plants in Tokyo, the nation's populous capital on the major island of Honshu. God's direction clearly added urban ministry to the Free Will Baptist vision for Japan. Today, 92% of the country's population is urban.

What's the present challenge?

More missionaries joined the force in Japan in succeeding decades, actively starting churches and developing outreach programs. Yet, the task in Japan remains far from finished. In fact, the Japanese are the second largest unreached people group in the world. Even though missionaries have served in Japan for many decades, **less than half of 1% of the population are evangelical believers.** The 125 million-plus Japanese people (the 11th most populated nation) desperately need to encounter the gospel.

Part of the reason Japan has been so resistant to the gospel is the deep-seated role of Japanese religions. Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism hold a strong grip on the Japanese mind. Essentially, to be Japanese means one is Buddhist and Shintoist. These religions are inseparable from the culture.

Japanese desire to respond respectfully to local and national religious rituals. Shinto shrines host baby dedications and ceremonies for life milestones. Buddhist funeral rites are observed for virtually all who die. Most Japanese never witness a Christian funeral.

The Japanese calendar is synced with religious festivals to indoctrinate school kids from kindergarten forward. The worship of ancestors is considered the normal expression of

a good family member and an important part of most Japanese homes. These traditional, non-Christian religions of Japan are a deeply engrained spiritual stronghold with thousands of years of observance.

The Japanese culture also breeds and demands conformity. Individuality is strongly discouraged. Instead, everyone is expected to look, act, and be like everyone else. The gospel itself is viewed as foreign to Japan. Human relationships are highly valued, often more than truth or principle. Harmony is greatly desired. Loyalty to the group is prized over individual expression or belief. The gospel message conflicts with this value. Christians are a tiny

Most Japanese have never been to church, have never read the Bible, and have no Christian friends. Estimates indicate 95% of Japanese have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

minority in a society where consensus is important. Few families come to faith. Individuals who do accept Christ experience shaming, exposure, and ostracizing.

Japan is also deeply materialistic, and their affluence is no friend to the gospel. Many Japanese are content with their desire for material wealth and the comforts that go along with it. The sincere, polite, hard-working Japanese are too busy to give heed to the gospel. They have little concept of personal sin.

Most Japanese have never been to church, have never read the Bible, and have no Christian friends. Estimates indicate 95% of Japanese have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. They raise each new generation to follow in the same life cycle.

What's the plan?

The plan is to break this deeply rooted cycle. How? The power of the gospel (Romans 1:16) can break through. The most vital and pressing need in Japan is more gospel-driven churches. Only one church exists for every 16,700 people, as contrasted with one church for every 800 people in the U.S. Furthermore, 60% of churches have fewer than 30 attendees. Without additional churches and the increase of Japanese believers, most people will never have a vital contact with the gospel.

Planting churches remains the mainstay of what Free Will Baptists do in Japan. We continue planting churches in the populated, urban areas of Tokyo and Sapporo, while supporting the less populated areas of rural Japan.

Through church planting and its activities, we give many Japanese people an opportunity to hear and understand the message of salvation up close and personal, often for the first time. Spending time with the Japanese and living out the gospel opens the way to plant the seed of the Word of God. Our churches focus on evangelistic outreach through a host of creative methods. Our desire is to see greater numbers of Christians in Japan, increasing the light of the gospel throughout the country.

We not only work at discipling believers in our churches but also in developing national leadership to carry out the work. Our missionaries are developing teaching materials and internship programs to raise up national leadership.

What's the progress?

We clearly see God blessing Free Will Baptists in Japan. A few years ago, we were down to one church in the entire greater Tokyo area. We relocated missionaries to develop works in the

Continued on page 55



From Generation *to* Generation

BY CLINT MORGAN

I have helped write more strategies than I can count. (Although some probably shouldn't be counted.) However, I have come to a major conclusion that has greatly curbed my appetite for spending great amounts of time and energy creating a strategy: *a strategy is not worth the paper it is written on if those who are to carry it out are not committed to it.*

At IM, we are fiercely committed to developing good strategies and seeing them realized. Good strategy yields:

- **Clear direction and efficiency.** Well-developed strategies provide IM with a clear direction as an agency and ensures efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Resource allocation and productivity.** Identifying priorities helps us know how to allocate our resources to maximize our impact and productivity.
- **Measurement and evaluation.** Good strategies provide instruments to track progress, assess the effectiveness of the strategy, and make the necessary adjustments.
- **Adaptability and responsiveness.** By regularly reviewing and updating our plans, we stay relevant and responsive in a dynamic international environment.
- **Excellence and honor.** By consistently pursuing our goals and objectives with excellence, in process and performance, we bring honor to God.

Our strategy helps IM define our goals and objectives.

We break down these goals and objectives into three core areas: reach, train, and give. One way we measure progress is through statistical reports. Though time and space will not permit a thorough look at each of these, I do want to share a few highlights.

REACH. God is blessing the efforts of our missionaries, national believers, and partners. **Through our IM missionaries and partners, we are reaching people in 34 countries.** Amazing!

We rejoice over the news of people coming to know Christ and following Him in baptism. The 2022 year-end reports from our fields showed:

- **1,788** professions of faith.
- **1,308** baptisms.

One of our goals is to see the **number of Free Will Baptist believers outside of North America grow from 35,537 to 50,000.** When we prayerfully set this goal, it seemed audacious. It took 85 years to witness 35,500 believers consistently worshipping God in our overseas churches. We felt courageous as we chose to increase that number by nearly 30%. But here we are, just over the halfway point to 2025, and we are almost to the 50,000 goal!

During 2022, Free Will Baptist churches outside North America had an average attendance each Sunday of **48,936.** Just over **30% of all Free Will Baptists are now located outside North America. I believe this number will surpass 50% in the near future.**

TRAIN. At IM, we are highly committed to discipling believers and training leaders.

Our 2020-2025 goal is to **assist national churches in developing field leadership training, growing from eight programs to 12.** (This includes Bible institutes and seminaries.)

Through our national churches' commitment to leadership training, **we have realized this goal and even surpassed it! A total of 14 organized training programs at institute or seminary level currently serve pastors, church leaders, and congregants.**

At the present time, **380 national believers attend leadership training institutions, and another 1,765 believers participate in organized discipleship/training programs.** Though these numbers

are impressive, the enormous, ever-growing needs of our churches around the world far exceed the present leadership. We must never abandon our focus on training.

GIVE. In 2022, we saw **an increase of more than 500 individual donors.**

We hope to see each of these individuals become long-term, faithful monthly supporters. The number of donors committed to fulfilling the Great Commission through IM should continue to grow as the number of missionaries increases.

Another significant financial goal is to see the World Missions Offering reach at least \$1 million each year. The 2022 **World Missions Offering increased \$50,000,** a big step in the right direction. (NOTE: Though the WMO offering date was August 27, 2023, each church and individual should feel free to choose another date if it is more convenient.)

Despite the many demands for your resources, you have clearly demonstrated your commitment to Christ and His Great Commission with a record-breaking **\$8.8 million given to IM during the 2022 fiscal year.** This is absolutely incredible! We honor each of you who gave. It is likely, in 2023, Free Will Baptists will give more than **\$9 million to reach the lost. Please continue giving as God continues to call those who need your support.**

Future Strategic Challenges

A good strategy doesn't just provide goals and objectives and ways to measure success. Good strategy helps identify and confront challenges, too.

Though we rejoice over the many victories, we are aware strategic challenges lie ahead. These potential obstacles do not deter us from pressing forward. An African proverb exhorts, "Don't let what you cannot do keep you from doing what you can."

FUNDING. In the great mystery world of finances, we cannot predict the next shift or structural change. Is a cashless society a real potentiality? Will crypto currency become the most viable means of managing assets? How will the next generation pay their monthly bills? This greatly affects how they make regular contributions to their churches and missionaries. Until we get definitive answers to these questions, we will stay the course and continue practicing good stewardship principles through good and bad times.

We do not believe the current financial landscape calls for major changes at the present time. Nor do we see a scenario in the near future (5-10 years) in which IM, or some mission-focused branch of Free Will Baptists, does not exist. So, let's stay the course together.



NEW FRONTIERS. Frontiers still exist for IM, and the rapidly evolving global landscape means new frontiers are developing. Therefore, a pressing need for new missionaries willing to pioneer these additional areas exists.

We asked God to open doors for us into restricted countries and even countries closed to the gospel. He has already cleared the way for us to help take the gospel to extremely resistant areas in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. We believe He will open new regions for us, and we must be ready and willing to go precisely where He leads.

PARTNERSHIPS. Partnerships are based upon the willful collaboration, cooperation, and commitment of two or more entities (people or organizations) who agree to pursue a particular plan and/or strategy together. These partners mutually commit to contribute and steward their available resources to realize collectively predetermined goals and objectives.

We surely cannot go about partnerships in a willy-nilly fashion. However, we must seriously consider the consequences of being unwilling to pursue partnerships. Some principles guide our determination regarding with whom to partner:

- **We believe developing partnerships is in line with our mission statement.** We exist to labor with the Body of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission.
- **We believe developing partnerships reflects our commitment to our core value of *interdependence*.**
- **We believe it is mutually rewarding** to develop partnerships with organizations and entities that share our passion and commitment to fulfill the Great Commission.
- **We believe developing partnerships accelerates the expansion of His Kingdom.**

The Next Generations

One of IM's strategic goals for the 2020-2025 period is to have 125 active IM missionaries by the end of December 2025. When we started on this five-year trajectory, we had 103 IM-approved missionaries. By April 2023, the IM board had approved an additional 12 missionaries. With resignations and change of status for the original 103, our total of active missionaries currently stands at 112.

We are well on our way to our goal and firmly believe we will reach and even surpass it.

IM anticipates new generations will bring innovation, excitement, freshness, and energy to our field and office teams. We are already experiencing this to some degree. However, we need to balance the exuberance of each generation's ideas and vision with the experience and wisdom of those who have served with IM for many years. Collectively, we must build a shared vision and unshakeable commitment to taking the gospel to the least reached.

As a denomination, if we desire to pass the God-given vision of missions to the next generation, we must:

- 1. Faithfully proclaim absolute truths, biblical doctrine, and foundational life principles without compromise.**
- 2. Preserve the authenticity and rich heritage of the denomination.**
- 3. Willingly involve all generations in ministry opportunities of serving and leading.**

To what new frontiers will God direct us? How many more missionaries will our Free Will Baptist churches prayerfully and financially support? Will our national churches continue to send workers into some of the most resistant countries? I really don't know the answer to these questions.

But one thing I do know: He will call. We will send. And, a harvest of souls will bring honor and glory to God. **ONE**

About the Author: Clint Morgan is the general director of IM, Inc. Learn more: iminc.org.

Alton Loveless With the Lord

Columbus, OH—Dr. Alton Loveless, world traveler and ministry leader, is now home with his Lord and his wife. Dr. Loveless modeled servant-style leadership in every role he occupied with a sharp mind, business savvy, and relational graciousness. Through loving interaction, he became a father/grandfather figure to many throughout the years.

Alton, a native of Conway, Arkansas, began preaching in 1955 at age 17 and was ordained as a Free Will Baptist minister the very next year. He attended Hendrix College and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College (now Randall University) and later a Masters of Christian Leadership and a Ph.D. in business administration from Columbia Pacific University.

Loveless pastored four Free Will Baptist churches in Arkansas and Missouri from 1955 to 1970. From 1970-1974 he served as a field representative, a Christian education consultant, and the national marketing director for Scripture Press Publications. Dr. Loveless returned to denominational leadership when Ohio named him executive secretary in 1974. For 19 years (1974-1993), he assisted Ohio pastors and oversaw the state bookstore.

During his tenure in Ohio, Dr. Loveless served 12 years on the Sunday School Board (Randall House), ten years on the Historical Commission as chairman, and a term on the Foreign Missions Board (IM, Inc.). He was president of the Free Will Baptist Bookstore Association for 18 years.

Following the retirement of Dr. Roger Reeds, Alton stepped into the role of President & CEO of the National Sunday School and Church Training Department of the National Association of Free Will Baptists (later known as Randall House Publications). He provided nine years of much-needed business acumen and a ministry mindset that carried Randall House forward, building on the legacy of the leaders who came before him.

Dr. Loveless was known for conducting numerous train-

ing seminars for churches and conferences. As the second of three CEOs in the nearly 70-year history of Randall House, his tenure was pivotal, setting the stage for the transition to D6 and generational discipleship.



Dr. Alton Loveless

Dr. Loveless published more than 1,300 articles and conducted over 950 seminars in 38 foreign countries and 48 states. Current Randall House CEO, Dr. Hunter, notes, “Randall House’s legacy comes from several great men who paved the way: Roger Reeds, Winford Davis, William Mishler, Harrold Harrison, Malcolm Fry, Jonathan Thigpen, Jim Lauthern, and—without question—Alton Loveless. I learned much from Dr. Loveless, and he was my biggest champion when I succeeded him in March 2002. We maintained a great friendship through the years and kept our annual breakfast meeting at Bob Evans each year during the Ohio state meeting.”

After retiring, Dr. Loveless started his own publishing company to aid and assist authors in self-publishing ventures, and he released over 230 books. In addition, he mentored and influenced scores of people during his lifetime.

Alton and Delois Loveless shared nearly 60 incredible years of marriage and ministry. They were proud of their two sons, Randy and Steven, and their families.

Randall House is accepting donations in memory of Dr. Alton Loveless to continue his legacy of training churches.

—Ron Hunter Jr., Ph.D.

CEO, D6 Family Ministry ONE

Worry and a Good Word

BY JOSHUA COLSON

“Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop:
But a good word maketh it glad” (Proverbs 12:25).

In Proverbs 12:25, Solomon paints a concrete picture of how the abstract concept of anxiety affects us. The first image that appeared in my mind after reading these words was from a commercial for Spiriva, a medicine used to treat respiratory problems. The commercial featured an elephant sitting on a man’s chest, weighing him down and making it impossible to breathe.

Solomon depicts anxiety like that elephant, weighing heavily upon our lives and making it difficult to live. Anxiety makes us think the wrong thoughts, feel the wrong emotions, and perform the wrong actions. Truly, anxiety is a burden that weighs down the heart.

Yet Scripture is clear God did not design humans for a life of anxiety. After all, anxiety is the opposite of faithful trust in God. Anxiety worries about the unknown future while faith trusts “the unknown future to the known God,” as Corrie Ten Boom famously put it. Humans were designed to trust God, but, in Adam, we all rebelled and were estranged from our Creator. This alienation was evident in the Garden after our first parents ate the forbidden fruit: “And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.” (Genesis 3:8). Why did they hide? They were afraid of having their sin exposed to the Lord (Genesis 3:10).

Sinful human beings have anxiety about being in the presence of God. Something in the human constitution, what Paul calls “the law written in their hearts,” condemns us

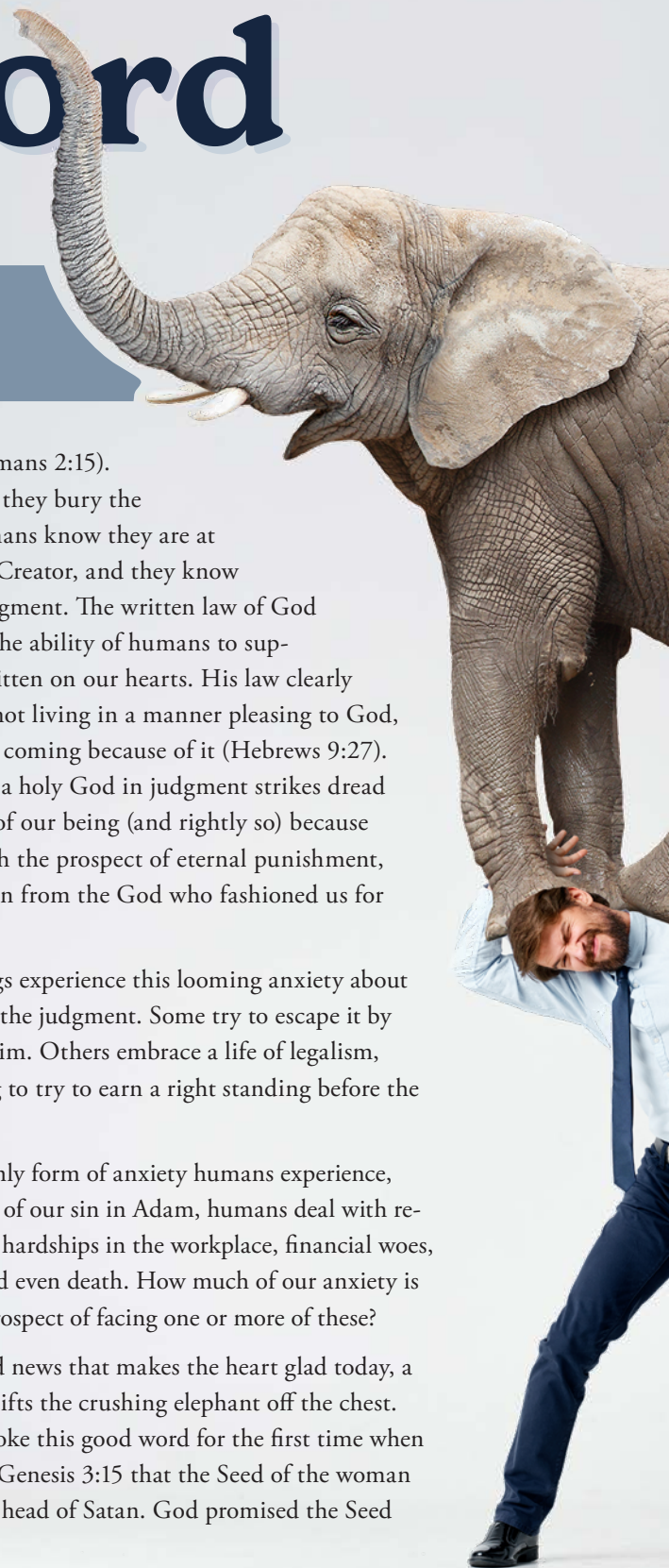
before God (Romans 2:15).

However deeply they bury the knowledge, humans know they are at odds with their Creator, and they know they deserve judgment. The written law of God simply shatters the ability of humans to suppress the law written on our hearts. His law clearly declares we are not living in a manner pleasing to God, and judgment is coming because of it (Hebrews 9:27). Standing before a holy God in judgment strikes dread into the depths of our being (and rightly so) because we are faced with the prospect of eternal punishment, eternal separation from the God who fashioned us for Himself.

All human beings experience this looming anxiety about meeting God in the judgment. Some try to escape it by running from Him. Others embrace a life of legalism, anxiously toiling to try to earn a right standing before the holy Judge.

This is not the only form of anxiety humans experience, though. Because of our sin in Adam, humans deal with relational conflict, hardships in the workplace, financial woes, pain, disease, and even death. How much of our anxiety is born from the prospect of facing one or more of these?

But there is good news that makes the heart glad today, a good word that lifts the crushing elephant off the chest. God Himself spoke this good word for the first time when He promised in Genesis 3:15 that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of Satan. God promised the Seed



of the woman would do all Adam had left undone before the Fall and undo all Adam brought about by the Fall. Of course, that “Seed” is the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom God speaks grace, healing, and reconciliation.

For those who run from God in their anxiety, Jesus Christ invites us to stand fully forgiven and at peace with our Father through His righteous life, atoning death, victorious resurrection, and priestly intercession. To those who anxiously toil in a desperate attempt to earn a right standing before God (like Adam and Eve sewing fig leaves together to cover themselves in Genesis 3:7), Jesus Christ invites us to cease from our anxious toil and trust in His finished work. This invitation was foreshadowed to our first parents when God graciously made garments of skins and clothed Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). Our first parents could rest easy in the knowledge their garments, divinely given, far surpassed the tattered fig leaves they had sewn together for themselves. Likewise, God has not left us to be clothed in the “filthy rags” of our own righteousness (Isaiah 64:6); rather, He clothes us in the shining white robes of Christ’s righteousness.

What news could lighten the heart more than this? What words are sweeter than Jesus’ own: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28)? We can be freed from the ultimate anxiety of judgment by faith in Jesus Christ.

Of course, we know anxiety is a persistent reality in our current unglorified state. As believers, we live as members of the “already here but not yet consummated” Kingdom of God. The Kingdom has entered the world through Jesus Christ, and we have been invited to join it. Yet, we pray His Kingdom will continue to come until Christ returns. And, the world is not now as it should be. We deal with relational conflicts. We experience pain, hurt, loss, disease, and financial woes. We reckon with the looming reality of mortality, first for others, then for ourselves. And because these things are a reality, anxiety remains a reality, as well. We still have worries and fears, and—for that reason—we need continually to hear a good word to overcome them.


We need to hear *the* good word of the gospel again and again. As you read this, perhaps you have sinned in

such a way that you question whether you are still a child of God, whether you have gone beyond His forgiveness. Hear this good word: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Though we have sinned, “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

Maybe you have anxiety about health concerns and need to hear the blessed promise Jesus gave to Lazarus’ family: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (John 11:4). Lazarus’ illness did, in fact, lead to death; but Jesus raised him from the grave, proving even disease and death do not have the final word over Jesus’ disciples.

Maybe you have anxiety about the future and just need to hear our compassionate Father is in control (Matthew 6:25-34). He holds the future in His hands. He sees farther than we see. He knows more than we can know. He has greater plans than our eyes can see, than our ears can hear, than our hearts can imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9). The surest confirmation of this came when God raised Jesus from the dead. We need to hear this good word God has spoken to us in Christ Jesus time and time again.

Not only do we need to hear it. We also need to share it, that others might also overcome anxiety. God uses people like you and me to communicate His good word. An entire world of heavy-hearted people needs to be made glad by the good Word, who is Jesus Christ. Perhaps you know an anxious unbeliever with whom you might share the peace that comes through knowing Jesus. I assure you there are anxious individuals in your local church who especially need the good word of the gospel to gladden their hearts.

God uses our brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage us, and He wants to use us to encourage our brothers and sisters. Perhaps you should send an encouraging text message right now, as you have reached the end of this article. Perhaps your words will be sweet to the soul and bring healing (Proverbs 16:24) by lifting the elephant of anxiety from another’s chest. 

About the Author: Joshua Colson is associate pastor for Christian Education and Member Care at Pittsburg FWB Church (IL). In addition to pastoring, Joshua is an adjunct instructor at Welch College.



Welch College Releases *Christians in Culture*

“I heartily commend this volume as one that will enable readers to think and live in an informed way, grounded in the redemptive work of Christ and the grandeur of our majestic and gracious God.” That’s what David Dockery, President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, said in his foreword to Welch College Press’s most recent publication, which can be purchased at www.welch.edu/welchpress.

Christians in Culture was written by ten Welch College faculty to equip readers to engage the spheres of culture in a manner that is equal parts biblical and winsome. This book was edited by Matthew Steven Bracey and Christopher Talbot, each of whom teach courses in theology and culture. Both Bracey and Talbot wrote chapters for the book.


“We’re incredibly thankful to see this book published. My prayer is that it would help readers better and more fully understand how to live faithfully under Christ’s Lordship in every sphere of life,” Talbot said. “We’re also thankful for how this book demonstrates our educational philosophy at Welch. Each discipline works in harmony with every other one, which our various contributors exemplify, as we each confess Christ as Lord.”

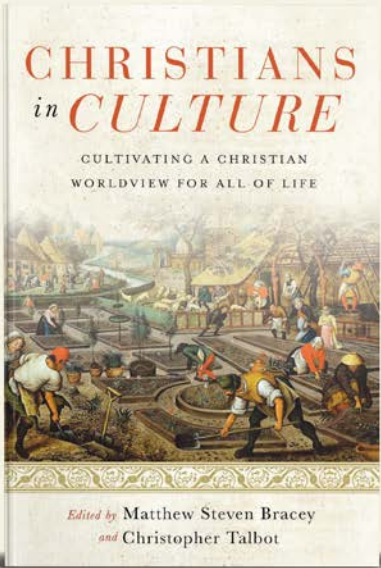
“Whether you are interested in the arts and entertainment, sports and recreation, technology and science,

politics and economics, labor and vocation, or history and tradition, this book is relevant for you,” the book’s slip-cover reads. R. Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, describes *Christians in Culture* as “an incredibly helpful guide and resource. I highly commend it to Christians today. Read every chapter and put it into many hands.”

“In many ways, this book also serves as an introductory text to worldview thinking for Christians trying to make sense of the cultures in which they live,” Bracey said. “It is careful yet accessible, appropriate for high school and college students alike, as well as laypeople and church groups interested in the intersection of their Christian faith and the spheres of culture. I hope and pray that people will find it helpful in their Christian walks.”

Welch President Matt Pinson, who also contributed several book chapters, said, “*Christians in Culture* represents the sensibilities of Welch College by teaching us that we do not need to withdraw from the culture but also we do not need to be compromised by the culture. As Forlines once wrote, ‘We don’t need the culture to transform us, but we need to transform the culture.’”

People interested in the book may purchase it at www.welch.edu/welchpress. 



CHRISTIANS
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CULTIVATING A CHRISTIAN
WORLDVIEW FOR ALL OF LIFE

Edited by Matthew Steven Bracey
and Christopher Talbot

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Welch College Welcomes 80 New Dorm and Commuter Students



At the beginning of the fall semester, Welch College welcomed 80 new dorm and commuter students to campus. The new students began undergraduate studies in one of Welch's 50 programs of study under the loving supervision of the faculty and staff. As director of enrollment services, on behalf of the enrollment team, we are excited this moment has finally arrived.

God has granted us the opportunity to assist these parents and students throughout the admissions process. This is a big moment for these students, and we consider this a ministry opportunity to work with these parents and students. This is also an exciting time for our campus, with the largest new student enrollment since COVID-19 and our third largest new student enrollment in a decade.

Several parents responded with encouraging comments after move-in day:

"Thank you so very much for the love and attention. ...Your care was God-honoring, and we are so thankful!" —*Amber*

"I love that the heartbeat and mission of Welch is to be a community of faith and learning. Knowing that my daughter will be known, mentored, and discipled by the Welch faculty and staff gives me so much peace, which says a lot, since we are many hours away from her!" —*Pat*

"It is a great gesture for you to check on how things are perceived. I cannot offer anything but encouragement and satisfaction with what I have seen." —*Gary*

As we look ahead to a great semester, here are four ways you can pray for these 80 new students:

- Pray students will apply themselves to their academic studies and develop appropriate study habits.
- Pray they would mature in their faith and look back on their years at Welch as important years of spiritual growth.
- Pray for friendships that encourage them to serve Christ.
- Pray for the Spirit's guidance as they transition from parental supervision to a higher level of independence. **ONE**

—**By Daniel Webster, Director of Enrollment Services, Welch College**



Four Obligations for the Church

BY BARRY RAPER

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14

“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

It is much easier to *go to church* than to *be the church*. Don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with saying we are “going to church.” When you are trying to get your family to church on Sunday morning, it is common to say, “It is time for us to get ready to go to church.”

Yet, we must also keep in mind that, as Christians, we *are the church*. When we live with that reality, we embrace certain responsibilities or obligations we must fulfill toward one another. This passage presents these fundamental obligations to others in the church family. The first three are similar as Paul describes people in different situations in the church family and explains how we should respond in each situation. Then, he follows with a single ingredient that must be present in every situation.



01

WARN THE UNRULY. The word *warn* or *admonish*, as it is sometimes translated, literally means *to put in order* or *to arrange*. Picture soldiers out of rank on a parade ground. This word describes a person whose life is disorderly rather than disciplined. Paul expanded on this in the second letter to the Thessalonians (3:6-12) where he wrote about those living in idleness and not working to support themselves.

In our context, this passage suggests we should admonish (warn or correct) other believers living outside the lines. Not as an enemy, as Paul said in the 2 Thessalonians passage, but as brothers and sisters.

As Christians, we haven't drawn our own lines, our own standards of behavior. Instead, we live within the clear boundaries God has given us in the Bible. When those we know and love stray “outside the lines,” we have an obligation to warn them.



02

COMFORT THE FEEBLEMINDED.

The word translated *feebleminded*, or sometimes *fainthearted*, is a compound word in the original language and is used only in this verse. The first part of the word means *little* or *small* and is combined with the word for *soul*. So, literally, it reads *little-souled*. Obviously, this does not mean one person's soul is smaller than another's. Rather, this word reminds us Christians sometimes find themselves disheartened in spirit, in a state of discouragement. In those moments, they need the presence and words of a brother or sister to soothe, comfort, and encourage.

Unlike the first situation, this person doesn't need scolding or rebuke but someone to come alongside with words of comfort and hope. Climbing out of the pit of discouragement is hard, and we have an obligation to let down the rope of encouragement to help our fainthearted brothers in need.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor executed by the Nazis at age 39, wrote in his little book, *Life Together*:

God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. *He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. ...The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure.*



03

SUPPORT THE WEAK. Most commentators believe this word points to the spiritually weak, although I think there is room to include the physically weak and infirmed. When we know of someone

experiencing weakness, the text says we should help—bolster, fortify, reinforce, and support.

Physically, we all understand this. Someone is injured and cannot walk properly without some help. Maybe the help comes in the form of a steadying hand, or maybe the injury is so great we must put the person's arm over our own shoulder, supporting his weight and walking along together. As believers, we must be ready to support other believers struggling spiritually and physically.

Each of these first three obligations shares one common ingredient, an overarching obligation.



BE PATIENT TOWARD ALL. Have a long fuse. Be patient with those exhibiting frustrating behavior. *Toward all* implies patience with self as well as others. Patient help takes time. If a person fits the category or condition of being fainthearted or depressed, we shouldn't expect to offer a few encouraging words and for him or her to snap out of it. We must be patient and persistent in our help.

We live in an age of instant gratification. We demand quick results. If we aren't careful, we bring this mindset and disposition to helping people, and it simply does not work. Depression, grief, anxiety, and spiritual growth are not microwaveable. Helping others takes time. So, how do we stay patient? We must keep in the forefront of our minds how patient God has been and continues to be with us.

FOUR FOR YOU AND FOUR FOR ME...

There is no such thing as a perfect church. We all know this, and yet we need to be reminded of it. The very fact Paul lists these four obligations points to these imperfections. A person might think, "I wish I could go to a church without people who are unruly, feeble-minded, and weak. I wish I could go to a church where everyone lives up to their potential, has a positive mental attitude, and is strong."

Let me be clear. You will *never* find such a congregation on this side of eternity. And, at any point along the way, you find yourself as the one needing help. Sometimes, we may be the person admonishing; other times, we need a warning ourselves. Sometimes, you will bring encouragement to others; other days, your own "faint heart" may need to draw strength from other believers. Some days, you will be strong. On other days, you may be the weakest link. And, as every good sports coach understands, a team is only as strong as its weakest link. Through it all, we must be patient with one another, demonstrating the longsuffering God has extended to us.

Sure, it is much easier to *go to church* than to *be the church*. But by the grace of God, and by fulfilling these four simple obligations to one another, we can grow stronger together. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Dr. Barry Raper is associate dean of Welch Divinity School and pastor of Bethel FWB Church near Ashland City, Tennessee.



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Don't Leave a



MESS

BY BILL AND BRENDA EVANS

There are messes. Then there are BIG messes. A big mess is what our friend Angus left for us to clean up when he died, and we became co-executors of his estate.

Angus died early one afternoon following a brief illness. A relative called a funeral home, then us; handed us a copy of Angus' burial contract; and insisted we take it from there. That night, moments before closing time, we were at a department store deciding on appropriate clothes for Angus. No family member would do it, or plan funeral and burial services, so we did.

Soon enough, his lawyer told us Angus named four heirs. He gave us a copy of the will and keys to his property. Angus had planned some things well. In addition to a valid will, burial contract, and cemetery plot, he left titles to his property, previous tax returns, insurance documents, medical records, and bank accounts including a payable-on-death account for us executors to clean up final bills. He left his mother's cedar chest with family pictures, memorabilia, and family letters. All were accessible to us. Good.

But all was not well. Angus' financial documents were incomplete and confusing. He had more than a dozen investments to settle (some with missing paperwork), which required crazy hours on the phone, trips to the lawyer, and bigger piles of paperwork. Also, he owned a 2,800 square-foot home, a pickup truck, 20 acres of land, and two large outbuildings stuffed to the gills with discarded furniture, tools, farm implements, pots and pans, broken lamps, old newspapers and magazines, and a gazillion unlabeled boxes and bags of what could only be called junk.

Angus had also hinted to heirs that he kept a stash of money hidden "for emergencies." The heirs quickly let us know we should carefully comb through everything. *Find that cash* was the implication. We tediously grubbed through every box and bag, every nook and cranny. We found a stash of cash in the back of a closet in the pocket of an old pair of jeans—ten \$100 dollar bills. When you clean



out the house of the dead, check everywhere. One woman we know hid bills in her book collection!

For 20 long months, we worked on settling Angus' estate. We kept meticulous notes and records on all we did as reports to the lawyer and heirs. In addition to the legal business of probate court, bank accounts, final medical bills, credit cards, Social Security, investments, and other legal odds and ends, two tax seasons came during those twenty months, so we made tax filings for the year of his death and the next year—a final estate return.

In the meantime, we tackled the physical work of emptying the house and outbuildings to sell—a monumental ordeal. The heirs decided not to have an estate sale, so each came in cars and trucks and took away memorabilia and household items—whatever they wanted and with no plan for equitably dividing things. Obviously, his property was *their* property. But we heard things like, “Angus told me I could have that,” followed by a brief dispute, eye-rolling, and finally, unhappy acquiescence. One heir told us the other three no longer spoke to him.

Angus was a hoarder. We donated loads of good furniture and clothing to charities and Angus' friends. Deep piles of junk went into three roll-off containers. The day all the buildings were cleared was a day of jubilation. Next, we hired painters, repairmen, and inspectors and contracted a real estate agent.

From our experiences with Angus' estate and three others we have settled, we offer several suggestions for avoiding a mess (though we won't pretend to cover everything).

Don't say: “I live in an apartment. I don't have an estate. I don't even own a car. I don't need to do anything.” You *do* have an estate of some kind. Social Security, disability, retirement account, health insurance, and more must be handled when you die. You also probably have personal items with sentimental or family value. Maybe you don't want a funeral, just a cremation or burial. Who knows that and will take care of it? We all need a plan: some extensive, others simple.

Also don't say: “My kids will take care of everything. They love each other. They'll do what's right.”

Dollars, houses, land, and family memorabilia split families. Don't think settling your estate will be an exception. Be kind to those you leave behind. Make your own plans and don't leave them squabbling.

Get legal papers in order. Talking about death and what you need to do to prepare will not hasten your death one iota. So, make an estate plan and consider a Living Trust. Guardianship or custody is a big issue if you have underage children or others needing lifetime care. Take care of that issue. Free Will Baptist Foundation and their partner Cornerstone Estate Planning are excellent sources to provide information and help you create a plan. Call 877-336-7575.

Sit down with your executor or trustee and share at least the basics of your estate plan. We already have complete lists of legal papers, along with clear directions, for the one who will settle our estate. He has that list and knows exactly where to find our important documents.

Establish power-of-attorney to act on your behalf if you become disabled or impaired and can't carry on your business or health decisions. (Remember that POA expires at your death.) Also, make a living will that spells out your desired medical care. Organize and file all legal paperwork in an easy-to-understand format. **These are all things Angus did well.**

Angus' investments were a big tangle because he had paperwork for previous investments mixed in with active ones. Also, some investments had changed names, and he had not noted that. We had to chase them down, and it was a mess. Whether you have one 401(k), one insurance policy, one bank account, or dozens, be kind to your executor and heirs. Get that paperwork organized and accessible. Destroy or clearly label everything that has been cancelled, cashed out, or sold.

Remember Scripture. James 4:13-17 reminds us we don't know what tomorrow will bring. He also warns us not to be arrogant, thinking we know how life will go. He ends with a final warning that whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. In Ecclesiastes 8:5-6, Solomon said the wise know the proper time and the just way, for there is a time and a way for everything. In short, be wise. Be just. Shrugging off preparations for our end-of-life issues may be a sin. Planning is the right thing to do.

What to do now. Take care of all those legal documents and clean out junk. Cancel credit cards you no longer use,





and then shred them. Yes, cancel first, then shred. Decide which online subscriptions or accounts you no longer need and cancel them. Name your funeral home and purchase a burial contract, plot(s), and perhaps a marker. Plan your own funeral service if you want to. Write your obituary (but don't brag or go on too long). A recent obit in our local newspaper was two 15-inch columns long.

If necessary, establish a joint or payable-on-death account with your executor so he or she can pay bills after your death. However, be cautious here. Many of us don't need to put another name on an account—especially a big account. If it is a joint or payable-on-death account, the money becomes the property of the person you have named. Check with a lawyer on your best approach.

Review often. We review and update all our legal documents, lists, and directions to our executor every three to five years—and sometimes more often. Be sure you follow your state's laws. Also, choose executors and successor trustees carefully and with their consent. Are they organized and good at details, and can they keep confidences?

Be wise.

Clear out the junk. Angus was a hoarder. The physical labor of clearing his house was enormous. Maybe you are not a *hoarder*, just a *saver*. Aren't we all? Consider what Swedish author Margareta Magbusson calls "The Gentle Art of Death Cleaning." Get rid of things *now* that you don't use or enjoy regularly, so you don't leave behind too much "stuff" for others to deal with. Ask, "Will my family be happy I kept this? Will they want this? Or will they be troubled, worn out, and angry about having to deal with it?"

Finally, (let me repeat) don't leave a mess.

We are all traveling unknown roads. Don't leave litter. Someone will have to "clear out and clean up" after our death. Be kind. Give them time to grieve without cleaning up your mess. **ONE**

About the Author: Bill and Brenda Evans live, teach, and write in Ashland, Kentucky. Reach out to them at beejayevans@windstream.net.

Church Planting Legacy

When God called 17-year-old sawmill worker **M. L. Hollis** to preach, he had only eight years of schooling. But he determined to preach if the whole world laughed. In 1918, Damascus FWB Church (MS) offered Hollis their pulpit and arranged to pay his expenses to finish school. **It was a good investment!** He finished high school with honors and soon earned multiple college degrees. During the 1920s, Hollis pastored five churches in Alabama simultaneously before moving to a full-time church in Bryan, Texas. Two years later, he returned to Red Bay, Alabama, where he pastored 21 years, while additionally serving 11 other churches, preaching five to six sermons every weekend! He also organized 24 new churches through tent revivals, the most by any Free Will Baptist minister of the modern era. No wonder Hollis became the first chairman of the National Home Missions Board when it formed in 1938.


Why not start your own church planting legacy through an endowment to benefit **North American Ministries** through Free Will Baptist Foundation?



Photo: **M. L. Hollis** (left) and **I. L. Stanley** (right) at a tent revival in 1931.



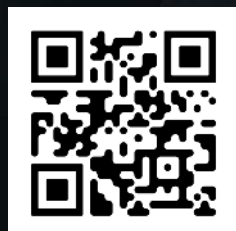
Free Will Baptist Foundation | www.fwbgifts.com



Life and ministry is **better with others.**

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When you retire, will you have the financial means to continue blessing those you have supported for so long? Visit our website and prepare now, so you'll **be ready when the time comes!**



**Board of
Retirement**



boardofretirement.com

Guaranteed Lifetime Income

BY JOHN BRUMMITT

If you have been watching the news over the last couple of years, you may have heard of the SECURE Acts. These acts were meant to “beef up” retirement plans and access for Americans. Our nation is in a retirement crisis. Only about 50% of households reported having any retirement savings in 2019. Less than a quarter of Americans have more than \$100,000 in retirement savings, and less than 8% have more than \$500,000. According to recent data from the Federal Reserve, the average American only has around \$65,000 in retirement savings.

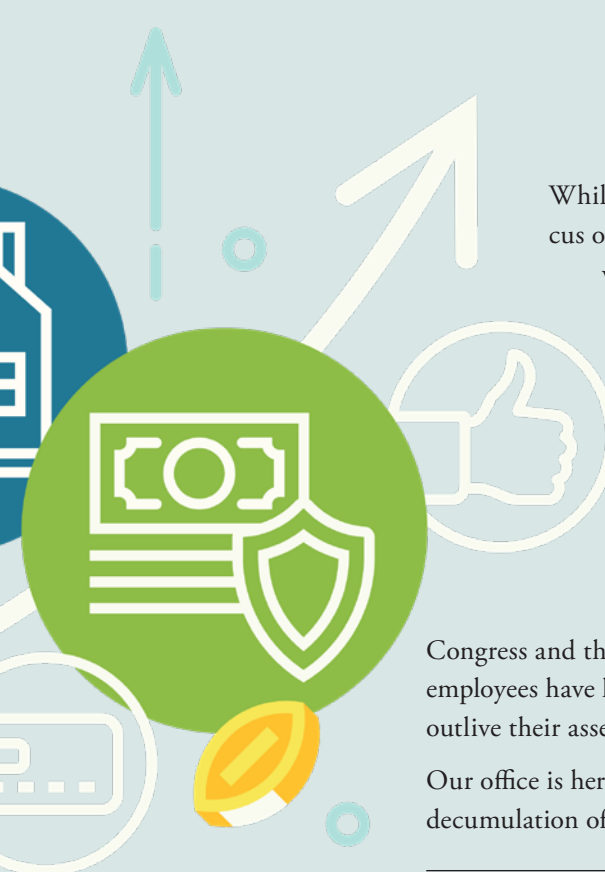
More and more people are growing concerned about the Social Security benefits system, and how it will impact them in the future. Congress also has been trying to forestall this crisis and has focused much effort on lifetime income. While employers offer vehicles for retirement saving during working years, Congress is now pushing them to offer help in the decumulation stage of retirement by developing avenues for employees to receive income during their retirement years that, hopefully, they will not outlive.

Previously, the primary focus has been saving for retirement (or the need to save for retirement). As this has yet to take hold with Americans—as demonstrated by only 50% having retirement savings—it is essential to note the importance of saving for retirement and the need to start immediately. Many people don’t realize just how much money they need to save to prepare for a comfortable retirement.



An adequate amount requires around 80% of your yearly income in retirement, but how do you figure out the lump sum that will produce that 80% needed? A simple savings breakdown goal chart would make it easier to target your number.

Age	Retirement Goal
30	1 x your salary
35	2 x your salary
40	3 x your salary
45	4 x your salary
50	5 x your salary
55	6 x your salary
60	7 x your salary
65	9 x your salary
67	10 x your salary
(Full Social Security Retirement if born after 1960)	



While this is not an exact system, it will at least get you headed in the right direction. The focus of the retirement industry for several years has been set on the accumulation of assets. But with the recent acts being passed by Congress, the retirement industry must now shift its focus to the decumulation side of retirement planning, as well.

For Free Will Baptists, this is an area where we have been working since the 1980s. During that time, the Board of Retirement established our annuity program. This program operates differently than the deferred annuities one would purchase through a bank or financial advisor. Our program was set up as an immediate annuity, starting when the participant transferred into the pool. The objective was to provide our pastors and employees with a way to decumulate assets throughout their lifetimes.

Congress and the rest of the retirement industry are now trying to create options Free Will Baptist employees have had since the 1980s. Guaranteed lifetime income is essential to ensure retirees will not outlive their assets in retirement.

Our office is here to help! Feel free to contact us if you would like more information on options for the decumulation of assets. [ONE](http://www.BoardofRetirement.com)

About the Author: John Brummitt became director of the Board of Retirement in January 2016. He graduated in 2011 with an MBA from Tennessee Tech University. A 2004 graduate of Welch College, he has been with the Board of Retirement since spring 2006: www.BoardofRetirement.com.



Anticipate the joy!

Blessing others can take financial resources. Setting aside a portion of the income we are blessed with throughout our lives allows us to **bless others throughout our retirement years and beyond.**

Get in touch with us today and begin to anticipate the joy of **blessing the people in your life.**



BoardofRetirement.com

More Like LEGOLAND, Less Like Disney

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

We recently changed our name from Randall House Publications to **D6 Family Ministry** to reflect our broader mission. Describing D6 Family Ministry feels less like one organization and more like managing a theme park. Most theme parks combine multiple parks and experiences in one place. Some theme parks have multiple branded parks where one ticket allows you to visit whichever park you desire.

Like a multi-park ministry, people are often amazed by the many ways D6 Family Ministry serves churches and families: discipleship curriculum, books, Vertical Three Conference, Truth & Peace Student Leadership Conference, Youth Evangelistic Team, D6 Podcast, Top Reads for Busy Leaders, two U.S. D6 Conferences, and six global ones. While there are no perfect metaphors, grab a park pass and hang on through this roller coaster of comparisons.

Most people grew up with fond memories of loading the car and visiting a theme park with castles, flags, aquatic creatures, or stages. No matter the park, they all created great family memories. Hopefully, this article will provide an entertaining and educational comparison between those theme parks and D6 Family Ministry, including characters, kiddie parks, and prices, and we certainly cannot overlook the fireworks. After serving Free Will Baptists and the greater Kingdom of God for nearly 70 years, we are not mousing around.

Theme parks often provide characters—people dressed in themed costumes to create a magical story. D6 teaches about biblical characters who seem larger than life. But the magic is not make-believe; it's transformational. We want people of all ages who encounter our discipleship resources (our primary mission) to understand the story of the Bible, not as a distant historical book, but as the living, breathing Word of God revealing His redemptive story. Christ will always be our featured “character” who loved us, died for us, and desires His will for us. We provide the discipleship material churches

choose for generations!

When it comes to theme parks, some people want to ride the latest roller coaster while others go for their nostalgic favorite, the one they hope never goes away. Whether it is to eat, laugh, scream, or buy the t-shirt or keychain, people visit theme parks for many reasons. D6 Family Ministry, like your local church, offers many age-specific ways to serve people and bring them closer to Christ.

While we understand people who always want the latest coaster may continue to jump from theme park to theme park, we seek to serve those who want to create a legacy through quality, repeated experiences for their families. Our church and home curriculum does not follow the latest trends. While our award-winning design feels comfortable and fresh, the biblical content will always be deep and foundational.

Loving parents and grandparents want to look back on connected conversations centered around enjoyable experiences like attending the same church, having familiar dinner table routines, and sharing devotional studies that anchored their interactions. Strategic-minded churches will care enough to offer a well-thought-out, family-aligned curriculum creating generational connections. If you attended theme parks the way some churches do small groups, members of the same family would never be in the same section of the park, and probably not even visit the same park at all. In their opinion, the desire to “ride our own rides” outweighs the need to be together and make spiritual memories along the way.

Speaking of specific sections of the park, why do theme parks have a kiddie section? Most people think it was designed to squeeze a couple of additional tickets out of mom and dad.





That's not true. The park has a longer-term strategy than you realize. They want those children to become patrons for life, looking forward to the day they are tall enough to ride the "you-must-be-this-tall" roller coasters. We borrow from this playbook when we recognize church nurseries are not for baby-sitting; those little ones can learn! Young parents will notice your teaching nursery and family-equipping approach, and your church will begin to become much more multi-generational. D6 Family Ministry can help your church feel the connection between your children, youth, and adult ministries when you become strategically intentional rather than letting everyone ride separate attractions.

Theme parks are not cheap. The price of theme park meals today cost nearly what admission cost when I was young. Admittedly, theme parks cost far more than we think they should, yet people still fill these parks, understanding that value requires investment.

How much of your annual church budget is directly invested in developing people and equipping families? Just as a family must budget for a vacation, or even groceries, you show your leadership priorities by investing in your congregation. At a theme park, parents spend far more than the price of admission to take home the memories: shirts, hats, food, and gadgets. Just like those theme parks, your church must show families how to take discipleship home with them.

Nothing of value comes without a price. If spiritual development comes only from what you get at church, the odds of your kids staying true to their faith is about 34%. But the percentage shoots up substantially for those who say the church provided a springboard into family conversations through aligned daily devotional studies.

D6 Family Ministry offers curriculum for the church, but don't miss out on the devotional study guides that extend what they learn at church throughout the week. I recently heard a dad say, "At the end of our time at the theme park, I loved seeing the reflection of the fireworks on the face of my kids; they were in awe." That dad understood his investment in memories (though costly) had become an investment his kids will never forget.

The word "fireworks" can also describe mayhem or trouble. When you minister to a group as broad and diverse as Free Will Baptists, not everyone will like the preferences of others.

I know some people who cannot stand certain rides at the parks—upside-down coasters or water rides. Not everything has to be for everyone.

D6 offers a wide variety of resources to meet the needs of our denomination. But while we may not always meet everyone's preferences, we will never stray from the gospel and our core evangelical and denominational doctrines. Any "fireworks" from our products have resulted from preferential and *not* doctrinal differences. What does that mean? It means you, as Free Will Baptists, cannot find another curriculum that more closely teaches what you believe than D6—not one!

For decades, theme parks existed only for the entertainment of families. Sadly, in recent years, some parks have become political powerhouses attempting to influence unbiblical, non-family values. When parks push an immoral agenda, the "glass slipper" breaks, and the park ceases to be a Cinderella story.

To be transparent, D6 Family Ministry also has an agenda. It's called a mission statement, and it says simply: "helping you build believers through church and home." Our mission is biblical, rooted in Genesis 1, with principles derived from Deuteronomy 6, described in Nehemiah 8, and reinforced by Paul in Ephesians 6. So, if D6 Family Ministry is not like Disney, what theme park best represents us?

I know, the title gave it away. While there is no perfect comparison, we would argue LEGOLAND shows the value of tiny building blocks that result in strong, beautiful structures.

Like LEGOLAND structures, D6 equips teachers and parents with the everyday building blocks founded in Scripture, which will determine the stability of one's faith and life trajectory. We teach people how to be part of the body of Christ within a family setting, just like a LEGO build is less about individual blocks and more about the collaborative way blocks connect to create something substantial. We can continue to divide into smaller pockets of people who build our own small structures, or we can work together, combining our Scripture-guided efforts to build God's masterpiece.

D6 Family Ministry provides the generational discipleship resources you need for life. As a church, maybe it is time to get all your families a D6 multi-pass for life.

To learn more, visit D6family.com. **ONE**

About the Author: Ron Hunter Jr. has a Ph.D. in leadership and is CEO of D6 Family Ministry. You may contact him at ron.hunter@randallhouse.com.

Mail It In? No!

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

A dear pastor friend and I were talking recently, and he shared his admiration for leaders who could “mail it in” but don’t. What does this idiom mean? The origin dates to a time when people mailed something when they didn’t care enough to deliver it in person. The idiom evolved as people started “phoning it in.”

To *mail it in* evolved to mean a lackluster performance with little passion or effort—doing just enough to get by. A modern comparison would be texting someone rather than having a hard conversation in person. People *notice* when you mail it in or phone it in.

Few people succeed by starting a career with a perfunctory approach to performance. At first, they give it their best effort. Yet, as my pastor friend noted, we have all seen successful people reach a stage in their lives or careers where they start to coast and hope no one will notice. Please do not confuse this with a season of rest or recovery. When I say someone has mailed it in, I am referring to patterns of performance (or lack thereof).

How can you recognize this in your own behavior? After all, healthy self-awareness is a sign of a great leader. Let me pose some open-ended and general questions to help you self-diagnose.

- Are you justifying how much you deserve to slow down while earning the same paycheck for doing less?
- Do you find yourself shrugging off the need for diligent preparation?
- Do you ignore routine administrative or detailed duties?
- Inversely, do you regularly avoid conversations among your team, community, or direct-reports?
- Do you detest change and always see it as something to be avoided?

You can stop yourself from becoming someone who mails it in. Read regularly: God’s Word, articles, books, and heftier works that challenge your thinking. Spend less time



wanting to be heard and more time listening. Look for areas where personal and spiritual growth are needed; none of us have arrived. Reduce procrastination by blocking out time well before a deadline. Work on adaptability. Schedule rest and reflection time for self-evaluation. Ask others for feedback (and not just the ones who will tell you what you want to hear). Find a mentor to stretch you and ask hard questions.

Let’s never be accused of “mailing it in” or “phoning it in.” We must avoid even the appearance of laziness. The Apostle Paul easily could have rested on his laurels, but he planted more churches, wrote half the New Testament, and never stopped working until the moment he sacrificed his life for the gospel. His life modeled “pressing toward the mark.” **ONE**

About the Columnist: Ron Hunter Jr. has a Ph.D. in leadership and is CEO of D6 Family Ministry. You may contact him at ron.hunter@randallhouse.com.



BIBLE VERSES

Galatians 6:9
Ecclesiastes 9:10
1 Timothy 6:12
Hebrews 12:1
1 Thessalonians 2:12
1 Corinthians 9:24

LEADERSHIP QUOTE

“We often miss opportunity because it’s dressed in overalls and looks like work.”
 —Thomas Edison

Continued from page 35

city. Today, we have four church plants in Tokyo, cooperating to make a bigger impact in the capital city.


We have 14 churches in Japan. Nine dot the northern island of Hokkaido, four in Tokyo and one in southern Japan. On any given Sunday, nearly 200 people attend our churches.

Hope Alive was started by missionaries in Tokyo. Just before that, a Japanese couple launched a new church in Hokkaido. The New Life Church, led by a missionary team, recently launched in the Sapporo area. We have an association of churches interested in expanding the Kingdom, both in Japan and beyond. Our Japan Free Will Baptist Association supports Japanese missionaries to other parts of Asia, in addition to supporting the annual WMO.

These churches impact their communities with the gospel. Outreach Bible classes inside and outside of church buildings, evangelistic English class parties, music meet ups, gospel music workshops, street gathering events at train stations, Bible clubs, VBS summer activities, outdoor park gatherings, picnics, science hobby meetups, and a host of other activities provide gospel opportunities. Our contacts are ever increasing. Some churches stream services online with evangelistic hooks

to attract listeners to activities at local venues. We sponsor Internet pages with testimonies sharing hope and encouragement for those battling severe depression and considering suicide. Short term teams, CMP students, and ETEAMS provide new contacts each year for our churches. During the past few years, while other missions reduced their personnel numbers, Free Will Baptists have added to our Japan mission staff in unprecedented numbers.

Though we have not hit MacArthur's challenge of 10,000 missionaries, Free Will Baptists now have 25 missionaries in Japan, the largest number ever. Missionaries with a host of gifts and talents are submitted to impacting the nation. We praise God for this! The gospel light is burning brighter than ever.

Japan's current receptivity to the gospel is unprecedented. That is the work of God. He is doing a new thing, breaking the cycle that has blinded the eyes of the Japanese people for centuries. Please continue to pray, send, and give for the gospel light to shine in Japan. Let's fill the spiritual vacuum! 

About the Author: Donnie McDonald and his wife Ruth served as missionaries to Japan for three decades. Currently, Donnie works in the IM office, and Ruth serves as director of WNAC. Their daughter Kate Speer and her husband Daniel have returned to Japan as career missionaries. Learn more: iminc.org.

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Just a Minutes!

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

Our Christian heritage is quickly and easily forgotten. What may seem important now—even unforgettable—may soon become an afterthought. One of the saddest verses in Scripture is found in Judges 2:10: “And there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.”

We have a responsibility to tell the story of our faith. It’s good for us, and it’s good for those who come behind us. As a church, the creation and preservation of good congregational records is a key part of telling that story. Sadly, many churches have been poor record keepers, and as a result, the story of how God has worked in their congregations is lost to the passage of time.

How can a church effectively preserve good records?

Find a System

Establish a system for keeping records that works for you and follow that system. While there is not necessarily a right or wrong way to keep records, it is important the *church* establish the system of recordkeeping rather than a clerk or

some other individual. Encourage church leadership to determine *what* will be kept, *how* it will be kept, and *where* it will be kept. Then teach these expectations to each new clerk, treasurer, or historian. Record this simple policy within official church documents to avoid any confusion about the wishes of the church.

With a system established, what should church records include? Historian Robert E. Picirilli offers a simple, one-sentence formula: “Include the minutes, and then include anything that helps clarify those minutes—committee reports, treasurer’s reports—anything not included in the minutes themselves.”

Keith Burden goes into greater detail, suggesting four broad areas for recordkeeping:

- Up-to-date membership records
- Records of business meetings and proceedings (church minutes)
- Careful financial records
- Statistical records (attendance, births, deaths, and marriages)

Composing Minutes

The content of church minutes varies according to the bylaws and requirements of leadership. In most basic form, church minutes should record all official actions and decisions taken by the church. Most church minutes fall into one of two types. The first creates detailed minutes of the meeting; the second provides a summary or overview. The process can be simplified with the following suggestions:

Make it easy. Make sure minutes are dated, readable, identified well, and easily accessible. Robert E. Picirilli shares, “I can’t tell you how often church minutes start with no date, time, or occasion, just ‘The church met Sunday night....’”

To avoid creating confusion, carefully identify the date of the meeting, the type or purpose of the meeting, the number of eligible voters, and the time the meeting begins and ends. Matt Pinson, president of Welch College, suggests clerks carefully record events of the meeting by noting who made each motion and second and by putting as much information about each motion as space allows.

Keep it brief. Record the meeting completely in the fewest words possible. Capture a brief snapshot of what happened. In this quest for brevity, remember it is not necessary to record discussion about decisions. Record only specific actions taken by the church. Remember, the clerk's job is simply to record facts and decisions. When necessary, describe responses to the decision. But avoid inserting your own opinion regarding the decision.

While some churches do not record motions or resolutions that do not pass, at times failed motions and resolutions are helpful to piece together the history and personality of a congregation. Don't forget the spiritual side of the meeting. Who opened in prayer? Who led the devotion and regarding which passage?

Keep it consistent. Find a simple formula or structure for creating minutes and stick to it. Over time, this consistent style will streamline minutes and make it easier for future clerks or historians to locate needed information quickly. Keith Burden suggests the following structure for each action: *Motion to...Seconded by...Motion passed.* Others reduce this even further (and perhaps too far) by using MSC, a concise acronym for Motion, Seconded, and Carried that omits the names of those making the motion and second and reports only on the motion itself. Once again, be careful not to omit important facts. Any reporting structure chosen should adopt the goal of providing maximum historical data in the briefest form possible.

Record them promptly. Don't wait to complete the minutes. Record details immediately, while they are still fresh on your mind. Thanks to new technology, meetings can be recorded easily on smartphones. Don't fall victim to a faulty memory!

Suggested Content for Minutes

- Date and type of meeting (regular, called, annual, etc.)
- Start time and finish time
- Official actions and decisions

- Motions and resolutions, including who made and seconded each motion
- Treasurer's reports or additional financial reports
- Committee reports
- Significant staff actions (hiring, resignation, etc.)
- Membership decisions

Make It Yours

You can't keep everything. (I've tried.) Many pastors and church leaders become frustrated with rows of large filing cabinets filling the church office and overflowing with everything from local newspapers to denominational brochures or pamphlets. A good rule of thumb to keep the church office from looking as though it is run by hoarders is to keep only those items produced by (or about) your church. Trust district, state, and denominational archives to preserve broader associational literature. Rely upon the local newspaper office to archive back issues. Don't feel it necessary to house the history of *every* church or organization—just yours.

Keep the extras. Retain the full text of resolutions, motions, and official decisions. When a decision or resolution is mentioned in minutes without accompanying details, the full text of the item may be lost to history. Matt Pinson suggests each church clerk create an annual notebook of church minutes that includes a heavy-duty cellophane sleeve or envelope. Throughout the year, the clerk should accumulate in the sleeve any items that might further explain the minutes to readers. "Low tech is not a bad thing," Pinson advises. "These days, we tend to dismiss anything not done on a computer, but paper and plastic are your friends when it comes to preserving records."

Well-organized notebooks, with clear labeling as an official supplement to the church minutes, make it more difficult to discard important records.

Find a Place. Determine a place to keep and organize church records, preferably in at least two locations: one inside the church and another outside the church to prevent loss in case of fire or flooding. Other simple safeguards for records include:

- Invest in water-resistant filing systems.
- Use acid-free archival boxes and folders to protect documents.
- Store records off the ground to protect against minor flooding.

- Use climate-controlled storage.
- Never display records in direct sunlight.
- Never add moldy or mildewed records to a “dry” collection without treatment.
- Organize and label carefully.
- Use common sense.

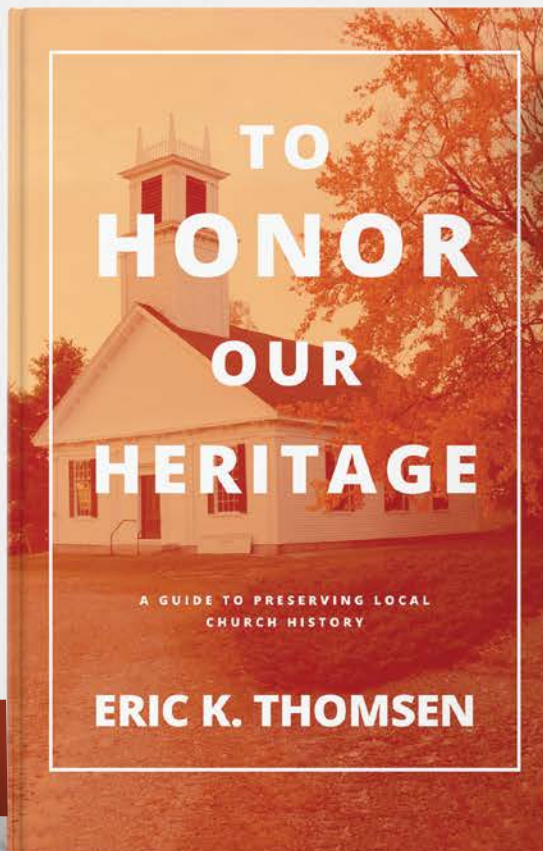
Take advantage of new technology. Computers and scanners make preserving church records easier for us than for previous generations. If your church copier does not have scanning technology, invest in an inexpensive flatbed scanner, and make it your goal to scan and store everything electronically. (If nothing else, digital apps turn any smartphone into a surprisingly high-quality portable scanner.)

While digital copies should never completely replace physical records, they make organization and preservation easier. Follow the same guidelines for digital records you would for physical records. Keep a backup in the church library or archives and another offsite. Flash drive, external hard drive, or Internet cloud storage—the type of storage is not as important as ensuring the collection is safely archived in multiple locations.

Update annually. To avoid an insurmountable backlog of files, set aside a specific time each year to organize, scan, and add records to your archive. Think of it as a necessary seasonal activity like changing out batteries in smoke detectors.

Understand your role. Few people are more valuable to local church history (and ultimately denominational history) than a conscientious and organized clerk. If you are a new clerk, make up your mind to do your part to preserve history. If you have been a faithful church clerk for decades, thank you. Please find someone to mentor. Share the tips and tricks you have learned and instill the importance of good recordkeeping in the next generation. **ONE**

About the Author: Eric K. Thomsen is managing editor of *ONE Magazine* and the secretary of the Free Will Baptist Historical Commission. Learn more about preserving the history of your church in his new book, *To Honor Our Heritage*: randallhouse.com/product/to-honor-our-heritage.



Will the next generation remember?

We all play an important role in preserving our story for the next generation. The new book *To Honor Our Heritage* by Eric K. Thomsen provides a simple, step-by-step guide to help individuals and churches write the story of God's faithfulness.

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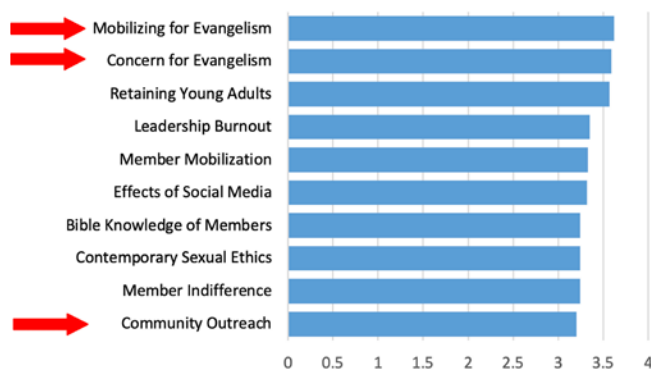
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Finding *Hope* IN THE Hope Initiative

BY EDDIE MOODY

Last fall, the Great Commission Research Network surveyed evangelical church pastors and asked them about the top challenges they anticipated facing in 2023. Take a look at the table below, and you will notice the top two challenges, along with number ten, all relate to evangelism.

Figure 1: *The Top Ten Challenges for 2023*



The lack of evangelism has become a real problem for the North American church. Last year, research by Dr. Thom Rainer of Church Answers discovered only 4% of churches have any type of evangelistic outreach, and less than 1% of churches have a year-round evangelistic outreach approach.

However, while these statistics are discouraging, Rainer notes the church and its leaders need hope and not guilt. “Churches aren’t evangelizing because Christians sense little urgency to reach the lost. Many churches struggle to maintain regular evangelism efforts because the task can feel like a stale obligation.” Rainer continues, “Your members need hope-filled inspiration, not guilt-ridden guidance!”

With these things in mind, Rainer began to develop The Hope Initiative, which uses prayer and Scripture as the foundation. He concluded that, to be successful, this approach would need to be efficient, taking less than 20 minutes a day for participants.

Because it is difficult to engage the entire congregation in the revitalization process, The Hope Initiative seeks to change the culture of a church three to five participants at a time over a 12-month period.

Last year, Dr. Rainer asked Free Will Baptists to partner in the development of this new initiative. As the year went by, our churches that participated in beta testing discovered The Hope Initiative works. Rainer expressed his thankfulness for these churches, noting, “I am confident God will use their desire to be obedient to the Great Commission to



What are the keys to The Hope Initiative?

- ♥ Provides a simple strategy for reaching communities.
- ♥ Grounds the motivation for evangelism in the Word and prayer.
- ♥ Leads believers into something foundational to their faith: knowing God and reaching others.
- ♥ Encourages the pastor to lead the initiative, setting the example for outreach and evangelism.
- ♥ Focuses on pastors recruiting, leading, and influencing small groups of members.
- ♥ Accessible to any church member without significant training!



reach many people for Christ, and that many of their churches will see abundant fruit in the days ahead.”

Consider one exciting example of this abundant fruit. While participating in The Hope Initiative, Pastor Noah Taylor sent a note to a man in his community. The man immediately began attending Evergreen Free Will Baptist Church in Erwin, Tennessee. He also began attending a life group and was saved a few months later.

Excited about his newfound faith, this individual began to share the gospel with people throughout his community. On his own, he decided to host a “Got Saved Party” on Good Friday, inviting his new friends at church and his lost friends to come together (see photo above). (This sounds much like the story we read in Luke 5:29-32). He was baptized April 16, 2023.

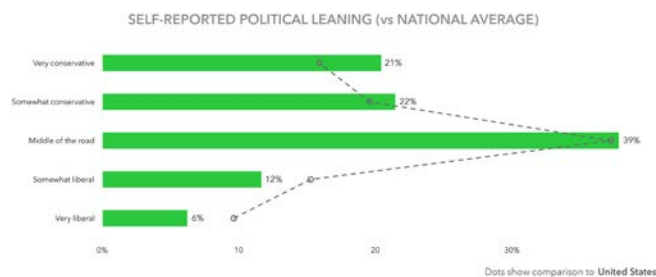
The Hope Initiative works, and I encourage you and your church to participate. We offer this initiative through Church Answers at cost. To get started, email questions@nafwb.org. **ONE**

About the Author: Dr. Eddie Moody is executive secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists. Learn more: nafwb.org/hope.

More Than Politics! Your Community Needs the Church

BY EDDIE MOODY

Election season is here, and many are concerned about the future of their communities and country. The community depicted below is likely very concerned about our current state of affairs.



This chart comes from a Know Your Community (KYC) report where a Free Will Baptist church is located. This community is characteristic of the 13% of Free Will Baptist churches that have participated in KYC.


Middle of the road is always the highest ideology, but 43% of community respondents also describe themselves as very or somewhat conservative. They likely would endorse beliefs consistent with Scripture and might even have a high respect for the church. However, when asked, "Do you attend religious services regularly?" 41% percent disagreed completely, and 18% disagreed somewhat. The majority (59%) of this highly conservative community are not attending religious services.

Many in this community probably have a strong sense of right and wrong. For example, they are probably concerned about drag shows in front of children and other social issues. Those concerns may not persist without involvement in a local church. In 2001, 57% of Americans opposed same-sex marriage, and 37% favored it. In only 15 years, that shifted to 61% support, with 31% opposing same-sex marriage. As Ryan Burge has noted, "The hold outs do tend to be more religiously engaged." Christ and the church are key to a biblical ideology as well as the well-being of a community. Here are three groups that benefit from church attendance.

The church is good for children. Most *ONE* readers are well aware of how church benefits children. However, rigorous research indicates being brought up in church has a wide range of mental and physical benefits that extend into young adulthood. Media probably will not report on this research from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Those who want to help their community should double down on Sunday School (d6family.com), partner with CEF (cefonline.com), start an Awana club, and reach children.

The church is good for couples. Couples are struggling today, even Christian couples. However, Christian couples who regularly attend church are significantly less likely to divorce or have marital disruption. It appears this relates to prayer activated in their lives and relationships built with others at church. Perhaps consider marriage mentoring from Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott: marriage mentoring.com.

The church is good for older people. Long ago, I asked Duke University researcher Harold Koenig, "Is it better for my health to go to the gym or church on Sunday morning?" I suspect many are surprised church attendance impacts mortality and morbidity in important ways. Regular church attenders live longer and have later onset of disability in life. The result is so potent Gallup researches recently asked if boosting religiosity should become a public policy aim.

So, if you are worried about your community, by all means engage politically, but remember, the answer is Christ and His church. Both Scripture and data teach us involvement in a local church changes a community for the good. Let us tout that message in a world turned upside down. 



Eddie Moody

Executive Secretary,
National Association of
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