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ONE magazine

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2026

From Death to Life:
*One Church's
Resurrection Story*

Will You Join Me at 9:38?

From Visitor to Member

A Walk in Her Shoes

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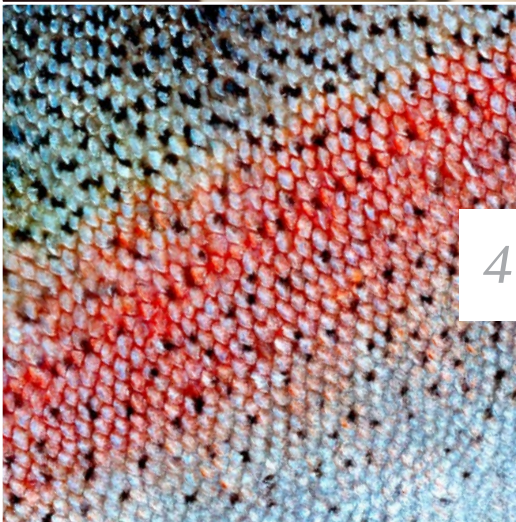
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of our role in the extension of God's Kingdom*

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A Dirty Altar

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

“Wow! That looks *rough*.”

The thought flitted through my mind as I sat on the front pew waiting for the morning worship service to begin. A large black scuff ran horizontally across the creamy white altar, just to the left of the pulpit, clearly visible for everyone to see.

“Bad spot,” I thought casually. Then the prelude ended, and any thoughts of scuff marks were lost in the joy of leading music for a congregation that loves to sing (a little foretaste of Heaven, in my opinion).

The following week, however — same time, same pew, longer prelude — I noticed the mark again. And this time, with the morning sun shining brightly through the sanctuary windows, I realized it wasn’t just one mark but dozens. A veritable spider web of shadowy marks crisscrossed the altar wall, some faint, others darker, some even leaving a scar in the drywall.

“What in the world?!” I wondered to myself. “Looks like the preschool class did a craft project up there.” I briefly pondered whether I should let the trustees know the wall needed to be painted. Surely, a dirty altar wasn’t the message we wanted to communicate to first timers. Then, the prelude ended, and, once again, the altar wall was forgotten as the worship service began.

That morning we experienced a particularly moving service, with an emphasis on salvation, both in music and preaching. The sermon delivered a clear presentation of the gospel, both to those yet to accept Christ and to believers, reminding us of what the Savior has done in our lives and the responsibility to share our story with others. The presence of the Holy Spirit was palpable!

As the invitation hymn played, the altar filled. And then it crowded again a second time when we prayed over student summer missionaries headed around the globe. As people

squeezed together, boot soles kicked, jeans scuffed, watches scraped, buttons clinked, and tears ran freely. Suddenly, I knew the source of all the strange marks on the altar.

The following Sunday, as I waited for the service to begin, I thanked God for the opportunity to be part of a church with a “dirty” altar. For some reason, the marks I previously found distracting now held a strange beauty.

“Please give me your eyes, God,” I begged. “Forgive me for being distracted by things that do not matter and help me see clearly what is important in light of eternity. And, please, help us *always* to have a dirty altar.” **ONE**

About the Columnist: Eric K. Thomsen is managing editor of *ONE Magazine*. Email: eric@nafwb.org.



WHAT'S COMING IN NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2026

November 1 • The Beginning of the World • Genesis 1:1-31

November 8 • The Beginning of Sin • Genesis 3:1-24

November 15 • The Beginning of Judgment and Rescue •
Genesis 6:5-22; 8:15-22

November 22 • The Beginning of Languages • Genesis 11:1-9

November 29 • The Beginning of God's Promise • Genesis 12:1-9

December 6 • The Beginning of God's Nation • Exodus 1:1-14; 6:6-7

December 13 • The Beginning of the Promise • 2 Samuel 7:12-16

December 20 • The Beginning of God With Us • Luke 2:1-20

December 27 • The Beginning of Godly Habits • Colossians 3:12-17



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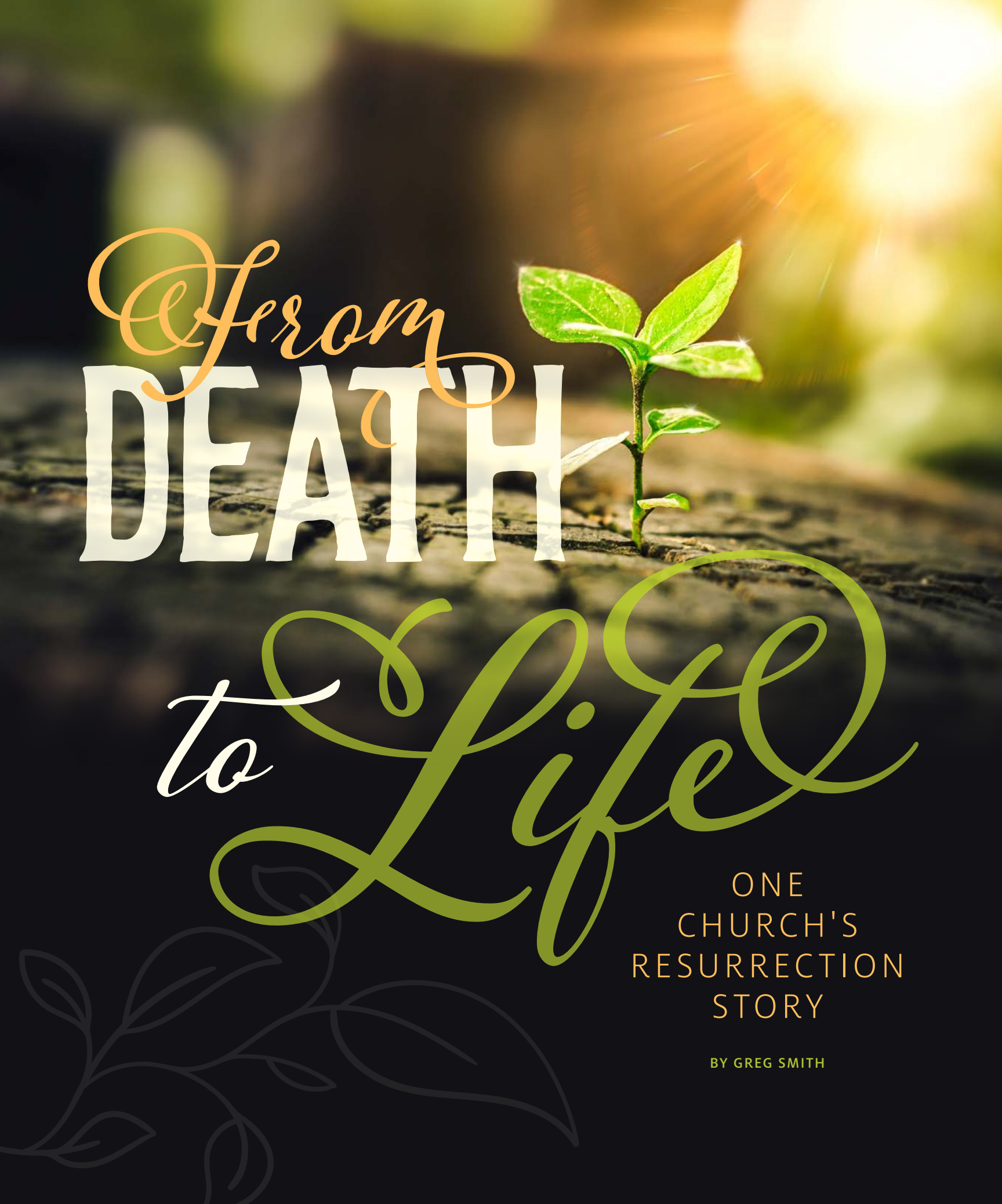
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From
DEATH

to Life

ONE
CHURCH'S
RESURRECTION
STORY

BY GREG SMITH



It's Sunday. The pews are full, the parking lot is overflowing, people are being saved and baptized, and the kids' ministry is thriving. Leaders are asking whether it's time to expand. The church is growing.

And then it isn't.

It's quiet at first. Momentum slows. Numbers soften. While some come in, more slip out. What once felt full begins to feel empty. The church is dying.

This is part of the story of Community Free Will Baptist Church in Ypsilanti, Michigan. A once-thriving church entered decline, and faithful leaders were left wrestling with what to do next. They didn't know what to do, but they believed God was not finished with their congregation. It was clear this wasn't a situation solved with small adjustments. They were past revitalization.

They needed a new start.

This process is called *replanting* — one church choosing a “strategic” death so another can be born. Churches, like all living things, have life cycles. Many quietly close their doors each year. But replanting offers a different possibility, that life can spring forth from death.

In February 2024, Community FWB Church relaunched as The Well Church, a replant led by my family and a committed launch team.

VISION

When you replant a church, a clear, strong vision is vital. Everyone has an idea of what the new church will be like, what ministries it should have, and even what kind of people it will reach. The challenge for any leader in the replanting process is to cast a strong, clear, and compelling vision and to do it in such a way people no longer compete with it but buy in. We find a great example of this in Nehemiah 2. Nehemiah clearly communicated the reality of a desperate situation, rallied the returned Jewish exiles to a course of action, and effectively communicated what was at stake.

I don't believe I had ever cast vision quite like this before.

I quickly learned you want this vision to come from God and not from your own preferences or design. Pray and ask God what He wants to do through your people and what kind of church He wants to build. What kind of church do you need to become so God can reach your community? Ask the Lord to help you see what He sees and then help your people see it, too.

MISSION

One of the primary reasons churches die is because their focus has shifted from accomplishing the mission of God to something else. That “something else” can even be born out of fruitful seasons of accomplishing the mission of God. For example, one of our team members shared about being part of a church where people were saved and baptized almost every week. They grew quickly and soon outgrew their location, so they began a building project. Before long, the new building became the focus, and they spent less time and fewer resources on reaching people. As a result, the church began to decline.

For many dying churches, a similar shift takes place when they shift from focusing on the mission to focusing on preservation. It all becomes about survival. Rather than reaching new people with the gospel, the focus turns to the people you have and keeping them happy and faithful.

Replanting requires a course correction, a return to focusing on the mission of God. We have been given a mission to make disciples, lead the lost to a saving faith in Jesus, and help those new converts grow into maturity. Correcting that missional focus is essential, and it may ruffle some feathers. Sometimes, when you leave the 99 and go after the one far from God, it turns out not all the other 99 are too fond of that.

The LGBTQ+ community maintains a strong presence in Ypsi. When I said a missional focus meant they should be welcomed in the doors and able to hear the gospel, I was soon approached by a person about whom I care deeply. This individual said, “If we start baptizing them, I'm leaving!”

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Shouldn't that be our prayer? That people far from God would be saved and baptized? That they would publicly declare their decision to die to sin and self and follow Jesus? For some, comfortable Christianity is preferable to being a missional church.

CHANGE

“We’ve always done it this way.”

“We’ve never done it that way.”

It is inevitable these statements will come up. We had to emphasize the posture of open hands. We were going to hold everything before the Lord with open hands and allow Him to give and take. Yes, we held tightly to biblical principles and convictions: Christ-centered preaching, strong biblical lyrics in songs, the call to make disciples, and the need to lead lost people to Jesus.

However, everything that did not fall into those categories, we held with open hands: the way the building looked, the style of music we sang, what outreach looked like, how people dressed, and many other things. Change needs to happen, and when it does, it can be uncomfortable. That can lead to another challenge.

WHEN PEOPLE LEAVE

One of the biggest challenges in replanting is when faithful people who began with you walk away. This is especially difficult early on, when you are already a small group, and every person who leaves is painful. I quickly learned this important truth: “I don’t own people. They are not mine.”

The truth is, every person belongs to the Lord, and sometimes we can fight for someone to stay when God directs him to leave. Replanting is not for everyone. I believe some people are genuinely led by God to leave because it is not for them. Others leave because they don’t embrace the changes. When people leave, it will feel personal, but that doesn’t mean you are responsible; it means you care.

The best thing you can do when people leave is pray with them, and if they believe God is leading them, support them. Even help them find another gospel-believing church. Learning to care for people when they leave will help you remember they were never yours to keep, just to shepherd for a time.

CULTURE CHANGE

The culture of your church may be one of the most important qualities to determine the growth and health of your church moving forward. Many churches decline and die because their culture isn’t healthy. The church may have an insider culture that doesn’t feel open or welcoming to new people.

Visitors may experience a judgmental attitude regarding tattoos, clothing choices, or any other number of reasons. One member of our replant even described new people as “strangers.” That kind of mindset contributes to an unhealthy culture, and people feel it when they come in.

A healthy culture welcomes people and tears down barriers. It encourages connections and relationships. It values authenticity by communicating we are not perfect, and we don’t get everything right, and that’s okay. We can figure it out together and help one another up when we fall. Many ingredients contribute to a healthy culture, but one thing is certain: people feel the difference. If you aren’t sure what your culture feels like, ask people outside your church to visit and pay attention to what they hear, feel, and see. When they share their experience with you, the feedback may surprise you.

LOCATION

Replanting also provides an opportunity to consider where you will launch as a new church. This decision is important and must be approached with prayer and wisdom. You may have a building already and think, “We’ll launch here, of course!” But you need to pray and ask these questions:

- Do these facilities fit the vision God has given us?
- Does our location allow us to reach the people God wants us to reach?
- Does this location have a reputation we need to leave behind?
- Do you have resources to launch somewhere else? Venue? Team? Finances?

These are only a handful of the many questions you must consider and pray through as you decide on a launch location. After much prayer and research, we decided to launch in the building we already owned. That came with pros and cons. On one hand, we had our own building, and we didn’t have to set up, tear down, or share. On the other hand, the existing building made it harder to keep the old culture from creeping back.

We had to emphasize the posture of open hands. We were going to hold everything before the Lord with open hands and allow Him to give and take.

Despite all the changes, it took time for people to embrace a new identity in the old building. People still walk into our services and say, "I've been coming to this church for years." And I've never seen them before!

IS IT WORTH IT?

I remember standing in the sanctuary, leaning against a pew, and praying, "God, what have I done? What have I gotten my family into? I moved them across the country for this. Did I hear you wrong? Did I make a mistake?"

At various moments during the replanting process, I questioned everything. But I kept coming back to the clarity my wife and I experienced regarding God's call to this ministry. There were (and are) hard days. But watching God move and work in it all is nothing short of amazing.

During the pre-launch period, when all the change was happening, a couple let me know they were planning to visit other churches and praying about leaving. I prayed with them, prepared for them to leave, but deep down really wanted them to stay. God never gave them peace about leaving. Fast forward:

they now lead a small group in their home, and their daughter, who hasn't attended church in years, has begun attending regularly. She even brought her best friend, now saved and baptized.

Three members of the original congregation realized they had never trusted in Christ and have been saved and baptized. We started with a group of 30 faithful people (mostly older). Some left, but most are still here and serving. Since launching in 2024, we have seen 45 people give their lives to the Lord and be baptized. On Easter, we stood in awe as over 300 people attended two services. I have watched God stretch and grow our remnant members to disciple and walk with new believers.

Replanting isn't easy. Dying to resurrect a new congregation is messy and challenging, but when God is in it, it is always worth it. There is no limit to what He can do with a few faithful people. **ONE**

About the Writer: Greg and Hailey Smith are lead church planters at The Well FWB Church in Ypsilanti, Michigan, a church replant through North American Ministries. They have three children: Norah, Lucy, and Theo. The Well exists to lead people to hope by loving them like Jesus. Learn more about their ministry at fwbnam.com/gregandhaileysmith/.

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Will You Join Me at

BY EDDIE MOODY

We need shepherds. More specifically, we need men answering the call to be Free Will Baptist pastors. This is an across-the-board (and across all denominations) problem, part of an overall cultural shift away from the ministry. As I said a few years ago, it is “everyone’s problem.” We have a shortage of pastors.

What happens when we have too few pastors? Without pastors, churches close or become inactive. Fewer churches means fewer places for people to worship and grow. As churches close and struggle, people quietly drift away to another church or out of church entirely. Spiritual growth declines, and membership gradually falls.

We need more pastors, but how do we get them?

ONE: Pray and Search for Pastors

The truth is the shortage of workers is NOT a new problem. When Jesus looked at the scarcity of laborers, He commanded His followers to pray for more laborers (Matthew 9:37-38; Luke 10:2). Let us devote serious prayer to asking for more laborers.

This year, we are challenging every Free Will Baptist to pray for new pastors every day at 9:38 a.m. or p.m. (preferably both).

As noted above, this mandate comes from Jesus Himself (Matthew 9:38). We ask every Free Will Baptist to pray daily for God to raise up workers for His harvest. And while we desperately need missionaries, teachers, and deacons, no need is more essential, more pressing to the future of our movement than seeing God call more pastors.

What should we do while we wait for God to answer our prayers? Let us familiarize ourselves with the job description

and qualifications of pastors (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4) and ask God to help us identify men He is calling. Then, encourage them, train them, and provide them opportunities to exercise their calling.

We began addressing this problem more than five years ago through a series of articles. I encourage you to read or review those articles to acquaint yourself with the complexities of this issue: nafwb.org/938/.

TWO: Support Our Existing Pastors

Refresh Counseling. A recent article from Axios noted the high number of pastors who have considered quitting the ministry. The same is true in our own ranks. The National Association began offering the Refresh Counseling Program in 2022, and to date, we have conducted more than 3,500 counseling sessions. This fulfills our belief that a laborer is worthy of his hire. Several participants indicate the program helped them through burnout and enabled them to continue, even excel, in ministry: nafwb.org/refresh/.

Rekindle Coaching. Pastors, especially those in rural areas, often feel isolated. The Rekindle Coaching Program allows pastors to work with a mentor on strategy and planning. This fulfills our belief we are not meant to minister alone. It is truly an example of how iron sharpens iron: nafwb.org/rekindle/.

The Shepherding Initiative. Many churches stagnate or close when they go without a pastor. The top reason we lose churches is they cannot find a pastor. Through The Shepherding Initiative, Dr. Tim York works with church members to help them stay focused on the church’s ministry. He trains



*The harvest truly is great,
but the labourers are few:
pray ye therefore the Lord
of the harvest, that he
would send forth labourers
into his harvest (Luke 10:2).*

them to conduct devotions or make hospital visits and keep ministry moving until the next pastor is in place: nafwb.org/shepherding/.

THREE: Help Shoulder the Load of Ministry

When we first shared the reality and challenges of the pastoral shortage in the March 2021 article “Everyone’s Problem,” we also shared simple guidelines for how to pray for and search for pastors and deacons. In the meantime, we must do our best to serve the local church effectively.

In short, it appears God is pushing all of us back to the principle expressed in Ephesians 4:11-12. Paul made it clear the ministry of the church was never meant to fall upon one person or even a small handful of people. Instead, we all are called to work together to edify the Body, working, training, encouraging, and modeling. As congregations, we are called to help shoulder the load of ministry, working together with our

pastors to meet the needs of the communities around us through the hope of the gospel.

If we stay busy fulfilling the unique roles for which God designed us (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12) while also discipling and training others to follow in our footsteps, Free Will Baptists will not only survive the pastor shortage, but we will also thrive!

Let’s stop treating church growth and ministry as the pastor’s job and start viewing it as our shared calling. We are, and always will be, **Better Together.** 

About the Writer: Eddie Moody is the executive director of the National Association of Free Will Baptists.

From VISITOR to MEMBER

BY COREY MINTER

“Pastor, what does our church think about _____?”

For the life of me, I cannot remember the actual point of the question. It may have been a particular ministry, or maybe a question of doctrine. We had been talking about all of those and more during an eight-week membership class I offer before the Sunday morning church service. The reason I can’t recall the point of the question is because I got distracted by two words that are music to a pastor’s ears: *our church*. It is a bright spot in a pastor’s week when a newcomer shifts from using language like “your church,” “this church,” or even the local vernacular “y’all’s church,” and instead, says, “*our church*.”

Granted, Psalm 24:1 is correct. “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” The Lord owns it all. And Paul wrote it even more to the point in his beautiful hymn recorded in Colossians 1:18. “And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”

Truly, it is the Lord’s Church. Nevertheless, He has called us to minister within His local congregations, and it is a beautiful thing when each of us takes positive ownership of that responsibility. When someone calls it “our church,” I don’t hear an ounce of control in that possessive pronoun, but, rather, cooperation.

Recently, during a marathon staff meeting (Monday morning, no less), I sat down with our church clerk to try to get my head around two important aspects of church health: first-time guests and membership. Specifically, I wanted to know if visitors were making the transition to “our church.” Frankly, I do not think any church leader could be satisfied if large numbers

of people visited but never connected. Studies show only one in nine first-time guests to the average church will, in fact, eventually become a member.¹ That statistic has not changed much over the decades, and that can be disheartening.

However, one positive point of connection kept resurfacing throughout that Monday meeting, and it verified something I have witnessed consistently in my own local church ministry. Church visitors who quickly find their place in a Sunday School class stayed. As a matter of fact, I can say unequivocally Sunday School remains the program or ministry most responsible for leading guests toward an “our church” mentality than any other.

Thankfully, I am the beneficiary of a church with an incredibly strong Sunday School ministry. On any given Sunday over the last decade, four of five people in the pews attended a small group Bible study an hour before. (Lest that come across like a self-important boast, the percentages were actually higher *before* I became pastor.) I am truly eating fruit from trees others planted, and their efforts were not in vain. I certainly see the immense value a strong Sunday School ministry brings to a church.

Call it whatever you want: small group, Bible study, life group, etc. More important than the name is the role these regular small group Bible studies play in the life of a local church. These groups help guests feel part of something tangible. They take students deeper into their relationships with Jesus through studying His Word together. They join the entire congregation in real-life ministry rather than delegating ministry

¹ McIntosh, Gary L.; Arn, Charles. *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church* (p. 44). (Function). Kindle Edition.



[Discipleship] groups help guests feel part of something tangible. They take students deeper into their relationships with Jesus through studying His Word together.

to a paid staff member. For those reasons, we have adopted a slogan (not original to us) that perfectly encapsulates what Sunday School helps accomplish in our local church. *Sunday School allows us to better reach, teach, and minister to people within our congregation...together.*

Church size does not matter. A pastor simply cannot accomplish all three of those endeavors on his own. Reaching, teaching, and ministering to people is essentially the Great Commission, and that command was rendered to *all* Jesus' disciples. The work of the ministry was never intended to be done by a single individual but, instead, by the whole.

In fact, taking into account Jethro's advice to Moses in Exodus 18 and Paul's direction for pastors to equip the saints in Ephesians 4, trying to do it all by yourself is unhealthy. "The thing that thou doest is not good," Jethro told Moses (Exodus 18:17), and I am sure the same could be said of many pastors who never enable capable leaders to reach, teach, and minister. Involving everyone in a Sunday School program for all ages assists the pastor by spreading ministry responsibility throughout the congregation.

Shelves of books have been written and revised over the last century regarding how to reach people with the gospel through our local churches. That is because it is so important. With Lifeway Research reporting a first rise in church

attendance since the pandemic, we now grapple with assimilating first-time guests, grafting them into the life of the church.² They visited your church for a reason, and I am convinced the majority are seeking truth found in God's Word. What better way to introduce them to that truth than through a Bible study where they can ask questions.

We make it our goal to put a Sunday School teacher in contact within a week with every guest who enters our doors and fills out a visitor's card. As the pastor, I make first contact and ask permission to pass along their details to one of our Bible study leaders. Often, the visitor is thrilled to be welcomed by someone beyond the pastor. Take advantage of that and make it normal for Sunday School teachers (or an outreach leader within the class) to make the second contact.

Once the introduction has been made, and the guest knows he or she has a place in the Bible study, begin praying John 14:26, that the Holy Spirit will teach them all things through God's Word because teaching the Bible ought to be the central purpose of any small group.

² Earls, Aaron. *Church Attendance Increases for the First Time in Decades* May 1, 2026 <https://research.lifeway.com/2026/05/01/church-attendance-increases-for-the-first-time-in-decades/>.

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Pathways to Renewal

REALISTIC STEPS TO REVITALIZATION

BY BRAD RANSOM

In the first article in the State of the Church series, I wrote about “Facing the Decline.” It wasn’t a fun or encouraging article to write. But it is important to state the facts clearly before proposing a solution. Last time, I delivered the bad news. Now, let’s consider some good news.

Church revitalization is possible, and it’s happening.

Across the country, Free Will Baptist churches are rediscovering their mission, reaching new people, and building momentum. We are also planting healthy new churches helping to turn the tide. In 2025, NAM church plants celebrated 220 salvations and 180 baptisms. Many established churches are healthy, growing, and seeing people saved and baptized.

While scrolling through social media recently, I saw several churches that set attendance records this year, which is extremely encouraging. But revitalization isn’t just meeting a one-time attendance goal. It takes vision, leadership, and strategic action.

Consider an encouraging statistic. In 2023, a Lifeway Research study revealed nearly 70% of churches that implemented intentional revitalization efforts saw measurable growth within three years.¹ That includes increased attendance, baptisms, and financial health. The key is focused change. So, what does that look like for Free Will Baptist churches? Here are a few practical but essential suggestions for any church seeking revitalization.

REFOCUS ON THE MISSION

I will dedicate an entire article to this later in this series, but let me remind you that revitalization starts by

¹ Lifeway Research (2024).

“U.S. Church Closures Outpace Openings.” <https://research.lifeway.com/>.

reembracing the Great Commission. This means moving from maintenance to mission, focusing not just on keeping people happy but reaching people far from God. Healthy churches prioritize evangelism, disciple-making, and leadership development. This may sound too simple. And though it’s not a guarantee to fix every problem, it is a starting point. If every church simply refocused on the mission of the Church — to make disciples — it would go a long way in reversing church decline.

EVALUATE HONESTLY

Churches need to assess where they are and determine where they need to go. Tools like NAM’s *Fresh Wind Guide* church assessment can help identify blind spots. Is your church welcoming? Is your preaching relevant and biblical? Is your leadership pipeline working? The most effective way to move from Point A to Point B is to know where you are and where you need to go. Assessment isn’t always enjoyable because it exposes flaws, but the best way to address problems is to acknowledge they exist. NAM has a recently updated resource titled *Fresh Wind: A Church Revitalization Strategic Plan* available free to every church. Contact us at fwbnam.com for more information.

STRENGTHEN THE PASTOR/LEADER

Church revitalization rises and falls on leadership, and many pastors are tired and under-equipped for leading a turnaround. Investment in pastoral health and leadership development is essential. Churches with revitalized pastors are twice as likely to grow.² Give your pastor the resources and permission he needs to lead well.

The Executive Office and North American Ministries are at the forefront of providing quality resources, care, and training for pastors. We provide free coaching and counseling

² Thom Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (B&H Publishing, 2014).

Revitalization starts by reembracing the Great Commission. This means moving from maintenance to mission, focusing not just on keeping people happy but reaching people far from God.



to pastors and their families. Many other resources are available, including a pastor's resource video series (fwb-nam.com/revitalization), First Aid Ready resources, Know Your Community, The Hope Initiative, The Bless App, Better Together Podcast, and so much more (nafwb.org/resources). Free Will Baptists have never enjoyed as many resources as we have available today, but they must be accessed (and used) to be helpful.

ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Thriving churches don't just exist in a community; they engage with it. They see neighborhoods as their mission field and intentionally build bridges through events, partnerships, and outreach. They listen with compassion, learn the needs of their neighbors, and speak the language of the people they are called to reach. This is what it means to live out the gospel.

However, far too many churches remain on the sidelines. Their buildings are surrounded by neighbors who hardly know they exist. Congregations gather faithfully inside, while the community outside remains untouched and unchanged. This is not how God designed it to be! The church is called to be salt and light, to influence the place God has planted it. Every community should feel the presence of the local church, not because of its building, but because of its love, service, and engagement.

When a congregation truly engages its mission field, the gospel gains credibility, hearts are changed, and lives are transformed. It's time for churches to stop blending into the background and stand out by making a difference. Our communities are waiting — not for another building, but for people who will step out, show up, and shine the light of Christ where it's needed most.

UPDATE YOUR SYSTEMS

Most dying churches, at least in our denomination, don't have a theology problem; they have a systems problem. Without clear processes for outreach, assimilation, leadership development, discipleship, and more, churches stall. Healthy systems create a structure for mission. I recommend every pastor read my book, *Creating Healthy Church Systems*, available from D6 Family Ministry. It contains helpful suggestions churches can easily implement to improve their systems. Revitalization doesn't require a massive budget or flashy programs, but it does require courage to

change and unwavering commitment to the gospel.

Every church can take steps forward, but it begins with the first step. Take it. A few years ago, Danny Dwyer noted, "when it comes to church revitalization, the need is greater than our interest, and our interest is greater than our commitment."

If we want to avert further crises, the time to act is now!

A CALL TO RENEWAL

The story of revitalization is not about what churches used to be, but about what God still wants to do through them. The decline is real, but so is the hope of renewal. Across our denomination, churches are proving that when God's people embrace His mission, assess with honesty, strengthen leaders, engage communities, and build healthy systems, transformation happens.

Every church — no matter the size, location, or current condition — can take a step toward health. Revitalization is not reserved for the exceptional church; it is possible for any church willing to realign itself with the gospel and commit to the hard but rewarding work of change. The question is whether we are willing to act.

The future of Free Will Baptists will not be determined by our challenges, but by our response. Will we sit back and hope for things to get better? Or will we courageously step forward and follow God's leading toward renewal? Renewal is possible. Revival is needed, and with God's help, we can see our churches not just survive but thrive for generations to come.

In the next article in this series, we will explore: **Don't Lose Heart! Staying Focused on Discipleship.** [ONE](#)

About the Columnist: Dr. Brad Ransom is director of church planting and chief training officer for North American Ministries. Contact Brad: brad@nafwb.org.





Jonathan and Robin Lewis Approved as Associate Church Planters

Pueblo West, CO — North American Ministries is pleased to announce the approval of Jonathan and Robin Lewis as associate church planters in Pueblo West, Colorado. They will serve alongside lead church planters Lory and Danielle Rawlinson at Free Church (Free Will Baptist Church), originally established through the faithful efforts of veteran church planters Mark and Donna Thomas. Following the Thomases' retirement in 2025, the Rawlinsons assumed leadership of the work, and the current team is committed to building on the strong foundation already in place as they continue sharing the hope of Christ with the people of Pueblo West.

As associate planter, Jonathan brings more than two decades of ministry experience to this new role. He has served in pastoral leadership positions in Colorado, Tennessee, and Virginia, most recently at First FWB Church in Florence, South Carolina. Jonathan earned a Bachelor's degree in Bible, pastoral theology, and music from South-eastern FWB College, and Robin recently earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Liberty University. Together, they have faithfully invested in churches and communities through years of ministry, service, and discipleship.

Their burden for Pueblo West is rooted in both personal connection and spiritual conviction. Having been raised in Colorado as part of a NAM church-planting family, Jonathan has long-carried a burden for the people of his home state. As God began directing their hearts toward Pueblo, Jonathan and Robin became increasingly aware of the significant needs in the area, including poverty, addiction, and a large population with little connection to the gospel.

The Lewis family is faithfully answering God's call to Colorado, and they look forward to building relationships, serving their community, and sharing the hope of the gospel in Pueblo West.

To learn more about the Lewis family and support their work at Free Church, visit fwbnam.com/lewis/. **ONE**



Jonathan and Robin Lewis Family

New Church Planters and Missionaries Commissioned at NAFWB Convention

Columbus, OH — The Wednesday night missions service at the annual NAFWB convention is a memorable time to honor current church planters, missionaries, and ministry partners; worship as one body; give toward future ministry endeavors; and seek the Lord's will regarding our roles in fulfilling the Great Commission. A special part of the evening is the commissioning of new church planters and missionaries. This year, five NAM church-planting families and three IM missionaries were commissioned, committing to follow God's call into ministry in North America and around the world. As part of the commissioning service, those who attended also committed to supporting them as they serve. We ask that you would also pledge to pray for these newly commissioned leaders and commit to support them as the Lord directs. For more



information on current NAM church planters and their families, visit fwbnam.com/church-planting/.

NEWLY COMMISSIONED NAM PLANTERS:

Devin and Victoria Cominskie (Skokie, IL)
Jonathan and Robin Lewis (Pueblo West, CO)
Hansel and Ellie Morell (Lebanon, TN)
Lory and Danielle Rawlinson (Pueblo West, CO)
Isaiah and Anna Smith (Hickory, NC) **ONE**



New Life FWB Church, Amory, Mississippi, Reaches Self-Supporting Status



Amory, MS — Praise God for bringing New Life FWB Church to self-supporting status. New Life celebrated this milestone and announced a leadership transition during the congregation's Charter Sunday services this summer.

Ask God to continue to bless this wonderful congregation with growth and depth, and pray for Eric and April Keeton, as Eric transitions into the lead pastorate and former church planters Chad and Paula Kivette move into new ministry opportunities. **ONE**

Cominskie Family Approved by NAM to Plant Work in Skokie, Illinois

Skokie, IL — NAM is pleased to announce the approval of church planters, Devin and Victoria Cominskie. The Cominskies will serve as lead planters at Living Hope FWB Church in Skokie, Illinois.

Living Hope Church is a joint church plant project between the Illinois FWB Mission Board and North American Ministries. The Cominskies are thankful for Faith FWB Church in Goldsboro, North Carolina, and Dr. Daniel Mann for starting the work in Skokie and continuing to support Living Hope Church.

Originally from Virginia Beach, Virginia, Devin has a B.A. in missions from Southeastern FWB College and an M.A. in ministry and theology from Welch College. Victoria is from Muncie, Indiana, and has a B.A. in secondary education from Southeastern FWB College. Previously, the Cominskies spent nine years in ministry at Anchor FWB Church in Jacksonville, North Carolina, where Devin served as youth and music pastor and Victoria taught in the Christian school. The Cominskies have four children: Nova, Judson, Selah, and Elliott.

The village of Skokie, Illinois, is located immediately north of Chicago in Cook County. Skokie has a population of 70,000 and fewer than ten evangelical churches. The spiritual need in Skokie is great, and the laborers are few. Skokie is one of the most diverse Chicago suburbs, where 40% of people are foreign-born, 30% are Jewish, 30% are

Assyrian, and only 50% of households speak English at home, with the remainder speaking over 90 different languages. This presents Living Hope Church with a unique opportunity to reach the world from their home community.

Please pray for the Cominskies as they begin the fundraising process and continue the ministry already started at Living Hope!

To learn more or partner with Devin and Victoria, visit fwbnam.com/cominskie/. **ONE**



Devin and Victoria Cominskie Family



What Does **NORTH AMERICAN MINISTRIES** Actually Do?



BY ED GOODE

Partner in Church Planting (and More) Through the Mission North America Offering

I can't be the only church planter who often hears, "What does North American Ministries actually do?" And I'm sure I'm not the only church planter who answers with two words: **encouragement** and **equipping**.

Some of the best people in our movement work for North American Ministries. They not only answer the phone when you call but come to your town to help you work through the challenges and joys of church planting. On the few occasions I've visited the NAM office in Antioch, the staff acts as though seeing me was the main reason they came to work that day. (Although, on reflection, I've never been there without my wife Rachel, which may explain it.) And, when they tell you they're praying for you, they really mean it.

Every church planter has endured a hard season or difficult situation the team at North American Ministries helped them navigate. I couldn't imagine church planting without their encouragement.

Maybe you find all that a bit intangible, so let's consider the practical equipping North American Ministries offers. I remember my first **Church Planters Boot Camp** in February 2022. Over three exhausting but invigorating days, we heard from seasoned pastors, church planters, and other ministry leaders. I remember getting into the car to drive back to Illinois, taking Rachel by the hand, and telling her, "We can do this!"

Before Boot Camp, you don't know what you don't know. After Boot Camp, not only do you know what you don't know, but you also have the tools to grow and the examples of those who have gone before you. Last year, our church planting team here

in Champaign grew, so all four of us went back to Boot Camp. Or, in the words of my five-year-old nephew, "They've forgotten how to start a church, so they're going to learn again."

The program was even deeper, richer, more equipping (yes, longer) than last time, and we came home even more exhausted and exhilarated. Almost everything had changed since 2022, and it did my soul good to know North American Ministries continues to equip themselves to better equip their church planters.

I promise the following story is true. About a year ago, while talking to a friend planting a church in North Carolina, we both agreed that, sometimes, the hardest part of church planting work is sorting out what is most important to do next. Only a few weeks later, I learned about **WIN training** from NAM (an acronym for What's Important Next). Josh Bennett soon came to Champaign, Illinois, and spent two days helping us work through where our church plant is, where we want it to go, and how we will get there.

Pastoral ministry is lonely work; I don't think there is any way around that. Church planting can be — or at least can feel — particularly lonely. Every year, North American Ministries gathers their planters for either **Summit**, including every planter, or **ReCaps**, which is more regionally based. These meetings feature formal preaching and teaching, gathered worship, and prayer. We also enjoy times of fellowship, food, and fun. Again, we are encouraged and equipped. We get a short break from explaining, "What exactly is it you do?" and we remember (maybe) we're not crazy. Or if we are, at least

we're not the only ones. We remember what's possible, and we are reminded we are not alone.

None of this would be possible without you.

I grew up in a Christian home but not a Free Will Baptist home. One thing I love about our denomination is our commitment to the Lord and each other. Giving expression to these truths is one of the reasons the **Mission North America Offering** exists. By giving to the Mission North America Offering, you do two things: you help this work continue, and you partner with the work itself.

When you give on November 22, you help the work of North American Ministries continue. This offering is not about paying salaries, although that's also a good reason to give. Your gifts fund real ministry across the continent and sometimes around the world. You help North American Ministries equip and encourage church planters. You help fund regular training, but also late-night phone calls and last-minute visits to offer vital encouragement and wisdom. Your money constructs new church buildings in under-churched areas and allows the gospel to be presented in unreached areas. Your giving says **you believe in the mission of North American Ministries** as they open new frontiers of opportunity across the country. When you give, you are funding gospel work.

And when you give, you also partner with that ministry. I hope everyone reading this can visit one of our church plants. By the grace of God, there's plenty to choose from. From Chula Vista, California, to Burlington, Vermont, and Jamestown, North Dakota, to Puerto Rico, you will find church planters who would love for you to visit. (By the way, you're welcome here in Champaign, Illinois, anytime, but April, May, September, and October are the most welcoming months.)

Maybe you don't have the opportunity to visit a church plant. I don't know, but it's a fair assumption that people in Glennville, Georgia, wished they could have gone with Laura Belle Barnard when she became the first official missionary of the National Association. As far as we know, none were able to go with her physically, but they went through prayers and financial partnership. The same is true for every church planter. Maybe you'll never visit Champaign, Ardmore, Hickory, or Waco, but as you give to the Mission North America Offering, we know you are with us.

You may never meet David, who, filled with cynicism and pain, decided to give church one last try. David now leads our A/V team, sets up on Saturday afternoons, and is the last to leave on Sunday morning. Maybe you will never meet Kayla, who found church community with us after growing up in a spiritually dysfunctional climate and serves on our First

Mark your calendar!

What:

**MISSION NORTH
AMERICA OFFERING**

When:

NOV. 22, 2026

Who:

Every church, group, or individual

Why:

To support the Kingdom work of North American Ministries, their church planters, chaplains, and partners

How:

Pray, promote, and receive a special offering on November 22, 2026



Resources are available at fwbnam.com/mna/, including offering envelopes, bulletin inserts, social media graphics, videos, and more.



Impressions team. Or Shiloh, currently the youngest member of our church family, growing up in a home where his parents are being discipled and putting the Word of God first.

You may never meet these people, but their stories and thousands more are only made possible because of your faithful giving to the Mission North America Offering.

Thank you. ONE

About the Writer: Ed and Rachel Goode are lead church planters at Bridge FWB Church in Champaign, Illinois. Working with associate planters Jeremy and Rebekah Huff, the Goodes work to make the real Jesus impossible to ignore in Champaign.

Pre-Thanksgiving DAYS of PRAYER



NORTH AMERICAN
MINISTRIES

Use this daily prayer guide to lead you through five days of intentional prayer leading up to the Mission North America Offering November 22. As you pray, ask God to **MULTIPLY** His Kingdom through new disciples, growing churches, effective chaplains, thriving cross-cultural ministries, and intentional leaders and partners who make gospel ministry possible across North America.

**Join North American
Ministries for our
Pre-Thanksgiving
Days of Prayer,
November 16-20.**

MON
16

MULTIPLY Disciples

At the heart of the Great Commission is the call to make disciples. Pray for church planters, pastors, chaplains, and ministry partners who faithfully share the gospel and reach people who need to know Christ. Pray for new believers to grow in their faith and become disciple-makers themselves. Ask God to give NAM a greater gospel reach as more people hear, believe, follow, and share the good news of Jesus. **Ask God to MULTIPLY disciples who MULTIPLY disciples.**

TUE
17

MULTIPLY Churches

Church planting is the heart of North American Ministries. Pray for new church plants to grow across North America and for established churches to partner with new works. Ask God to provide the leaders, resources, ministry partners, and financial support needed to establish healthy, multiplying churches. Ask Him to open doors in communities where gospel-centered churches are desperately needed. **Pray for churches to not only grow, but also MULTIPLY by making disciples and sending others to go.**

WED
18

MULTIPLY Cross-Cultural Ministries

With over 93 unreached people groups in the U.S., the "utmost parts of the world" are now on our doorstep. Pray for NAM's cross-cultural ministries and the growing number of congregations reaching people from various cultures and backgrounds. Pray for Hispanic, South Asian, and other cross-cultural ministries such as the Hispanic Bible Institute as they develop leaders who will serve their local communities. **Pray more established churches will partner with cross-cultural works until all people groups have heard the gospel and are transformed by the hope of Christ.**

THU
19

MULTIPLY Ministry Leaders

God multiplies the Kingdom through ordinary people willing to say "yes" to His call. Pray for those serving NAM as church planters, chaplains, pastors, and ministry partners throughout North America. Pray especially for new leaders to sense God's call to serve. Ask God to raise up the next generation of leaders who faithfully proclaim the gospel, disciple others, and equip still more people to serve through opportunities like Frontier Student Missions. **Ask God to call more believers to serve Him and pray they will obey that calling, committing to reaching the lost and making disciples wherever He leads.**

FRI
20

MULTIPLY Gospel Resources

Multiplication begins with a willing heart. Ask God what role He wants you to play in His mission to reach North America and the world. Will you pray? Will you give? Will you use your time and talents to serve? Will you encourage someone answering God's call to ministry? Will you go yourself? Pray for Sunday's **2026 Mission North America Offering** and ask God to use you and others to provide the resources needed to equip church planters, chaplains, and leaders for greater gospel impact. **Pray God will MULTIPLY every gift, prayer, leader, and act of obedience for His Kingdom.**

MNA Offering resources, including digital downloads of these Pre-Thanksgiving Days of Prayer prompts, are available at fwbnam.com/mna/.



Pray faithfully. Give generously. Join the mission.
Together, we can **MULTIPLY** the impact of the gospel across North America and beyond.

Dr. Danny Conn Earns Second Doctorate



Dr. Danny Conn

Nashville, TN — Dr. Danny Conn recently earned his second doctoral degree. In July 2026, Dr. Conn completed his Ph.D. in Theological Studies from Columbia Biblical Seminary. The Ph.D. is widely recognized as the highest academic research degree, requiring years of original scholarship and the successful

defense of a doctoral dissertation that contributes new knowledge to the field. Dr. Conn previously earned an Ed.D. in 2002.

For the past 20 years, Dr. Conn has faithfully served D6 Family Ministry, first leading the curriculum division before transitioning eight years ago to oversee the book publishing division. He continues to serve as the theological editor for D6 Curriculum, ensuring biblical accuracy and theological integrity throughout the curriculum. For

the past five years, he has also served as general editor of the *D6 Family Ministry Journal*, an academic journal published in conjunction with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, collaborating with accomplished scholars from around the world to advance the academic study of generational discipleship.

Dr. Conn's doctoral research examined the faulty belief and practice of Progressive Christianity, specifically the relationship between the diminished authority of Scripture and departure from biblical sexual ethics. His deep knowledge of Scripture, theological insight, and exceptional ability to communicate complex biblical truths with clarity have made him an invaluable protector of curriculum, books, academic scholarship, and discipleship resources published by Randall House and now D6 Family Ministry.

We celebrate this significant accomplishment and are grateful for the faithful scholarship, wisdom, and leadership Dr. Conn continues to invest in D6 Family Ministry and the broader church, for which our churches benefit. **ONE**

Continued from page 13

With a myriad of solid Bible resources at our fingertips, the modern church has no reason to lament like the prophet Amos about a famine of hearing the Word in the land (Amos 8:11). Now, more than ever before, free and inexpensive resources make it possible for every single Christian to dive deeply into God's Word. As church leaders, we should celebrate that from the pulpit by referencing what our classes are studying, by handing out helpful books on similar topics in the Sunday evening service, and by regularly mentioning opportunities for Bible study throughout the week.

People are starving for answers to life's questions, and more than one person has found Christ through the taught Word within the community of a Sunday School class. *Community* is the exact right word, too, because while it is easy for a guest to slip in and out of the sanctuary, it is nearly impossible to go unnoticed in a small group. Within that group, not only will the Bible be taught as the ultimate authority for life, but also true fellowship — the sharing of spiritual resources — will be experienced as each member ministers to one another (1 Peter 4:10).

As members of the church begin to experience the value of reaching and teaching people for Christ through their individual Sunday School classes, a healthy spirit of ownership begins to grow within the congregation. Meal trains, hospital visits, prayer needs, community events, and even financial help are offered within the context of small groups. People once on the fringes and in the shadows are welcomed into the Body of Christ as valuable and needed members in ministry.

This church, that church, your church...*OUR church*. An "our church" mentality grows best when every member becomes actively involved in reaching, teaching, and ministering to one another, spreading the responsibility across the congregation and collectively bearing one another's burdens, which Paul indicated fulfills the very law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). **ONE**

About the Writer: Corey Minter, graduate of Gateway Christian College, joined New Hope FWB Church staff in 2009 as the student pastor. He became the lead pastor in early 2014. He and his wife Rachel have three beautiful children: Claire, Naomi, and Theo.

A Walk in Her Shoes

Recently, Kristi Johnson, director of WNAC, interviewed **Bethany Douglas**, former church planter and current publications director for North American Ministries, and **Angela Wooton**, church planter to St. Croix, USVI, about their lives, their calling, and their Kingdom work.

WHAT FIRST SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN MISSIONS?

Bethany: My church was always great about having missionaries visit. My family had personal connections to the Lytles, and I was always so impressed by Jerry Pinkerton's giant snake-skin. Ultimately, I developed a very tender heart for people suffering with physical and spiritual needs around the world.

Angela: I did not take missions courses in college or go on a short-term missions assignment. But when we accepted a pastorate in Pensacola, Florida, my husband Gene and I had many conversations about the "saturation" of the gospel

there. Of course, you find unsaved people everywhere, but we often felt we were competing with "the other 25 churches" in our small area. We said if we ever left our beloved church, it would be to serve in a place with less gospel influence. When we were asked to consider St. Croix, we were very happy. We had recently bought our dream home and had no plans to move. But the Lord moved our hearts, and His call was clear.

WAS THERE A SPECIFIC MOMENT YOU KNEW GOD WAS CALLING YOU INTO THIS WORK?

Bethany: Yes! At church camp in the summer of 2005, I felt a distinct calling to missions or career ministry. I assumed it would be as an international missionary. ETEAM confirmed this, but my journey didn't go quite as I thought. It's amazing how God leads in ways you would never imagine.

Angela: In my flesh, I would *never* live in a place like St. Croix. I'm close with my family and always assumed I would live within a mile radius of my parents (like they did). I'm an introvert, not particularly adventurous, don't like to be up front

or in charge, or make difficult decisions. However, through the Holy Spirit working in me, I do all these things every day. When we first visited St. Croix, I was completely out of my comfort zone. But the call was so strong I knew it was God. During our visit, I recall one very hard day when we met many new people (exhausting for me) and it was sweltering hot (and I hate being hot). But when we laid down in bed that night, I said, "I think we're moving." I could hardly believe I was saying it, but I knew it was right. The Lord changed my heart and gave me a love that came fully from Him.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WAYS NAM SUPPORTS CHURCH PLANTERS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THEY ARE SENT?

Bethany: We work with church planters every step of the way, starting from initial interest through the application process and a thorough assessment. After a church planter is approved, we provide training and coaching before, during, and after the launch phase of the church plant. Our staff knows our planters personally. We celebrate with them, mourn with them, and genuinely love to fellowship with them, from our office to the National Convention.

Angela: Having the NAM support system is truly invaluable. We may not call for help or reach out for questions often, but knowing a group of believers who know where you are and are praying for you by name is so reassuring. Not only have NAM staff visited us, but after Hurricane Maria in 2017, Ken Akers and Master's Men volunteers came down and worked to help us recover. My husband has experienced a couple of medical emergencies there, and I'll never forget being flown off the island in an air ambulance, leaving my kids behind, and in a state of panic. That's when I received a text that said simply, "We've made a deposit into your account to help with expenses."

WHAT IS ONE CHALLENGE PEOPLE RARELY SEE BEHIND THE SCENES OF MISSIONARY WORK?

Bethany: People rarely think about the family load church planters carry. They are trying to start a ministry from scratch with no connections in the community or family nearby to help with the daily challenges of family life. I pray often with them about burdens surrounding childcare, children's friendships, aging parents, and loneliness — even after their church is established and full of people.

Angela: It is tough to be an “outsider.” The Lord has given us immense love for the people with whom we live, work, and worship. And, yes, we have been met warmly by many people, especially our church family. However, other islanders resent outsiders coming to “take their jobs.” Some islanders are taught outsiders are bad because their parents saw visitors act inappropriately or unkindly. In this culture, being a native islander carries great respect. Everyone else is an “outsider.”

HOW DO YOU STAY ENCOURAGED WHEN MINISTRY FEELS DIFFICULT, SLOW, OR DISCOURAGING?

Bethany: I always remember who I’m serving. I know I am always serving Christ, but I’m also serving His leaders. So, I try to text church planters, catch up with them in person when possible, and follow and comment on socials. Spending time with our planters and chaplains, like at the National Convention, reenergizes me and helps me remember the reason behind filing reports and answering phone calls.

WHAT ARE MISCONCEPTIONS PEOPLE HAVE ABOUT MISSIONARIES OR MISSION AGENCIES?

Bethany: A few years ago, I jokingly started using the term “Free Will Famous” to refer to people well-known in the denomination. However, I do think we sometimes put church planters, missionaries, and national leaders on pedestals. Missionaries and church planters are the same as you. They are not super Christians. And you don’t have to be a super

Christian to serve the Kingdom. I work with these people. I promise they are normal, and some are even abnormal...in the best of ways. Jesus calls and equips us all differently. If Jesus leads you to it, He is faithful to equip you for the work to which He calls you.

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH PLANTER AND SUPPORTERS LOOK LIKE?

Bethany: Communication is key, and it goes both ways! Church planters should make an intentional effort to connect with supporters and keep them engaged in the ministry they are helping fund. Supporters should be faithful to pray, encourage, and contact missionaries.

WHAT ARE THE MOST VALUABLE FORMS OF SUPPORT MISSIONARIES RECEIVE FROM THEIR SENDING ORGANIZATIONS?

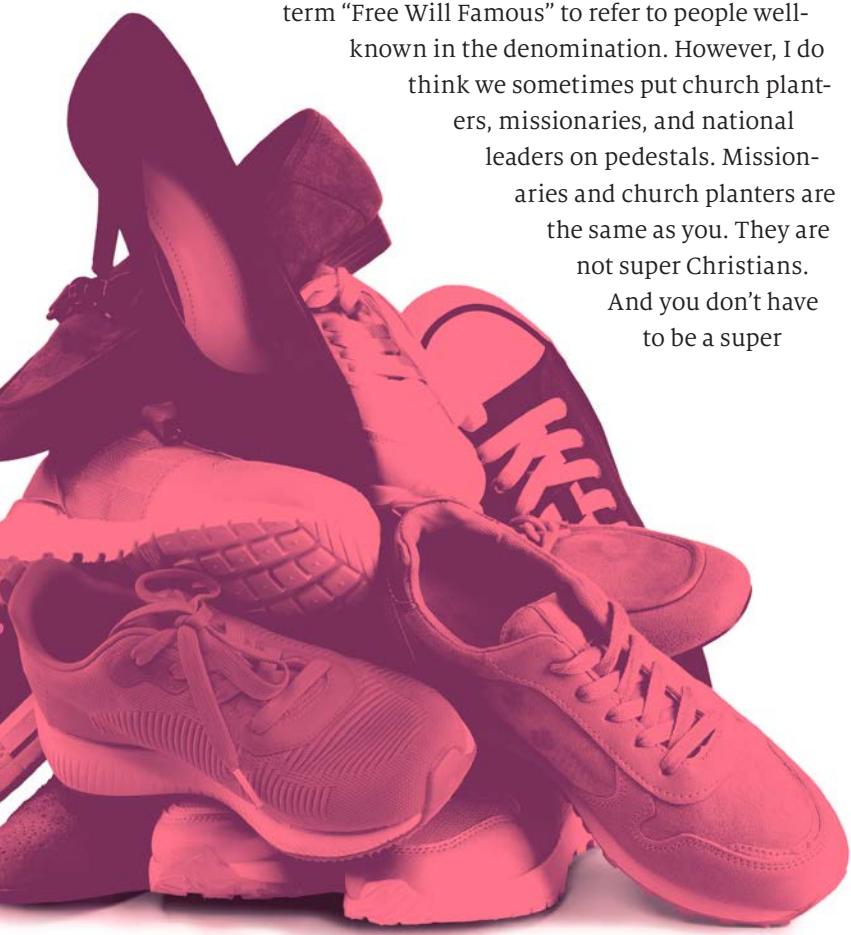
Bethany: You always think of the tangibles: salary, stipends, gifts, and items from the Provision Closet. But I think the most important form of support church planters receive from our denomination is relationship. When you are alone, far from home and extended family, the care and concern of those who send you is vital and validating. You may not know what to do, but you know who to call for prayer, practical guidance, and reassurance.

WHAT HAS YOUR HOST CULTURE TAUGHT YOU ABOUT FAITH, COMMUNITY, AND GOD’S CHARACTER?

Angela: I’ve learned much about faith from the Christians in St. Croix. Their speech almost always includes a Scripture or a comment about God. In conversation, many of them will not speak of anything in the future without saying, “If God wills.” And it’s common for these dedicated Christians to answer a conversational question with Scripture. Their faith inspires me to live more closely attuned to what God has planned.

WHAT GIVES YOU THE MOST ENCOURAGEMENT AND EXCITEMENT IN YOUR PLACE OF SERVICE?

Bethany: I am excited about diversity and student missions. Let me explain. I see more diversity in language, ethnicity, age, and culture in our denomination than ever before! We are truly reaching the world with the gospel. I am also excited to see us engaging students in ministry NOW. Giving them opportunities to develop their gifts and explore their callings provides a pathway to lifelong ministry. Programs like ETEAM, Truth & Peace, YET, and NAM’s new Frontier Student Missions fill me with great hope because I see students leading now and



*When you
are alone, far
from home
and extended
family, the care
and concern of
those who send
you is vital and
validating.*

not waiting for a future assignment. I truly believe the Church is in good hands!

Angela: In our case, any encouragement we receive brings joy we cannot explain. Just knowing someone realizes we are here and doing this is so special. These gifts always seem to come at just the right time. It's a wonderful thing to share with your children about the Body of Christ. Thank you for every prayer and gift.

IF YOU COULD ASK EVERY MISSIONS SUPPORTER TO DO ONE THING MORE INTENTIONALLY THIS YEAR, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Bethany: I would ask every Free Will Baptist to secretly "adopt" one church planter or missionary family and intentionally connect this year. It doesn't have to be awkward or over the top. Just send an email saying you would like to pray with them intentionally and ask for requests. Then follow up on those prayer items. Maybe send a gift card or cards for kid's birthdays. You never know when your encouragement will be needed most!

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR SUPPORTERS (PRAYER, FINANCES, ENCOURAGEMENT) OVER THE YEARS, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THEM?

Bethany: "Thank you" seems inadequate! I can't explain the impact of that kind of intercession. When you are tempted to think, "All I can offer is prayer," I want you to know the power of prayer has fueled the Church, its ministries, and its ministers for centuries. We cannot do anything for the Kingdom without first approaching the King and asking Him for His guidance and blessing. So keep praying! You are engaging in vital Kingdom work every time you approach the Father. 



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FREE WILL BAPTIST CHAPLAINS



FREE WILL BAPTIST
NORTH AMERICAN
MINISTRIES



**North American Ministries
is proud to serve as the
endorsing agency for ministers
pursuing the chaplaincy!**

Whether it is through the military, in Veterans' Affairs, at a local hospital, or serving first responders, each day Free Will Baptist chaplains make a gospel impact.

We are incredibly grateful for our dedicated team of FWB chaplains who serve the Lord and our nation faithfully.



**LT Josh
Alderman, CHC**
Navy,
Guam



**CH (CPT)
Mason Anderson**
Army National Guard,
Republic, MO



**CH (MAJ)
Amir Ashoori**
Army Reserve,
Fresno, CA



**CH (CPT)
Michael Beatty**
Army,
Fort Riley, KS



**CH (MAJ)
David Dodson**
Army,
Fort Bragg, NC



**CH
Chris Dotson**
Secret Service,
Knoxville, TN



**CH (LTC)
W. Lee Frye, Jr.**
Army,
Fort Bragg, NC



**LTJG Josh
Hampton, CHC**
Navy, Twentynine
Palms, CA



**CH (COL)
Brad Hanna**
Army National Guard,
Arlington, VA



**CH (CPT)
Shaun Hembree**
Army,
Fort Stewart, GA



**LCDR
Hal Jones, CHC**
Navy, NAS
Oceana, VA



**LCDR Mark
McCraney, CHC**
Navy,
Chesapeake, VA



**CH (LTC)
Kevin Trimble**
Army, Fort McNair,
Washington, D.C.



**CH (CPT)
Jonathan Truett**
Army,
Fort Bliss, TX



**Ethan
McCraney**
Cadence
International, Hill
AFB, Layton, UT

FWB military chaplains serve as **faithful shepherds** to our servicemen and women and their families, ministering to military personnel from all over the world through biblical instruction, chapel services, mentorship, and training. They are called upon to stand alongside fellow soldiers and their families in times of sickness, celebration, tragedy, and war.

NAM currently has 15 military chaplains and ministry partners faithfully serving across our nation. Please remember these men and their families in prayer as they minister to our servicemembers.



Consider the call to serve as a military chaplain. This unique ministry has been supported by Free Will Baptists since our beginning. From Benjamin Randall to our present FWB chaplains, we have ministered to America's sons and daughters in peace and in war. Be a part of this legacy of service and ministry!



— CH (COL) Terry Austin, Retired,
NAM Chaplain Support Officer



A call to the military chaplaincy is a call to walk alongside our nation's warriors, bringing hope to all who serve. We need more Free Will Baptists to consider the incredible opportunities we have to serve God and country!

— CH (COL) Brad Hanna

I am so proud to be a FWB chaplain because the NAFWB is so supportive, loving, receiving, hospitable, and patriotic. My wife and I often remark we feel at home in Free Will Baptists and part of a real family. I've had other chaplains tell me how they envy the support and love I receive.

— CH (CPT) Michael Beatty

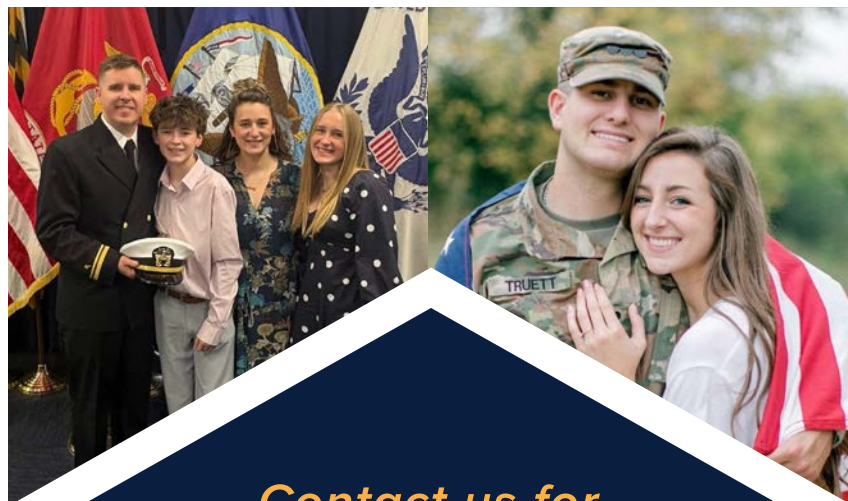
The call to the Army chaplaincy is a journey in faith. The Lord has provided a platform for us to be His witnesses, to bring the gospel to soldiers, families, and civilians through personal ministry, influence with commands, and public preaching. God has proven Himself daily by sustaining and providing wisdom, encouragement, and energy.

— CH (LTC) Kevin Trimble

Are you considering the call to military chaplaincy?

North American Ministries is a partner you can trust.

Our experienced team works closely with the chief of chaplains for each branch of the military to ensure that aspiring chaplains are effectively prepared and supported. Trust in our dedication to guide you through your chaplaincy journey, knowing we provide the support you need to succeed.



**Contact us for
more information today!**

fwbnam.com/chaplaincy





The **MISSION** **BEGINS** *With* *the* **MAP**

BY RON HUNTER JR.

During my Army training, one of the most challenging exercises was land navigation. The instructors loaded us into trucks, drove for miles, and then stopped in the middle of unfamiliar terrain. They dropped each soldier at a separate location and drove away, leaving us alone in the woods.

We only had one problem. We didn't know where we were. This exercise took place long before GPS or smart phones. Prior to the truck ride, each soldier received a map, compass, and protractor, along with a set of coordinates for our first checkpoint. After reaching Point One, we received coordinates for Point Two. Then Point Three. Eventually, we had to reach six checkpoints to complete the course.

Here is the key principle behind both land navigation and today's GPS technology: you must know both your location and your destination before you can plot a course. Open the map app on your phone while visiting an unfamiliar city and disable your location services. The map still knows where the restaurant or hotel is located. But it cannot tell you how to get there until it first knows where you are.

Church leadership works the same way. Most leaders, teachers, volunteers, and parents know where they want their church

to go. They long to see children develop lasting faith, students remain engaged after graduation, adults mature in Christ, families grow stronger, and members become disciple-makers. Those are all worthy destinations. The first challenge, however, is not determining where to go. It is honestly determining where you are.

Until you identify your present location, every direction looks reasonable. Confidence cannot replace accuracy. Guessing might get you moving, but it will not get you closer to the objective. During Army training, we never skipped checkpoints because success at Point Six depended upon accuracy at Point One.

I've often thought about that exercise while serving churches. I regularly meet capable, passionate leaders who genuinely desire healthy churches. Yet many ministries attempt to solve problems before accurately diagnosing them. Like a physician treating symptoms without identifying the illness, churches

often prescribe solutions before understanding their true starting point.

Many churches unintentionally misidentify their location. We often assume spiritual growth happens primarily at church. It doesn't. Church is where believers gather for worship, fellowship, encouragement, and equipping. Growth is cultivated when believers live out their faith the other six days of the week. Sunday should ignite what Monday through Saturday sustains.

If you want an honest picture of your church's health, don't begin by counting attendance. Look for evidence of biblical engagement beyond the church walls. Are people consistently spending time in God's Word? Are families talking about Scripture at home? Are members discovering and using their spiritual gifts to serve others? Are teenagers becoming more resilient, sacrificial, and Christ-centered, or simply becoming more comfortable? Those are the checkpoints that reveal whether discipleship is taking root.

One of the simplest places to begin is helping every generation engage Scripture consistently. The goal is not to complete another reading plan or check another spiritual box. The goal is to develop a lifelong rhythm of hearing God's voice and allowing His Word to shape everyday decisions. Quality always outweighs quantity when Scripture moves from information to transformation.

Research has repeatedly shown regular Bible engagement changes people. Believers who consistently spend time in God's Word are more likely to serve, share their faith, make decisions shaped by biblical values, and persevere through difficult circumstances. Those qualities do not develop by accident. They grow as God's Word shapes both the heart and the mind. Without meaningful engagement with Scripture, Christianity slowly becomes somewhere we attend rather than Someone we follow.

The need for honest self-examination is one reason Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to examine themselves. Honest evaluation is never an admission of failure. It is the beginning of wisdom. A physician cannot prescribe treatment without first understanding the patient. Likewise, church leaders cannot confidently chart the future without accurately assessing the present.

Once you understand where your church is today, you can begin plotting a faithful course forward. Practical assessment tools can help identify both strengths and opportunities for growth across a congregation. Resources that engage every generation in Scripture together create natural conversations in both the church and the home. Assessment reveals your first point. Intentional discipleship helps you navigate to the next one.

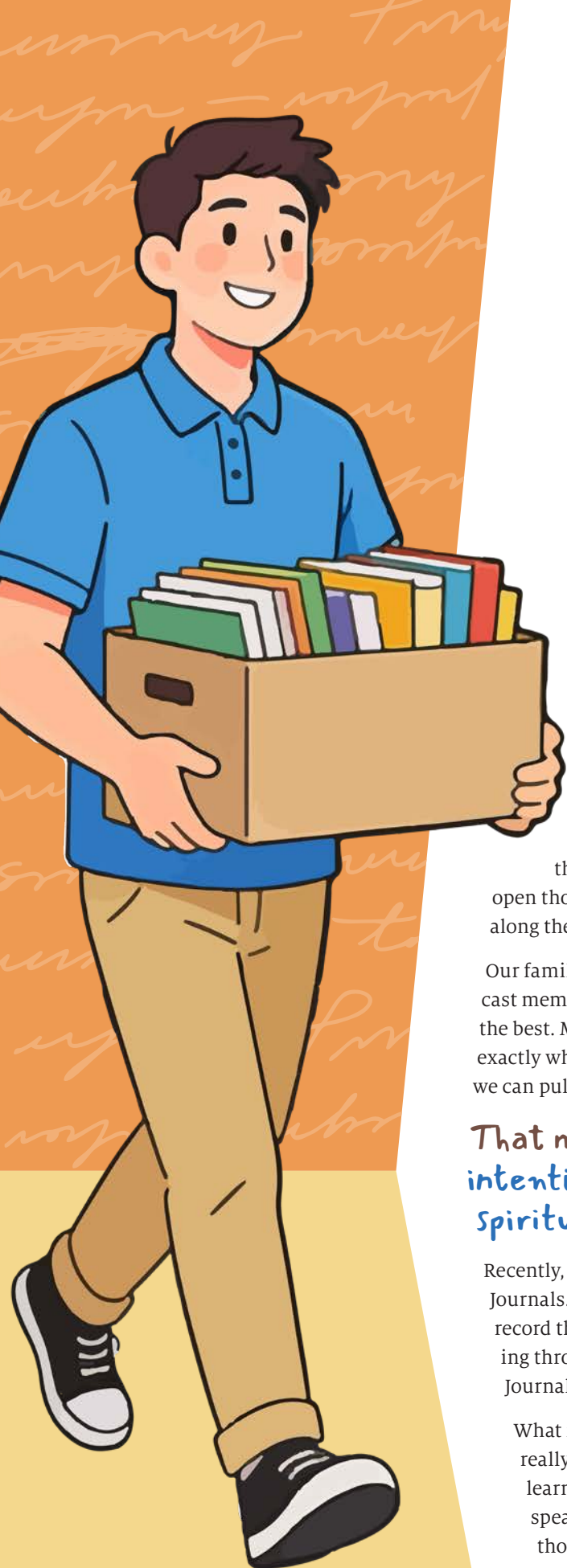
That conviction shapes the mission of D6 Family Ministry. We exist to come alongside churches, helping leaders identify where they are, clarify where they believe God is leading them, and provide practical resources to strengthen discipleship in both the church and the home. Whether through assessments, curriculum, Bible engagement resources, conferences, coaching, or books, our desire is not simply to offer another program. We want to help churches make measurable progress toward generational discipleship.

Years ago, standing alone in unfamiliar woods with only a map, compass, and protractor, I learned determination could never compensate for not knowing where I was. Churches are no different. Vision is essential, but vision without an honest assessment is little more than wishful thinking. Identify your first point. Plot the next step.

Every soldier knows an important truth: missions are never accomplished by the people on the front lines alone. Behind every successful mission stands a network of leaders who equip, supply, train, gather intelligence, and provide strategic support. The same is true in ministry. Pastors, teachers, volunteers, and parents faithfully serve on the front lines of discipleship, but they should never have to serve alone. Healthy churches need trusted partners who invest in research, develop practical resources, and continually equip leaders for the challenges ahead.

***Until you
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Confidence
cannot replace
accuracy.***

Continued on page 31



A Box Full of God's Faithfulness

BY KEVIN BARNETT

Most families have a box somewhere filled with memories. Maybe it holds a child's first attempt at writing his name, a kindergarten graduation certificate, an old team photograph, a handmade Mother's Day card, or an art project only a parent could love. We save these things because they capture the moments we don't want to forget. Years later, parents and grandparents can open those boxes, smile at how far that child has come, and remember the milestones along the way.

Our family has a memory from a trip to Disney World when our youngest son was six. A cast member taught our family how to draw Donald Duck. My wife's drawing was clearly the best. My nine-year-old and I were passable. But our six-year-old's drawing was, well, exactly what you would expect from a six-year-old. We saved it anyway. Now he is 24, and we can pull it out, laugh together, and see just how much he has grown.

That makes me wonder: What if we were just as intentional about preserving evidence of a child's spiritual growth?

Recently, I attended a teacher training for the new D6 Curriculum and its Discipleship Journals. The journals give students a place to engage with the Sunday School lesson, record thoughts from the sermon, identify meaningful takeaways, and continue learning through daily devotions during the week. As I looked through the D6 Discipleship Journal, a light bulb came on.

What if parents, grandparents, and teachers encouraged children and teenagers to really use these journals? Not simply to fill in blanks, but to record what they are learning, questions they are asking, truths they are discovering, and ways God is speaking through His Word. What if families used the daily devotions to continue those conversations at home?



Then, when a journal is completed, **put it in a keepsake box.** Do it again with the next journal. And the next. Imagine a small child beginning that practice and continuing through high school. Now picture the night before he or she leaves for college, begins a career, joins the military, or simply steps into adulthood. Mom and Dad pull out the box, and together they look through years of spiritual growth.

They might find an awkward answer written by a nine-year-old, just like that awkward Donald Duck drawing. But there also might be a verse that became important during a difficult year. A sermon note might reveal something God was teaching long before the teenager understood why it mattered. Questions may demonstrate growing faith and understanding. Page after page could provide reminders of God's faithfulness.

This idea extends beyond the home. Sunday School teachers and church leaders can champion it. A teacher could remind students, "Don't throw this journal away. You are building a record of what God is teaching you." Churches could encourage families to preserve completed D6 Discipleship Journals

and even create moments when graduating seniors look back at their spiritual journey. **Imagine the power of ten years of journals in one box.** If your child is close to adulthood, save whatever you have and reflect even on a year's worth.

We already save report cards, photographs, trophies, certificates, and childhood artwork because they remind us of growth. Those things are worth celebrating. But what if alongside them we intentionally preserved something even more important: **a record of God working in a child's life?**

I treasure that terrible drawing of Donald Duck. But I would treasure even more a milestone box filled with memories of how God's Word shaped my children, how their faith matured, and how the Lord proved faithful year after year.

Someday, that may be the keepsake that matters most. **ONE**

About the Writer: Pastor Kevin Barnett serves as the lead pastor of Ozark Family Church in Ozark, Missouri. He is married to Jennifer Barnett, an active participant in children's ministry and author of the book *Walking With Jesus*. They have two sons, Matthew and Michael.

Continued from page 29

That commitment shapes the work of D6 Family Ministry every day. We continue to invest in research that helps churches understand where they are and where they need to grow. We are expanding resources such as the *D6 Discipleship Journals*, strengthening discipleship through interactive Bible engagement, helping with the rocky moments of life through D6 HomePoint, developing the next generation of D6 Curriculum, and providing conferences, coaching, books, and training to equip leaders to build cultures of generational discipleship. Our goals have always been simply to serve our churches and homes so every generation can know Christ and faithfully pass their faith to the next.

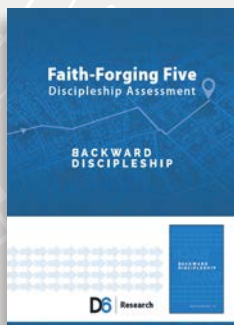
If you would like to move beyond general observations and gain a clearer picture of your own church, we invite you to begin with the free **Faith-Forging Five Assessment** at **D6Family.com**. Every church has goals. Every church has a destination. The assessment helps identify your current location so you can plan intentional next steps. If the mission matters, grab the map, find your first point, and chart the course forward. D6 Family Ministry is your partner for discipleship. One mission. Every generation. **ONE**

About the Writer: Ron Hunter Jr. is the CEO of D6 Family Ministry and author of *Backward Discipleship*.



**Download the
Sample Report
From the NAFWB
National Convention**

**Take the Faith Forging
Five Assessment**



Twenty Miles EAST of the EQUATOR



BY CLINT MORGAN

I have been asked several times if I would ever write a book. I generally respond, “Have you been in a library lately?” The point is, once you see all the unread books, you begin to wonder about the value of writing another one just to place it on a shelf.

However, I have thought about it, and if I were to write a book, the title would be *Twenty Miles East of the Equator*. I don’t know about you, but I think it is a catchy title precisely because it isn’t logical. It suggests an underlying, not immediately obvious, meaning.

We all know you can’t go twenty miles east of the equator. The statement makes no geographical sense. But if you’ve lived long enough — especially working in missions — you realize much of life feels exactly like that. God often leads us to places that don’t fit the maps we have drawn.

An African proverb states, “To get lost is to learn the way.”

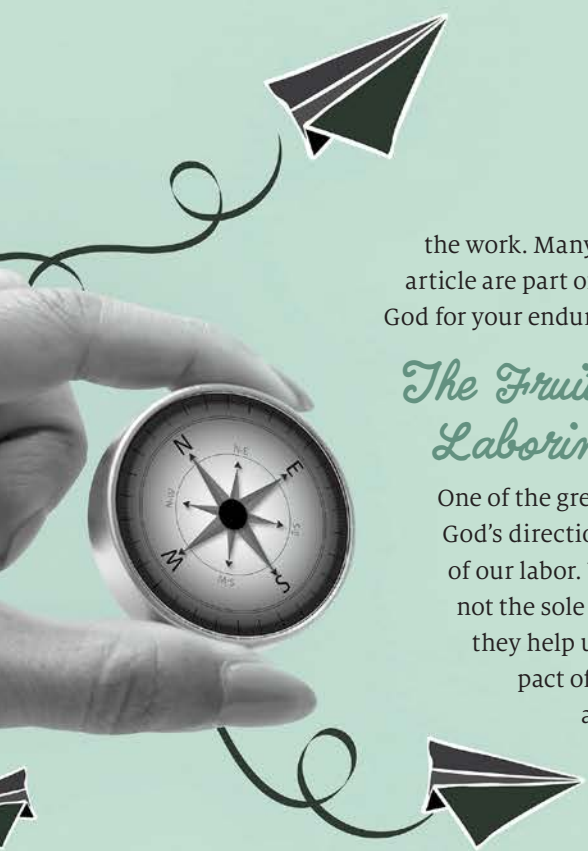
It speaks to the idea the unfamiliar path may become the very road where wisdom, courage, discovery, and adventure are found. The world of missions does not follow normal coordinates. It is a journey where logic, geography, and expectations don’t always align. God sometimes leads us off the map. The question is: are we willing to follow Him wherever He leads?

Honoring the Map Makers

Before our missionaries arrived on their fields, others went before them. These pioneers walked where there were no paths, spoke when there were no listeners, and labored when there was little visible fruit. No doubt, at times they felt they were twenty miles east of the equator. They carried the gospel across barriers where their faith was tested in ways we can scarcely imagine. We stand where they once stood. Not because the work was easy, but because they were faithful and drew the maps we now follow.

And while we honor these pioneers, we also thank the countless faithful supporters who stood behind them across the decades. Missionaries never serve alone. Behind every pioneer missionary stood praying churches, sacrificial givers, mission advocates, faithful friends, and families who helped sustain





the work. Many of you reading this article are part of that legacy. We thank God for your enduring faithfulness.

The Fruit of Laboring Together

One of the great joys of following God's direction is seeing the fruit of our labor. While numbers are not the sole measure of success, they help us see the visible impact of our investment in IM and its partners.

We are truly thankful for the faithful work of IM missionaries and our partners. I want to share

some encouraging numbers from our 2025 statistical report. Each newly-commissioned missionary goes through a period of intense training in our office. One of the focus points of that training is what we call the "six tasks." Every IM missionary is expected to be committed to carrying out these six tasks:

1. Minister
2. Witness
3. Disciple
4. Plant
5. Train
6. Partner

Let's go through each one to see how they were carried out in 2025.

MINISTER. The first task, ministering, is about building relationships, learning people's needs, and meeting those needs, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Ministry has a strong emphasis on our fields of work. This is evidenced through workers staffing 167 ministry centers (not including churches) who met the needs of 110,784 people in 2025.

WITNESS. As evangelical believers, we lean heavily into evangelization — or witnessing, as we sometimes describe it. This

means sharing a message of compassion and hope with the lost in a way it can be understood, and the hearer can respond appropriately. The results of strong witnessing efforts on IM fields are demonstrated by 278 mission works and preaching points. We know faithful witnessing produces results. Last year, 3,612 conversions recorded in works outside of North America testify to the power of sharing the gospel message with men and women.

DISCIPLE. The focus of the Great Commission is the third task. Discipling is the intentional, relational, and Spirit-dependent, spiritual covenant process of helping other believers follow Jesus. We see this lived out as IM missionaries and partners labor together. According to 2025 reports, 2,651 people participated in new convert classes, and 3,212 people professed their faith in Jesus Christ through baptism.

We firmly believe that if the first three tasks are properly carried out, new churches will emerge. Gathering believers together to function as a local church must be intentional. Missionaries are charged to plant churches.

PLANT. We encourage believers to come together to function as the Body of Christ. At the end of 2025, 83 new churches had been organized, with 909 churches gathering an average of 67,061 men and women in Free Will Baptist or affiliated churches around the world.

TRAIN. Training is vital to ensure churches have strong leadership. Field reports indicate 15 Bible institutes are actively training 519 believers to lead Free Will Baptist churches and movements in their country or region.

PARTNER. We view this last task as the act of laboring with other like-minded believers so the world can see Jesus in our lives, hear the gospel from our mouths, and become disciples who follow Him together. We rejoice constantly in the expansion we see while laboring with the Body of Christ.

Currently, we have 113 IM-commissioned missionaries serving in six countries. They work alongside 36 partner agencies with a direct connection to Free Will Baptists. Because we work

**GOD OFTEN
LEADS US TO
PLACES THAT
DON'T FIT
THE MAPS WE
HAVE DRAWN.**

together with the Body of Christ, Free Will Baptists impact 39 countries.

These are not simply IM statistics. These numbers represent the faithfulness of thousands of Free Will Baptists around the world and throughout the decades. These numbers represent not only those who followed God's call to go, but also the thousands of people who engaged in fervent prayer, sacrificial giving, and dedicated support for those who labor cross-culturally.

To all who have engaged in God's plan for laboring in the fields "white unto harvest" we say with deep sincerity, "Thank you!"

Building for the Future

The IM leadership team, staff, and board are excited about where God is leading us. After much prayer and refinement, we have clarified our **2035 Horizon Goals** and are moving forward with purpose.

Commission 100 New Missionaries. As we pursue the goal of commissioning 100 new missionaries by 2035, we must actively challenge young people to follow the compass of His calling. One of the realities of living "Twenty Miles East of the Equator" is starting with a map that changes before the finish line.



WHEN GOD REDRAWS
THE MAP, LET'S
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LEAD RATHER THAN
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COMFORTABLE.



As we step into new cultures, challenges, and opportunities, we discover territory we didn't know existed. We must identify those willing to enter these new places with the message of hope and salvation. Pray for ETEAM, College Missions Program (CMP), and The Hanna Project as we challenge young people to travel with Him to the most unreached areas.

Sending 100 new missionaries undoubtedly will take strong financial support. Considering this need, **we commit ourselves to pursue three major financial goals:**

- Reach and sustain at least \$1 million in the annual World Missions Offering (WMO)
- Use earnings from the \$3 million GROW Endowment to help launch new missionaries
- Build the Cornerstone Endowment to \$10 million for long-term General Fund sustainability

Additionally, we are praying to see Free Will Baptists outside North America more than double over the next ten years.

Our objectives are to:

- Grow from just over 60,000 to more than 120,000 believers.
- Share the gospel with one million people.
- Plant 1,000 new churches.

These are not merely numerical goals. They represent transformed lives and communities reached with the gospel.

Conclusion

Let's not forget, we have not yet completed the Great Commission. This is evidenced by the fact:

- Nations are still waiting to hear the gospel for the first time.
- Unreached people remain unreached.
- Our task is not finished until He returns.

That is why we invite you to keep journeying with us. Let us continue to **labor with the Body of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission.**

When God redraws the map, let's pray He will help us follow His lead rather than cling to what we understand and find comfortable. Let's commit to trusting the God who sees beyond our limited realm and follow Him wherever He leads without reservation.

Together, let's follow Him when it may not make sense, even "Twenty Miles East of the Equator." 

About the Writer: Clint Morgan is the director of IM, Inc.



Voltz Family Transitions to Japan

Antioch, TN — After completing a two-year missionary internship in Bulgaria, Jacob and Hailee Voltz will transition their missionary service to Japan. During their time in Bulgaria, they focused on multigenerational ministries such as weekly nursing home visits, English Clubs for children and adults, men and women's monthly meetings, drum lessons, and more. With hearts for encouragement and serving others, they were instrumental in reaching Bulgarians with the gospel and love of Christ.

Currently on stateside assignment, the Voltz family is seeking funding and support to relocate to Japan and serve alongside new teammates Rusty and Brenda Carney. The Carneys serve the Free Will Baptist Kamifukuoka Christ Church (KCC) in the Tokyo area of Saitama Prefecture.

Visit www.iminc.org/news-updates to read the full news release or partner with the Voltz. 



Focused on the Mission

Columbus, OH — The IM Board and Leadership Team gathered July 21 for a board meeting during the Free Will Baptist National Convention in Columbus, Ohio. This year's convention theme was "Focus," and IM's focus remains steady on sending workers to the harvest.

During the meeting, the Board approved **Emma Hayes** for a two-year internship to Japan. From Oklahoma City, Emma attends Crosspoint Church in Norman, Oklahoma. A graduate of Oklahoma State University, she holds degrees in Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. In 2025, Emma participated in a College Missions Program (CMP) trip to Hope Alive in Tokorozawa, Japan, where she became burdened for the Japanese people.

Director of Field Ministry Personnel Curt Holland affirmed, "Emma has demonstrated tremendous maturity and intelligence in many areas of life. We look forward to seeing what the Lord accomplishes through Emma's ministry in Japan."

The board recognized Clint Morgan, general director of IM, for 50 years of faithful service with IM.

After 12 years, several as board chairman, Jeff Nichols concluded his time on the IM Board.

The Board acknowledged Kenneth Eagleton for expanding the reach of IM through IM Global Partners in his role as director of global partnerships. Though his service as director of global partnerships will end December 31, 2026, Kenneth will move into a new role as IM's global training coordinator. His primary responsibility will be working

with pastors and leaders in global partner countries to ensure solid biblical teaching and leadership training.

Francisco (Frank) Vazquez will follow Eagleton as director of global partnerships. With twenty years of ministry and secular workplace experience, Frank has demonstrated passion for ministry, vision for reaching the lost, and a personal commitment to seeing the gospel spread to all nations.

Read the full release at www.iminc.com/news-updates/. 





Driscolls Conclude Missionary Service With IM

Antioch, TN — Brenton and Debbie Driscoll resigned from service as IM missionaries to Bulgaria June 1, 2026. Raised as missionary kids, the Driscolls brought Christ's light to the Bulgarian people as they offered hospitality, built discipleship relationships, hosted women's events, led conferences, started Bible studies and sports outreaches, translated Christian literature, and much more. Their impact on the field will ripple for generations to come as they reached many families with the gospel.



The Driscoll Family

To read the full news release, visit www.iminc.org/news-updates/. **ONE**

New IM Partnerships Announced

Antioch, TN — June 13, IM Global Partners and the Panama Association of Free Will Baptists met with the Iglesia del Rey FWB Church in Honduras and agreed on a memorandum of understanding where IM and Panama partner with the only Free Will Baptist church in Honduras. The objective is to help train the leadership of the Honduran church and help them plant more churches in needy areas of the country. Kenneth Eagleton expressed excitement about the role Panama is playing in reaching other nations in Central America and the Caribbean and the opportunities in Honduras.

IM Global Partners and Friends of India also partnered to assist national believers from a longstanding Free Will Baptist work in South Asia. The partnership is training leaders in another country where a Free Will Baptist work recently was established. Due to religious and political tensions in South Asia, details of this new partnership will not be published. **ONE**

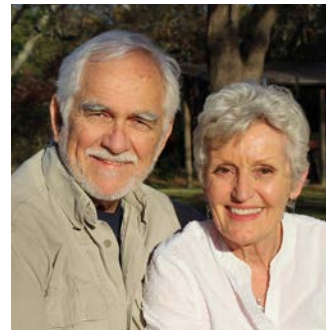
Celebrating 50 Years of Faithful Service

Antioch, TN — In 1976, Clint and Lynette Morgan embarked on an extraordinary journey as missionaries with IM, Inc. Over the next five decades, their dedication left an indelible mark on villages and communities across continents, shaping a missionary movement that resonates around the world. These years instilled in them a deep love for people, a profound understanding of missionary life, and an unwavering commitment to the Great Commission.

For three decades, the Morgans poured their hearts into serving in Côte d'Ivoire, embracing the joys and challenges of cross-cultural ministry. They then spent five years in France on various assignments, further broadening their perspective.

Board Chairman Rodney Yerby captures Clint's essence best: "I never think about Clint without thinking about an African proverb. The proverb **'The lion does not turn around when the dog barks'** perfectly encapsulates Clint's steady courage and unwavering focus on God's mission, even amidst countless distractions."

In 2010, the Board called Clint to serve as interim general



Clint and Lynette Morgan

director. What began as a temporary appointment soon revealed itself as a calling shaped by years of faithful service. Lynette remembers those challenging days, drawing strength from Esther 4:14: "For such a time as this."

This story is not Clint's alone. For fifty years, Lynette has been a steadfast missionary and partner, demonstrating grace, sacrifice, wisdom, and unwavering devotion. Together, they nurtured and mentored missionaries, empowered national leaders, encouraged churches, and inspired generations of devoted followers of Jesus.

The Morgans' half-century of service is a powerful testimony to God's faithfulness and the impact of lives fully surrendered to His purpose. IM stands stronger today because of examples like theirs, and countless people around the globe have heard the gospel thanks to Clint and Lynette's willingness to answer the call in 1976. **ONE**



STOP WALKING in ONE SHOE!

BY TIM AWTREY

Many churches in the United States reach out to the community by hosting a big event at their building, advertising on local radio stations, or sending teams to knock on doors in the neighborhood. What do you do when you don't have a church building? What if you can't advertise on the radio or door knocking is impossible? Is outreach stymied?

On the contrary! In Bulgaria, despite these hurdles, our community outreach is thriving and growing day by day.

BORYANA

Years ago, when our children Alex and Yanna were little, Lydia, along with other young mothers, met in the park to watch the kids play. Many mothers wanted their children to play with Alex so they could learn English while playing games with him.

Lydia took this idea and began an English Club at church. She read stories to children and chose ten English words each week for them to learn. After a few weeks, we noticed the mothers in the back of the room wrote down the words, too. They also wanted to learn English. As a result, we started weekly English lessons. For over 15 years now, we have hosted a weekly English class for children, adult beginners, and adults who are more advanced. This has proven a strategic outreach for our church.

Ye are the *light* of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men *light* a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it *giveth light* unto all that are in the house. *Let your light so shine* before men, that they may see your good works, and *glorify your Father* which is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).



A few years ago, we invited a lady we met at the bank to English Club because she said her daughter was interested in learning English. Boryana attended English Club for several years. From time to time, she also attended occasional ladies' gatherings we hosted. All the while, Boryana observed everything we did as a church, and the Holy Spirit worked in her life. One Sunday, Boryana gathered the courage to attend our little church. She began coming regularly on Sundays and, one day, gave her life to Jesus.

She has been through a discipleship course and now oversees the church finances. Boryana, like many others, simply had an interest in English. But God used English Club to do so much more in her life.

RUMYANA

We know God often speaks to people through His Word. Sometimes, He speaks to them through unusual means — like a paint brush. Rumyana, a doctor at the main hospital in Svishtov, runs the children's ward. In partnership with The Hanna Project (THP), we helped renovate the entire children's ward.

For Rumyana, who loves the children for whom she cares, this was a living example of the gospel. Her introduction to the

love of Jesus did not start with a Bible verse or a prayer, but with a can of paint and a brush. Seeing the gospel in action led her and her husband to attend an outreach event. They heard more about the Jesus who sent people from thousands of miles away to care for her sick children.

Many people in atheistic cultures like Bulgaria have ears closed to the gospel. It is difficult to overcome mistrust and barriers erected over decades. Often, simple, practical service unplugs their ears and opens their hearts to receive the Good News.

DESSI

A single mom with two little ones walked into church a few weeks ago. You could tell by the way they huddled together nervously this was their first time in church. They were unsure about what they would find in a place many Bulgarians

label a cult. I knew I had seen Dessi before, but I couldn't remember where. Then it struck me: the Christmas party.

Every year, in conjunction with Samaritan's Purse, we host a Christmas party.

We play games, listen to a story about Baby Jesus, eat snacks, and hand out Christmas shoebox presents. Dessi and her little ones came to our Christmas party at a time the Holy Spirit was speaking to her about needing to change her life. A simple shoebox present, and a deep longing for something real, led Dessi to the Jesus who had been reaching out to her since she was a little girl.

We rarely see the whole picture. Many parents whose children receive a shoebox simply take the box and go home. However, on that day, Dessi received much more than a simple present. God opened her heart so she could receive the greatest gift ever — new life — all because of a shoebox gift.

Community outreach is like a pair of shoes. One shoe just doesn't get the job done. If we serve the community without the gospel, we are walking around with one shoe. If we share the Word, but neglect to meet people where they are, again...one shoe. Of course, we can get around town on only one shoe, but the experience is not the best, and it slows us down. Let me ask you, in your church or ministry, are you wearing both shoes? Or are you hobbling around on only one?

Perhaps, the Lord would have brought these wonderful people to our church some other way if we had not reached out to our community, but perhaps not. But I do know we can experience no greater joy than seeing lives changed for the Kingdom of God by a few words of English, a paintbrush, or a shoebox. **ONE**

About the Writer: In December 2005, IM, Inc. opened Bulgaria as a field of work for Free Will Baptists. In April 2006, Tim and Lydia Awtrey were approved to pioneer this work in the challenging country. Learn more: iminc.org/.



Bury All My Faults

BY PAUL V. HARRISON

“But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Corinthians 5:13).

Paul thus concludes his instructions to the Corinthian church concerning a member guilty of incest. The goal of such excommunication was that the man’s “spirit may be saved” (1 Corinthians 15:5). Ousting such an offender also would keep sin from spreading. In other letters, Paul called for churches to disfellowship or reject members involved in blatant sin. Such extreme action was called for, because, to use the words of Church Father Chrysostom, “This man, if he be let go unpunished..., will corrupt likewise all the rest.”

In keeping with Jesus’ words in Matthew 18, those wishing to bring back wanderers should begin at a personal level. Keep the matter “between thee and him alone.” Jeremy Taylor urged: “Let not your reproof be public and personal: if it be public, it must be in general; if it be personal, it must be in private.” Oftentimes straying sheep can be reclaimed without the wider church ever being aware of a problem. If such a private approach fails, a small delegation can often prompt repentance.

Sometimes, however, when the above measures fail and the sin is blatant and public, the church at large must be involved. James Arminius wrote: “If it [the sin] be known to the whole church, the sinner must be reprehended before all the members; for this practice conduces both to the shame of him who has sinned, and to deter others from sinning after his example.”

When churches engage in such actions, kindness and love should always be forefront. The possibility of legal ramifications must also be considered.

At times, the church has gone to extremes. Basil the Great (A.D. 330–379) taught that a repentant murderer should be “excommunicated from the sacrament for twenty years.” Adulterers, 15 years.

Such extremes aside, oh, the beauty of a repentant soul returning to the flock! Benjamin Randall described Thomas Davise, a member of the Free Will Baptist Church in New Durham, New Hampshire, who was disciplined “for his

wayward living.” On June 1, 1799, a heartbroken Davise wrote to his church: “I have brought death upon my own soul! . . . But glory to God, through the riches of His grace and boundless love and tender mercy extended towards me as one of the worst of backsliders, I have found a place of repentance! . . . He has softened my heart, and so it is I feel the power of His love in my soul. . . . While I beg for a reunion with you into the fellowship of the faith, for I want to be readmitted into the privileges of the church and know a union with you again my brethren, I pray you my brethren and sisters to overlook and bury all my faults in oblivion. I hereby promise thee in the strength of the Lord to be more circumspect over my conduct and be engaged more in the cause of God, and to be more faithful and obedient to the commands of God.” **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: www.classicsermonindex.com/.





MERE Spirituality

A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR EVANGELICAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION

BY CHRIS TALBOT

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis likened the historic Christian faith to a hallway “out of which doors open into several rooms.”¹ He argued these rooms are various denominations or theological traditions. The confessional distinctives are found in the rooms, not the hallway. Yet, in case a reader is tempted to stay in the hallway, Lewis reminded us: “It is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, from which to try various doors, not a place to live in.”²

I am thankful for Lewis inviting us into the hall. I have personally been impacted by his apologetics in *Mere Christianity*. And, at least for me, his approach worked. I did not stay in the hall. Instead, I found a hearty meal with the room marked “Free Will Baptist” on the door.

1 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), xv.

2 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xv.

While Lewis sought to use this analogy for apologetics, I want to borrow his language and metaphor to describe a healthy and shared Christian spirituality. Lewis was not offering a reductionistic defense of the Christian faith in *Mere Christianity*. Instead, he offered an intellectually stout defense of the faith. Likewise, I am not interested in offering a weakened view of Christian spirituality but one that is robust and broadly evangelical.

MERE SPIRITUALITY

To offer a healthy and robust view of Christian spirituality across various theological distinctives, I want to propose three important Christian convictions. Like Lewis, I do not think these convictions signify the end of a healthy or complete view of Christian spirituality. Instead, they are a sound starting point for those who wish to promote a richer and more biblical approach to Christian spirituality. One can begin with these



suggestions and grow deeper with Christ in his or her own confessional beliefs. These convictions include: 1) a rich theological anthropology, 2) a committed Protestant soteriology, and 3) an unwavering view of Scripture's sufficiency.

RICH THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY.³ Much could be said on this subject, but two points will suffice. One, a “mere spirituality” should emphasize man’s bearing the image of God (*imago Dei*). As Scripture explains, the *imago Dei* provides the grounding for human worth and dignity; it sets humanity apart from the rest of creation. Thus, any Christian spirituality worth its salt must rightly emphasize man’s unique position in God’s creation.

Two, evangelicals would do well to emphasize mankind is both body and soul. Most derelict approaches to spiritual formation begin with misunderstanding on this point. People either think of man in a purely spiritual (soul) perspective, which fails to account rightly for man’s embodied existence, both now and in eternity, or they focus too much on man’s habits as an embodied creature in a manner that fails to account for man’s immaterial side. One side sees man as only a soul and reinforces a latent Gnosticism, while the other side ends up being nothing more than a baptized naturalism. Instead, a healthy view of spirituality rightly emphasizes both elements of mankind, noting he is both body and soul.

Rightly emphasizing both body and soul means our discipleship practices engage the whole person. We preach and pray and fast and worship knowing we are interacting with people who are not just bodies or souls but both. Our outer habits and our inner life are both important. Our souls can be affected by the things we physically watch and hear, and our physical life can be enriched by biblical spiritual disciplines. With respect to a healthy spiritual life, we are whole people. Consequently, we should emphasize a holistic approach to Christian spirituality.

3 Consider two books on the intersection of Christian spirituality and theological anthropology: Kelly M. Kapic. *You’re Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God’s Design and Why That’s Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022); and Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs. *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1998).

COMMITTED PROTESTANT SOTERIOLOGY.⁴ I avoid using the word *reformed* here because of the wide range in which that word is used (although the traditional understanding of “reformed” is largely what I mean). Specifically, a healthy spirituality includes a clear understanding of total depravity, justification by faith, sanctification, and glorification. While space here does not allow a full exploration of how this implicates spiritual formation practices, I will give one example to illustrate my point.

We must rightly balance justification and sanctification to avoid lopsided spiritual practices. If a believer realizes he or she is justified in Christ — positionally righteous in the eyes of the Father — that believer will avoid any attempt at works-based righteousness. And yet, if one rightly emphasizes sanctification, he also will avoid antinomianism and seek to display loving obedience to God as he seeks to grow closer to Him day by day.

Knowing we are justified before the God of the universe alleviates us from the impossible pressure of earning our own salvation. Likewise, knowing we are called to “work out” or exercise our own salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12) keeps us from a “set it and forget it” approach to our Christian faith.

UNWAVERING VIEW OF SCRIPTURE’S SUFFICIENCY. Years ago, the question for evangelical Christians was whether the Bible was inerrant. While some still debate the question, many have settled on their side of the line. Evangelicals (another contested term) have largely declared the Bible, as God’s Word, is both inerrant and infallible. Yet, while we evangelicals often say out of one side of our mouths the Bible is inerrant, we betray it out of the other by not demonstrating its sufficiency. James Montgomery Boice rightly stated over a decade ago, “Inerrancy is not the most critical issue facing the church today. The most serious issue, I believe, is the Bible’s sufficiency.”⁵ Today, we contradict our statements regarding inerrancy by methods that reject the Bible’s sufficiency.

4 Matthew Bingham’s *A Heart Aflame for God: A Reformed Approach to Spiritual Formation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2025) is a wonderful resource for this subject.

5 James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to The Gospel of Grace? Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 72.

We betray the Bible's sufficiency when we say it is God's Word but fail to live under its daily authority. When it comes to our spirituality, we see this betrayal when people feel a need to add to the Bible's commands on one side or to ignore its commands on the other. Some feel they need to do more than what the Bible commands, inventing practices to make themselves feel more spiritual. Others feel the need to dismiss the clear commands of the Bible, bending to cultural pressure and the spirit of the age and ignoring what the Bible makes clear.

A SIMPLE CONCLUSION

Ultimately, I am convinced theology should drive methodology. What we believe theologically will orient how we approach spiritual practices and discipleship programs. Much more could be said about healthy approaches to Christian discipleship and spiritual formation. But my prayer is that those seeking to find a deeper walk with the Lord are not tempted toward extreme spiritual practices that instead malform the disciple of Christ. I pray these three Christian convictions serve as the "hallway" leading to a rich walk with Christ our Lord.

By rightly emphasizing mankind, we will avoid trying to do things God never intended for us, thereby becoming lopsided in our spiritual formation. Committing to Protestant soteriology will strengthen our resistance against trying to earn our salvation through spiritual practices. Lastly, trusting in the Bible's inerrancy *and* its sufficiency will provide a clear guide to maturing in Christ.

These three convictions are our "mere spirituality" leading from the hallway into rooms where we find food and warmth in the fires and meals of our particular confessions. **ONE**

About the Writer: Chris Talbot is the youth and family ministry program coordinator at Welch College. He is the author of *Remodeling Youth Ministry: A Biblical Blueprint for Ministering to Students*. Learn more: Welch.edu. This article is adapted from an essay originally published by Helwys Society Forum: TheHSF.com/.

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Whitney Lute Named Welch Dean of Students

Gallatin, TN — Mrs. Whitney Lute has been named dean of students at Welch College, according to Dr. Daniel Webster, vice president for administration and student engagement.

Lute has served in Student Services at Welch College since 2020, most recently as women's resident director and interim dean of students. "During her six years of service, Mrs. Lute has demonstrated effective leadership in residence life, student development and conduct, as well as counseling support and crisis response," Webster noted. "Her service has earned the confidence of the college's administration and the respect and support of Welch students."



Mrs. Whitney Lute

President Matt Pinson expressed gratitude for Lute's commitment to the college: "I'm so happy to announce Mrs. Lute's appointment as dean of students. Whitney is deeply committed to the mission of Welch College and to the spiritual, personal, and academic development of our students. We look forward to her continued leadership in Student Services."

Webster, who led the search process, said Lute emerged as the strongest candidate. "Having observed Whitney's leadership

over the past six years, we have seen her compassion and effectiveness," Webster said. "She has the relational gifts to serve students and the administrative ability to lead this program."

Lute earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Welch College and a Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) from Tennessee State University. Throughout the search process, she demonstrated a vision for a Christ-centered campus community where faith and learning are intentionally integrated.

Her qualifications were also affirmed by respected leaders beyond the Welch community. Even prior to the public announcement of the position, the administration received strong letters of recommendation commending her character and leadership. These endorsements affirmed Lute's gifts and abilities are recognized not only by those who serve alongside her at Welch, but also by leaders beyond the institution.

Lute said she is honored by the institution's confidence and grateful for the opportunity to continue serving Welch students. "It is a privilege to serve the student body as dean of students at Welch," she said. "I look forward to continuing the legacy of those who have served before me. I am grateful for the trust the administration and Board have placed in me and am excited to continue facilitating holistic student growth in an atmosphere centered on Christ." **ONE**

Welch College Offers Theater Education Major

Gallatin, TN — Welch College began offering a Theater Education major in the Secondary Education bachelor's degree during the fall semester of 2026, according to Provost Matthew McAfee. Welch has a long history of extracurricular theater performances that have been well-received by students, alumni, and community guests since former Speech and Drama faculty member Mrs. Laura Thigpen first arrived at the college in the 1940s.

In recent years, AnnaGee Harris, theater director and coordinator for enrollment events and student representatives, has produced and directed many popular plays and musicals at Welch, such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and *Sense and Sensibility*, as well as training Welch's touring team *The Evangel Players*. These productions have coincided with Harris' roles in Enrollment Services and as adjunct instructor of theater for the Humanities and Arts degree since fall 2021.

The new program will be directed by Dr. Stephen Beck, undergraduate dean of the school of education. Harris will serve as the primary instructor. Harris is a 2005 Secondary Education and Theology graduate of Welch and holds two master's

degrees, one in teaching from Trevecca Nazarene University and one in theater from Regent University.

"Serving as the theater director at Welch College continues to be an incredibly rewarding and fulfilling experience," said Harris.

Dr. Beck said about the new major, "I am excited about the new opportunities this degree brings to students who are passionate about theater! Our desire is that this program will prepare students to share their love of the arts with the next generation from the perspective of a Christian worldview."

Students studying Secondary Education with a major in Theater will be prepared to pursue state licensure for teaching theater, continue their studies in theater on the graduate level, and engage in professional work as an actor, director, and dramatic writer.

To learn more, visit welch.edu/GoToWelch/ to apply. Visit welch.edu/theater/ for more information about the Welch College Theater Department. **ONE**

A Call for Christian Separation

BY BARRY RAPER

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis painted a vivid picture of spiritual warfare through an ongoing conversation between a head demon (Screwtape) and one of his minions, a demon named Wormwood. The two are working hard to tempt a man, and their conversations about their target are designed by Lewis to help us imagine and understand the opponent's strategy. Consider one exchange about the lure of the world:

Since the Enemy's servants have been preaching about "the World" as one of the great standard temptations for two thousand years, this might seem difficult to do. But fortunately, they have said very little about it for the last few decades. In modern Christian writings, though I see much (indeed more than I like) about Mammon, I see few of the old warnings about Worldly Vanities, the Choice of Friends, and the Value of Time.

Here, the demon celebrates that you don't hear much in Christian circles anymore about worldly vanities, choice of friends, and the value of time. And if these were problems in Lewis' day, how much more today? The Bible makes it clear that the world — both spiritual and physical — is a dangerous place. The values and practices of this present age are a danger to the Christian's testimony and faith.

However, the Church is called to be separate from the world. In verse 17 of this passage, both individual Christians and the local church are called to separation. This word is used in other places in the New Testament. For instance, Paul often stated he was separated or set apart to be an apostle. In this passage, the emphasis falls upon our responsibility to be separate from the world.

First, it is important to understand what separation does *not* mean. We must not separate from relationships with unbelievers. Doing so would cut them off from access to the gospel. Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians 5, requesting the congregation to break fellowship with a man in the church who was guilty of immorality. He requested this action in hope the wayward brother would repent of his sin. But Paul also emphasized this did *not* mean the church

should stop interacting with the world at large. Instead, he echoed the principle taught by Jesus: to be *in* the world but *not of* the world.

LEADING QUESTIONS

Paul began this passage with a command not to be "unequally yoked" with unbelievers. Most commentators agree Paul was alluding to the section in Deuteronomy where the Israelites were told not to yoke different types of animals together for plowing. For centuries, this verse has been used to teach — and rightly so — Christians should not marry unbelievers. After all, there's no greater "yoking" than the bonds of marriage.

However, this principle extends beyond marriage to other relationships. Consider business partnerships. If a Christian starts a business with an unbeliever, it is likely the differing worldview, values, and core beliefs will clash. To emphasize this principle, the Apostle asked a series of rhetorical questions that essentially lead to the same obvious conclusion:

- What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? **None!**
- What communion hath light with darkness? **None!**
- What concord hath Christ with Belial? **None!**
- What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? **None!**
- What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? **None!**

Though we must be in the world to reach the world, Paul makes it clear we must not become united or yoked with the world in the process.

PRECIOUS PROMISES

In verses 16-18, Paul shared "precious promises" from the Old Testament, specifically Isaiah 52, Ezekiel 20, Ezekiel 37, and 2 Samuel 7. God made these covenant promises to Israel, and now they also apply to the new covenant people of God, those in Christ. In this letter, Paul already indicated the



Though we must be in the world to reach the world,...we must not become united or yoked with the world in the process.

promises of God find their yes or *amen* in Christ. If we are in Christ, we have entered a covenant sealed by the blood of Christ, through which God forgives our sins, shares the gift of the Holy Spirit, and writes His laws on our hearts.

These promises come from God Himself, and He will do what He says. These promises reflect God's heart for us; He desires to dwell among us, walk with us, draw us close as sons and daughters. They focus on who God is to every believer: our ever-present Father, welcoming us as sons and daughters.

We all grow weary of politicians who say they are going to do this or that, only to get elected and do exactly the opposite. Sure, some are well-intentioned, but good intentions are not the same as following through. Rest assured! God always keeps His promises to us.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

These promises bring responsibility. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (verse 17). We must cleanse ourselves. What defiles the flesh and spirit? Moral pollution comes from both outward action and inward attitudes and desires. We are guilty of defiling the flesh and spirit when we go against God's clearly revealed will in the Bible.

How do we cleanse ourselves? We can only be cleansed by the blood of Christ. The old hymn answers the question

simply: "What can wash away my sins? *Nothing but the blood of Jesus.* What can make me whole again? *Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*"

Once Christ has cleansed our hearts and souls, we have a responsibility to live with newness of life, to allow the Holy Spirit to work within us and keep on perfecting holiness. This is an ongoing process and will never be completed in this life. From the moment we accept Christ as our Savior, we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, becoming more like Him until the day we die.

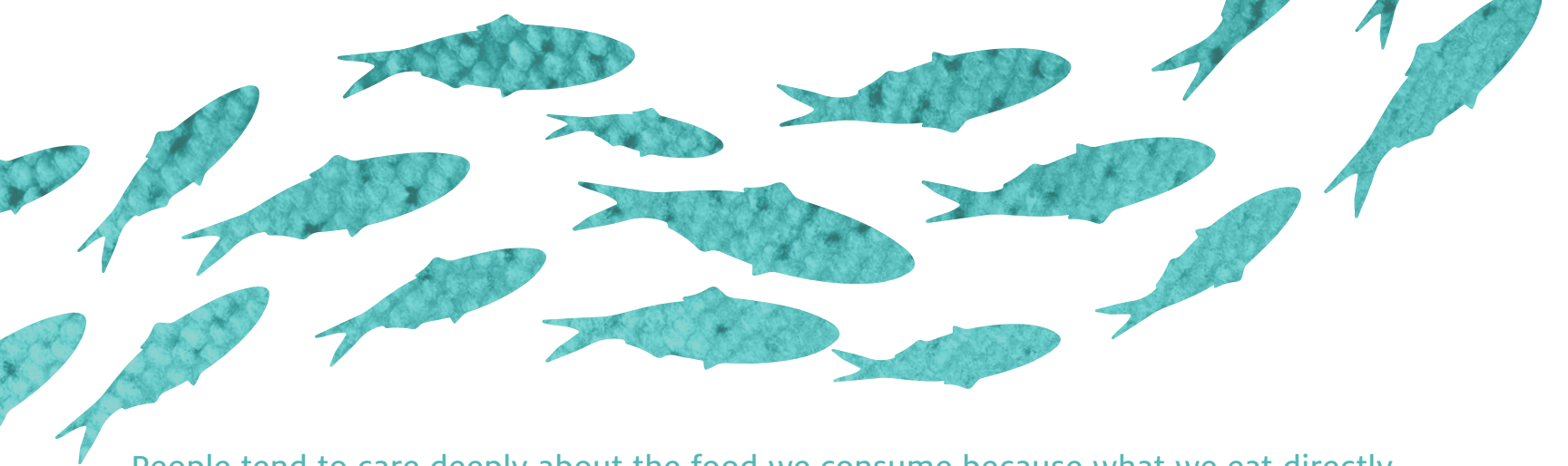
During the pandemic, we all got used to washing our hands more frequently. I still carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer in my truck, and it has become a regular habit to use sanitizer after I have been in a public space. While I do not suggest we become obsessed with introspection regarding our Christian lives, we should cleanse ourselves regularly by comparing our lives to the perfect guide of God's Word and letting His Spirit point out imperfections.

God does not save us to take us out of the world. He leaves us here to *reach* the world for Christ. And our separated lives — lives reflecting the change Christ makes within — should draw others toward the Savior. **ONE**

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

The God Who Feeds

BY NICOLAS CRUZ



People tend to care deeply about the food we consume because what we eat directly impacts our overall health, but do we take spiritual nutrition as seriously as physical nutrition? We should, because Jesus fulfills both our physical and spiritual nourishment.

At the beginning of John 6, a large crowd followed Jesus to the Sea of Tiberias, and looking at the throng, Jesus asked His disciples how they could feed the crowd. Jesus then took five loaves of bread and two fish, fed the five thousand people, and even had leftovers!

The next day, after walking across the sea, Jesus arrived at a synagogue in Capernaum and began to teach. Starting in verse 35, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

The Jews listening began to grumble and reject His words. Some followers even said it was a hard saying, and many left. But Peter, when questioned by Jesus regarding whether he and the other eleven disciples also would leave Him, replied simply in verse 68: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”

Imagine for a moment you were one of the five thousand Jesus fed. You had no idea where He got enough food that everyone was satisfied, or how there were leftovers. The next day, after following Him into the synagogue where He explained this miraculous meal provided only a glimpse into the spiritual food He provides, you reject Him and leave.

Not only did the Jews and other skeptics around Jesus reject the idea He could fulfill their physical needs, but also their spiritual needs. They ultimately rejected the Father, which resulted in eternal separation from Him. Perhaps this was why Jesus was so hurt by those who still refused to acknowledge Him as Messiah.¹ The Jews who claimed to follow God, but who

¹ Calvin, Jean, David W. Torrance, Thomas F. Torrance, and Parker T H L. *The Gospel According to St John, 11-21; and the First Epistle of John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979, p. 50.



rejected Christ, ultimately rejected their faith in God.² In John 10:11, Jesus declared He was sent by the Father to be the Good Shepherd, not just to Israel, but to all who would put their faith in Him.³

Today, we think how foolish these skeptics were for leaving after experiencing this miraculous meal firsthand, but I think John provided a glimpse into the type of nourishment they craved. They were not ready for spiritual food (although they desperately needed it). Instead, they were overly focused on their physical needs. Jesus, having a physical body, knew hunger and thirst, and He cares deeply about our physical health, but how much more does He care about our spiritual health?

Psalm 119:135 reminds us that just as food satisfies our stomachs, our spirits long to be satisfied. What can satisfy the growling hunger in our souls? Jesus — the Word made flesh. The One sent by God the Father to deliver us from our sins and fulfill the deep longing in our spirits.

The Word of God provides food for our famished spirits. The feast all of God's children will attend one day will be the most fulfilling event ever experienced. We will never fear going hungry again, whether physically or spiritually. If you've accepted God's gift of salvation, find comfort in Jesus' words when He says anyone who comes to Him will never be cast out (John 6:37b).

If you have never accepted Christ's salvation, come feast with us! The Word of God can provide everlasting nourishment, and there will even be leftovers, as we saw with the bread and fish. This is the call to the "dinner table" — the call to salvation: believe in Jesus as the Messiah who was sent by the Father to pay for our sins.

Make no mistake: Jesus is the *only* eternal food for our souls. If we want to have eternal life, we must come and eat, because "eating is believing."⁴ We might ask, "How do we begin to feed ourselves spiritually?"

First, eat the Word. Develop a healthy and balanced diet of the Word of God.⁵ Although we are living under God's new covenant, we need to explore and understand the "old"

2 Wilhelm, Meyer Heinrich August, W. Urwick, Frederick Crombie, and A. C. Kendrick. *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of John*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1983, p. 382.

3 Cowan, Christopher. "The Father and Son in the Fourth Gospel: Johannine Subordination Revisited." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March 2006, pgs. 117-118.

4 Anizor, Uche. *The Goodness of God in the Gift of Scripture*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2026 p. 112.

5 Ibid.

promises God made to His people. Uche Anizor explains: "God's law is to be obeyed, and His promises trusted."⁶ But how can we trust His promises if we don't know how to obey the law? If we only study the New Testament, we miss out on God's total work of redemption.

Second, feed one another. As fellow Christians, we have a responsibility to others in the flock of God, looking out for their spiritual nourishment. In Galatians 6:1-2 Paul admonished, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.... Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

This may include feeding one another physically. My wife and I visited a "well-fed" Hispanic church just outside New York City. Once the morning service began, the church members remained at the church until the conclusion of the evening service. After the morning service, they ate lunch together, studied the Bible in small groups, and then worshiped together again in the evening.

Third, take in only what is nutritious. Paul identified these nutritious spiritual ingredients in Philippians 4:8: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." If you feel starved today, does your spiritual food meet Scripture's criteria for what is good?

You and I certainly do not remember every instance we were fed (whether physically or spiritually), but whatever it was, it sustained us and led us to where we are today. If you are only eating the Word of God at church, make no mistake, you are malnourished.

Do you feel far from God today? Eat His Word. Read, meditate, and pray through Scripture, and find comfort in knowing you are holding the Word of God, full of life and power, and sufficient to meet your cravings for all eternity.

The table is spread, and there is a seat for you. Come and eat!

ONE

About the Writer: Nicolas Cruz serves as academic office assistant at Welch College in Gallatin, Tennessee. He received his B.A. from Welch and is currently pursuing an M.A. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Indiana Wesleyan University and an M.A. in Humanities at Welch College. Nicolas also serves as a counseling intern at Serenity Counseling. He and his wife Emily are active members at Cofer's Chapel.

6 Ibid., p. 114.

Life in TENSION



AN INVITATION FROM GOD

BY HANNAH CARMACK GADDY

Some seasons only make sense in hindsight. In the moment, often you only see grief, disappointment, and apparently unanswered prayers. Then, out of nowhere, it becomes clear what God had been doing all along. A different rationale suddenly envelopes the mind — peace beyond understanding where one sees clearly the sustaining and ever-present character and love of God. This reminder takes me back to a beautiful image from Genesis 28.

Jacob was fleeing home, exhausted and uncertain about the future. He laid down to sleep in the wilderness, and during the night God met him in a dream. He promised Jacob He would remain with him, keep him, and fulfill every promise spoken over his life. When Jacob woke, his response was simple but deeply convicting: “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not” (Genesis 28:16).

In my current season of new beginnings and comfortable endings, I find myself returning to those words again and again. I can’t help but wonder how often we miss God’s presence because it doesn’t look the way we expected. How often do we become consumed with disappointment, grief, anxiety, and unanswered prayers and fail to recognize His presence all along?

Recently, I emerged from a season marked by heartbreak and disappointment. Looking back, I realized something painful: God was kind to me during that season, yet I missed much of His goodness while living through it. I had one of those Jacob moments: *Surely the Lord was here, and I didn’t know it.* I began to ponder: How many wrestle with this same dilemma? How do we embrace grief and gratitude at the same time? How do we acknowledge heartbreak without losing sight of the good hope offered by the Lord?

I had always *known* these could exist simultaneously, but I struggled to *believe* they could exist simultaneously. If someone hurt me, I assumed love had disappeared. If life felt painful, I assumed goodness was absent. But a mentor once told me

something that changed the way I viewed both relationships and faith: *Two feelings can be true at once. One neither diminishes nor devalues the other.* Now, I understand that more deeply. Love and frustration coexist. Joy and sorrow sit in the same room. Hope and disappointment often occupy the same heart.

The Christian life constantly invites us into this tension, living in the “already and not yet.” We experience the goodness of God now, while living in a broken world awaiting restoration, where beauty and suffering exist side by side. That is, of course, until Christ returns and makes all things new. For now, both realities remain.

Honestly, life there is uncomfortable. However, God never promised the Christian life would be easy. In fact, Scripture repeatedly reminds us hardship is inevitable. Yet, woven throughout every trial is the promise of God’s presence. Isaiah 43:2 affirms, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

Notice God does not say *if* we walk through deep waters or fire. He says *when*. Hardship is not evidence of God’s absence. Sometimes, it is the place where His presence becomes most clear.

Sometimes, I find myself clinging tightly to things I cannot change. I replay conversations, dwell on disappointments, and hold on to frustration as though, somehow, my worrying will change the outcome. But God continually reminds me I was never meant to carry everything alone.

If I truly believe the promises of Scripture, then I can rest and delight in them. Exodus 14:14 says, “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” This verse has become an anchor. A few days after my grandmother’s burial, while out for a walk, I found my mind spiraling through grief, family

tension, and unresolved hurt. As the anxiety grew louder, the Holy Spirit gently interrupted my thoughts with a simple yet important truth: *You do not have to endure this alone.* Often, these spirals result in contempt, bitterness, and sin. This is a pattern we must break. The Christian life, in tension, can have something better.

In that moment I pictured myself breathing in God’s promises and breathing out fear. Breathing in peace. Breathing out control. Breathing in truth. Breathing out the exhausting need to hold everything together myself. Those feelings did not magically disappear, but they no longer held me in their grasp.

That distinction matters.

Human emotions are real, but they are not our foundation. God’s Word is. A loving Father does not shame us for our grief; He meets us inside our grief and gently directs our eyes toward something steadier than feelings. Feelings are made and given to us by God, but feelings often make us good followers, not good leaders. I am reminded of the Israelites beside the Red Sea in Exodus 14. God led them there into a situation that looked impossible — behind them an army,

before them a seemingly impassable body of water. Fear made complete sense in that moment. Yet God had not trapped them but positioned them for an unimaginable deliverance.

Sometimes, God brings us to places where our only option is trust. With our “backs against the wall,” we finally realize He alone can save. He told the Israelites three simple (yet difficult) things: do not fear; stand firm; be silent.

What if we lived that way? What if we stopped our thoughts long enough to recognize God is already present in our uncertainty? What if we believed peace is not just something waiting in eternity but available through Christ right now? As Christians, it is easy to settle for head knowledge — knowing

Two feelings
can be true
at once.
One neither
diminishes
nor devalues
the other.

Hardship is
not evidence
of God's
absence.
Sometimes,
it is the place
where His
presence
becomes
most clear.

Scripture, quoting verses, agreeing with truth intellectually. But living as though we truly believe God is near is something entirely different.

When we remain in Scripture daily, God gradually reshapes us from the inside out. We learn to surrender fear, not feed it. We practice replacing bitterness with gentleness, anxiety with trust, despair with hope. This is sanctification. The slow, refining work of becoming more like Christ. And it requires intentional surrender again and again.

Sure, I still have dreams, disappointments, fears, and unanswered questions. But I no longer fear I have been forgotten by God. The same God who led the Israelites to the Red Sea opened a way to the other side. The same God who met Jacob in the wilderness still meets His daughters today.

Even here. Even now.

If you find yourself in a season of tension, grieving while trying to hope, waiting while trying to trust, maybe Jacob's words can become your prayer too: *Surely the Lord is in this place.*

Even when you do not see Him. **ONE**

About the Writer: Hannah Gaddy is married to Frank Gaddy and is one of five siblings. She is proud to be the middle child and loves coming from a big family. A recent graduate of Welch College, she is excited to discover what God will use her to do. Her favorite things include hosting friends, going to Trader Joe's, and learning new coffee recipes.



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Everlasting Thursday



BY BRENDA EVANS



Thursday is laundry day at our house, and today is Thursday. Although I chose Thursday, I don't remember why. When our three sons were young, laundry was most days, except Sunday. They showered a lot, one of them three times a day because he was always into athletics. The others were, too, but his laundry pile was always bigger than theirs. As they left home one by one, the piles grew smaller, so laundry day eventually devolved into one day, Thursday, as weird as that choice seems to me now.

When I was young, Monday was laundry day. Mother called it "wash day." That meant my sister and I would crank up rainwater from our cistern, some for Mother to heat in big pots on the stove for the wringer washer, and some to dump unheated directly into our zinc rinsing tubs.

Today, I thought of all that. I also wept a little, partly because I felt nostalgic about Mother's Monday wash day, and how hard she worked at our GE wringer machine, rinsing tubs, and sagging clothesline. I also wept because of the intense pain in my legs for which two doctors and a physical therapist can't pinpoint a cause or offer a remedy.

Later today, I'll do PT, and what do I say to my doctor/physical therapist? Act like it's helping, when in fact, the pain is rip-roaring, and PT is doing diddly-squat to relieve it? Today is also a Jeremiah day, which means I'm alternating between whining about pain, doing laundry, and reading the Weeping Prophet, who, by the way, had plenty of things to whine about, many



more than I do. The Lord's message to the people of Judah was hard, and they didn't want to hear or heed. So, Jeremiah, God's spokesman, complained, and he was a good complainer — if complaining can be considered good.

What I mean is, six times he groaned aloud to the Lord. Sometimes, the Lord rebuked him; at other times the Lord spoke consolations: "I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee" (15:20). Though Jeremiah kept complaining, he also kept speaking God's message.

His sixth complaint was the sharpest. Pashur, a priest, false prophet, and chief officer in the household of the Lord, railed against Jeremiah's message. He beat Jeremiah and put him in stocks. Eventually released, Jeremiah gave Pashur an even harder message from the Lord. I'll paraphrase: *You will be the downfall of both you and your friends. You will watch them fall by the sword. All Judah, including you and your household, will go into captivity in Babylon; you'll die there and be buried, and so will your friends* (20:1-6).

Ridicule followed. Jeremiah was churned up and down. He became a laughingstock: "Every one mocketh me," he said, yet "his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones...and I could not stay [keep from speaking]" (20:7-9). Shortly, despite the burning fire he couldn't hold in, he flopped

the other way: "Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" (20:18).

Self-pity, confusion, and indecision were jumbled together, and why not? Jeremiah had been publicly beaten and shamed. What if something worse were ahead? Confusion must have thrived on those *what ifs*, despite that "burning fire" roaring in Jeremiah's heart.

Still, the Lord minced no words. Jeremiah and his complaints were secondary to the message Judah and the king should hear. Jeremiah needed to get on with it. The Lord said tell the people, "I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the Lord: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire." (21:10). So, Jeremiah went on speaking the Lord's warning.

The Weeping Prophet did not know he would be seized again, beaten, cast into a dungeon, confined to the courtyard of the guard, lowered into a muddy cistern to die of starvation, then finally raised from it but still confined. In the end, both he and Baruch, his transcriptionist, would be taken to Egypt by men who flouted God's warning not to go there to escape the Babylonians (chapters 37, 38, 43).

Jeremiah did not see all this ahead, and we don't know any of the *what ifs* that plagued him. We do know *what ifs* can be torture for worriers and complainers. They were for me on that Thursday laundry day. The intense pain and my what-if-this-never-goes-away attitude stirred up more self-pity. What could I do but plunge further on with the Weeping Prophet? That's when my laundry Thursday became an everlasting Thursday.

In Chapter 30, the Lord told Jeremiah to write down all He had said to and through the prophet in a book. Then, He encouraged Jeremiah not to be afraid. God would bring deliverance, both to the prophet and to the nation. From there, promises and more warnings go on and on.

Surprisingly, in 31:3-4, the Lord dropped rare and precious words on Jeremiah and me. He explained Himself and why He would show mercy: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built."

Oh, my, an *everlasting love*. A love *now*, a love in the *past*, a love in the *future*. A perpetual love, unending; a love always there, world without end. A faithful love, a building love — for Jeremiah, for these ancient people, for all who are His children, including me, a whining, self-pitying complainer, crying in pain and doing Thursday laundry.



*Yea, I have
loved thee with an
everlasting love:
therefore with
lovingkindness
have I drawn thee
(Jeremiah 31:3).*



over them to do them good” (32:41). *Them* — yes, that’s Judah and Jeremiah but also you, me, and all others whose trust and faithfulness are founded in Him.

Jeremiah’s was an evil day, and so is ours. But God reminded Jeremiah and us He was and still is the true and living God, the *everlasting* King with *everlasting* love who keeps His *everlasting* covenant and will do good for His people *forever* (10:10; 31:3; 32:40). I finished Jeremiah’s book several days later, and by the end, the Lord had warned me one hundred times to repent, to cling to His “*everlastingness*.”

Gratitude began to well up within me for the Lord’s *everlasting* love, and I went on into Chapter 32. There, the Lord promised to also make an *everlasting* covenant with His people. He said He would give us a single heart and a single way, so we would not turn from Him. Then He added, “I will rejoice

The word the Lord used to describe Himself and His work hung with me. It still hangs in my heart. I dug deeper into the Hebrew word for *everlasting*. *Olam* is used more than four hundred times in the Old Testament. In addition to *everlasting*, it is translated *forever*, *ever*, *evermore*, *always*, *unending*, *eternal*, and *eternity*. Or, to say it in everyday words, it never runs out.

Scholars believe Jeremiah’s ministry may have lasted more than fifty years — half of a century he endured repeated threats, beatings, imprisonments, hunger, isolation, ridicule, rejection, and, finally, exile to Egypt where the Lord had warned Jeremiah and His people never to go. So much suffering! I felt ashamed I had complained.

Then and there, my Thursday became more than a day of complaints and laundry. It became an *everlasting* Thursday. A day of soul-scrubbing repentance, attitude-cleansing adjustment, and sweet-smelling gratitude for my *everlasting* King, His *everlasting* love, His *everlasting* covenant. A blessed day — an *everlasting* Thursday. **ONE**

About the Writer: Brenda Evans lives and works in Ashland, Kentucky. You may reach her at beejayevans@windstream.net.

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ASK *Your* PASTOR ABOUT HIS RETIREMENT PLAN



BY JOHN BRUMMITT

Over the last several years, the government has made a strong push to implement requirements for employers to provide retirement benefits. Some state governments have started their own plans, so if an employer doesn't offer retirement benefits, they either must use the state plan or develop their own plan to meet the state mandate.

On the federal side, things have been busy as well. Multiple acts over the last few years have been designed to build retirement savings for U.S. workers. Why? These government entities seek to protect our country from a "retirement crisis," where the money saved does not meet the needs of retirees. These entities seek to give people options by providing income for their final years. Mandates and changes benefit workers, even if additional expense and effort is required on the employer's side.

Churches have a unique option regarding their retirement benefits. They can use the denominational retirement plan, which meets all governmental requirements and mandates. This allows the church to focus on its ministry without the additional burden of keeping up with benefits laws.

The retirement plan from Richland Ave Financial has been set up through the National Association of Free Will Baptists so each church, while separate, can be treated as part of the whole, allowing the benefits to be maintained throughout

a career of service rather than switching each time a pastor moves from one pastorate to another.

The retirement plan keeps funds active and growing over the pastor's career without disruptions, such as rollovers or closeouts between one pastorate and the next. It also provides additional benefits to pastors that are unavailable through other types of retirement plans, including the ministerial housing allowance option.

Currently, only a third of churches within the denomination offer or provide their pastors with the retirement option. Often, when a pastor is hired by the church, it is up to the pastor to ask for retirement benefits. This can be awkward for a new pastor and may be a difficult subject to bring up. As members, deacons, and lay leadership within the church, we often overlook these resources enjoyed by workers in the secular world (and often received automatically).

While government mandates affect some churches and require them to provide benefits to their employees, many churches are exempt from these requirements. These exemptions are usually given because of the separation of church and state. But, as with anything in this world, if churches don't keep up with the financial standard, pastors fall further behind in terms of quality of life.

If you were buying a new car, the list of standard equipment on the base vehicle is vastly different than it was two decades ago. These days, if A/C were considered an extra option, you would probably find a different model! The same advancements have been made to pay packages as well. Providing retirement benefits to our church employees should have become standard years ago!

If your church doesn't provide retirement benefits for your pastor, or if you are unsure whether they do, ask! Ask the awkward question so your pastor doesn't have to. A little change to the church's overall budget would make a massive difference to the pastor (and to the church as well).

Providing retirement benefits helps your church and the denomination begin working to meet the retirement crisis. This crisis will be the same, if not worse, than the crisis coming for the rest of the U.S. When workers can't retire due to a lack of funds, they stay too long in their current jobs, which, in turn, denies positions to new workers, who then go elsewhere for employment. In the church world, this leads

our next generation of pastors to look elsewhere for employment, whether a secular job or in churches outside our denomination.

Retirement savings help churches and denominations have natural off-ramps for one generation and on-ramps for the next. Retirement savings also allow pastors to transition into another phase of ministry: mentoring the next generation and filling vital roles in our churches and denomination they didn't have the opportunity to fill in the past.

You may be the first person at your church to ask about your pastor's retirement. Enrolling your pastor in the denominational plan adds peace of mind for him and provides for his family in the future. All the result of a single question.

So, ask your pastor about his retirement plan! Sure, it's a tough question, but it's vitally important. **ONE**

About the Writer: John Brummitt became director of Richland Ave Financial in January 2016. He graduated in 2011 with an MBA from Tennessee Tech University. A 2004 graduate of Welch College, John has served with Richland Ave Financial since spring 2006.

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PREPARING for *Tomorrow's* *Ministry*

BY CHRIS COMPTON

For generations, Free Will Baptists have demonstrated the commitment to faithfully support Kingdom work through local churches. Because of good stewardship and sacrifices by those who came before us, many of our churches enjoy the fruits of those labors that continue to impact lives today.

Every church is entrusted with resources that not only belong ultimately to God but are also to be used for His purposes. Whether finances, facilities, equipment, land, or faithful tithing and giving, these resources are not just assets to be maintained but rather resources to be used to advance the gospel.

As stewards of these resources, churches have a responsibility to carry out today's ministry needs while also preparing for future ministry opportunities.

Many churches naturally focus on today's needs and expenses. While this is important and necessary, it shouldn't stop there. Biblical stewardship calls us to look beyond the here and now and make preparation for the future. Churches should consider how today's decisions strengthen (or weaken) ministry for generations to come.

One of the first steps churches should take toward long-term stewardship is developing a clear financial plan. As a congregation makes budgetary decisions, they should make sure the budget reflects ministry priorities and supports both present and future ministry opportunities. Ask questions like: What has God called this church to do in the next five to ten years? Are we storing or stewarding? And before all the numbers appear on paper, anchor the budget biblically.

Another important aspect of stewardship is preparing for future needs and ministry opportunities God may provide. These needs don't always give a "heads up." Churches will inevitably face unexpected building repairs, equipment replacement, or economic challenges that place



significant strain on church finances. At the same time, God may open doors for new ministries, community outreach, missions involvement, or facility expansion. Establishing reserve funds and practicing sound financial management will help churches respond to challenges and opportunities without disrupting ministry.

As a church prepares for the future, leadership also should consider how excess funds can be strategically invested for future ministry purposes. Too often, churches keep excess funds in a checking or savings account. Rather than allowing significant resources to sit idle in low-yield accounts, a church may benefit from investment options that align with their values and risk tolerance. Properly managed investments help preserve purchasing power, provide additional income for ministry, and support long-term ministry goals.

As your church develops a financial plan, it is important to remember this is not merely a financial responsibility; it is a spiritual one. Every dollar entrusted to a church represents an opportunity to impact souls with the gospel and strengthen

the church's ability to fulfill its purpose and mission.

When a church stewards resources well, they position themselves to disciple believers, serve their communities, support missionaries, and expand ministry opportunities for generations to come. This is about more than preserving resources. This is about growing the Kingdom.

Richland Ave Financial is available to help. Through our institutional investing program and financial resources tailored to churches and ministry organizations, we can partner with your leadership team. We can provide guidance on managing your financial resources and preparing for future ministry opportunities. We welcome an opportunity to begin a conversation and help your church prepare for future ministry. Learn more: richlandavefinancial.com/. 

About the Writer: Chris Compton is the CFO for Richland Ave Financial. He graduated in 2007 with an M.A. in Bible Exposition from Columbia International University. A 1998 graduate of East Tennessee State University, he has over two decades of administrative and financial experience in various fields, along with seven years in pastoral ministry.

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Phrases Leaders Struggle to Say, Part 5

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

The previous four columns explored phrases that reveal a leader's courage, humility, capacity, and willingness to change course. This final installment shifts our attention from what happens within a leader to what happens when leaders intentionally invite others into the journey. Leadership has never been a solo endeavor. If you cannot invite followers into something greater than yourself, you are not leading; you are simply doing.

Perhaps no phrase is misunderstood more than **"I need your help."** Some assume asking for help signals weakness or a lack of competence. Healthy leaders know otherwise. Inviting others into the work demonstrates competence rather than insecurity, while pursuing something greater than yourself. Seeking help values the gifts of the team above the ego of the leader. Organizations become stronger when leaders stop carrying every burden and empower others to share ownership of the mission. As a follower, earn that ownership through similar team dynamics and growing competence.

The phrase, **"Your idea is better than mine,"** demonstrates remarkable objectivity. Leaders are not called to win arguments; they are called to pursue the best outcome. Recognizing a better idea reveals integrity, emotional security, and a commitment to what is right over the desire to be right. Teams become more innovative when people believe the best ideas, not simply the leader's ideas, will shape the organization's future.

Admitting, **"I need coaching,"** or even, **"I need counseling,"** carries far less stigma than it once did. The healthiest leaders recognize they also need mentors, coaches, counselors, and trusted advisors. That decision grants permission for everyone else to seek shaping from others. Leaders who invest in their own development create organizations where learning becomes part of the culture. Learn from people, books, mistakes, and weaknesses.

The final phrase may be the hardest of all: **"I need you to hold me accountable."** Throughout my career, I have invited younger team members to identify my overused phrases, trusted colleagues to challenge my blind spots, and mentors to tell me when my leadership loses effectiveness,



so I will not overstay my role. Many people hesitate to offer honest feedback because they fear receiving it in return. Yet Scripture reminds us **iron sharpens iron**. Leaders who welcome correction become sharper, wiser, and more effective. Leaders who avoid accountability eventually dull both themselves and those they lead. Are you sharpening others while becoming sharper yourself?

These four phrases share a common interactive responsibility. Leadership flourishes through collaboration, not isolation. Leaders who ask for help multiply influence. Leaders who embrace better ideas strengthen decisions. Leaders who seek coaching continue growing. Leaders who invite accountability remain teachable.

The strongest leaders are rarely the most independent. They are secure enough to let others make them better. **Leadership is never completed alone. Neither is a leader.** 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@d6family.com.

WNAC Exhibit Features “Pop-Up” Provision Closet

Columbus, OH — At this year’s National Convention, WNAC featured a “pop-up” Provision Closet in their booth in the Exhibit Hall. The Provision Closet is a warehouse located in the WNAC office in Nashville, Tennessee, filled with anything and everything missionaries and church planters could need, either on the field or stateside.

I was privileged to help manage the pop-up Provision Closet at the convention. We received donations from churches across the denomination on Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, missionaries and church planters attending the convention stopped by and picked up anything they needed.

I spoke with missionaries and church planters who needed little things: measuring cups, sheets, bedding for growing kids. One new missionary was overwhelmed at the thought of what she’d need or what she could even take with her. We were able to provide her gift cards, since every missionary needs good luggage.

A recently appointed church-planting family stopped by for cooking utensils and sheets. The husband, who

grew up in a church planting family, knew the Provision Closet well. He told me about visiting the closet in Nashville as a child.

His family picked out a box with a hand-crank radio pictured on it, and he and his siblings were thrilled to get it home. When they opened it, they found beautiful glass goblets instead. His parents handed these down to his family when they were appointed as new church planters.

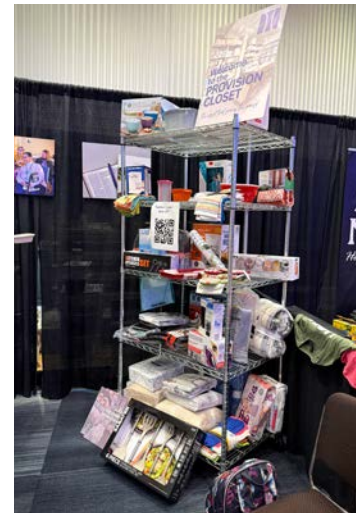
I could share many other stories — pitchers to serve lemonade to international students and utensils to prepare meals for families who haven’t heard the gospel. We even supplied items for missionary kids moving into their new dorms.

Your gifts have made — and continue to make — a difference.

If a one dollar *Go Fish!* card game can be used to teach English, imagine what else can make a difference? The Provision Closet doesn’t just serve the world; it reaches the world with the gospel, as missionaries and church planters use the items you’ve given to reach people for Christ.

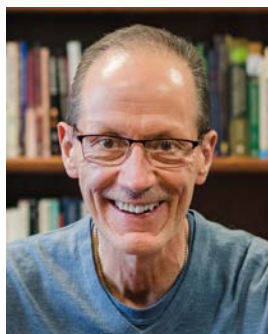
Learn more about the ministry of WNAC, including the Steward Provision Closet at wnac.org/. **ONE**

— Submitted by Rebekah Lopes



Lawless to Speak at 2026 Leadership Conference

Nashville, TN — Dr. Chuck Lawless, senior professor of Evangelism and Missions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary will headline the 2026 Leadership Conference, December 7-8, at Sonesta Nashville Airport. Pastors and church leaders from across the denomination will gather to examine “Church Tools: The Basics of Effective Ministry,” a refreshing look at what really matters in ministry. Lawless will speak four times: twice during Monday and Tuesday keynote sessions, along with sessions Tuesday morning.



Dr. Chuck Lawless

Dr. Lawless serves as the dean of Doctoral Studies and the vice-president of Spiritual Formation and Ministry Centers at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, where he also serves as professor of Evangelism and Missions. Dr. Lawless was awarded an M.Div. and a Ph.D. in Evangelism and Church Growth from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where he also served as a professor and the dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism. Prior to that, Lawless pastored two Ohio churches. He is a frequent conference speaker and the author of several books, including *Disciplined Warriors*, *Putting on the Armor*, *Mentor*, and *Nobodies for Jesus*. Dr. Lawless and his wife, Pam, have been married more than 30 years, and they live in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

“Chuck Lawless brings a strong interest in discipleship and mentoring,” notes Executive Secretary Eddie Moody. “His perspective as a pastor, educator, and church practitioner are unique, and we encourage Free Will Baptists to take advantage of an opportunity to enjoy hearing Dr. Lawless in person.”

Five additional seminars from Derek Altom (TN), Dr. Ron Hunter Jr. (TN), Dr. Jeff Manning (NC), Dr. Brad Ransom (TN), and Dr. W. Jackson Watts (MO) will offer practical guidance on topics ranging from discipleship and sermon preparation to church systems and structure. Throughout the conference, attendees will establish and renew friendships over meals, explore new resources from national departments, and enjoy visiting the Nashville area.

Multiple boards and committees will meet in conjunction with the conference, including the Executive Committee; D6 Family Ministry; Free Will Baptist Foundation; IM, Inc.; North American Ministries; Richland Ave Financial; Welch College; WNAC; the Historical Commission; and state leaders and promotional directors.

“Leadership Conference is such a great time for ‘iron to sharpen iron,’” observed conference director Ryan Lewis. “Attendees not only gain valuable insight from speakers and presenters, but they also swap ideas, share burdens, and spend time with others who understand ministry.”

For updates or registration, visit nafwb.org/leader/.

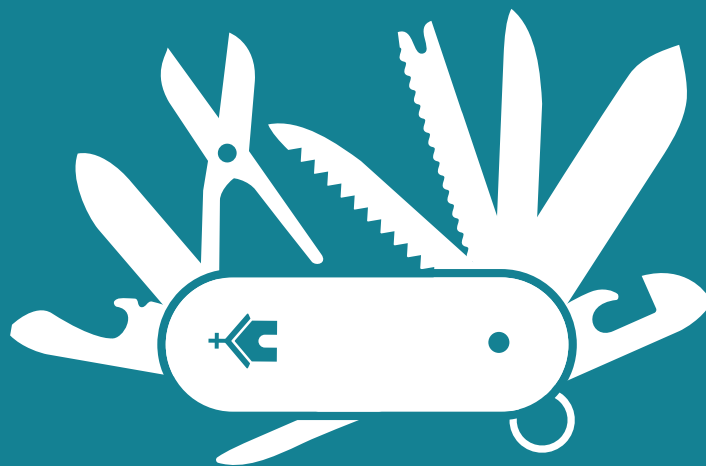
CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

- 3:00 Registration Opens
- 5:30 Dinner
- 7:00 **Session 1** — *The Healthy Leader: Guarding Your Walk With God*, Dr. Chuck Lawless

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

- 8:00 Breakfast
- 9:00 **Session 2** — *Stop Counting What Doesn't Count: Rethinking Your Discipleship Strategy*, Dr. Ron Hunter, Jr.
- 10:00 **Session 3** — *The Healthy Church: Recognizing What Matters Most*, Dr. Chuck Lawless
- 10:50 Break
- 11:10 **Session 4** — *The Disciple-Making Church: Developing People Who Develop Others*, Dr. Chuck Lawless
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:30 **Breakout Sessions**
 - Dr. Jeff Manning** — *From Text to Transformation: The Essential Tools of Effective Preaching*
 - Dr. W. Jackson Watts** — *Bylaws: Why They Matter, Where to Start, and Other Frequently Asked Questions*
- 2:30 **Breakout Sessions**
 - Derek Altom** — *Give Me Five! Five Practices That Should Shape Your Ministry and Create Lifelong Disciples*
 - Dr. Brad Ransom** — *Building Systems That Support the Church's Mission*
- 5:30 Dinner
- 7:00 **Session 5** — *The Evangelistic Church: Leading Your Congregation into the Community*, Dr. Chuck Lawless



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The Kind of Leader Every Church Needs

BY EDDIE MOODY

Most people never realize how far their influence reaches. The best leaders continue shaping others long after they are gone. One of those leaders in my life was J.P. Seley.

I was sitting in my friend Les Strickland's living room when the pulpit committee from Tippet's Chapel FWB Church interviewed me. Everything seemed to be going well until Mr. Seley asked, "You mean you aren't planning to quit your job?"

I explained I intended to serve as a bivocational pastor. Although I could tell he wasn't convinced, I appreciated his honesty. I'd known Mr. Seley in another context, but this was my first experience with him as a prospective church member. He was a straight shooter. You never had to wonder what he was thinking. Looking back, I came to appreciate that quality because I *always* knew where I stood with him.

As pastor, our church experienced a few challenges. Like many young pastors, I quietly wondered if the church regretted calling me. One day, I shared those concerns with

Mr. Seley. His response surprised me. "As far as I can tell," he said, "our best days are ahead."

Those simple words changed my perspective. He wasn't just reassuring. He was encouraging. From that day forward, I knew he had my back, and that confidence gave me the courage to keep leading.

One Sunday evening, after our young people sang a song that didn't match everyone's preferred style,

I could sense tension in the room. Then Mr. Seley stood. My heart sank, and I wondered what he would say. He smiled and said, "Pastor, I don't think I've ever been happier than I am right now to see these young people singing in church."

With one brief statement, he redirected the congregation's attention away from personal preferences and toward what truly mattered, the next generation. That moment shaped our church far more than he probably ever realized.

Mr. Seley also demonstrated faithful love, first when his sister became ill, and later when his wife developed Alzheimer's disease. He cared for both of them with remarkable faithfulness. When his wife entered a care facility, he visited every day, living out what it means to love your spouse "for better or for worse."

As the years passed, Mr. Seley urged us to let him know when he was no longer serving effectively. He loved the church too much to become an obstacle. Eventually, that day came. While visiting him in the same care facility where he faithfully visited his wife, he said, "Pastor, you have to take my name off the church roll." I asked him why. He explained he had tried to leave the facility "unauthorized." Then he said he didn't want to do anything to hurt the church. Even in his diminished capacity, his greatest concern was the reputation of the church he loved.

Mr. Seley passed away at age 94 —16 years ago this month. I still hear his voice. So do many others who served alongside him. We smile, laugh, and remember. His influence did not end when his life did.

That is godly influence. A life marked by faithfulness, encouragement, humility, sacrificial love, and devotion to Christ's church continues to shape people long after the leader is gone. Every church needs leaders like J.P. Seley. May God help each of us be that kind of leader. **ONE**



Eddie Moody
Executive Director,
National Association of
Free Will Baptists

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PRAY

Pray together for pastors, every day at 9:38!

"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

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A large, stylized 'X' graphic composed of four arrow-like shapes pointing towards the center. The top-left and bottom-right shapes are orange, while the top-right and bottom-left shapes are red. The central vertical bar of the 'X' is white.

MULTIPLY

MATTHEW 28:18-20

» NOV. 22, 2026 «



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