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WE SHOULD NOT LOOK for excuses for wriggling out of our obligation when occasion offers to talk to others about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we find ourselves shrinking from this responsibility, and trying to evade it, we need to face ourselves with the fact that in this we are yielding to sin and Satan.

We need to pray that we may so overflow in love to God that we should overflow in love to our fellowmen, and so find it an easy and natural and joyful thing to share with them the good news of Christ.—J. I. Packer (Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, InterVarsity Press)
MINISTRY SNAPSHOT

Lee University’s Summer Honors program concluded a successful two-week term in June, exposing high-achieving students to life at Lee. A record number of 173 students participated.

If you have a ministry photo to be considered for this page, send it to evangel@pathwaypress.org.

CHURCH OF GOD DECLARATION OF FAITH

WE BELIEVE:

1. In the verbal inspiration of the Bible.
2. In one God eternally existing in three persons; namely, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
3. That Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. That Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. That He ascended to heaven and is today at the right hand of the Father as the Intercessor.
4. That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that repentance is commanded of God for all and necessary for forgiveness of sins.
5. That justification, regeneration, and the new birth are wrought by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.
6. In sanctification subsequent to the new birth, through faith in the blood of Christ; through the Word, and by the Holy Ghost.
7. Holiness to be God’s standard of living for His people.
8. In the baptism with the Holy Ghost subsequent to a clean heart.
9. In speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance and that it is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Ghost.
10. In water baptism by immersion, and all who repent should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
11. Divine healing is provided for all in the Atonement.
12. In the Lord’s Supper and washing of the saints’ feet.
13. In the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.
14. In the bodily resurrection; eternal life for the righteous, and eternal punishment for the wicked.
Among the parting words of our Lord Jesus Christ prior to His ascension was the command to preach the Gospel. Specifically, He directed that repentance and the forgiveness of sins “be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). In response, His disciples “went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed” (Mark 16:20).

One cannot read the New Testament without recognizing the prominence of preaching. More than 115 times the words translated for preaching appear, with the principal words such as kerusso, “to herald” (as a royal proclamation), and evangelizo, “to announce the good news,” occurring more than 50 times each. When it came to fulfilling the Great Commission, “every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

John preached the baptism of repentance (10:37). Philip preached Christ at Samaria (8:5). Peter said Jesus “ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead” (10:42). Paul said he was ordained and appointed to be a preacher (1 Tim. 2:7, 2 Tim. 1:11) and believed all other duties to be subordinate to that divine call (1 Cor. 1:17). Timothy was instructed to “preach the word . . . in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2). Peter advised those who were scattered and living as aliens to “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

Believers in the New Testament could not but preach, lest they deny their own identity and abdicate their ordained purpose. Likewise, the Church of God has been known historically as a preaching church.

When recounting the phenomenal growth that occurred early in the church’s history, historian Charles W. Conn wrote:

During the year, the ministers preached everywhere they could gain an audience—in churches, under tents, in open fields, under brush arbors, in homes, in schoolhouses, on street corners, or to individuals met by chance. They preached because of an inner compulsion known as a divine calling; they preached because the message of God was burning upon their hearts; they preached because they loved their fellowman; they preached because they must preach or go to hell. They preached because there were sinners to rescue, believers to baptize, afflicted to heal, skeptics to convince, minds to train, and hopeless ones to comfort.

They received no praise and did not expect it; they did not preach for plaudits of men or because of vanity of heart—they preached because they had to preach. The choice was God’s and the responsibility was theirs.

They were sometimes stoned, pelted with rotten eggs and tomatoes, ridiculed, scorned, cursed, reviled, malign’d, beaten, spat upon, shot at, feared, and sometimes loved; but they were not ignored. . . . They received little or no pay; for five out of six worked during the day and preached at night. But they still preached . . . and as they preached, many heard and believed, and the Pentecostal faith spread wonderfully (Like a Mighty Army).

Preaching is rooted in Scripture and revealed in the unfolding story of the Church. Preaching did not emerge from empirical research or the Church’s experimentation with various communication techniques. The Church does not preach because preaching is thought to be a good idea or an effective communication technique. Rather, we preach because we have been commanded to spread the Gospel.

*All scriptures are from the New King James Version.
HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE IS HERE

DURING A DEBATE in his 2004 U.S. Senate campaign, Barack Obama said, “My religious faith dictates marriage is between a man and a woman; gay marriage is not a civil right.” In 2008, as a senator running for the presidency, Obama stated, “I believe marriage is the union between a man and a woman. As a Christian it’s also a sacred union.”

In 2012, President Obama told ABC News, “It is important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married.”

On June 26, 2015, Obama celebrated the U.S. Supreme Court’s legitimization of same-sex marriage by authorizing the White House’s illumination with rainbow lights. He called it “a moment worth savoring.”

Obama’s flip-flop parallels the American public’s changing attitude toward homosexuality. In a 2008 Gallup poll, 78 percent of Americans said gay and lesbian relationships are morally acceptable. In May 2015, 63 percent said such relationships are morally acceptable.

Proponents of homosexuality would say American citizens are becoming more enlightened. However, the Holy Scriptures portray us as becoming “dark and confused” (Rom. 1:21 NLT). The apostle Paul continued:

God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. . . . The women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having sexual relationships with women, burned with lust for each other (vv. 24-27 NLT).

As the darkness deepens, how should Christians respond?

STAND ON GOD’S WORD

Each time homosexual acts are mentioned in the Bible, they are condemned (Gen. 19:5; Lev. 18:21-22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:8-10). Some critics have asked why Jesus never addressed the topic. Realize that He also did not address polygamy, pedophilia, or bestiality. Instead, He lifted up God’s plan for marriage, which excludes a same-gender union:

“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt. 19:4-6 NASB).

In our denomination’s official statement about the Supreme Court’s decision on same-sex unions, General Overseer Mark L. Williams wrote:

The Church of God stands with fellow Christians who understand that God intended marriage to be between a man and woman, as explained in Genesis and confirmed by Jesus. . . . We urge the pastors and members of the church to continue to hold high the Biblical standard for godly marriage. A legal definition of marriage may have changed, but the orthodox understanding based on God’s revelation has not changed.

LIGHT THE DARKNESS

The Church of God statement continues, “We call upon men and women to demonstrate to a confused world the fulfillment that results when they covenant in marriage to practice faithful and sacrificial love” . . . and therein lies part of the problem. We believers have repeatedly failed to show our world what godly marriage looks like. Countless Christian marriages have dissolved because of unscriptural excuses like these:

• “I don’t love her anymore.”
• “I realize he is not my soul mate.”
• “We’ve grown apart.”
• “My spouse won’t change.”

When divorce, pornography, extramarital affairs, and unmarried couples living together plague the church, our declarations against homosexuality ring hollow. We must shake ourselves and determine to live by Romans 13:12-14:

Lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (NASB).

One reason Satan fights and perverts marriage is because the husband/wife relationship is intended to mirror Christ’s relationship with the Church. As The Message paraphrases Ephesians 5:25-26, “Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ’s love makes the church whole.”

FIGHT FOR FAMILY

“If our children listen to what the culture says about marriage, they’ll get three big ideas: same-sex marriage is an expansion of rights for others; marriage isn’t dependent on gender; and anyone who resists this change is essentially a bigot,” said Nick Eicher (World magazine). Let’s briefly address each of these.

Same-sex marriage is not a God-ordained right. Equal rights for all regardless of gender or skin color are Scriptural ideas that became enshrined in American law through much perseverance and suffering. Contrary to secular opinion, same-sex marriage is not a civil-rights cause.
Instead, it is the endorsement of a lifestyle condemned by God’s Word. **Marriage is dependent on gender.** The only genuine marriage is one between a man and a woman. My two granddaughters will be brought up in a nation that holds a contrary viewpoint, and I must help them understand that legitimate marriage requires an Adam and an Eve.

**Opposing same-sex marriage is not bigotry.** LGTB advocates commonly label someone who opposes same-sex unions as a *homophobe*, which Webster defines as “a person who hates or is afraid of homosexuals or treats them badly.” If that defines me, I am wrong, because Christ teaches me not to hate, fear, or abuse anyone. Instead, I must express loving concern for all people while standing against an immoral imitation of marriage (even though it has been legalized).

**Fighting for our children requires knowing what they are being taught in school regarding sexual practices, gender identity, and marriage.** Columnist Cal Thomas wrote, “What might be a preview of things to come occurred [in July] when the Fairfax County (Virginia) School Board voted 10-2 to approve a ‘gender identity’ curriculum for children starting in seventh grade. News reports said the crowd that showed up for the vote overwhelmingly opposed the decision, but majorities no longer matter.”

**Fighting for our kids means guarding how we entertain ourselves and how they are entertained.** If we are absorbing shows that feature adultery, fornication, and homosexuality, it is affecting our children. They need to see us making different choices.

**Fighting for our family involves faithfully interceding for them, asking God to rescue them from destructive American culture.** Abraham had a nephew who lived in the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were filled with homosexuality (Gen. 19:4-7; Jude 7), adultery and dishonesty (Jer. 23:14), and pride and gluttony (Ezek. 16:49). The Sodomites, who became a symbol of the deepest depravity, loved to “parade their sin” (Isa. 3:9 NIV).

The Lord could not find even 10 righteous people in Sodom (Gen. 18:32), so He destroyed the city by fire. However, in response to Abraham’s intercessory prayer, God rescued Lot (19:29). When we see people parading the LGBT cause, let’s pray for their salvation and for the preservation of our families.

**BE ENGAGED**

We as Christians must not live as if nothing has changed. The Church of God statement declares, “The ill-considered opinion of the activist members of this Supreme Court will have far-reaching and threatening aftereffects in coming months and years.”

On June 30, Nathan Collier went to the county courthouse in Billings, Montana, to register to marry his partner, Christine, even though he is already married to Victoria. He argued that due to the legalization of same-sex marriage across the country, his marriage to two women should be recognized. His request was denied, but we can anticipate similar cases to arise.

On July 10, the Boy Scouts of America unanimously approved a resolution allowing its chartered organizations to choose homosexual men as troop leaders.

In Oregon, Aaron and Melissa Klein, the owners of Sweet Cakes bakery, were fined $135,000 by the state’s Bureau of Labor and Industry after they refused to make a wedding cake for a lesbian couple. They refused to bake the cake because of their Christian beliefs, and their case is still in litigation. With the Supreme Court decision in place, Christian business owners can expect more such legal hurdles.

**PUSH BACK**

On July 1, the Episcopal Church made marriage for same-sex couples available throughout its congregations. Meeting in Salt Lake City for its 78th General Convention, church leaders approved a canonical change that eliminates a written definition of marriage as between a man and a woman and authorizes two new marriage rites for same-sex or opposite-sex couples.

Katrina Trinko, who writes as a conservative Christian, penned these words in *USA Today*:

Though I oppose gay marriage, I found the enthusiasm displayed on June 26—the rainbow photos on Facebook, the cheering and the exultation that “#lovewins”—inspiring. It showed many Americans’ thirst for justice and their determination that our country’s laws reflect love and kindness.

I disagree with them on what is just and loving, primarily because I think children deserve a dad and a mom, but it’s heartbreaking to witness so much moral energy.

The idea that one can exert “moral energy” for an immoral cause is convoluted. Personally, I was dismayed when I saw the White House flooded with rainbow colors. It spoke not of a thirst for justice and love, but of the imposition of a godless standard in our floundering nation.

Andrée Seu writes in *World*:

Do you remember how you felt the first time you saw a movie or TV show that broke the gay “taboo”? We Christians knew what was going on. This was the opening salvo of a long-range strategy of the savvy gay lobby to make homosexuality less disgusting, and then acceptable, and finally mainstream. . . .

It is clear to me that the order of the day for Christians is to no longer stand our ground but to push back—with the weapons of purity, politeness, decent behavior. To stand still is to be lost. 🙏
The purpose of CURRENTS is to inform readers of trends and events influencing the culture.

PRAYER AND HEAVEN FEATURED IN NEW FILMS

Two riveting Christian films are showing in theaters around the nation in September.

War Room explores the transformational role prayer plays in the lives of one family. "We made this film to inspire, challenge, and motivate viewers to fight the right kind of battles and to fight them the best way possible," said director and co-writer Alex Kendrick.

Filled with heart, wit, and humor, War Room follows Tony and Elizabeth Jordan, a middle-class couple who have great jobs, a beautiful daughter, and a dream home. However, appearances can be deceiving. In reality, the Jordans’ marriage has become a war zone and their daughter is collateral damage. With the help of Miss Clara, a prayer warrior, Elizabeth discovers she can start fighting for her family instead of against them. Through a newly energized faith, Elizabeth and Tony’s real enemy doesn’t have a prayer.

Meanwhile, 90 Minutes in Heaven—The New York Times best-seller and inspiring true story of Don Piper’s death, time in heaven, and return to a life that included years of intensely painful recuperation—is now a movie starring Star Wars’ Hayden Christensen and Superman Returns’ Kate Bosworth.

With more than 7 million copies sold, the book has a new preface by the author and cover art tied to the film.

"The response to 90 Minutes in Heaven, as awareness grew, has been humbling and inspiring," Piper said. "My wife, Eva, and I want this movie edition to reach more people, sustain them in hardship, and inspire them to grasp God’s hand in this world and the next."


As he drove home from a church conference, a semi-tractor truck crossed the lane and crushed Piper’s red Ford Escort against the iron railing of a two-lane bridge. First responders pronounced him dead and covered his body. Piper was in heaven experiencing bliss . . . until a fellow pastor from the conference saw the accident scene and prayed over Piper’s body.

In an instant, he was restored to life, one that brought him into years of grueling tests—both physical and spiritual. He endured 13 months of difficult hospitalization and 34 major surgeries. All of that was followed by years of rehabilitation and battles against depression.

With his family’s support and the prayers of many, Don Piper eventually came to believe God had a purpose for his pain, and he hesitantly began to share his story to skeptics and believers alike.

Concerns grow over radicalized Muslim youth

Three years ago, Solomon Osman woke up in a dimly lit room in Garissa, Kenya, after armed men grabbed him and stuffed him into a truck as he was selling clothes on the street in Mombasa, 280 miles away. He said al-Shabab—the Somalia-based radical Islamic terrorist group that killed 148 students and others at Garissa University College in April—had kidnapped him and 20 other youths.

“We lost our senses, only to wake up in a mosque in an unknown place,” he said. “We were all forced to convert to Islam, given new Muslim names and scarves, and warned not to contact anybody outside the mosque.” Osman previously had been a Christian.

Osman, who surrendered to the Kenyan government in June following an amnesty offered to al-Shabab fighters, said his captors subjected him to three months of training with AK-47 rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and other weapons.

“Our masters told us that Kenya was the targeted enemy because it had invaded Somalia,” he said, referring to Kenyan troops stationed in Somalia since 2011 to help Somali government forces fight al-Shabab. “He said it was our right to fight for our religion.”

The terrorist group has long been recruiting young men throughout Garissa.

“Al-Shabab militants are no longer focusing only on mosques, schools, or madrassas for recruitment but also our
Most of today’s American Catholic parents don’t go to Mass, provide any Catholic education for their children, or stress the basic sacraments beyond baptism. However, “they still have a relationship with God and pray for their family,” said Mark Gray, co-author of the research.

Other findings from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA):

• One in three did not find it very important that their children celebrate their First Communion. One in four didn’t consider it very important that they be confirmed. These are red flags said Gray. “If you don’t have First Communion and you’re not confirmed, you are more likely to leave the faith as an adult. You can’t take Communion or really practice your faith.”

• 68 percent of Catholic parents do not take their children to a Catholic school, parish religious training, or even a Catholic youth ministry. This is significantly less than in previous generations, based on CARA surveys of adults.

• Less than half (49%) pay any attention to Catholic information sources in any form.

• Only 16 percent of parents pray the rosary at least once a month and 7 percent at least once a week.

• The survey, which also looked at family media consumption, raised the rhetorical—and unanswered—question: “How will they come to know what their faith is about? Wikipedia? Siri?”

On the flip side, the research found:

• Around eight in 10 are sure “without doubt” about the Catholic view of God, Jesus, Mary, and heaven, and that their prayers are heard and answered. However, one in four have doubts about the existence of hell.

• 53 percent of parents attend Mass at least once a month—slightly better than Catholic adults overall (43%).

• Three in four parents (76%) say they pray every day—and they pray foremost for the well-being of their family.

But most also say they pray alone. Only about one in four pray with their family.—Cathy Lynn Grossman (RNS)
MY WHOLE BODY trembled as I climbed the front steps of my neighbor’s house. In my mind, I tried to rehearse what I would say to convince my neighbor to buy some candy for my high-school fund-raising project. But waves of fear paralyzed me. I rang the bell timidly and prayed that no one would be home.

As soon as I heard footsteps inside the house, panic struck me. As fast as I could, I ran down the steps and hid behind the nearby bushes. Humiliation and fear swept over me.

I was always terribly shy, and my coping style while growing up was to stay on the fringe in group situations or try to hide. Throughout my childhood and teen years, shyness continued to plague me.

I was brought up in a Christian home and accepted Christ as my Savior when I was a child. As I grew in my understanding of the Lord and God’s Word, I became aware of the Biblical mandate to witness for Christ. Guilt waged war within me as I realized I was not telling people about Him. I wasn’t reaching out to the lost with the good news of salvation. Instead, I hid behind a wall of shyness, rationalizing that if I couldn’t even sell chocolate candy that I enjoyed, God certainly wouldn’t expect me to witness for Him.

However, I was not happy. I hungered to share my faith but I didn’t know how.
So I signed up for an evangelism class. There I met others who had the same fears as mine when it came to telling people about Jesus. I was glad to know I was not alone.

One night we were challenged to read together 2 Timothy 1:7: “For the Holy Spirit, God’s gift, does not want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them” (TLB). Those words penetrated my heart like a sharp knife. Could I possibly learn to love people and enjoy being with them?

My first step in overcoming my shyness was to give God my problem.

“Please change me, Lord,” I prayed. Just praying that relieved me. My weakness was now His concern, and I was finally willing for Him to change me so I could do what He called me to do. Looking back, it was my willingness to change that opened my eyes to the advantages of my quiet personality.

The second step was to trust Him to make me whatever He wanted me to be.

I asked the Lord to give me a genuine concern for others and to see people with His eyes. Gradually, a sense of God’s wondrous power penetrated my being. My fear of people was slowly replaced with a real concern and love for others.

I became aware that the sensitivity to people the Lord had given me was my strength when it came to sharing my faith. That sensitivity to the needs of others enables me to sense when and what to say. Instead of becoming mechanical in my approach, I am able to be relationally astute and meet people where they are. Instead of wanting a quick decision, I am able to talk about Him and grace. Gradually, the shyness that once dominated so much of my life is no longer in control; God is.

Third, I grew to realize evangelism is a team effort.

Hanging out with nonbelievers is a necessity. As I do so, I am one of possibly several people the Lord might use to move someone closer to faith.

Evangelism is not something I do, but something God does. It’s God who draws people to Himself. As I lift Him up before others, He works. God uses me to speak to others about their need for Him.

Fourth, I had to move my focus off myself.

It is easy to wonder what people will think about us when we witness, or to ask ourselves if we are doing it the right way. . . but that leaves us continually focusing on ourselves. Instead of scrutinizing the method, may our longing be to see people come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. We must pray for the Lord to work through us and to be our strength.

Yes, there were still days when I was overcome with shyness and froze. Little by little, however, I learned to express myself and to reach out to others in His name.

My love for Jesus broke forth in amazing ways. As I developed relationships with my neighbors and coworkers, I discovered people were not objects to be feared, but treasures to be uncovered.

Now, when I pray for an opportunity to share my faith, the Lord provides an occasion to speak with a family member, a neighbor, a coworker, or even a stranger. By focusing on God and His rich resources rather than on myself, I am able to talk about His love and grace. Gradually, the shyness that once dominated so much of my life is no longer in control; God is.

Jesus is our role model for evangelism. He turned ordinary encounters into extraordinary appointments, and so can we. The more I rest in His timing, the more people He brings my way who are hungry to hear the Gospel.

Wherever you go, there are people who need Christ. Look for opportunities to share your faith in daily life. The Lord will create those sacred encounters as you depend on Him for wisdom.

Several years ago, I stood at the bedside of a dear friend who apparently had only a short time left to live. Her life had been a testimony to God. That afternoon she took my hand and held it in her wrinkled one.

“Keep telling people about Jesus,” she whispered. “That’s all that matters. Tell them about Jesus.”

My eyes filled with tears as I stood there.

“I will tell them,” I said.

Those words became my promise to God. As His child I cannot be silent. No, I must tell others about Jesus for as long as He gives me breath.

Will you join me in telling people about Jesus? Become intentional about sharing your faith. Listen carefully to others while praying for opportunities. Volunteer, build relationships with neighbors and friends, participate in community activities, offer to pray for people, and through it all, remember you are a team member. The more we yield our lives to God, the more He will work in and through us to bring people to Himself.

Sharon Beth Brani lives in Culpeper, Virginia.

THE SPIRIT OF WITNESS

IN THE BOOK OF ACTS, the early believers moved in the power of the Spirit to conquer cities for Christ and to plant churches across the then-known world. An evangelistic thrust of the Church began on the Day of Pentecost. Before that day ended, the original 120 Spirit-anointed believers grew to about 3,000 (Acts 2:41). As these believers continued to preach the Gospel, their number increased to about 5,000 (4:4).

After such growth, their number swelled so much that Luke speaks of the believers simply as “the multitude” (v. 32).

This extraordinary growth was the result of their reception of the “Spirit of witness.” From the Day of Pentecost to the present, part of the great work of the Holy Spirit has been to empower the church for sharing their faith and the love of Christ with others. The emphasis on power for witnessing lines up with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).—French Arrington (Encountering the Holy Spirit)
HOW BIG IS OUR BIBLE?

THE BIBLE IS OUR SOURCE, OUR TEXTBOOK, OUR MESSAGE FOR WORLD EVANGELISM.

BY GRANT McCLUNG

S A YOUNG missionary family, my wife and I were determined to involve our 2-year-old son in family Bible reading and prayer every night before bedtime. One evening, I told him, “Little Man, bring Daddy the Bible.”

The Bible in question was a large, illustrated family version, prominently placed on the coffee table in the living room. It was quite a load for a toddler (or for me). Struggling under the weight of it, yet determined to be involved, my son said, “Here comes the little man with the big Bible!”

That incident, though 35 years past, has often been a personal reminder that God’s Word must be big in me, with a heavy bearing on my discipleship and mission as a Christ-follower. John the Baptist’s cry, “He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30*), was a way of proclaiming what my 2-year-old realized: “I'm little and this big Bible is heavy!” This childlike confession is our template for humble and fruitful ministry.

The apostle Paul confessed, “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves, to take credit for anything of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who has made us able ministers of the new testament” (2 Cor. 3:5-6). Revivalist Vance Havner declared, “Our efficiency without God’s sufficiency is only a deficiency.” Paul and Vance had big Bibles.

Born-again Christians believe in God’s global mission because we believe His Word. The Bible is our source, our textbook, our message for world evangelism. John Stott said, “Whenever Christians lose their confidence in the Bible, they also lose their zeal for evangelism. Conversely, whenever they are convinced about the Bible, then they are determined about evangelism” (“The Bible in World Evangelization”).

USED BIBLES?

Eugene Nida once called Latin American Pentecostals, “The Church of the Dirty Bibles.” There, he observed, the Bible is used frequently in worship services, being

* All scriptures are from the New International Version.
read by the working poor with their soiled fingers as a reading guide.

Contrast this with “The State of the Bible 2013 Survey,” conducted by the Barna Group on behalf of the American Bible Society, which found that more than three-fourths of Americans (77%) believe morals and values are declining in the United States, with a lack of Bible reading being the most cited cause. One of the troubling trends is that young adults (ages 18-28) are the least likely age group to read the Bible. What could this imply for the future of missions?

BIBLE IN THE CENTER

The revival that took place under the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah shows us how to recover, restore, and centralize the Bible in our ministry. From Nehemiah 8—10, here are seven practical guidelines emerging from the actions of those in spiritual leadership toward the Word of God.

1. They brought out the Book: “They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel” (8:1). We must come together under the central authority of the Bible.

2. They read the Book: “He read it aloud from daybreak till noon . . . And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law” (8:3). Samuel Escobar said, “Evangelicals must acknowledge they themselves have a long way to go in terms of deepening their understanding of the Biblical basis of mission, in order to establish its validity not on isolated sayings but on the general thrust of Biblical teaching” (Evangelical Missiology). “A deepened understanding” requires a reading of the Book—all of it.

3. They opened the Book: “Ezra opened the book . . . and as he opened it, the people all stood up” (8:5). David Platt says, “The Word does the work. Make sure the Word’s the foundation. . . . I love seeing the Word take root in different people’s hearts and begin to grow in different ways” (Mission Frontiers). For this to happen in our ministries, the Word has to remain open, constantly at hand, leading in every decision and new initiative.

4. They explained the Book: “The Levites . . . instructed the people in the Law. . . . They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read” (8:7-8). There was a communal reading and reflection on God’s Word for a new generation yet untrained. Simply stated: Exegesis + Exposition + Explanation = Evangelization.

5. They celebrated the Book: “All the people went away . . . to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them” (8:12). As God’s Word is brought out, opened, read, and explained, let us pray for a refreshed love for God’s Word as stated in The Cape Town Commitment: “We love God’s Word in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, echoing the joyful delight of the psalmist: ‘I love your commands more than gold. . . . Oh, how I love your law!’” (Ps. 119:127, 97).

6. They confessed and worshiped from the Book: “They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God” (Neh. 9:3). The key documents of major missions conferences are seasoned with the language of confession and repentance. Consider this on a local, individual scale with your agency, church, or missions committee. What would it look like in terms of change in our ministries when conviction from God’s Word required a new direction, a change of policy, or restitution for past errors (to name a few)?

7. They obeyed and followed the Book: “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement . . . to follow the Law of God . . . and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord” (9:38—10:29). In the midst of a welcome global resurgence in Biblical mission, let us pray that missional leaders will reconnect with this fact: “Our point of departure should not be the contemporary enterprise we seek to justify, but the Biblical sense of what being sent into the world signifies” (“Reflections on Biblical Models of Missions”). Let us make “a binding agreement” to obey and follow.

The Great Commission enterprise is constantly tempted toward potentially increased dependencies on human expertise, the traditional wisdom of mature missions executives, the perceived “sharpness” of emerging missions leaders, and a plethora of successful business models from secular leadership. While we can appreciate and learn from every arena of life and leadership, let us not forget to pause and ask, “How big is our Bible?” as we renew and maintain our confidence in the Bible for missional leadership.

“Without the Bible, world evangelization would not only be impossible but actually inconceivable.”

—John Stott

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“Without the Bible,” John Stott told us, “world evangelization would not only be impossible but actually inconceivable.” Therefore, let the world missions community bring it out, open it, read it, explain it, celebrate it, confess and worship from it, and obey/follow it in every dimension of world evangelization.

Grant McClung, president of Mission Resource Group (MissionResourceGroup.org), is missiological adviser to the World Missions Commission of the Pentecostal World Fellowship.
HERE’S A WOMAN on fire. She quakes with strength as the Holy Spirit moves upon her. She steps out from her pew. With tremor and love, she lays hands on the broken, the wounded, and the rejected. Her beautiful apparel speaks of her royal calling, and her engagement with our community exemplifies her humility.

This article will emphasize the power to overcome through the Holy Spirit. However, first meet “Mama Jacqui” as I know her. After my arrival in Tennessee, I heard that Evangelist Smith “doesn’t play.” My curiosity awakened, I had the privilege of meeting her at Redemption Point Church in downtown Chattanooga. After introducing myself to her, I noticed how she curved her words primly and spoke authoritatively. She has earned the respect of her contemporaries and the rising generation. However, it has not always been this way.

In 1973, Jacqui Smith gave her heart to the Lord and joined a church. She had a background in classical music and began to use her musicianship for the Lord. She recalls her secular career as a classically trained singer with bittersweet tones: “They threw roses on the stage for me.” That life also brought diverse temptations and other unhealthy things.

Jacqueline was raised in a largely Caucasian culture, much like myself. Although she precedes me by many years, we come from neighboring states. She is from New Jersey; I am from New York. Both of us are northerners living in the South.

Evangelist Jacqui spent the first 12 of her 37 ministry years preaching below the Mason-Dixon Line, opening her eyes to the mantle God had placed on her to break through racial and gender barriers. As a single, female, African-American preacher, she took many hits for her spiritual endeavors.

One summer when Jacqui was preaching a youth camp in Alabama, a teenage girl told her she did not understand her presence there: “Blacks do not have souls and cannot be saved, so why are you here?”

And said he hated her and “all of her kind.” Oddly, he continued to come to the revival.

On the last night, he came to the front and asked the pastor for the microphone. Naturally, the pastor was hesitant, but he let the man speak. The man began to cry, asking God, Jacqui, and the congregation to forgive him. Two weeks later, the elderly man passed away. His daughter called Evangelist Smith and told her, “God sent you [here] to tear this out.” The daughter felt assured her father was now in heaven.

I asked Jacqui to recall a time when she cried out to God for a particular need. She remembered feeling low because of racism and God speaking to her, But Jacqui, I love them. When I send you to these places, I am giving them an opportunity to change their hearts.

Jacqui’s trials did not end there. In 2006, she became the first female to preach at the Church of God General Assembly. Certain ministers caused her a great deal of sadness by criticizing her on an online forum. However, the emphasis of Jacqueline’s ministry has been overcoming barriers and breaking through walls. Some of those ministers who trashed her later apologized to her.

The work of the Holy Spirit through Jacqueline has not been in vain. In 2014, another black woman evangelist preached at the International General Assembly. This woman did not experience the negative feedback Evangelist Smith experienced eight years earlier.

Jacqui has preached in 48 states of the U.S. She has seen churches that were once segregated and unwelcoming to other cultures become multicultural congregations.
Evangelist Smith has also preached in 38 countries. As the Lord spoke to her many years ago, Why have a career when you can have a ministry? Her ministry has reached tens of thousands, and has broken racial and gender barriers. God has used her as an evangelist, minister of music, prophet, and church mother.

At this point in her life, Jacqueline recognizes she is in a transition period. She is stepping back as God elevates others. She feels this is crucial, saying, “I’m not above my Master.” Jacqueline is also embracing an intergenerational ministry. As she and I spoke, we concurred: “I [Jacqui] can’t say that I don’t need you [Kashif], and vice versa.” It is all about giving glory to God and edifying the Church.

Jacqueline has been obedient to God by remaining single. She has never married. This has been another mantle, as God has used her to deliver singles from bondage as well.

The beautiful thing about Jacqui’s singleness is that she still has spiritual children all around the world. I am one of them. This past Sunday, Evangelist Smith preached at Redemption Point Church. During her sermon, she called me out as her “son in the Lord.” She preached about her walk with the Lord and the power of God.

My own mother, Esther, was there the Sunday Jacqui preached. After the service, Esther tenderly took my hand and joined it with Jacqui’s. She looked into Jacqui’s eyes, and for a moment they communicated without words. Mama Jacqui understood.

That is Jacqueline Smith’s story as I have seen it. I am certain that many others call her “Mother” like I do. Her sacrifice and suffering has opened many doors for those who are now stepping into the limelight. As she transitions into an enlightened phase of ministry, we continue to seek her wisdom, honor her presence with us, and pray for her strength.

Kashif A. Graham is a student at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee. kgraham@leeuniversity.edu
Meeting the discipleship needs of congregations around the world

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This coming week in the far-flung corners of the world, people will get saved in evangelistic meetings, disciples will be in formation in local churches, young ministers will be taught in Bible schools, and children will be fed and cared for in orphanages. The missions goals of evangelism, discipleship, training, and caring will be carried forward by donor dollars.

It will all be possible because congregations will send to World Missions a portion of the tithe that comes into the local church, and hundreds of donors will send gifts to help fulfill the Great Commission. If it were possible to follow a donor dollar on its journey, where might it go?

It may end up in Scotland, where Dennis and Vanna Tanner lead an aggressive and multiethnic church planting ministry. During the past year, the Tanners have led rebuilding and renovation efforts in major cities, inaugurated the first-ever youth camp, purchased a national office and training center, and celebrated recently planted Tamil-speaking Indian churches in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen. The dollar in Scotland gets a lot done!

It may travel to a Middle Eastern country that will remain nameless here. Missionaries Jim and Betty Stanford (not their real names) live in a high-rise apartment building in a multinational city populated largely by Muslims. He is a teacher, helps lead a church whose pastor is a national, and meets with small groups who have responded to appeals from a transnational television ministry. She diligently works with children and teaches other women how to do it. This dollar gets results where none may be expected.

It may show up in a Thailand orphanage where Jan Smitt explains that most of the residents are children of mothers who are in prison, and who themselves would live in the prison, too, if not for the orphanage. This dollar helps buy fresh fruit and vegetables to enhance the evening meal, eaten in a clean, professionally managed, and caring setting. This one is much appreciated.

It may show up in a Thailand orphanage where Jan Smitt explains that most of the residents are children of mothers who are in prison, and who themselves would live in the prison, too, if not for the orphanage. This dollar helps buy fresh fruit and vegetables to enhance the evening meal, eaten in a clean, professionally managed, and caring setting. This one is much appreciated.

The next dollar may have stopped at a publishing house to help pay for books that are on the way to the Bethel Bible College in Zambia, staffed by President Duncan Mboma and an all-African faculty. Dozens of men and women study in classrooms to prepare themselves for ministry in Zambia and beyond. This dollar invests in a resource that will be used over and over. It is a productive asset.

The dollar may go to one of hundreds of ministry points in 180 countries that touch the lives of thousands and points them toward eternity. Thank God for every dollar. More important—thank God for every donor who is responding to Christ’s commission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth!
Adoniram Judson, the first missionary sent from America, in 1813, spent 40 years in Burma, suffering immeasurable hardships, but realizing incredible victories. He translated the Bible into the Burmese language, a translation still used more than 200 years later. Jonny Moore is a young Church of God missionary who is laboring in Judson’s adopted land. He was recently interviewed for GlobalConnect.

**Editor:** You graduated from Lee University; then what?

**Jonny Moore:** While in college, I worked in a local church youth ministry and picked up good experience. I moved to Atlanta and worked with a tremendous youth pastor I wanted to learn from. During about five years on that staff, I moved from one position to another, advancing to be the missions pastor. In this role I took groups of young adults on mission trips. Over time, it became more difficult to return to the States; I started feeling like an alien in my own country.

**ED:** Was that how you got your missionary calling?

**JM:** I spent my early life in Germany (my dad is Robert Moore, director of the Church of God’s Ministry to the Military), so I grew up with a sensitivity to people of different backgrounds. I was always fascinated by people of other cultures and worldviews. As I matured, I came to see people not just as different, but as individuals created by God and loved by Him. I think God uses our gifts, talents, insights, and experiences as preparation for ministry. But, in terms of a calling, I believe in a certain sense that the need is the call. The Holy Spirit was dealing with me, leading me to commit my life to serving on the mission field, and I knew it was Asia. That’s where the great need is.

**ED:** Where are you now and what are you doing?

**JM:** I divide my time primarily between Thailand and Myanmar, formerly called Burma. In Chiangrai, Thailand, I work with MediaLight, a school run by veteran missionaries Chuck and Sherry Quinley to train Asian young people as leaders and media missionaries. It is an innovative and effective way to share the gospel through all kinds of media. In parts of the world not yet open to church planting, for example, a young person can start a YouTube channel or a blog and gain a huge...
A First Step in Developing a Prayer Life

“Never have I prayed just like this,” said a young woman who had begun using One Plus One, a prayer support for the Great Commission.

The starting place is a website called www.1plus1.cc. Log on to the site and hit the “Play” button. A two-minute session will begin. For the first minute, a missionary or missions leader will share a brief prayer request or need, and ask you to pray for it. Immediately, a one-minute meditative instrumental piece of music will follow, permitting you time to pray in response to the request.

The innovative prayer effort attempts to engage enough participants that in a year more than one million hours of prayer are offered on behalf of missions.

One Plus One may also be accessed through Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

Additional prayer resources are available through the main World Missions website, www.cogwm.org.
“Over My Dead Body!”

According to reports from Africa Field Director Peter Thomas, an elderly Muslim woman saved a Church of God recently.

Jihadists went on a rampage throughout one of the Firewall countries, burning or destroying 54 Christian church buildings. In the capital, a Pentecostal pastor was murdered. When the attackers arrived to enter and set fire to the Church of God structure, a group of Muslim neighbors stood outside and told them to go away. A small group of the raiders remained, intent on their purpose. Determined to stop them, an old Muslim woman lay down across the door, declaring, “You can come in this place, but only over my dead body!” At that point, they left.

The defense of the church testifies to the loving servant relationship the pastor has established in the community.

In Mozambique, wealthy Islamic sponsors built a brand new mosque in a community and sent in an imam to serve the few Muslims who lived in the area and to offer incentives that would attract others. Firewall pastors were active in the area, however, and in a matter of months so many people had been won to Christ that the imam had to move away and the mosque was abandoned.

Victories are won day by day along the Firewall. See the website for more information, www.africafirewall.com. A two-day training event in Cleveland, Tennessee, in October will orient U.S. pastors who wish to serve as one-week missionaries, teaching beginning African pastors. For information, call Men and Women of Action, 423-478-7956. ■

Philippine Projects Engage Church’s Young People

September marks the beginning of the Youth World Evangelism Action project for 2015-2016. This year’s undertaking is a series of efforts in the Philippines, where missionaries and national ministers lead more than 700 churches, four Bible schools, and a major regional seminary.

World Missions director and assistant director, Tim Hill and John Childers, along with Youth and Discipleship director and assistant director, Gary Lewis and David Blair, will guide the 2016 project alongside state/regional directors and local church leaders to enlist many thousands of young people in the endeavor.

Projects include the following:

**Caring for Children**

More than 2 million orphans live in the Philippines, who desperately need love and care. YWEA 2016 will partner and support local orphanages, adoptive agencies, and ministries currently reaching these neglected children.

**Conducting Benevolence and Outreach Ministries**

The Philippine Islands have experienced incredible devastation from typhoons and other natural disasters over the last several years, leaving many people in need and properties in shambles. YWEA will partner with benevolent agencies to distribute critical items to those in need. Additionally, Global Expedition teams will be mobilized to impact these areas with the gospel.

**Equipping Leaders**

A great need exists for training church planters and equipping pastors and youth and children’s leaders. YWEA will partner with ASCM (Asian Seminary of Christian Ministries) and national leaders to provide training opportunities and resources throughout the islands.

**Building Ministry Centers**

YWEA 2016 seeks to assist in rebuilding a ministry/relief center in Cebu that was damaged by a recent typhoon, as well as rebuilding and upgrading other critical ministry structures affected by natural disasters. ■
I was sitting on my living-room couch, crocheting a baby blanket to match the pink sweater, booties, and hat I had finished, when my son Caleb came home from school.

I loved crocheting, having been taught by my mom, Marcella, when I was 9 years old. Now I was trying to make a few baby things to sell since my husband and I were disabled and could no longer work regular jobs.

While looking at Caleb’s papers, and getting ready to sign his daily agenda book, I spotted a red pencil bag with the word Money printed on it. It wasn’t Caleb’s, so I asked him about it.

Caleb replied, “A friend of mine at school has a friend who is 18 and pregnant. Mom, can you believe her boyfriend won’t help her with anything? He doesn’t give her money or even talk to her anymore.”

“I can believe it. But what about this pencil case?” I asked again.

“My friend and I decided we needed to collect money for this girl,” Caleb said, as if on a mission.

I didn’t say anything, but a couple of thoughts ran through my head: I can’t take up money for someone I don’t know. . . . Aren’t there government agencies for situations like this?

Before I could voice these thoughts to Caleb, he said, “Mom, I know I can’t help everyone in the world, but haven’t you and God taught me that we should start one person at a time?”

What could I say? I had taught him to help others, and quoted him scriptures such as Hebrews 13:16: “Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (NKJV).

I went into my bedroom while my husband, George, took Caleb to karate class that evening. Caleb was right, but I knew there had to be another way to help—one that would be just as good. I needed divine wisdom. As I sat on my bed and talked to God, I felt a small voice say to my spirit, You should give the outfit you are working on to the young girl.

My family was living on a tiny income, and we needed the extra money this outfit would bring. But I knew the voice was from God, so I had to obey.

When Caleb returned home, I was still crocheting. I asked him, “How about instead of taking up money, we give the young lady this outfit I’m finishing? Would that be OK?”

“You should give away the outfit you are working on.”

“I’ll ask my friend, but I think that’s a great idea, Mom,” Caleb said.

I began to pray over the outfit, and Psalm 127:3 came to mind: “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord” (NKJV).

A few days later, I had finished the outfit and Caleb took it to school. His friend told him her mom had collected money, and that the outfit was just what the teenager needed.

Tears filled my eyes, and I said, “I know, Son. Thank you for teaching me that lesson.”

Several nights later, I was having trouble sleeping, so I got on the Internet to search for new crochet patterns. I stumbled onto a website listing charities that make baby blankets for local hospitals. I was moved by their generosity, and I felt the Lord say to me, Charity begins at home. What about your local hospital?

The next morning I emailed the person in charge of public relations at our local hospital. I received a response later that day telling me the OB Department had wanted the volunteer guild to make blankets for just such a cause. The guild was unable to do this because not enough of their members could crochet.

I know I have been blessed. My stitches for charity engaged others to join in this ministry, and a local yarn company contributed to our cause. Helping one person at a time is the work of God.

Jackie Smith lives in Austin, Indiana, where she does sewing and needlework.
David Hale: Pastor and State Representative

Why did you decide to run for state office?
We need more people of faith in governing positions. Decisions are made on moral issues without many people taking a stand for Christians. As a pastor, I felt people in our state needed a voice, someone who thinks like they think.

This was not an overnight decision; it was something my wife, Sheila, and I prayed about. We both knew the Lord wanted me to do this. We kept waiting for the right time.

How did you get elected?
This is the first office I've ever run for. I am a Republican who ran in an area that is 78 percent Democrat, and I defeated an eight-year incumbent. We are very conservative here, and people don’t vote so much the party anymore. I had to beat the bushes and let people know where I stand.

Kentucky is divided into 100 legislative districts, and there are 100 state representatives. Each district is divided pretty equally by population. Sheila and I began the campaign in March 2014, and we went nonstop until the election was held that November.

I met as many of our district’s 45,000 people as I could in a door-to-door campaign. Our district is probably 50 miles long. We went to all the functions, parades, and county fairs. I told everyone who I was, why I was running for the office, and that I was a pastor. I presented myself to people as an honest, upfront person, and they seemed to know I was telling the truth.

Describe your first year as a legislator.
I spent most of my time listening and learning the process—learning which people I need to be with, and those I didn’t need to be with. I cosponsored pro-life legislation that liberal people would not let come to the floor for a vote.

People have told me they know I’m doing this for the right reason. If I’ve accomplished anything so far, it is letting people see my purpose for being there.

I told some individuals during the election process that one person alone cannot make a difference, but you’ve got to start a foundation somewhere. You’ll hopefully bring other people on board. I would like for other people to see me as an example—“Pastor Hale ran for this office and was elected.” I want to see people of faith in their 20s and 30s to get involved.

Talk about your pastoral role.
I’ve been in the Korea Church of God my whole life, and I am a third-generation pastor here. My grandfather, Orville Hale, pastored the church for 28 years. He passed away in 1990. My father, Asa Hale, became the pastor in 1990, but Asa died in 1998 after being diagnosed with cancer three years earlier.

I was preaching revivals as an evangelist when our state overseer asked me if I would take the position on an interim basis, and I did. I had a couple of years of on-the-job training, which really helped. It was a hard decision to follow my father, but the people accepted me. Since then, we have constructed a new church. The Lord has been good to us. We are in a small rural community, and we have about a 200-member congregation.

My church has been very supportive of me becoming a state representative. They’ve held me by praying. I approached them about it very early in the process, and 99 percent of the people were on board.

Every Sunday, we do three worship services—two morning services and an evening service; I conduct all three most of the time. I have an associate who works with me. When the legislature is in session, I have not always been able to make it back on Wednesday night for midweek service, but I have my youth pastor or one of the laymen of the church to lead. The church expected this, realizing there would be times I could not make it back.

When I decided to run for office, I approached my administrative bishop,
Bruce Rabun, and he was supportive. He has called me, emailed me, and texted me about it.

**Have you seen people get more involved in politics because of your election?**
Yes, I have seen an increase in people’s interest and participation. Pastors from other denominations said because of my involvement, more of their people are voting and trying to learn the issues a little more.

A man from another church organization asked me, “Has your Pentecostal background or your Pentecostal beliefs come up among people? Have people ever questioned you about that?” I said, “Yes, they have. I’ve told people what I stand for and believe.”

**You worked for the state of Kentucky for many years. How has that influenced your role as a pastor and now as an elected representative?**
I worked for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife for 30 years, retiring from that position in November 2004. For about six years, I was pastoring while working at a fish hatchery. That job helped me a lot because I was in the public eye daily. I met people, conducted tours, and traveled all over the state going into the schools, doing programs for children. That gave me a great opportunity to meet people.

**You also serve on a long-term recovery center in your county.**
A devastating tornado came through here in spring 2012. Three people died, and hundreds of homes were destroyed. We formed a recovery organization, and I was chairman at that time. We assisted people in getting back into their homes. We brought in hundreds of people and many organizations from out of state to assist us. We did a lot of fund-raising. We got our 501(c) status to make it a creditable organization. That organization is still functioning today, and I serve on the board.

**The Supreme Court ruling against Biblical marriage might lead people to disengage from the political process. How would you respond?**
This decision will impact us for generations to come. Being a federal mandate, it is out of the states’ hands. We’ve been dealt a blow, but we need to stay engaged. I preached this in my church on Sunday. We’ve been wounded, but we’re not defeated. No matter how far our nation declines, we still must have people who say, “I’m going to stand up against this.”

I’m a legislator and a pastor, and I’ve looked at this from both sides. There are still things we can do. As a legislator, I will voice my opinion strongly. I will not back down. We must be vigilant in our prayers.

**Describe the spiritual battles you face as a state legislator.**
Government can be an evil place. Many individuals will test you. When I got to the state capital, I was put to the test immediately on some issues. I stood that test. My fellow legislators—whether or not they agree with me on moral and social issues—respect me for the stance I take. I get some dirty letters, but I’m doing what I’m supposed to do.

Party people and certain lobbyists put pressure on you to vote a certain way. You have to be careful about what you do and where you go; there’s always someone around the corner trying to make you look unethical. You have to keep your guard up continually. It is not for everybody, and certainly not for the faint of heart. It has been difficult, but anything worth doing is difficult.

One day on the House floor, I asked to be recognized after we debated a very controversial issue, and the Speaker of the House recognized me. I told the legislators that before I leave my office every morning, I bow my head and ask the Lord to give me guidance on how to vote. The place got deadly silent. Afterward, they gave me an applause. I didn’t do it for applause, but I think I earned their respect.

State representatives have to seek reelection every two years, so I will have to run again in 2016. I’ve already heard that liberals are going to spend a lot of money to beat me. I believe God opened the door for me, and He won’t shut it until it’s time.

Do you have a final thought?
We as Christians have been lured into this idea that we don’t need to be involved. We should just sit on the sidelines. I had people tell me I should not mix religion and politics. I said, “Where did you get that?” We are where we are today because Christians have not become involved.
Witnessing was not my thing. I had never been good at talking to others one-on-one about Jesus. I especially didn’t like the idea of talking to someone about their sins. It just wasn’t me. I hated confrontations of any sort. But Edna Van Dorp (not her real name) got me thinking differently.

It began when I volunteered to lead a small group for a course on basic Christianity at my church. In each session, after watching a video on Christianity, the attendees broke into groups. The leaders were trained to be discussion facilitators, not teachers. I liked that.

However, I did not anticipate having such a diverse group. Try mixing three Protestants, six Roman Catholics, and one agnostic. It was all I could do to keep everyone on topic without tempers flaring.

Edna was my group’s oldest—and most outspoken—member. Each week after watching the video, the Dutch lady would state, “That was a bunch of garbage!” Then she would stare at me, challenging me to a mental duel. I never took her up on it.

One night the topic was on finding God’s will. I asked the group what they thought about God guiding their lives. A good discussion followed, but Edna didn’t say a word. I finally turned to her and asked, “Edna, what do you think?”

“I don’t believe any of it,” she muttered. “It’s just a bunch of garbage. That man on the video is just a good salesman who is trying to get people’s money.”

Everyone stared at her in disbelief. I swallowed and smiled—and quickly asked someone else what she thought. Edna left before the discussion ended.

I phoned her when I got home. Would she join me for lunch the next day? I was relieved when she agreed—although I had no idea what I would say to her.

I spent much of that evening and the next morning praying and thinking. Edna obviously needed the Lord, but how could I reach her? What could I tell her that she had not already heard from the pastor on the videos? He was the expert, not me.

Shortly before I left for the restaurant, I felt compelled to take some Christian literature with me. Digging through a drawer, I found a couple of tracts. When I browsed through them, I was surprised to learn they came with instructions. The writer suggested the Christian and unbeliever read the tracts together aloud. The unbeliever was to read the Scripture verses, and the Christian was to read the comments that followed.

I tucked the tracts into my purse with strong doubts I would use them. Just giving one of those things to someone scared me. Reading them together aloud? I didn’t think so.

Edna was fidgety as she faced me across a booth near noon. We ordered, but hardly touched our food. For two hours, she divulged details about her difficult childhood in Holland, the hard war years, her

A LIFE-CHANGING CONVERSATION
I WOULD NEVER LOOK AT WITNESSING THE SAME AGAIN.
given my Thursdays to God,” she replied. She then explained she would be attending a Bible study in the morning and a church for private prayer in the afternoon.

Over the years since Edna’s conversion, I have witnessed the transformation Jesus Christ has made in many lives. But it’s her story that changed me—and for that I will be forever grateful.

Cathy Mogus is an author and Bible teacher who lives in Richmond, British Columbia, with her husband, Allen.

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HAPLAIN RONNY PIERCE told me about a devoted Christian from a non-Pentecostal church who came face-to-face with the reality of the power of the Spirit. Coming from a large church with a passion to do something for Jesus, he went to Bible college and soon found himself starting a mission for seamen in Mobile, Alabama.

One weekend several ships stood in the harbor, including a Russian freighter. In one particular service, his Russian-speaking interpreter did not arrive on time. Not knowing what to do, my brother proceeded to speak in English as a Spanish interpreter translated for the Hispanic people present. As he spoke, he noticed that the Russians were moved, but had no idea what was happening.

At the conclusion of his message, he gave an altar call and many of the Russians came forward, weeping, for prayer. He had no idea what to do. About that time, the Russian interpreter arrived. My brother asked him what was happening and the Russian interpreter asked the weeping sailors.

“They want to get saved,” was the reply. When my brother explained he had spoken only in English with a Spanish interpreter, the Russian interpreter asked the men if anyone understood English or Spanish. Not one knew a syllable of either language, but that didn’t matter: they had heard the service in perfect Russian!

This minister went back to his church and resigned every position he held, stating that he had to rethink his theology about the power of the Holy Spirit.

Excerpted from An Acts 2 Church in the 21st Century by Toby Morgan, who is administrative bishop for the Church of God in Arkansas.
HAVING SOMEONE next to you to encourage you, support you, and motivate you is critical for every minister, and I am no exception. Bonnie, my wife, was handpicked by God for me. She is a woman who loves God with all her heart—a woman with amazing faith, a burden for the lost, and an unrelenting desire to fight the devil through spiritual means.

In the late 1990s, I was scheduled to preach a revival in York, Pennsylvania. Our group would be there with me to provide the praise and worship and any other ministry the Holy Spirit would ask of them. Bonnie had a great prayer life, but when we had ministry on the schedule, she took it up another notch. She read and studied the Bible, fasted often, prayed, and decreed the Word of God. She was heading into battle and made sure that not only was she well equipped, but that her prayers covered me, too.

As it often goes when we are preparing to do God’s work, the devil began to fight. It usually occurs in the little things and in subtle ways. His goal is to get us distracted from the job at hand and, ultimately, diminish our anointing and wreak havoc in our life. The Bible warns us not to let Satan “get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11).

That is exactly why Bonnie would prepare for every battle as if her life depended on it. She knew there would be people in the worship service without hope and others who desperately needed a touch from God. She expected to be used by God and was willing to fight the devil to help these people receive what they needed.

Preparation was the key; it was in her lifestyle, not in a last-minute effort to engage in spiritual warfare. The weak are easy prey “because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We must “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:10-11).

Well, Bonnie was having one of those difficult days. Even when she recognized the scheme of the devil, it was still trying for her when everything was going wrong. She had somewhere she needed to be, and the clock seemed to be ticking faster than it should. We had plans to meet later that day, so I was not aware of what she was going through. I am blessed that Bonnie has always done her best to shield me on days when I am to minister so I can remain focused. She is willing to bear the heavier share of the load.

Finally, the family was in the car and on the road. Bonnie’s parents were going to watch our children while we were in church. Everything seemed to be going as expected until she was about a half-mile from her parents’ home; then the Lord changed her plans.

At a road where she usually turns right to go to her parents’ home, she felt the
Bonnie continued on her journey, met up with me, and shared everything that had happened. That night, I asked her to share her testimony in our service. But it wasn’t until sometime later that the Lord spoke these words to her:

The little boy was dead.

My brother-in-law, Pastor Will Ellis, owned a dry-cleaning business at the time and also ministered with us. He had an employee who happened to be there and watched this entire event unfold. The next time she came to work, she shared the story with Will. She said that some lady was praying for a little boy in a language she had never heard before, and told how she was amazed by the miracle she had witnessed. Will heard the testimony when Bonnie shared it during the service in York, and now her testimony was being confirmed. God desires to use you in the supernatural, too. Why not? His Word declares, “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). For Bonnie, it was a matter of her love for God, her preparation spiritually to be able to handle whatever would come her way, and her willingness to be used by the Lord. So be encouraged, be diligent in your prayer life and in studying God’s Word, and add fasting to your arsenal. Delight in the things of the Lord, pursue Him, and always expect the unexpected.

Bonnie continued comforting the mother and looked for something with which she could cover the boy. Before leaving, she shared a word about the Lord and gave the mother a Gospel tract I had written.

The paramedics arrived and came to the rear of the van where they checked the boy’s vital signs. They told the mother everything looked good and it was up to her if she wanted to have him transported to the hospital.

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**Sam Taylor** is an associate pastor of Gateway Ministries—a Church of God congregation in Williamsport, Maryland. This article is excerpted from his book, Expect the Unexpected (Pathway Press, 2013).
AS THE JURY reached a verdict?

“We have, Your Honor.”

It was April 1993. Three hours and 20 minutes after beginning deliberations, the jury returned to the packed courtroom to issue their verdict. The case had been stacked against us; we knew it months before the trial began. But the final decision lay not with the attorneys, the judge, or the witnesses who would frequently twist the truth or commit outright perjury. The final outcome rested with 12 people—in this case, eight men and four women.

“How finds the jury?”

“On the charge of criminally negligent homicide, three counts, we the jury find the defendant: not guilty.”

That verdict would crush our family and profoundly affect many of us for years to come. Even today, some of our relatives remain locked in heartache and unforgiveness over the tragic events of that fateful night when three of our family members were killed in a car accident and by the injustice later committed in the courtroom.

For years after the verdict, I was consumed with grief and had more than my share of anger—not just because of the loss but because of the trial that followed. We had sought only one thing: justice. But how is that possible when a legal system that prides itself on fairness seems to reward criminal behavior? If there is no fairness or justice, revenge is the next best thing, right?

Twenty years ago I was—and today by the grace of God still am—a minister of the Gospel. That makes this confession even more difficult. I confess that I wanted revenge. I confess that I was so full of rage I wanted to kill the other driver involved in the accident that killed my father, my grandmother Pauline, and my great-grandmother Retha.

MY CHOICE

From the time of the accident until after the trial—and even up to this day—we have seen no remorse from the driver. During the trial, my brother and I were in the restroom when the driver walked in. I was thinking, My brother and I could mess you up right now. We were in an ideal position to beat him to a pulp, which is exactly what I wanted to do. But had we done that, we would have caused a mistrial, and we would have been the ones going to jail. The Lord helped me control my emotions and be smart enough to restrain myself from pulverizing the guy.

For years it bothered me that the driver showed no remorse for his actions. I did talk to his father, who at least showed concern for what his son had done. I believe this tragedy would have been easier for the family to deal with in the long run had the driver expressed some sorrow for the events that killed three people and seriously injured three others.
But I learned, after being tortured by grief and unforgiveness for years, that my healing couldn’t depend on what the driver did or didn’t do. I would have to make a choice to forgive.

**TAKE IT TO THE LORD**

My mother had to deal with unforgiveness as well. I will let her share her experience in her own words:

> My husband was a prince of a man; and when we arrived that day to visit our son and his family, little did I know that within 24 hours I would be a widow, losing the love of my life, my mother, and my grandmother, who was like a second mother to me. I lost my husband, our life’s work, and our home. I moved out of the church’s parsonage and into the home with my son David and his wife, Lisa. I was lost without my husband. We had been married 33 years.

One night I went to dinner at a friend’s house, and other ladies were there visiting and sharing. My friend shared with the ladies what had happened and asked them to pray with me. One lady asked me if I had forgiven the driver of the other car. I replied, “I have just been trying not to hate him.” A lady suggested that when we pray, I should tell God that I forgive this driver and ask for His help in forgiving.

I did just that, and God began to help me forgive. I felt heaviness lift off me, and I began to get better. Unforgiveness will cause a person to have many problems, including health problems. Forgiveness helps us to heal. Mark 11:25 tells us that if we hold anything against someone, we are to forgive them so our Father in heaven will forgive us of our sins.

It has been over 20 years since the accident, and God has opened doors of work, friends, and a wonderful church. In 2013 the Lord brought a wonderful, godly man named Durand Faircloth to be my husband. Things happen that we do not understand, but God never fails us. And oh, how He loves us.

**REPENT OF REBELLION**

Jesus told us that we must forgive if we want to be forgiven. We reap what we sow, and we cannot sow evil and reap good things, or sow unforgiveness and reap forgiveness. To disobey and continue in unforgiveness is rebellion. Believing you have a right to get even is rebellion.

Ephesians 4:26-27 tells us, “Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Do not give place to the devil” (MEV). When you fail to obey this command, and when you engage in unrighteous anger with the desire to harm someone or get revenge, you give up your own territory to the Enemy. You also appear foolish and immature.

**RELEASE YOUR ANGER**

A woman told the story of seeing a Facebook post from another woman who had been involved in a sordid affair years ago with her first husband. She thought she had forgiven the woman, but the moment she saw her name, she realized she still harbored ill feelings toward her. In that moment all of the old emotions of anger and bitterness returned.

She got off Facebook and tried to get the woman off her mind. She prayed, “Lord, I thought I had forgiven her, but now this old hurtful pain and the ugly thoughts have returned. It is hard for me to even see her name again.”

To her surprise the Lord told her to befriend the woman. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing and said, “Oh, no, Lord, that cannot be from You!” But the thought was very clear and very strong, and she knew she had to befriend the woman.

After pondering all night whether to respond to the direction she sensed from the Lord, she sent the woman a Facebook friend request. The woman accepted and sent her a message telling her that she had been thinking and praying about her for years, because she had always been haunted by her past actions and regretted the hurt she had caused.

The woman was in tears, and in that moment she sensed the Holy Spirit pouring His love into her for the other woman. She no longer felt any hurt or bitterness, but only love. All those other feelings were suddenly gone. The woman replied and told the other woman that she forgave her, and she encouraged the woman to also forgive herself. Both women were once victims, but they became victors through forgiveness.

God wants to see us healed and whole, not stuck in unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is rooted in anger. Have you ever known people who always seem to be angry, people who always seem ready to explode? The Bible warns us, “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul” (Prov. 22:24-25 NKJV).

If you cannot let go of unforgiveness, perhaps you first need to release your anger. God does not want you to be angry and sin, so He will help you overcome anything that you truly release to Him in prayer.😊

**Craig Stone** is an evangelist, Gospel singer, and TV host who shares a message of hope, forgiveness, and encouragement in churches across the globe. Craig and his wife, Janet, live in Atlanta with their three children.

Excerpted with permission from Forgiving the Unforgivable (Charisma House, 2015).
I was so excited about being forgiven, free, and saved that I immediately began to share my story with others. I didn’t know anything about the Bible, only that Jesus Christ saved me and He would save others too. He loved us and had a plan for our life. To my amazement, several of the people in my drug business said they needed Jesus in their life as well. Following a prayer to receive Christ, I would invite them to church.

A few months after my conversion, I met lay minister Leonard Albert, who believed God anoints every believer to share their faith. That encounter was part of God’s plan for my life. He introduced me to a simple plan to engage family, friends, and total strangers in a conversation introducing them to Jesus Christ. Thirty-seven years later, my life is rich with memories of people who have prayed with me in parking lots, hotel lobbies, Laundromats, taxicabs, airports, airplanes, and elsewhere. The most important of those people are my three children.

Today, I pray as Leonard taught me to pray: I ask God for a divine appointment to sow a seed that will result in someone following Him. God saves and commissions each of us to tell others. Especially in our politically correct world, we are to share the Gospel every day. It is the only way to rescue people from destruction.

God Loves You and Has an Incredible Plan for Your Life.”

Steve Brown serves in marketing and public relations for PAR Church Builders, Inc. He lives in Villa Rica, Georgia.

About a year before I gave my heart to Christ, an elderly woman spoke those piercing words to me on her front porch. I was there to pick up her granddaughter for a date. Stunned by the woman’s boldness, I couldn’t get off her porch quickly enough; I turned and walked away, politely gesturing goodbye to her granddaughter.

Astounded as I drove away, I did my best to suppress her words, but the harder I tried, the more I contemplated them. Finally, on September 10, 1978, I knelt at an altar at the Toonigh (Georgia) Church of God and accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. At age 22, I was ignorant of the things of God. From as early as 13 years old, not only was I using hard drugs and alcohol; I was also putting together drug deals that resulted in a life so entangled in the drug culture that I could not unravel it and simply walk away.

On this incredible day of salvation, a crisis irrupted in my psyche that I would later discover was the convicting power of the Holy Spirit drawing me to Christ. At the moment of transformation, a cycle of addiction was broken—I was delivered instantly from alcohol, drugs, and crime. My insatiable appetite for getting high, sex, and money was now fixed on Jesus, “the author and finisher of [my] faith” (Heb. 12:2).

Some suggested that I switched one fix for another, but were they wrong! Steve Brown the drug dealer “died” that day, along with the generational curse that was on my dad (who died in his late 40s) and my grandfathers (who died at 29 and 31, respectively)—all drug- and alcohol-related. A brand-new Steve Brown was born into the kingdom of God. I exchanged death for life, sin for righteousness, and my sin nature for a new spirit born of the Holy Spirit.

I came to faith in Christ through a series of events by individuals who sowed the seed of the Gospel into my stony heart. One plants, another waters, but God gives the increase. God loved me and had an incredible plan for my life.
While in my mother's kitchen preparing for dinner, I became troubled. I’d met the man I wanted to marry, yet something was missing. Not realizing it at the time, this “troubling” was surely due to the prayers of my fiancé’s mother.

I searched Mom’s Methodist church cookbook for a new recipe and found something I never anticipated. A section in the back referenced Scripture verses for occasions when one felt disappointed or depressed.

Lifting the large family Bible from the coffee table, I thumbed through the pages. What I saw nearly took my breath away: “Woe to the hypocrites” (see Matt. 23:13). Stunned, I stared at the words as if cut by a sword. I was a hypocrite—a hypocrite who had played church for years. For the first time, I repented with the intention of allowing God to change me.

Life as I had known it would never be the same. The love letters to my fiancé evolved into words of adoration to God. When we married, the ceremony was more of a salvation invitation. His mother was happy.

Immediately, I became burdened for the souls of my family. Filled with the Holy Spirit, I fervently interceded for them. Within the next four years, they were all saved.

Recently, I saw an old video of a family reunion. Many of them were smoking. Ironically, I had forgotten they smoked—so great was the salvation of God in our house.

What began as a salvation prayer for one became a salvation for many.

A PRICELESS INVESTMENT

TEDDY CONN II IS THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND YOUTH PASTOR FOR THE WOODLAND CHURCH OF GOD IN KOKOMO, INDIANA, AND SERVES ON THE INDIANA YOUTH AND DISCIPLESHIP BOARD.

FROM THE AGE OF 10 until now, I have attended church. My testimony shaped me into the type of leader and teacher that I am today.

Originally, my dad’s pizza-place boss invited him to church. My family chose to attend that church, the Southwest Church of God in Indianapolis, because they had a bus outreach and children’s ministry. God used those hooks to pull my family into church.

The people of that church loved us. They took us in, accepted us, taught us, and poured themselves into us. They ministered to every age and every person, regardless of their background. From our weekly children’s church to Sunday school, and from VBS to youth group, the people poured out themselves to me. I was receiving so much more than I realized then. The value of the time people invested in me was priceless.

One particular Sunday morning, our associate pastor was speaking. I had spent time in his home because his son was my close friend. That man walked the walk, and his son was also authentic; and I wanted that. I can’t recall what was preached that morning, but I remember going to the altar and giving my heart completely to Christ. I soaked up everything, preparing me for what I would later become. By the time I received the call of God on my life at an Indiana Church of God youth camp, so much had been invested in me.

We in the church can take Proverbs 22:6—“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it”—too lightly. The key word in that scripture is train. Although big events such as camps and weekend retreats are good, it’s not about the big event. Ongoing training is vital. We must realize that students’ eyes are watching and learning. As leaders in the church, are we genuine? Are we showing students they are worth our time? We must become disciples of Jesus Christ who are willing to invest in the lives around us by training them. Have we become so busy that we are no longer pouring into individuals and families?

As I have grown into leadership in the church, I am constantly reminded of the need to invest in those I am serving. Whether with a student in our youth ministry or someone I meet outside of church, the approach to reach them is the same. I strive to model Christ in my actions and attitude. By loving people where they are, by understanding I am part of their journey with Christ, and by being willing to train them when possible, I am doing all I can to influence others to follow Him. My goal is to serve in the manner that I experienced growing up, with the humility and willingness to pour myself out, allowing God to use me for His glory.
CONNECTICUT CONGREGATION CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

Hartford, CT—From October 24 through November 1, the Rehoboth Church of God will be celebrating 50 years of ministry. Guest speakers will be W. A. Blair (overseer of Jamaica), Courtney Williams, Derrick Webley, and General Overseer Mark L. Williams.

The ministry began in the heart of Peter C. Barrett and his wife, Daphne, who helped birth a church in Croydon, England, in 1957. On a visit to Connecticut in 1962, the Barretts learned there was no Church of God congregation in the state capital. He then resigned his pastorate and moved to Hartford to plant a church.

The Barretts and their son, Andrew, started prayer meetings in their Sterling Street apartment. On May 27, 1966, they organized a congregation with five members—Linette Coombs, Ruth Skyers, and themselves. As the church grew, they rented the Lenox Theater for worship services, followed by a period at the Vine Street School. Those sites were available only for evening services, but after a few months, they rented a Seventh-Day Adventist Church. In June 1967, some 25 people attended the first morning service.

Reverend Barrett found jobs and housing for incoming residents, provided loans from his personal funds to needy individuals, directed those with immigration issues to legal experts, and offered pastoral counseling. Daphne Barrett was a bank teller who served the congregation as clerk, Sunday school director, president of the women’s ministries, and bookkeeper for the childcare center.

One member, Mary (Colbert) Matthews and her family (Barbara, Israel, Wesley, Shawn, Amber, Algenon, and Dana) formed the first choir, called the Hartford Youth Choir. Andrew Barrett was one of the early musicians who greatly influenced the choir’s singing style. “Drew” was a gifted musician and songwriter who died young in 1991.

In 1975, the growing congregation raised funds to purchase a church building on Blue Hills Avenue. In 1979, Tom Coker helped establish the “Peter C. Barrett Scholarship Achievement Committee.” Pastor Barrett often encouraged young people, “Put something good into your head.” In 1981, the Blue Hills Childcare Center opened, with Coker serving as executive director.

Reverend Barrett mentored several ministers, including Fennis Huggins and Byron Peart, who currently are Church of God pastors.

After Peter Barrett’s death in 1987, L. Martin Wright became the pastor. During his tenure, the Lord added to the congregation tremendously, necessitating two morning worship services. Membership exceeded 700.

Reverend Wright had a burden for souls and an effective evangelistic ministry. He implemented the church’s first tent crusade, with W. A. Blair serving as evangelist. Through the outreach of the church’s Spiritual Crusaders choir, Paula Clouden pioneered the church’s prison ministry in Somers, Connecticut. “The Better Way” (helping people overcome substance abuse), led by Hyacinth E. Lewis-Scott, and the faithful food pantry team, directed by Elsa Smith, continue to impact the community.

In February 1992, Reverend Wright was appointed overseer of the Church of God in Southern New England. The Blue Hills Church’s expansion project, birthed under his leadership, was executed by his successor, Jeremiah McIntyre, who led the church until 1997.

Like his predecessors, Pastor McIntyre was impassioned to evangelize Hartford. He was an exceptional communicator of the Gospel and a renowned musician.
He encouraged those called to ministry to further their studies through the denomination’s Ministerial Internship Program. The Lord blessed the church tremendously. Four worship services were held on Sundays, including Sunday school.

With more space needed, a groundbreaking service for a building renovation was held in 1997. Reverend McIntyre temporarily moved the church into the Lewis Fox Middle School, but he did not see the completion of the expansion project. He became ill and passed away on November 27, 1997.

In the remodeled building, the Reverends Wallace Sibley (state overseer), Derrick Henry, and Michael Mitchell courageously led the congregation as interim pastors until Joseph E. Jackson became the new pastor in 1998. Following the installation of Pastor Jackson, Reverend Mitchell founded the King’s Chapel Church of God in Hartford, where he continues to serve as pastor.

Joseph Jackson was a gifted orator of the Gospel and an adept administrator. The newly renovated facility was dedicated under his leadership on June 13, 1998.

From 1999 until 2012, Joselyn A. Williams served as pastor. In 2001, with the help of June Thomas (Christian education director), he established the Peter C. Barrett Bible Institute to offer a more intense study and application of the Word of God. Reverend Williams appointed the church’s first youth pastor, Marvyn Walters, and his wife, Sophia.

In 2003, Reverend Williams, a former missionary, led the church in adopting the building of a school as a mission project, and the Norma Williams Academy was dedicated in 2002. The church’s current mission project is helping to build a center for troubled teens in Jamaica. Madge Thompson is the church’s missions director.

In 2003, property was purchased at 1170 Blue Hills Avenue. Construction on a new edifice began five years later. In its new building in Bloomfield, the congregation was renamed “Rehoboth Church of God” in fall 2009. The name comes from Genesis 26:22: “He called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”

Since 2012, Jonathan Ramsey Jr. has served as pastor. He has a passion for reaching the disenfranchised and those in crisis. There is an air of excitement with new ministries and structure in place. The lower level of the facility was dedicated debt-free on January 2015. Sunday morning services are being live-streamed as Dr. Ramsey enthusiastically imparts the Word of God.

After 50 years, this ministry has only just begun. Our best years are yet ahead. We are a place to belong, a place to grow, and a place to serve.—Beverly Coker

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**DECEASED MINISTERS**

**BECK**, Bobby Joe; 64; ordained minister; South Carolina; Rachel Beck (wife)

**CARLSON**, David L.; 63; ordained bishop; Ohio; Elizabeth Carlson (wife)

**COMBS**, Philip Benjamin; 78; ordained bishop; Florida; Michael Combs (son)

**CORTEZ**, Florentino F., Sr.; 88; ordained minister; California; (no contact listed)

**CULPEPPER**, James Randall; 49; exhorter; Alabama; Lucy Culpepper (wife)

**FRANKLIN**, John C., Jr.; 82; ordained bishop; Alabama; Alice Franklin (wife)

**KIM**, George C.; 76; exhorter; California; Kye Kim (wife)

**KING**, Donald Ray; 80; ordained bishop; Florida; Joyce L. King (wife)

**MERCER**, Loy C.; 96; ordained bishop; North Carolina; Susan Mercer (wife)

**VELGARA**, Juana; 88; ordained minister; Illinois; Amado Pantoja Sr. (brother)

**WILES**, Charley Darris; 85; ordained bishop; Arkansas; June Wiles (wife)

**WINBURN**, Dorothy B.; 87; exhorter; South Carolina; Laverne Winburn (son)

**WOFFORD**, Clyde Richard; 57; ordained minister; South Carolina; Juanita Wofford (wife)

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**BOMBARDING HEAVEN FOR OUR MOM**

Jacksonville, FL—In the fall of 1984, our mother, Alvisell Pridgen, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and given six to eight months to live without chemotherapy. Even with chemotherapy, the outlook was bleak. We (Cyndee and Kandi) were sisters attending Lee University, and we wondered if our mother would be alive to attend our graduations.

One Lee professor, Charles Beach, led the charge to bombard heaven with prayers on our mother’s behalf. Each time he led prayer in chapel, he called Mom’s name and thereby reminded the student body to pray for her and our family.

He was a prayer warrior and our champion.

Charles Gay, a man back home at the West Jacksonville Church of God, was instrumental in ensuring Dad had the time needed to care for Mom. During a trip to Israel, Charles placed her name on the Wailing Wall.

It’s now 2015, and our family continues to experience the results of the prayers. Upon the retirement of Mom’s oncology doctor, she reminded him that he promised to always be her doctor. He said he had two categories of patients—(1) those he thought would live but died, and (2) those he thought would die but lived. She realized in which category he had placed her.

Mom and our father, Glenn (a retired pastor) celebrated 63 years of marriage in May. They are active in their church and senior citizens center. Mom has lived to see our graduations, our marriages, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.—Cyndee Byerly and Kandi Lee
"The people around Piney Grove met to and did organize and set forth a Christian Union Church on October 8, 1897."—Reverend R. G. Spurling

Pages of the timeworn and stained ledger appeared as if they had not been handled by human hands or viewed by questioning eyes for countless years. Measuring about 15 inches high and 6 inches wide, the first few pages were fragile and breaking. Their corners had been bent with years of use so that a few of the words in the handwriting of R. G. Spurling were difficult to read.

Yet, even at first glance, these pages inspired hope that unanswered questions might now be resolved. Whether by accident or by providence, in fall 2013, Bishop Wade H. Phillips discovered this ledger that has now revealed important details about the Piney Grove Christian Union and early Church of God history.

Until recently, the activities of Church of God founder R. G. Spurling immediately following the formation of the Christian Union at Barney Creek in 1886 seemed shrouded in mystery. We knew that the Christian Union ceased meeting at Barney Creek when the Spurling family sold their property and moved to Polk County, Tennessee, in 1889. Several sources reported he preached wherever he had an opportunity. The written testimony of his son, Pinckney, suggested Spurling had organized other congregations. However, details remained vague.

In recent years, Bishop Phillips has concluded that Spurling established three Christian Union congregations between Barney Creek in 1886 and the Holiness Church at Camp Creek in 1902. Having purchased a farm from his wife’s family, Spurling set a Christian Union in order along Shuler Creek near the Hiwassee River about 1890. Spurling relocated to Turletown in 1893, however, and the Christian Union at Shuler Creek likely dissolved by 1898. About that time, Spurling established a Christian Union on “Paul’s Mountain,” also known as “High Top.” He ordained Andy Paul to serve as pastor of this congregation, which survived until about 1910.

The most successful congregation was the Christian Union that Spurling organized in the community of Piney Grove in 1897. The ledger that Phillips discovered contains their “rules of decorum,” the handwritten note confirming their date of organization, a later membership list, and the minutes of some of their business meetings.

The Piney Grove Christian Union was not far from the Holly Springs Baptist Church where R. G. Spurling’s father, Richard, was a member. R. G. Spurling had been preaching in the Piney Grove community for about a decade when he organized the congregation in 1897. Indeed, even before the Piney Grove church was set in order, the Holly Springs church excluded several of their members who had come under Spurling’s influence. Many of the members of the Piney Grove church were part of Minter Freeman’s family, and Spurling ordained Minter’s son, Andrew, as their pastor. Spurling also licensed Dorcus Freeman Bowers to preach—making her the first credentialed female minister in our movement.

The Piney Grove church did well, with perhaps as many as 100 people attending around the turn of the century. Although Pastor Andrew Freeman attended our first General Assembly in 1906, the congregation chose to remain independent rather than to associate with what they considered “The Assembly Church of God” led by A. J. Tomlinson. With this decision, they fell out of Church of God history.

For more information about the four known Christian Union congregations established by R. G. Spurling, see Wade H. Phillips’ book, Quest to Restore God’s House: A Theological History of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Volume 1, 1886-1923 (CPT Press, 2015).
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