



## Welcome to GCLI!

You are starting an exciting journey! To be a leader in the church of Jesus Christ is the greatest privilege in the world. In the Great Commission Leadership Institute, we believe:

1. *Our mission in the church rises and falls on leadership.*  
That's why we are committed to seeing more leaders raised up for the Lord's kingdom.
2. *Leadership can be learned.*  
All great leaders in God's church were weak people who learned how to have a strong faith in a supernatural God.
3. *Leadership is best learned in the local church.*  
By combining "on the job" training in local church ministry with structured coursework, we have the best of both worlds—the practical with the academic.

May God grant you abundant grace as you aspire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and His church in fulfilling His command to make disciples of all nations!



John Hopler  
Editor, GCLI

## **Great Commission Leadership Institute**

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## Article Guide

### BOOK 1: SESSIONS I & II

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2. Reaching the Nations<sup>†</sup>
3. Personal Evangelism\*
4. Outreach Through the Church\*
5. Planting Churches
6. International Missions\*
7. Ministry to the Poor

#### Session II: Commitment to God and His Word

1. The Sufficiency of God and His Word<sup>†</sup>
2. The Spiritual Training of a Devout Man<sup>†</sup>
3. Personal Devotional Life of a Leader\*
4. Creation and the Genesis Account
5. Interpreting the Scriptures
6. Building a Church of Prayer\*
7. Building a Church Devoted to God's Word\*
8. God-Honoring Authority
9. Not Loving the World

### BOOK 2: SESSIONS III & IV

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3. The Church as God's Family\*
4. Church History\*
5. The Local Church and National Ministries
6. Church Judgments
7. Counseling and the Church
8. Other Religions' Views of God\*
9. Finances and the Church\*

#### Session IV: Church Leadership / The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

1. Five Principles of Effective Church Leadership<sup>†</sup>
2. Jesus Christ, The Son of God<sup>†</sup>
3. Styles of Leadership\*
4. Elders and Leading the Local Church
5. Women and Leadership
6. Defending the Deity of Christ Against the Teachings of Contemporary Cults
7. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

### BOOK 3: SESSIONS V & VI

#### Session V: Raising Godly Families / The Doctrine of Man and Sin

1. The Doctrine of Man and Sin<sup>†</sup>
2. Five Shared Beliefs on the Family<sup>†</sup>
3. Building Strong Marriages in the Church\*
4. Divorce and Remarriage
5. Building Strong Families in the Church\*
6. Sanctification
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8. Parent-Led Education
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#### Session VI: Grace / The Doctrine of the Scriptures

1. Grace<sup>†</sup>
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5. The Inerrancy of the Scriptures
6. Old Testament Survey
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7. God's Sovereignty and Man's Ability to Choose
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#### Session VIII: Everyone a Minister / The Doctrine of The Holy Spirit

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<sup>†</sup> Audio teaching/outline

\*Multiple readings



## INTRODUCTION

### **Questions & Answers**

#### *1. What is the Great Commission Leadership Institute (GCLI) Foundations Program?*

GCLI is a 2-year national program, combining teachings, regional meetings, and local church mentoring, designed to systematically train pastor-elders who are part of Great Commission Churches (GCC).

#### *2. Why was this program developed?*

For over 40 years, God has raised up pastor-elders within Great Commission churches by the church leadership focusing on doctrine, character, and ministry skills of the men within their church. Also, during the 1990s, pastors in GCC churches consistently asked for help in training elders within their churches. A common question asked by men aspiring to be elders in churches was, “What practically can I do, and what steps can I take, to move closer to being an elder?” In response, the GCLI program was established. Since 1999, the GCLI has been a program that combines local church mentoring with the structure of a national program to enhance what God has already been doing for several decades in GCC.

#### *3. What is the typical schedule for a man enrolled in the program?*

Each man will be asked to devote about one to two hours per week on homework. Each session will have two teachings (on CD with outlines) and five or more readings. Overall, each session has six or more homework assignments—one based on the two teachings, and five or more based on the readings. In addition, each person will participate in a one to two hour mentor group, usually twice each month, led by elders in his church. Each participant will also have a personal mentor (an elder in the church), coaching him one-on-one in character areas and in ministry skills, which he will be exercising within the church ministry. Finally, each person will participate in the annual Pastor/Staff Conference, coupled with regional meetings with other elder-pastors in GCC churches near to them.

#### *4. Where will the regional meetings be held?*

The regional meetings will be held in regions throughout the United States. Contact your pastor for the one closest to you.

*5. What will be taught at these regional meetings?*

The regional meetings will cover the “Going Deeper” teachings. That is, we will cover the core values and doctrines covered in the GCLI material, but with greater focus and depth.

*6. Why were the topics in the GCLI Foundations material chosen?*

Our desire in GCLI is to give a basic orientation and overview of those issues that every man should know before he is appointed as an elder. The topics taught on the CDs and the readings are ones that cover these essentials.

*7. Why not simply cover these topics within the local church? Isn't the local church adequate for teaching these topics to elder candidates?*

Yes, the local church is adequate for raising up elders. And be assured that each local church in GCC is the foundation for the GCLI program. GCLI will only enhance what the church is already doing in developing men in doctrine/core values, character, and ministry skills. Furthermore, the mentor group topics will all be covered in groups led by the elders of the local church.

*8. How will GCLI enhance men in doctrine and core values?*

A special dynamic occurs when the Word is taught in a group setting. Few churches have enough elder candidates to provide this dynamic for their local leadership training. Also, GCLI provides articles and testimonies from pastors who have broader gifts and effects than may be present in a particular local church. This impresses the truth more deeply into the lives of church leaders. Finally, specific doctrinal issues that pastors in GCC churches encounter in day to day ministry will be the focus of study in the program.

*9. How will GCLI enhance the character training of those enrolled?*

As part of the program, each participant will take the Elder Qualification Test to develop character qualities in which to grow. The structure of the program, coupled with counsel by regional directors, will enhance the character training done by local pastors.

*10. How will GCLI enhance the ministry skills training of men in the church?*

The structure provided by the program and the counsel by regional leaders will help local pastors focus on developing practical ministry skills in each participant. Pastors' Conference workshops and subsequent networking from the workshops will help develop participant's ministry skills. The mentor group topics are designed to deal with practical day-to-day ministry issues in which every elder must be skilled.

*11. Please describe the mentor group times.*

The mentor groups can best be described as “simulated elder meetings,” where doctrinal and ministry issues affecting the whole church are discussed. The elder candidates will not only be trained in ministry decision-making, but will also be brought into a closer fellowship with the elders of the local church.

*12. What if the material covered is inconsistent with that which is taught in the local church?*

Be assured that the program is designed to deal with doctrines and ministry issues relevant to every church in GCC. Controversial doctrines are addressed in a balanced way or are avoided altogether. No one ministry model is emphasized. In addition, all pastors are invited to help in the development of materials for the program. The goal is that the GCLI program represent the entire association of churches.

*13. Why are the articles written by Great Commission pastors, rather than others in the body of Christ?*

There are two primary reasons we chose Great Commission pastors to be the writers of these articles.

First, one of the goals of GCLI is for you to become part of the leadership community of Great Commission Churches. We are a band of brothers linked together to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Reading articles by ones within our association is a way for you to get to know some of the men that you are joining in the mission of world evangelization.

Second, we whole-heartedly believe that God can raise up any man to be an elder-pastor. The pastors in Great Commission Churches are not superstars. They are ordinary men who have been empowered by an extraordinary God. These articles show that any man can become a leader in God's church, if he simply is humble and committed to God, His Word, and His church. Honest testimonies and practical articles by the association's pastors demonstrate to future pastors that being a pastor is not out of reach—it is very doable.

*14. What are the requirements for those interested in enrolling in GCLI?*

The GCLI program is for any man aspiring to be an elder in GCC who:

- Is recommended by a pastor in his local church;
- Agrees to participate in the Pastors Conference and regional meetings; and
- Agrees to participate in the mentor group in his local church.

*15. What are the guidelines that local church pastors should use in selecting participants for GCLI?*

Here are some suggested guidelines:

- Does he have a sincere desire to do the work of an elder and to aspire to that office?
- Is there a general confidence that he could possibly be recognized as an elder in the next few years?
- Is he presently doing effective ministry within the local church?
- Has he had evangelism training in his church?
- Has he had basic small group (or ministry) leadership training in the local church?
- Has he participated in mission activities and conferences through the local church (e.g., Faith-walkers, High School LT, short-term international mission trip, domestic mission trip, etc.)?

*16. Is there a limit to the number of men who can participate in the program from any given church?*

There is no official limit. However, practically, there will be a limit to the number of men any given pastor will be able to mentor.

*17. Is there a recommendation as to the number of participants from each church?*

Although it will vary greatly from church to church, we would recommend (and hope) that churches have enrolled one to four elder candidates in GCLI per existing elder enrolled in GCLI.

*18. What about women and those who are not elder candidates? Can they participate?*

Women and others may (and are encouraged to) participate in the Pastor/Staff Conference, regional conferences, and in the mentor group times (per the discretion of the pastors in each local church). Although the material is primarily designed for developing elders, the material can be used for training other leaders in the local church.

*19. What is the cost of GCLI?*

The program will cost each participant \$75 for the entire two-year program. In addition, each participant will need to pay for registration and housing/food/transportation costs for the Pastor/Staff Conference and the regional meetings.

*20. What are the benefits that a participant receives for this cost?*

- Orientation to the essential topics that a prospective elder needs to know.
- Solid teaching on leadership, including a notebook of readings for the mentor groups.
- Greater unity and camaraderie with leaders in GCC through participation in the group sessions.
- Focused coaching in character and ministry skills.
- A certificate of completion from GCC to be given to all who complete the 2-year program.

*21. What if someone cannot financially afford GCLI?*

Scholarships are provided for those who have financial needs and are not able to afford the cost of the GCLI program. Ask your regional director for more information.

*22. If someone enrolls in the program, will it guarantee his appointment as an elder in GCC or in his church?*

No GCLI participant is guaranteed that completion of the program will qualify him to be an elder. Local church leaders ultimately make the decisions concerning who is appointed as elder in their church. Pastors will certainly have increased peace and confidence in appointing a man who has completed this course. Therefore, the GCLI program is a tangible step toward becoming an elder for any man in a GCC church who desires this work. In addition, completion of the GCLI material is required for ordination by Great Commission Churches.



*23. Can a person enroll in GCLI at any point during the year?*

Yes, someone could enroll, for example, between Sessions II and III, or anytime during the program. GCLI is designed to be a continuous program that rotates every two years.

*24. If I have any further questions or suggestions as to GCLI or would like to contribute to the development of the program, whom should I contact?*

Contact your pastor, your regional director, or John Hopler (614-840-9900, [jrhopler@gmail.com](mailto:jrhopler@gmail.com)).

## How to Use the GCLI Notebook

GCLI is in four books with two sessions per book. Each of the two sessions contains six or more homework assignments. The first assignment of each session will be based on two teachings on CD. Listen to the CDs and follow along with the outlines provided.

In each church, the pastor(s) will lead a mentor group for six or more times. Mentor groups may prefer to meet weekly; others will meet every other week. Overall, in the course of one year, each mentor group will cover 30 teachings/articles.

Each GCLI participant will do the homework assigned and come prepared to share at the mentor group time. The homework will include an exercise which will help develop your convictions in key doctrines and core values. The first week's exercise will be a discussion of what was learned from the CDs. The other five homework exercises will be based upon readings which have been included in this notebook.

Each reading and exercise should take no more than 60-90 minutes to complete.

## A Word to the Wives

For those married men who are participating in the GCLI program, a commonly asked question is: How can my wife participate with me as I pursue the path of leadership?

There are several ways for a man's wife to participate:

*Regional and National Conferences.* Wives are welcome to attend regional and national conferences. In addition, be aware that every other year at the Pastors Conference there will be a special seminar track for the wives. Also, special seminars will be offered for the wives at several regional gatherings (see your regional coordinator for more details).

*CDs and Readings.* Wives are welcome (and encouraged) to listen to CDs of the teachings and to read the articles in the GCLI notebook. In this way, the values and truths are being imparted not just to the husband, but to the husband and wife as a team.

*Small Groups in the Local Church.* We urge each church to form small group activities specifically for the wives of those participating in GCLI. This could either be a wives' group or a couples' group that would meet, for example, monthly.

*One-on-One.* Developing a strong personal relationship with the wife of another pastoral candidate would be one of the most valuable ministries that a pastor's wife could do.



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## **Elder Qualifications Test**

JOHN HOPLER

An evaluation designed to help determine a man's maturity, measured by the standards set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

### **Acknowledgements**

Most of the original information in this booklet was derived from a discussion by the elders of Valley Brook Community Church in Columbia, MD, compiled in writing by Steve Huhta. The author extends his gratitude to them for their service and contribution to this work.

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John Hopler

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## **Elder Qualifications Test**

### HOW TO USE THIS TEST

This is a tool to help discern whether (or how closely) a man is qualified to be an elder.

For any man who is seriously being considered for appointment, the test should be taken by:

1. The man himself.
2. All the elders (locally and regionally) who know him.
3. His wife (or roommate).
4. Other leaders who are close to him.

For those aspiring to leadership, but not close to being appointed, the test should be taken by:

1. The man himself.
2. The elder who knows him best.
3. His wife (or roommate).

After this test is taken, the results should be discussed by the leadership and shared with the man whose life is being scrutinized. Page 27 gives further instructions on how to use the results of this test.



**Elder Qualifications Test**  
TEST QUESTIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS DESCRIPTIONS

**Person being evaluated:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Person who is doing evaluation:** \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this test is not to rate the spirituality or maturity of the elder candidate, but to determine, yes or no, whether you personally have confidence that he is above reproach and thereby qualified to be an elder. Therefore, either answer Yes or No to the following questions by writing a “1” for a Yes, and a “0” for a No. Record a “1” if the questions do not apply (e.g., a question as to children if the man has no children). Then add the four answers for a total and insert that number on the Summary Sheet on page 26.

**A. Above Reproach (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2

Definition: Greek word “anepileptos” means “not to lay hold of.” That which cannot be laid hold of. Not open to censure, irreproachable, irreprehensible. Phillips translation: of blameless reputation. Amplified Bible: give no grounds for accusation but must be above reproach.

**Blameless (NIV)**

Verse: Titus 1:6,7

Definition: Greek word “anegkleilous” means “not open to censure, irreproachable, unrebukable, irreprehensible.” Phillips translation: unquestioned integrity, of unimpeachable virtue. Amplified Bible: men who are of unquestionable integrity and are irreproachable.

- 1. Is it true that no one has an unresolved justifiable complaint against him? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2. Do those closest to him (wife, other church members) believe he is qualified to be an elder? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3. Does he believe he is qualified to be an elder? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4. Is he open and vulnerable with others as to his personal life? \_\_\_\_\_
- Total for A** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B. Husband of One Wife (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6

1. Is it true that neither he nor his wife (if he is married) have been divorced? \_\_\_\_\_  
Note: if a divorce in question was Biblically based, write down "1."

2. Is he faithful to his wife physically? \_\_\_\_\_  
(If single, does he have control of his sexual desires?)

3. Is he pure in his relationships with other women in the church? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Does he have a high moral standard as to what he reads, \_\_\_\_\_  
or watches in theatres, videos, T.V. or the internet?

**Total for B** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**C. Temperate (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6

Definition Greek word "nephaios" means "sober, clear-thinking, mentally alert, able to make sound judgments." Thayer translation: a state untouched by any slumberous or beclouding influence. Phillips translation: a man of self-control. Amplified Bible: circumspect and temperate and self-controlled.

1. Does he regularly deny himself liberties, for the sake of \_\_\_\_\_  
benefiting others? (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8 & 10)

2. Does he control his weight? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Does he respond well when confronted with discouraging circumstances? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is he free from significant and uncontrolled financial debts \_\_\_\_\_  
(not including a house, car or school loan)?

**Total for C** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**D. Prudent or Sensible (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “sophron” means “discreet, reasonable, sensible, serious, sound mind, self-controlled.” Implies sound judgment and a disciplined state of mind which is not characterized by impulsiveness or given to extremes. New International Version: self-controlled. Phillips translation: a man of discretion. Amplified Bible: sensible and well-behaved, sober-minded (discreet).

- 1. Does he generally display good common sense, particularly in financial areas? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Can he give good counsel on matters dealing with personal relationships? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Does he consistently go to the word of God when making important decisions? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Is he able to think creatively on how to see the church make progress? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for D** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**E. Respectable (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6

Definition: Greek word “kosmios” means “modest, honorable, decent, orderly, proper, trim, adorned, decorated, organized, attractive, beautiful.” Webster’s Dictionary: worthy of respect, decent or correct in character or behavior, proper. Wuest translation: one whose life is in accord with the position he holds and which is an adornment to it. Phillips translation: a man of disciplined life. Amplified Bible: dignified and orderly (disciplined) life.

- 1. Do others take his words to heart? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Does his external appearance measure up to what is considered proper both biblically and culturally? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Does he spend time regularly in planning out his time? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Does he keep his priorities? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for E** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**F. Hospitable (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “philoxenos” means “lover of strangers, hospitable.” Webster’s Dictionary: given to generous and cordial reception or guests, offering a pleasant or sustaining environment, readily receptive. Amplified Bible: hospitable, showing love for and being a friend to believers, especially strangers or foreigners.

1. Does he often use his home to minister to people? \_\_\_\_\_
2. At church meetings, does he go out of his way to meet visitors or people he doesn’t know? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does he generally have a cheerful countenance? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does he regularly invite people to church? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for F** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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**G. Able to Teach (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2

Definition: Greek word “didaktikos” means “apt to teach.” Phillips translation: have the gift of teaching. Amplified Bible: be a capable and qualified teacher.

1. Is he able to share the word of God in a public group and have a good effect? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is there clear growth in the lives of those people with whom he shares the word? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Has he led people to Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Have there been people who have joined the church because of his sharing the word of God with them? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for G** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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**H. Not Addicted to Wine (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word "paroinos" means "a man who sits too long at his wine, given to wine, drunken." New International Version: not given to drunkenness. Phillips translation: not intemperate, not overfond of wine. Amplified Bible: not given to wine, not given to drink.

1. Is it true that there are no sins that have mastered him \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Does he make sure to do nothing that is causing a weaker Christian to stumble? \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Is he sober emotionally? \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Does he refrain from excessive drinking or taking addictive drugs? \_\_\_\_\_
- Total for H** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Not Pugnacious (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3

Definition: Greek word "plektes" means "excessively inclined to quarrel or fight, a bully, striker, quarreler." New International Version: not violent. Phillips translation: not violent. Amplified Bible: not combative.

1. Is he able to maintain a concern for a person though personally offended by that person? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Is he diligent to not receive accusations against other people except on the basis of two or three witnesses? \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Does he consistently abandon potential quarrels? \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Does he handle criticism well? \_\_\_\_\_
- Total for I** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**J. Gentle (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3

Definition: Greek word “epieidis” means “gracious, encouraging, considerate, kind, yielding, seemly, equitable.” Amplified Bible: gentle and considerate.

1. Is he flexible to change his positions on minor issues? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is he a good and empathetic listener to people? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Is he kind and respectful towards those who are lowly or financially poor? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Is he able to secure the discipline of others without a show of authority? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for J** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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**K. Uncontentious (NASB)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3

Definition: Greek word “amakos” means “peaceable, not quarrelsome, not apt to contend, not given to angry debate, abstaining from fighting or strife, not struggling or fighting or giving a violent effort to obtain something, not disputing.” New International Version: not quarrelsome. Phillips translation: not a controversialist. Amplified Bible: not quarrelsome but forbearing and peaceable.

1. Does he avoid foolish controversies or arguments about nonessential matters? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Does he promote peace, harmony and unity rather than division when doctrinal issues are discussed? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does he see the good points in the views of other Christians with whom he generally disagrees? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Is he a man under authority (in the church, in business, and in society)? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for K** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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**L. Free From the Love of Money (NASB)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3

Definition: Greek word “aphilarguros” means “not greedy, without love of money.” Phillips translation: not greedy for money. Amplified Bible: not a lover of money — insatiable for wealth and ready to obtain it by questionable means.

**Not Fond of Sordid Gain (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word “aiskrokerdei” means “greedy, of base gain.” New International Version: not pursuing dishonest gain. Phillips translation: not greedy for financial gain. Amplified Bible: not grasping and greedy for filthy lucre (financial gain).

1. Does he trust God when tested financially? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is he generous with his money? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does he value ministering to people more than having a job on staff with the church? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does he tithe? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for L** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**M. Manages His Household Well (NASB)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:4

Definition: Greek word “kalos proistamenon” means “to direct, be at the head, rule well, be concerned about, care for, give aid.” Also “to stand before; hence to lead, attend to, indicating care and diligence.” Wuest translation: preside over his own household. Phillips translation: must have proper authority in his own household. Amplified Bible: rule his own household well.

1. Does he lead out spiritually in his family? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Does he take the lead in training his children in character? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Is his house clean? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does he maintain a budget of his finances? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for M** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**N. Keeping His Children Under Control with All Dignity (NASB)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:4

Definition: Greek word for control is “hupotage,” meaning “subjection.” Also, “primarily a military term, to rank under.” Greek word for dignity is “semnotes,” meaning “seriousness.”  
 New International Version: see that his children obey him with proper respect. Phillips translation: able to control and command the respect of his children. Amplified Bible: keeping his children under control, with true dignity, commanding their respect in every way and keeping them respectful.

**Having Children . . . Not Accused of Rebellion or Dissipation (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:6

Defintion: Greek word for dissipation, “asotia,” means “debauchery, wild, wastefulness.” The word for rebellion, “anupotaktuos,” means “not made subject, disobedient, undisciplined.”  
 New International Version: not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Phillips translation: not likely to be accused of loose living or lawbreaking. Amplified Bible: not open to the accusation of being loose in morals and conduct or unruly and disorderly.

**Having Children Who Believe (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:6

Definition: Greek word for believe, “pistos,” means “faithful, reliable, dependable, trustworthy, inspiring trust, confidence or faith.” Phillips translation: with children brought up as Christians. Amplified Bible: whose children are (well-trained and are) believers.

- 1. Are his children consistently well-behaved in public? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2. Does he have a good, healthy relationship with his children? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3. Do his children respect him and his words? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4. Do his children respect other adults? \_\_\_\_\_
- Total for N** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**O. Not a New Convert (NASB)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:6

Definition: Greek word for new, "neophutos," means "newly planted." Not a recently saved or a younger believer, one who has had little opportunity to test his own faith or demonstrate faithfulness. Phillips translation: he must not be a beginner in the faith. Amplified Bible: he must not be a new convert.

**Not Fond of Sordid Gain (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word "aiskrokerdei" means "greedy, of base gain." New International Version: not pursuing dishonest gain. Phillips translation: not greedy for financial gain. Amplified Bible: not grasping and greedy for filthy lucre (financial gain).

- 1. Has he been a believer for a significant period of time? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Has he faced trying circumstances and succeeded? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Has he learned how to claim God's promises over a period of time and see them fulfilled? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Has he shown proven character in serving in a church ministry? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for O** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**P. Good Reputation With Those Outside the Church (NASB)**

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:7

Definition: The Greek words for good reputation, "kalos marturia," mean "beautiful or good testimony." Phillips translation: he should have a good reputation with the outside world. Amplified Bible: he must have a good reputation and be well thought of by those outside (the church).

- 1. Do fellow employees and workers who are unbelievers appreciate and value him? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Is he honest, demonstrating integrity in business and personal dealings? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Is his social life a good testimony before non-Christians? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Do his neighbors respect him? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for P** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q. Not Self-Willed (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word “authades” means “self-willed, stubborn, arrogant, self-pleasing, self-centered, own authority, headstrong.” New International Version: not overbearing. Phillips translation: not aggressive. Amplified Bible: not self-willed or arrogant or presumptuous.

1. Has he surrendered his will to Jesus Christ in all areas of his life? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is he a “team player” as to the goals and plans laid out by the leaders of the church? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does he generally wait on the Holy Spirit’s leading before making decisions? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does he often ask for advice when making decisions? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for Q** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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**R. Not Quick Tempered (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word “orgilos” means “inclined to anger, passionate, cross, irritable, sharp-tongued, short fuse.” Phillips translation: hot-tempered.

1. Does he hold his temper well? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is he quick to forgive others who have wronged him? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Does he generally rejoice in trials? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does he generally refrain from correcting his children in anger? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for R** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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**S. Loving What Is Good (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “philagothos” literally means “to love (phileo) good (agathos), loving that which is good, a lover of good.” Amplified Bible: a lover of goodness — of good people and good things.

1. Are his closest associates godly people? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Does he quickly claim the grace of Christ when he sins or fails? \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Does he believe the best about others? \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Does he have a hopeful and optimistic view of life, based on the Scriptures \_\_\_\_\_
- Total for S** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**T. Just (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “dikaios” means “just, righteous in human relationships, upright, able to make proper judgments and act accordingly, correct, innocent.” New International Version: upright. Phillips translation: fair-minded. Amplified Bible: upright and fairminded.

1. Is he fair and honest in his relationships with other people? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Does he listen to both sides of a discussion before coming to a conclusion? \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Do others seek him out as a fair counselor? \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Could he confidently and righteously lead in putting out of the church someone who deserved to be removed from fellowship? \_\_\_\_\_
- Total for T** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**U. Devout (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “hosios” means “holy, pleasing to God, observable practical holiness, being undefiled, innocent, righteous, pious.” New International Version: holy. Amplified Bible: a devout man and religiously right.

- 1. Does he desire to please God more than men? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2. Does he have a strong prayer life? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3. Is he committed to obeying God and His word regardless of pressures or trials he goes through? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4. Does he regularly schedule extra time with the Lord? \_\_\_\_\_
- Total for U** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**V. Self-Controlled (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “egkrates” means “disciplined, in full control of oneself, strong, master of, to have power over oneself.” New International Version: disciplined. Amplified Bible: temperate and keeping himself in hand.

- 1. Does he usually accomplish tasks on time? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2. Does he get to meetings on time? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3. Is his appearance neat and orderly? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4. Does he control his eating? \_\_\_\_\_
- Total for V** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**W. Holding Fast to the Faithful Word (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:9

Definition: Greek word for holding fast is “antekomenon,” which means “clinging to, devoted to, paying attention to, holding firmly to.” New International Version: hold firmly to the trustworthy message. Phillips translation: a man who takes his stand on the true faith. Amplified Bible: he must hold fast to the sure and trustworthy word of God.

**Able to Exhort (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:9

Definition: Greek word “parakaleo” means “encourage, appeal, request, comfort, console, to call to or for.” New International Version: can encourage. Phillips translation: stimulate faith. Amplified Bible: to give stimulating instruction and encouragement.

**Sound Doctrine (NASB, NIV)**

Verse: Titus 1:9

Definition: Greek word for sound is “hugianino,” meaning “to be sound, healthy.” Phillips translation: sound teaching. Amplified Bible: in sound (wholesome) doctrine.

**Able . . . to Refute Those Who Contradict (NASB)**

Verse: Titus 1:9

Definition: Greek word for refute, “elegkein,” means “convince, convict, expose, point out, reprove, correct, set forth.” Phillips translation: confute opposition. Amplified Bible: to refute and convict those who contradict and oppose it — showing the wayward their error.

- 1. Is he able to mobilize a small group or ministry team to serve Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Is he able to boldly refute someone who is teaching wrong doctrine? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Does he have a good grasp of a wide variety of biblical doctrines? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Is he united with the other church leaders on all areas of major doctrine? \_\_\_\_\_

**Total for W** \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



GREAT  
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CHURCHES

## Elder Qualifications Test

SUMMARY SHEET

		<i>Totals</i>
A	<i>Above Reproach</i>	
B	<i>Husband of One Wife</i>	
C	<i>Temperate</i>	
D	<i>Prudent or Sensible</i>	
E	<i>Respectable</i>	
F	<i>Hospitable</i>	
G	<i>Able to Teach</i>	
H	<i>Not Addicted to Wine</i>	
I	<i>Not Pugnacious</i>	
J	<i>Gentle</i>	
K	<i>Uncontentious</i>	
L	<i>Free from the Love of Money / Not Fond of Sordid Gain</i>	
M	<i>Manages His Household Well</i>	
N	<i>Keep His Children Under Control With All Dignity</i>	
O	<i>Not a New Convert</i>	
P	<i>Good Reputation with Those Outside the Church</i>	
Q	<i>Not Self-Willed</i>	
R	<i>Not Quick Tempered</i>	
S	<i>Loving What Is Good</i>	
T	<i>Just</i>	
U	<i>Devout</i>	
V	<i>Self-Controlled</i>	
W	<i>Able to Exhort in Sound Doctrine and Refute Those Who Contradict</i>	



GREAT  
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## **Elder Qualifications Test**

### HOW TO EVALUATE THE RESULTS

1. First and foremost, understand that this is only a tool to help you evaluate if a man is qualified to be an elder. Reliance on the Holy Spirit and much prayer is needed when considering a man's qualifications.
2. The following is a scale to determine a man's qualifications based on the number in the "Total" column on the answer sheet:  
  
0: Not qualified  
1-2: Probably not qualified  
3: Perhaps qualified  
4: Qualified
3. The best way for the man being considered to use the results of this test is to take the one area of qualification in which there was the lowest rating and to devote himself to growing in that one area.
4. This ministry resource is provided by:

Great Commission Churches (GCC)  
6797 N. High St.  
Suite 319  
Worthington, OH 43085  
614-840-9900

GCC is a fellowship of churches and ministries devoted to Jesus Christ and fulfilling the Great Commission.



## The Great Commission Statement of Faith

**The Scripture.** The sole basis of our beliefs is the Bible, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. It was uniquely, verbally, and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, and was written without error in the original manuscripts. It is the supreme and final authority in faith and life in every age.

**God.** There is but one God, infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love, Creator of the universe, eternally existing in three persons-Father, Son and Holy Spirit-each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and the characteristics of personality.

**Man.** God created man in His own image, and man as he was originally created, was innocent before God. But man chose to sin by disobeying God, and therefore was alienated from his Creator and came under divine condemnation. Thus, all human beings are born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life, and are totally incapable of pleasing God in and of themselves.

**Jesus Christ.** God the Father, by His own choice and out of love for sinful men and women, sent Jesus Christ into the world to reconcile sinners to Himself. Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. He was God in the flesh, both true God and true man. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life and voluntarily suffered and died as our substitute to pay the penalty for our sins, thus satisfying God's justice and accomplishing salvation for all those who trust in Him alone. He rose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He lived and died. He bodily ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father, where He, the only mediator between God and man, makes intercession for His own. He will return to earth personally, visibly, and bodily to judge all men and establish His kingdom.

**Salvation.** Men and women are freed from the penalty for their sins not as a result, in whole or in part, of their own works, goodness, or religious ceremony, but by the undeserved favor of God alone. God declares righteous all who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation.

**The Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit has come into the world to reveal and glorify Christ, to convict men and women of their sins, and to impart new life to all who place their faith in Christ. He indwells believers from the moment of spiritual birth, seals them until the day of redemption, and empowers them to live a life pleasing to God.

**Assurance.** All who are born again of the Spirit can, through the sure promises of God, be fully assured of eternal life from the very moment they put their faith in Christ. This assurance is not based upon any kind of human merit but upon the finished work of Christ, who completely paid for their sins and upon the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is the deposit guaranteeing their inheritance.

**The Resurrection of the Dead.** At physical death, the believer enters immediately into eternal, conscious fellowship with the Lord and awaits the resurrection of his or her body to everlasting glory, and blessing. At physical death, the unbeliever enters into eternal, conscious separation from the Lord and awaits the resurrection of his or her body to everlasting suffering, judgment, and condemnation.

**Baptism and the Lord's Supper.** Jesus Christ has instructed those who believe in Him to be baptized in water as a symbol of their new birth in Christ. Baptism is only for those who have personally believed in Christ. Our practice is to baptize by immersion. The Lord also instituted the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of His suffering, death, and resurrection. Neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper has any merit in helping a person obtain eternal life.

**The Church.** All true believers make up the church worldwide and should assemble together in local churches for worship, prayer, fellowship, and teaching, in order to become conformed to the image of Christ and to become equipped to carry out the 'Great Commission' that Christ gave His followers in Matthew 28:19-20.



## The Great Commission Covenant

As part of Great Commission Churches, I commit to:

1. Love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.
2. Believe and follow God's word at all costs.
3. Love and honor my fellow believer in Christ as Jesus Christ has loved and honored me.
4. Uphold the following core values of Great Commission Churches.

*Grace of God*—God's grace through Jesus Christ is the basis and power, not only of our personal lives, but also of our ministry.

*Commitment to God and His Word*—Our aspiration is that our ministries will be marked by a wholehearted devotion to God, through prayer and by studying, obeying and teaching His Word.

*All Nations Reached With The Gospel*—Our ultimate goal and mission is to reach the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to make disciples of all the nations.

*Church*—The local church is God's vehicle for accomplishing the Great Commission. The church is the place for winning people to Christ, building them to maturity, raising up leaders, and for preparing church planting teams to be sent out for the expansion of God's kingdom.

*Church Leadership*—We place a priority upon raising up pastors and other leaders of Christ-like character within the local church.

*Oneness (Love and Unity)*—We desire our ministry to be marked by a Christ-like, selfless love, loyalty, and unity with fellow believers.

*Raising Godly Families*—Strong families are the foundation for strong churches. Therefore we make it a priority to equip members and pastors in building their marriages and families.

*Every Member A Minister*—All Christians are empowered through the Holy Spirit to be workers in the church, not just the pastors. Therefore we seek to equip each member to utilize his/her spiritual gifts to serve others.

5. Strive to believe the best about any who make this covenant, to support them with a loyal tongue, and to be quick to defend them. I will be slow to accept an accusation against them and will not accept such an accusation unless it is supported by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If an accusation should prove to be valid, I will seek to gently and lovingly confront and restore my wayward brother to a faithful walk with Christ.
6. Love all those who make this covenant and to unite with them as fellow team members, believing in them, serving them sacrificially and holding them accountable to this covenant, as we unite together to bring glory to our Lord and to accomplish His work on this earth.





## **Session I: The Great Commission**

### OVERVIEW

In this session, our focus is the Great Commission. The goal is that you, as an individual and as a leader of God's church, will, in your heart and actions, be devoted to "making disciples of all nations."

There are six homework exercises:

#### ***1. Discussion from the GCLI Teachings***

What are the main lessons you learned from the teachings?

#### ***2. Personal Evangelism***

In the readings there are several testimonies of leaders who are aspiring to lead out in personal evangelism. The goal of this exercise is for you take steps to be an example as a leader in reaching people for Christ.

#### ***3. Outreach Through the Church***

After reading several testimonies of churches, you will be asked to evaluate and improve your church's plan for outreach.

#### ***4. Planting Churches***

John Meyer's article focuses on the importance of planting churches. Your assignment is to evaluate and suggest ways in which your church can be more effective in planting new churches.

#### ***5. International Missions***

After reviewing the two articles, you will be asked to devise a plan which will help your church be more active in international missions.

#### ***6. Ministry to the Poor***

After reviewing John Hopler's article, you will be asked to put together a plan to equip your church to be more effective in ministering to the poor.



GCLI TEACHINGS

## The Great Commission of Jesus Christ

Pastor Herschel Martindale · Columbia, MD

*“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).*

(Note: “Go,” “Baptizing,” and “Teaching” are participles in the Greek text. “Make disciples” is the only imperative, or command. Many Christian leaders are careful about baptizing and teaching, but easily fail to “make disciples” and “equip” other believers to “make disciples.”)

Other Bible passages related to the same command:

*“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).*

*“He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-47).*

*“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

### The Core Values and Practices of the Great Commission Churches

(From Article III of the GCC Core Values paper, “All Nations Reached With the Gospel”)

#### A. Values

1. Out of love for God and people (The Great Commandment, Matthew 22:36-40), our mission as individuals and as churches is to fulfill the Great Commission—making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).
2. God’s desire is that every individual in the Church personally embrace the Great Commission— that, in one sense, we are all “missionaries” wherever we are located. All believers are to be “on mission,” to do their part in reaching their city, nation, and the world for Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9).
3. While personally embracing this mission, God’s will is that every individual work together with others as a team, serving within his giftedness and unique role as part of that team in fulfilling the Great Commission (Ephesians 4:11-16).



## **B. Common Practices:**

1. Practice of churches in our association has been to equip and train members to effectively share their faith with non-believers.
2. Our church members take to heart Paul's words when he said that he "did all things for the sake of the gospel" and consider how their life decisions regarding family, moves, career opportunities, etc., may affect their success in reaching the world.

From this core values paper, I have several comments:

1. The command of Matthew 28:19-20 is to "make disciples." A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ. To teach disciples how to live their lives for Jesus Christ and obey his teachings is to teach discipleship. Our first goal, however, as Christians and as leaders is to make disciples and equip our churches to make disciples. To make a disciple is to communicate the gospel in a relevant way (1 Corinthians 9:19-22), so that a person is convicted of sin and his/her need of a Savior and confesses Jesus Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9-13).
2. One of the core values of Great Commission churches is that members fulfill this command and personally embrace this mission of making disciples and effectively share their faith with as many as possible. It seems clear from this core value that each member should take seriously this command of Jesus Christ, and make it a priority to learn how to effectively make disciples as we share the gospel with our acquaintances and friends. This would also be a high priority of each leader in a Great Commission church, regardless of his spiritual gift, and the desire and pursuit of every obedient Christian. Teaching disciples to obey all that Jesus commanded would obviously include this command. As we see people saved, we can then baptize and begin to teach them to obey the many other truths and principles of the Scriptures.
3. Church planting is surely a strategic way of getting believers involved and often results in more people hearing the gospel. In the New Testament, church planting was the result of evangelism, rather than the reverse. When church planting is the focus, it is easy to prioritize programs, strategies, personalities and activities, rather than training believers to make disciples.

## **A Personal Experience**

My life was deeply affected through a pastors conference with Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. Dr. Bright spoke the first two days of the conference on "spiritual breathing," his term for walking with God, being filled with the Spirit, and overcoming sin in our daily lives. It was refreshing, but I was familiar with the Bible truths about these issues.

The third day he focused on "reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ in this generation." I had been a pastor for 12 years, had started churches, and was considered quite successful. I believed John 3:16 and the Great Commission. It was the phrase "in this generation" that really bothered me that day. I had a rather careless attitude toward evangelism. I felt that the Holy Spirit really did the work of evangelizing, and putting a time element on it seemed a human viewpoint. I believed that God loved people everywhere in every generation, but I felt little urgency or real concern in this area. During a break in the conference, we gathered around tables for coffee and cookies. Dr. Bright went from table to table visiting and asking questions. He came to our table and said, "I have two questions to ask you.

First, do you really believe that God wants to reach every person with the gospel in this generation?" I was embarrassed. We had seen some saved in our church, mainly Sunday School children, but I had not personally considered it a priority. I thought about the huge apartment complex just a block from our church. None of us had ever really prayed for the many young people who lived there, and we had never developed a plan to reach out to them with the gospel. Some of our young people had passed out leaflets and invitations in front, but had not really tried to engage any of them in conversation. I nodded "yes" to his question.

He went on. "The second question is this. If all Christians were doing what you are doing, will the world be reached with the gospel in this generation?" I was stunned. The Holy Spirit spoke strongly to my heart. I got up. I had to get out of there. I could hardly think. I walked out into the field next door. The tears were streaming down my face. I knelt in the weeds and wept before God. "Lord, I don't know what to say. If all Christians were doing what I'm doing, there is no way the world can be reached with the gospel in this generation." I just confessed my selfishness and pride to God and asked Him to help me to change. I said, "God, I don't know what this means or how to do it, but if you will somehow teach me, I want to give the rest of my life to obey you and be a part of fulfilling the Great Commission."

### **A More Recent Personal Experience**

As I visited one of our pastors on a trip to Europe, I asked, "What about the leaders that you are training to be pastors? How are they progressing in effectively sharing the gospel and seeing people saved? Tell me about each one." He was hesitant, and then said, "Well, that's one of the harder things to see developed." I said to another pastor, "Tell me about your leaders that will someday be pastors. Are they regularly reaching out to see people saved?" He said, "One of the brothers is really strong in that area, but many are not."

A pastor friend asked me recently, "Would you help me as I work with a brother who may be our next pastor?" I asked him, "What do you see as his greatest need?" He said, "He is a good teacher, and a godly brother. He has a good family, and has a good walk with the Lord, but I don't know if he has ever seen someone come to Christ."

Another pastor friend asked me, "Would you help me evaluate several brothers who are leading in our church? I would like to see one or two of them become pastors someday." I asked him to email me a resume of each one. How long had they been saved? How long had they been in the church? How was their marriage and family? It was interesting to me as I read the story of each. With three of them, this brother commented, "I don't know if he has ever led anyone to Christ."

Tom Short, campus evangelist, said, "A leader is called to be an example to the flock (1 Peter 5:3). Although it is important for us to model the Christian life in all areas, it is especially vital that we be a **living demonstration of effective evangelism** and figure out how to do it in such a way that others in the church can actually see that we are reaching people for Jesus Christ."

Many pastors are examples of sacrificial love and sharing the gospel with as many as possible. Many churches are successful in seeing many come to know Christ as their Savior. It's easy, however, to be distracted with all the responsibilities of caring for the needs of a church and allow the Great Commission to become a theology, rather than a passion and a priority.

## What Seems Radical Must Again Become Normal

Erwin McManus issued a startling challenge in his fine book, *The Unstoppable Force* (Group Publishing), “The formerly revolutionary church soon became the community church; the community church must now once again become the revolutionary church. What seems radical must again become normal” (pages 31-32).

He went on to say, “Those of us who live in this window of history must consider ourselves uniquely appointed by God. God would not allow us to live in a time of such great opportunity if He did not have on His heart the desire to pour out the greatest movement of His Spirit in human history. We must consider strategies for incremental or nominal growth as inadequate, and we must re-examine our assumptions of how the Spirit of God desires to work through the Church. We must not be satisfied until we enter into an explosion of spiritual transformation that matches the challenge that has been entrusted to us.”

### “It’s Not My Gift”

We often hear people say, “but it’s not my gift.” Your gift may not be giving, but God wants you to give. It may not be administration, but God wants us to lead wisely and adequately. It may not be mercy, but God wants us to be compassionate. Paul challenged Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). The numbers are not the issue, but the commitment, priority, and example are critical to fulfilling the will of God and the Great Commission.

### Other Key Bible Passages that Affect this Subject

1. *“For Christ’s love compels (Gk: urges, moves, constrains) us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again”* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).
  - Christ’s love compels and urges us to no longer live for ourselves, but for Him. If I am living for Him, I will obey His command to make disciples.
2. *“So from now on **we regard no one from a worldly point of view.** Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer”* (2 Corinthians 5:16).
  - We naturally see people as pretty or ugly; fat, thin, old, young, tall, short, likable undesirable, educated, ignorant, rich, poor, stranger, friend, black, white, brown, yellow, etc. How we view people affects our value of them. If we live for ourselves, we relate in light of our biases; if we commit ourselves to live for Jesus, we will begin to **see** people as God sees them. It will change our perspective. Jesus said to His disciples, “I tell you, **open your eyes and look on the fields.** They are ripe for harvest...” (John 4:35). The Apostle Paul could even say, “I could wish that I myself were cursed for the sake of those of my own race.”
3. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come**”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)!
  - Jesus Christ has made us totally new people. God wants to change all the old perceptions and values. We have a new life, a new power, a new Savior, a new guide, a new family, a new

set of values, a new future, a new present, and a new beginning. We need to discover all that we are, the provisions that we have in God, and learn to live in the joy, vision, and power of God's Holy Spirit.

4. *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"* (2 Corinthians 2:18).
  - Not only are we completely new people, but God has given us a new ministry, that of telling our whole world about a God who loves them, and wants them be a part of His eternal family. Jesus died for every human being, no matter what their circumstances, and wants them to know Him and have Him in their lives forever.
5. *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us"* (2 Corinthians 5:20).
  - **God** wants to live His life and love through **us!**
6. *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible"* (1 Corinthians 9:19).
  - God never forces anyone to serve Him. There is no greater privilege in this one life, than to be able to serve God however He leads, but especially as we win people to Christ through the gospel. Paul talks about those who give up everything to win a wreath in sports and games. We do it to receive a crown that will last **forever**.
7. *"To the Jews I **became** like a Jew, to win the Jews...I have **become** all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some"* (1 Corinthians 9:20-22).
  - Paul didn't say, "I became a Jew," but rather, "I became **like** a Jew." He did whatever necessary to be able to communicate effectively to a Jew or anyone else. This is one of the reasons that we are often not effective in reaching others for Christ. We are not willing to sacrifice the time and effort to win a friendship and a hearing. Friends talk with friends. We often avoid salesmen and superficial contacts. Paul said that he did whatever was necessary to be able to communicate effectively the life-giving message of the gospel.
8. *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (cowardice), but a spirit of power, of love and of self discipline. So, do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord...**but join with me** in suffering for the gospel"* (2 Timothy 1:7-8).
  - All of us experience fear and insecurity at times, as we consider sharing the gospel with our friends, relatives, and colleagues. God wants to provide His power and love to give us the courage, wisdom, and truth we need as we share the life giving message of the gospel with as many as possible.

### **Some Things Needed for a Church to Be Successful in This Mission**

1. Leaders who provide vision, plan, and the essentials.
  - a. A personal example of effectively reaching out to the lost.
  - b. Communicating this often in teaching and interaction with all.

- c. Encouraging all members to be examples and stimulators in this area.
  - d. Providing training and equipping for success in reaching others.
  - e. Providing materials that can be used by all.
  - f. Providing small groups, events, and other means of reaching the lost.
  - g. Encouraging accountability so that the mission is not neglected.
2. Church members, who are willing to sacrifice time, faith, and energy for God. Every person has normal contact with between 15-25 people each week. This is called our “sphere of influence.” You see a person and greet them with a friendly greeting. It may be a neighbor, friend, colleague, student, employee, even a relative. YOU have the best opportunity of helping this person to understand the love of God, and the good news about Jesus Christ, and eternal life. It’s easy to live many years near people like this and never share with them the most important message of their life. We don’t tell them because of fear. We’re afraid that they will not receive it. We’re afraid that they will not like us if we share it. We’re afraid that we will not be able to do it effectively.

Just think, if 100 people in any church effectively shared with even 15 of those people in their “sphere of influence” in a year, or even two years, 1500 people who need our Savior would have an opportunity to receive the most important message on this earth. If this were happening in every church, the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus would be fulfilled easily. People would develop a vision and concern for the world, and God would be able to lead many, even to other countries, to share this wonderful lifegiving message.

### **Thelma Obeyed**

A lady in Texas called me one day. She asked if I could come by to see her. I knocked at her door, and a voice told me to come in. Thelma was a paraplegic, and her “sphere of influence” was a wheel chair in a room. She told me that she had been moved of God to share her faith with others. “What can I do? I can’t even go out of this room unless someone takes me.” She prayed. She would look out the front window and notice how many people walked by her house each day. She asked her husband for the neighborhood phone directory. “I decided to call the people in the block around my house.”

“Hello, my name is Thelma, and I live just down the street. I am a paraplegic, so I can’t come over to visit you, but I wanted to get acquainted with you.” She asked about their children, jobs, schools, sports, all kinds of things. Then she closed by asking, “Is there anything that I could pray for you and your family? Do you mind if I call occasionally and ask if God answered the prayer?” One by one, the neighbors would stop by and visit her to get acquainted. They rapidly became friends. At the right time, Thelma would give them a booklet, Bible, or something that shared the gospel clearly. One by one, Thelma saw neighbor after neighbor open their heart and trust Jesus as their Savior. After a while, she went on to the next block. Thelma smiled and said, “There have been over 40 people who have prayed to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior in this room.” Thelma was obeying the Great Commission and God was blessing.

## A Personal Strategy

What is a personal strategy? It is a deliberate plan of action by an individual to accomplish a specific goal or objective. I'm sure that you want to obey the Lord Jesus and reach your friends for Christ. Would you want to meet your friend in eternity and he/she ask you, "Why did you never tell me how I could have eternal life?" Your personal plan should include getting the training that you may need, and then learning how to share this effectively with anyone as God leads you. Here are some suggestions as you develop this plan.

1. Be sure that you have believed and personally received Christ as your own Savior. Read over the following verses from the Bible and ask God to help you make sure that Jesus is your Savior. John 1:12-13; 3:1-7, 16; 5:24; 10:29-30; Ephesians 2:1-9; Romans 10:9-13; 1 John 5:11-13.
2. Be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Give God the first place in your life daily. Talk to God about your life each day, and ask His help, guidance, and blessing. Make the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5).
3. Team with someone else in your church to win people to Christ ("*Two are better than one*" Ecclesiastes 4:9).
4. Make a list of people in your sphere of influence and begin to pray for them daily. Ask God to open opportunities for you and to give you courage (2 Timothy 1:7-8).
5. Strategize about ways to develop a friendship, and ways to relate naturally. Look for opportunities to share what God has done in your life, and how they can experience this too. Find booklets, books, and New Testaments that you can ask them to read and tell you what they discover. Ask them regularly what they are learning and what questions they have.
6. If they pray to receive Christ as Savior, invite them to church with you, to a small group, or a Bible study. If there is no Bible study available, start one.

### Some Challenging Quotes:

Dr. Bill Bright: "*The Great Commission is the greatest plan ever given to men, by the greatest person who ever lived, concerning the greatest power ever revealed, and with the greatest promise ever recorded*" (A Global Strategy that Includes You-Worldwide Challenge).

William Carey: At the age of 62, after translating the Bible in whole or part into 35 languages of India... he said this, "*Remember three things: 1. It is your duty to preach the gospel to every creature. 2. God's Word will accomplish that for which it is sent. 3. God can as easily remove the present seemingly formidable obstacles as we can move small particles of dust.*"

Tom Short, campus evangelist: "*I want to challenge you to change your vision and get on the offensive to really advance God's Kingdom. We need a breakthrough. Apathy and luke-warmness is very entrenched and will be hard to break out of.*"

Mission Frontiers Bulletin-1996: *“Christians worldwide are getting excited, realistic, and specific about throwing themselves in the final phase of God’s unchanging purpose...with unprecedented technological breakthroughs in cultural studies, communication and travel, we are better equipped than ever before to reach our whole world.”*

George Verwer: *“Let us be honest and admit that at present, only a tiny percentage of believers in the US are really taking ownership of the Great Commission. There is more talk than walk and it always leads us to a cloud of deception and unreality.... It is a mistake to think that the next big move is God’s. His big moves have already taken place; from the cross, the empty tomb, and Pentecost. NOW, IT’S OUR TURN.”*

Great Commission Leadership Institute (Session I: “Outreach Through the Church”): *“God has designed the local church to be devoted to fulfilling the Great Commission in its community, first by making disciples (i.e. leading people to a saving relationship with Christ), then baptizing them, and then teaching those new believers to obey Christ. Therefore when considering its mission and ministry, each church must stop and ask these questions: Are we really being effective in reaching non-Christians? Are people being won to Christ? Are people being baptized as new followers of Christ? This is the first priority, the first step in our mission. A church may have many fine programs and ministries—but until it is effective in this matter of reaching non-Christians with the gospel of Jesus Christ, that church truly has not made “first things first” in fulfilling its mission.”*



GCLI TEACHINGS

## Reaching the Nations

Brent Knox · Bloomington, MN

God sent the Messiah on a mission to \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.

### 1. The prophets spoke of how God would glorify Himself as the Messiah brought salvation \_\_\_\_\_ of the earth.

*“And now the LORD says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—he says: ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Isaiah 49:5-6).*

### 2. Jesus stated His mission and \_\_\_\_\_ on numerous occasions. “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

*“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).*

Jesus’ Mission Statement: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ people who are lost.

### 3. Jesus had a \_\_\_\_\_ to fulfill His mission.

*“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles— that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:13-14).*

*“‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men’” (Mark 1:17).*

His strategy:

- **To choose** \_\_\_\_\_
- **To disciple** \_\_\_\_\_
- **To give them the** \_\_\_\_\_ **mission.**

Although the disciples saw Jesus’ miracles, heard His teaching, witnessed His crucifixion and resurrection, they didn’t grasp everything at first. They certainly didn’t grasp the gravity of their mission. But, at a very critical time, the time between the resurrection and the crucifixion, the Lord appeared to them at least ten times. His appearances seem to have a two-fold purpose.

1. To prove who He was and explain the timing of the Kingdom.
2. To leave a mission.



**The last words of Jesus to His disciples are what we call “the \_\_\_\_\_.”**

*“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:16-20).*

*“He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.’ After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16:15-20).*

*“He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high’” (Luke 24:44-49).*

*“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’” (John 20:19-21).*

*“So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’” (Acts 1:6-8).*

**How would the disciples have understood the Great Commission?**

**1. The mission task is being passed on \_\_\_\_\_.**

- *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).*

**2. The scope of the mission is \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ — just as it always has been.**

- *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).*

**3. The purpose of the mission is to “make \_\_\_\_\_.”**

- “...go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:19).

**4. The mission task is to be passed on to other \_\_\_\_\_.**

**a. The command is not \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_.**

- “...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

**b. The command is \_\_\_\_\_.**

- “...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).

**c. The command reveals God’s \_\_\_\_\_ and we are to have His heart.**

***What did the disciples do in light of the Great Commission?***

*“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16:15-20).*

Even one apostle, untimely born, understood his mission.

*“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (1 Corinthians 9:19).*

*“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28-29).*

**Their actions demonstrated their understanding. They went out and preached \_\_\_\_\_!**

***How did the early Church understand the mission? How did “Joe Christian” understand the mission?***

**1. They proclaimed the gospel \_\_\_\_\_ they went.**

*“And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:1, 4).*

**2. As the Apostles reached a city, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the city reached out to the entire region.**

*“Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:8-10).*

*“The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the*

*living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10).*

**3. Paul urged everyone to \_\_\_\_\_ of advancing the gospel.**

*“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1).*

**4. Paul taught that \_\_\_\_\_ who have been reconciled to God have a \_\_\_\_\_ others.**

*“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:15, 18-20).*

**The Grand Conclusion: Every single Christian should adopt the Great Commission as \_\_\_\_\_ for life.**

***The Pastoral Challenge: Does the mission mean that every person is to go everywhere? Should every Christian feel obligated to go to other countries?***

1. No. It is obviously a mission given to the \_\_\_\_\_ church.
2. As the church carries out this mission, there is to be a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The \_\_\_\_\_ modeled a division of labor: Peter to the Jews; Paul to the Gentiles.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ imply a “division of labor.”
5. When God has the whole heart of a Christian, He is able to lead that believer to help fulfill His mission in a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ way.
6. The Holy Spirit has the ability to \_\_\_\_\_ the efforts of every Christian and every group into one massive effort of reaching the entire world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This being said, it seems that many more people should be willing to move!

- There is a dearth of missionaries from America.
- The spread of the gospel seems to be moving at a snail’s pace.
- Experienced Christians (pastors, leaders) are needed to go.
- Are you willing? This is the issue!

## *Enlisting Your Church in the Mission*

1. Be \_\_\_\_\_ to move to another geographical location.

2. Build into every believer a \_\_\_\_\_ for the \_\_\_\_\_.

- Every believer is to work for God's glory.
- Every believer is to have the heart of God.
- Every believer is to be active in reaching people in their sphere of influence.
- Every believer is to be a worker.
- Every church is to reach its sphere of influence (city). Churches need to be fruitful!
- God may want believers to move geographically. Encourage it.
- Enthusiasm for this mission diminishes quickly. There is a heavy entropy.
- Leaders need to constantly re-ignite this mission (conferences, teaching, modeling, etc.).

3. The Great Commission will only be fulfilled as we \_\_\_\_\_ with others.

- We cannot reach the world without partnering.
- We need to partner especially within the movement, and to a certain degree, outside of the movement.
- Support Great Commission's plans for church expansion overseas. Make room in your church schedule for communication and fundraising. Make your church a Great Commission church!

4. Lead your church to be active in \_\_\_\_\_ local and international evangelism efforts.

The Great Commission tells us that God is interested in reaching people and \_\_\_\_\_. While one soul is not more valuable than another, God wants those to love and glorify Him from every tribe and tongue and nation of the world. (NOTE: If you are interested, John Piper in his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* does a very good job demonstrating that "all nations" refers to "people groups" rather than individual gentiles.)

### ***Four General Ways To Be Active in the International Effort:***

A. Send \_\_\_\_\_.

*"Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth" (3 John 1:5-8).*

*"Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need" (Titus 3:13).*

*"I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while" (Romans 15:24).*

*"Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go" (1 Corinthians 16:6).*

Sending money is a great task. We must send people on their way.

“ \_\_\_\_\_.”

**B. Send \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ workers.**

**C. Send \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ workers.**

**D. Send your \_\_\_\_\_ people.**

Ex.: The Antioch church sent some of their best people: Paul and Barnabas.

Ex.: Timothy left local churches to travel with Paul.

**5. Pursue opportunities with “people groups” within our \_\_\_\_\_.**

**6. Keep our hearts stoked with a \_\_\_\_\_ for the Great Commission.**

Identify what motivates you most; pray and meditate on these motivators:

- God’s glory
- Obedience
- Love and compassion
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix**

There are many perplexing questions that arise when a church seriously considers the Great Commission:

- When should a person “go”?
- When is a local area “reached” with the gospel?
- How should a local church, or international association, be involved in the Great Commission?
- Should we feel a greater responsibility to organize efforts to go to more fruitful areas, or to areas where no evangelical church exists?

*The Holy Spirit can and will give us specific plans to fulfill the Great Commission:*

1. God moved the early Church out of Jerusalem through the circumstance of persecution. The Christians did not move by human design (Acts 8).
2. The Holy Spirit led Peter to speak with the Gentiles, overcoming his cultural racism (Acts 10).
3. The Holy Spirit sent out Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-5).
4. The Holy Spirit directed the decision at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:25).
5. The Holy Spirit directed Paul away from Asia and into Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16:6).
6. The Holy Spirit directed Paul away from Bithynia and into Troas (Acts 16:7) and Macedonia (Acts 16:9).
7. The Holy Spirit compelled Paul to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22).

**Key Lessons:** We need to be very close to the heart of God. We need to be in prayer. We need to have our strategic planning led by the Holy Spirit. GOD is our supreme commander and strategist.



GCLI TEACHINGS  
**Exercise**

1. What are a couple of major lessons which came through to you from these messages?

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2. Develop a brief outline you would use to share with a young Christian when teaching about the Great Commission.

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## GCLI TEACHINGS

**Exercise**

3. Of the numerous, different motives for fulfilling the Great Commission, list at least three and state briefly why each motivates you.

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4. The size of our vision must affect our day-to-day activities. Identify several ways in which your personal life, and the life of your church, are different because you believe in the Great Commission.

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5. We each have different gifts and ministries in the body. If you were to dream a bit, and if you knew you could not fail, how would you like God to use you in the fulfillment of the Great Commission?

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## THE GREAT COMMISSION

### **Personal Evangelism**

As a leader, we are called to be an example to those we are leading. Therefore, one of our highest priorities is to be an example in personal evangelism. The following are testimonies of pastors who have set the pace for their church in reaching people for Christ.







PERSONAL EVANGELISM

## A Heart for the Lost

Pastor Dave Blum · Manassas, VA

God loves lost people. It breaks His heart to know that they are condemned, lost for all eternity, separated from Him unless they repent and believe in Christ for the salvation of their souls.

As poignant and vivid a picture as exists in all of Scripture is Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as recorded by Luke. "As he [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes'" (Luke 19: 41-42).

Jesus knew that most of Israel would reject the peace He offered because they would reject Him. It broke His heart and He couldn't withhold His tears as He entered Jerusalem on the Sunday of Passion Week. The following are a few things that have instructed and motivated me in my pursuit of influencing lost people for Christ.

*"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."*

*-Jim Elliot,  
missionary martyr who  
lost his life in the late  
1950s trying to reach the  
Auca Indians of Ecuador.*

### The Truth Is, God Seeks Lost People

The incarnation is proof positive of God's intentional pursuit of lost people. John 1 says the Word of God (the exact expression of God Himself) became human, taking on the limitations we all face. Jesus faced temptation, hunger, thirst, loneliness, and fear. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He sympathizes with our weaknesses.

The Apostle Paul exemplified this same pursuit of, and passion for, lost people. "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Luke 15 documents three parables of Jesus all relating to God searching, finding, and celebrating something that was lost: a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost (prodigal) son. When God says something three times in a row, we better listen!

### Be Jealous for the Glory of God

We all ought to be jealous for God to get the glory due His name. Seeing lost people come to Him, make decisions for Him, and be transformed in Christ's image is perhaps the most powerful demon-

stration of God's love and power. I think it's more powerful than our demonstrations of discipleship, organization, and serving, though these are essential for the practice of our faith.

### **Running the Race Involves Discipline**

There are oft-quoted verses from Paul in 1 Corinthians that I love. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Guess what? These verses immediately follow the passage where Paul indicates he had become all things to all men so that some might get saved. In essence, he related running the race directly to his mission and commission by Christ to spread the gospel.

Here are some practical things that have helped me "run the race" and continue to share with people the love and truth of Christ.

Have a soft, moldable, and sensitive heart. Do the things that break God's heart break yours also? Do you ever cry over lost people? Do you care? Do you ever pray for them, I mean, really pray? Do you travail in prayer for them?

Be spontaneous. Pray for, and expect, opportunities throughout the day. Ask God to bring someone along your path with whom you can share the gospel. One day at work on a secular job, I prayed God would do just that. At 4 p.m., I reminded Him of the request. Within 15 minutes, I received a phone call from a co-worker in Phoenix who, after conducting our business, said, "Dave, can I ask you a question? Why are you always so happy?" Wow, what an open door! It led to a brief conversation about Christ and, during my next trip to Phoenix, to an in-depth discussion of the gospel and spiritual issues with her and her fiancée over dinner.

Be intentional. After Matthew (Levi) came to Christ, he planned a party to get Jesus and His salty fishermen around his own unsaved friends. He put effort into exposing himself to lost people (so did Jesus!). Plan to show lovingkindness. Serve lost people (help them move, do a meal together, serve them, call them up on the phone, or do a God-honoring activity with them). If you do these things, you'll find them inviting you to do things on their turf, not just on your comfortable, sanctified, spiritual ground.

*"While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while children go hungry, as they do now I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight-I'll fight to the very end!"*

*-William Booth*



PERSONAL EVANGELISM

**40 Days of Witnessing**

Pastor Bill Young · Salt Lake City, UT

*“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ”  
(Philemon 1:6, NIV).*

I was convicted at a Faithwalkers conference to be more active in sharing my faith...to take me out of my comfort zone in the area of evangelism. Then God gave me an idea. I decided to attempt to share my Christian faith by witnessing (verbalizing my faith and/or handing out a gospel tract) to at least one person per day for forty consecutive days and to write about each day’s experience in a blog.

And that is exactly what I did. Forty opportunities for people to learn about a relationship with God. Forty opportunities to be an example to my family and my church.

Here are some of the lessons learned over the past forty days.

Day #1

Here we go—the first day of a personal challenge to share my faith for forty days. To begin my journey, I decided to walk to a nearby gas station. I figured it was safe--hey, these folks get paid to be kind! After arriving, I picked up a pack of gum and waited in line for the biker-looking dude with “Tony” on his name badge to cash me out. He didn’t seem happy.

After getting my change (the gum cost \$1.50!!), I looked Tony in the eye and said, “Would it be OK if I gave you something to read that has really changed my life?” He looked at it, then snapped, “No, thanks,” and started helping the guy behind me. I said, “OK, have a great day,” as I left the store. This was going to be harder than I thought.

I dodged traffic and ran across the street to another store. I was in luck—no one else was in the store except the kind-looking woman behind the counter. I picked up another pack of gum (witnessing might get expensive!) and headed to the checkout. After paying and thanking her, I handed her my tract and said, “Here’s something for you to read. It tells about how Jesus changed my life.” Before she could turn me down, I smiled and started walking out. No way was I going to have to buy another pack of gum! I heard her tell me “Thank you,” as the door closed behind me.

Whew! The first day is probably going to be the toughest. We’ll see.

Day #26

Mary and I took our two younger boys out to a restaurant while the older ones were leading worship in Provo. Mary noticed that our waitress, Shannon, had very pretty pink and red decorated nails. My

***“It does not take a perfect church to introduce a man to the perfect Christ.”***

*- Richard Woodsome*

sweet wife engaged in conversation with her and told her how beautiful she thought her nails were. Shannon lit up and said playfully, “It’s for Valentine’s—even though I don’t have a special ‘someone.’”

She half-joked that she hoped her nails would help her get someone. After dinner, I got out my tract ready to give it to her, and my wife suggested what I should say as I offered her the gospel. I said, “Shannon, I’ve got something here that is better than any Valentine you could ever get. It talks about how Jesus has changed our lives. We go to The Rock Church and love to tell people about Jesus.” She looked it over, smiled, and said, “Oh, thank you.” My wife chimed in, “And you were a wonderful waitress!” Shannon laughed and said, “Maybe you could tell my supervisor on the way out”...which we did.

Pray that Shannon comes to church and meets the One who loves her more than life itself—Jesus!

#### Day #27

On the way to our Saturday night church service, I prayed with my boys that God would give me an opportunity to share the gospel with someone. After the service, I got my chance.

A man named Clay in a tie-dye Bob Marley T-shirt came up to me and told me a bit of his rough and sad story. He had come to church with a friend of his named Patricia. Sadly, Clay and “Trish” both had dear friends die in the past week. Clay told me he wasn’t religious at all, but was at peace with what he believed about God. He informed me that he loved the message and wanted to know more about what I believed.

I asked him if I could give him something that I thought would help him understand God. He said “Sure.” I handed him a tract and actually thumbed through it with him, explaining how he could know God personally. He listened as I said, “Clay, God isn’t interested so much in religion—Jesus didn’t come to start a church—He came to have a personal relationship with you.” After we talked some more, he said he would read it. I prayed for him and Trish, and then asked them to pick up a “Diagram” gospel DVD on the way out. They said they would be back.

God answered my prayers. Pray that God speaks to Clay in a very real and personal way.

#### Day #28

I prayed on the way to church that I would have an opportunity to share the gospel, or a tract. I got my opportunity after the second service when a young couple brought a friend of theirs, a young woman named Samantha (not her real name) to meet me. Samantha had been to The Rock four times, and this sweet couple was simply loving on her and following her up. It turns out she is currently going through a divorce and her brother recently died. She was looking for answers, and wasn’t finding any. Frustrated, she talked to friends who recommended The Rock Church.

At The Rock, Samantha has found Christians that love her and empathize with her. She says her family and old church friends will have nothing to do with her, even during this extremely emotionally tough time. Her “religious” family and friends have offered her no hope. That breaks my heart. But Samantha’s eyes have been opened, and God is working on her heart. I asked Samantha if she would watch a

***“You are a Christian  
because somebody  
cared. Now it’s your turn.”***

***- Warren Wiersbe***

***“Let others report bad news; we’ll share the good news.”***

***-Woodrow Kroll***

DVD that explains from the Bible how she can know for sure she could go to heaven. She agreed, and I got her a copy of the Outreach Diagram DVD. I also gave her my card and told her to contact me after watching it.

Pray for Samantha—that she finds comfort and salvation from Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

#### Day #31

I got two cavities filled about an hour ago. I love going to the dentist! Not! My mouth is still numb, but my heart is alive because of the opportunity I had with my dentist. He’s a great guy, a young man who is well aware of the fact that I’m a pastor of a Christian church because my whole family has used this clinic for years.

I decided to push the relational envelope one more step with my dentist. God gave me that opportunity as he was filling out my chart (he probably wrote: “Bill squirmed like a little girl throughout procedure,” in his notes). As he wrote, I pulled out my tract and my business card ready for action. I prayed, “God, give me the opportunity.”

Once he finished writing, my dentist turned to me and said, “How’s your congregation doing?” (*Nice! Way to go, God!*) I said, “It’s great, things are going well. In fact, I’d like to give you this—in case you or anyone else is ever interested in coming. Also, here’s a booklet that tells how you can know you’re going to heaven.” He gladly accepted it, smiled, and thanked me. We shook hands and said our goodbyes.

As I’ve said, witnessing to people you know and will have many future interactions with is scary, but is much more meaningful, and, in the end, I believe will bear more fruit.

I sure hope we have at least one more dentist in the Kingdom because of today.

#### Day #40

Well, I finished off my forty days of sharing with a purchase of a pack of gum from Reams. It seems fitting to end the way I started! I handed the young attendant a tract with my card saying, “Here’s something for you. I go to The Rock Church, and I like to tell people about how they can go to heaven.” She seemed genuinely surprised and at a loss for words. She finally mustered a weak “OK.” I walked out, thanking God for the opportunity to be challenged in sharing my faith for the past forty days. I passed out at least fifty tracts, made numerous invitations to church, and witnessed about Jesus to dozens of people. In all, my faith was strengthened, as was the faith of many around me. God’s purposes prevailed. As it says in Isaiah 55:10-11: “*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it*” (NIV).

Amen! Thanks for joining me on this journey. I think God has taught me a lot and encouraged many people in my family and in our church through this challenge. Pray that God brings lasting fruit. Amen!

(If interested in reading Pastor Bill Young’s blog, visit <http://gr84god.blogspot.com>.)



PERSONAL EVANGELISM

## Reaching Your Family for Christ

Pastor Andy Sanchez · Albuquerque, NM

My story begins in 1968. I was 18 years old and going to school as a freshman at New Mexico State University. I was a very religious Catholic, but I would not have considered myself very righteous. I was hoping that if I died, God would judge on the curve because, though I was not as bad as some, I certainly did not feel as if I was righteous enough to go to heaven. I went to mass every Sunday, confession every two weeks, and kept all the holy days of obligation as my parents had taught me to do.

As the semester went on, I noticed that the only difference between my roommate, who was also catholic, but did not do all of the above, and myself, was that he got more sleep on Sunday morning. In some ways, he even lived a more moral life.

That made me start questioning what good religion was doing me. I kept going to church because that was how I was raised and I would have disappointed my parents and my sister who was a nun if I had stopped. Never the less, my life began to seem meaningless and without purpose.

Late in the first semester, a man who was going through the dorms witnessing shared the gospel with me. I felt like I had heard it all before, but what really impressed me was when he shared his testimony and he said he had a relationship with God and knew God personally. Later on, my friends and I commented that we believed him—he did seem to know God in a personal way. That was a totally new concept to me. I had never considered that God could be known personally.

I tried not to show any interest because, as a Catholic, I did not want to speak with Protestants (who I defined as anyone who was not Catholic). I must have shown some interest, however, because this persistent Protestant kept on coming back. He never told me about his church, he just shared the gospel with me.

When I went home for Christmas that year, I felt more and more empty and without purpose. So without much repentance or reverence I said, “Jesus, come into my life. Let’s see what you can do.”

When I went back to school, my persistent Protestant friend asked me if I had thought any more about what we had talked about. I replied, “Yea, when I was home I asked Christ to come into my life.” To say he was excited would have been a great understatement! He was bouncing off the walls and I wondered what the fuss was all about. I found out twenty years later that he had been faithfully witnessing in the dorms for a whole year and I was the first person he had led to the Lord.

***“The salvation of the lost is not best accomplished by great popular campaigns, conducted by a small minority of specialists in public evangelism, but by the godly, honest witness of believers individually. It is pure irresponsibility to leave the evangelization of the lost to the ‘experts,’ as many are doing today. God would have every believer do his part to win the lost to Christ by prayer, personal witness and sincere godliness.”***

***-Cornelius Stam***

***“I want the whole Christ for my Saviour, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field.”***

*- John Wesley*

Now known to me as Brooky Stockton, he disciplined me for the next two years. One of the first things I learned from him was the significance of what I had done. Jesus had chosen me and now his kindness had led me to repentance. As I grew in Christ, I knew that I had to share what I had learned with my family. I developed a desire to become a disciple and understood that to mean “a follower of Jesus.” When I read Mark 10:29-30, Jesus said I would have to love him more than I loved my own family, and I would have to be willing to lose my own family in order to be his follower. The promise in Mark says that He would pay us back 100 fold for anything we lost in following Him, along with persecutions.

As I began to share with my family, it was probably the worst experience—the biggest crisis—my family had ever gone through. My mother and father had nine children. None of us had ever been rebellious or disrespectful to them, and certainly not to the church we had been raised in. My sister was a nun, my brother had gone to seminary, my cousin was a Jesuit theologian and his sister was a nun. We were Catholic with a capital “C!” They began to ask me all kinds of questions about this religion of mine that I did not have the answers for. I began to defend myself by telling them it was not necessary for me to go to mass, confession, or pray to the saints because I knew for sure I was going to heaven. I ended up talking about religion and not sharing the clear and simple message of the gospel.

When I went back to school, Brooky asked me what we had talked about. I told him and he explained to me, “If your family stops going to mass and they stop praying to Mary and the saints, they won’t get saved. They’ll only get saved when they hear the gospel. From that point on, I determined to “know nothing except Christ and Him crucified.” When a question came up about a religious matter I would say, “I don’t know much about that, but I do know that Jesus said in John 1:12, *“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* Or in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”* And in 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* Or, of course John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* I only knew where five verses were, but it was enough.

As we had these discussions with my family, my brothers and sisters would listen and became very interested in what I was saying. Especially that I was willing to take a stand, even though it was costing me a great deal and it was costing my family a great deal. I had never been willing to be involved in any controversy. I had never believed in anything I was willing to fight for, and that alone had a big impact on all my brothers and sisters. One of my brothers said, “If Andy’s willing to get in trouble for this, it’s probably worth looking into.”

I was able, one by one, to share Christ with my brothers and sisters. I was writing to my sister Audrey, who had been a nun for ten years and had told her how Christ had changed my life and had changed the life of my friends at school whom I had led to the Lord. She told me, “Andy, I became a nun to do what you are doing. And you are in a secular college and know the Bible and I don’t. I want to have what you have.” She didn’t accept Christ at that point, but over the next five years of sharing with her, she came to know the Lord as her personal savior. (There is a lot more to that story!)



My parents believed the Bible to be the Word of God and before long, allowed me to have Bible studies with my younger brothers and sisters if I agreed to say nothing bad about the Catholic Church, which I readily agreed to. (I never left the Catholic Church. I just grew out of it.) Although my family would credit me for leading them all to Christ, some of my brothers and sisters led the others to the Lord.

These were sad days for my parents. They went from having the model Catholic family to hearing the priest openly preach against the Sanchez brothers while they were in the pews. Finally one day, my mother said to my younger brother, Mike, “The only reason you win these arguments is because you know the Bible better than we do. If we knew the Bible as well as you do, we could prove that the Catholic Church is the one, true, apostolic church.” To this my brother replied, “OK, show us in the Bible why we should be Catholic and we will all come back to the church.” That was all it took for my mom and dad to start reading the Bible.

One day, as my Mom and Dad were reading their Bibles, they turned to each other and said, “What the kids say is in this book and what we say is not.” Within a few weeks, my parents were going to mass first and then coming to church with us afterwards, until they, too, grew out of the Catholic Church.

My mom and dad were baptized and my father became a true prayer warrior, praying daily for his descendants, now numbering over 200. My mom and dad had nine children who married and had children who then had children of their own. All but about five are pursuing God. Those five are being prayed for daily.

I’m a pastor, and six of the grandchildren are pastors or in full time ministry. We have had short-term missionaries in England, Italy, Spain, Honduras, Africa, Russia, India, Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Several are deacons and the majority is active in their churches and in starting new churches.

In conclusion, there are four things, which invoked these results.

1. I believe this all started when I made the decision to become a disciple of Christ and was willing to give up my family to follow Him. I believed the promise that I would receive 100 times in this life what I gave up for Christ.
2. The power of God’s Word penetrates the heart.
3. The testimony of lives that were changed and the sincere love for family members who at the time didn’t like me, perhaps even hated me.
4. The results of “*the prayer of a righteous man*,” James 5:16, “*is powerful and effective*”. My dad was one of those righteous men.

One of my greatest honors and joys was when, on several occasions, my father thanked me for not giving up in the face of persecution. My greatest reward here on earth has been for my father to thank me for what I did for his family.

***“In Proverbs we read:  
‘He that winneth souls is wise.’ If any man, woman, or child by a godly life and example can win one soul to God, his life will not have been a failure. He will have outshone all the mighty men of his day, because he will have set a stream in motion that will flow on and on forever and ever.”***

***-Dwight L. Moody***



## PERSONAL EVANGELISM

### Initiating

Pastor Tom Short · Columbus, OH

A leader is called to be “an example to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). Although it is important for us to model the Christian life in all areas, it is especially vital that we be a living demonstration of effective evangelism and figure out how to do it in such a way that others in the church can actually see that we are reaching people for Jesus Christ.

Evangelism is tough work. The devil trembles when we take the gospel to the lost and seeks to paralyze us with fear and intimidate us with a feeling of inadequacy concerning evangelism. He will stand by idly as we perform a thousand different activities within our holy huddle, but let us break forth to impact the lost and he goes into action to oppose us.

This is why it is so hard for our people to actually evangelize and why they need real examples of effective evangelism. We know that more is caught than taught. We can give numerous teachings on evangelism, organize campaigns to invite friends, exhort them to overcome fear and be bold—all of which are good and important things to do—but nothing seems to work better than to actually bring our own converts to church! A picture is worth a thousand words and actual fruit is worth a thousand sermons!

Do you want to have credibility when you teach on evangelism? Do you want your people to have a heart for evangelism? Do you want them to step out of their comfort zones and talk to people about Jesus? Then have some of your own converts sitting in church next week and make sure that they are publicly acknowledged in such a way as to inspire and motivate your people to follow your evangelistic example.

Is evangelism not your gift? Then believe God to use you anyway, just as we want Him to use others who are not gifted as evangelists to be instruments of His love in bringing the gospel to the lost. Are you gifted as an evangelist? Then it is all the more important that you be found faithful in exercising and modeling this precious gift from God.

### Personal Examples

It was the second night after we had moved to Atlanta. As I laid restlessly in bed, doubts, fears, anxieties, and a deep feeling of inadequacy seemed to overwhelm me. I had left the familiar surroundings of the University of Maryland where I knew how to evangelize and now found myself in a suburban community where I did not have a clue how to reach people. In my confusion I cried out to God for help.

This type of desperation, wanting to be used by God, is vital. If you don't care whether or not you are fruitful, it is unlikely God will force fruit upon you!

*“We are debtors to every man to give him the gospel in the same measure in which we have received it.”*

*-P.F. Bresee, founder of the Church of the Nazarene*

Within days I met my new neighbor, Tony. It started by introducing myself to him at the pool. Later that night, he came over to check out my new basketball hoop. One conversation led to another and, of course, when he asked what I did, I had an answer designed to create further interest in Jesus Christ. A few weeks later, Tony and his wife visited our church — and hated it! But around the basketball hoop in my back yard, we continued to have conversations, which became more and more open, and before long, Tony’s objections to Christianity were out in the open and able to be addressed. Several months later, Tony trusted Christ, and his wife, who may have been saved years earlier, was soon to follow in a genuine commitment.

***“Sympathy is no substitute for action.”***

*- David Livingstone*

What is the key lesson Tony’s conversion teaches? Be desperate for God to use you, and then open your eyes to recognize whom God brings your way.

While in San Diego, I began coaching youth basketball. I can’t remember whether I first did it to provide a means of outreach or simply because I enjoyed it. Either way, God used me to bring a number of families into our church. Again, this proved to be a tremendous model to the church because I was bearing fruit as “just a regular guy” rather than as a pastor.

There were several valuable lessons I learned during this time:

1. *Take the initiative to get involved in something you enjoy.* Leading a church is a very time-consuming job. Demands on our time can prevent us from getting out among the lost. And yet, Jesus commands us to go to the people. To help me get out of the church and go to the people, I got involved in something I enjoyed—basketball. This particular activity also allowed me to be involved with my kids (allowing my family to be a witness) and to serve other kids. There is no greater way to reach parents than to benefit their children. By taking a sincere interest in each youngster on the team and trying to develop them as a player and as a person, I won the respect and admiration of most of my players—and of most of their parents as well. This proved to be a wide-open door for the gospel.
2. *Take a sincere interest in people and serve them.* This is the point I made in the previous paragraph, but it is so important I wanted to reiterate it.
3. *Let people know you are a Christian from the very beginning of your relationship.* This makes it so much easier to bring up spiritual matters when appropriate. If we fail to inform them early on, it sometimes becomes difficult to tell them later because we are afraid we will damage the “secular” relationship we have established. Also, it saves them from embarrassment by letting them know how to act around us (perhaps you, too, have had the experience of talking with a fellow for awhile before he asks what you do and when you tell him you’re a pastor, he turns white as a sheet as he remembers some of the language he’s been using!).

It is important that we take the initiative in letting people know we are Christians. I prefer having a non-Christian come up to me and say, “I’ve been watching your life and you seem so wonderful that I really want to be like you. Please tell me your secret!” Unfortunately, no one has ever said that to me! Remember, we can’t expect non-Christians to have more boldness in initiating spiritual conversations than we do!

I do things like wear a Christian T-shirt, let people know that we attend church, mention God to my team and lay out my expectations of behavior based on Christian teaching (no cussing, etc.). And we must think ahead about how to answer questions like, “What do you do for a living?” so that we can respond with answers which spur more spiritual conversations in the future.

4. *Live a consistent witness.* If you are going to let people know up front that you are a believer, you’d better be ready to live like it. I have a friend who never told people at work that he was a Christian because he was afraid he might act in a non-Christian way and ruin his testimony (he’s like the fellow who wouldn’t put a Christian bumper sticker on his car because he knew what kind of a driver he was!). As a result, he often didn’t live a good testimony. If he would have been upfront about his faith from the beginning, I feel he would have been a far better witness all along.

Remember, once they know you are a Christian, they will watch you like a hawk. They will exaggerate your shortcomings and some will delight to see that you aren’t perfect. Strive to be a good example and, if you fail, remember that some of our strongest witness is how we respond to failure and sin in our lives. This hits at the heart of the gospel message and we need to demonstrate humility more than perfection.

5. *Regular prayer is vital.* I have prayed out loud with my sons while on the way to nearly every practice and game we have ever had. We pray that we will be a good witness and that we will reflect Christ in all that we do. And we pray that God will use us to actually win some of the players and their families to Christ and that they will join our church. God answers prayer, and prayer helps keep us focused on what we are really all about.
6. *Team up with others.* Whenever possible, I have tried to include another brother with me when doing activities amongst the lost. It helps keep me sharp and focused on my real mission. It presents a natural opportunity to introduce him as someone “from my church.” And it allows me to disciple him in reaching out to the lost.

Most, not all, evangelism in the New Testament was done by a team of two or more. Most relational evangelism (especially in a work situation) is expected to be done by an individual. No wonder we are not more fruitful. Figure out ways to work with someone in evangelism and you will be far more fruitful.

***“The reason some folks don’t believe in missions is that the brand of religion they have isn’t worth propagating.”***

***-Anonymous***



PERSONAL EVANGELISM

## International Students and Immigrants

Pastor Jim Wiebelhaus · Lincoln, NE

Some of the greatest opportunities for evangelizing the world can happen without even leaving your country. You might be thinking that this is true through prayer and, indeed, prayer reaches nations. But, I also mean that we can be involved in real, face-to-face contact with people from all over the world. Like no other time in history, there is a gathering from almost every country of the very brightest of people in every city in the U.S. that has a university or a high-tech job center. I am talking about International Student Ministry (ISM). There are over 600,000 international students studying in the U.S. today. Many of these students also bring spouses and children, which increases the number of people that God has brought to our communities. These internationals are often open to friendship with Christians.

*“We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.”*

*- John Stott*

There are also millions of immigrants to the U.S. who have many of the same needs as international students. U.S. immigrants often return for visits to their home country and could easily take the gospel with them. I am reminded of God’s sovereignty with where people live in Acts 17:26: “And God has determined the times and places in which people should live in order that they might find Christ...” Wow! God is bringing these people to the U.S so that they might find Christ.

### Understanding Their Needs:

ISMs and outreach to immigrants are possibly two of the richest evangelical opportunities available in the U.S. for several reasons.

1. They are new to this country and have a natural curiosity to discover what Americans are like. Sadly, 85% percent of the international students studying here never set foot in an American home. Many international students and immigrants will have never met a Christian before they meet you.
2. They are often lonely. They are thousands of miles away from home, family, and all that is familiar. This creates a strong desire for them to want to be around friends and families. They want to learn about American families and most of them love to be around children.
3. Most have a desire to improve their English-speaking skills. What better way to accomplish this than to have some trusted American friends with whom they can converse on a regular basis.
4. Many come from a culture where family values are highly regarded and respect for elders and authority is expected. This means that many have a heart that is teachable.

5. They have many practical needs that you can easily meet. They don't know the laws or customs. They don't know where to find information or where to turn for advice. Simple hospitality opens doors for the gospel.

For the above reasons, most American Christians are highly qualified to be involved at some level in International Student Ministry or cross-cultural ministry.

Here are some things that almost anyone can do to be involved.

### **Volunteer**

Volunteer with your university to be a host to an international student for their first year here in the U.S. Volunteer to pick up international students arriving at the airport. Jesus called us to be ambassadors, and imagine the impact of being the first American to welcome them to the U.S. Volunteer to have students stay in your home, as sometimes they arrive when the university residence halls are not open. Volunteer at organizations that serve immigrants. Become a host family for high school exchange students.

### **Give Gifts**

Offer to help them with obtaining furniture, clothing and living/school supplies. Those arriving in January often need a winter coat right away! Some churches have a garage-give-away every August. This is where furniture is donated and stored in a garage. A special day is then advertised where international students can come and pick out what they need free of charge. Have some friends ready to help with the delivery and they may be the first Americans to set foot into their home! When appropriate, give them a Bible with a personal note from you. Remember, God says that a gift makes room for a friend.

### **Share Meals**

Speak slowly, be patient, smile a lot, and invite them to your home for a meal. If you have children, encourage your children to show hospitality by including students in games, reading books, etc. Children are so good at breaking the ice and melting hearts. For many cultures, to be invited to share a meal with you in your home is a great honor and won't be forgotten.

### **See the World from Their Viewpoint**

As you get to know them, ask questions about them, their family, and their country. Take a sincere interest. A very important gesture of love and sincerity is to learn a few words of their language and to speak them to the best of your ability. This levels the playing field as you experience the same awkwardness they feel in trying to pronounce English words correctly. Also, get out a map and ask them to show you what city they are from and other important things about their country. Most international students are delighted to discover how much my kids know about other countries and that they can find them on a map.

*"The spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions.*

*The nearer we get to him, the more intensely missionary we become."*

*-Henry Martyn,  
missionary to India  
and Persia*

## Verbal Witness

It is important to let them know as soon as it is natural that you are a Christian. Don't rush in to share the gospel; but since being a Christian is the most important thing about us, it makes sense to let them know that we are Christian. Some may ask questions about Christianity right away and others will wait until more of a friendship and trust is built. There is no formula other than the rule of love; that is, being sensitive to their readiness to hear.

Friendship, servant-hood, and a learning spirit are three ingredients necessary for effective evangelism among international students. As they trust you more, you can have very open dialogues about God and religion. Be patient, however, as they come from a very different background and worldview than yours. Also, don't have a superior attitude about your culture, country, or even your Christianity. Of course, Jesus is the only way to Heaven; but remember that many internationals see "American" and "Christian" as the same thing and they may have difficulty seeing past all the immorality and hypocrisy they perceive to be rampant among Americans. Only by building trust into the friendship will you be able to patiently explain to them what a real Christian is and that most Americans don't have much of an understanding of Jesus.

Finally, be sure to follow through with the friendship – even if they seem to not be spiritually interested. Create an atmosphere of love and acceptance for them and they may yet come around to believing in Jesus.

## Teambuilding and Networking

Once you have built a few friendships with international students or immigrants, you need to build a ministry team and network through their friends and family. In John 17, Jesus said that the whole world would know we are His disciples by our love for one another. It is a beautiful and powerful picture of God's love and power when brothers and sisters in Christ from several nations are living in a tight and loving community. It may be that there is nothing in the world that comes close to comparing to a multi-national body of believers who loves one another deeply from the heart and cares for one another from their personal means.

With your international friends, begin going with them to meet their friends or family. We see Jesus doing this with Matthew, the tax collector. Have your international friends invite their friends and family to your home for a meal and visiting. We see Jesus doing this with the woman at the well as she brought out the townspeople to meet Jesus.

Just this last Thanksgiving, my multi-national team invited their friends to our home for a meal. Students from China, Malaysia, and Singapore had a great time visiting. Then, a few of us sat in my living room and I asked one of the students a spiritual question. As a result, ten plus international students were sitting in my living room for the next one and a half hours discussing the teachings of Christ.

This "team approach" is an excellent example for all the believers involved. It is reproducible in any region of the world. It takes out the "lone-ranger" mentality and the idea that only a few can really

*In a Milan Cathedral, on the door up to the pulpit, is inscribed, "All that pleases us is but for a moment. All that troubles us is but for a moment. That only is important which is eternal."*

***“I have but  
one candle of  
life to burn,  
and I would  
rather burn it  
out in a land  
filled with  
darkness  
than in a  
land flooded  
with light.”***

***- John Keith Falconer***

evangelize. I may often be the one who leads someone to a decision to surrender their life to Christ, but that is only a small part in evangelism. Everyone's prayers are vital. It may be the weakest member of the body who makes the most friends and brings unbelievers into contact with the rest of the body. Those who are good at making food, providing transportation, teaching English, learning some parts of another language, teaching how to drive, fix or buy a car, etc., are equally of great importance. International Student Ministries give opportunities for many believers to work together and to use their gifts in accomplishing the Great Commission.







PERSONAL EVANGELISM

**Exercise**

1. What are two or three main ideas that you picked up from these evangelism articles?

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2. Write down several factors (i.e., fear, schedule, etc.) which keep you from being more effective in evangelism. Now, write down a verse that addressed each of these issues.

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3. Recall a successful experience you have had in evangelism and briefly share what happened.

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PERSONAL EVANGELISM**Exercise**

4. Develop a list of people in your network whom you believe God wants you to influence through prayer, action, and words. What is your plan to reach these people?

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5. Are there new networks you feel motivated to penetrate with the gospel? How do you think you can best do this?

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GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

### **Outreach Through the Church**

God has designed the local church to be devoted to fulfilling the Great Commission in its community, first by making disciples (i.e., leading people to a saving relationship with Christ), then baptizing them, and then teaching those new believers to obey Christ. Therefore when considering its mission and ministry, each church must stop and ask this question: Are we really being effective in reaching non-Christians? Are people being won to Christ? Are they being baptized as new followers of Christ? This is the first priority, the first step in our mission. A church may have many fine programs and ministries, but until it is effective in this matter of reaching non-Christians with the gospel of Jesus Christ, that church truly has not made “first things first” in fulfilling its mission.

God will lead each church in His own unique way in order to accomplish this mission. The following are several testimonies of churches that are working to fulfill the Great Commission in their communities.

As you read these articles, consider the following questions:

1. How can the leaders of the church reach people through the public proclamation of the gospel?
2. How can the church reach people through training and mobilizing the members to be effective witnesses for Christ?
3. What other unique ministries can be started in the church to reach people for Christ?





## OUTREACH THROUGH THE CHURCH

### Acts 1:8 Plan

Pastor John Hopler · Columbus, OH

In His last words on earth, Jesus said this to His disciples:

*“But you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

This vision for Christians to proclaim Christ in local, national and international contexts has remained a foundational inspiration to the Great Commission church movement since its inception in the 1970s.

Our heart desire is that each church in our association truly be a “Great Commission church.” Towards that end, each church has sought God in developing its own “Acts 1:8 Plan.” This plan, tailored to that particular church, describes how church members will be a witness for Christ in their city, region, nation, and the world.

The following are some examples of Great Commission churches and their Acts 1:8 plans:

#### **Gator Christian Life in Gainesville, Florida**

GCL is a campus church on the campus of the University of Florida. As for reaching their city, the church provides opportunities for local witnessing on a weekly basis. Their gospel approach utilizes the simple Bridge Diagram on campus, as well as in outreaches to other colleges. The church has also coordinated efforts with the Evangelical Campus Ministers Association (ECMA) to put on large group outreach events at the university. GCL home groups provide communities where lost people can be reached in smaller groups.

As for reaching their Judea/Samaria, GCL has established a Florida State University church plant, and continues to support it through coaching and finances. Student home groups in Gainesville also chose locations in other GCSoutheast churches to reinforce during spring break trips. Team have been sent to support GCC churches in Jacksonville, Florida, Raleigh, North Carolina, and to Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, Gator Christian Life has had summer projects for college students in Jacksonville, Tampa, and Columbia, South Carolina.

Internationally, GCL sent (and continues to support) missionary, Dominic Marrone, to start a new church in Pamplona, Spain. The church sends short-term mission teams to teach English clubs and evangelize, as well as teams to Nicaragua and to La Ceiba, Honduras.

*“Paint Jesus Christ upon your canvas, and then hold Him up to the people; but hold Him up so that not even your little finger can be seen.”*

*-Edward Payson*

### **Cornerstone Community Church in Overland Park, Kansas**

Cornerstone is a community church in the Kansas City area. The church has spent time refocusing small groups on the core value of evangelism. Much emphasis has been spent on evangelism training, as well as on outreach in the neighborhoods where the small groups meet, and in the relational spheres of the small group leaders. They have had success with their “October Outreach” to neighborhoods near their meeting place, with the offer of fall yard work and home maintenance to the elderly, widows, and single mothers. They have also done “Prayer on the Porch” outreach in the same neighborhoods, where members go door-to-door, asking if residents have any prayer requests.

*“God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.”*

*-George Whitefield*

Outside of their community, Cornerstone members have teamed with other GCC churches in their region. The church has supported a new church plant, Crossroads, made up of young people, aimed at reaching an urban area in Kansas City. In addition, Cornerstone continues to strengthen ties with fellow GCC churches so that they may serve those churches in any way they can in the future.

Cornerstone’s international focus supports missionaries in Germany, Taiwan, Japan, Italy, Poland and Romania, supporting the work in those countries with short-term teams. Finally, the elders continue to promote local awareness of global missions and the persecuted church overseas through monthly features and prayer time.

### **Cottonwood Community Church in Grand Forks, North Dakota**

Cottonwood is a community church in a community with a major college campus, the University of North Dakota. The church has reached their city by sending out over 33,000 mailers annually and addressing topical needs in the community. As an outreach, Cottonwood has started an AWANA children’s program, as well as a food cupboard for poor and underprivileged people in the city. Their monthly dance outreach teaches dance lessons in a safe environment. And the “Be the Church” campaign sees them actually close the church on a selected Sunday morning so that church members are able to go out into the city to do a variety of service projects to help the community.

Regionally, Cottonwood planted a church in nearby Warren, Minnesota, with plans of another church plant in Minnesota. They have implemented a summer Leadership Training camp for college students. In addition, Cottonwood sends many teams on spring break trips to strengthen existing GCC churches throughout the U.S.

Internationally, Cottonwood supports the GCLA Costa Rica church. This is done through giving financially, as well as sending a mission team each year to work with and strengthen that church.

### **Linworth Road Church**

Linworth Road Church is a community church in the Columbus, Ohio area. The church stresses the importance of each staff leader having a major evangelistic thrust in his or her ministry. Existing programs include the children’s ministry, Cross-Crew, which does a VBS outreach and various fam-

***“If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”***

***-David Otis Fuller***

ily-friendly activities like a pancake breakfast and an Easter egg hunt. The high school ministry takes part in teen outreach activities. The college ministry, Alive, is involved in personal evangelism on campus, reaching out to Ohio State University students. Finally, every new visitor at Linworth is given a copy of Tom Short’s “5 Crucial Questions about Christianity” book, which explains common questions asked by people investigating Christianity.

On a regional level, Linworth was the first GCC church in Columbus and has sent out many church plants. Linworth Road supports The Rock, a GCC church that is reaching an urban area in Cleveland, Ohio. Linworth gives finances, as well as pastoral support to The Rock. Linworth also supports church member, Tom Short, who devotes a major part of his year preaching open-air on college campuses. In 2010, the church plant, Awaken Church, was sent from Linworth. This church is reaching urban and young professionals in an area just north of downtown Columbus.

Overall, the church has been a major supporter and hub for regional ministry in Great Commission churches, providing prayer, encouragement, finances, and pastoral support to these new church plants.

Linworth has also been very active internationally. The church has given finances and sent mission teams to the Great Commission Europe churches in Italy and Germany, as well as the GCLA church in Nicaragua. Besides financially supporting many other missionaries throughout the world, Linworth sent longtime members, Dieter and Lucy Schade, to be fulltime missionaries at the GCE Rock Berlin church.

## **Conclusion**

Someone said once, “Make the Lord’s last words be your first concern.” These four churches are doing just that. They are excellent examples of taking the last words of Christ in Acts 1:8 and putting them into practice. As they continue to give of their resources and time to reach their city, region, nation, and the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, they are taking practical steps to fulfill the Great Commission.

In Great Commission Churches, it is our hope and prayer that God will raise up more and more Acts 1:8 churches throughout the United States and the world. And it is our hope that every member of every Great Commission church will be fully engaged in the mission, supporting the local church in its Acts 1:8 plan. If we do, we know that God, by His Spirit, will raise up many disciples and many churches—all to the glory of Jesus Christ. May all of us as God’s people truly make Jesus’ last words our first concern!





OUTREACH THROUGH THE CHURCH

## A Seeker Service Model

Pastor Brent Knox · Bloomington, MN

### Introduction

There are two basic ways that churches reach out to people. Churches are either “front door” churches or “side door” churches. It’s a philosophy of ministry issue. “Front door” churches choose a philosophy of ministry where a person’s first contact with the church is the big Sunday service. “Front door” churches design their service to be seeker-friendly. “Side-door” churches choose a philosophy of ministry where a person’s first contact with the church is a smaller event, like a small group or a need-oriented seminar. “Side door” churches design their big service to relate entirely to the saved church people. They design smaller events and meetings to relate to the seeker.

Even among “front door” churches, there can be great diversity and variety of approaches. Some “front door” churches are “seeker-oriented.” These churches design their big service completely around the needs of spiritual seekers. The messages are topical in nature and are aimed at satisfying felt needs of seekers. The music is decidedly contemporary. The format is simple and devoid of liturgy. Other “front door” churches are “seeker-sensitive.” These churches design their big service to feed and build the saved. But, they make the service as palatable as possible for any seeker who walks in for the first time. Messages also tend to be topical and the music contemporary.

For the first 15 years of Evergreen, we chose a “front door”, “seeker-oriented” philosophy of ministry. It was a successful strategy. However, over the last five to seven years, each location has deliberately moved toward weekend services that are “believer-oriented”, yet “visitor friendly.” We believe the culture is changing to a post-Christian culture. People in a post-Christian culture are less inclined to believe that a church can meet their spiritual and emotional needs and therefore, are less inclined to respond to an invitation or an advertisement for church. We must go to people rather than expect people to come to us. At the same time, visitors frequently walk in the doors through personal invites and internet searches.

Therefore, we strive to be “visitor friendly.” We ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Is “Christian-ese” (insider, confusing, technical Christian language) being avoided?
2. Are basic issues being thoroughly explained?
3. Are the speaking pastors being authentic and transparent?
4. Is the Gospel spoken regularly?

*“Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist.”*

*-Oswald J. Smith*

5. Is the title of each series “visitor friendly” and does it speak to a “felt need”?
6. Are live testimonies integrated regularly?
7. Is the music quality?
8. Are our people as friendly as possible?

Our messages and worship are squarely aimed to feed and build the believers. We believe it is possible to be aim at believers, yet be visitor friendly.

The rest of this article explains the earlier philosophy of ministry pursued by Evergreen in the first 15 years of Evergreen.

Evergreen’s weekend “seeker services” follow the “common ground” principle. “When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who follow Jewish laws, I do the same, even though I am not subject to the law, so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can. In this way, I gain their confidence and bring them to Christ. But I do not discard the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are oppressed, I share their oppression so that I might bring them to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ. I do all this to spread the Good News, and in doing so I enjoy its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:20-23, NLT).

This Bible passage describes the secret of influencing people: become like people in order to win people. For an extreme example, consider the Amish. Many of the Amish are sincere believers. But how effective are they in bringing other people into their faith? Not very. Why? Because they have remained a sub-culture in our culture. They have not become like people in order to win people. Unfortunately, many other Christian groups have become their own sub-culture with their dress, style of music, and vocabulary. They no longer know how to relate to or reach out to lost people.

In our culture, surveys show that 70% of the baby-boomers do not attend church, yet still have a spiritual interest. Why have many people stopped coming to church? Because the church isn’t becoming like people. Here are some of the reasons most often given why people do not attend church:

1. Dull, boring, and irrelevant sermons.
2. The church is always asking for money.
3. I do not relate to the music.
4. Members are unfriendly to visitors.
5. The church makes me feel guilty.

Why not design a church that overcomes these barriers? Why not design a church that relates more to where people are at? That is what Evergreen Community Church is all about!

*“Jesus did not seek suffering, rather He sought to save lost souls. The suffering was the cost of His pursuit of lost souls.”*

*-Anonymous*

At the weekend services, our goal is to win people to Christ. We do it by finding common ground with people. Therefore, we:

*1. Preach relevant, practical, positive, personal, topical messages.*

We prepare messages that appeal to “felt needs,” then show the seeker how God can solve their felt needs by meeting their real needs. For instance, not many seekers would come to a message entitled, “Coming to Jesus for Salvation and Healing,” but many will come to a message entitled “Overcoming a Dysfunctional Past.” And yet the content of both messages might be the same! Not many seekers would come to “Making Jesus Christ Lord in Your Life,” but many will come to “Decisions, Decisions...Making Better Decisions.” And yet, again, the content of both messages might be the same! Many seekers feel that churches make them feel guilty. Although feelings of guilt are a prerequisite for salvation, we make our messages as positive as possible. Good news should be good news!

Many are suspicious of church leaders. They feel preachers are insincere. People are looking for authenticity. The most effective messages contain personal stories from the teacher’s life. The more personal and transparent the teacher can be, the more powerful the message becomes.

Yet we do not shy away from hard teachings from the Bible. We boldly teach on subjects like Heaven and Hell, Jesus being the only way to God, Christ’s payment for sins, sexual intimacy, the authority of the Bible, and more. The Bible includes some teachings that are hard for non-Christians to hear. We model our approach after the Lord. He preached basic truth to the multitudes. Then He pulled His disciples aside to teach more deeply. We preach basic truth at the weekend service (multitudes) and teach more deeply to the serious-minded at the mid-week New Community service. Jesus preached topically using many stories. And, at times, His teaching was hard. We seek to imitate His model. We seek to be culturally relevant while remaining doctrinally pure. Here’s what Bill Hybels and Mark Mittleberg say about this issue in their book, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (page 209): “Contagious churches have learned that they must communicate to their culture without compromising with their culture. They know if the message of the cross of Christ is ever diluted or hidden, then the battle has already been lost. What good is it to speak the language of secular people if we lose our message in the process?”

*2. Use contemporary music.*

The style of music marks our relevancy more than anything else. Music sends a strong message that the church “swims in the cultural waters.” We select our music according to the type of music to which our target audience is listening. We will even use secular music if it is an appropriate “bridge-building” tune. The volume of music is also an important issue. For younger people and old rock’n rollers, music must be felt as well as heard.

*3. Use occasional drama and multi-media.*

We are a sight and sound generation. The more “sensation to the senses” we can bring to our services, the better.

***“The will of God -  
nothing less, nothing  
more, nothing else.”***

***-F.E. Marsh***

***“If the Great Commission is true, our plans are not too big; they are too small.”***

*-Pat Morley*

*4. Develop a casual atmosphere.*

People dress up to go to work all during the week. At Evergreen, we want to give people a break from dressing up. People really want to be casual. There are no ties, but plenty of blue jeans—even from the pulpit!

*5. Let people remain anonymous.*

We do not ask guests to wear nametags, stand up, or do anything else that may make them feel embarrassed. Our goal is to allow guests to feel completely anonymous if they wish. We hope that they can come week after week and listen, and then sneak out the back if they so desire. However, we are training our people to be aggressively friendly.

*6. Downplay giving money.*

Many seekers have an impression that churches are overly concerned about money. Perhaps this impression has come about by television evangelists, or from old memories. Therefore, we publicly downplay money at the offering time. At every offering, we ask new people not to give, but to just sit back, relax, and enjoy the service.

*7. Encourage a friendly atmosphere.*

A friendly atmosphere is a key to church growth. Many seekers have a memory of church being unfriendly, and of people who were eager to leave as soon as the service was over. Evergreen has developed an atmosphere that says, “I want to be here,” rather than, “I’m obligated to be here.” We serve refreshments after each service. People are more comfortable to talk if they have something in their hands. We also have “ushers” and “hosts” to help new families with the Sunday School system and to initiate conversations with people who look disconnected.

*8. Use personal stories.*

Many Evergreen services contain a testimony from a church member who has a story that relates to the message. People love to hear stories. A visible demonstration of how God changes people’s lives is powerful.

Our weekend services help our people be involved in evangelism. Helping Christians be involved in evangelism is one of the greatest challenges churches have in America. At Evergreen, the weekend services make it easy. Surveys show that 25% of unchurched people would go to church if a trusted friend would invite them. Word-of-mouth is certainly the best advertising there is. But many Christians are reluctant to invite their friends to church because they feel the church service does not relate well to unchurched people. At Evergreen, we make our services an easy invite. It is much easier to invite a friend to church than it is to share the gospel. We tell our people to invite people to church and let us preach to them. Then we encourage our people to initiate spiritual conversation after the service. This makes the evangelism effort easier and more productive.

## Advertising

Advertising has been a big part of Evergreen's growth.

*“Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. ‘Let all who are simple come in here!’ she says to those who lack judgment. ‘Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding”* (Proverbs 9:1-6).

***“The best remedy  
for a sick church  
is to put it on a  
missionary diet.”***

***-Anonymous***

In this culture, where is the “highest point of the city?” How do we spread the news? In the times of the kings when this proverb was written, the “highest point of the city” was the accepted place of communication. Times have changed. Now there are other accepted channels of communication: newspapers, radio, TV, direct mail, etc.

Good advertising can bring people to church. Even though “word-of-mouth” is the best advertising possible, good advertising can greatly help the word-of-mouth efforts. It is far easier to invite people to church if they have already heard of the church through other means. Also, good advertising exposes new groups of people to the church who will tell their friends, thereby giving the church more word-of-mouth opportunities.

There are many people who have a spiritual interest in our communities and they want to find a church to which they can relate. Advertising is more important to churches with a “front door” strategy. Why? If people come to church because of advertising, they will need to feel that this church relates to them.

Good advertising creates a positive church image in the community. It creates a positive first impression. When Evergreen first began to advertise, we positioned the church to be fresh, contemporary, alive, and exciting. First impressions last a long time in people's minds. Advertising also gives the church an image to live up to. For instance, if we advertise the church to be friendly and alive, will our people live up to their billing? You can mold your church not only through exhortation, but through advertising. Advertising also gives the church a positive self-image. Good advertising can send a message to your own people—“Yeah, I guess our church is pretty hot!” It can help your own people feel good about their church.

There are several principles that guide Evergreen's advertising strategy.

1. The medium of advertising must be culturally acceptable. We do not pass out tracts or go door-to-door. We probably would not consider a telemarketing campaign. We rely on more acceptable mediums such as radio, direct mail, etc.
2. Design high-quality advertisements. People will form an impression about the church by the quality of work they see. The quality and creativity of our advertising ought to rival current advertising quality; otherwise we will stick out like backward, out-of-touch people, fuddyduds that no one would like to associate with.
3. There are two basic approaches:
  - a. Advertise felt need messages.

b. Advertise the nature of the church.

The second approach appeals to people who are already interested in attending a church. It also “positions” your church better in people’s minds. They begin to understand what the church is like. The second approach is especially important if you are introducing a new church or church concept to the community. Evergreen has used both approaches successfully.

4. Make the advertising simple and creative. People cannot remember complicated messages. Make one point stick. People don’t expect churches to be creative, so when we are, it is impressive to them.

At Evergreen, we feel that we cannot afford not to advertise! Advertising is one of the most important expenditures we make as a church. We spent about \$50,000 in Fall 1989- Spring 1990. And we estimate that the advertising brought in about 100 new people. Advertising may be more important than supporting new leaders. Not many new pastors can bring a hundred people to the church in one year.

### Winning Ways

Even though the weekend service makes it easy for a Christian to be involved in evangelism, we encourage Christians to be active in evangelism directly. We offer a seminar entitled “Winning Ways.” This five-week seminar is designed to help each believer understand that they are a hand-picked representative of Jesus Christ able to impact the world. The seminar is more than just sharing the gospel. The seminar describes how to make Christ attractive to the world—through acts of kindness, becoming a servant to co-workers, neighbors, and friends. Although not many people are gifted evangelists, everyone can love lost people and serve them in some way with practical acts of kindness. By doing so, we let our light shine before men and our good deeds win them to Christ. At this seminar we teach people to care, to put compassion in action, and to win the world.

### Short-Term Missions trip

A very important part of Evergreen’s evangelism training is short-term missions trips. Each pastor leads a mission trip at least every other year. Many pastors lead a trip more often.

There are four valuable aspects of a short-term mission trip:

1. *Evangelism training.* We equip the people who are going by teaching them how to share the gospel. Christians who go on the trips come back more equipped and motivated to share the gospel with friends, relatives, co-workers, etc.

*“Why does the Church stay indoors? They have a theology that has dwindled into a philosophy, in which there is no thrill of faith, no terror of doom and no concern for souls. Unbelief has put out the fires of passion, and worldliness garlands the altar of sacrifice with the tawdry glitter of unreality. The Holy Spirit cannot conquer the world with unbelief, nor can He save the world with a worldly Church. He calls for a crusade, a campaign, and an adventure of saving passion. For this enterprise He wants a separated, sanctified and sacrificial people.”*

*-Samuel Chadwick*

2. *A faith challenge.* A growing Christian needs to have an experience that will stretch and challenge their faith. It is a good, short-term effort that will help Christians focus their faith and experience God in fresh, new ways.
3. *World perspective.* We believe that Jesus has commanded us to reach the world. However, most American Christians do not think much beyond their own back yard. A short-term mission trip helps breed a worldwide perspective.
4. *Salvations.* Every trip has resulted in people getting saved, and the local foreign church being helped.

***“If a commission by  
an earthly king is  
considered an honor,  
how can a commission  
by a Heavenly King be  
considered a sacrifice?”***

***-David Livingstone***



OUTREACH THROUGH THE CHURCH

## Kindness / Servant Evangelism

Pastor Terry Lewis · Lewis Center, OH

In 2000, I led a team from Linworth Road Church in Columbus, Ohio to start Grace Point Community Church in nearby Lewis Center, Ohio. From the start, our heart has been to reach people for Christ. A major way we have reached people is through servant evangelism.

For this evangelism approach, I have found great inspiration from the life of Jesus in the gospels. In Mark 10: 42-45, the Bible says, *“And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”* Like Jesus, we are to serve people. And when we serve, we open up a door for the gospel.

I was inspired by some modern day writers who have promoted servant evangelism. Steve Sjogren’s book, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, and the companion idea book, *101 Ways to Reach Your Community*, have been great tools. Robert Lewis’ book, *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, also had a big impact on me. We were serving the community even before we started the church. We went to community events and passed out cookies and magnets with important phone numbers. Interestingly, 10 years later, someone called to have lunch. He told me that after having an argument with his wife and she stormed out of the house, he was staring at his refrigerator and saw that 10-year old magnet with our phone number. Yes, sometimes it takes that long for someone to respond to a servant evangelism outreach.

I got to know the community by joining the local Rotary club and meeting many community leaders. I joined the neighborhood homeowner’s association board. I asked many questions and offered our church to serve at community functions. I was often asking our church to step up to serve and pray for an opportunity to share the gospel while interacting with un-churched folks. I became friends with the public school superintendent by inviting him out to lunch and asking how I or the church could pray for or serve him or the schools.

Many people know of us or our reputation. Community leaders speak highly of us and trust us. Many have come to church and some have become Christ followers themselves. We often hear of someone who visits Grace Point tell of being touched by our church sponsored Easter egg hunt or a donut give-away at their kid’s soccer match.

We have many memorable stories from our servant evangelism outreaches. Once, we gave everyone at church a dollar bill and a challenge to get creative as to how to use that dollar to show God’s love in a practical way. Some people bought a stranger a cup of coffee while others bought a 99¢ greeting

*“Remember, a small light will do a great deal when it is in a very dark place. Put one little tallow candle in the middle of a large hall, and it will give a good deal of light.”*

-Dwight L. Moody



card and left it for a co-worker. Others bought a single stem flower and taped it to the locker of a schoolmate with a smiley face. Others pooled their dollars together and blessed someone together. It was fun to hear the stories the next weekend at church.

Servant evangelism gives us opportunities to meet people outside the church family and in the community. Occasionally, we will cancel Sunday morning services and serve people in the community. During these “Be the Church” Sundays, I particularly love to see families in the church serving together. Some families will serve a pancake breakfast to dozens at a recreation building in a trailer park. Other families will take donuts to a local firehouse, police station or urgent care facility to thank those that work on our behalf, and to tell them that they wanted to show God’s love in a practical way. Some families will pile into their car and visit a few military families in the community that will be saying goodbye to mom or dad who will be deployed next month. They will walk to the door together with a gift basket filled with gift cards and goodies to make a family memory. Children that do this with mom and dad never forget these moments.

For our first Sunday morning community service outreach, we made the mistake of not telling people ahead of time what they would be specifically doing, and our turnout was low (although we were so thankful for the ones that showed up). The next year, we were more prepared, and had four leaders organize four servant evangelism projects. The last time we did a Sunday morning outreach we offered five options. The one I led was not really evangelistic, but it built unity in the larger church family. There are 24 churches in our community, and on that Sunday, we delivered a gift basket to each local pastor to thank him for serving. We know where to find pastors on Sunday morning!

Do you have a desire to motivate your congregation to serve? If so, just do it! Do it yourself and tell stories on Sundays. Then invite a few others to do it with you and have them tell a story. Then take the big move and invite the whole church to do it. Your enthusiasm and sincerity are very important in motivating the church. And as you take steps to serve, your community and your church will never be the same!

***“Kindness is the noblest weapon to conquer with.”***

***-Thomas Fuller***



OUTREACH THROUGH THE CHURCH

## Sunday Seminars

Pastor John Meyer · Ft. Collins, CO

One of the problems that have probably always challenged the organized church is how to get the ear of lost people. In our increasingly secular culture, spiritual issues are not topics of daily concern to most unsaved people. Yet, their lives are shaped and hurt by the lack of spiritual answers to issues that confront them everyday. Somehow, people have come to so compartmentalize the “spiritual” and “secular” worlds that they no longer think truths about God can help them in their every day lives.

We know, of course, that in the long run, nothing affects everyday life as much as what someone believes about God. All the issues that people want answers for— relationship problems, money problems, time problems—all are affected, even transformed, by an obedient faith in the God of the Bible. It is not an overstatement to say that the whole course of someone’s life is changed by such faith.

But when people have a stereotypical picture of the topics they will get in church, how do we get an open ear?

One solution we have tried with some success in Summitview is the idea of community seminars done in place of our regular Sunday morning services. We have found that the unsaved world grants Christianity and the Bible a high degree of authority on certain subjects—and they are willing to listen if we offer them an opportunity in a safe environment.

Since our beginning in 1989, Summitview has met in two locations—a Holiday Inn that is often used for local conventions, and a new high school auditorium. Both are nice in appearance and spiritually neutral. While at the Holiday Inn, we decided we wanted to try to speak to the felt needs of the lost as directly as possible, but we also wanted people to have a contact point with our church. Our solution was to offer a seminar series as a community service, during our regular Sunday morning time and in our regular location. The whole church would come as usual, but it would not be a normal church service.

Our first such series was on parenting and we promoted it as a community seminar series called “Parenting in the 90’s.” We were clear in our advertising that it was sponsored by Summitview Community Church in place of our regular services, that regular children’s programs would be available for childcare, and that we would be offering biblical answers to family struggles. The advertising included newspaper ads and a tabloid with testimonies of people who had been helped by the principles to be shared. About 20,000 tabloids were hand delivered throughout the city. We also put in a significant amount of effort helping people in the church think through people they could pray for and invite. As a result, our first service saw 70 new adults come, when our normal adult attendance was probably

*“No matter who you are, you are the best Christian that somebody knows.”*

*-Anonymous*

about 170. We did have some Christians come from other churches who went back to their regular church when the series was over, but the Sunday morning time slot screened out a lot of church-goers who might otherwise have come. We did get a lot of unsaved people looking for help and support on that particular topic.

To make the series fit the community seminar mold, we had everyone wear nametags with the “Parenting in the 90s” logo (everyone usually wears Summitview nametags). Each person got an attractive folder with several pages of “fill in the blank” notes for the seminar. The folder also had a sticker with the series logo on it. Inside the folder were sheets explaining anything someone might need to know related to children, bathrooms, etc. Then the announcements were given as the first thing of the morning, again giving explanations to people, just as one might hear at any conference or seminar. There was coffee and refreshments before and afterwards, and hosts with clear name tags to help anyone with questions.

For the first seminar, our only music was a song sung by a mom who also shared about being a mom. At each succeeding seminar, we introduced more music, beginning with simple songs that anyone, saved or lost could sing (like, “He is able, more than able, to accomplish what concerns me today...”). The last of five seminars was actually a lot like a regular church service. We again explained to people along the way that the seminars were in place of regular church services and that as time passed, they would get a taste of what our church services were like. We found that if people were coming back, they had no problem with spiritual content or format. The last seminar included the gospel and an opportunity to receive Christ. Five or six people took the opportunity to do that.

We have done similar seminar series a number of times on topics including money (“Taming the Money Monster”), marriage (“Mission Impossible”), and the disappointments of life (“Got Life?”). All have been successful and all have resulted in some people receiving Christ. The best topics seem to be the most specific (kids, marriage, and money seem to be perpetual winners). We have also found that no matter how much we advertise, it is the personal invitations of the people in the church that bring most people. Taking the time and effort to envision the church is key to a series’ success.

By the time the series is over, most people seem to have already decided if they are going to continue coming. If they are there for the last week, and don’t already have a church home, the chances are good they will continue to attend.

Doing such seminars can be an especially good tool for small churches because new people don’t have any expectations for things to be large. But creating the friendly, professional atmosphere that people would expect at a seminar means extra work and requires thinking about the morning in a completely different way.

It also requires people to mentally give up those Sunday mornings as being “for them.” Although the topics are helpful for people in the church, the focus is on doing whatever would best meet the needs of new unsaved people who are coming to have a particular issue addressed, not just check out a church.

*“Throughout the world,  
in nation after nation,  
men and women  
have died for their  
Christian faith. The  
very least we can do  
is live for our faith.”*

*-Anonymous*

*“Perhaps if there were more of that intense distress for souls that leads to tears, we should more frequently see the results we desire. Sometimes it may be that while we are complaining of the hardness of the hearts of those we are seeking to benefit, the hardness of our own hearts and our feeble apprehension of the solemn reality of eternal things may be the true cause of our want of success.”*

*-James Hudson Taylor*

A church that gets united in successfully promoting and presenting a seminar series like this will have a rich experience in reaching out to the community. God’s church is “the pillar and foundation of the truth” in every area of life. We have answers that really are answers. To put those answers out there in the world’s marketplace of “help options” shows a proper confidence in our message that, in turn, builds more confidence when we watch it truly meet people’s needs.



OUTREACH THROUGH THE CHURCH

## Preparing for a Lifetime of Service

Pastor Matt Gordon · Gainesville, FL

The mission statement of Gator Christian Life (GCL) is, “Bringing college students to Jesus Christ and preparing them for a lifetime of service.” We have tackled the first part of our mission statement by providing tools with training like the Outreach Training Class and the Do You Know For Certain tract. Our Home Groups provide a culture where outreach to friends is nurtured and young believers are brought into a loving community. We are making strides in “bringing college students to Jesus Christ,” and by God’s grace we will excel still more.

But for the longest time “preparing students for a lifetime of service” has been a fairly nebulous goal. Each year, a number of our students would graduate into the real world and we had very little in place to prepare them specifically for life after college beyond an occasional seminar on “Finding the Right Church,” “Using Your Career for God” or “Consider Staff.” We were convinced that God had placed us on a college campus to raise up leaders and plant churches, but that vision was slow and sporadic in being realized.

I believe the turning point came as a few of our leaders became burdened to see our graduates living out the Great Commission together and were willing to do something about it. I remember standing before 45 graduating seniors at our closing ceremonies and charging them to live for God, but the next week realizing we had “sent” those students out in 45 different directions and few of them to Great Commission churches. Were we being the most strategic with opportunities God had given our church?

Our church leadership began believing and communicating a vision to our student Home Groups that God had uniquely put each group in place as a loving community and that God may want to use their group beyond college to stay together and plant a church or reinforce an existing church. This vision is catching on in varying degrees within each Home Group and we are seeing an expectation develop among our students who are prayerfully considering how to stay together beyond college to pursue the Great Commission.

To put feet to this vision, we have developed Train(ing) Tracks to equip our upperclassmen for life after college. Ideally, three semesters before a student is ready to graduate, they select one of four tracks that will better prepare them for their next step after graduation. Here’s a description of the tracks we currently have available:

***“The Saviour is not looking for men and women who will give their spare evenings to Him, or their weekends, or their years of retirement. Rather, He seeks those who will give Him first place in their lives.”***

***-William McDonald***

***"I never made a sacrifice. We ought not to talk of 'sacrifice' when we remember the great sacrifice, which He made who left His Father's throne on high to give himself up for us."***

***-David Livingstone***

1. *Foreign Missions Track* – This intensive missions mentoring program is for those who desire to be a missionary in another country in the next two to five years. The current opportunity through GCL is our Pamplona, Spain church plant.
2. *Campus USA Track* – For someone who wants to be heavily involved with a campus church plant or existing campus church after graduation. Current opportunities include joining up with the Seminole Christian Life church plant or remaining to strengthen Gator Christian Life.
3. *Leadership Development Program (LDP) Track* – Those who aspire to be a church leader with significant responsibilities (elder, deacon) in a Great Commission church should join this program. The primary material covered is the GCLI doctrine and core values. Current opportunities in Jacksonville, Gainesville, and other cities in the Great Commission Southeast (GCSE) region.
4. *Marketplace Ministry* – Anyone who is planning on being an influence for Christ among non-Christians in a secular work setting. We also will discuss the post-college church search and life. This track will involve larger group seminars, speakers, and optional homework.

Most of these tracks meet on a monthly basis, allowing students to continue to be involved in their Home Groups and ministry roles. Where feasible, we encourage those who have a vision to stay together after college to pursue the same track together.

Our goal is to always have simultaneously a campus church plant, community church plant, and overseas church plant that we are developing teams for or reinforcing. After planting a church, our goal is to reinforce it for several years before planting another church of its kind.

We realize we only have a few years to build into most of our students, even less for some. A challenge of leadership involves focusing on those equipping opportunities that are strategically in line with our vision for the limited time available. This means making the tough decisions to eliminate certain activities that don't clearly fit with our vision, and incorporating other activities that are more in line with the vision.

There are several key equipping opportunities we emphasize annually to reinforce a vision for church planting. Faithwalkers has provided a strategic time for our students to hear from pastors from around the country who are living out the Great Commission. This national convention has helped our students realize that they are part of a larger work of God beyond the local church.

For spring break, each of our Home Groups plans and executes a short-term mission trip. These trips build unity, outreach experience and leadership opportunities within each group. We have directed each group to target a church plant we are developing, a campus where we have a sister church (typically in the SE), or a sister church overseas. After a stretching, faith-filled, spring break outreach, our students grow in confidence that God can use them effectively in the Great Commission.

For college students, summers provide the unique opportunity for intense training over an extended period of time. We challenge our students to invest their summer in a project we create to experience church planting first hand. Not only do our students get to experience all the details, trials, and excite-

ment of church planting, they also are providing critical manpower to help the church plant get off the ground.

A major leadership lesson I've learned is that we have the ability and responsibility to shape the expectations in our church such that church planting becomes part of the culture. Several years ago we had a church-wide vision to plant another campus church, but for years we just were not making progress on that goal. Once we brought that vision to the Home Group level and empowered each group to consider themselves as a potential church planting team, then our saints took ownership in a church planting vision. Now I find myself in conversations regularly where students within a given Home Group are wrestling with God's direction for them as they consider church plant options.

From a leadership perspective, I don't see it as my job to try and talk our saints into being a part of a church plant after college. In fact, many of our students are not interested in church planting, and that's okay. My goal is to effectively cast vision, then provide ample equipping experiences throughout a student's college years. As they prepare to graduate I can help direct them to a church plant if God has so placed it on their heart. Jesus masterfully cast this outreach vision before His disciples: *"Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest'"* (Matthew 9:36-38, NASB). The very next thing Jesus does is sending the twelve out on an equipping short-term mission trip. Our local church is determined to pursue His example as best we know how as we take serious His charge to fulfill the Great Commission in this generation.

***"It is possible for the most obscure person in a church with a heart right toward God, to exercise as much power for the evangelization of the world, as it is for those who stand in the most prominent positions."***

***-John R. Mott***



OUTREACH THROUGH THE CHURCH

## Developing a Campus Ministry

Pastor Tim Rude · Des Moines, IA

Walnut Creek Community Church (WCCC) is located in Des Moines, Iowa and was started in 1985. In 1998, WCCC began a collegiate ministry at Drake University.

Drake University is a small private university with less than 3500 undergraduates. It is located in the older section of Des Moines—about five minutes away from our church building. Prior to 1998, several attempts had been made to follow up Drake University students who visited WCCC with hopes of starting a Bible study, but nothing took root. It became clear that until we had students who were already committed to our church as students, it would be difficult to start a ministry.

What precipitated from the campus ministry outreach in 1998 was due to several factors. First, one of the pastor's sons had graduated from high school and intentionally chose to attend Drake to start the ministry. Second, a young lady from our sister church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin was also going to enroll at Drake. And lastly, a graduate student at Drake who was willing to invest his life in campus ministry serving as its first director.

From the outset of the ministry, it was determined that it would be a church-based campus ministry. Some churches had started campus churches that were independent of the community church which had planted it. The desire was to have the ministry at Drake be part of Walnut Creek Community Church. Students who are part of the campus ministry would be expected to attend Sunday services, serve in the ministries, and attend special events. Any student leader of the campus ministry would be required to be a member in good standing at WCCC. It was the intentional desire to disciple everyone on campus within the local church with the understanding that upon graduation from college they would already be active in the church.

What guided this logic:

1. WCCC could support the campus ministry by providing leadership from a team of pastors and older men to guide the ministry and its leaders.
2. The church could support the ministry by providing financial and physical resources.
3. The church body would be able to provide examples of how to live as families and adult singles to members of the ministry.
4. The church could provide prayer and fellowship support for the campus ministry.
5. The church, in turn, would be stimulated and benefited by a youthful zeal and spiritual gifting by college members functioning within the church.

*"The philosophy of the classroom today will be the philosophy of government tomorrow."*

*-Abraham Lincoln*



6. The church would be benefited by developing young leaders and workers for the future growth and stability of the church.
7. The church would have an active segment of college-aged people who could minister to college-aged individuals in the community who are not in college.

Until 1998, our church had seen relatively slow growth. Our attendance averaged around 150 people. The building itself was located in the section of Des Moines with the oldest demographic in the state. One church growth expert was contacted and asked whether the present church building should be bought. Although every other counselor told us to buy the church building, he advised not to. His reasoning was that the location would not be conducive to growth evidenced by the disbanding of a Christian and Missionary Alliance church, from whom the building was being purchased. The decision was made, however, to purchase the property, though it was hard to attract any visitors to attend. The thought was that eventually the community demographic would change to a younger population.

The slow growth encouraged the church to try new things—to give God a reason to bless the faith of the body. One of the new faith ventures was to start a collegiate ministry.

A quick summary over the last eight years would be to say that the ministry has grown to around 275 student members that meet at the large weekly campus meeting called Alive, on Drake's campus. The on-campus ministry is called Campus Fellowship and is the largest student organization at the university. Over 200 Drake students are currently active members of Walnut Creek Community Church. In three years, three new growing campus ministries have begun on other local college campuses in the Des Moines area.

Here are 10 of the benefits of having the campus ministry:

1. *New Staff:* The church has been able to add ten additional staff members to the church staff, full or part-time, from the college ministry.
2. *New Ministries:* The church has been able to start new ministries or strengthen existing ministries due to the large numbers of young, single workers in the church. The primary new ministry is a sports ministry that utilizes over 100 volunteers from our campus ministry alone.
3. *New Missions:* WCCC has had many college students participate in overseas mission trips over spring break. For the last four years, the church has been able to send mission teams comprised of 50 people or more to Spain, to pioneer the gospel in an area of the world where the gospel is not being preached.
4. *Increased Prayer:* There has been a noticeable increase in the commitment to prayer in the church. The college church members meet weekly to pray, at many different times in large groups and small leadership groups. Regularly over 100 people from the college ministry gather to pray each Monday night for the needs of the church and for Campus Fellowship.

***“Tell the students to give up their small ambitions and come eastward to preach the gospel of Christ.”***

***-Francis Xavier,  
missionary to India,  
the Philippines,  
and Japan***

5. *Enhanced Music Ministry:* Many of the college students are musically gifted and have increased the quality and depth of the church's music ministry.
6. *Increased Finances:* The church is benefiting financially. A good percentage of college graduates are electing to find jobs in Des Moines and are now tithing. It's thought that this could be due to the fact that they have experienced fellowship in the local church and see themselves already belonging.
7. *Greater Capability to Plant Congregations:* The church has the ability to plant multiple congregation plants from the pool of workers coming from the college ministries. Future church (congregation) plants will be drawn from a demographic of 22 to 30 year-olds from within church. In the next year, a second congregational plant will be done outside of the main building location in downtown Des Moines, comprised of these individuals. The idea of being part of a church plant will continue to be presented to upper-classmen at Drake and other colleges. This is a good way to instill the vision to be part of reaching the world and will give these aspiring student leaders something great to work and believe God for, once they have graduated.
8. *Enhanced Spiritual Vitality:* It is a blessing to have a church that is full of young people. Visitors comment that they have never seen a church so full of young people. It is the belief that most people are attracted to a young and growing congregation. Many of the college members are new converts, fresh with an eagerness to learn. The enthusiasm of the
9. *Increased Number of Converts:* There has been a steady flow of college-aged people, and younger, come to faith in Christ. This excites the whole church. Surveys indicate that people come to Christ in larger numbers when they are younger. There is consistent talk of new converts each week.
10. *Growing Number of Workers:* The church body has prayed faithfully for the last seven years with the most persistent prayer having been for laborers (Matthew 9:36 – 38). This prayer is visibly being answered through the collegiate ministries.

***"There is nothing in the world or the Church, except the Church's disobedience, to render the evangelization of the world in this generation an impossibility."***

***-Robert Speer, leader in Student Volunteer Movement***





OUTREACH THROUGH THE CHURCH

**Exercise**

1. What common threads did you notice from these various testimonies/methods which enabled them to be fruitful?

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2. Did any of these methods particularly excite you as something your church should do? Jot down some ideas and steps you and your church can take.

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OUTREACH THROUGH THE CHURCH**Exercise**

3. Describe in your own words the outreach plan for your church (including public proclamation of the gospel to non-believers and mobilizing members in evangelism). Evaluate the effectiveness of this plan. Are there changes that should be made?

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4. Are there some methods described in these articles that you think should *not* be used in your church? Explain briefly why not.

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5. Discuss what obstacles stand in the way of your church being more effective in evangelism. Obstacles may include attitudes of members or leaders, church organizational structures, spiritual issues with the church flock, etc.

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## THE GREAT COMMISSION

### **Planting Churches**

Church planting plays an important role in fulfilling the Great Commission. This article by John Meyer looks at various aspects of church planting and offers practical information. You will be evaluating how you and your church can be more effective in furthering the gospel through new church plants.





## Planting Churches

Pastor John Meyer · Ft. Collins, CO

### 1. What part does church planting play in fulfilling the Great Commission?

There is not just one activity that, by itself, expresses the fulfillment of the Great Commission. But if the Commission is being fulfilled, three things among everything else must be occurring—salvations, recognition of elders and deacons (or similar leaders), and the formation of new congregations. When the Christian church, with right biblical doctrine, continually sees those three things happen over time, it is on a course that will eventually result in the fulfillment of Christ's command to make disciples of the whole world. These three can be looked at as the hallmarks of the Great Commission.

***“The Church  
must send or the  
church will end.”***

*-Mendell Taylor*

Forming new congregations, or churches, is essential because God's process of building the believer must primarily occur through the church, or ecclesia, a local fellowship of believers, united in their relationships because of a shared commitment to trust and follow Christ.

Why is the local church so necessary? *“...the body...builds itself up in love, as each part does its work”* (Ephesians 4:16). *“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”* (1 Corinthians 8:1). *“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love”* (Galatians 5:6). *“The fruit of the Spirit is love...”* (Galatians 5:22). *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love”* (1 John 4:7-8). God's Word makes it abundantly clear that His work in us, and through us, is done through *agape* love. God wants us to receive His love and to love others in the same way, especially our fellow believers.

But what does this love look like? We find that described in the New Testament as well, and the best summary is probably found in a compilation of the “one another” verses. There, believers are told to bear with one another, forgive one another, encourage one another, greet one another, admonish one another, pray for one another, and a number of other commands that cover nearly every aspect of healthy human relationships. Nearly all of the commands are most easily and appropriately carried out with people who know one another. Indeed, people who have a heart to obey those commands will discover they are in a circle of believers, committed to one another, who (when biblical leadership is added) make up a New Testament church. We can say that wherever believers are committed to obey the instructions given to them in the Bible, a church will exist. God's intent is to multiply such groups all over the earth!

When believers are not living in Christ-imitating relationships, Christianity becomes reduced to right doctrines and beliefs, or perhaps commitment to some social cause. But real Christian growth and maturity does not come about through communicating right doctrine or ideals. If that were so,



Jesus probably would have started schools. Instead, He founded the Church—a family of believers and a body of vitally interdependent members. We need to be convinced that, although there are many things that can support God’s plan of the local church (i.e. books and other media ministries, spiritual service organizations, large scale Christian events, etc.), it is through the context of the local church that those other things become part of bearing real fruit in believers’ lives. A workman without proper tools faces a challenge, but tools without a workman are useless. The many Christian events and ministries of our day are God’s toolbox. But the relational life of the local church is the workman God has created to build His body (Ephesians 4:16).

*“When John Wesley died, he left behind a few books, 20 pounds and the Methodist church.”*

*-Anonymous*

But we need to note that the New Testament tells us that a church is more than just a relational group. It is marked by spiritual gifts, Spirit-recognized leadership given to manage and teach, and certain specific responsibilities, such as baptism, making disciples, disciplining members, and reaching the lost. Our pattern from the Book of Acts is that such churches are nearly always started by the intentional effort of leaders and other churches. And that pattern is still true to this day. Church planting must be an intentional aim of existing churches, or new spiritual families in new locations will seldom be started.

Planting churches is more than just providing the proper context for Christians to grow. It is also essential for reaching the unsaved person. One of the most profound promises in reaching the lost is John 13:35, “... all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” So it is not how effectively we communicate the truth to the lost that guarantees our success in reaching this world, but our own relationship with Christ expressed through our relationships with our fellow believers. Jesus said the most effective tool in evangelism will not be radio programs or gospel tracts by themselves, but the life of the church when it is filled with the Holy Spirit.

This indicates that the lone missionary, working to share his faith with others, will be greatly handicapped in his efforts. The lost are most effectively won when they can be drawn into the body life of believers—the church. This body life can be fully expressed in a relatively small group of people, but when numbers dwindle to a few (or one), the dynamic of body life is lost.

In summary, God builds His Church as the Holy Spirit works through the Christ-centered relationships of the local church. Not only that, but the world sees Christ through those same relationships. God’s people can, and should, use many different kinds of tools, but unless the tools are connected with people that the seeker eventually may have a relationship with, God cannot complete His work. Thus, for the Commission to be fulfilled, local churches must be established in every tribe, tongue, nation, and people. These new churches must come primarily from the intentional church planting efforts of already existing churches.

## **2. How does planting a church affect the existing church?**

Beliefs are built on what we hear; convictions are built on what we do. Though this particular group of believers calls itself Great Commission Churches and shares the importance of the Great Commission frequently, the individuals in this movement will build their convictions about the Christian life upon what they see their church—and themselves—doing. Thus, when a church goes for a great length of time without seeing in its own setting some or all of the three hallmarks of the Great Commission

*“There is one thing that mars all the pleasures of my life. I am afraid the Bible is true. If I could only know for certain that death is just a sleep, I should be happy. But here is what pierces my soul-if the Bible is true, I am lost forever.”*

*-Modern day atheist, at his death*

mentioned above, people come to the conclusion that such events are spiritual and theoretical, but not really part of the experiential Christian life. For example, if very few people in a church have ever seen someone saved, then that church will have a warped view of why the church is here. If very few people have been in the church when an elder has been recognized from out of their midst, then men will give little practical thought to aspiring to that “good work.” If very few people in a church can remember when their church started, or when their church started another church, then the notion of planting churches will not really be part of their understanding of God’s plan for the Church.

Salvations, recognizing leaders, and starting churches (at some point) are an essential part of fulfilling the Great Commission in the lives of the people who are already in the church. It is hard to overestimate the impact on a church of hearing fellow members share stories of how God has convicted them to move with others, how God has gotten them a job, how God has helped them to sell their home, or trust Him though the home does not sell. The very self-image of the church is different when a vision to plant churches is developed and carried out.

The impact goes beyond vision, however. When a team is sent out, new opportunities for responsibility open up in the existing church. People who had viewed themselves as new will often be asked to fill in the shoes of those who have moved on. People are motivated to sacrifice because of the greater sacrifice they see others making.

However, along with the positive aspects, it is important to remember there is the potential for negative impacts from planting a church, as well. For instance, if a pastor who has been a significant part of the teaching team leaves, some loss of attendees may also happen. People are often more attached to one pastor than another as their “shepherd,” and his departure will break one of their most significant links to the church. This can be alleviated, somewhat, if a six-to-twelve month transition time can be planned, where the moving elder is gradually replaced in the teaching and counseling schedule.

Be aware that individuals can be “orphaned” within the church if their spiritual relationships are lost when the team leaves. Sometimes people need direction and support in reconnecting to other individuals or groups within the church.

Also, continual church plants over time can continually skim off “faithful, available, and teachable” saints, and leave the church with an increasingly higher percentage of people who are either neither faithful, available, nor teachable. Churches that have a long history of church planting caution against planting churches too rapidly, and making sure some strong emerging leadership remains in the existing church.

### **3. What is the effect on those who plant the church?**

If a church planting team is small, every member of the team is continually presented with tasks to be done and needs to meet. Rather than having one ministry for which they are responsible, people serve in many areas and could be called upon to do almost anything at some point in time. This gives people an experience that is almost impossible to duplicate in a larger church. Everyone knows they are a vital

part of the working of the church and, as a result, have a tremendous ownership of its success.

Again, because of the small size and the team unity of their common goal, members of a church planting team also have a high level of concern for supporting and shepherding one another's lives. The sense of needing one another, appreciating one another, and wanting to care for one another is generally very strong.

Overall, those who are part of planting a new church experience an environment which affects their Christian life very positively, bringing about growth in convictions which last the rest of their lives.

*“Why not go out on a limb? Isn't that where the fruit is?”*

*-Frank Scully*

#### **4. How does starting new churches help reach non-Christians?**

Seventy percent of the people in the United States have no relationship with an evangelical church. How do we reach them? One answer is church planting. Because people are different we need more and different churches to reach more people. Church planting is one of the most effective steps we can take in reaching new groups of people for Christ. One study showed that in churches that are 50 years or older there is one conversion for every 83 members; in churches 10-15 years old there is one conversion for every 10 members; and in churches 0-3 years old there is one conversion for every three members. This shows that new churches encourage outreach and evangelism.

#### **5. What are the challenges the new church must overcome?**

Being part of a new church is exciting if it grows, but not as exciting if it does not. Yet the new church faces definite challenges in making that growth happen.

The first challenge is just getting new people through the door for the first time. If the team has recently moved to the area, they will not have many natural relationships in the community. Often advertising and special events are a key part of connecting with new people.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the small church-planting team is legitimacy in the eyes of those who consider coming. Are they just something weird, or are they a real, respectable church? The greatest tool to overcome this is the people in the church. If they are warm, genuine, and excited about God and the church, such loving enthusiasm melts away a lot of concerns. If people do not have those qualities, probably nothing else they do will be able to attract new people.

But assuming the team has a welcoming, loving attitude toward new people, there are other things that can make a difference in the way the church is “sized up” by visitors. The meeting location is important. Our culture has come to equate legitimacy and acceptability with quality of facilities. Think of your own response when shopping for an expensive product you aren't really familiar with. Would you rather go to a run-down, locally owned store in an old strip mall, or a large, expensive building for a national chain? Most people are affected by the quality of facilities and that is why stores and malls build such expensive buildings. Obviously, a new church is not going to be building any fancy buildings. But, like it or not, the location you choose makes a statement about the people who meet there. The visitor asks themselves, “What label will I get from associating with this group of people? Do I want to belong here?” A new church consisting of a handful of people meeting in a location that

*“One person with passion is better than forty who are merely interested.”*

*-Tom Connellan*

most people wouldn't go to in their normal shopping or social lives is probably not headed for the kind of growth they want.

That is one reason why schools, when available, can be good locations. They are very neutral, usually familiar places, and expected by people to be what they are. Another good option is a conference hotel. While that can be a little more expensive, the atmosphere is attractive and professional.

What the group does with the facilities can be as important as the facilities themselves. Since the facilities don't belong to the church, people will draw conclusions from what the church makes of those facilities. The quality of signs, decorations, brochures, name tags, and placement of greeters all make a statement about the character of the group. Remember, the question being asked by the lost is, “Are these the kind of people I would like to be associated with outside of a church environment?” So, while a new small church should not fall into the trap of trying to be

an imitation big church, they must be sharp and worthy of respect in all they do. The first impression of the church should be a positive one, and this is determined by choice of facilities and how the church presents itself in those facilities.

Another challenge a new church faces is simply the inability to meet the broad range of church expectations new people bring. It may be several years before a church can meet the needs of teenagers through a viable youth group, yet people may not join the church because no youth group exists. The new church has to be content with a more limited field of ministry and allow it to grow naturally over time.

## **6. Who should go on a church plant?**

Hopefully everyone, at least once in their life, will have the experience of helping plant a church. But many factors weigh in when determining who should be part of a particular church planting team. At least as important as the numbers is the makeup of the team. A “team” is a good description—they must be a group of people united together in a great challenge. Success depends on their ability to give and serve in a Spirit-filled, sacrificial way, relying upon God in the demands, disappointments, and perseverance sometimes required in a church plant.

The team is more likely to be successful if relationships are already well-established before the church plant begins. Church planting tests relationships and relationships that have already been tested will offer the fewest surprises. Not only that, but getting to know people takes time and energy. Any energy spent getting to know one another after the move means less energy available to get to know new people. Because of this, it can be a good idea for the team to meet together weekly for the purpose of developing relationships, common vision and specific plans for three months before moving. It is probably unwise to take someone who has no relationships on the team unless they come highly recommended and there is sufficient time before the move to get to know them.

If the team is small, the leader must have close working relationships with the core (if not all) of the people on the team. Often people want to go simply because of their committed relationship with the pastor or someone else on the team and this is one of the best reasons to be on a church planting team. Paul clearly had people travel with him because they already had a committed working relationship.

Another factor to consider when thinking through a church planting team is the demographic makeup of the team. When a church is small, it is helpful if the team is made up primarily of a more narrow demographic slice—i.e., pretty much one kind of people. This can be helpful because the strength of a new small church is relational and unsaved people generally want social relationships with a group of people with whom they can identify. A small church of young couples will attract young couples, but they will not attract single people or older people nearly as easily. As a church gets larger, its demographic band broadens, but it is essential to understand that in a new small church, new people connect with the church as a whole as much as with individuals. So a church planting team should decide on its target group and make sure the team can connect relationally with the demographic target.

*“Soul winners are not soul winners because of what they know, but because of the Person they know, how well they know Him, and how much they long for others to know Him.”*

*-Dawson Trotman*

Another demographic issue to consider is that of age and stage of family life. Church plants require a lot of time and relational energy, and this means that people who are young, single, or in the early stages of married and family life will be the most helpful with generating the body life essential to a new church. Families that are older can provide stability and maturity, but a team will probably fail if it is made up exclusively of couples whose lives are fully consumed by job, family, and the regular church schedule. Singles and younger families are helpful for another reason as well—their peers are free too. Younger people are freer and easier to reach—they are looking for social relationships and are more open to change.

So, generally speaking, an ideal church planting team will consist of (at least in part) a full-time elder and a number of singles or young couples and families.

### **7. How many people should go on a church plant?**

Though this varies a great deal with the size of the planting church and philosophy of ministry, churches can be planted with relatively small teams. A minimum requirement is a group large enough to create a spiritual family. A good team of 15 to 20 adults is probably sufficient to be the beginnings of a new church. If the new location does not require buying and selling homes or changing jobs, then much larger churches can be started.

### **8. When should a church consider planting another church?**

Starting a church takes leadership, people, and money. How much of each depends on what kind of new church is envisioned, but starting a new church is probably within the reach of most churches in our movement. Generally, churches tend to start churches like themselves—small churches start small churches, larger churches start larger ones. But the end result is the same—the body of Christ, established and at work, in one more place in the world.

The first and most important question is available leadership. Is there a recognized elder available to go? Having a vision for planting churches is a tremendous motivation for continually developing new elders because a successful church plant usually requires a full-time pastor. The amount of experience the pastor needs will vary with the situation. The closer and more connected the new church will be, the less experience is required for the planting pastor. If the church plant is a “just down the road” ven-

*“People who don’t believe in missions have not read the New Testament. Right from the beginning, Jesus said the field is the world. The early church took Him at His word and went East, West, North, and South.”*

*-J. Howard Edington*

ture, then a multiplicity of leadership can be maintained by simply making the new church a second congregation of the existing church. However, the ideal planting pastor is still someone with at least one or two years of experience as a recognized elder. Sending a brand new elder robs him of the opportunity to develop his initial skills and patterns as a pastor with other elders at his side. Since most of our training for pastors is on-the-job training, the training can’t really be complete until they have been on the job awhile.

There is always a temptation to start a church plant without sending full-time leadership. After all, it may only be a group about the size of a home group. But planting churches without full-time leadership usually leaves them without the spiritual energy required to make a new church grow. People working full-time can lead and manage a small group of 15 to 20 people, but will not have the time and energy to foster growth beyond that. Therefore, regardless of the maturity of the sent leaders, a new team can be perpetually caught in just keeping itself managed if it does not have full-time leadership. With insufficient leadership resources, it is possible to see years of hard work, faith and effort pass without growth in the numbers of the new church.

The second question is—can a church planting team be put together? The planting elder should have a few people who want to go because of their close relationship with him—a “Timothy” and “Silas.” These united laborers will make up the core of the new church’s leadership team. If an elder does not have anyone like this, there should be some question as to whether he should be the leader for the church plant. Other team members can be sought through a general invitation to the church, open interest meetings, and personal recruitment.

The necessary money is usually the simplest problem to solve. Special offerings to raise a salary, start-up and operating costs for a year is well within the reach of most churches that would be able to put together a church planting team. It is customary for churches to raise large sums of money for buildings; it should be natural for us to apply that same energy to raising money for planting churches (“you are God’s field, God’s building” 1 Corinthians 3:9). Sometimes financial help is available from regional sources as well.

## **9. How much does it cost to plant a church?**

The costs of planting a church are the ongoing costs of running the church, plus start-up needs. Running a church requires a salary, a meeting location, and operating expenses, which usually aren’t very high. Start-up costs could include band and sound equipment, computer and peripherals, a trailer, photocopier, miscellaneous office supplies, and perhaps, office space. Upfront start-up costs can vary greatly depending on how much money is available, the demographic target group of the new church plant, and what size the new church will be. It is not hard with a little research to develop a realistic budget of start-up costs when the church plant is planned.

## **10. When does a new church become financially self-sufficient?**

Though this varies a great deal depending on many circumstances, a new church’s income should gradually increase and can be reasonably expected to have its income meet its expenses in about two years.

## 11. How do you choose a location?

Locations can be “the right location” for a number of reasons. Some locations are a natural choice because people attending the existing church already live there. A suburb 40 minutes away or the town 15 miles down the highway may be the place for a new congregation, the beginnings of which are already in your existing church now.

A church plant location that requires everyone to move and change job locations obviously must be chosen through a different set of criteria. A clear sense of God’s leading has to be part of any church plant decisions, and with long distance ventures, all the more so because so much more is being put at risk.

God’s leading is often seen through very practical considerations. What kind of location will enable the planting team to do church the way it knows how to do church? The goal is not to just do something completely different, but to bear as much spiritual fruit as possible in one more place. Therefore it seems that the planting church should try to use the things it has learned as much as possible. A church successful in a metropolitan setting would be able to put that to use in another metropolitan setting. Do what you do best in one more place. Hopefully every church plant would feel like there is strength and a strategy that uniquely suits them for that location, even if it does present many significant differences from the existing location.

For example, Summitview Community Church in Fort Collins, Colorado, initially considered Salt Lake City for its first long-distance church plant. Though Salt Lake presents a number of clear differences from northern Colorado, it was chosen because its similarities fit the strengths the church had made use of in Fort Collins. The leadership team at Summitview had a vision and some success in planting small nearby churches in a relatively short time from the original church. The Salt Lake area was similar to the Front Range—a string of towns along an interstate highway that looked like a natural place to replicate the short-distance church plants that Fort Collins had seen happen in Loveland and Greeley. It was also an area with a high-tech job base, which was a large makeup of the Summitview congregations. Salt Lake was also the closest population center to the Colorado Front Range—seven hours driving distance. That meant ongoing support could be more practically carried out.

But practical considerations should be followed up with seeking confirmation from the Lord regarding that location. Trips to “spy out the land,” short-term outreaches of various sorts, and interviews with other church planters in the area can all be part of giving God opportunity to confirm the location, or lead you on to somewhere else.

After deciding on Salt Lake as a logical location, about a year of prayer, counsel, road trips, and outreaches followed, seeking God’s confirmation of this choice. The elders took several two-and-three-day trips there to interview spiritual leaders, drive throughout the area, and talk to people off the street. Two three-day outreaches were done with people from Summitview, one primarily with community members and one with students. The outreach done with community members had the benefit of allowing people who could not afford the time or money to go on a short-term mission trip outside the country to nonetheless experience outreach to “another culture” right in their own back yard. It was a great experience for everyone who went and gave the leaders a much clearer picture of the spiritual climate of the community. Bill Young, the pastor who would lead the team if the church plant were to

*“God’s work done in  
God’s way will never  
lack God’s supply.”*

*-Hudson Taylor*

*“Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.”*

*-Theodore Roosevelt*

happen, also went to Salt Lake for a few days alone with his wife so they could pray together for the city and seek God’s direction.

These activities gave practical help and insights, but were also some of the means by which God gave supernatural confirmation to this particular plan. Had these exploratory activities not happened, the church in Salt Lake would have been very different in timing, location, and makeup.

Eventually, the church leadership has to make a challenging decision in faith, trusting a sense of leading and confirmation from God one way or the other. Long distance church plants require a lot of courage, sacrifice, and faith. It is good to remember that most of us now serve in churches that were started by saints who chose to walk in those qualities.

## **12. How does a new church reach out to others?**

The new church can experience great success in drawing in new people if the focus is on its strengths and not its weaknesses. Small churches have obvious limitations—they will not be able to have the same quality of music, children’s programs, or other ministries as a larger church. Often, if the planting church was large or put a lot of emphasis on quality music or other ministries, a new church plant can think that church growth for them will come through the same means.

That is not so! One of the biggest mistakes a new small church can make is to try to imitate or pretend to be a big church. When they do that, they miss their greatest asset! The small church expresses more effectively than the larger church what God uses most of all to reach people—relationships. In a small church, the entire congregation is one tight-knit family. If that family is focused on reaching and loving others together, the result is almost inevitable—new people will be drawn into that loving family. Small new churches face a challenge in getting new people to come through their doors, but a healthy new church plant should keep a much higher percentage of new people than a large church. They will also have a higher favorable response from unsaved or unchurched people than a larger church will because relationships are such a strong part of the church life.

Advertising will probably be an important part of making contact for the new church because the church planting team will have no history of relationships in the new community. Advertising will be most effective if it offers seminars or services that meet felt needs of the lost, because the very small church may hardly classify as a regular church in community people’s minds. The assets of the new church are that: (1) they are new (people feel more comfortable coming to something that has no history of long-term relationships—then they start out on the same plain as everyone else); (2) they are very warm and relational; and (3) they can share answers to people’s problems as well as anyone else. Advertising should focus on those assets. If a church planting team is united, focused on the lost, and filled with the Spirit, the only challenge left to be met is to bring new people through the door. This challenge can be met with creative planning of advertising, events, and an investment of time and money.

## **13. How much autonomy should the new church have from the planting church?**



Size of the church plant, number of elders, experience of the leadership, distance from the planting church, and philosophy of ministry of the leadership all are part of determining the answer to this question. A small church plant that is geographically close can greatly benefit from remaining as one church in two congregations, especially in its establishment years. This relieves the new church from a lot of financial and organizational responsibilities, as well as provides a multiplicity of leadership in the church. It also allows a simple sharing of resources, equipment, seminars, conferences, and leadership development programs. This model is the most feasible when the new church is close enough so that all the elders can continue to hold their normal regular elders meetings together, and can provide a multiplicity of leadership that is as effective as that in a single congregation church.

***“Someday, someone is going to read it for the first time, believe it and act upon it.”***

***-Leonard Ravenhill***

After a church has developed an income that is greater than its expenses, it will also have raised up a number of leaders that were never part of the original church and, of course, have members that were never part of the original church. As this process continues, the church will probably function more efficiently if it becomes more self-reliant and self-directing, moving in the direction of greater autonomy.

#### **14. What role can regional and national ministries have in starting new churches?**

To be effective in planting churches, it is imperative that there be a strong working together between the local church and the regional and national ministries. Consider this analogy in the area of evangelism. In a local church we all see the importance both of each individual member effectively sharing his faith, as well as that of the pastors leading out in proclaiming the gospel and training the members in evangelism. Analogously, we all see the importance of each local church initiating at starting new churches as well as that of national and regional directors leading out in starting new churches and equipping churches to do the same. There are several ways that Great Commission Churches and your regional director can help in getting new churches started:

- a) *Training.* These ministries are able both to assess potential church planters as well as coach church planters.
- b) *Resources.* Informational resources as well as financial resources are available regionally and nationally that will help facilitate the church planting process.
- c) *Networking.* Oftentimes churches will not get planted unless more team members are added. Regional and national directors are able to network together teams for more church plants.
- d) *Ongoing care for the new church.* Many pastors aspire to have a ministry outside of their local setting so that when a new church gets started, that pastor would like to continue to have an ongoing responsibility in caring for that new church. Other pastors merely want to be involved in the start-up phase of a new church, continue to have a fellowship with that church, but desire to entrust the ongoing care for that new church to the regional ministry. This is particularly so for churches being started in a region different from the sending church. For example, although it would be possible for a church in the eastern United States to send a team to start a church in the western United States, it would be less feasible for pastors from there to provide ongoing care for that new church plant. A more practical plan for the sending church would be for the regional director in that part of the country to care for the new church.

- e) *Strategic planning.* Regional and national ministries can be valuable for helping to decide where would be the most strategic location for planting a new church.

As the local church pastors unite together with regional and national ministry leaders, utilizing each others wisdom, resources, and spiritual gifts, our church planting effectiveness as a movement of churches is multiplied.

### 15. Should every church plant churches?

That is a hard question, because “every,” “always,” and “never” can easily be misapplied when used for something other than the clear absolutes of Scripture, and there are no direct commands for churches to start churches.

But we know that every believer is under God’s command to make disciples.

That involves many things, and most of them have no connection with church planting. Yet, while God’s “next step” for each church will often be something other than a church plant, it does seem that starting new churches should be part of the vision of every church. It is hard to see how a church can claim to be committed to the Great Commission if it does not want to reproduce itself somewhere else. Jesus told us, “The field is the world...” (Matthew 13:38). “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). If God’s plan is the local church, then the local church is responsible to reproduce itself in every culture on earth.

When we engage with that responsibility, new places and individuals are reached. But more than that, the practical Christian life is redefined, and we experience a need for God that is not experienced any other way. God has called us to a task that is far bigger than ourselves and it is when we are committed to the gospel beyond our current church that we connect with that task. It is part of God’s discipling process for us and the Christian life is probably not complete without it.

Editor’s note: John Meyer has been affected by church planting throughout his Christian life. His first visit to a Great Commission church was in Ames, IA, in 1977 as an unsaved college freshman. Part of the service that day was tearful farewells from a group of people moving to start a church in East Lansing, MI. On the way home from that service, John committed his life to Christ. From there, he witnessed a number of church planting teams leave the church in Ames. Many of those teams included close friends, including his younger brother. In 1989, he moved to Fort Collins to help establish a fledgling church plant that had no pastor. Over the following eight years, two sister congregations were planted from Fort Collins in the nearby towns of Loveland and Greeley. A new long distance church is being planted in May of 1999 in Salt Lake City and a student church is being planned in Boulder, CO, for September.

*“If you are  
ever going to  
do anything  
for Christ and  
His kingdom,  
do it now.”*

*-Bill Bright*



PLANTING CHURCHES**Exercise**

1. What did the Lord most impress upon you from this article?

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2. Do you feel you, as church leaders, have a strong or weak vision to plant churches? How strong is the church planting vision of your church body? Discuss your reasons for giving each answer.

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3. What obstacles have prevented your church from greater multiplication? How do you feel those obstacles can be addressed and overcome?

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PLANTING CHURCHES

**Exercise**

4. List at least five (ten would be better) positive benefits your church could experience if you birthed a new church.

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5. Discuss as leaders any church planting plans, goals, or aspirations you have and what it will take to make them happen.

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GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

THE GREAT COMMISSION

**International Missions**

Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19-20). As one man said, “We are to make His last command our first concern.” For this reason, we in Great Commission churches aspire to see the gospel spread, not only in the United States, but also throughout the world. Therefore, each GCC church has part of its mission to reach people in other countries.

The following two articles by Herschel Martindale and Mike Keator will inspire you to be devoted to international missions.





INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

**International Missions**

Pastor Herschel Martindale · Columbia, MD

**1. What is the biblical basis for international missions?**

The day our Lord Jesus arose from the dead, He appeared to the eleven disciples and said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:14-15). This would have been sufficient to give marching orders to His Church for international missions. That was only the beginning. A little later, He said to them, “Repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [My] name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Later, on a mountain in Galilee, He spoke to the eleven again and said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). After forty days, Jesus spoke for the last time to His disciples before ascending to heaven, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

*“World missions was on God’s mind from the beginning.”*

*-Dave Davidson*

The fact that Jesus commanded the eleven to preach the gospel in all the world to all creation, to make disciples of all the nations, and to give them His commandments, implies that every new believer should receive His commands, which included going to all the world. Since every generation needs to hear the gospel, the “international mission” is always current and imperative.

**2. What is the biblical basis for each local church to be involved in international missions?**

The first mention of the Church in the New Testament gives us a glimpse of its purpose and importance. Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Matthew 16:18). Jesus is rescuing people with the gospel and building His church, and Satan’s forces are resisting, but failing to stop Him. The Apostle Paul reminded the Ephesians, “He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all things” (Ephesians 1:22-23). The Church is the body (instrument) of Jesus. Local churches are merely a representation of this universal body or Church. A body is merely an instrument or means by which the purpose of the head is accomplished. Our Lord Jesus gave the command to reach our entire world with the gospel. He does this through His body, the Church. Every local church should be available to Jesus to fulfill His plan and purpose as He leads. The Great Commission should be a foundational core value of every church. It applies first to where we are (our Jerusalem), but includes the whole world.



### **3. Will an international involvement distract the local church from its primary purpose of reaching people where we are and equipping the saints?**

It is often just the opposite. Seeing the “big picture” usually helps one see more clearly the importance of what they need to do where they are. The believers in Acts, having just received the command to reach the world, immediately began to reach people in Jerusalem.

- “...and with many other words, he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation’” (Acts 2:40).
- “Repent therefore, and return, that your sins may be wiped away...” (Acts 3:19).
- “...many of those who heard the message believed” (Acts 4:4).
- “...all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number” (Acts 5:14).

Freshly seeing the big picture reminds us that we have a great God who wants to do great things in and through us as we yield to Him and trust Him.

### **4. Will giving to missions, short-term team members, and international staff not weaken and hurt the financial support of the local church?**

One of the earliest “foreign” missions was in Antioch in Syria. In the persecution that arose with Stephen, some of the Jews from Jerusalem went to Antioch, and some were saved. The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to help them. Barnabas went to Paul and asked him to come also. This church had hardly begun when they heard that the believers in Jerusalem were going through hard times. “And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea” (Acts 11:29).

It might be easy to think that this would really limit or set the church back. Only a short time later, God spoke to them to release Paul and Barnabas to go as missionaries to Asia. They gave heavily of their money, and then shortly their main leaders left to go overseas. Would such a church survive?

Not only did it survive, but God raised up many more leaders and the church at Antioch became one of the strongest churches of that part of the world.

“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly nor under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 6-7).

*“If ten men are carrying a log—nine of them on the little end and one at the heavy end—and you want to help, which end will you lift on?”*

*—William Borden as he reflected on the number of Christian workers in the U.S. as compared to those among unreached peoples in China*

**5. Should local churches participate in short-term missions? Can people who do not know the language or culture accomplish much? Is it not a waste of money?**

These are surely valid questions. Many of those who go on teams do not know the language or culture, and often are not that fruitful or effective in their churches at home. The following are some of the reasons why short-term teams are valuable.

- a. It is unlikely that any money spent would have been given to the church at home if they did not go.
- b. The spiritual preparation for the trip, the partnering with those in the target church, the increase of their personal vision, the testing of their faith and convictions, seeing spiritual transformation in lives they touch are just a few of the reasons that thousands of young people have had their lives deeply affected through short-term missions.
- c. Hundreds of people hear the gospel who would not hear had the team not come.
- d. There are obviously those in the target country who respond for selfish reasons. Many however, have had life-changing experiences because of these teams.
- e. Many in the target churches have had their lives changed through the outreaches.
- f. Those from other countries stir interest where they might otherwise not listen.
- g. Churches have been started through short-term teams.
- h. A significant percent of team members have gone on to become full-time staff.
- i. Many team members come home with a renewed desire for service and witness. It is up to the home church to help them adjust to local opportunities and needs.

*"If I had 1,000 lives, I'd give them all for China."*

*-Hudson Taylor*

**6. How can a local church include international missions in its leadership training?**

- a. One of the best ways to expand vision is through short-term teams. Every young leader should go on a short-term team and later lead a team.
- b. Every pastor should lead a short-term team. This strongly communicates a world vision and concern.
- c. Include the international aspect in all teaching of the Great Commission.
- d. Include strategic missions books in the books given to leaders by the church.
- e. Include Great Commission Church missionaries and needs in regular prayer times.
- f. Have a mission leader or missionary speak at a leaders' overnighter.
- g. Plan a Mission Sunday at your church. Show videos, drama, testimonies, etc.

## 7. How can a local church become more aware and interested in missions?

- a. Encourage people to participate in short-term outreaches.
- b. Have good mission books at the book table available for sale or loan.
- c. Cooperate in a missions conference: leaders' and missionaries' testimonies.
- d. Invite an international staff person to speak at church.
- e. Display a church bulletin board with photos/newsletters of Great Commission missionaries.
- f. Have a regular time to pray for those leading and laboring overseas.
- g. Start a missions small group to help keep the vision alive and growing.

*When James Calvert went out as a missionary to the cannibals of the Fiji Islands, the ship captain tried to turn him back, saying, "You will lose your life and the lives of those with you if you go among such savages." To that, Calvert replied, "We died before we came here."*

## 8. How can a U.S. church have an on-going relationship with an overseas church?

Great Commission pastors and churches overseas desire to have a long-term and significant relationship with U.S. leaders and churches. It is easy to feel lonely and cut off when you are in other countries and do not have regular regional and national fellowship. The process of partnering is much the same as with churches here. There must be communication and contact as often as possible. The Internet is a great asset. E-mail, web sites, and current pictures via the Internet are all extremely helpful. If an overseas church cannot afford this equipment, the U.S. church might take this on as a project.

Short-term teams going each year are also valuable in building unity. There must be respect and consideration given for the convictions and preferences of the staff and leaders of the overseas church. It is easy to think that our way of doing things is best or more biblical. Methods and approaches used in the States may not be effective at all in other countries. The leaders in the other countries are very sensitive to the culture and customs where they labor. American leaders should consult with the Great Commission country director before suggesting changes in church practices.

Telephone calls to staff members, both privately and during church services, are very encouraging. Hearing their voices and testimonies, and then praying for them, draws people very close. Encouraging overseas staff members to visit churches when they are home on furlough is also a blessing to all. Having them speak to the church and also children's classes help develop a missions awareness. Keeping a missions bulletin board public and current, with lots of pictures is effective. Staff members love to send or bring pictures if they know people are interested. Encouraging a missions small group is good. Reading letters and praying for needs keeps the relationships current. Great Commission international leaders make regular trips to different countries and would be happy to take small gift items to overseas staff from a church, individual, or missions group.

### 9. How can a local church or family adopt a missionary family?

Missionaries raise their own support, so are acquainted with many people at home. A church or family could prayerfully choose someone to “adopt” and develop a special relationship with that person or family. Some suggestions for doing this would be:

- a. Regularly communicate by letter, email, Internet, or telephone.
- b. Send special gifts from time to time (money, items for family members, birthday remembrance, holiday greetings, etc).
- c. Invite them to visit you when on furlough.
- d. Visit them in their country where possible (be sure that this fits their schedule and is not a burden).
- e. Participate in a short-term team where they are.
- f. Set up bulletin board with pictures and letters in church or at home.
- g. Sponsor a church fund-raising activity with the proceeds going to that family.

*“We talk of the  
Second Coming;  
half the world  
has never heard  
of the first.*

*-Oswald J. Smith*

### 10. How can a local church work more closely with Great Commission in missions activity?

Great Commission is very dependent on local churches in its international vision and success. There are many ways that churches can work closely together in this effort:

- a. Read and distribute different international newsletters. Europe and Latin America have regular newsletters giving current information.
- b. Short-term teams are one of the best ways of working together. The response to the needs in Honduras has been exemplary. Contributions, work teams, and visits of pastors have all been of great help to our brothers and sisters there. Short-term teams have been the entry point for beginning churches in Venezuela, Costa Rica, Germany, Ukraine, and Italy.
- c. International leaders in Great Commission would enjoy having a pastor with them on their international trips. A local church could pay for such a trip. It would be good for the pastor, the Great Commission leader, the overseas church, and ultimately for the home church.
- d. Great Commission is very dependent on local churches to help potential staff members raise their support to go overseas. This is a very challenging and sometimes difficult process. It really tests the faith and character of the staff member, but it has great benefits. It helps envision and bless the donor and builds a prayer team that is essential to the future success of the staff person.

### 11. Should a church partner with other churches to send a team overseas?

There are many things to consider in sending teams overseas to plant churches. One of the first steps should be to contact the Great Commission Churches office. The team working in international ministry is most aware of the circumstances involved in the country of interest. Some of the most important issues to consider are:

- a. What legal obstacles (visas, etc.) are there with the government of that country?
- b. What issues are involved with the national church and church leaders?
- c. Are there cultural and linguistic issues to understand and solve?
- d. Will there be long-term financial support of the staff and church?
- e. What long-term supervision and management will there be?
- f. What provisions for safety and security of personnel are provided?

The Great Commission international ministry has the processes in place to cope with each of these needs and challenges. Most local churches do not. Local churches might team together, working closely with Great Commission

international leaders and formulate a plan to begin a church in a country of interest. To seek to do this independently usually creates many problems and even tragedies.

### 12. How can a church conduct an effective missions conference?

A local or regional missions conference is one of the most effective ways to create interest and stimulate participation in international missions. Consider these things:

- a. Discuss this with a regional representative of Great Commission, or contact the Great Commission Churches national office directly. Express your desire and ask for counsel.
- b. They will know the schedules of staff members and when they will normally be in the United States. It is much more financially feasible to ask staff to join you in a conference if they are already planning to be in this country.
- c. Mission leaders living in the U.S. may be available if you need them.
- d. They will know how to obtain any materials that you will need, such as videos, pictures, newsletters, brochures, etc.
- e. They can also put you in touch with people who can give testimonies and examples.

*“Someone asked, ‘Will the heathen who has never heard the Gospel be saved?’ It is more a question with me whether we, who have the Gospel and fail to give it to those who have not, can be saved.”*

*-Charles Spurgeon*

### 13. How can a church set up a missions small group?

An effective small group needs to have a purpose, a motivated leader, and several people who will unite to make it successful. Several factors can help a missions small group to be an encouraging experience:

- a. A leader who has a sincere interest in missions.
- b. The leader needs a plan that will cause others to want to join. Unless the leader has experience in international missions, he or she will need someone to guide and help them formulate a good plan. One of the pastors might do this, or someone in the church who has been on a short-term team and has some understanding of organization. If there is no one to help establish a plan, contact your regional director or the GCC national office and they will ask someone to help you.
- c. The group needs to be creative in order to hold interest. Setting up bulletin boards, sponsoring a missions conference, regular correspondence with an overseas church or staff members, scheduling overseas staff to visit the church, setting special prayer times, and projects to raise funds will all create interest and excitement.

*“China is not to be won for Christ by quiet ease-loving men and women.”*

*- Hudson Taylor*

### 14. Where does the money come from to support both the local church and foreign missions?

This is obviously a very serious and practical question. There are several areas to be considered:

- a. We must not spend beyond our means, but must carefully examine our priorities. It is so easy in our personal finances to consider things important simply because we desire them, not always because they are essential.
- b. If God has commanded us to reach the world, then it would seem that some involvement internationally would be important and surely blessed by God.
- c. When church members see that a church has a wide vision and commitment, they often desire to give more. When God sees a heart to sacrifice and give to that which is on His heart, He blesses even more.
- d. God always honors and blesses faith and sacrifice. The Bible is filled with examples where God adds and multiplies when our little is given to Him. Sometimes our financial need is an indication that our hearts are not really devoted enough to Him.
- e. The familiar passage in Malachi 3:10 seems appropriate at this point: “Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven, and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

### **15. What about support international ministry outside of Great Commission? What are some advantages of coordinating with Great Commission?**

We praise God for all that He is doing throughout the whole body of Christ in reaching our world with the gospel. There are many unique ministries reaching out to different segments of the population. World Radio Ministries, literature ministries, Campus Crusade, Navigators, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Gospel Recordings, and hundreds of other fine mission groups are reaching out as God has led them. We would like to work as closely together as possible with groups with similar vision and doctrine wherever possible. You may have relatives or close friends working with one of these organizations and God may be leading you to financially or prayerfully support a person or ministry. God will surely bless whatever is given to Him and His work. The advantages of coordinating with Great Commission are primarily unity and multiplication. As you give, pray, or go, you develop a very close relationship with many in your local church who are united to reach our world for Christ. You are united with other churches regionally who keep the vision before us. You develop close relationships with those who are led to other places to serve Christ. There are many opportunities on a local, regional, and international level for working together to see the most happen. A good example was the tragedy in Honduras a few years ago. When the hurricane left enormous damage to the country and people, the leaders of Great Commission in Central America were instantly on the scene. People in the United States gave very sacrificially to help. Great Commission leaders were quickly mobilizing aid, and teams from many churches went to work to help rebuild homes and minister to needy people.

*"In our lifetime, wouldn't it be sad if we spent more time washing dishes or swatting flies or mowing the yard or watching television than praying for world missions?"*

*-Dave Davidson*

The opportunity to work together and multiply our lives is also valuable. Some years ago, we had the opportunity of beginning a church in Houston, Texas. A group of us went to Clemson, South Carolina to help see a church start there. Two of the leaders raised up in that church are now missionary pastors in Kiev, Ukraine. Working together with short-term teams from the United States, a church was begun in Kiev. With the leadership of those pastors and with the assistance of short-term teams, leaders are now being trained to start new churches in Ukraine. People will be trained in those churches to not only reach Ukraine, but also many other parts of the world. There are many other examples of this working together to see our world reached with the gospel.

### **16. If a person is interested in going overseas someday, what steps should they take now?**

Missionary work overseas may be either specialized or general. Specialized work would be things like pastoring, nursing, teaching, printing, mechanical work, computers, etc. General ministry would be evangelism, follow up, leading small groups, coaching, etc. Most full-time staff, except pastors, will be involved in general ministry. It is essential for people to become skilled and fruitful in these areas in their local church here, if they wish to be effective overseas. GCM will require applicants for overseas staff to have either a pastor's recommendation, stating that the person is proficient in these skills, or to take specialized training here before going overseas. It is important also for the person to develop strong habits of daily fellowship with God, a faith-filled prayer life, and unity with other believers so

as to be able to successfully work through conflicts and difficulties, skills of time management, and motivating others to devote themselves to living for Jesus Christ.

**17. What are some issues (finances, education, family size, health) that should be considered?**

- a. Finances: It is wise to be as free from debt as possible. Good financial habits are desirable, but not required.
- b. Education: GCM has no educational requirements for overseas staff, but it is surely desirable. Most European countries place a high value upon education. It will be difficult to effectively communicate and affect those who may regard us as inferior because of a lack of education.
- c. Family size: The size of families is somewhat relative, but there are important factors. It is difficult to find housing in many places for larger families. Many countries will not allow home schooling, thus requiring either private schools or tutors for children who do not know the language, and both are quite expensive. The ages of children are also important. The older the child, the more difficult it may be to adapt to a new culture or language. The loss of friends and familiar surroundings may also contribute to culture shock for older children.
- d. Health: Physical conditions which require regular medical attention may present difficulties in the more underdeveloped countries. Parents should seek a doctor's advice about living in a particular country.

*“As long as there are millions destitute of the Word of God and knowledge of Jesus Christ, it will be impossible for me to devote time and energy to those who have both.”*

*-J.L. Ewen*

**18. How can church leaders respond to those who desire to go overseas?**

When a person asks counsel from a pastor about possibly going overseas someday, they often have little understanding of the issues and problems. A wise pastor will gently probe to get more understanding of their concern.

It will often be undeveloped and immature. They need patient guidance and encouragement to grow spiritually and learn to serve God effectively where they are, while not dampening their interest in the possibility of serving God overseas someday. It would be good to recommend good missionary biographies to read. “Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret” was a great blessing to me. “Daws” (story of Dawson Trotman) is inspiring. “Through Gates of Splendor” (story of Jim Elliot and others in Ecuador), “Inn of Sixth Happiness” (story of Gladys Aylward in China) and the story of William Carey in India are all challenging examples. Encouraging people to participate in a short-term team is very helpful. This takes away the romanticism of overseas work and gives a glimpse of reality.

Encouraging people to be a part of a missions small group for prayer or research is helpful. Helping people to become pen pals with missionaries is also enriching. People should be challenged to get regular counsel from leaders as they continue to have interest in going overseas. They should be en-



couraged to get all the training possible in their local church. They may also want to apply for staff here before going overseas.

### 19. What about being a “tentmaker?”

A “tentmaker” is simply one who supports him/herself with secular employment while doing missionary work overseas. This is especially important in those called, “limited access countries.” Many countries will not grant missionary visas, so secular employment is essential to be in the country. Some go as teachers, others as medical personnel and some go as specialists and technicians in various fields. It is important that people do not go by themselves. If a team can get jobs and work in a specific location, there may be real success. When working alone, there are great temptations and also potential discouragements and spiritual or physical dangers. Many employers will not permit their employees to be active spiritually as they fear the displeasure of the company or government. A job opportunity should be carefully explored before taking employment. If there is not spiritual fellowship and oversight, it is probably best to reject the opportunity.

*“People who do not know the Lord ask why in the world we waste our lives as missionaries. They forget that they too are expending their lives...and when the bubble has burst, they will have nothing of eternal significance to show for their years they have wasted.”*

*-Nate Saint,  
missionary martyr*

### 20. How can a local church reach internationals here in our own country?

- a. Over 400,000 international students come to this country to study each year. Many of these are very open and seeking friendships with Americans. They want to learn American culture and many of them desire to obtain jobs and stay here. Most will need to return to their countries when they have completed their studies. This is a unique opportunity to reach internationals here. Mainland Chinese have especially been open to the gospel and hundreds have come to know Christ as Savior while here. The churches in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia were all started because of international students going back to their countries with a desire to reach their own countries for Christ. These students were reached and trained while attending universities here in the United States.
- b. There is a great increase of minorities from other countries settling in all of our communities. Many are shocked to see mosques appearing, Buddhist gathering places being set up, and an influx of Hindu-oriented teachings being offered (such as transcendental meditation techniques). Many churches have been slow to see this as an opportunity for meaningful friendships and sharing the gospel. We have often been more concerned with the homogeneous principle than with the command to reach our world. Many of the minorities have united tightly together because of this slowness to be accepted. As they unite, they become more resistant to the gospel. We need a fresh vision to see internationals that are all around us. We are often insecure because they seem different and often not fluent in English. It will take love, courage, and faith to reach out to these whom God has brought to us, instead of us going to them.

## 21. What are some practical steps to reach out to internationals here?

- a. Begin to pray that God will open our eyes and let us see the “fields” here.
- b. Remember that the greatest need of an international here is a friend. “A friend loves at all times” (Proverbs 17:17). Love reaches out to any need (1 John 3:16-18). Look for an opportunity to meet an international, then look for needs that they have. Walk in their shoes. Put yourself in their place. “God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). Sacrifice and make yourself available to help them meet needs. Your greatest opportunity is when they first arrive, but they will often respond at any time.
- c. Everyone loves to eat. Invite them for a meal. Tell them about your favorite foods. Ask them to fix you one of their meals. You provide the materials.
- d. Internationals love to tell you about their country and culture. Show genuine interest. Don’t be shocked about anything. Don’t think their customs are weird. Never criticize things about their customs or language. Remember that our customs are strange to them.
- e. Speak slowly, distinctly, and simply. Most of them are still learning English. Avoid slang. Compliment them on their English and their effort to learn.
- f. Internationals love pictures. Show them pictures of your family and background. Ask them for pictures of their families and genuinely show interest in them. Ask questions.
- g. Be very patient and do not give up. Communication will often seem difficult at first. It is very difficult for them also.
- h. Include them in your normal activities. Do not think that you always have to do something special. They want to know what is normal for you. Include them in your sight-seeing trips. These are of special interest.
- i. Holidays are quite special in any culture. They will want to know what you do on Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, Easter, etc. Include them in your family activities. Don’t be afraid of age differences. A student will appreciate being with a family, or even older people.
- j. Do not hesitate to invite them to church or small groups, but do not embarrass them in front of the group. Some will not want to speak or be singled out, and others will enjoy sharing things about themselves and their culture to your group or church. Ask them before calling on them.
- k. Internationals usually love children. Your children are a good entry to get to know people.
- l. Many Bibles and good reading materials are readily available from the International Bible Society in most languages. As you develop a relationship, give them good books or a Bible in their language if possible.

*In the year 1266, Mongol leader, Kublai Kahn, asks the pope to send 100 Christian teachers to baptize him and teach his people. The pope sends seven. In 1295, the Mongols begin to convert to Islam.*

m. Do NOT preach at them or push them in spiritual areas.

It is fine to share your testimony. Be careful about a quick “conversion.” Remember that their total spiritual orientation and world view is probably different from yours. It will take time and patience to see them come to a real understanding of the spiritual issues and their need.

## **22. How can pastors develop a greater heart for reaching the whole world?**

People who aspire to overseeing usually have a sincere heart for people and the needs of our world. We all desire to have a greater love for our Lord and the world of people whom He loves. We also face a challenge. Someone has said that “human nature tends toward inertia.” Our flesh also tends toward comfort and selfish interests. The inner cities of our world are rapidly increasing in size and critical spiritual need. It does not bother us too much because they are usually out of sight unless we see something on the news. The same is true with our huge and needy world. Over two billion people have never even had the true gospel presented to them, and they will spend an eternity in Hell. It doesn't bother us too much, though, because we never see them. They are just statistics; faceless forms across the sea. The deceived, the starving, the old, the children, the diseased, those being killed in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sudan, Nigeria, Burundi, flash on the screen, then they are gone. A pastor's example, enthusiasm, and encouragement to reach the whole world with the gospel greatly affect the vision and convictions of the church.

Some of the ways we can keep our hearts burning might be to make the sacrifice to lead that short-term team, to read missionary stories of God's working in other lands, to write letters to staff members in different countries, to join some brothers praying for the needy people of the world, to memorize and review verses that prod us to let “God's love compel us” so that we “*no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died for us and rose again*” (2 Corinthians 5:14-20). Our churches will seldom catch a fire that does not begin in the hearts of God's servants and leaders. May His Word and the Great Commission freshly grip our hearts in these strategic days as it did on that road to Emmaus when the disciples said, “*Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and opened the Scriptures to us*” (Luke 24:32)?

*“In response to the criticism, ‘You are going too fast’, if anyone still wants a reply, let him ask the lost souls in Hell whose brothers and sisters are following them there. Let him go and ask the blood-washed throng in Heaven, whose eyes are wide open at last to the value of salvation. Let him anticipate the Judgment Day, and in spirit stand before the Throne and propose, if he dares, the question to God Almighty. I think from Hell, Heaven and the Great White Throne, the answer would come back; “More speed! Go faster!”*

*-William Booth*



INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

## Reaching the Unreached People Groups

Pastor Mike Keator · Columbus, OH

The Lamb of God came down from heaven and gave His blood for the people of every tribe, every language, every people group, every ethne, but nearly half of them still don't know it! Jesus is worthy that all of them know of this heavenly gift. More than that, it is an absolute affront to Him, a denigration of His majesty that they haven't been told.

We all know that five times after He gave His blood for them, He commanded believers to tell everyone in every place that He died for them. Yet 2000 years have gone by, and we who claim Christ as our Lord haven't gotten it done. We, Christians, have plenty of money, and plenty of man-power, but we haven't mobilized these resources and focused them to this cause. We have gotten distracted, and the resources have gotten diverted to such an extent that 99.8% of the offerings are spent on ourselves, and 99% of the workers are deployed to those who have already been reached!

The situation we are facing today is that there are still:

- 3000 unreached, unengaged people groups with no missionary
- 1,000,000 villages with no church
- 3,500,000,000 Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists with very few Christian workers

This situation is unacceptable. It is unacceptable because it didn't have to be this way. These people could have been reached a long time ago. It is unacceptable because it doesn't have to stay this way. It can be changed, and we have proven it can be changed.

The double tragedy is that many of the least reached are also the most open. Nearly every day Su and I meet people who have NEVER heard of Jesus! And yet, many of those come to Christ after hearing the gospel.

So why, after 2,000 years, are these people groups still unreached? Some are in the most remote, difficult to reach places, but not all. Some face fierce opposition from non-Christian radicals, but not all. We are finding that some of these unreached people groups are quite accessible, and in some places there is no opposition!

If believers only knew how easy it is to reach them, many would do it. This tragedy can be remedied by increasing awareness, and providing more avenues through which volunteers can go.

There is a biblical principle that indicates we should look for where God is working and join Him. We see it in the episode of Phillip and the Ethiopian. Phillip sees him reading the Scriptures, and the Spirit says, "Go up and join this chariot." There are places today in the world where the totally unreached are

*"A congregation that is not deeply and earnestly involved in the worldwide proclamation of the gospel does not understand the nature of salvation."*

- Ted Engstrom,  
World Vision

wide open and responding to the gospel in historically unprecedented numbers. And yet, hardly anyone is going! Hardly anyone is giving! Hardly anyone is praying!

Only 0.02 % of all giving to the world's churches goes into the work of reaching the truly unreached. That is two pennies out of every \$100. "In fact, a mere 0.2 % of the total of \$270 billion in annual revenue of all churches goes into ministries aimed outside the church toward local evangelistic and foreign mission activities among lost people of any kind" (John Rowell, *To Give or Not to Give*). Christians are keeping 99.8 % of all church revenues for themselves. Ninety-nine percent of the missionaries deployed are going to the places relatively reached.

The blood of these unreached people groups is on our heads, because we could have warned them, and we haven't! Paul said he was innocent of their blood, because he went to them, won them, and he mobilized the new believers so they reached 25 million people in 15 years. This can happen again! We can do this!

Millions of the unreached live in the safer places. We can go to the less hazardous places now, yet be ready to go to the "impossible" places when God opens the doors. Political upheaval, military conflicts, economic crises, natural disasters and famines often open the hearts of those who have been closed historically to the saving message of Jesus Christ. We must be ready and react quickly when these crises occur to bring the gospel to them. Are you ready?

God is still asking the question, "Who will go for Us?" The eyes of the Lord are searching for leaders who will be single minded and unself-seeking, with faith enough to turn obstacles into stepping stones, staunch enough to endure the hardships to finish the task of reaching the least reached of the world.

Will you volunteer? Will you say with Isaiah, "Here I am, send me"?

If you can't go right now, will you send others, and help them get there?

Will you pray daily for the billions of unreached people sitting in darkness with no clue how to be saved?

For further study go to: [www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net) or [southasianpeoples.imb.org](http://southasianpeoples.imb.org).

(Statistics in this article have been taken from [www.issacharinitiative.org](http://www.issacharinitiative.org), and *To Give or Not To Give* by John Rowell.)

***"I believe that in each generation God has called enough men and women to evangelize all the yet unreached tribes of the earth. It is not God who does not call. It is man who will not respond!"***

***— Isobel Kuhn, missionary to China and Thailand***

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS**Exercise**

1. Write a few sentences to summarize the main points of these articles.

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2. Does your church have a plan for participation in international missions? If so, briefly write it down.

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3. List several benefits you have personally seen or experienced from short-term mission trips.

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INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS**Exercise**

4. What practical steps can your church take to be more involved (and to involve more people) in international missions?

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5. Do you think God is leading you to go on a short-term mission trip sometime soon? What must you do to make it happen? Is there someone you would like to make sure you take with you?

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#### THE GREAT COMMISSION

### **Ministry to the Poor**

Throughout the history of the church, the sharing of the gospel has been paired with a compassion for the poor, both within the church and outside of the church. The following article addresses many key issues related to this very important aspect of the Christian life--ministry to the poor.







## Ministry to the Poor

Pastor John Hopler · Columbus, OH

*NOTE: Many of the thoughts from this paper were based on a summary written by Brent Knox of a discussion by the elders at Evergreen Church in Minneapolis. I appreciate their contribution.*

### Introduction

In the 4th century, the Roman Emperor Julian testified that the Christians were more charitable to non-Christians than non-Christians were to each other:

*Why do we not observe that it is their benevolence to strangers ... and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done the most to increase atheism [i.e., Christians not believing in the Romans gods]. ... It is disgraceful that when ... the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men should see how our people lack aid from us.*

Throughout the centuries, the gospel of Jesus Christ has advanced because of the powerful example of Christians like these who cared for the needy. This paper is written to address this very important matter of ministry to the poor.

In this paper, I have three overall objectives:

- I. That church members in Great Commission churches grow in compassion, reaching out to the poor and needy in new and dynamic ways.
- II. That church members in Great Commission have a solid biblical and eternal perspective on this matter of ministering to the poor.
- III. That Great Commission church pastors adopt a 5-fold strategy in caring for the poor.

Jesus told His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matthew 16:6). The Pharisees lacked compassion; the Sadducees lacked faith and an eternal perspective. My hope is that this paper will guard us, so that we, like Jesus, will be filled with both compassion and faith.

***“Love your fellowmen, and cry about them if you cannot bring them to Christ. If you cannot save them, you can weep over them. If you cannot give them a drop of cold water in hell, you can give them your heart’s tears while they are still in this body.”***

***-Charles Spurgeon***

**Here is a summary of this paper:**

**I. Jesus Christ wants us to grow in our compassion, and to reach out to the poor and needy in new and dynamic ways.**

- A. Jesus Christ is our example of showing compassion to all men.
- B. The Scriptures place a great emphasis on being compassionate.
- C. There are many excellent examples in Great Commission churches of people reaching out with compassion.

**II. God wants us to have a solid biblical and eternal perspective in our ministry to the poor.**

- A. Who are the Poor?
  - 1. In one sense, all mankind is poor before God.
  - 2. The poor are those who are poor in spirit—who are humble before God.
  - 3. The poor are those who are legitimately poor in the things of this world-- i.e., those who are materially disadvantaged or oppressed in some way.
  - 4. The poor are those who are persecuted for believing in Christ.
- B. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, 20 is the over-arching mission given in the New Testament. We must always keep the Great Commission as our overall mission focus. Caring for the materially poor in the church and outside the church is under this over-arching mission.
- C. In the New Testament, God places a special expectation on Christians to clothe and feed poor family members and fellow believers in the church.
- D. Although the “social justice” teaching proclaimed by certain Christians is a good reminder to the church to be more compassionate and generous, much of this teaching is imbalanced or unbiblical and will hinder God’s purposes on this earth.

**III. I recommend a 5-fold strategy for churches to care for the poor in the world:**

- 1. Encourage church members to fulfill their responsibilities in their families and church.
- 2. Minister to believers in other cities and nations, especially those in Great Commission churches and persecuted believers.
- 3. In evangelism, remember that God transforms “humbled unbelievers” into “humble believers.” Therefore, reach out to unbelievers who are needy.
- 4. Equip members to care for the unbelieving poor through a relational approach.
- 5. Support and fund Christian workers to start churches in areas where the poor live.

## I. Jesus Christ wants us to grow in our compassion, and to reach out to the poor and needy in new ways.

### A. Jesus Christ and a Heart of Compassion

Jesus Christ is our model. We are to follow His example. We know from the Gospels that Jesus felt compassion for people who were “harassed and helpless” (Matthew 9:36, NIV). Out of compassion, Jesus preached the gospel to the poor and met physical needs. Unless we feel compassion for people, we will not have God’s mind on how we are to live our lives.

Like Jesus, we are to be holistic in our compassion. God is concerned about the whole person—body, soul and spirit. The love of Christ will compel Christians to be caring for the needy here and now. While we recognize the eternal impact of the gospel in delivering us from our sins and giving us life with God for eternity, we also recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ will have a powerful effect in making this world a better place to be. The compassionate lives we live as fruit of the gospel will bring glory to God both now and in eternity.

This compassion will work itself out in how we use our resources. We are managers, stewards of limited resources (time, money, energy, spiritual gifts). However, if we are overly concerned about our resources, we can easily slip into being stingy. It takes faith to be generous. God blesses those who are generous (Proverbs 11:24-25). Like the Macedonians, we are to give out of our poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-6).

### B. Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures and Compassion

For the purpose of this paper, I am using the word “poor” to refer to any who are needy: materially poor, physically disadvantaged, widows, orphans, the marginalized and oppressed.

Here are some Old Testament and New Testament verses that inspire or exhort us to be compassionate, particularly towards the poor:

*“If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother” (Deuteronomy 15:7).*

*“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns” (Deuteronomy 24:14).*

*“I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted and justice for the poor” (Psalms 140:12).*

*“He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor” (Proverbs 14:21).*

*“One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed” (Proverbs 19:17).*

*“He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered” (Proverbs 21:13).*

*“Don’t be afraid of outgiving God. It is impossible to do that.”*

*-Charles R. Swindoll*

*“The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, the wicked does not understand such concern” (Proverbs 29:7).*

*“Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard” (Isaiah 58:6-8).*

*“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy” (Ezekiel 16:49).*

*“...and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. And do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another” (Zechariah 7:10).*

*“Jesus was going through all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:35, 36).*

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18, 19).*

*“But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:13, 14).*

*“Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys” (Luke 12:33).*

*“In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).*

*“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation” (Romans 12:15, 16).*

*“For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Romans 15:26).*

*“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).*

***“Biblical orthodoxy without compassion is surely the ugliest thing in the world.”***

***-Francis Schaeffer***

*“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12).*

*“If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.” (1 Timothy 5:16).*

*“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).*

*“For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? (James 2:2-4)*

***“I judge all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity.”***

***-John Wesley***

### **C. Compassion Ministries in Great Commission Churches**

The following are real life examples of Great Commission churches reaching out to believers and unbelievers with the compassion of Jesus Christ:

1. A church partners with a ministry that packages meals that are sent to starving children throughout the world.
2. A grandmother mobilizes a team of women in the church to start an on-going ministry that cares for single mothers.
3. A church in a depressed urban area runs a program that gives free bread to people in its city.
4. A pastor in a community church challenges the congregation to be radical for Jesus—and concludes the sermon by asking the members to leave their shoes in the church. These shoes are then given to the poor.
5. A church raises funds for a pro-life ministry that seeks to stop the killing of innocent unborn children in their city.
6. An American doctor begins a clinic in Honduras to provide medical treatment to the poor.
7. A couple leads a team of college students to an impoverished community in Mississippi to do service projects.
8. A U.S. church in a city destroyed by a flood is helped by other Great Commission churches that give finances and send mission teams to rebuild the church.
9. An optometrist provides free eye exams and glasses to needy people in Latin America.
10. A pastor begins a ministry that multiplies Christian workers in Europe to deliver people from the demonic oppression and deception of atheism.

11. A church promotes a ministry that supports the persecuted church in other countries.
12. A pastor cuts back his ministry activities in order to devote more time to care for his wife and his sick child.
13. A couple starts a church service on Sunday afternoons for the homeless in their community.
14. A pastor joins a regional ministry that strengthens pastors needing support in the spiritual battle.
15. A church partners with an urban ministry that provides academic tutoring to needy students.
16. A Christian leader begins a ministry to provide encouragement and strength to embattled Christian fathers.
17. A pastor modifies his church ministry schedule in order to care for an aging parent.
18. A missionary in Ukraine starts a ministry that helps alcoholics gain freedom through Jesus Christ.
19. A couple mobilizes a fellowship church to send thousands of Christmas shoeboxes with the message of Jesus Christ to children overseas.
20. Christians in U.S. Great Commission churches give sacrificially to provide relief to Honduran churches devastated by Hurricane Mitch.
21. A team of college students reaches out to international students at their university, helping them adjust to the new culture, and eventually sharing with them the message of Christ.
22. A pastor and his wife become missionaries to India, sharing the gospel with some of the most impoverished people in the world.
23. A couple with children decides to open up their hearts and their home by having foster children become part of their family.
24. A pastor reaches out to a young father in prison who he then leads to Christ.
25. Over several decades, a local church and other GCC churches financially care for a former elder who has significant health needs and is no longer able perform his regular pastoring functions.

***“A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.”***

***-Proverbs 22:9***

As you can see from the above examples, the compassion of Jesus Christ is shown in many ways. The Holy Spirit does a marvelous work when a person is willing to be used to demonstrate the love of Christ to a needy world.

Our prayer and desire in Great Commission Churches is that God will inspire individuals and churches to grow in reaching out to the poor and needy in new ways. In particular, we are asking God to work through the next generation in even more powerful ways to the needy, so that the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified will grow and multiply throughout the world.

Question: How does God want you to demonstrate the compassion of Jesus Christ?

## II. God wants us to have a biblical and eternal perspective in our ministry to the poor.

### A. Who are the poor?

#### 1. In one sense, all mankind is poor before God.

In America the word “poor” refers to a person without much money. The word “poor” has been expanded by some Christians to include those who are needy, marginalized by society, or oppressed. So, from man’s perspective, some people are poor and others are not. But from God’s perspective, every person is “needy.” Everyone is a slave of sin, blinded by the devil, and oppressed by this world system.

*“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience”* (Ephesians 2:1, 2).

It is important that we have an eternal perspective that all of us are “poor” before God.

#### 2. The poor are those who are poor in spirit—who are humble before God.

All men and women are spiritually captive, spiritually blind and spiritually oppressed. While God loves all men, His special favor is on those who are “poor in spirit”: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Those who are poor in spirit—who are receptive to the gospel—are the ones that Jesus favors. And those are the ones God wants us to reach as well.

#### 3. The poor are those who are legitimately poor in the things of this world-- i.e., those who are materially disadvantaged or oppressed in some way.

Although all mankind is poor before God, we understand that the “poor” in Scripture usually refers to those who are materially or physically disadvantaged in society. God’s word puts a great emphasis on reaching out and caring for widows, orphans, the oppressed and materially poor.

A question arises: Since all mankind is poor before God, why is there such an emphasis on caring for those who are poor in this world?

In one sense, God favors no man. He is not a respecter of persons. In fact, God specifically forbids partiality towards the poor: “...nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute” (Exodus 23:3). However, there are at least two reasons why God wants us to focus on caring for the poor:

- a. Human beings in their sinfulness and selfishness will gravitate towards people who can give to them rather than to the poor who have no resources to give. (Luke 14:13, 14). Therefore, God steps in and defends the poor and needy because they have been abandoned by human beings. He does so, not because He loves them more than others, but because they are more needy. If God has a special sensitivity to help and defend the needy, we ought to as well.

*“The bread that is spoiling in your house belongs to the hungry. The shoes that are mildewing under your bed belong to those who have none. The clothes stored away in your trunk belong to those who are naked.”*

*-Basil the Great*



b. As stated above, God loves all men—but His special favor is on those who are humble in spirit (1 Peter 5:5). A financially rich person with a humble heart will be blessed by God over an impoverished person with a proud heart. However, God oftentimes uses humbling circumstances to produce humble hearts. The disadvantaged person may be in a state of humility to receive the grace that God gives. Therefore God wants us to care for the poor and needy, in hopes of finding those who are truly “poor in spirit”—those who are receptive to the gospel of grace through Jesus Christ.

*“This country cannot afford to be materially rich and spiritually poor.”*

*-Abraham Lincoln*

In this regard, we learn from 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

*“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not that He might nullify the things that are, that no man may boast before God.”*

Ultimately, caring for those who are poor to this world is consistent with God’s overall plan to humble mankind and to bring glory to God-- *“to nullify the things that are so that no man may boast before God.”*

#### **4. The poor are those who are persecuted for believing in Christ.**

In the New Testament there is a special emphasis on caring for Christians—those who are poor in spirit—who are persecuted and physically oppressed. Persecuted believers are special because:

1. They are Christians—ones who are poor in spirit.
2. They are experiencing extreme suffering-many to the point of death.
3. There are evil and oppressive people who are actively trying to hurt them.
4. They are suffering because they proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Although we want to show compassion to all men, none of the four statements above are true of a typical unbeliever in the U.S., for example.

Throughout the gospels and the epistles, God’s people are faced with persecution because of their faith. (Matthew 24:9; Mark 10-29-31; John 15:18-27; Acts 4:1-22; 5: 17-42; 7:54-8:1; 12:1-17; 13:50; 14:5, 19-22; 16:19-24; 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 15:32; 2 Corinthians 4: 7-12; 11:23-27; Galatians 6:17; Ephesians 3:1, 13; Philippians 1:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 2: 14-16; Thessalonians 1:4-7; 2 Timothy 1:8; 2:11-13; 3:10-12 1 Peter 2:18-25; 3: 13,14; 4:1, 12-19; Revelations 6:9-11; 13:10; 16: 5-7; 18:24)

Some examples of persecuted and oppressed believers today are:

1. Christians overseas who are jailed and tortured for their faith.
2. Believers in the United States who lose jobs or opportunities for economic advancement because they obey the Scriptures.
3. College students who suffer for taking a stand for Christ in their classrooms
4. Fathers and mothers who are opposed in their efforts to train their children for Christ.

Also, we should not forget the most oppressed group of people in the United States—unborn children who die through abortions. Christians who take steps to save the lives of unborn children are very much helping the persecuted poor.

## **B. The New Testament Mission: The Great Commission**

*The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19,20 is the over-arching mission given in the New Testament—and we must always keep the Great Commission as our overall mission focus. Caring for the materially poor in the church and outside the church is under this over-arching mission.*

### **1. What is the New Testament heart we are to have?**

In one word: Love. Jesus gave the Great Commandment which is to love God with all of your heart, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39).

### **2. What is the New Testament over-arching mission?**

The advancement of the kingdom of God is a central theme throughout the Scriptures. It is God's desire for all mankind to come under the authority of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In keeping with that, we as believers are to have a "Great Commandment" lifestyle, always loving God and loving men. How is that love to be worked out in our mission?

While living a Great Commandment lifestyle, we are to embrace Jesus' mission: To seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10), and to build obedient disciples of Christ (Matthew 28:20). We are in a titanic struggle for the souls of men. Those who believe in Jesus Christ will have eternal life. Those who do not believe will experience the wrath of God for all of eternity (John 3:36). It is in the context of this eternal struggle that we exercise compassion. In His compassion, Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission:

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20).*

We are to preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15), leading people to Christ for their salvation (make disciples); to baptize them, placing them in local churches (1 Corinthians 12:13); and to teach them to obey all that Jesus commanded. In this way, God's kingdom is advanced on the earth. This is the mission of the church. We must always keep the Great Commission as our over-arching mission focus and not be distracted by another over-arching mission.

For example, we are to have many good goals and activities: Bible reading, prayer meetings, evangelism, building strong marriages, developing loving families, establishing spiritually healthy churches, and feeding the poor. But these noble goals and activities are under the over-arching mission of the church, which is the Great Commission. It is vital that we keep this big picture in mind.

For some people, eradicating poverty in the world has become their over-arching mission. However, Jesus, after His resurrection did not give His followers the over-arching mission to "feed and clothe the poor." The only mission He focused on after He rose from the dead was the Great Commission. On

***"He who is dying of hunger must be fed rather than taught."***

***-Saint Thomas Aquinas***

the other hand, we understand that obedient disciples of Jesus Christ will love people, which will include meeting their physical needs. If we are truly embracing the over-arching mission of the church—the Great Commission—it will result in obedient disciples who will indeed have strong marriages, loving families, spiritually healthy churches and Christians who are caring for the poor. However, if we, as pastors, are promoting strong families and caring for the poor or any other noble goal or activity without teaching the over-arching mission of the Great Commission, we are not properly reflecting the mission that is on Christ's heart.

*“How different our standard is from Christ's. We ask how much a man gives. He asks how much he keeps.”*

*-Andrew Murray*

### 3. What are some other verses that show the priority of the Great Commission?

- a. In referring to the poor at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus highlights that His mission was to “preach the gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:18). However the word “poor” is defined, the mandate of Jesus was not that the poor be clothed and fed but that they have the gospel preached to them.
- b. When Jesus saw the poor and had compassion on them, He instructed His disciples to pray for workers (Matthew 9:35-38). Based on this passage, I would argue that the most compassionate step we can take for the needy in this world is to pray for the multiplication of workers in the gospel.
- c. After Jesus rose from the dead, He directed His disciples to preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15) and to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19, 20). There is no mention in Jesus' post-resurrection teachings of a focused ministry on the poor.
- d. Preaching the good news was the emphasis of the Apostles in the Book of Acts and the epistles. The Apostles arranged their personal time this way (Acts 6:1-7). As important as it was to care for the widows, the apostles understood that the greatest good they could do was to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).
- e. The importance of proclaiming the Word of God is affirmed in 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, where the greater gifts (the speaking gifts) are defined. This reflects the purpose of the church.
- f. 1 Timothy is Paul's “How to Lead the Church” manual to Timothy. Notice the order and emphasis of the topics in this letter. Before addressing the needs of widows in chapter 5 and exhorting the rich to be generous in verse 6:18, Paul first urges Timothy to silence false teachers (Chapter 1), build a church of prayer (Chapter 2), appoint leaders (Chapter 3), and to teach the Word (Chapter 4). So, Paul was concerned for the widows and building generosity in the church. But with his first emphasis being on the ministry or prayer and the Word, Paul established the gospel as primary and central to all activities of the Church. When a church is established in the Word, then a sure foundation exists to build compassion ministries and a generous spirit in all Christians.

At the same time, I want to emphasize that there is no duality between gospel proclamation and gospel demonstration. While the Great Commission is the priority, it is not an “either/or” but a “both/and.” As we proclaim the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ, God calls us to live out the love of Christ by meeting the physical needs of people.

#### 4. Doesn't Luke 4:18,19 indicate that Jesus' mission was to reach out to the poor?

In Luke 4:18,19, Jesus said, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."*

This passage is often taught as the "Vision Statement" or "Mission Statement" for Jesus. How does this passage relate to the Great Commission? Is this a mandate from Jesus to reach out to the poor? Is this passage a call to eradicate poverty, hunger and oppression?

To understand Luke 4:18,19, we first must see that Jesus was identifying Himself with the Messianic prophecy, which foretold the coming of the One who would deliver His people from their oppression. When the Jews heard Jesus read from Isaiah 61, their minds would naturally go to their desire for liberation from Rome. But Jesus identified their real enemy as *their own sin!* Rome was just a symptom of the real issue – the sinfulness of God's people and their need for liberation from it.

Thus, while caring for the poor's physical needs is part of what Jesus did, Israel needed to see that their poverty, oppression, blindness, and captivity were due to a need they shared with everyone else in the world – including the Romans – sinfulness. And Jesus' proclamation of the Gospel, while it included ministry to those in need, was primarily aimed at getting to this root of all their problems and the problems of all the other nations of the world. This confirms the focus of Jesus' mission as He trained His disciples for their coming task of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth.

A key question is: Who are the "poor" according to Luke 4:18,19? To answer this question –and to understand Jesus' mission—it is important to read the rest of this passage:

*And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?" And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way" (Luke 4:20-30).*

*"Sometimes I would like to ask God why He allows poverty, suffering, and injustice when He could do something about it." - "Well, why don't you ask Him?" - "Because I'm afraid He would ask me the same question."*

-Anonymous

The people in Nazareth wanted Jesus to feed and heal everyone. But He refused. Why? Jesus explained that Elijah did not feed all the widows in Israel and Elisha did not heal every leper. Like those two prophets, Jesus came to minister to those who were “poor in spirit”—who were humble before God. Jesus was also stating to the Jews that His favor was on those who were humble—even if they were not Jews. These Gentiles—the widow in Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian—were poor in spirit and were blessed by God. So too we are to care for those who are humble before God.

***“Endeavor to live so that when you die, even the undertaker will be sorry.”***

*-Anonymous*

Luke 4:18.19 reveals the heart of Jesus. He had compassion for people, which led him to feed the hungry, heal the sick and to deliver them from demonic oppression. But when considering the primary needs of His poor, oppressed, blind, and captive people, His compassion caused Him to focus on helping them identify their primary need—their sin and their need to repent and put their trust in Him. For some to say that Jesus’ stated over-arching mission was to “alleviate or eradicate physical poverty” is to make a serious error and miss the most important part of His message and His mission—to eradicate sin in the lives of His people. Thus, when He rose from the dead and commissioned His disciples, He directed them to do what He had done and to focus as He had focused. And while they, and we, are to engage in acts of compassion to meet the needs of people in holistic ways, we must remember that Jesus told them and us to make disciples, baptize them and to teach them observe all that He commanded.

### **5. How does feeding and clothing the poor relate to this mission of winning people to Christ?**

Christians dedicated to obey the Great Commission are not to be “utilitarian.” We don’t feed the poor in order to “get people to join our group.” Rather, Christians care for people because that is what followers of Christ do. Christ followers are to be people of compassion. And they do so by sharing the gospel while caring for the needs of people.

A good example of this is the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:30-37). This story shows that we are to avoid self-justification and to love the unlovable. This is the heart that God wants us to have towards all men. The person who responds to Jesus will live a life of compassion. How that compassion works itself out will vary from person to person.

On one hand, caring for the physical needs of people often leads to their receiving Jesus Christ. It is the kindness of God that leads people to repentance (Romans 2:4). On the other hand, the most compassionate step for some is to allow them to go hungry. Hunger was God’s way of bringing the prodigal son to his senses, leading to his repentance (Luke 15:14-18). As we seek God on how to best love people, God will give us wisdom on what step to take to bring a person to salvation in Christ.

Compassion ministries will be an overflow of the evangelism and discipleship provided by the leaders of the church. In this regard, there are two quotes from William Booth, who started the Salvation Army, that give us some instruction.

On the one hand, Booth was unwavering in his mission, which was to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ: *“I must assert in the most unqualified way that it is primarily and mainly for the sake of saving the soul that I seek the salvation of the body.”* On the other hand, Booth was extremely practical in

his fulfilling the Great Commission when he said, *“But what is the use of preaching the Gospel to men whose whole attention is concentrated upon a mad, desperate struggle to keep themselves alive.”* May God grant the Great Commission church movement to keep both perspectives in mind.

### C. The New Testament Mandate to Clothe and Feed the Poor

*In the New Testament, God places a special expectation on Christians to clothe and feed poor family members and fellow believers in the church.*

#### 1. What is the New Testament mandate as to feeding and clothing the poor?

There is a general mandate to love all men—to have compassion on every person. We are to love the whole person—spiritually, emotionally, and physically. The question is: How is that worked out practically?

As to clothing and feeding the poor, Christians are commanded to provide for the physical needs of family members and believers in the church:

*“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).*

*“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him” (1 John 3:17).*

So, there is a clear mandate to feed and clothe the poor in our families and churches.

#### 2. Is there a New Testament mandate to feed and clothe every unbeliever we see?

As stated earlier, there is a clear mandate to love all men. However, the “reproaching” language used by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:8 and John in 1 John 3:17 is not used in the New Testament in describing our responsibility to unbelievers who are destitute. There is no example in the New Testament of Christians under a “mandate” to feed and clothe all unbelievers. Jesus did not go throughout Israel to make sure that everyone had food and clothing. Nor did the Apostles give their time to feeding and clothing unbelievers.

Still, there is a mandate to “love all men” and to take steps to see them won to Jesus Christ. And meeting the practical needs of people will be a major way in which God will direct individuals and churches to love unbelievers in their communities.

#### 3. What about Matthew 25:31-46? Doesn’t this passage indicate that we are to clothe and feed all the poor that we know?

*“Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord when did we see you hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You? The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me’” (Matthew 25:37-40).*

*“We must never minimize the suffering of another. Scripture’s mandate to us is, ‘Weep with them that weep’ (Romans 12:15).”*

*-Billy Graham*

Matthew 25 is often quoted to urge Christians to care for unbelievers. However, this passage is speaking of caring for believers in Christ, most likely in the context of persecution. Jesus refers to these needy people as “brothers of Mine”—and Jesus makes it clear that His brother is the one who “*does the will of My Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 12:50). Very possibly this passage was written in the context of the anticipated persecution during the tribulation period (Matthew 24:9). As in Acts 9:4 when Saul’s persecution of the church was equated with persecuting Jesus (Jesus said, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*”), Matthew 25 is also equating the suffering of the church with Christ’s suffering.

Consider the following passages from the book of Hebrews:

*“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one” (Hebrews 10:32-34).*

*“Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are illtreated, since you yourselves also are in the body” (Hebrews 13:3).*

These Hebrews passages give perspective of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:37-40. We are to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ, particularly those who are suffering for their faith.

#### **4. In light of the above, which is a greater priority: meeting the need of believers in another city or country, or meeting the needs of poor unbelievers in our community?**

Galatians 6:10 states: “*Let us do good to all men, especially those of the household of the faith.*” Based on this verse, I would prioritize the needs of believers in another country over unbelievers in the U.S. In Acts 11:29,30, Barnabas and Saul took the offering from Antioch to meet the needs of the saints in Jerusalem. Some have speculated that Barnabas and Saul likely bypassed some of the needs of the unbelieving poor in Antioch in order to meet the believers of Christians in Judea. Although admittedly this is speculation, this example and the clear teaching of Galatians 6:10 have led me to prioritize my giving to believers, whether they be in my own church or overseas. However, I also recognize that the Holy Spirit will prompt people to give as He sees fit, whether to unbelievers at home, or believers abroad.

#### **5. Is there a priority to give based on the type of need?**

Yes. I recognize the difference of “need.” We prioritize people who are destitute (lacking food, clothing, and/or shelter), over people who have lesser needs (transportation, meals when life is busy). Older widows had a greater need than younger widows (1 Timothy 5). People who have the ability to work have lesser need than those who do not. The assumption of 2 Corinthians 8-9 is a crisis of great need: People were starving. This is why the Macedonians gave out of their poverty. Starving people had a greater need. And, in general, the poor in other countries have a greater need than the poor in the United States.

*“Trying to do the Lord’s work in your own strength is the most confusing, exhausting, and tedious of all work. But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then the ministry of Jesus just flows out of you.”*

*-Corrie Ten Boom*

For these reasons, ministry that provides material needs to destitute Christian overseas (particularly persecuted believers) should be a high priority. Their physical needs are greater than those of unbelievers in the U.S., and we have a greater responsibility to meet the material needs of people in the body of Christ than we do of nonbelievers.

#### **6. What part does a person's character play in how to minister to the poor?**

Inside the church, there is a giving priority to people with demonstrated character (1 Timothy 5:9-10, 2 Thessalonians 3:10). Perhaps this is one reason why in the early days of Acts, meeting needs was funneled through the Apostles (Acts 4:32-37). In particular, I would caution against young and idealistic church members giving money to certain segments of the materially poor, who are skilled in taking advantage of the naïve.

While it is true that God gives rain to all men, even His enemies, we need to prioritize giving to people outside the church who respond to root issues. The best kind of generosity is personal, accountable, and spiritual. One exception to this is in the case of a crisis. The needs created by a natural disaster (e.g. flood, famine, etc.) should receive quick attention without as much attention to character issues.

#### **D. Social Justice Teaching**

*Although the "social justice" teaching proclaimed by certain Christians is a good reminder to the church to be more compassionate and generous, much of this teaching is imbalanced or unbiblical and will hinder God's purposes on this earth.*

##### **1. What about the term "social justice?"**

The term "social justice" is a popular term used today to describe a mandate for men and women to eradicate or alleviate poverty, oppression and injustice from the earth. Depending on who uses the term, social justice may refer to a form of economic egalitarianism through income redistribution.

Christian therefore should be careful about embracing the "Social Justice" movement because so many of those promoting this term do not come from a Christian worldview. They may mean something by this term very different than what we, as believers, believe to be Biblical. Generally speaking, the "Social Justice" movement is rooted in political movements that seek to impose "equality" through the power of government. While such a goal may sound noble, the only way government can bring about such "equality" is to violate other Scriptural principles of freedom and ownership of private property. Biblically, we understand justice to refer to impartial treatment before the law, not a government guarantee of equal economic status.

Therefore, in referring to compassion ministries done by Christians or by the church as a whole, I prefer not to use the term "social justice." The term has so many different definitions that its usage is confusing and even, perhaps, misleading. In particular, the term "social justice" is used by many non-Christian and professing Christians to inaccurately portray Jesus' mission on the earth. My concern is that naïve and good hearted Christians will be misled by people who are not devoted Christians, but who use Christian jargon to promote their own personal agenda. For these reasons, I urge Christians to use a different term (such as "Christian compassion" or "Biblical justice").

*"You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you."*

*-John Bunyan*



## 2. What good do you see from Christians who are advocating “social justice?”

This movement challenges the church to be strong in compassion, to live modestly, to be generous with our money, and to treat our fellow man with fairness and justice, which I appreciate. Any exhortation to grow in compassion and Christ-like righteousness is good. Poverty and sickness are real needs. We, in America, have been given many resources which God wants us to share with the world. There is much injustice in the world—the abortion of unborn children, sex trafficking, and economic oppression. Efforts taken to correct these injustices and to meet the needs of the poor are noble and should be encouraged.

*“Your spiritual gift is whatever you can do for someone else in the name of Jesus.”*

*-Anonymous*

## 3. What concerns do you have about the Christian social justice movement?

My main concern is with the teachings and beliefs of certain Christian “social justice” teachers today. The term “social justice” is promoted by many whose beliefs are not strongly rooted in the Scriptures. Many who promote social justice do not accept Jesus as the only way to salvation or the Bible as the literal Word of God. If God’s word is not the center, the following will occur:

- a. The gospel message of forgiveness and deliverance from an eternal hell through the cross of Christ is denied or downplayed and the Great Commission is set aside as the over-arching mission of the church.<sup>1</sup>
- b. The Bible-teaching church as God’s vehicle for reaching the world with the gospel of Christ is effectively replaced by social programs that meet temporal needs without addressing the eternal destiny of the poor.
- c. The biblical family is undermined or downplayed as central to God’s purposes on this earth.<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, I would evaluate the teaching of any professing Christian who is promoting a social justice agenda.

## 4. What is to be our response to the “social justice” message?

Christians are to take the lead in showing compassion to the lost and justice to all mankind. If we simply live out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, God will bring true compassion and justice, both eternally and, to a certain degree, in this world.

For these reasons, I recommend that instead of identifying with the “social justice movement,” we live out compassionate and just lives under the banner of Jesus Christ and the gospel. My strong exhortation is to avoid teachers whose beliefs are not based on the Bible, and to learn from those teachers whose lives and teachings are founded on the Scriptures. In ministering to the poor, join with Christians who hold to an evangelical Statement of Faith (such as the GCC Statement of Faith) and who promote New Testament values and practices (such as those written in the GCC Core Values Statement).

### III. Church Strategy/Priorities Questions

I recommend a 5-fold strategy to pastors for churches to care for the poor in the world:

1. *Encourage church members to fulfill their responsibilities in their families and church.*
2. *Minister to believers in other cities and nations, especially believers in Great Commission churches and persecuted believers.*
3. *In evangelism, remember that God transforms “humbled unbelievers” into “humble believers.” Therefore, reach out to unbelievers who are needy.*
4. *Equip members to care for the unbelieving poor through a relational approach.*
5. *Support and fund Christian workers to start churches in areas where the poor live.*

#### 1. Encourage church members to fulfill their God-given responsibilities.

The first step in loving all men is to fulfill our responsibilities. As believers we have a special responsibility for our own lives, our families, and our churches. The emphasis for compassion ministries in the New Testament is to help the believing poor. The goal is to build responsibility within the covenant community of the family and the church. Therefore:

- a. Meet your own needs first (Ephesians 4:28, 1 Thessalonians 4:11- 12, 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12, Titus 3:14).
- b. Then family needs (1 Timothy 5:8)
- c. Then believers in your local church (1 John 3:17)
- d. After meeting the needs of those within our covenantal community, we seek to meet the needs of other believers and unbelievers, particularly those within our geographical area.

Should a person in debt give to the poor? My answer is: Generally, I would encourage a person in debt to get out of debt first before giving a free will offering to meet another person’s need. Getting out of debt is an act of compassion towards your family, your church and the lost. (At the same time, I do not deny that the Lord might lead someone who is working to get out of debt to be generous with a needier person in a particular instance.)

Another question is: What do you think about church members who give their tithe to help the poor? My answer is: Your first responsibility is to support your church led by your pastors. The tithe is intended to support the pastors and the overall church ministry, which would include ministering to the poor. Therefore, I encourage members to tithe to the local church, and then if a particular person is in need, I encourage members to give a free will offering above the tithe.

Finally, does it make a difference what profession we choose to meet the needs of our families? Answer: It is worth considering how your vocation is helping the overall community. Is the job you are doing generally enhancing the welfare of the community? Is your vocation in some way taking advantage of

*“Find out how much God has given you and from it take what you need; the remainder is needed by others.”*

*-Saint Augustine*

the poor? Christians should consider professions that benefit the community as a whole and specifically those who are needy.

**2. Minister to believers in other cities and nations, especially those in Great Commission churches and persecuted believers.**

One of the most prominent compassion projects highlighted in the New Testament was Paul's raising of funds from Gentile believers to help the poor in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8, 9). Caring for believers outside of our own congregation is a powerful testimony to the world of our love for another as believers.

In that regard, it is important to realize that God has organized Christians in churches and associations of churches. Just as believers in a congregation take a special responsibility to care for a member of that congregation, we in Great Commission Churches take a special responsibility to care for members in churches in our association and our overall movement. For example, Great Commission churches helped the GCC church in North Dakota devastated by the 1997 flood, and served the GCLA churches in Honduras during Hurricane Mitch. We are also to give special care to the persecuted believer. Those who suffer because of their faith are not only needy financially or physically. They also have people intentionally trying to oppress them. Therefore, serving the persecuted church through such ministries as Voice of the Martyrs is to be a high priority in our caring for the poor.

**3. In evangelism, remember that God transforms “humbled unbelievers” into “humble believers.” Therefore, reach out to unbelievers who are needy.**

We are called to share the gospel with all creation (Mark 16:15). We are also called to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit as Christ's witnesses to the world (Acts 1:8). As a practical matter, we understand that God is preparing hearts to receive the message of Christ. How does He do so? Oftentimes, God uses humbling circumstances to transform unbelievers into humble Christians. Therefore, as believers seeking to win the lost, it is wise to sow the gospel especially with those who are needy.

This principle of reaching out with the gospel to those who are needy has a one-on-one application as well as a church corporate strategy. As believers, we need to be especially aware of how God is using circumstances to humble unbelievers in our lives. Physical sickness, economic hardship, and family problems are used by the Lord to bring unbelievers to Himself. For those that the Lord is humbling, we need to be especially alert to opportunities to share the love of Christ and the message of the Cross.

Also, as the church does corporate outreach, it is wise to reach out to those sections of the community that are poor, needy and marginalized. Campus ministry has been so effective for Great Commission churches for the past four decades because of the many “spiritual orphans” at universities. Thousands of students who needed a family to be a part of were loved by the church and brought into a relationship with God, their Heavenly Father. Community churches have had a special ministry to moms who were divorced, widowed, or whose husbands were not providing for them spiritually, emotionally or financially. People enslaved by addictions have found Christ through church outreaches that proclaim the love and power of the risen Christ.

*“The more he cast away  
the more he had.”*

*-John Bunyan*

Therefore, while we are to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all people in our communities, I recommend that churches make a special effort to reach out to needy individuals and those broad segments of the community that are going through humbling circumstances.

#### **4. Equip members to care for the unbelieving poor through a relational approach.**

Many churches organize programs that bless unbelievers in their community with acts of kindness. These are done in obedience to Galatians 6:10: “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

One benefit of organized compassion programs is that it provides a way to mobilize church members to do acts of service, which they would not do otherwise. Also, these ministries are a great and visible apologetic for our day. “Doing good to all men” is important to our culture, especially the younger generation.

While the Lord has worked marvelously through organized ministries that care for the unbelieving poor, it is important to realize that many institutions and programs begun by Christians have often become separated from the gospel. Colleges formed by churches now are proclaiming atheism and social programs formed by evangelical believers are now in the hands of non-Christians. Also, if not carefully monitored, ongoing organized programs may be found to be ineffective. Goodhearted Christians can oftentimes be so taken up with keeping a program running that they lose sight of whether the program is truly helping the poor and that the gospel is remaining central to it.

There are no New Testament examples of an organized compassion program designed to feed and clothe the unbelieving poor. (In Acts 6, there was program organized to care for widows in the church.) Although this fact should not keep us from starting such a program, it should at least cause us to pause when organizing compassion projects for the lost. In the New Testament, believers showed compassion to the lost more personally. When giving is personal, relationships are strengthened. People appreciate their need being met through friends, rather than the “impersonal” church doing so as an organization.

So, while applauding organized compassion projects to serve the poor in a community, I especially encourage churches to equip members to minister to the unbelieving poor using a relational approach, through small groups or through individual families.

#### **5. Support Christian workers to start churches to reach the poor.**

One of the people groups in the United States that is still unreached are the poor, particularly in urban areas. America is divided along economic lines. Wealthy people live with wealthy people; middle class people live with middle class people; and poor people live with poor people. As a practical matter, we need to consider taking steps to cross over these economic boundaries in order to bring Christ to these people.

As leaders, we should consider promoting and cultivating a heart to reach the poor. It is possible that our people are avoiding ministry among the poor because of an addiction to comfort. At the same time, let's be careful not to transfer a personal passion for a certain ministry onto someone else. There

*“Society's  
rejects have a  
special place in  
God's heart.”*

*-Anonymous*

will be Christians “called” to reach out to the poor—just as there will be Christians “called” to reach other people groups in other countries. Not all Christians are missionaries. Not all will be “called” to reach the poor. But some will, and we want to support them as much as possible.

In light of this, consider Matthew 9:35-38:

*Jesus was going through all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.’*

*“Do all the good you can,  
by all the means you can,  
in all the ways you can,  
in all the places you can,  
at all the times you can,  
to all the people you can,  
as long as ever you can.”*

*-John Wesley*

The compassion of Jesus Christ resulted in a plea for workers—gospel workers. For this reason, I believe that the most compassionate step we can take for the unbelieving poor of the world is to support gospel workers to plant churches in areas where the poor live.

Missionaries who do incarnational ministry in urban areas in the U.S. and in needy countries overseas will have the most dynamic impact for fulfilling Christ’s mission with the needy. Church planters are able to meet basic needs in a relational and personal way while also evangelizing the lost and discipling the saved.

As a movement of churches, I urge us to give these missionaries our support— through our prayers, our finances, and our service by sending mission teams. Money given to support workers to plant Great Commission churches among the poor, in the U.S and overseas, ought to be a priority way that we give to the poor.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> An example of this is the statement made by President Jimmy Carter, a person is who viewed as a leader in social justice:

*“...the most serious and universal problem is the growing chasm between the richest and poorest people on earth....The results of this disparity are root causes of most of the world’s unresolved problems, including starvation, illiteracy, environmental degradation, violent conflict, and unnecessary illnesses...”* (Page 98, *A Hole in Our Gospel* by Richard Stearns)

I agree that greed is sin; that we are to deplore selfishness; and that we are to care for the poor. However, if I were asked the question, “What is the most serious and universal problem today?,” my answer would be “The most serious and universal problem today is sin—and the one and only cure is Jesus Christ.” Our message—Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2) must be clear. If it is muddled, the world will not be saved.

<sup>2</sup> Many in the social justice movement endorse (or refuse to speak out strongly against) homosexuality, which itself undermines the biblical family. Also, the mundane caring for family members is not highlighted compared to serving in “exciting” programs to minister to the poor. Finally, certain Christian social justice teachers can appeal to the fleshly desire of youth to disrespect and separate from their elders by criticizing the older generation for not promoting a social justice agenda.



MINISTRY TO THE POOR

**Exercise**

1. In general, what are your thoughts about this paper?

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2. What practical steps are you doing as an individual to show the compassion of Jesus Christ? What additional steps can you take?

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3. What practical steps is your church taking to minister to needy people? What additional steps can your church take?

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MINISTRY TO THE POOR

**Exercise**

4. What do you think about what this paper states as to our biblical mission?

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5. What do you think about what this paper states about the social justice movement?

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6. What are your thoughts about the recommended 5-fold strategy for caring for the poor and needy people in the world?

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MINISTRY TO THE POOR

**Exercise**

7. Develop a church wide strategy for ministering to the poor and needy in your community. What are the key elements of that strategy?

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## **Session II: Commitment to God and His Word**

### OVERVIEW

The topic for this session is Commitment to God and His Word. The goal is that each leader and each church be devoted to the Lord and to following His Word.

There are eight homework exercises:

#### ***1. Discussion from the GCLI teachings***

In this exercise, you will reflect upon the main lessons you learned from the teachings.

#### ***2. Personal Devotional Life of a Leader***

There are in the readings several testimonies of leaders who are examples in seeking God. The goal of this exercise is for you take steps to grow in your own personal devotion to the Lord.

#### ***3. Creation and the Genesis Account***

After reading Dave Bovenmyer's article, you will be asked to evaluate your view of the Scriptures in light of theories about the world's origins that are prevalent today.

#### ***4. Interpreting the Scriptures***

After reading the articles by John Hopler, Dave Bovenmyer, and Tim Haring, you will be asked to determine how you can be more effective in studying and understanding the Scriptures.

#### ***5. Building a Church of Prayer***

After reading several testimonies, you will be asked to evaluate how your church can become more devoted to prayer.

#### ***6. Building a Church Devoted to God's Word***

After reviewing several testimonies, you will be asked to develop a strategic plan that will more effectively build your church to be committed to the Word of God.

#### ***7. God-Honoring Authority***

After reading this article by Dave Bovenmyer, you will be asked to answer questions and evaluate your church and family in regards to the standards of biblical authority in the church and in relationships.

#### ***8. Not Loving the World***

After reviewing this article by Rick Whitney, you will be asked to evaluate your own choices in regards to worldliness and the effect of the media on your life.



GCLI TEACHINGS

## The Sufficiency of God and His Word

Pastor Herschel Martindale · Columbia, MD

### God commissions Moses — Exodus 3:10-12

*“Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?’ And He said, ‘Certainly I will be with you...’”*

1. The commission that God gave was beyond the capability of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The great training and abilities of Moses were \_\_\_\_\_ for the challenge.
3. Only \_\_\_\_\_ could accomplish such an impossible task.
4. When God has a plan and leads, He also \_\_\_\_\_.
5. God did not take away the problems and difficulties, but \_\_\_\_\_ what was needed.
6. Before Moses went to the backside of the desert, there is no record of him praying. After God sends him on mission, he regularly prays. Prayer is the \_\_\_\_\_ of faith.

### God promises that He is adequate for all our needs.

*“Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5).*

1. His grace IS sufficient.

*“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly therefore I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything; you may have an abundance for every good deed” (2 Corinthians 9:8).*

2. His power is surpassing.

*“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might” (Ephesians 1:18-19).*

*“Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us...” (Ephesians 3:20).*

## 3. His wisdom is pure.

*“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).*

## 4. His love is beyond knowledge.

*“That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:17-19).*

## 5. His spiritual blessings are unfathomable.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).*

*“To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).*

**God’s sufficiency is provided through unity with Jesus.**

*“I am the vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:1-5).*

1. God is continually \_\_\_\_\_ in our lives.
2. His purpose is that we may \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The branch of a vine or tree separated from the vine \_\_\_\_\_ bear fruit.
4. This illustrates the spiritual need of our being \_\_\_\_\_ to Christ.
5. “Much fruit” is always directly related to our \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in God.
6. What are some things that easily keep us from closeness to Christ and trusting Him?

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**God, the Holy Spirit is our Helper.**

*“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

*“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever” (John 14:16).*

*“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26).*

*“But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth...He shall glorify Me; for He will take of mine, and shall disclose it to you” (John 16:13-14).*

*“...For He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you’ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my Helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6).*

#### Conclusions:

1. Wherever God clearly leads, He will always give the \_\_\_\_\_ to do all He wants to do.
2. The difficulties that we experience are really \_\_\_\_\_ to grow and see God work.
3. Our greatest challenge will be to continually \_\_\_\_\_ God’s Word and choose to trust Him.
4. Satan will do all that he can to distract us from the simplicity of \_\_\_\_\_ to Christ.
5. One of the more difficult things in life will be to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ God when we can’t see what He is doing.
6. Moses was \_\_\_\_\_ for anything God led him to do, when he believed and obeyed God.
7. Leadership in the church brings many new challenges and some things that seem almost impossible. *“I can do \_\_\_\_\_ through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).*

#### **The transformational power of God’s Word.**

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

*“For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).*

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good, and acceptable, and perfect” (Romans 12:2).*

#### **God’s Word is living and active.**

1. God changes, transforms, and equips us as the truth of God \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ our understandings.
2. The Bible becomes living as the Holy Spirit \_\_\_\_\_ the Word to our lives.
3. This world system has its media and God has His media (the Bible). Whichever we \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to the most will determine our convictions and actions.

### God's Word IN us makes us strong spiritually.

*"With respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (Romans 4:20-21).*

*"I have written to you young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:14b).*

1. Faith declares that God will do what He \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. Our greatest defense against Satan and his temptations is \_\_\_\_\_ .

### Each of us must make the choice to put the Word in our hearts.

*"And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord's Word, seated at His feet.... Only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).*

Jesus makes it very clear. The Word is \_\_\_\_\_ to our faith and spiritual life.

### Obedying the Word is essential to real growth.

*"Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Behold, My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father who is in Heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12: 48-50).*

*"But prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves...one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22, 25).*

When we do not obey the Word and apply it honestly to our lives, we are \_\_\_\_\_ .

God's richest blessing is upon those who \_\_\_\_\_ His will.

### Conclusions:

Great Commission churches have usually held a strong core value of the importance of the Scriptures and its application to the whole of life. The emphasis of Jesus with the Twelve was not just studying the Bible, but rather the application of truth to every part of life. He focused more on the development of their character and practice than their mere acquisition of knowledge and doctrine. The Apostle Paul said that "knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1). Those aspiring to spiritual leadership should make a high priority of daily reading, studying, and meditating upon the Scriptures, and then diligently applying and obeying God's instructions.



GCLI TEACHINGS

## The Spiritual Training of a Devout Man

Pastor Brent Knox · Bloomington, MN

*“For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:7-9).*

From the Elder Qualification Test by John Hopler:

- “Devout” Gk. “*hosios*” means “holy, pleasing to God, observable practical holiness, being undefiled, innocent, righteous, pious”
- “self-controlled” Gk. “*egkrates*” means “disciplined, in full control of oneself, strong, master of, to have power over oneself”
- “holding fast” Gk. “*antekomenon*” means “Clinging to, devoted to paying attention to, holding firmly to”
- “able to exhort” Gk. “*parakaleo*” means “encourage, appeal, request, comfort, console, to call to or for”
- “sound doctrine” Gk. “*hugianino*” means “to be sound, healthy”
- “able...to refute” Gk. “*elegkein*” means “convince, convict, expose, point out, reprove, correct, set forth”

What is the picture you get from these words?

### Part One: The Need for Spiritual Training

*“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).*

What is the context?

The goal is to \_\_\_\_\_ .

\_\_\_\_\_ training is required.



The training done in \_\_\_\_\_ bears fruit later in \_\_\_\_\_ .

The motivation is an \_\_\_\_\_ crown.

Strict training is \_\_\_\_\_ .

Strict training is \_\_\_\_\_ .

*“If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:6-8).*

In speaking of exercise or training he uses the term “gumnaze,” from which we get our word “\_\_\_\_\_.”

Godliness is a fruit of \_\_\_\_\_ .

Spiritual training has great \_\_\_\_\_ .

*“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:15-16).*

- Our Lord was devoted to spiritual training.
- Paul was devoted to spiritual training.
- Great Christians were devoted to spiritual training.

WARNING! Spiritual training is not the same as \_\_\_\_\_ .

*“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?” (Isaiah 58:1-5).*

## Part Two: The Disciplines of Spiritual Training

### 1. Devoted to a \_\_\_\_\_ .

*“This is what the LORD says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word’” (Isaiah 66:1-2).*

*“For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war” (2 Chronicles 16:9).*

*“‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing — grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God” (Joel 2:12-14).*

*“Then he explained to them, ‘You have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others have not. To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge’” (Matthew 13:11-12, NLT).*

### 2. Devoted to the \_\_\_\_\_ .

#### The focus of a leader:

*“For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezra 7:10).*

#### The command to a leader:

*“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).*

#### The wisdom of a leader:

*“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts” (Psalms 119:97-100).*

#### The effect of a leader:

*“For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:8).*

### 3. Devoted to \_\_\_\_\_ .

*“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).*

What are the implications of this promise?

*“Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks” (Matthew 7:7-8, NLT).*

What is the implication of “keep on?”

#### “Snapshots” of Devoted Prayer

*“The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).*

*“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:16-18).*

*“And Elijah said to Ahab, ‘Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.’ So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. “Go and look towards the sea,’ he told his servant. And he went up and looked. ‘There is nothing there,’ he said. Seven times Elijah said, ‘Go back.’ The seventh time the servant reported, ‘A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.’ So Elijah said, ‘Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.” Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on and Ahab rode off to Jezreel” (1 Kings 18:41-45).*

2 Kings 4:1-7, Elisha and the widow’s oil.

2 Kings 14:14-19, Elisha, Jehoahaz and the arrow incident.

#### **Why should leaders pray?**

1. Because we have \_\_\_\_\_ to cast.

*“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).*

Follow the example of Paul.

2. Because we know people to \_\_\_\_\_ .

*“For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:19).*

Follow the example of the Psalmist.

3. Because the best \_\_\_\_\_ comes through prayer.

*“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law,” (Psalms 119:18).*

*“Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart” (Psalms 119:33-34).*

*“You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees” (Psalms 119:68).*

*“Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands” (Psalms 119:73).*

Follow the example of Jesus.

*“For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say” (John 12:49-50).*

*“So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me’” (John 8:28).*

4. Because the best \_\_\_\_\_ comes through prayer.

*“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:1-5).*

Follow the model of Solomon, 1 Kings 3

#### **4. Devoted to “\_\_\_\_\_” seeking God**

The practice of implies a devotion to “extended times” seeking God.

1. Examples of fasting:

Moses: Ex. 34:28

Samuel: 1 Sam. 7:6

David: Psalm 35:13; 2 Sam. 12:16

Nehemiah: Neh. 1:4

Israel: Joel 1:14; 2 Chron. 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:16; Jer. 36:9; Judges 20:26

Jesus: Matt. 4:2

2. Jesus comments on fasting.

*“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:17-18).*

*“Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast’” (Matthew 9:15).*

### 3. The practice of church leaders.

*“For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered. The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying’” (Acts 9:9-11).*

*“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:1-2).*

*“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23).*

### 5. Devoted to \_\_\_\_\_.

Titus 1:8; 2:2, 5, 6, 12

Self-control is more than fleeing from passions. It is the ability to control your life so that you \_\_\_\_\_.

\*All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.



GCLI TEACHINGS

**Exercise**

1. What do you believe was the main lesson you learned from these messages?

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2. Share a past experience in which you believe God wanted you to do something for which you were inadequate and in which you relied upon His strength. How did you go about accessing His adequacy?

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3. It has been said, “Don’t ask for a task equal to your strength, ask for strength equal to your task.” It is especially important for leaders to let God stretch them. Is there an area where you believe God wants to stretch you or your church? Can you cite some promises relating to this challenge?

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## GCLI TEACHINGS

**Exercise**

4. Do you see a conflict between our exercising spiritual discipline and God's grace and power being given to the weak? Write a brief paragraph about how these two concepts work together.

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5. We were instructed in five areas of spiritual training and discipline. Write down at least one action step that you can begin taking in each of these disciplines.

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COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

**Personal Devotional Life of a Leader**

As leaders, we are to be examples to those we serve in all areas of godly living. Jesus said that listening to His Word was the one thing that was really necessary (Luke 10:38-42). Therefore, it is vital that a leader of Christ's Church be an example in his personal devotional life. The following are testimonies of leaders who have demonstrated a strong commitment to God and His Word.







PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER

## A Heart of Devotion for God

Pastor Mark Darling · Bloomington, MN

The single most important thing in your life is to be devoted to God. In 1975, I started following God. I was reading Jeremiah 1:6 where it says, “I am a youth.” I was a youth at that time and that got my attention! Then He went on to say, “For who is he who will devote himself to be close to Me?” I was 19, a youth, and my heart leapt. At that point, I said that I would be the one to devote myself to God. I determined right then to make God the number one devotion of my life and to be devoted to be close to Him.

I have seen within our movement of Great Commission a strong commitment to the work of God by many, but I feel that it is a real need of ours to have a strong commitment to know God. Paul said in Philippians 3:8, “*More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.*”

I married my wife for a reason—to know her, to be with her for the rest of my life. It wasn’t so I’d have a lover, a maid, a cook, someone to rub my back. No. I wanted a relationship with her because of her, because of who she was. God saved me because He wanted to know me and reveal Himself to me. He wanted me to know Him. He didn’t save me just so I’d do His work. He was after a relationship with me as His child, not as His slave.

When Jesus was on the earth, He desired the same thing. When He visited His good friends, Mary and Martha, He appreciated all Martha did for Him. But it was of Mary whom He said, “*for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her*” (Luke 10:42). What was she doing when He said this? Mary was sitting at His feet, drinking in His words, desiring to know Him more personally. Martha served, but Mary adored. When was the last time you stopped to sit at His feet and adore Him?

Everybody is familiar with the instant replays during sports. Do you know why they replay things in slow motion? It’s not so you can see that leg broken again or to see that missed catch. It is so that you have time to appreciate the athleticism and ability, the skill and talent of that athlete as he makes that amazing catch, as he slugs the ball out of the stadium, as he makes that incredible, impossible basket to win the game. It is to give you time to adore, to watch closely, to be amazed at that athlete in the middle of his act of greatness. It is to our shame that many of us spend more time watching and adoring the talents of other men than we do God. He wants us to marvel at Him, to adore Him.

David was a man who spent time adoring God and gazing on God’s greatness. God said that David was a man after His own heart. He anointed David as king because, “*People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at a person’s thoughts and intentions*” (1 Samuel 16:7, NLT). David’s thoughts were of God, how great He is, how beautiful He is. That is seen so often in the Psalms as David sings God’s

*“The Christian is strong or weak depending upon how closely he has cultivated his knowledge of God.”*

-A. W. Tozer

praises, extolling His power, His majesty, His provision, and comfort (Psalm 84:10, NLT). *“O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better to me than life itself...”* (Psalm 63:1-3, NLT). David, in spite of his flaws, was passionately in love with God. He passionately wanted to see God and to know Him. It's hard for many men to relate to this.

Over my years of following God, I have kept a book of thoughts. Thoughts about God, thoughts that inspire me, thoughts to stimulate more thoughts. The following are some thoughts that God has given me about knowing Him and having a heart for Him:

- Things don't complete our lives, only Christ does that. Fulfillment comes not from marriage, not from sex, not from money, not from our careers, not from success, not from friends. God, and God alone, fulfills and satisfies. All these other things are enjoyed, only as we understand this perspective. Without it, all these things leave us empty, disillusioned and addicted to more things.
- Life seldom lives up to our expectations; God always goes beyond our expectations.
- God is our life support system. Pull the plug and we cease to live.
- Our expectations (perceptions) of life are usually always greater than reality itself and our expectations (perceptions) of God are usually always less than reality.

The more we see of God, the more of God we'll want. Yearn for Him, make Him your heart's number one desire, be driven to know Him deeper each day. Then you will be like the person in Jeremiah who would devote himself to be close to God for the rest of his life.

***“I have seen a fraction of God's glory, and it is awesome.”***

***-Bernard of Clairveaux***



PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER

**DAWG Day**

Pastor Doug Brown · Lee's Summit, MO

December 23rd, 1993, I was busily typing away at my computer working on my Christmas Eve message and Sunday service message. I was writing, typing, reading illustrations, and stuffing my face with an office Christmas gift of popcorn.

All of a sudden, I felt an incredible pain in my abdomen and I had to literally run to the men's room. By the time I got home, I thought I was having an appendicitis attack. It turned out to be a false alarm. I didn't have appendicitis but I did have, and have had since, recurring abdominal problems.

I view this episode in my life as a wake-up call. I tend to be a doer. I like getting things done. It is easy for me to just jump into the details of the day without spending much time preparing myself spiritually to face the challenges of the day. As much as I enjoy engaging in the battle, I am also learning the importance of resting in the Lord and renewing my spirit in the sovereignty of God.

I came up with an acronym that has helped me put first things first — DAWG Day. My DAWG Day means — **Day Alone With God**. Besides my quiet time I have tried to plan in my weekly and my quarterly calendar time alone with God. As of this writing my weekly time with the Lord is Monday. I purposely don't schedule anything on Monday morning into the afternoon so I can get away for personal time with the Lord.

I have a special place I go in a park where there are trails. It is always quiet and private during the day on Mondays. When the weather permits, I drive to the park with all of my stuff for the day, turn off my phone and have a one-on-one with the Lord. I may vary the routine some, but I usually include a prayer walk with the Lord, singing, worship, Bible reading and Bible study, reading other literature, planning, and engaging in creative thinking. Recently, I have included a partial fast with my Monday trysts with the Lord.

I also have planned longer DAWG days quarterly. This will normally include at least an overnight somewhere. Lately, I and the other pastors at our church have planned DAWG days for all of us together before we have planned anything else in our church or personal calendars. These "outings" have been very rich for us personally and have greatly enriched our relationship with each other.

Yet, I am learning that these cannot replace my own special "outing" with the Lord. It is great to seek the Lord with others, but I need time one-on-one without any distractions from others.

*"Being in the presence of God will change you. Prayer brings you into the presence of God."*

*-Unknown*

I don't always have an emotional sense that I have been touched by the Lord or that I have touched His heart. Often, it is a commitment of faith to seek God privately (in my closet) trusting God to reward me as He said He would.

I have discovered that, whether I "feel" God or not, these DAWG days are necessary for my life. They help me primarily in relaxing in the sovereignty of God. It helps me to get away and get outside in order to see God's handiwork. I am then reminded of God's power, His presence, and His promises. I remember that He is at the helm. He is the governor of the universe. He is the King who sat at the flood. He is King forever. I reflect on His providential hand upon my life and what is happening in our family and church. I thank Him that He is involved in the details of my life. As He promised, He will guard my going out and my coming in.

These DAWG Day experiences help me to cease striving and realize that He is God. They help me recharge my batteries and they restore my soul. It has become the Sabbath rest of my life. I am learning the importance of resting from my work and relying on the providence of God. Our service must flow from our worship. Our service must come from a heart that is at rest with God. I have found that I experience God's rest the most when I:

- Reflect on the sovereignty of God
- Enjoy a one-on-one relationship with Christ
- Submit to the Holy Spirit's leading
- Thank God for His providence in my life

As Isaiah the prophet said, "*take root downward, bear fruit upward*" (2 Kings 19:30). So let us take the time — no, let's make the time — to seek the Lord.

***"Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord."***

***- J. I. Packer***



PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER

## Memorization and Meditation

Pastor Tom Dunham · Grand Forks, ND

*“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16a).*

There is no clearer or broader promise for the believer in Jesus Christ than the promise of blessing when a habit of memorization and meditation in Scripture is maintained. This was impressed upon me early in my Christian walk as I observed the fruitful lives of those who practiced memorization and meditation and as I pondered particularly the following verses:

*“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).*

*“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper” (Psalm 1:1-3).*

*“Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation” (Psalm 119:97, 99).*

Stimulated by these passages of Scripture, as well as living examples of those who practiced them, I was determined to be heavily involved in memorization and meditation. I memorized whole chapters of the Bible, including a couple of the New Testament epistles.

But a model of consistency, I was not. Years ago Tony, a friend of mine, and I were both motivated by a teaching in Proverbs to memorize the whole book—chapter by chapter, one per week. We agreed to check each other in chapter one after the first week and, well, we missed that week and failed to meet together for accountability at all after that!

Fortunately, the Lord is patient and later I was able to get back on the accountability track with another friend and develop consistency and a weekly habit of memorizing new Scripture.

Let’s look closer at the promises of those verses I cited from Joshua and Psalms. First, the promises are conditional. That is, God’s blessing is experienced as we fulfill our “obligation.” Our duty is to delight in and meditate on Scripture, while God’s part is to make our way prosperous and grant us success. He, of course, reserves the right to define “prosperity” and “success.” But as we meditate on His Word, our idea of prosperity and success will conform to His.

***“The word of God hidden in the heart is a stubborn voice to suppress.”***

***- Billy Graham***

A word about meditation: it is clear that the Lord wants us to not merely memorize Scripture, but meditate on it. Memorization is required for meditation, but meditation is taking what we have memorized and pondering it, ruminating on it—the analogy of a cow chewing her cud is apt—throughout the day and night.

Once a passage is memorized, opportunities for meditation abound: walking, driving, resting before sleep—that is, any time of the day or night when our minds are not actively engaged in conversation or other activity. And even then, the Scripture to which we've devoted ourselves will guide us to the most fruitful outcomes.

We experience blessing and growth from meditation in Scripture because we are engrafting it. Just as a branch from a pear tree can be grafted into an apple tree—resulting in the apple tree bearing pears on that branch—so we will enjoy the “fruit” of the particular Scripture to which we are devoting ourselves. Looking to grow in unconditional love? Try meditating on 1 Corinthians 13. Desiring wisdom? Focus your meditations on The Book of Proverbs where wisdom is promised to the diligent student.

God's Word is our food and drink. Jesus said that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. I should hunger for God's Word even more than my physical food. Job said he treasured the words of God's mouth more than his necessary food (Job 23:12). Meditation in the Bible satisfies our spiritual cravings.

A schedule that has helped me stay on track for a number of years is one in which I memorize and meditate on a new passage weekly. Whether it's one verse or one chapter, I spend Sunday through Tuesday in memorization and Wednesday through Saturday in meditation. The new week initiates a new passage.

Unquestionably, the most fruitful endeavor of my life has been memorization and meditation in Scripture. It has transformed me from the inside out and made me a different person. I would not be a spiritual leader without it. It has helped produce the fruit of the Spirit in my life and equipped me for service for Jesus Christ as I teach and lead the saints He has entrusted to my care. I have committed myself to a lifetime of memorization and meditation and I know if you do the same, unparalleled blessings and success await you!

*“The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me.”*

*-Martin Luther*



PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER

## Yearly Reading Through the Bible

Pastor Herschel Martindale · Columbia, MD

I've been reading through the Bible, using The Navigator's "Through the Bible in a Year" plan for about ten years. It has been a great blessing to my life. Without a plan, my tendency was to read whatever I desired at that time. I would often read some of my favorite passages and books many times during the year, and many other parts of the Bible would not be read at all.

The man who led me to Christ taught me to color my Bible with a system I will describe later. I don't believe that this system will work for everyone as it has for me. However, this was one of the greatest helps in discovering the truth of God for my life. I do not know of any other one factor that affected my early Christian life as much as coloring my Bible. Unfortunately, when I finished coloring a Bible, I would often go for a period of time before starting to color another. My times of closeness and fellowship with God would sometimes suffer and the Word of God would have less importance in my life. I would try to keep a daily habit of Bible reading, but I would usually select favorite passages and neglect much of the rest of Scripture.

The Navigators' "Read Through the Bible in a Year" was just what the doctor ordered. It gave me a clear goal for each day. The plan covers two readings in the Old Testament and two in the New. This gave me variety and a better perspective. There is a little box to check when you finish reading a passage. If you like, you can read one passage in the morning and the other at different times in the day. The freedom of this plan was a help to me. Sometimes, I would be pressured with time in the morning, and could only read one passage. I would often read another at lunch, and be blessed throughout the day.

Another problem for me in normal Bible reading is that I would sometimes try to read straight through the Bible. I would often become weary somewhere in Leviticus or Numbers and then begin to get careless with my daily reading. The two passages in the Old Testament and two in the New Testament kept the needed variety and interest.

Another advantage of this plan is that it only requires reading 25 days of the month. With other plans I would occasionally miss a day and get behind. After awhile, I would give up. Twenty-five days a month reading gives you five or six days each month to catch up. I have been able to finish the plan each year without much trouble. Occasionally, I will need to take a weekend just to catch up. These times have been a special blessing to me as well.

A word of warning. Sometimes I find myself reading just to keep up with the plan, but not really hearing the voice of God and hiding His Word in my heart. I need to remind myself regularly to keep my heart ready to hear God. Although I find it best to stick right with the plan, there are times I will

***"The Word of God well understood and religiously obeyed is the shortest route to spiritual perfection. And we must not select a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian."***

- A. W. Tozer



read elsewhere to remind myself that I am seeking God and not merely keeping to a schedule. If you have a Bible reading plan that is really effective, stick with it. If not, I strongly encourage you to try this one—and watch God bless you.

### Coloring the Bible

The man who led me to Christ started me coloring the Bible the first day of my Christian life, and I still do it from time to time after these many years. His plan was simple. He used seven colors to represent seven subjects of the Bible. Although I have changed these subjects throughout the years, I always come back to the ones he gave me. They are as follows:

**Yellow** - *The Glory of God, God, His person, character and attributes.*

**Green** - *Grace. All gospel verses, but also for all aspects of Grace.*

**Red** - *Blood. Anything about the death, sufferings, blood, of Christ.*

**Blue** - *Person and work of the Holy Spirit.*

**Brown** - *Judgment, punishment, sin, temptation, etc.*

**Purple** - *Prayer, the royal privilege, promises, examples, instructions, etc.*

**Orange** - *Word of God, anything that mentions the Word, Scriptures, promises, etc.*

He had a biblical basis for each color, such as Brown being the “brass” of the Bible, often associated with Judgment. Yellow or “gold,” often associated with the glory of God being seen in the Bible. Green, the color of earth and God’s grace coming from Heaven to mankind. Blue, the Heavenly One who indwells us, etc.

To effectively use this method, color only the word or phrase that mentions the subject. You may have two or more colors in a verse. Use colored pencils with soft lead. Do not use colored pens as it will blot through the paper of your Bible.

### Advantages of Coloring:

- a. You must concentrate on the verses in order to know what color to use. This concentration enables you to gain more understanding of the verse.
- b. There is greater retention of what you are reading.
- c. There is greater ability to recall. I have found many passages as I looked for the colors.
- d. Coloring is often a prelude to further meditation and study. As you think about its meaning, you are often stimulated to think and reflect further. Happy coloring!

*“I have no magic formula for your holiness. I have no hocus-pocus treatment to offer you. I have no shortcut to spiritual power for any of you. All I can do is say to you - Get back to your Bible, meditate therein day and night, and go down on your face before God in prayer. For the greatest transactions of a man’s experience are made, not in a church, but behind closed doors.”*

*-Alan Redpath*



PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER

## The Heart of a Leader for God's Word

Pastor Tim Haring · Morgantown, WV

In the year 1922, British archeologist Howard Carter made a remarkable discovery in the Royal Valley of Egypt. After digging and searching for years, Carter discovered the tomb of King Tutankhamen (King Tut). I can only begin to imagine the excitement he felt at his discovery. In his own words, he said that he “saw strange animals, statues, and gods—everywhere the glint of gold.” Carter went on to spend the next ten years of his life carefully removing the more than 3,000 amazing and valuable artifacts.

Recently, I had the privilege of seeing the treasures of King Tut firsthand at the Cairo Museum in Egypt. I was not only fascinated by what I saw, but I gained a new appreciation for the hard work and sacrifice that must have been involved in making this discovery. I wondered, “How many times was Carter tempted to give up the work?” His success had not come overnight. He was oppressed by the heat and the dry, dusty, desert sand. Lesser men may have given up the search before finding the treasure, but Carter understood something about the nature of treasure hunting. It takes time, hard work, and a realization that most of the time, **you have to dig deeply if you want to find “the good stuff.”**

In Psalm 119:11, the Psalmist writes, *“Thy Word I have treasured in my heart ....”* God’s Word is a treasure unlike any other. Some of the jewels contained within its pages are easy to find, like diamonds on the surface of the sand. But others seem to be hidden, reserved for those who are willing to take the time and hard work required to dig deeper. No one has ever exhausted the storehouse of treasures found within the pages of the Bible! Peter tells us about the precious and magnificent promises that God has given in His Word (2 Peter 1:4). The writer of Hebrews informs us that the Word of God is alive (Hebrews 4:12)! Paul writes about the Word of God as the Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). I wonder sometimes if we realize what a treasure God’s Word really is!

As leaders, we are not only to highly value God’s Word, but we are to be careful how we handle it. We are to dig deeply and carefully, and this requires work. Paul wrote to Timothy, *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15, NIV).

How can we make sure we are properly handling the Word? I would like to suggest three things:

**1. Have a proper mindset.** In Psalm 119:100 (NIV), we read, *“I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.”* When I first got involved with GCA, a dramatic change took place in the

*“It is scripture alone, not conservative Evangelical tradition or any other human authority, that must function as the normative authority for the definition of what we should believe. The authority of the scripture means that all the words in the scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”*

- Wayne Grudem

way I viewed Scripture. I used to read the Bible just to understand it, but early on in my involvement with one of our churches in Columbus, I began to read the Bible from the perspective of “What does God want me to DO about what I am reading?” This mindset makes all the difference in terms of our understanding. Let me give an example. I can read all I want about the sport of basketball, but until I get out on the court, I will never really understand or appreciate the game. And I certainly will not be in a position to teach others how to play!

In Ezra 7:10 (NKJ), we read, “*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*” Ezra had a heart to learn God’s Law, but his next step was not to begin teaching it to others. He took the important step of personally obeying God’s Word first. This takes time and work, and in a day of instant food and cash-on-demand ATM machines, many leaders will not take the time necessary to allow God’s Word to move from the mind to our heart to the feet and hands and finally to the lips. When God’s Word is incarnated in our lives, we will have an understanding that cannot be discovered through study alone.

*“To have God do His own work through us, even once, is better than a lifetime of human striving.”*

*-Watchman Nee*

**2. We should take time to study the Bible.** To my shame, over the years, I have misunderstood, misapplied, and incorrectly taught many passages of Scripture because I didn’t do my homework. Every verse in the Bible has a literary, historical, geographic, and theological context within which the passage must be interpreted. Fortunately, many great resources are now available to us both in print and in the form of software. I currently use an extensive Bible software program put out by Parsons Technology that has, among other things, eight Bible versions, seven commentaries, two Bible dictionaries, a Bible handbook, a Bible encyclopedia, a Bible atlas, a topical Bible, a concordance and a Hebrew/Greek dictionary. In addition to these references, I often use other references such as study Bibles, expository dictionaries of Greek words (such as Vines and Kittles) and books about biblical history and customs. These resources are invaluable, because they provide the context for proper interpretation.

Recently, I completed an in-depth Bible study for some of our students and singles. We were covering the book of Revelation, which relies heavily upon imagery from Old Testament history, the sacrificial system, and the typology and symbolism related to the tabernacle. It also requires an understanding of the New Testament recipients of the letter. Many study Bibles will provide some background material for a study such as this, but I had to rely heavily upon other materials as well. I have found that I must spend about 18 hours a week in personal Bible study in order to be ready for the Sunday message and the two other Bible studies I lead.

**3. If possible, take advantage of formal training.** When I graduated from Bible college, I felt ill prepared for the real world of ministry. Therefore, I came to believe that the practical experience I was gaining through my involvement with GCA was of much greater value than the formal training I had received. As time has passed, though, I have come to realize how vitally important my training was in laying down a solid biblical foundation for ministry. God has given gifted and knowledgeable teachers to the worldwide Church to help equip leaders to better handle the Word. Many of these teachers are in our Bible colleges and seminaries.

***“This book outlives, outloves, outlifts, outlasts, outreaches, outruns, and outranks all books. This Book is faithproducing. It is hope-awakening. It is death-destroying. And those who embrace it, find forgiveness of sin.”***

***- A. Z. Conrad***

Only in recent years have I once again taken the opportunity to further my education both through on-campus and extension training at two different seminaries. The experience has sharpened my study skills and revitalized me personally. I have also accumulated new material for Bible studies and Sunday teachings. One additional benefit of formal training is that it has forced me to study more because the courses I am taking have a deadline. Since I have to complete the courses, I HAVE to make time to study! I currently spend an average of five hours a week in continuing education.

In 1 Timothy 5:17 (NKJV), Paul instructs his young disciple, “*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine*”. May we see God’s Word for what it really is and treasure it enough to work hard at studying, applying it to our lives, and teaching it to others.



PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER

## Collecting and Review Life Verses

Pastor John Hopley · Columbus, OH

I became a Christian in 1973, and shortly thereafter developed the habit of reading the Bible daily. However, it was 20 years later that I began an additional habit that has significantly transformed my life, both as a Christian and as a leader. That habit is the discipline of collecting and reviewing my life verses.

### My Experience

Many times in my life I have had the experience of praying and reading the Word, and during my reading, a verse will “jump out” of the pages. The Holy Spirit will illumine my mind and heart to give me a burst of faith and assurance that the verse that I just read was in some unique way intended for me. Now we all certainly understand that all the Scriptures are for us at all times. All Scriptures are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). And we also understand that as many as may be the promises of God, in Christ they are yes — that is, applicable to you, to me, and to any follower of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). However, it is nonetheless true that the Holy Spirit has His own unique ministry and He has, throughout the ages, shone His precious light on specific passages to individuals as they have sought God in the Scriptures. This certainly has been my experience. Sometimes the Scripture highlighted is a command to be followed. Other times it is a promise to be believed. The Scripture may relate to my personal life, my family, a friend, my ministry, or my church. In all cases, I come away from my time in the Scriptures with a sense that I have done more than merely read a book. Rather, I come away convinced that I have had a personal encounter with the living God.

### My Dilemma

My dilemma is this: There oftentimes is little connection between my day-to-day life and the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit has highlighted. Directions given by God that are the source of joy and encouragement are often neglected in the hustle and bustle of life. Promises for my life, children, and ministry that during my devotional times give me inspiration and hope for an unseen future are too often forgotten in the face of the realities of what is seen. As an example, I will often be brought to the point of despair over defeats in my ministry. It is only by being reminded by the Lord of past life verses that I can get up and keep going on in ministry.

*“The Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives.”*

*- D. L. Moody*

*"I did not go through the Book. The Book went through me."*

*- A. W. Tozer*

### **My Solution**

So how do I bridge the gap between what God says and what I experience? I have found the answer is in collecting life verses and regularly reviewing those verses. People collect that which is most precious to them. Some collect butterflies, others baseball cards, and still others guns. It occurred to me several years ago that my most precious possession is God's word, and especially God's personal word to me. God's word gives me hope, encouragement, understanding, inspiration, and direction. Also, it occurred to me that if the Holy Spirit went to all this trouble to get my attention the first time in illuminating certain passages of the Scriptures, I should take the responsibility to continue to concentrate on those passages.

With this in mind, I began to collect life verses. I categorized them according to areas of concern: my personal life, my family, and my ministry. This collection has been profitable for two reasons:

1. When seeking God's direction on an area (such as my ministry focus), I don't need to "start from scratch." I am able to remind myself what God has spoken to me in the past and then I am able to hear God freshly as to His future direction.
2. I am able to keep from getting "knocked off course" or discouraged because I regularly review these verses and thereby am less vulnerable to Satan's attacks. Promises for my family, for example, are deeper in my heart so as to prevent me from being discouraged as I seek to lead my family to become like Jesus Christ. Rather than being on the defensive or being reactive, I am pursuing a proactive course of allowing His word to get deeper into my heart.

### **The Fruit**

The result of this habit has been increasing peace and joy in my heart, as well as a greater assurance that I am in the will of the Lord. There has been greater stability in my walk with Christ and a greater strength in my convictions in ministry. And, in addition, I have seen greater fruit and the accomplishment of ministry goals, all because my walk has been consistent with the personalized words that Christ has spoken to me.



DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER

## The Importance of Prayer - Accountability Groups

Pastor Bill Young · Salt Lake City, UT

Ever since I became a Christian in 1981 at Iowa State University, I knew God had called me to influence the world for Jesus. I also knew that the most effective way to reach the world was to dedicate my life to prayer and to the study of the Word. This would fuel my passion to know God and help me become disciplined in every facet of my life. I committed my life to Christ and counted the cost of following Him. I knew that the battle for souls was not against flesh and blood, and because of this I needed to become a prayer warrior. I needed to become a man who knew how to come before God on my knees in desperate prayer. So why didn't I pray more?

*"It is impossible for the preacher to keep his spirit in harmony with the divine nature of his high calling without much prayer."*

- E. M. Bounds

### Prayerlessness

Pray had never been my strength. I just didn't do it much. Over the years, I've come to realize that my problem of prayerlessness wasn't that I didn't believe in prayer or that I hadn't seen God answer prayers or even that I didn't WANT to pray. It actually seemed like the more I wanted to pray the less I actually prayed. It was kind of a Romans 7 complex ("I don't do what I want to do..."). I studied prayer. I taught on prayer. I told OTHERS they needed to pray. I read E.M. Bound's book, *Power Through Prayer*, but couldn't seem to be consistent in prayer. Unfortunately, the one thing that did continue to grow in my life was guilt! I felt like such a loser! I felt like I was letting God down, and Satan beat me over the head with that guilt.

**I remember attending a Promise Keepers conference in Boulder, Colorado in 1993. At the end of the first evening, while speaking, Bishop Wellington Boone called all pastors to get out of their seats and come down on to Folsom Stadium field and join him in front of the stage. It was surreal to see 40,000 screaming men cheering 1,000 pastors down to the field! Then Wellington Boone began to speak to us, and I'll never forget his rebuke: "You men are called to be our shepherds, and our leaders. But recent surveys show that the average evangelical pastor prays for less than three minutes per day! This is shameful! How can God bless our prayerlessness?"**

I wish I could say that Bishop Boone wasn't talking to me – but he was. My heart was broken and I was totally convicted. I felt like I'd been "caught". Here I was a full time pastor, yet I knew that most days I wasn't praying for more than a few minutes. What was wrong with me?

### Finally, an Answer

It wasn't until years later, after I moved from Loveland, Colorado to plant a church in Salt Lake City that things finally turned around. A pastor friend of mine named Greg Johnson, invited me to listen to a tape by a minister named Dee Duke, senior pastor at Jefferson Baptist Church in Jefferson, Oregon,

on the importance of prevailing prayer. Pastor Duke believed in prayer. He practiced prayer. He consistently prayed for four hours per day (ouch – here comes the guilt again!).

Pastor Duke has a great saying about prayer: “Much prayer, much blessing. Little prayer, little blessing.” He challenged all pastors to pray for at least an hour a day. But how could I do that? Pastor Duke’s answer was simple: Accountability. Surround yourself with others who will hold you accountable for your prayer times. Get with a group of 8-10 men who will truly hold you accountable for some basic godly disciplines.

### The Plan

Here are the ten commitments that Pastor Duke encouraged all those wanting to join an accountability group to keep (non-pastor requirements in parenthesis):

1. Prayer – 1 hour per day (30 minutes).
2. Pray for every church member by name – once per week (small group members)
3. Pray with wife – three times per week (or accountability partner)
4. Bible reading (non-sermon-prep) /devotions – 30 minutes per day (15 minutes)
5. Review personal goals – two times per week (come up with at least five – mine include verse memory and review, personal retreats, family time, etc).
6. Exercise – 30 minutes aerobic, three times per week.
7. Reading – 20 pages of book (of choice) per week.
8. Email accountability group – once per week (short summary of week – no excuses)
9. Pray for each accountability partner – once per week.
10. Meet every month for extended (two to four hours) prayer, fellowship, and lunch.

### Expectations

Accountability is never easy. In fact, it shouldn’t be. Here’s what I had to consider and what I now tell men considering joining me in this commitment: “Joining this accountability group is not to be taken lightly. This commitment will take your time and your energy. Serious time, thought and prayer should go into making the decision to join. You may have to change some things about the way you live. If this group were forced on anyone it would easily be defined as legalistic. However, because this is strictly on a volunteer basis you agree to take a certain amount of harassment. If you agree to be a part of one of these groups, you give permission to your partners to get in your face when you slack off. Emailing each other weekly will be crucial to let each other know how you are doing. If you don’t email it is assumed that you aren’t doing well with your commitment and your partners will get in your face. This isn’t for everyone and we should never use it as a gauge to determine if someone is better than someone

***“Prayer is the first thing, the second thing, the third thing necessary to a minister. Pray then, my dear brothers: Pray, Pray, Pray.”***

*- Edward Payson*



else. In love we should rebuke when needed, and in love we should congratulate when deserved.”

### **Counting the Cost**

After listening to Dee Duke’s tape, I had a decision to make. Would I be willing to commit myself to all ten of these commitments – especially prayer for one hour every day? After weeks of deliberation, I decided to call Greg and tell him “I’m in.” I’ve now been in the group for over five years, and for the first time in my Christian life, I know that my devotional life is where it should be. Not that I’m perfect, or hit 100% very often, but I know that with the help and support of other men, I have been way more consistent and faithful in these disciplines than I ever have before. Not only that, but I have also begun these groups with many laymen in our churches. We call them “Band of Brothers” accountability groups – and they are effectively changing lives.

*“A praying, holy man  
is an awful weapon in  
the hands of God.”*

*-Robert Murray McCheyne*

### **The Results**

For the past 25 years, I’ve tried to pray consistently. Only one thing has worked for me: Accountability with like-minded individuals. I can testify along with Dee Duke, that “Much prayer, much blessing. Little prayer, little blessing.” Might we all become the prayer warriors God intended for us to be and in doing so reap much blessing.



PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER

**Exercise**

1. What impressed you most from these testimonies?

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2. Do you have any life verses? Write them down and be prepared to share how God has made these special to you. Try to develop a simple plan to collect and review these verses.

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3. Write down at least three motivations to spend extended time alone with God.

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PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL LIFE OF A LEADER**Exercise**

4. Schedule and share with the group a time and place (within the next 45 days) where you will spend an extended time alone with God. Is there anything that comes to your mind that you hope is accomplished during this time?

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5. Review your action plan for the last exercise concerning the five spiritual disciplines (page 161) and share what steps you have implemented so far.

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COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

**Creation and the Genesis Account**

When two people are in an adversarial relationship, a tactic is for one to undermine the very first words that the other says or writes. So, too, Christians should not be surprised when the evil one plants seeds of doubt in people's minds about the first words of the Bible in Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we as believers proclaim and affirm the truth that God is the Creator. Dave Bovenmyer's article addresses this very important topic of Creation.





## Creation and the Genesis Account

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer · Ames, IA

Our newspapers and magazines frequently report on a battle that is occurring in the classrooms and courtrooms of our country. In years past, the battle concerned whether naturalistic evolution alone should be taught in our schools or whether the Biblical view of origins should be allowed. Recently, the battle has morphed into a battle between naturalistic evolution and intelligent design—essentially a battle between naturalism (nature is all that exists) and theism (a creator God exists).

Affecting this battle is the reality that materialistic naturalism has gained the predominate influence in our universities, scientific communities, educational system, and legal system. To a naturalist, God is not allowed a foot in the door. Any claims of the supernatural (including creation) are, by definition, not a part of “science” and therefore untenable. These social and scientific battles spill over into the church, which must defend and proclaim the Biblical concept of a creator God and the Biblical revelation of how He created the universe.

The original Great Commission Leadership materials did not address the doctrine of creation, and this doctrine is only briefly mentioned in the Great Commission Churches’ statement of faith. Since the creation/evolution controversy is so vigorously debated in American culture, and since this debate spills over into the church, the leadership of Great Commission Churches commissioned this paper addressing the subject for the GCLI Going Deeper program.

The approach of this paper will be to defend what the Scripture teaches about creation and the origin of all things, especially at points where culture is pressing against the teaching of Scripture. Particularly, it will address attempts to harmonize the creation account with modern scientific scenarios and will advocate a straightforward reading of Genesis chapters one through eleven.

The position taken in this paper is not a part of the doctrinal statement or core values statement of Great Commission Churches (GCC). Agreement with all aspects of this perspective is not required for membership in Great Commission Churches. On the other hand, the essence of the paper’s position is the prevalent teaching of the association’s churches and is shared by the majority of its pastors. Although not a doctrine essential for salvation or a core value, this is an issue of importance, prompting the association’s leadership to include this paper in our leadership training material.

The strength of these arguments is not meant to be a sign of disrespect for the godly Christian leaders, some within our movement and some in the greater evangelical church, who disagree with aspects of this position.<sup>1</sup> Although we are presenting a vigorous defense of a straightforward reading of Genesis, we must respect our brothers who disagree, and we must remain open to the possibility that there are

*“In all its bearing upon scriptural truth, the evolution theory is in direct opposition to it. If God’s Word be true, evolution is a lie. I will not mince the matter: this is not the time for soft speaking.”*

*-C. H. Spurgeon*

errors in our overall approach or in our understanding of the text. It is our hope that this paper will encourage continued study of the Scripture and continued dialog so that every Great Commission leader and believer will develop Biblical convictions concerning the important truths of Creation.

### **1. How important is the Scripture in understanding the origin of the world?**

The church must guard against societal pressures that tempt us to accommodate the philosophies of the world; and that includes the world's philosophies of origins. In 1 Corinthians 1-3, Paul exhorts the Corinthian church, urging them to stop glorying in the "wisdom of men." He tells them that the wisdom of the world is "folly with God" (1 Corinthians 3:19, ESV<sup>2</sup>).

What is the difference between the wisdom of men and that of God? Is one "wisdom" intrinsically logical and the other illogical? Not necessarily. Paul seems to imply that the difference is in our starting point. The wisdom of men starts with man and his attempts to come to conclusions concerning the ultimate questions of life apart from the revelation of God. But the wisdom of God starts with God and His revelation. Paul spoke nothing among the Corinthians but "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (2:2, NASB<sup>3</sup>), the ultimate revelation of God. To the mature, Paul spoke in "words taught by the Spirit" (2:13, NASB), who alone knows the mind of God and reveals it to us. God's revelation gives us wisdom that is "not of this world," but is from God; "decreed before the ages for our glory" (2:6-7, ESV). If we start with God's revelation at the core of our assumptions, we will be able to "appraise all things" even spiritual things (2:15, NASB).

Therefore, God's revelation must be our starting point in evaluating and interpreting everything around us. Of utmost importance to the Christian is the question, "What has God revealed to us in Christ and through the words of the apostles and prophets inspired by the Spirit?" This paper, then, will focus on what the Biblical revelation teaches concerning the beginning of all things, concentrating especially on Genesis chapters 1-11.

### **2. How important is science in understanding the origin of the world?**

One of the dictionary definitions of the word "science" is "the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of phenomena."<sup>4</sup> So defined, science and the disciplines associated with it are certainly helpful, and even essential, in understanding the natural world God has created, including how things got the way they are today.

Yet, when looking at the distant past, science has an inherent weakness. No scientist was there to "observe, identify, describe or experiment with" what was happening. So, when the historical sciences (geology, paleontology, archeology, etc.) seek to interpret the past, unproven and un-provable assumptions must be made. One assumption that cannot be proven but seems reasonable is that the laws of physics and chemistry have remained the same (apart from miracles) since the creation. This is an assumption that Christian scientists tend to agree with. Other assumptions are more hotly debated, such as the question of how the earth's geological formations were formed; whether by processes similar

*"I thoroughly believe in a university education. Yet I believe a knowledge of the Bible without a college course is more valuable than a college course without a knowledge of the Bible."*

*-Dr. William Lyon Phelps*

*“Surely the essence of wisdom is that before we begin to act at all, or attempt to please God, we should discover what it is that God has to say about the matter.”*

*-D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

to present-day ones (uniformitarianism) or by catastrophic disturbances of nature (catastrophism), such as a world-wide flood.<sup>5</sup> Although all truth is God’s truth,<sup>6</sup> whether discovered in the Scripture or from observation of the world, Scripture has a distinct advantage when it comes to understanding the past. First, there is the possibility that Genesis’ creation account was handed down through written or oral tradition from eye-witnesses who observed what happened in earth’s early history—in the garden of Eden, at the flood, and at the tower of Babel.<sup>7</sup> Second, the Scripture is God’s revelation, having the overwhelming advantage of being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Certainly, rightly interpreting the Scripture and discerning the author’s meaning present a challenge, since Scripture was written in a language and to a culture that is different than ours. Yet, the Scripture’s powerful advantages (eyewitness testimony and Divine inspiration) coupled with the weakness of historical science (unproven assumptions concerning the continuity or discontinuity of earth’s history) argue that we should give far greater weight to the Scripture’s statements concerning the past than to the hypotheses of the historical sciences.

### **3. On face value, what does Genesis 1-11 tell us about creation and the beginnings of all things?**

Yahweh God, the God of Israel, created the heavens and the earth in six days, shaping and forming the earth and the universe and everything in them. God then rested on the seventh day. The order of God’s creative work was as follows:

Day 1 — God created the heavens and the earth<sup>8</sup> in an initial state of chaos.<sup>9</sup> He created light and separated it from darkness.

Day 2 — God created the firmament, separating the waters above it from the waters below it.

Day 3 — God formed land and created vegetation, plants and trees.

Day 4 — God created the sun, moon, and stars to give light to the earth, to separate light from darkness, and to act as signs for seasons, days, and years.

Day 5 — God created the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air. He blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply.”

Day 6 — God created land animals and the first man and woman, blessing them by again saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”

Day 7 — God rested from His work of creating. He blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

A few other observations from an initial reading of Genesis chapter one through chapter eleven include the following:

- God created man in His own image, distinguishing him from the animals and giving him authority to rule and care for the earth and its creatures (1:27).



- Repeatedly during the days of creation, God saw that what He had made was good. At the end of the sixth day, God saw that everything He had made was “very good” (1:31).
- God gave plants for food to mankind and to the beasts of the earth and birds of the air (1:29-30).
- According to a simple reading of the Biblical genealogies, creation occurred at approximately 4,000 BC. The genealogies at face value seem to give no room for added years or generations, since they indicate the age of each man when his son was born<sup>10</sup> (5:1-32).
- Soon after creation, man sinned, death entered the world, and the earth was cursed (3:1-19).
- Mankind rapidly deteriorated morally and spiritually so that the earth was filled with violence, causing God grief that He had created man (6:1-8).
- One thousand six hundred and fifty six years after creation,<sup>11</sup> the earth was deluged and destroyed by a world-wide flood that destroyed all mankind and animal life except for eight people and the animals preserved on Noah’s ark (6:1-9:7).
- After the flood, God promised Noah and his sons and every creature living on the earth never to send a flood on the earth again to destroy all flesh (9:8-17).
- After the flood, God gave “every moving thing that lives” to mankind for food, and animals, birds, and fish became afraid of man (9:1-5).
- As the earth repopulated after the flood, mankind was dispersed into various groups and nations by a confusion of languages at the tower of Babel (11:1-9).

*“In science we have been reading only the notes to a poem; in Christianity we find the poem itself.”*

*-C.S. Lewis*

#### **4. Why are the creation account and the early history of the world so important?**

In his commentary on Genesis, Derek Kidner said, “There can scarcely be another part of Scripture over which so many battles, theological, scientific, historical and literary, have been fought, or so many strong opinions cherished.”<sup>12</sup> There is good reason for this. The implications for our view of God, of ourselves, and of much of the rest of Scripture all hang on how we interpret the early chapters of Genesis. Here are some foundational doctrines established in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

- The nature of God is revealed, including that He is one, that He is personal, and that He is sovereign.
- God is transcendent, but also immanent. He is awesomely powerful, yet relational, both with His creation (3:8) and within Himself (1:26).
- God is purposeful and orderly and cares for His creation.
- God is awesome in power, intelligence, and wisdom. He created the world through the power of His word.

- God is ruler over all creation and over man. Since God made us, He is truly our Father in the most profound sense. We do not belong to ourselves, nor is the purpose of human life to be determined by man. God created us for His purpose, and that purpose defines who we are and why we're here.
- Morality and ethics are not arbitrary but were established by God in the beginning. They are woven into the very fabric of creation and what it means to be human. Therefore, morality or "rightness" is God's purpose and goal for every human life. Violating that created intent is always wrong and will inevitably be destructive. It also offends God, who created us with the ability to choose whether or not to take part in that purpose (2:17).
- God's right to judge the world is founded on the fact that He made it and that we are His.
- Man is God's special, ruling agent, uniquely made in His image (1:27). This gives us value and defines our role in the creation (1:28). We are stewards of the creation and are called to use it as a resource to do good, thereby reflecting God's character.
- The proper functioning of society and life is founded in creation. God made things as He desired and that desire is to be followed. The understanding of what it means to be male and female (1:27), the definition of family (2:24), heterosexual marriage, the importance of work (2:15), and civil government (9:5-6) are all established in the first chapters of Genesis.
- Man has a fallen, corrupt nature, not because of any imperfection in God's original creation, but because he chose to rebel against God (3:1-4:16).
- Death, suffering, sickness, and disease are a result of man's sin. They are not part of God's original creation, but are unnatural enemies (2:17, 3:16-19). The Biblical creation account, supported in the rest of scripture, provides the only satisfying understanding of how an all-good, all-powerful God can rule over a world of injustice and suffering.
- As a consequence of sin, the earth has been cursed, requiring man to work in "painful toil" (3:17 NIV<sup>13</sup>) simply for survival. The first chapters of Genesis tell us why we must endure so much sorrow and suffering and why our losses hurt so badly—we were created for a better world.
- The creation account addresses rival and false theological concepts of the ancient world: idolatry; worship of the sun, moon, and stars; nature worship; and fertility rights. It also addresses rival and false theological concepts of our day: humanism, naturalism, evolution, and uniformitarianism.
- God has intense wrath against sin, as revealed by the flood cataclysm (6:5-8). Recorded in the earth's geologic layers, the flood stands as a powerful testimony and warning that God is indeed a God who judges. The flood also demonstrates that God's warning of future judgment is completely within His character (2 Peter 3:3-7).

*"I know of no finding in archaeology that's properly confirmed which is in opposition to the Scriptures. The Bible is the most accurate history textbook the world has ever seen."*

*-Dr Clifford Wilson,  
former director of the  
Australian Institute of  
Archaeology*

- All men, no matter what race, nationality or language, come from the same root, being descendants of Adam and Noah, and are therefore equal in value and dignity before God. The tower of Babel account reaffirms this, while explaining the origin of different races and languages (11:1-9).

These foundational doctrines present perspectives about God, man, and the world that are essential to our faith. They are the bedrock of the gospel, establishing the goodness of God, the sinfulness of man, and the need of a Savior. We must not treat the creation account lightly.

### **5. Can the Genesis account be harmonized with the ideas of biological evolution and of creation over vast ages?**

One problem with attempts to harmonize the creation account with evolutionary and uniformitarian scenarios is that the attempt itself might easily frustrate the primary goal of interpretation—discovering the author’s intended meaning for his original audience. In other words, proper interpretation does not allow us to superimpose modern assumptions on the text, unless it can be shown that those assumptions were part of the world view of the author and his readers. If we lose sight of this fundamental interpretive goal—to discern what the author intended to communicate to his readers—the Scripture (or any other communication for that matter) quickly loses its authority. Apart from this interpretive discipline, the reader becomes the author, the originator of meaning.<sup>14</sup>

Paul does say that the Old Testament was written for our instruction (Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:11). Yet even though it was written for us, it was not written to us. It was written to its original readers and we must first seek to understand what it meant to them before we can understand how it applies to us. As much as possible we must seek to put ourselves in the original reader’s place. What was his worldview? How would he have understood the words that were written? What would he discern the author’s meaning to be?

### **6. Who was the author of Genesis and when was it written?**

There has been much debate concerning who wrote Genesis. For the purposes of this paper, I have assumed that Moses was the author, or at least the compiler, as follows.

- Both Jewish and Christian scholars have, from very early times, considered Moses to be the author of Genesis.
- Although still taught in secular universities, the documentary hypothesis has been countered and largely discredited by conservative scholars. This hypothesis was developed by liberal scholars in the 19th century as an attempt to explain differences in literary style throughout the Pentateuch (first five books), particularly the use of the names of God. It postulates that the Pentateuch was written by four or five different authors who wrote throughout Israel’s history.<sup>15</sup>

*“If all the animals and man had been evolved in this ascendant manner, then there had been no first parents, no Eden, and no Fall. And if there had been no fall, then the entire historical fabric of Christianity, the story of the first sin and the reason for an atonement, upon which the current teaching based Christian emotion and morality, collapsed like a house of cards.”*

*-H.G. Wells*

- Although the New Testament does not explicitly state that Moses wrote Genesis, it does imply it, especially since Jews of Jesus' day viewed the Pentateuch as a unit written by Moses. For example, several times Jesus referred to the entire Old Testament, using the phrase "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:31, 24:27, 44). This implies that He viewed Genesis as part of what Moses had written.
- If Moses was the author, he may have incorporated prior written or oral accounts that had been passed down to him. The existence of prior source material could easily explain the variety in literary elements, such as the use of different names for God. Additionally, the words "These are the generations of"<sup>16</sup> may point to a change of source material.
- Although Moses probably relied on prior sources when writing Genesis, he would have tailored the vocabulary and language to ensure that it was understandable to his readers. Therefore, in our interpretive efforts, we should look for Moses' intended meaning as would be understood by the Hebrews leaving Egypt at the time of the Exodus.

*"Education is  
useless without  
the Bible."*

*-Daniel Webster*

## **7. Did Moses and his readers hold to an evolutionary perspective or to an assumption that God created over vast ages?**

The secular cultures that Moses and his readers were familiar with were those of Mesopotamia and Egypt. The religions of these cultures were polytheistic with belief in a supernatural world and belief in personal gods who created the world, often in ways that were clearly mythological. There was no tradition in ancient Hebrew, Egyptian, or Mesopotamian culture of life arising from lower forms in an evolutionary process nor did these ancient creation stories suggest that creation occurred over vast ages.<sup>17</sup> These concepts were simply absent from ancient Hebrew culture. So, Moses and his readers had no reason to think of the six days of creation as anything other than the normal days they were familiar with. Neither did they have any pressure to believe that man arose from lower life forms.

This is further confirmed by the fact that prior to the 17th century and the beginning of uniformitarian thinking, no Jewish or Christian expositors of the Bible interpreted the Scripture to teach creation through evolutionary process or vast ages.<sup>18</sup> The apocrypha, the pseudepigrapha,<sup>19</sup> and the writings of Josephus all assume the historicity of the creation account in six normal days, further showing that ancient readers saw nothing in the text pointing to creation through evolution or creation over vast ages.<sup>20</sup>

The evolutionary and uniformitarian concepts that so thoroughly pervade our culture are recent and modern. Attempts to superimpose these modern concepts on the ancient author or readers of Genesis undermine the fundamental goal of interpretation, that of finding the author's intended meaning to his original audience. When we lose this goal, Scripture loses its authority.

## **8. Did God accommodate Himself to the ignorance of the Hebrew reader?**

Having just been rescued from slavery in Egypt, Moses' audience probably didn't include a high percentage of PhDs. And they lacked much of the scientific knowledge we have today. Perhaps God accommodated himself to the ignorance of the Hebrew reader. Additionally, concepts about God are

often difficult, if not impossible for finite humans to grasp, and God often speaks in anthropomorphic language (ascribing to Himself human qualities). For example, when the Psalmist says that God's eyes are attentive to the righteous and that His ears are attentive to their prayers (Psalm 34:15), he is not declaring that God has physical eyes or ears, but is referring to God in human terms that we can understand. God is beyond us and it would be difficult, if not impossible for Him to describe Himself to us without reference and comparison to things that we are already familiar with.

***"Everything must be decided by the Scripture."***

*-D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

Yet an application of this argument to the creation account quickly breaks down when we stop to realize that there is nothing difficult to understand in the modern evolutionary or uniformitarian scenario, which is taught to and understood by grade school children. The modern ideas—that God created over vast ages and that plants and animals arose through a process of gradual change from common ancestors—are not difficult for even the most uneducated to understand. Nothing in the modern scenario requires technical, scientific language. Using ancient Hebrew, Moses could have easily communicated the modern scenario to his listeners had he desired to do so. So, there was no need for accommodation. The modern scenario is just as easy to explain as the six-day creation scenario.

### **9. One approach to harmonization is the idea that the creation account was mythical. Could this be true?**

I'm using the word "myth" in the sense of a story that is not necessarily historical; that may never have actually happened in time-space history. The important elements of a myth are the concepts presented, not the truthfulness of the story.

Nothing in the text of Genesis suggests that Moses intended for the account to be mythical in the sense of non-historical. To a mind that is open to the supernatural and the existence of a creator God, there is nothing bizarre or extreme in the story, as there are in the creation myths of other ancient cultures. In his commentary on Genesis, Bruce Waltke says:

*...the author of Genesis represents himself as a historian, not as a prophet who receives visions of events. He gives an essentially coherent chronological succession of events, using the Hebrew narrative verb form. He validates his material as much as possible by locating his story in time and space (e.g., 2:10-14), tracing genealogies (e.g., 5:1-32), giving evidence of various sorts that validate his history (e.g., 11:9), and citing sources (5:1).<sup>21</sup>*

It seems, then, that Moses intended Genesis to be understood as history, not myth.

Chapter one differs somewhat from the rest of the book with its beautiful literary elements and symmetrical structure. Yet the author's evident literary skill does not require a mythical or non-historical interpretation. Even with these literary elements, chapter one is presented as a narrative and varies greatly from Hebrew poetry, as exemplified in the Psalms and Proverbs.<sup>22</sup>

Unquestionably, Moses wrote to establish and emphasize important truths that refuted competing religious philosophies of the day. The Genesis narratives undergird the theology of the Law and of Israel as set forth in the rest of the Pentateuch. Yet if we focus solely on these theological truths and claim that they are all that is really important and let go of the historicity of the account, the "myth" loses its

*“... Probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the [idea] that creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience...”*

*James Barr,  
Oxford University*

power. The author is then advancing theology that has no historical basis to it, thus robbing it of its credibility. The stories of Genesis were not fabricated by Moses in an effort to undergird and support the theology of the Law and of Israel. Rather, the theology of Israel was built upon the historical facts of creation, the fall, and God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as recorded by Moses.

Finally, the Genesis account is understood to be historical throughout the rest of the Bible.<sup>23</sup> Jesus referred to the creation of Adam and Eve and the flood of Noah as real historical events (Matthew 19:3-6 & 24:37-39). So did Paul and Peter, often basing their doctrine upon the Genesis account (Romans 5:12-21, 1 Timothy 2:13-14, 1 Corinthians 15:45, 1 Peter 2:4-10, 3:4-7).

#### **10. Can the Bible’s teaching about creation be interpreted to describe an earth that is billions of years old by defining the word “day” to mean an age?**

Many have tried to harmonize the Biblical account and modern science’s four-billion year-old earth by claiming that each “day” in Genesis chapter one can represent a vast age of hundreds of millions of years.

Before we look at the “days” of chapter one, let’s look at an even more problematic passage for this approach. Exodus 20:8-11 describes an event the Israelites witnessed firsthand, in which God spoke out of the thick darkness above Mount Sinai. Here Moses recalls and writes down the very words of God spoken out of the cloud above the mountain. “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God...” The Lord goes on to explain the reason for this command: “For in six days the Lord made Heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (ESV).

The word “day” is used identically in the Lord’s two sentences, one describing the days of the week, the other describing the days in which the Lord created the heavens and the earth. There are no indications from the grammar, syntax, or context that God used the word “day” in the first sentence to refer to a regular day and used it in the second sentence to refer to six ages. The Hebrew language has several terms to express the concept of “age” that God could have used had He wanted to.<sup>24</sup> If the world was indeed created in six ages, would not God have misled them by using the word “day”; the same word used in the previous sentence to describe their work week? How could they believe anything else? It’s hard to imagine a clearer statement concerning the length of creation. And it comes from the very mouth of God Himself.

Additionally, in His statement, God refers to creation as the basis, the reason, why the Israelites should work for six days and then observe the Sabbath. If this is interpreted to mean creation in six vast ages, the reason for observing the Sabbath is obscured, if not undermined. A creation in six ages with God resting for a seventh age would seem to argue that men should work for six decades and rest on the seventh (since the span of a man’s work and life tends to be seven decades).

Let’s move on to the word “day” in Genesis chapter one. Can it be interpreted here to mean an “age”?

The Hebrew word translated “day” in chapter one can have the following meanings according to the Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon:<sup>25</sup>

1. day, as opposed to night
2. twenty four hours
3. a lifetime
4. a time period (general)
5. a year
6. temporal references such as today, tonight, tomorrow

In Hebrew, as in English, words such as “day” have various possible meanings depending on the grammar, syntax, and context of the word.

To accurately understand the author’s meaning, it is not sufficient to look at the word’s possible meanings and choose whichever meaning we like, as though each meaning has equal validity. The grammatical form of the word, the syntax of the sentence, and the context of the passage determine which meaning is appropriate.

Although the Hebrew word for day, “yom,” can carry the meaning of an indefinite period of time, it only does so when used in a specific form or when accompanied by particular words in specific constructions. This form or these accompanying words are required to give it the meaning of a period of time. Examples would be “in that day” (Isaiah 2:11, NASB), “a day of darkness (Zephaniah 1:15, NASB),” or in some contexts, simply “that day” (1 Samuel 8:18, NASB). But none of the words or phrases that would give the word “day” the meaning of an indefinite period of time are used in chapter one’s description of the six days of creation.<sup>26</sup>

Two of the meanings given in Strong’s are seen in Genesis 1:5, “God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day” (NIV). Here, the meaning of the first use of the word “day” is clearly the first meaning—“day, as opposed to night.” It is contrasted with “night,” telling us that the first meaning is appropriate. But the meaning in the word’s second use best fits the second meaning—“period of 24 hours,” since it describes the first cycle of day and night or light and darkness. The words “evening” and “morning” confirm this. As in their normal usage, the word “evening” refers to the waning of the light and “morning” to the return of the light.

The text does not specifically highlight the length of the day as 24 hours. Rather, it emphasizes the cycling of light and darkness. Furthermore, the word “first” is used prior to the verse’s second use of “day” indicating that this was the very first “day” or cycle of light and darkness. The word “first” also indicates that there was only one cycle of light and darkness during the first day. This is further confirmed in verse 8, “And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. It was not the tenth or thousandth or millionth cycle of darkness and light, but the second cycle. Each “day” consisted of one and only one cycle of darkness and light, evening and morning.

The description of events on each succeeding “day” is concluded with the same phrase, “and there was evening, and there was morning—the third day...fourth day...fifth day... sixth day.” This emphasis on light and darkness makes it extremely difficult to conclude anything other than that there were only six cycles of light and darkness throughout the six “days” of creation. It’s hard to see how any unbiased

***“Many refuse to accept the reality of a personal God because they are unwilling to submit to His authority.”***

***-Kurt Bruner***

*“There is not the slightest possibility that the facts of science can contradict the Bible, and therefore, there is no need to fear that a truly scientific comparison of any aspect of the two models of origins can ever yield a verdict in favor of evolution.”*

*-Henry Morris*

reader, ancient or modern, could read this in any other way than that it describes six cycles of light and darkness, six evenings and six mornings, and six normal days.

The sun was not created until day four. Because of this, some have argued that we cannot be sure the alternating periods of evening and morning are normal 24-hour days. However, the creation of the sun on day four actually establishes the author’s understanding of the length of the days, at least the length of days five through seven. Moses states that one of God’s purposes for the creation of the sun, moon, and stars was to measure time—to “serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years” (Genesis 1:14, NIV). So, even if there might be question about the length of days one through four, days five through seven must refer to 24-hour days as measured by the sun, moon, and stars. And since days 5-7 are 24-hour, sun-measured days, and nothing in the passage shows that the first four days were anything different, the ancient Hebrew reader would undoubtedly have concluded that the first four days were also of the same length.

Some have argued that the words “morning” and “evening” should be understood figuratively, referring to the beginning and ending of something else, perhaps the beginning and ending of God’s work during each period of time (which could be millions of years). But there is nothing in the passage to indicate this was the author’s intention. Actually, it is just the opposite. Initially there was darkness. Then God created light and separated it from the darkness, dividing it between two periods, one of light and one of darkness. It then defines that first cycle of light and darkness as the “first day.” This defining, in the passage itself, indicates the meaning

of the word “day”—one cycle of light and darkness. So, the passage clearly indicates that the words “day,” “morning” and “evening” all concern the cycling of light and darkness, not the beginning and ending of God’s work<sup>27</sup> or some other beginning and ending.

So, if we let the passage itself define the meaning of the word “day,” it is impossible for the modern scenario to fit. Four billion years would require 1,460,000,000,000 cycles of light and darkness. Moses records that there were six.

### **11. Can the Genesis account be interpreted to show that the days of chapter one are intended to refer to indefinite periods of time and that the chronological order of the days is superseded by a literary “framework” that pervades the text?**

There are various versions of the framework view, but some fairly common elements of this complex view are briefly presented here. The framework view argues that the literary structure of Genesis one and two point us toward a topical rather than a chronological interpretation. This literary framework is said to be clear enough to inform the reader that the language concerning time and sequence is figurative and that literal days and sequential order are not the intended meaning.

Genesis chapter two is said to be topical and non-chronological, showing that Genesis one should also be interpreted this same way. One example is Genesis 2:19 “Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them...” (NASB). This verse (with the word “formed” in the present tense, as in most translations)



would seem to indicate that the animals were formed after man, thus contradicting the order of the account in chapter one.

Also it is argued that Genesis 2:4-7 indicates that between the creative acts of God, ordinary providence was at work, preserving what had been previously created. Ordinary providence is God’s providing, sustaining activity through natural rather than supernatural means. In this passage, which appears to be a retelling of the creation of man on day six, ordinary providence seems to be at work since the plants needed watering: “But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground” (2:6, NASB). The framework view argues that the creative acts of God should be limited to the spoken Word of God that brought things into existence, but the sustaining of things created was achieved through ordinary providence. Supposedly, this presents a problem with the order of creation because the creation of light on day one would require something supernatural to sustain that light until the creation of the sun and stars on day four. Since Genesis 2:4-7 shows that God was using ordinary providence to sustain things, then we should conclude that days one and four are actually descriptions of the same creative events and not different chronological days. Additionally, the argument is made that since the sun, moon, and stars were created on day four to separate the light from the darkness, and that this separation also happened on day one, then days one and day four refer to the same creative concept or event. Also, it is noted that each day has one creative act, except days three and six, which have two, showing correspondence between them.

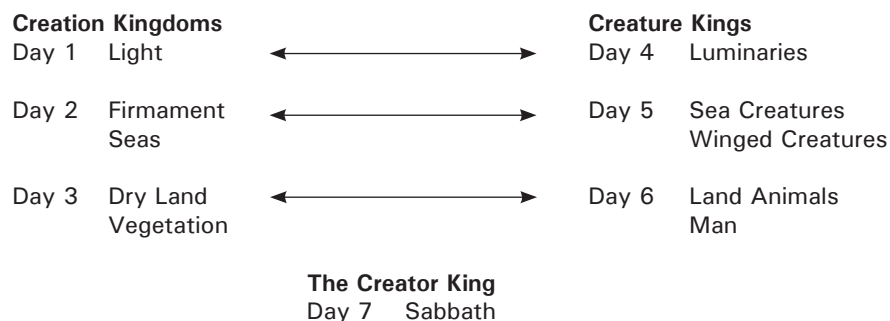
*“Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature, and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator. In most modern scientists this belief has died: it will be interesting to see how long their confidence in uniformity survives it.”*

-C. S. Lewis

It is argued that the organized symmetry of the text argues for a non-literal, non-narrative, non-chronological interpretation. Also, the words, “day,” “evening,” and “morning” are considered to be anthropomorphic or figurative attempts to explain an unexplainable concept about God and his work in limited human terms.

In summary, the framework view purports that the first three days of creation correspond to the second three days, indicating that each pair of days (1&4, 2&5, and 3&6) are referring to the same creative act or concept and that the author was intending the account to be non-literal in regard to the elements of time and sequence. The following chart illustrates the supposed correspondence of the creation days, which, it is argued, would inform the reader that each pair of days was a single creative act.

**Lee Iron’s & Meredith G. Kline’s Framework View**



*“What can be more foolish than to think that all this rare fabric of Heaven and earth could come by chance, when all the skill of art is not able to make an oyster!”*

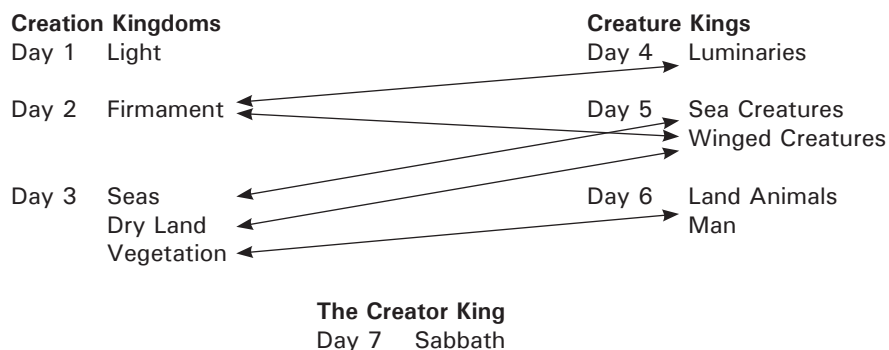
*-Jeremy Taylor*

A weakness of the framework view is that one of the most obvious elements of the text is its chronological arrangement. Ordinal numbers are used (first, second, third) indicating clear chronological progression. The chronological arrangement of the text is also clear in its logical progression. Light is created prior to the luminaries that govern it. The firmament is made prior to the luminaries that fill it. The seas are made prior to the creatures that fill them. Land is formed prior to the vegetation and creatures that inhabit it. The entire account climaxes with the creation of man to rule over the earth. It is difficult to think that any reader would disregard this obvious chronology because chapter two, verse 19 appears to speak of the creation of the animals out of chronological order. Also, the tense of the word “formed” in Genesis 2:19 (which seems to say that the animals were created after man) apparently can be translated “had formed,” since the NIV translates it as past tense and the ESV shows this as a possible marginal reading.

Another weakness of the framework interpretation is that apparently no one saw this literary framework prior to the last couple decades. If we are to put ourselves in the place of the original reader, can we really say that this supposed framework is such an obvious literary device that Moses intended his readers to hold to it in spite of his clear and obvious chronological arrangement (first, second, third, etc.)? The framework theory is shadowy at best, shadowy enough that apparently no interpreters saw it until the recent clash between Genesis and modern scientific scenarios.

The concept of a framework is not as straightforward as presented. Actually, the luminaries created on day four are not placed in anything created in the supposedly corresponding day one, but in the firmament created in day two. Similarly, sea creatures created on day five are placed in the “seas” created on day three,<sup>29</sup> not in the widely dispersed waters of the supposedly corresponding day two. Also, the flying creatures created on day five are placed both in the firmament created on day two and on the land created in day three. So, although it is clear that God created the environments for His creatures prior to creating them (which makes sense), there is no strict correspondence between the days that would point the reader to believe that days one & four, two & five, or three & six are referring to the same creative events or concepts. The following chart more accurately represents the correspondence between the environments created in days one through three and the inhabitants of those environments in days four through six. (Actually vegetation, created on day three, isn’t an environment, but an inhabitant of the earth.)

### A More Accurate Look at the Genesis Account



Upon closer examination, the supposed correspondence between the days breaks down. All the correspondence that remains is that days one and four both involve separation of light and darkness and days three and six both involve two creative statements. Any additional correspondence is shadowy at best.

Concerning the source of light before the sun: even if Genesis 2:4-7 does indicate that ordinary providence was at work during the creation week, nothing in chapters one or two argues against God's use of extraordinary, supernatural providence as well. Clearly, God worked in ways during the creation week that were very different from how He has worked since that time. In the midst of all the supernatural activity of the creation week, it should not surprise us that God might create and sustain light through extraordinary providence prior to the creation of the sun, moon, and stars.

Additionally, the modern hard and fast distinction between the natural and supernatural have largely resulted from the influence of naturalism. Moses and his readers most likely had a fuzzier conception than we do of the line between the natural and supernatural and would probably not have been concerned whether God was using natural providence or supernatural means to sustain the light present on days one through three. Again, we need to put ourselves in the place of the author and his readers to understand the author's intended meaning and not place our modern scientific grid on the text. J. Ligon Duncan III and David W. Hall, in their response to the framework view in the book *The G3N3S1S Debate* ask the following question:

*Can we really believe that Moses intended to signal pre-modern hearers of Genesis that his account of the days was non-sequential by stating that the sun's creation was on the fourth day? Could such an "exegetical marker" have made sense to anyone in the second millennium B.C.?*<sup>30</sup>

But even if we were to conclude that God only used ordinary providence to sustain created things in between his creative acts, nothing in the text excludes the possibility that the light on day one was somewhat "natural," perhaps stellar material that had not yet been divided. Day four would then involve dividing and organizing the stellar and other material into the sun, moon, and stars and putting them in their places. This would fit with the differentiating, organizing activity of God that occurs throughout the chapter.

The fact that chapter one has a highly organized structure and symmetry does not mean that it should be interpreted as figurative or as not having actually occurred in the sequence indicated. Other narratives in Genesis and throughout the Bible are highly organized and yet straightforward narrative.<sup>31</sup>

Interpreting the timing elements of chapter one as figurative and the other parts of the chapter as literal is arbitrary. Why should the chronology and duration of the creation narrative be interpreted as fig-

***"I have always been suspicious of Christian intellectuals whose primary agenda seems to be to remove embarrassment about being an evangelical and to assure their colleagues that they are really acceptable, rational people in spite of their evangelicalism. While we need to be sensitive to our unbelieving friends and colleagues, we should care far less about what the world thinks than about what God thinks of our intellectual life."***

***-J. P Moreland***

urative, while the rest is taken literally? Concerning the Framework theory's figurative approach, Joseph A. Pipa from Westminster Theological Seminary says:

*Moses' style in chapters two and three is as figurative if not more so than chapter 1 (description of the creation of man; a talking serpent; God's making clothing): why are not these acts made symbolic? Why are not chapters two and three made nonliteral? Why is the flood account a chronological narrative and Genesis 1 is not? Or why do we allow for supernatural intervention later in the Pentateuch (the plagues, crossing the Red Sea, the clothing of the children of Israel not wearing out) but demand that only ordinary providence has been at work in the midst of the omnipotent creating work of God? It seems to me the method has no exegetical brakes. Each decision is made on the basis of the presuppositions of the interpreter. Is this the way we want to instruct young men and women to interpret the Bible?*<sup>32</sup>

***"The Bible is no mere book, but a living creature, with a power that conquers all that oppose it."***

**-Napoleon**

One final weakness of the framework theory is that once you say that days four to six refer to the same events as days one through three, you have a cycle of four events, not seven. This violates the sabbatical week that is established upon the events of creation.

## **12. Can the Biblical account be interpreted to show that Noah's flood was a local flood, confined to the region of Mesopotamia?**

At face value, Genesis 6-9 teaches a worldwide flood of the entire earth. Such a flood is inconsistent with evolutionary and long-age histories for the earth, since it would radically alter modern science's approach to geology, paleontology, archeology and many other sciences. If there was a catastrophic world-wide flood, as the Bible describes, the vast majority of all fossils would have been deposited, not over vast ages, but in a little over a year during the flood. Since all these buried plants and other creatures would have existed at the same time, there could be no evidence in the fossil record for evolution. And if there was a worldwide flood, the vast majority of all geological formations would have been formed in it, effectively nullifying any geological evidence for an earth that is millions or billions of years old. Therefore, there is little more threatening to an evolutionist or old-age proponent than the idea of a cataclysmic world-wide flood of Biblical proportions. Those who attempt to harmonize the Genesis account with modern scientific ideas almost universally try to show that the flood was only a local flood. But can Genesis 7-10 be interpreted to refer to a local flood? Genesis 7:19-23 says:

*They (the waters) rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. Every living thing that moved on the earth perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark (NIV).*

It is hard to imagine language that could more clearly communicate the world-wide nature of the flood. All the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered to a depth of more than twenty

feet. Every living thing that moved on the earth perished (this fact is repeated three times). Noah and those with him in the ark are the only land dwelling creatures that survived.

In addition to contradicting the clear wording of the passage, the idea of a local flood also has numerous logical fallacies:

- If the flood was local, why did Noah have to build an ark? He and his family could have walked to the other side of the mountains and been safe. Even traveling a long distance would have been far easier than spending many years building a huge ocean-going vessel.
- If animals had populated the earth for millions (even thousands) of years, they would have migrated during that time to remote parts of the world. Why would it be necessary to have them on the ark since similar animals would have lived in other parts of the world?
- Why was the Ark big enough to hold two of every kind of animal? If only Mesopotamian animals were aboard, the Ark could have been much smaller.<sup>33</sup> The ark was approximately 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high with a gross tonnage of 14,000 tons—in the same category as today’s ocean-going vessels.
- Why were birds sent on board? These could simply have winged across to a mountain range away from the local area.
- If the Flood was local, how could the waters rise to twenty feet above the mountains? Water seeks its own level. It couldn’t rise to cover the local mountains while leaving the rest of the earth untouched.
- How could a local flood last almost a year after the rains quit falling and the subterranean waters ceased to flow?<sup>34</sup>
- The source of water was not only from rain, but “all the springs of the deep burst forth” (Genesis 7:11, NIV). The water came both from above and below, something not typical for local floods and possibly implying that the oceans rose to flood the earth.
- The world known to the Hebrew reader was much larger than Mesopotamia. They were very familiar with Egypt. It would have been difficult for them not to include Egypt in their interpretation. Any flood that would simultaneously cover all the mountains of Mesopotamia and Egypt would certainly have to be a worldwide flood.
- Presumably, the readers were familiar with Ararat. Whether in Turkey or northern Iran, these mountains are much farther away than a local flood could possibly reach.<sup>35</sup>
- Many ancient cultures have recollection of such a flood. Josephus believed in a world-wide flood and quoted from numerous pagan sources to show that the flood occurred.<sup>36</sup>
- If the flood was local and if fossils are formed primarily through flooding, fossils should be confined to Mesopotamia, when, in fact, they have been found on all continents. The huge fossil graveyards in Wyoming and Colorado and many other places in the world show evidence of cat-

*“All that is not eternal is eternally out of date.”*

*-C.S. Lewis*

***“The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world.”***

***-Charles Dickens***

astrophic flood deposition that could only be the result of rapid burial of colossal scope, a scope unknown to floods today.

Genesis 9:9-11 describes the promise that God gave to Noah never again to send a universal flood to destroy the earth. The language God uses unmistakably reaffirms the worldwide nature of the flood.

*Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth” (NIV).*

God refers to the ark-inhabiting creatures as “every living creature on earth.” There were no other living creatures remaining on earth, except those who were with Noah in the ark. Also, in verse eleven, he promises to never again cut off all life by the waters of a flood, nor to ever destroy the earth again with a flood. Verses 16 and 17 further reinforce the global nature of the flood:

*“Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth. So God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth’” (NIV).*

It was necessary for God to make a covenant with “all life” because He had just destroyed “all life” from the face of the earth. Also, the rainbow covenant is not given just to Noah and the creatures with him, but applies to all who see the rainbow down through subsequent generations. Yet there have been many and devastating local floods throughout the history of the earth since Noah’s day, showing that Noah’s flood was unique, destroying both the earth and all creatures under the entire heavens.

In 2 Peter 3:3-7, Peter affirms the historicity and world-wide nature of the flood

*First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (NIV).*

If we view the flood as a local flood, should we not view the coming judgment as a local judgment as well, perhaps one only for Israel? No! Peter describes both as world-wide conflagrations, the first destroying “the world at that time,” and the second to destroy the “present heavens and earth.”

Interestingly, Peter’s description of the coming scoffers’ statement fairly accurately describes the uniformitarian assumption behind much of the historical sciences, “Everything goes on as it has from the beginning of creation.” But Peter refutes this idea by pointing out the dramatic, world-wide destruction brought about by the flood.

### 13. Can the creation account be interpreted to harmonize with evolution, in what is called theistic evolution?

Theistic evolution is the belief that God created all living things over millions of years through the process of evolution. Thus all living things, including man, evolved from other living things. But Genesis 2:7 says that the Lord “formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (NASB), indicating that ~~man did not arise from other life forms, but was created from the dust of the earth.~~ Genesis 3:19 reaffirms this: “By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19, NASB). Other verses that affirm that man was created out of dust are Job 10:9; 34:15, Psalm 90:3, 103:14, Ecclesiastes 12:7, and 1 Corinthians 15:47-49. Additionally, Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 says that the animals also came from dust, not from lower life forms. Psalm 104:29 affirms this as well.

Another contradiction between the idea of theistic evolution and the Genesis account is that Genesis 1:11-12, 20-21, 24-25, 7:14 & 8:19 all state that God created plants and animals to reproduce after their “kind,” not to produce any type of creature other than their own kind. These statements contradict the idea of macro-evolution.<sup>37</sup>

### 14. How would acceptance of theistic evolution affect our understanding of God’s goodness and salvation?

At the end of His creative work, God said that everything He had made was very good. Yet, the geological and fossil records contain abundant evidence of each of the following:

- Death (and burial) of both animals and men.
- Cancer and other diseases in the creatures that were buried.
- Carnivorous activity (some animals were buried while fighting or devouring one another).
- Earthquakes (geology seems to indicate that the mountains were pushed up by the collision of the plates of the earth, which would certainly cause earthquakes).
- Floods (fossils are not formed unless plants and animals are rapidly buried, and the formation of massive fossil graveyards required massive flooding).

So, theistic evolution, which teaches that the fossil record was deposited prior to the fall of man, must view these calamities as part of God’s “very good” creation. Theistic evolutionist Dr. Howard Van Till summarizes the issue like this:

*“It is an incontrovertible scientific fact that there is a long history of life and death for a period of billions of years before people like you and I appeared on earth. So physical death before the fall must be accepted as a fact of science.”<sup>38</sup>*

*“Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in Thee.”*

*-Augustine*

***"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else."***

***-C.S. Lewis***

But what does this supposed "fact of science" tell us about the character and nature of God? How can a good God create a world with such massive amounts of suffering, disease, struggle, violence, and pain? How would a theistic evolutionist answer Harvard anthropologist Irven DeVore:

*I personally cannot discern a shred of evidence for a benign cosmic presence. I see indifference and capriciousness. What kind of God works with a 99.9 percent extinction rate?<sup>39</sup>*

Theistic evolution teaches that God created through a process involving the death of enormous numbers of creatures and the extinction of vast numbers of species. What kind of God would create in this way? What kind of God would use death and the struggle for survival as a kind of creative force? The indifferent and capricious God of theistic evolution must have created, as His original design, a world filled with death, violence, suffering, and pain. It is difficult to conclude that such a God is a good God, a God of joy, peace, love, and life.

But beyond obscuring the goodness of God, theistic evolution strikes right to the core of the Christian message. This is boldly confessed by, Thomas Ambrose, an Anglican Priest, who reveals where the acceptance of theistic evolution has taken him theologically.

*Fossils are the remains of creatures that lived and died for over a billion years before Homo sapiens evolved. Death is as old as life itself by all but a split second. Can it therefore be God's punishment for Sin? The fossil record demonstrates that some form of evil has existed throughout time. On the large scale it is evident in natural disasters. The destruction of creatures by flood, ice age, desert and Earthquakes has happened countless times. On the individual scale there is ample evidence of painful, crippling disease and the activity of parasites. We see that living things have suffered in dying, with arthritis, a tumor, or simply being eaten by other creatures. From the dawn of time, the possibility of life and death, good and evil, have always existed. At no point is there any discontinuity; there was never a time when death appeared, or a moment when evil changed the nature of the universe. God made the world as it is; evolution as the instrument of change and diversity. People try to tell us that Adam had a perfect relationship with God until he sinned, and all we need to do is repent and accept Jesus in order to restore that original relationship. But perfection like this never existed. There never was such a world. Trying to return to it, either in reality or spiritually, is a delusion. Unfortunately it is still central to much evangelical preaching.<sup>40</sup>*

This clergyman is candid about how his evolutionary philosophy led him to reject the very core of the gospel. Theistic evolution views death, not as an enemy needing to be defeated through the death and resurrection of Christ, but as a natural part of life and of God's "very good" created order. And if death is good, why do we need a Savior? If there has never been a world without sin, suffering and death, and if the world we see is all that has ever been, it would be foolish to think that there ever will be a different world. Whatever salvation is, it cannot be a place of perfection, free from pain, suffering, violence, and death. Although not all theistic evolutionists are as consistent as Ambrose in accepting the implications of their beliefs, it is hard to see how theistic evolution does not undermine the very foundations of the gospel.



**15. Some believers have rejected macro evolution, but accepted a local flood and an earth that is billions of years old in the idea of “progressive creation.” Does this solve the theological problem?**

Progressive creation, as popularized by astronomer Hugh Ross, theorizes that God created plants, animals, and man in their various kinds and from the dust of the earth<sup>20</sup> rather than through an evolutionary process. Yet progressive creation understands Him to have done this over millions of years, with each creation “day” extending over vast ages.<sup>41</sup>

Progressive creationists can be commended for rejecting macro-evolution and accepting Genesis’ statements that God created creatures to reproduce after their “kind.” Progressive Creation also avoids theistic evolution’s problem of God using death and the struggle for survival as a creative force. In its belief that God created life from the dust of the earth, it also soundly rejects naturalism and embraces the reality of the supernatural. Also, it teaches that Adam and Eve actually existed as the very first humans, that there was a first temptation, a first sin, and a subsequent judgment upon mankind and the earth. Therefore it teaches that there was once a world without human death, suffering, or disease.

However, progressive creation agrees with theistic evolution that the fossil record (except for human fossils)<sup>42</sup> was laid down over millions of years prior to the end of creation day six. Although rejecting the death of humans prior to the fall, it teaches that animals died, suffered, and devoured one another prior to God’s curse of the earth. These conditions with animals were part of God’s original “very good” created order. This is no small problem, as shown by the following:

- It continues to compromise the goodness of God. Atheistic schools in the Soviet Union used to show elementary students videos of carnivores attacking, disemboweling, and eating cute and defenseless animals. The shocked and traumatized children were then told that there was no good God who would create such a world of struggle and violence. Those who believe in carnivorous activity prior to the fall and curse would have difficulty answering such challenges to the goodness of God.
- Many of the Hebrew readers were shepherds familiar with carnivorous animals. As they read the book of Genesis, they would find that their forefather Jacob bore the loss of animals to carnivores himself, rather than report them to his father-in-law (31:38). As they continued reading, they would come across God’s promise in Leviticus 26:6 that if they obeyed Him, He would eliminate harmful beasts from the land. Then they would come to Deuteronomy 32:24, where God warned that disobedience would result in the multiplication of these animals, devouring both livestock and humans. Could they possibly have considered such behavior by animals to be part of God’s original “very good” creation, as progressive creation and theistic evolution teach?
- Isaiah 11:6-9 describes the coming new order, “The wolf will live with the lamb...They will neither harm nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (NIV). This implies that the hurting and destroying of animals by one another is not consistent with God’s perfect plan which will be restored in the future.

*“Another century  
and there will not be  
a Bible on earth!”*

*-Voltaire (1694-1778) whose  
home was later used as a  
distribution center for Bibles in  
many languages.*

- Death from old age and the processes of disease and parasites in animals are biologically parallel, if not identical, to what happens with man. It seems somewhat incongruous to say, on the one hand, that these processes in animals are part of God's pre-fall, "very good" creation and to say, on the other hand, that they are a result of the fall and the curse in man. And what does this say about the profession of the veterinarian? If death and disease among animals is part of God's "very good" creation, is the veterinarian fighting against the plan of God?
- Toward the end of creation day six, God gave mankind the job of ruling over the animals. Yet progressive creation envisions that fish, birds, and animals had been killing each other for millions of years prior to this. It would seem that Adam, who was given the responsibility of being a caring, protecting ruler, would have tried to prevent them from killing each other. But wouldn't such a protective desire on Adam's part go against God's well-established and "very good" created order?
- Progressive creation also has to consider earthquakes and floods to be part of God's "very good" creation, since they are recorded in the geologic record. Yet these do untold damage in our world, destroying the lives of men and animals.
- Progressive creation effectively diminishes the traditional Christian understanding of the curse's effects. It tends to reduce the curse to a diminishing of the ground's productivity, as stated in Genesis 3:17-19. Yet, Romans 8 states that the creation awaits the revealing of the sons of God and that God subjected the creation to futility. This passage seems to envision a much larger release of creation from "it's bondage to decay" (Romans 8:21 NIV) than simply increased productivity of the ground.

Minimizing the effects of the curse on creation is no small error. How do we answer people who are angry at God because their property or pets or livestock have been destroyed in a hurricane, tornado, earthquake, flood, or forest fire? How do we comfort people devastated by a tsunami resulting from an earthquake? Do such disasters occur because God has cursed the earth as a judgment on us for our sin, or should we consider them wonderful blessings; part of the original created order of a "good" God? If we believe that God, Himself, created them, our ability to defend the goodness of God is seriously compromised.

## 16. Can the Biblical account be harmonized with the actual scientific data?

What we observe in the world around us ought to line up with the actual history of how things came to be. It should not be a surprise, then, that when we assume that God exists, that creation involved supernatural acts on His part, and that the earth was at one time flooded in a huge cataclysmic event, the scientific data can, by and large, be interpreted to support a young earth and world-wide flood. Certainly, creationist and young-earth scientists still have problems to solve and work to do. Yet a few privately-funded scientists have been making significant progress toward finding solutions to some of the tension points between the scientific data and a straightforward reading of the Biblical creation account. On the other hand, scientists who believe in evolution, in spite of their massive amounts of funding and decades of research, continue to have massive problems correlating the scientific data to

*"I follow the example of St. Augustine, who was . . . the first and almost the only one who determined to be subject to the Holy Scriptures alone."*

*-Martin Luther*

the evolutionary, uniformitarian scenario. If, indeed, the book of Genesis accurately describes the history of the early earth, the scientific data will continue to support it, and increasingly so as additional research is undertaken. Already, the evidence has forced many geologists to turn from a strict uniformitarian position toward more catastrophic scenarios. Also, evolutionists are being challenged by the lack of evidence for evolution and the lack of a viable mechanism for its accomplishment. In the end, the full scientific data, rightly interpreted, will universally support the true history of the earth and universe. I believe that this will ultimately line up with a straightforward reading of the Genesis account.

Here are a few very brief arguments and some resources that support the young-earth creationist position:

**Evolution:** Creationists agree with evolutionists in regard to what has been referred to as “micro-evolution”—changes within a gene pool or Biblical “kind.” But creationists have consistently pointed out the lack of evidence for macro-evolution—an addition of new information leading to new “kinds.” Darwin predicted that the fossil record would eventually show numerous transitional fossils. Yet even a century and a half later, evolutionists can only point to a handful of dubious examples. Additionally, scientists have no viable evidence that constructive genetic information has been added or is being added to any gene pool. All known changes and differentiation can be attributed to a loss or sorting of information, rather than an increase in it. An excellent summary of creationist arguments against evolution can be found in Jonathan Sarfati’s books, *Refuting Evolution I* and *Refuting Evolution II*. These books are a response to National Academy of Science’s educator’s guidebook *Teaching about Evolution and the Nature of Science*. Sarfati’s books are available online at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/RE1/index.asp> and <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/RE2/index.asp>.

**The Flood:** If a world-wide flood of Biblical proportions did occur, surely we ought to be able to see evidence for it in the geological formations on earth. Such evidence is abundant and persuasive. The *Genesis Flood* and *The Young Earth* (see bibliography) are a good place to start. A list of online articles can be found as follows:

*World-wide flood:* <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/flood.asp>.

*Geological evidences:* <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/Geology.asp>

*Catastrophic plate tectonics (rapid movement of the plates of the earth) as a possible mechanism for the flood:* <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/tectonics.asp>.<sup>43</sup>

**The Age of the Earth:** For a list of online articles giving evidence for a young earth from astronomy, atmospheric science, botany, geology, glaciology, human history, and oceanography, see: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/Home/Area/faq/young.asp>.

**Ancient starlight:** Starlight from distant galaxies, apparently billions of light-years away, has been a difficult issue for young earth scientists to explain.<sup>44</sup> A few articles addressing this issue can be found at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/search/Default.aspx?qt=starlight>

*‘We have no acceptable theory of evolution at the present time. There is none; and I cannot accept the theory that I teach to my students each year. .. I teach the synthetic theory known as the neo-Darwinian one, for one reason only; not because it’s good, we know it is bad, but because there isn’t any other.’*

*-Professor Jerome Lejeune*

Interestingly, starlight and time pose a problem for the big bang theory as well: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v25/i4/lighttravel.asp>

**Radiometric dating:** Radiometric dating has tended to be extremely inconsistent. For example, rock from the lava dome at Mount Saint Helens, which was formed during October 1986, returned Potassium-Argon “ages” ranging from 340,000 to 2.8 million years.<sup>45</sup> Yet these rocks are only twenty years old! The Creation Research Institute has recently completed a multi-year project studying radiometric dating. Their research presents several lines of physical evidence suggesting that radioactive decay rates were much higher in the past than they are today. This would require much younger radiometric dates, pointing to an age for the earth in the thousands rather than billions of years. The research has also verified that measurable carbon 14 is found in coal and even diamonds, placing their age at a few thousand years. See online resources at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/dating.asp>

**17. If the scientific data can be interpreted to support a world-wide flood, a recent creation, and the creation of “kinds” rather than macro-evolution, why do the vast majority of scientists believe in evolution and an earth that is billions of years old?**

This may be one of the most important questions addressed in this paper. Imagine with me that 50% of the scientific community believed in and strongly argued for a sixthousand-year-old earth and a world-wide flood. How would this affect Christians’ interpretation of Genesis chapter one? Would many, if any, Christians interpret chapter one in any way other than its straightforward reading? The truth is, we are intimidated by the fact that over 95% of scientists believe in evolution and an earth that is billions of years old.

Yet bias in the scientific community is common and in this case is often obvious. For example, it’s ironic that scientists look at pictures of horizontal marks on the cliffs of Mars and speculate that Mars, which currently has little, if any, liquid water, was at one time flooded with water. Yet, the scientific community tends to scoff at the idea of a world-wide flood, even though the earth is three quarters covered with water and has enough water to cover its surface two miles deep if the earth’s surface was leveled. Marine fossils are found on the highest mountains, indicating that they must have at one time been flooded by water. Why does the scientific community scoff at the idea of a world-wide flood of the earth, yet readily accept the idea that Mars, a planet evidently drier than the Gobi desert, was once flooded with water?

Could it be that the scientific community’s bias stems from its presuppositions and its a-priori acceptance of evolution and rejection of God as creator? Romans chapter one states that unredeemed humans tend to flee from God and reject the knowledge of God and whatever truths remind them of God or His glory. The world of men is at war with God and this includes many scientists. The apostle John states that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Should we be surprised, then, when we find that scientists, our culture’s primary thinkers and intellectual leaders, are deceived by and influenced by the devil’s schemes and philosophies?

*“I am an ardent evolutionist and an ex-Christian, but I must admit that... the literalists are absolutely right. Evolution is a religion.... Evolution therefore came into being as a kind of secular ideology, an explicit substitute for Christianity.”*

*-Michael Ruse*

Romans one is just as true today as during the days of idolatry. Men suppress the truth in unrighteousness. We tend to worship the creation rather than the creator. In Paul's day, idolatry tended to envision gods who were personifications of the forces of nature. So, the mythology of ancient paganism could almost be seen as an attempt to avoid the Creator God and see the world as self-creating, just as today's naturalistic evolution does. Humanism, atheism, and agnosticism are no less culpable and irrational than idolatry—they are just more sophisticated.

Another factor is that the scientific community has become deeply entrenched with the presumption of evolution. There have been few scientists researching the young earth, world-wide flood model and they have been poorly funded. Significant young-earth arguments and evidences are either not yet well developed or are relatively new and unknown. Additionally, scientists are becoming increasingly specialized in narrow fields of study. Many have been taught evolutionary concepts and assume that others have done the work or research to support it and simply don't feel the need to seriously reexamine it.

*“Everything Scripture teaches about sin and redemption assumes the literal truth of the first three chapters of Genesis. If we wobble to any degree on the truth of this passage, we undermine the very foundations of our faith.”*

*-John MacArthur*

### **18. How should Christians relate and interact with scientists or others who strongly believe in evolution and uniformitarianism and who scoff at those who don't?**

When trying to persuade people committed to naturalism, wisdom would normally advise us to follow the lead of the intelligent design movement by focusing discussion on the idea that creation proves the existence of an intelligent Creator. Just as we don't typically lead with the issue of women's roles when presenting the gospel to people committed to feminist thinking, so it is normally unwise to lead with the idea that the earth is young and all fossils were laid down in a world-wide flood. The gospel is the power of God for salvation. Often, people can come to faith in Christ while still holding to theistic evolution and uniformitarianism. Afterwards, they may desire to re-examine their belief in evolution and an old earth.

However, since the gospel is the power of God for salvation, care should be taken not to undermine the gospel or present a weakened gospel that fails to state that God created all things and so has authority to judge us. Also, we must proclaim the Biblical understanding that God created a perfect world without sin, suffering, and death and that sorrow and suffering are present in the world as a result of our sin. However, these concepts can often be shared without specifically refuting evolution or discussing the age of the earth.

In some instances, a person may be unwilling to embrace the gospel because he sees the incongruity between the Genesis account and the prevailing scientific opinion. In such cases, we may need to interact and point him to evidence that supports the Biblical account so that He can believe in God and His word with intellectual integrity.

*“The human body has been called the microcosm of the universe, a little world of wonders and a monument of divine wisdom and power, sufficient to convince the most incredulous mind of the existence of the Great Designer.”*

*-A. B Simpson*

**19. If the Scripture is so clear regarding the creation week and world-wide flood, why are many respected Christians open to attempts at harmonizing the creation account with evolutionary and uniformitarian thinking?**

Godly and respected Christian leaders of the past, such as C. S. Lewis, Bernard Ramm, and Francis Schaeffer, as well as present leaders, such as Norman Geisler, John Ankerburg, Charles Colson, Walter Kaiser, and others have expressed openness to theistic evolution or to progressive creation. Hugh Ross’ Reasons to Believe web site lists 41 Christian leaders of the present and past who have expressed openness to an old earth perspective or to theistic evolution. Yet, to be fair to these men, we must acknowledge that most have not actually advocated theistic evolution or an old-earth position, but simply expressed some openness to it. Some on the list seem to have simply used the Big Bang Theory as an argument that the universe had a beginning.

There are probably many and varied reasons that godly Christian leaders might disagree with the thrust of this paper or with the strength that it has argued for a straightforward reading of Genesis. I haven’t thoroughly studied each person’s position and don’t want to speak for anyone else. But here is a list of possibilities that I can think of.

- Some may agree that both the Scripture and science reveal truth but disagree with this paper’s conclusion that Scripture is a far more reliable witness for early earth’s history than are the historical sciences.
- Some may not have considered the theological and practical ramifications of attempts to harmonize Genesis with evolutionary and uniformitarian scenarios. They may not see the importance of making this a battleground. Or they may not agree that these ramifications exist.
- Common principles of Biblical interpretation have not been fully agreed upon in evangelical Christianity. Some may disagree with this paper’s insistence that the goal of interpretation should be to find the author’s intended meaning as it would be understood by his original audience. Or some may disagree with certain specific points of interpretation.
- Some may make different assumptions concerning the authorship of Genesis, the time period in which it was written, or the world view of the author and his readers.
- Much of the increasingly persuasive, but recent scientific data and theories that support a young earth and a world-wide flood may have been unavailable to them or have not been seriously studied by them. Some may have unanswered questions about scientific data that, at face value, might point toward evolution or a billion-year-old old earth.
- Some may not want the gospel to be ridiculed or Christians to be branded as ridiculously stupid. Young earth creationists and their teachings tend to be ridiculed by much of the scientific community. Some believers’ attempts to harmonize the Bible with modern scenarios, at least in part, stem from a commendable desire to win people to Christ and not to unnecessarily alienate them.

- Some may not have seriously considered how secular man's rejection of God blurs his objectivity. They may be intimidated by the scientific community's wholesale acceptance of evolution and a four billion-year-old earth.

## **20. What should our attitude and approach be toward Christians who disagree with us on the interpretation of these key passages?**

Since many of these creation issues are not core doctrines necessary for salvation, we should treat Christians who disagree as brothers and sisters in Christ, love them, respect them, and work shoulder to shoulder with them whenever possible. Christians must be able to disagree on doctrines not essential for salvation and remain united. On the other hand, we should not yield what we consider to be clearly taught, important truths to a sense of ambiguity simply because people we respect disagree. We should humbly teach and preach what we believe is important without disparaging our brothers who disagree.

If someone who disagrees is interested and open to dialog, we should seek to interact with them and encourage them to investigate the scientific and textual evidence for a straightforward reading of Genesis. We could also encourage them to remain true to the Scriptures regardless of pressures from the scientific community. We should seek to correct any exalted opinions of secular "science" that they may have, pointing them to the true wisdom that stems from the revelation of God as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 1-3 & Colossians 2.

Also, we should remain open to the possibility that we may have wrongly interpreted Genesis or misunderstood the author's intended meaning.

## **21. If these creation issues are non-essential, are they worth debating?**

Some have argued that the issues addressed in this paper are not important enough to debate. The presumption is that we can hold divergent views on evolution and the age of the earth and remain largely unaffected by possible deception. But how do we know which doctrines are important and which are not? Are we really so wise that we can judge which doctrines are crucial and which peripheral? The creation account clearly and straightforwardly addresses the issues this paper has discussed. The creation account is clearer and better attested than many other important doctrines; for example the deity of the Holy Spirit or the differing roles of men and women or the proper use of the Old Testament by those living under the New Testament. Should not the clarity of the passages themselves show that they are important enough to debate and defend?

Consider what might happen if all Christians believed in an earth that was merely thousands of years old. What powerful effect might this have on us? Might we better understand the goodness of our God, who recently created a world that was "very good" in every way? Might we better perceive the horrendous consequences of our fall into sin? Might we realize that history is very short and its culmination imminent? Might it have some effect in combating worldliness, as we realize that not only are we, as individuals, aliens and strangers on earth, but that the entire history of the human race is exceedingly short and that the entire race is, in a sense, an alien and a stranger on this damaged earth?

*"Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in Thee."*

*-Augustine*

What effect does it have if we yield the interpretation of these passages to ambiguity? What would this say about our ability to interpret the rest of the Bible? If Christians hear their leaders say that Genesis 1-11, Exodus 20, 2 Peter 3, etc. are so ambiguous that we can't really know what they say and yet themselves read something so straightforward and clear, does this not seriously compromise their confidence in their own and their leader's ability to understand the Scriptures?

A. W. Tozer has said, "We should and must learn that we cannot handle holy things carelessly without suffering serious consequences."<sup>46</sup> We may not always know or understand what the consequences may be, but they will affect us none the less. Although most of these contemporary issues concerning creation are not addressed in our doctrinal statement and are non-essentials in regards to saving faith, we ought to be slow to consider any clear teaching of Scripture an unimportant doctrine not worthy of serious defense and debate.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> To my knowledge, no Great Commission leader believes in macro evolution or rejects supernatural miracles within creation and beyond.
- <sup>2</sup> The Holy Bible : English Standard Version. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.
- <sup>3</sup> New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.
- <sup>4</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company.
- <sup>5</sup> Today, scientists who hold to uniformitarian views tend to believe that the processes now operating are sufficient to explain the geological history of the earth, but that the rates and intensity of these processes may have varied in the past, allowing for the possibility that the earth's history may have included catastrophic upheavals.
- <sup>6</sup> See, the GCLI paper The Bible and Psychology, Sociology, Science, and Business Principles (year 1, session 2) for further thoughts on the relationship of the Bible and science.
- <sup>7</sup> If a straightforward reading of the genealogies is accepted, the possibility that the Genesis account is eyewitness testimony is strengthened. Adam's grandson lived until Noah was 80, and Noah lived until the birth of Abram. The longevity of these men allowed them to protect the integrity of their testimony and accurately pass it on to future generations.
- <sup>8</sup> Whether the heavens and earth were created on day one or sometime prior to day one has been a matter of some debate. So has the question of whether verse one describes a separate creative act or functions as a title summarizing God's work in the six days that follow. See Word Biblical Commentary, by Gordon J. Wenham, pp. 11-15.
- <sup>9</sup> The "gap theory," postulates an indeterminate period of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. The gap theory is not widely held today, since it has significant interpretive problems and doesn't harmonize well with modern geological perspectives. A critique of the gap theory can be found at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/Home/Area/AnswersBook/gaptheory3.asp>.
- <sup>10</sup> There is Biblical evidence that some genealogical lists in the Bible skip a few generations. It appears that the purpose of at least some of the genealogies was to prove ancestry, not necessarily to give a complete list of all the ancestors. Yet a list that includes gaps of thousands or millions of years would not serve well in proving ancestry either. Even if there are gaps, it would be hard to stretch the lists more than a few thousand years. Arguments that gaps are possible can be found in The Genesis Flood, by John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, pp 474-489 and in Genesis in Space and Time, by Francis A. Schaeffer, pp 122-124. For an argument that the text cannot support gaps in the early genealogies of Genesis, see [http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/magazines/tj/docs/v17n3\\_Chronogenealogies.pdf](http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/magazines/tj/docs/v17n3_Chronogenealogies.pdf).
- <sup>11</sup> This is assuming that there are no gaps in the genealogies. Also, it is based on the Hebrew text. The Samaritan text gives this as 1,307 years and the Greek Septuagint as 2,262 years.
- <sup>12</sup> Kidner, Derek. Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary, Tynedale Old Testament Commentaries, p. 9.
- <sup>13</sup> The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (Ge 1:4-5). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- <sup>14</sup> For a defense of the idea that the goal of interpretation should be to discern the author's intended meaning, see the first chapter of Validity in Interpretation by E. D. Hirsch, Jr.
- <sup>15</sup> A fairly concise summary of the different schools and approaches to authorship and literary structure of the Pentateuch can be found in Creation and Blessing, by Allen P. Ross, pp. 23-36. A thorough critique of the documentary hypothesis can be found in Gleason Archer's A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. A brief critique can be found at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v20/i4/moses.asp>.
- <sup>16</sup> This phrase, as translated by the ESV appears ten times in Genesis, dividing the book into eleven sections (Genesis 2:4, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, 36:9, 37:2).
- <sup>17</sup> A brief overview of Egyptian and Mesopotamian creation stories can be found at: <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ab83#2000>.
- <sup>18</sup> In his book A Matter of Days, astronomer Hugh Ross gives evidence that a few early Christian and Jewish expositors (particularly Augustine and Philo) either found allegorical meaning in the days of creation or did not interpret them literally (Augustine preferred the idea that God created in an instant.) Yet Ross gives no evidence that any church father or Jewish expositor believed in vast ages for creation or that anyone interpreted the days of Genesis chapter one to be long periods of time. In defending the Scriptures from accusations of error, some church fathers did speculate that God's warning to Adam that he would die "in the day" he ate of the fruit was fulfilled allegorically in that Adam failed to live a thousand years (an allegorical day), but Ross does not show that any of the fathers applied this thousand-year allegory to the "days" of Genesis one.
- <sup>19</sup> The pseudepigrapha is a body of texts written between 200 BC and 200 AD and spuriously ascribed to various Old Testament prophets and kings.
- <sup>20</sup> For a description of references to creation in Josephus, the Apocrypha, and the pseudepigrapha, see Biblical Creationism, by Henry M. Morris, pp 233-248.
- <sup>21</sup> Waltke, Bruce K. Genesis, a Commentary, p 29.
- <sup>22</sup> The difference between Hebrew narrative and poetry is clear and discernable as shown by Dr. C. Taylor in Linguistics, Genesis, and Evolution: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v4/i1/linguistics.asp>.
- <sup>23</sup> For an analysis of how Genesis is viewed as historical and foundational throughout the rest of the Bible, see Biblical Creationism, by Henry M. Morris.
- <sup>24</sup> For a list of Hebrew words that refer to a long period of time, see How Long Were the Days of Genesis One? by Russell Grigg. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v19/i1/days.asp>.
- <sup>25</sup> Strong, J. (1996). The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (electronic ed.) (H216). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.
- <sup>26</sup> A more thorough analysis of the forms of the Hebrew word "day" in Genesis chapter one can be found at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/tj/v17/i2/numbering.asp#f2>. Also, in Genesis 2:4, the Hebrew word "day" is used in a prepositional form: "in the day when the Lord made the heavens and the earth." Used in this prepositional form, the word often refers to an indefinite period of time, as indicated by the translation of this phrase as "when" in the NIV, NLT, GNT, and NCV.

<sup>27</sup> Actually, an interpretation that “morning and evening” refer to the beginning and ending of God’s work hurts the day-age proposition. During the first day, God said, “Let there be light,” and “there was light.” The language is dramatic and strongly implies that God’s work was accomplished instantaneously. The only events that occurred on the first day were that God spoke, light was instantly produced, and God named the light and darkness. If the morning and evening refer to the beginning and ending of God’s work, then the length of the first day would appear to be a few seconds, certainly not millions of years.

<sup>28</sup> The G3N3S1S Debate, edited by David G. Hagopian, p.224.

<sup>29</sup> The preceding chart is in error when it indicates that the seas were created on day two. They were created on day three (Genesis 1:9-10).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 261.

<sup>31</sup> As an example, see Genesis, A Commentary, by Bruce K. Waltke, pp. 18-21.

<sup>32</sup> Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Framework Hypothesis, Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., Ph.D., Westminster Theological Seminary/California, <http://capo.org/cpc/pipa.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/answersbook/arksize13.asp> for a discussion on the adequacy of the ark to hold creatures of every “kind.”

<sup>34</sup> For a chronology of the flood, see the commentary on Genesis 6:19-7:5 in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary.

<sup>35</sup> Josephus and other ancient authors located Ararat either in Turkey or Northern Iran. See <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/flood/ch7.asp>

<sup>36</sup> Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1996, c1987). *The works of Josephus: Complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson., Antiquities I, iii 6.

<sup>37</sup> Macro-evolution would involve an addition of genetic information resulting in evolution (change over time) that crosses the boundary of a “kind.” In contrast, micro-evolution is change over time within certain limits (i.e. within a “kind”) and coming from a loss or sorting of genetic information. An example of macro-evolution would be invertebrate animals developing a backbone. An example of micro-evolution would be the variations in the sizes and shapes of finch beaks that Darwin observed on the Galapagos Islands or as observed in the breeding of domestic animals.

<sup>38</sup> Van Till, Howard. Audio taped debate held on October 27, 1988, quoted by James Stambaugh, M.Div. in *Death Before Sin*, <http://www.icr.org/index.php?module=articles&action=view&ID=295>.

<sup>39</sup> DeVore, I., *Astronomy Might be refashioning Images of God*, *Times-News Weekender*, May 1, 1999. This commonly cited figure is exaggerated — it is based on the evolutionary assumption concerning the many transitional forms that ‘must have existed.’ There are only about 250,000 known fossil species <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v21/i4/oldearth.asp>.

<sup>40</sup> Ambrose, Tom, Just a pile of old bones, *The Church of England Newspaper*, A Current Affair Section, Friday October 21, 1994

<sup>41</sup> See Hugh Ross’ books *Creation and Time*, 1994, Navpress and *A Matter of Days*, 2004, Navpress.

<sup>42</sup> The progressive creation organization *Reasons to Believe* teaches that fossil hominids, such as

Neanderthal man, *Homo Erectus*, and other human-like fossils were not truly humans and not descendants of Adam. Adam was the first hominid with a soul, created by God perhaps 40-50 thousand years ago. See [http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/wieland\\_sarfati\\_statement.shtml](http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/wieland_sarfati_statement.shtml).

<sup>43</sup> I’ve heavily cited the Answers in Genesis web site, not because I prefer it to the Institute of Creation Research web site ([www.icr.org](http://www.icr.org)), but because it has some excellent lists of young-earth creationist articles from many online sources.

<sup>44</sup> The Creation Research Institute is attempting to raise funds to develop a cosmological model in some ways similar to the Big Bang that would support a six day creation and answer the problem of ancient star light as proposed in Russell Humphries book *Starlight and Time*. See <http://www.icr.org/article/2468/>.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v23/i3/radiodating.asp>.

<sup>46</sup> A. W. Tozer *The Best of A. W. Tozer*, p. 64. Compiled by Warren W. Wiersbe. Quoted from Tozer’s *God Tells the Man Who Cares*.

CREATION AND THE GENESIS ACCOUNT**Exercise**

1. Why is it important that we understand and uphold the truth that God is our creator? Why might our hearts sometimes rebel against this idea? Why should we rejoice in it?

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2. This paper argues that the goal of interpretation should be to find the author's intended meaning as it would have been understood by its original audience. Why is it important that we adopt and pursue this goal? What can we do to try to avoid reading the scriptures through the lenses of our own modern worldview?

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3. Did you find persuasive the arguments against interpreting each "day" of Genesis as an age? Why or why not? Which arguments were most persuasive to you? Can you think of other arguments that might apply to this issue?

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CREATION AND THE GENESIS ACCOUNT

**Exercise**

- 4. Why is a worldwide flood such an important issue in understanding the story of the earth's beginning? Why do you think almost all Christians who adopt an evolutionary viewpoint deny a worldwide flood? Do you think the biblical account of Noah's flood can rightly be interpreted to be a local flood? Why or why not?

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- 5. In what ways might an evolutionary scenario and a young-earth creation scenario of the origins of the world produce very different views of God, man, the world, and the future?

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CREATION AND THE GENESIS ACCOUNT

**Exercise**

6. Does it bother you that the vast majority of scientists believe in amoeba to man evolution? If the straightforward biblical account is actually the truth, why do so many scientists disagree with it?

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7. How strongly should we defend the straightforward biblical story, and how should we use wisdom in addressing this issue with unbelievers and fellow believers who disagree with it?

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COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

**Interpreting the Scriptures**

As a leader who is committed to teaching the Scriptures, you must first be proficient in interpreting and understanding the Scriptures. The following are three articles on this subject.





## INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

### The Key Rule

Pastor John Hopler · Columbus, OH

An accurate interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures is the earnest desire of every sincere leader in Christ's Church. Without the Bible, and an accurate understanding of what those Scriptures are saying, how can we possibly know what is truth? Therefore, it is of paramount importance to know how to rightly interpret God's Word.

So, how is this done? How can we have confidence that we are not being deceived in our interpretation of the Word? How can we avoid the fate of those who over the centuries have fallen into the trap of doctrinal error?

*"We owe to  
Scriptures the  
same reverence  
we owe to God."*

- John Calvin

### What do the Scriptures Say?

First, it is interesting to note what the Scriptures emphasize. There is no letter by Paul to the Berean church outlining "The Ten Rules of Hermeneutics." In pointing this out, let me hasten to say that there is great value in detailing rules of interpretation. These rules help us bridge the cultural, literary and historical gaps from the Biblical times to the present. But it is noteworthy that Paul and the other writers did not make this their primary emphasis. Instead, they focused on heart issues in helping their readers properly interpret the Scriptures.

So what do the Scriptures say is the proper way to understand the Bible? The rule given in the Bible is a simple one: the rule of humility. God promises that He will make known His wisdom and His understanding to the one who has a believing and humble heart:

*"At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes'" (Matthew 11:25).*

*"When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2).*

*"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1:5-6).*

### Is it really that simple?

Yes, it is really that simple. But that does not mean it is easy. Humility usually involves hard work and, oftentimes, much sacrifice. And humility in a person's life will be demonstrated in many ways. If a person is truly humble, he will be humble in at least three ways:

1. He will be humble toward God and His Word.



2. He will be humble toward the inspired writers of the Scriptures.
3. He will be humble toward the rest of the body of Christ.

### **Humility Toward God and His Word**

If a person is truly humble toward God and His Word, the following will be true:

1. He will acknowledge that he has no ability apart from God's grace to understand the Scriptures.

*"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).*

2. He will read the Bible not to justify his own personal biases, but with an honest and good heart to genuinely understand the mind of God.

*"...but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2).*

3. He will come to the Scriptures with the attitude of obeying what he reads.

*"If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:17).*

4. He will diligently read and study the entire Bible before jumping to conclusions or settling on a doctrinal issue, realizing that God does not contradict Himself. The humble man will listen to God thoroughly, hearing all that He has to say before coming to conclusions.

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).*

### **Humility Toward the Inspired Writers of the Scriptures**

If a person is humble towards the writers of the Scriptures, the following will be true:

1. With a humble and listening heart, he will take the time to find out what that writer really meant when he used the specific words he used. This would likely mean understanding the usage of that term in the Greek or Hebrew language during that writer's time.
2. He will take the time to understand the literary style that the writer was using and what he was intending to communicate. Was it history? Was it poetry? Was it prophecy?
3. The humble and listening person will study and research the historical setting in which that writer wrote, to better understand what that writer was intending to communicate.

***"The attitudes of humility, reverence, and repentance blessed by God's presence resulted in unforgettable worship. Worship begins with an attitude of reverence and awe and concludes with a commitment to service."***

***- Unknown***

4. The humble and listening person will read the writer's words in context, again to better comprehend what the writer is saying.
5. The person with a genuinely humble and listening heart will do all he can to understand the real intent behind the writer's words. Were they meant to be taken literally? Or were they meant to be taken allegorically? The humble person will not come with preconceived notions either way, but will, in a sense, go and sit at the feet of that writer and listen to and receive words from that writer in the way he intended his words to be received.

### **Humility Toward the Rest of the Body of Christ**

If a person is truly humble toward the rest of the body of Christ, the following will be true:

1. He will take the time to consider the interpretations of other believers in Christ, not only from this era, but also from centuries past.
2. He will allow his interpretations to be critiqued by other believers in Christ, for fear of missing God's mind on the matter at hand.

*"And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain" (Galatians 2:2).*

3. He will grow in his love and respect for all believers (including those with whom he disagrees), realizing that God supernaturally gives wisdom to His body as the Church grows in love and unity.

*"...that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3).*

4. If he has an interpretation of Scripture which is not held by the body of Christ in general, he may communicate his views with conviction, but not with the dogmatism he would communicate more essential doctrines (such as the deity of Christ or salvation by faith). Because of his respect for God's working through his brothers and sisters in Christ, he will be slow to develop his convictions where there is not a general consensus in the universal Church of Christ. He realizes that the fact that there is not unity is a possible indication that God has not made things abundantly clear on the issue, or the issue is not a very important one for the overall purposes of God. (An example of this is the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 where biblical interpretations and practices were determined and settled only after the body of Christ at large agreed on those issues.)

*"I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ and the brightest evidences that He is indeed our Master."*

*- John Newton*

## Humility and Hermeneutics

The person who is familiar with the rules of hermeneutics taught in seminaries and Bible schools will doubtless point out that I have merely restated these rules in a different manner (such as reading passages in context and comparing Scripture with Scripture, etc.). The issue, however, is not primarily one of hermeneutics, but of humility. We must continually emphasize this truth that God grants wisdom to the one who walks by the “rule of humility,” and who trusts in the grace of God for understanding. The one who so walks will work out this humility by practicing hermeneutical rules taught in Bible school classes. These hermeneutical rules (as described in the next article) are extremely important to follow. But let us be careful that we do not fall into the trap of thinking that we can obtain wisdom by trusting in our efforts to obey a predetermined “Ten Rules of Hermeneutics” any more than we can obtain salvation by obeying the Ten Commandments. God’s wisdom, like salvation, comes not because of our works but is a gift given to those with humble faith who show their faith by their works.

The rule is a simple one. God grants grace and wisdom to the humble. Therefore, pursue humility toward God and His Word, toward the inspired writers of the Scriptures, and toward the body of Christ. Then rest assured that the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will Himself “...give you understanding in everything...” (2 Timothy 2:7).

***“Only he who believes is obedient... only he who is obedient believes.”***

***-Dietrich Bonhoeffer***



INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

## Seven Foundational Principles of Interpretation

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer · Ames, IA

### Five Reasons Why Proper Interpretation is Important

1. The Scripture is our authority in all the ultimate questions of life.

*“Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life” (Deuteronomy 32:46-47, NIV).*

2. The devil uses the Scripture to deceive.

*“Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Matthew 4:5-7, NIV).*

3. The reason for much doctrinal confusion in the church is a lack of agreement on the proper principles of interpretation

*“Much of the current debate over the Scriptures among believing Christians is, at its core, a result of failure on the part of evangelicals to come to terms with the issue of hermeneutics. ...while many evangelicals may find a large amount of agreement on the doctrines of revelation, inspiration, and even cononicity, something close to a Babel of voices is heard on methods of interpreting the Scriptures.” — Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.*

4. Confidence in our ability to interpret strengthens our confidence to teach and preach the Word as truth.

*“These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you” (Titus 2:15, NIV).*

5. Adopting improper methods of interpretation leaves us without an adequate anchor and can result in shipwreck to our faith or to leading others astray.

*“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:15-16, NIV).*

***“For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.”***

***- Ezra 7:10***

## Seven Foundational Principles of Interpretation

1. The most important factor in proper interpretation is the illumination of the Holy Spirit. So maintain a clear conscience and a heart that desires to please God.

*“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14, NIV).*

*“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45, NIV).*

*“Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12, NIV).*

*“Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30, NIV).*

2. Scripture is our authority, not tradition or preference, scholarly opinion, or majority opinion.

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NASB).*

Come to the Scripture with as open a mind as possible, willing to question and challenge personal or denominational opinions and traditions.

Pray that God would help you get past your theological and cultural preunderstandings.

3. The Bible is to be interpreted by the same rules as other books and other communication.

The Bible is a revelation from God, but God has chosen to communicate to us in human language and in a manner that is identical to the way we communicate with one another.

Proper interpretation is largely common sense and is as native and universal to man as speech itself.

This approach is called the “literal” or “normal” approach to interpretation. “The purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation. That is, God gave man language for the purpose of being able to communicate with him. God created man in His image which included the power of speech in order that God might reveal His truth to man and that man might in turn offer worship and prayer to God.” — Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986, p 113)

4. The goal of interpretation is to understand the meaning of the passage as the author intended it to be understood.

*“Our aim is to discover what the text meant in the mind of its original author for his intended audience.” — Elliot Johnson*

***“No man is uneducated who knows the Bible, and no one is wise who is ignorant of its teachings.”***

***- Samuel Chadwick***

Some have argued that the author's meaning is irrelevant. What is important is what the verse means to the reader.

*"The answer to 'what does the text say,' becomes not 'what did the author intend for the text to say,' but 'what does the text say to the reader.'" — Elliot Johnson*

Meaning must originate somewhere, and if the author's meaning is irrelevant, then the relevant meaning must originate with the interpreter. The interpreter, then, becomes the author, the originator of meaning.

One way to help determine the author's meaning is to try to put yourself in the place of the original reader.

5. The personal significance and application of a passage is a distinct and secondary action that should occur only after I have understood the author's intended meaning to his original audience.

God does have a message for us in this day and age. The Scripture is written not only for the instruction of those to whom it was written, but also for the instruction of later generations.

*"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 14:4, NIV).*

Yet the application today can only be properly made after the author's intended meaning to his contemporary audience is understood. The scripture was written "for" us, but it was not written "to" us. Rather it was written "to" people who spoke a different language than we do and who lived in a very different culture than we do. Therefore we must understand what the author intended to communicate to them before we can understand what it means for us.

6. The words of scripture do not have a secondary, allegorical meaning in addition to or underneath their natural meaning. Many of the words of scripture are figurative, just as in all other communication. But they must be understood as figurative only when the context requires it. And in this case, the figurative meaning is the natural meaning.

*"The allegorizers believe that because the Bible is a spiritual book, it must be spiritualized, or allegorized, in order to be properly understood. However, since it is a spiritual book, conservatives agree that it needs no further spiritualization by man. God made it a spiritual work, and man's mind cannot improve upon it." — William A. Simpson*

The School of Alexandria, Egypt adopted the allegorical interpretation of the Scripture. St. Clement of Alexandria is considered the first Christian theologian to use allegorical interpretation, giving a method of using it in a practical way. His disciple, Origen, adds other justifications of using allegorical interpretation to the Scriptures.

*"In allegorical exegesis the sacred text is treated as a mere symbol, or allegory, of spiritual truths. The literal, historical sense, if it is regarded at all, plays a relatively minor role, and the aim of the*

***"Dusty Bibles always lead to dirty lives. In fact, you are either in the Word and the Word is conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ, or you are in the world and the world is squeezing you into its mould."***

***- Howard G. Hendricks***

*exegete is to elicit the moral, theological or mystical meaning which each passage, indeed each verse and even each word, is presumed to contain...” — J.N.D. Kelly.*

A couple examples from Origen:

Origen taught that the angel who appeared to Balaam, depicts the Angel of God who was leading His people through the wilderness, while Balaam represents the non-believers, for his name means “vain people.” As for the donkey, it refers to the simple Church that serves non-believers—the Church that reveals to them what they cannot perceive.

Origen taught from the passage where Rebecca drew water from the well every day and so was found by Abraham’s servant and married Isaac. So we must come daily to the wells of the Scriptures. Christ wishes to wed you, too and so sends his servant to you. The servant is the word of the prophets.

An example of allegorical interpretation from the Kitáb-i-Íqán by Bahá’u’lláh

*“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (Matthew 24:26-29).*

The words “sun,” “moon” and “stars” refers to the suns of truth, the prophets of God, the leaders of religion. In another sense these words refer to such laws and teachings of God that have been established in every dispensation. In a third sense they refer to prayer and fasting.

So this verse applies to the waywardness of the divines and the annulment of God’s laws among the religious.

Heavenly bodies will be cloven asunder: “Heaven” means the Heaven of divine revelation. So it is referring to the persecution of the divine prophets.

The allegorical method of interpretation allows the interpreter to symbolically apply almost any meaning he can imagine to the words of scripture. The original author’s intention is not seriously considered and meaning originates with the interpreter.

7. The author’s intended meaning is determined by studying the historical, literary, cultural, grammatical, theological, geographical, and scriptural contexts.

*“If birth and providence had so favored us that we were part of the culture and language when one or another of the prophets or apostles spoke, we could dispense with all background and language study. We would understand these areas as immediately as we now understand speakers and writers in our own day.” — Walter C. Kaiser Jr.*

We are hindered by a cultural, historical, linguistic, geographical, and theological distance.

***“Isn’t it amazing that almost everyone has an opinion to offer about the Bible, and yet so few have studied it?”***

***- R. C. Sproul***

*"I am busily engaged in the study of the Bible. I believe it is God's word because it finds me where I am."*

*- Abraham Lincoln*

**Historical**—What was going on in the lives of the writer and audience? What had their relationship been like prior to this writing? Often there are situations or problems that were known and understood by both the author and his reader that are not immediately evident when the passage is read today. Seek to understand as much as you can about the historical context surrounding the author and his readers.

**Literary**—What literary style did the author write in? Scripture is literature and contains various literary forms, such as poetry, narrative, law, wisdom, and apocalyptic. We should seek to learn and keep in mind the conventions of a literary form when interpreting a passage.

**Cultural**—What customs and practices did the author and audience share that might relate to the author's intended meaning? Bible dictionaries and commentaries are often helpful in understanding historical and cultural differences between biblical times and now.

**Grammatical**—What range of meaning did the words being studied have in that day? Which meaning best fits in this sentence and passage? How do the sentence structure and grammatical forms of the words relate to the meaning?

The meaning of a word is governed by the phrase in which it is used and the meaning of a phrase is often governed by the paragraph surrounding it. Similarly, the meaning of a paragraph is often determined by the author's purpose in the chapter or book as a whole. Seek to discover the author's purposes in writing this book, section, or paragraph. How does the passage or phrase in question relate to that purpose? The single greatest help in understanding the author's meaning is to look at the context, both the immediate context and the broader context. A good way to keep the context in mind is to read the entire book multiple times. Outlining the author's thought is also helpful.

When determining the meaning of a word, avoid the following:

*Root fallacy* — the meaning of a word does not necessarily follow the meaning of its root or roots. For example, the English word "nice" comes from a Latin root that means "ignorant." Yet the modern meaning is much different from the historical meaning of the word's root. This is also often true in the Biblical languages.

*Totality transfer* — a word does not carry all of its senses in any one passage. We must choose one meaning that best fits the passage.

*Prescriptive fallacy* — don't assume that a word has only one meaning in every place it is used. Words in any language are often very fluid and take their meaning largely from the context in which they are used.

*Selective evidence fallacy* — Don't pick the definition that fits your preconceived theology and ignore the others.

**Theological**—What theological concepts did the author and audience share? Each book of the Bible stands on its own, unless the author and his readers were already familiar with previous revelation. A passage in a later book of the Bible should not be the primary means of interpreting a particular passage, since the original readers did not have access to that later revelation.



**Geographical**—Where were the places that are mentioned in the writing and how might their location relate to the author's intended meaning?

**Scriptural**—What part does this book play in revelation history? God's revelation has been progressively revealed throughout history. Yet, later revelation never contradicts previous revelation or makes it defective, inferior, unimportant, or morally primitive.

*"I hold that the words of Scripture were intended to have one definite sense, and adhere rigidly to it... To say the words do mean a thing merely because they can be tortured into meaning it is a most dishonorable and dangerous way of handling Scripture."*

*- J. C. Ryle*



## INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

# A Workshop on the Principals of Biblical Interpretation

Pastor Tim Haring · Morgantown, WV

*“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).*

Hermeneutics can be defined as the science and art of biblical interpretation. Henry A. Virkler explains it this way: “Hermeneutics is considered a science because it has rules and these rules can be classified into an orderly system. It is considered an art because communication is flexible, and therefore a mechanical and rigid application of rules will sometimes distort the true meaning of a communication.”

Hermeneutics is essential because we have historical, cultural, language, literary, and philosophical gaps to our understanding of biblical texts. These gaps must be bridged if we are to interpret correctly. But how do we bridge the gaps?

For those who have completed the original GCLI materials, pages 191-194 address this question. The starting point is humility. Humility toward God, His Word, and His people. We should approach Scripture with a prayerful attitude, relying upon the Holy Spirit for interpretation. We should also have a heart to learn and apply God’s Word to our lives. Both diligent study and a heart to obey are essential if we are to have insight into Scripture.

Humility toward the Church is also important because the Church—both of the past and the present—provides a good check and balance for biblical interpretation. We need to recognize the value of the rest of the body of Christ when it comes to interpreting and applying God’s Word to our lives.

In addition to humility, the student of Scripture must be careful to follow proper hermeneutical guidelines when interpreting Scripture. Below I have listed some of the most common hermeneutic “rules” I have encountered over the years:

1. A text must be interpreted within its proper historical, literary, cultural, grammatical, theological, geographical, and scriptural contexts.
2. Since we acknowledge the inerrancy of Scripture, we recognize that God’s Word cannot contradict itself. Our interpretation of a particular verse or passage cannot contradict what the rest of Scripture has to say about the subject. (We recognize that some passages may seem contradictory, and the apparent contradiction may not be resolved easily.)
3. Difficult or unclear passages should be interpreted in the light of clear ones.
4. Wherever possible, we should allow the Bible to interpret itself.

***“Confidence that one’s impressions are God-given is no guarantee that this is really so, even when they persist and grow stronger through long seasons of prayer. Bible-based wisdom must judge them.”***

*- J. I. Packer*

5. Scripture should be interpreted normatively (also called “literally”). We should look for the normal and obvious meaning of a passage, making allowances for symbolism, literary devices, etc.
6. Biblical examples or stories should not be used to form doctrine unless Scripture provides commands, instructions, or permission to do so.
7. We must take into account the differences between the Old and New Testaments when interpreting certain passages of Scripture. We acknowledge some dispensational characteristics of Scripture. For example, we are no longer required to celebrate the Passover and we do not need to maintain certain dietary restrictions.
8. People should interpret personal experience in the light of the Bible, and not the other way around.

*“If you can not always get the right explanation for some Scripture, be sure you don’t miss the application of it.”*

*-Vance Havner*

### Exercise in Hermeneutics

In order to get some practice at applying hermeneutic guidelines to particular passages of Scripture, I have provided a list of texts that are often misunderstood. Read each set of verses, answer the question related to the passage, and determine which primary hermeneutical principles were applied to arrive at your answer. This exercise may be done individually or in small groups.

1. *Does Matthew 19:16-22 teach that we need to sell all of our possessions to feed the poor?*

No. Scripture clearly teaches that salvation is by faith alone. In Matthew, Jesus is not addressing the *conditions* for salvation. He is addressing the rich man’s *obstacle* to salvation.

Principles involved: #2, #3, #6

2. *In the NIV translation of Philippians 2:5-6, we read that Jesus didn’t regard equality with God something to be “grasped.” Does this passage teach that Jesus had not yet reached divinity, but was reaching for it?*

No. The key to this passage is the Greek word used for our English word “grasp.” The Greek word does not mean “to reach for something.” It means “to cling to something.” Jesus did not view his equality with God something he had to hold onto at all costs. He was willing to set aside his divine attributes in order to take on humanity.

Principles involved: #1 (grammatical rules), #2, #3, #4

3. *According to 1 Corinthians 14:34, are woman allowed to speak at all during a church service?*

Yes. The context reveals that Paul is addressing a particular problem in the church. Other passages of Scripture make it clear that women can pray and prophesy in the church. Therefore, Paul must be addressing a problem with speech that was particularly disruptive. [Editor’s Note: Another interpretation is that 1 Corinthians 11 refers to women praying or prophesying in intimate home meetings, whereas 1 Corinthians 14 refers to women being silent in the larger congregational gathering of the church.]

***“God Himself has condescended to teach me the way. He has written it down in a book. Oh, give me that book! At any price give me the book of God. Let me be a man of one book.”***

*-John Wesley*

Principles involved: #1, #2, #3, #4

4. *Does Revelation 3:20 teach we need to invite Jesus Christ into our heart to be saved?*

No. Revelation 3 is addressed to Christians. The issue here is fellowship with Christ, not salvation. [Editor’s Note: Another possible interpretation is that John in Revelation 3:20 was addressing people in the church who were attending the meetings, but who were not genuinely saved.]

Principles involved: #1, #2

5. *Does Romans 8:28 teach that, for the Christian, nothing can ever go wrong from an eternal perspective?*

No. Romans 8:28 must be tied together with Romans 8:29. The two verses are connected by the word for. The *all things work together for good* is specifically talking about God’s plan of salvation. From foreknowledge to glorification, God guarantees the outcome for believers. Therefore, nothing can separate us from his saving love!

Principles involved: #1, #4

6. *Is Jesus teaching in Matthew 5:27-30 that we need to cut off our hands or pluck out our eyes if we struggle with stealing or lust?*

No. Jesus was using a figure of speech called a hyperbole to make a point. Jesus was not into self-mutilation. He was, however, pointing out the seriousness of sin, and the statement he makes is true: *It would be better to enter Heaven blind or maimed than to go to Hell.*

Principles involved: #3, #5, #7 (Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking in reference to the Old Testament Law)

7. *Does Acts 8:14-17 provide a formula for receiving the baptism of the Spirit?*

No. The entire book of Acts should be viewed as historical, not doctrinal. Although the book contains doctrine, it is not to be used as a guidebook for practice.

Principles involved: #1, #6, #8

8. *Does 1 Corinthians 15:29 teach that we need to baptize the dead?*

No. There is a considerable amount of confusion over this passage. At the very least, the passage should not be viewed as an example to follow, for nowhere in Scripture do we read about baptizing for the dead.

Principles involved: #1, #3, #6

9. *Does Hebrews 6:4-8 teach that we can lose our salvation?*

No. Although there is some disagreement about the interpretation of this passage, the key is found in the illustration the author uses in verses 7-9. (Verse 9 also makes it clear that the author is not applying these verses directly to his believing readers.) The overall context indicates this interpretation: the gospel message “rains down” upon the hearts of people. Some receive the message and bear fruit. Others reject it. When people are continually exposed to the blessings and the message of gospel and they reject it, they are in danger of judgment, for God will make no other provision for their salvation.

Principles involved: #1, #2 (Several other passages of Scripture confirm the security of our salvation), #3, #4

10. *Does Acts 2:37-39 teach that we need to be baptized to be saved?*

No. This passage is at least partially cleared up by looking at the original Greek language. The word “for” can have several meanings in the Greek. For example, it can mean “in order to” (e.g.- He went to the doctor *for* healing, where the sense is “in order to be” healed) or it can mean “because of” (e.g. - He was thrown in jail *for* stealing, where the sense is “because he stole”). It is in this second sense that Peter is using the term here. Also, the rest of Scripture clearly teaches that salvation is by faith alone.

Principles involved: #2, #3, #4 (In verse 41, we read, “Those who accepted his message were baptized,” which indicates that baptism was not part of the gospel message.)

11. *Does Luke 14:26 teach that we should hate our father and our mother?*

No. Ephesians 6:1-2 makes it clear that children are to honor and obey their parents. Luke 14:26 is an example of a passage that needs to be interpreted within the context of the rest of Scripture.

Principles involved: #2, #3, #5 (I would call this hyperbole)

12. *Does James 2:20-24 teach we are saved by doing good deeds?*

No. The key to this passage is the definition of the word “justified.” Justified does not mean “saved;” it means “to declare righteous.” Our good deeds declare something about us—that we are righteous. Of course the rest of Scripture supports this interpretation.

Principles involved: #2

***“There is a way of reading the Bible that seems to leave God far away, off in the shadows somewhere. It is all information and technicalities and knowledge, but feels like you’re sitting with your back towards God. You come up against a difficulty or question, and you go to books, you ask pastors, friends, strangers on the internet, anyone but Him. Gradually God gets smaller and dimmer.”***

***-Unknown***

13. Does 1 Peter 3:21 teach that baptism is essential to salvation?

No. If you have trouble with this one, take heart. You are in good company! Some feel the baptism referred to here is a baptism into trials, which serves to refine us. Most, though, conclude that the baptism here is indeed water baptism, and that the passage is teaching that *that which baptism symbolizes* saves us. We are saved when we identify ourselves with Christ who died, who was buried, and who rose again from the dead. Baptism provides a vivid picture of what Christ did for us. Therefore, our baptism is a symbol of our faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, and it is that faith in Jesus that saves us. This passage, though, is a good example of the need to interpret unclear passages through the lense of clear ones. John 3:16 clearly spells out God's requirement for salvation.

Principles involved: #2, #3

14. Does Proverbs 22:6 promise us that if we raise our children correctly, they will not forsake us?

No. The Book of Proverbs is exactly that—a book of proverbs. We need to be careful not to take as promises what are just meant to be wisdom sayings.

Principles involved: #1

15. Does James 5:14-15 guarantee that anyone the elders anoint and pray over in the name of the Lord will be healed?

Yes. However, the key to this passage is the phrase “in the name of the Lord.” This phrase should be understood to mean “according to the will of the Lord.” When the elders pray and anoint the sick with oil *according to the will of the Lord*, healing will take place. Two other words are worth noting in this passage. The word used for “sickness” in this passage can relate to both physical and spiritual infirmities, and the word used for “oil” in the passage can refer to medicine (acknowledging both the physical and spiritual dimensions of healing).

Principles involved: #1

***“Here, then, is the real problem of your negligence. We fail in our duty to study God’s Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.”***

***- R.C. Sproul***

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So, how did you do? Which principles were used most often? I have discovered that most difficulties in the Bible can be resolved fairly easily by applying only one or two of the “rules” of interpretation. As you can see from the examples we just completed, a great deal of work is sometimes involved in the process of correctly interpreting Scripture, but the work can be fun. We are like detectives solving a mystery. And the better handle we get on applying the principles of interpretation, the better our understanding of the Word will be. May God give us grace to handle accurately the Word of Truth.





INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

**Exercise**

1. What struck you most as you read through these articles?

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2. Many university Bible classes are taught by non-Christians and even atheists. Is a non-Christian capable of properly interpreting the Bible? Why or why not?

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3. What would be a good course of action to take if you came to believe that the Bible taught something different than what you have been taught in the past (i.e., what your church is currently teaching)?

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INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES**Exercise**

4. What are some tools or study methods you use to help you gain a proper interpretation of the Bible?

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5. Set some practical goals and action steps to improve your Bible study and interpretation skills.

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GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

**Building a Church of Prayer**

God desires that His Church be a “house of prayer.” All of our best efforts to win and build people for Christ are weak compared to the work that God does in answer to our prayers. Or, as someone once said, “Prayer strikes the winning blow. Service picks up the pieces.” The following are testimonies of leaders who have taken practical steps to develop each of their churches to become a church of prayer.





BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

## Elders' Prayer Times - Testimony of a Maryland Church

Pastor Tom Short · Columbus, OH

E. M. Bounds said it best when he pointed out that “We are looking for better methods, but God is looking for better men—men of prayer.”

God must have had this in mind when he worked in the lives of Mike Keator, Jack Stockdale, and me in the early days of the Maryland church plant. We had gone forth to proclaim the gospel at the University of Maryland in December of 1979. This was the first of many churches to be planted from Columbus and one of three churches our movement planted that year. We had high hopes of seeing numerous converts and strong disciples raised up to help fulfill the great commission. However, nine months later, during our national convention in New York City, we had to face the fact that we had really accomplished very little. We were faithful, but we were failing to be fruitful. I personally felt a deep sense of shame in letting down our entire movement, for I knew that we had been sent forth with the prayers of multitudes. While many would think it a great accomplishment simply to move 11 families and eight singles to a new city on extremely limited resources and to survive eight babies born that year, unemployment, freak illnesses, and a host of spiritual onslaughts, we had set our sights higher than mere survival. We were in need of a mighty breakthrough which only God could provide!

The Lord specifically challenged me from John 15:8, “*In this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*” I knew I loved Jesus and was following Him with all my heart, but I was not “proving” it because of my lack of fruitfulness. I became desperate to win souls. I felt like Rachel of old when she cried out, “*Give me children, or else I die*” (Genesis 30:1, NKJV). God was working to break my fellow elders as well. Each of us knew we had to see a move of God and we were willing to pay the price to see such a movement.

It was decided that we would meet each morning for prayer. Not being a “morning person,” I would have preferred to meet at 10 am, but one of the brothers suggested and it was agreed upon that we would meet at 6:30—a.m.! The original plan was to pray for half an hour, but rarely were our prayers limited to that time frame. In fact, it was not unusual for us to pray for several hours as we lifted praises to God and cried out for our campus. We prayed intensely and fervently. We prayed in faith. We denied ourselves to intercede for others. And, as Scripture promises, such prayer “*accomplishes much*” (James 5:16).

The church was really born that fall as many students came to Christ, were baptized, and began to follow Him with courage and boldness. As a result of our aggressive evangelism, the campus was abuzz with the gospel. The revival was written up in the school paper, the local paper, and even *Christianity*

*“If the church would only awaken to her responsibility of intercession, we could well evangelize the world in a short time.”*

- T. S. Hegre

*Today* carried a lengthy article about what was happening. We also offered up many prayers for our nation.

The election of 1980 stunned many political observers and I believe our fervent prayers played a part in many of those unexpected victories. There were some prayers which, to my knowledge, remain unanswered to this day. We prayed often that God would use us as a torch to light a gospel fire up and down the east coast. While some churches were planted in this densely populated, but spiritually barren land, our dreams of vibrant campus churches from Washington to Boston have yet to be realized. (Perhaps some reading this article will be the ones God sends forth to accomplish this task!)

Finally, there was a great work done in the hearts of those of us who were praying. Our hearts and spirits were united like never before. We drew close to God. We humbled ourselves before the Almighty and before one another in a special way. Mike, Jack, and I, as well as the other elders who joined us in coming years, were molded into genuine spiritual leaders who led with an anointing from God. We had indeed become “men of prayer.”

***“Prayer does not fit us for the greater work, prayer is the greater work.”***

***- Oswald Chambers***



BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

## How to Have Your Church Committed to Prayer

Pastor Dennis Clark · Parker, CO

I have often thought of Jesus' words, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer*" (Matthew 21:13). What do you think that would look like? We have been challenged for our church to be a "house of prayer." We are not there yet...but we want to be, and I believe we are on the way.

Before I share our story, let's remember that, as leaders, we set the pace for prayer. If desperate, believing prayer is not a part of our lives, it will not be a part of our churches. So let me begin with some personal motivations God has used in my own life.

### 1. Verses

"My heart has heard you say, 'Come and talk with Me.' And my heart responds, 'Lord, I am coming'" (Psalm 27:8, NLT). What a picture of the intimate kind of relationship God desires with us. "Dennis, just come, sit down, and talk with Me..." The Lord has brought this verse to mind regularly the past few months, and has used it to motivate my own heart to say "Lord, I'm coming!"

"...that they should...not be like their forefathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart, and whose spirit was not faithful to God" (Psalm 78:8). For me, "preparing my heart" happens in prayer. Often that's when God speaks to my heart on needs in my life, reminds me of things I need to do, people I need to get with, a note I need to write, or a call I need to make. Prayer re-sensitizes my own heart. Lack of prayer desensitizes my heart.

### 2. Examples/Quotes that I often reflect on:

Jim McCotter: He "followed me up" in basic training. We would walk and talk and pray, and walk and pray. I never knew what prayer was all about until I met Jim. One night I visited him at his chapel on North Base (Ft. Polk). He didn't know I was coming. I opened the door and heard loud talking—very loud, and desperate. I opened the door into the sanctuary and was surprised to find Jim was all alone, walking around the outside aisle, around and around, in desperate, believing prayer. I didn't know what to do, so I joined in walking. It wasn't long before he noticed me. His example of desperate prayer has affected me more than any other quality in his life.

Three years ago, I was reading an article about the priority the church in Korea places on prayer when I ran across this quote: "There is one great difference in the church in America and the church in Korea. The church in America has very much program and little prayer; the church in Korea has very much prayer and little program." – Pastor Cho

***"Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things above all that we ask or think."***

***- Andrew Murray***

3. Motivated leaders within our church (here's our story). Several years ago, God began to stir the hearts of a few men in our church in Maryland with the need of desperate prayer. They shared this prompting and vision with other leaders, and it soon became a weekly gathering known as our "Friday night prayer meeting." Realizing that the average church's prayer meeting is the least attended meeting of the week, we all decided to make it "by invitation only." Are we where we'd like to be as a church when it comes to prayer? No, not yet. But we've got a good foundation upon which to build.

So, what's it going to take for our church and your church to become a "house of prayer?"

### 1. Leaders need to model it themselves.

### 2. Noble plans

*"But the noble man devises noble plans; and by noble plans he stands"* (Isaiah 32:8). I am personally very excited about the unity God is developing among the leaders in our church. We're in the process of clarifying our goals and plans, and uniting our hearts around them. Having united goals and "noble plans" driving our church will have a lot to do with driving us to our knees. *"The complacency of fools shall destroy them"* (Proverbs 1:32). One speaker at a pastors' conference said: "Passion for the glory of God must be the first thing in our lives." He went on to say "Burden produces passion. Do you ever get bothered? If you don't, you don't understand the heart of God." I needed to hear that. It reminded me about the desperate spirit, the non-complacent spirit that I observed as a younger Christian when I was getting my first glimpse of an all-church prayer meeting. We'd worship, sing, share from the Word, pray, worship, pray, share, pray, etc. long into the night. We would have maps either spread out on the floor, or taped to different walls, where groups would huddle together and pray for the future gospel thrusts. We would pray for our city/campus, our state, neighboring states, and other countries. Today, even though I can't remember all the specific states/countries we prayed for back then in the 1970s, my guess is that today we're in every one we prayed for...and more. Just as it is true individually, it is also true as a church: prayer dies for lack of plans...noble plans.

As I look back on our history as a movement, one of the things that characterized our churches was desperate, believing prayer meetings, which often would go long into the night. Today, we are seeing the results. As I think of our future as a church, and as a movement, I ask myself, "Are we as desperate in prayer as we were then? It's so easy to trust in methods, programs, and seminars rather than trusting in the God who put us where we are today. And that trust will be evidenced one primary way: desperate, believing prayer. Might we continue the heritage of our fathers, and continue to be the next generation who DID PREPARE ITS HEART AND WHOSE SPIRIT WAS FAITHFUL TO GOD.

*"What the church needs today is not more or better machinery, not new organizations, or more novel methods; but men whom the Holy Spirit can use -- men of prayer, men mighty in prayer."*

- E. M. Bounds



BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

## Prayer in the Small Group

Pastor Mike Keator · Columbus, OH

*“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men.” 1 Timothy 2:1*

Everyone would agree that prayer is one of the most important activities in the Christian life, and most would agree that it is one of the hardest things to get done. If a survey was taken, my guess is that most Christians would say that they are neither praying as much nor as effectively as they should. So how can we create an environment and a system wherein prayer will take place in such a way that Christ is fully pleased? The small group is an ideal place in which much praying can be accomplished. Many find it much easier to pray with others than alone. We spark each other, we help each other stay focused, and we express in prayer what others may not be able to put into words. It is a lot more fun to pray together than to pray all by ourselves. However, too big of a group can kill prayer. The reason is that if you don't get a chance to pray out loud very much, you get discouraged and lose interest and attention. A small group is just the right size for maximum effectiveness in prayer. Even in a small group, you have to break down into two's, three's, and four's often to keep people fully involved.

A small group meeting that is just a Bible study (as wonderful as Bible study can be) is missing a mighty opportunity to wage war in the Spirit. Jesus said in Matthew 18:19-20, *“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in Heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.”* There is something very powerful about praying in a small group. Jesus has come into your midst in a special way, and agreement in prayer in this context carries a unique promise of His answer. We cannot afford to miss it.

A small group meeting can easily have two seasons of prayer in each meeting. The worship time near the beginning doesn't have to be just singing. In fact, it will be much more powerful if it includes prayers and psalms of worship. This worship will so bind your hearts together that the sharing and learning will be deeper, and more profound. Toward the end of the meeting, supplication and intercession are very natural to include. We try to take at least 15 minutes at the end for prayer. This requires discipline to wrap up the discussion and leave time for prayer. Groups also have half nights of prayer, sometimes joining together with another group.

In a typical traditional church, of which I was a part from 1965 to 1970, the Sunday morning service may have 80% of the members in attendance, the Sunday evening service may have 50-60%, and the Wednesday night prayer meeting may have 20-30%. Typically, even though this Wednesday service was the “prayer meeting,” there was singing and a sermon for most of it, then writing down prayer

***“The main lesson about prayer is just this: Do it! Do it! DO IT! You want to be taught to pray. My answer is: pray and never faint, and then you shall never fail.”***

***- John Laidlaw***



requests for a lengthy period, and a tiny bit of prayer squeezed in at the end. So we had about 25% of the membership praying for about 10 minutes a week.

Today, in our church, we urge each person to be teamed up in a small group, and 98% of our people are in small groups. In many of these groups, 20-25 minutes per weekly meeting are devoted to fervent prayer (again, split into two blocks, one after the icebreaker, and one at the end). Most of our people are praying effectively with others every week, and God is answering prayer in marvelous ways. One of the best ways to train a person to be a prayer warrior at home is to model it in the small group, where they can participate and practice.

Another powerful aspect of prayer in the small groups is prayer in the discipling pairs. We have our people teamed up in discipling relationships, so that everyone in the small group has a partner. Some of our folks pray on the phone with their partner(s) every day. As they meet for their weekly discipling appointments, they include prayer as a major part. I enjoy walking and praying with my men. Often we go on a three mile trek for prayer.

You may have heard of these really spiritual guys that pray for many hours a day, and wondered, “How in the world can they do that?” Well, I recently found out that they don’t do it in one solid block, and they don’t do all of it alone. They pray in various groups of two, three, and more with their disciples and partners in ministry through the day! Whew! That’s more possible for me. How about you?

One last thing I want to share is that we have found it helpful to use prayer lists for our small groups. We call them “Blessing Lists.” Each person in the group is asked to share the names of two people in their lives that are not yet saved, and live in town. These names are compiled onto a list. The list is displayed at the end of each meeting for prayer, and a copy is given to each group member for daily intercession. Each group has their own list. The lists are updated regularly, as some get saved, and others drop out of the member’s sphere of influence, perhaps by moving out of town, or changing jobs. The list must be kept current for maximum effectiveness. We have found that when names go on the list, God moves in their lives. It is very powerful!

May God bless you as you increase prayer in your church, through your small groups!

***“The greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.”***

***- F. B. Meyer***



BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

## Leaders' Prayer Summits

Pastor Mark Bowen · Bloomington, MN

In recent years, the pastors at Evergreen in Minneapolis have developed the habit of taking key leaders and apprentices on quarterly prayer overnights to seek the Lord together for an extended time in the Word and prayer. Typically, a pastor will reserve a YMCA camp on the outskirts of town, gather his leadership “downline” at the camp by 8:00 pm on a Friday night, and work hard together at seeking God until Saturday at noon. In the fall quarter, we vary the routine and kick off the harvest season by gathering the pastors and all their leadership downlines together for a Friday night/ Saturday morning “Evergreen Prayer Summit.”

These quarterly getaways have proven to be a key touch-point for taking the pulse of our small group and ministry leaders, addressing emerging problems and concerns before they become substantial, maintaining encouragement and momentum, and raising the bar to believe God for greater and lasting fruit. We have learned that getting extended, strenuous prayer times with key leaders is like getting regular dates with your spouse—everyone agrees with it in principle, but it remains wishful thinking until you proactively commit, plan, and make it happen.

There are several reasons why regular prayer overnights have become an indispensable staple in our leadership training diet:

### 1. Fervent prayer is the hidden habit of an empowered leader's life.

*“After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’ He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer’” (Mark 9:28-29).*

Methods and strategies (while important) have never been, and will never be, the source of our power; God alone is. The disciples had seen and heard Jesus cast out demons numerous times. They themselves had successfully accomplished the task in the recent past (Mark 6:7-13). Yet on this occasion—probably mouthing the very same words that had brought deliverance before—the repeated, sincere, and strenuous efforts of these men were fruitless. Were they relying on a specific method, routine, or formula to give them success? If so, they fell into the familiar trap of counting on form, instead of substance, to carry the day—and they were not the last to make that familiar mistake. Confronted with their lack of power, they sheepishly asked Christ in private confusion, “Why couldn’t we do it?” His answer cut to the heart of the matter: “This kind comes out only by prayer.” It is worth noting that Jesus, in casting out the demon as a crowd gathered in verses 25 and 26, had neither prayed nor fasted on the spot. Rather, it was His hidden habit of seeking His father’s face in faithful, devoted, and fervent prayer that resulted in this and every other display of God’s power through Him.

*“When man works, man works. When man prays, God works.”*

*- Unknown*

## 2. Praying with aspiring leaders is critical to setting realistic expectations in them.

*“They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ he said to them. ‘Stay here and keep watch.’ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him” (Mark 14:32-35).*

*“And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like `drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44).*

In His hour of greatest personal struggle, Jesus took the 12 with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Before their very eyes, He fell to the ground in agony as He openly and without pretense poured His soul out to God. The dramatic battle between Jesus’ human desire for self-preservation and His commitment to do God’s will at all costs was played out—in the presence of these future leaders—in living, gutwrenching, unforgettable color. They heard Him cry out in horror as His soul was tormented to the point of death. They watched in stunned silence as He sweat literal drops of blood (the medical term for which is hemadatosis—a rare, life-threatening condition that occurs only under the most extreme and unbearable stress). They witnessed the life and death battle that every man or woman of God must wage—the struggle to lay down one’s own life voluntarily, in the face of conflicting personal desires and unrelenting outside opposition. It is a battle every one of us must fight and win if we are going to complete the work God has given us to do in our generation. It is a battle we must train future leaders to fight and win or our disciples will stumble and fall before the finish line.

## 3. Prayer with fellow leaders is the pathway to discerning God’s unique leading in time and history.

*“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:1-3).*

The groundbreaking initiative of Paul’s first missionary journey changed history—and came as the result of a leadership team routinely devoted to prayer. Paul’s teammate on the journey, Barnabas, was himself a high-profile leader in the church at Antioch; a pillar and a heavily relied-on source of direction and encouragement. Such leaders are never easy to let go of. In order for the church in Antioch to release these men for the greater good of the gospel in the face of a less certain future without them, the leadership core of the congregation needed to present a united voice backing the move. The Holy Spirit was able to direct the leadership team in Acts 13 to set apart Paul and Barnabas as a result of their practice of seeking God together.

Overall, prayer overnighters for leaders have been foundational in Evergreen in building a church that is truly a church of prayer.

\*All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

***“When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. And so on. But when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do.”***

***- Dr. A. C. Dixon***



BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

## A Church-Wide Concert of Prayer

Pastor John Hopler · Columbus, OH

Some of the most significant answers to prayer described in the Book of Acts involved a “specially called” church prayer meeting. For example, a great outpouring of grace resulted in Acts 4 after the church prayed in response to the persecution suffered by the Apostles. In Acts 12, as a result of a specially called prayer meeting, Peter was miraculously released from prison the night before he was to be executed.

This pattern has led me to encourage churches to conduct periodic church-wide “concerts of prayer.” A concert of prayer is when the church focuses for a defined period of time (perhaps 12 or 24 hours) on praying for breakthroughs in the lives of members, people in the community, and the world.

This is how one such concert of prayer was conducted at New Song Community Church in Columbus in order to kick-off their building campaign:

**1. Planning:** Six weeks before the concert of prayer, a team met to plan. If we take time to plan a conference where God’s Word is to be taught, doesn’t it make sense to take time to plan a special prayer time?

**2. Organize:** The month before the concert of prayer, teams were organized to take responsibility for portions of the 24-hour event. These teams were organized around our current small group structure. A special bulletin, giving the order of events, was also prepared.

**3. Promotion:** We built a spirit of anticipation by talking up the concert of prayer for several Sundays prior to the event. Members signed up for two hour shifts, ranging from 6:00pm on Friday until 6:00pm Saturday.

**4. The Leaders’ Prayer Time:** At 6:00 pm that evening, the pastors and their wives met for an hour to pray for the prayer time. Just as Aaron and Hur lifted up the hands of Moses (Exodus 17), these leaders were calling on God to strengthen the members as they sought God in prayer through the 24-hour period.

**5. The Kick-Off:** The whole congregation met for two hours in a time of worship and praise. During this kick-off, the pastors from other churches in Columbus encouraged the members of New Song. Then the pastors of New Song gave information about what would occur during the concert of prayer.

**6. City-Wide Pastors Prayer Time:** The first two hours of the prayer time was taken by the pastors of New Song and other Columbus area Great Commission pastors joined them. This served two purposes. First, it united the pastors in the city for the common purpose of praying for their sister church. Second, it allowed me, as the director of the concert of prayer, to model to the other pastors on how to lead the prayer time (which they would lead during the other two hours shifts).

*“Expect great things  
from God. Attempt  
great things for God.”*

*-William Carey*

**7. The Order of Prayer:** We organized four one-half hour prayer segments. Each of these segments was held in a different room. The prayer segments were:

- *First half-hour:* Worship, breaking of bread, and prayer for personal needs.
- *Second half-hour:* The prayer team moved to another room where we had mounted on the wall the names of every individual who had come to Christ through the ministry of the church. This was very motivating for those participating to pray for their lost friends and relatives. Each individual wrote down the name of these individuals and prayed for them during this half-hour slot.
- *Third half-hour:* The prayer team then moved to another room where we displayed the building plans for the church. They then prayed for all the details related to the building project.
- *Fourth half-hour:* Finally, the prayer team walked to the “missions prayer segment,” where they watched a five minute “video letter” from the team that had recently planted a church in Phoenix. The group went on to pray for this and other mission efforts in the Great Commission Association.

This format allowed for variety and encouragement, particularly for those who were praying at 3:00 AM in the morning!

**8. Tag-Team Prayer:** Every two hours, a new shift of prayer warriors took over. Each team was led by an elder or staff member of the church. (By the way, the teens took the early morning slot!)

**9. Closing Prayer Time:** The final hour of the concert of prayer was from 5:00-6:00 pm on Saturday. At this time, the whole congregation came back together to worship and pray that God would use the new building to reach many for Christ. We concluded the time by going out to the land, joining hands in a large circle, and asking God to bless in days to come.

God has been faithful to answer those prayers. Today there is a wonderful church building on that land where we prayed four years ago, and that building is being used to reach people on the east side of Columbus.

Does your church have a special prayer need at the present? Or perhaps is there a special outreach campaign that you are planning? If so, consider taking the time to organize a concert of prayer. What an awesome time it is to mobilize the church to come into the presence of God! And what awesome answers to prayer you will witness in response to your church seeking God in this way!

*“Prayer strikes the winning blow. Service picks up the pieces.”*

*- S. D. Gordon*



BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

## Forty Days of Prayer

Pastor George Sebek · Columbia, MD

Often, God will lead His church into more intentional and concentrated times of prayer. It may be because of needs in the church itself, needs in the community, or the result of intense spiritual attack. This can also happen when God wants to open doors for us to better serve Him and influence people with the gospel. This happened with our church a few years ago, and we've learned that when God burdens your heart, the only righteous response is a resounding "Yes!" to His call on our lives.

We were, at that time, experiencing some intense spiritual warfare. So we knew we were close to being on the right track. We were also going through a leadership transition that was a little unsettling, but we were confident that God was in it. As a church, we were willing to do whatever it took to understand clearly what God was up to and how we could fit into what He was doing. We knew that in order to see God's hand of blessing on this church, our future, and on this needy community, we had to be in tune with Him and trust Him.

We had just finished a Forty Days of Purpose campaign. God used this in our church in an incredible way to save people and change lives. It was now a few months later and God was opening up some opportunities in a new community, and we had a new building on the horizon. The congregation was growing and we were ready to tackle our first "capital campaign" for a new building. We needed to take a 3-year campaign and squeeze it into 6 months! We were definitely in unfamiliar territory. It seemed like a good time to really pray.

During a time alone with God one morning, I began to feel an intense, personal need to pray. I also felt a real burden to call the church together to pray in a more intense and purposeful way. If God was going to come through, we needed to pray...and pray we did!

At first we didn't know how this was going to happen. Having had the 40 Days of Purpose campaign a few months earlier, we thought that praying for an extended period of time was great step of faith and practice. So we said, "Why not pray for 40 days?" From that point, we began to organize the church for "40 Days of Prayer".

We began by doing a series on prayer on Sunday morning. This was so we could all be refreshed and re-energized on the importance and the necessity of prayer – individually and collectively. This was extremely encouraging as it got us all on the same page and helped new people to catch the "prayer vision". In the series, we said that this prayer campaign would be unlike anything we had before, and we'd like for everyone to participate.

It began by setting up our website so people could sign up for times to pray. We knew we had to provide a workable plan and call people to commit. As a result, we put together a prayer chart on our website

*"The history of missions is the history of answered prayer."*

*-Samuel Zwemer*

and divided the 24-hour day into 15-minute segments. We told people they could sign up for as many as they felt they could be faithful with for 40 days. This meant there were 96 slots that needed to be filled each day for the duration of the prayer campaign. We also gave each person a Commitment Card to sign and put their times to pray. They kept these with them as a reminder.

We also gave people the ability to change or add times as they felt led by God. This worked out great since you really don't know how it's going to work until you get involved and start praying. Before long we had every slot filled for the 40 day period of time. It was so encouraging to go online and see who was praying before you, with you, and after you. We also had some unexpected blessings when we saw people from other parts of the country go onto our website, people we didn't even know, and commit to praying with us.

When people signed on for a prayer slot, their email address was automatically put into an address book for a daily Prayer Booster email from me. These emails were some of the most encouraging things that we did to help make the 40 Days of Prayer campaign successful. From the beginning, I had committed to have these Prayer Boosters completed daily by midnight so that they would be sent to those who were praying during the night.

The Prayer Boosters included motivational quotes from prayer warriors of the past like E.M. Bounds, John Wesley, Billy Graham, and D.L. Moody. The Boosters also included three or four prayer promises. We also listed specific needs so people would know what to pray for and what we were all believing God for. Almost immediately we began to see answers to our prayers! The last item in the Prayer Booster was a personal note from me. These started out as just simple notes of motivation, encouragement and practical help. However, not long after we began, they became increasingly longer and more involved. We believe God led in this because prayer is a discipline and is always going to be a work of faith and perseverance. The temptation will always be to slack off or quit. These emails were very challenging and everyone involved mentioned how they were very important in keeping at it and staying focused.

You never really know what can actually happen until you start praying. Scripture says that, "*The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results*" (James 5:16, NLT). This is so true! You never really know what God can do until you commit and begin. God is always faithful to answer the prayer of humility and faith. We became so aware of this as we committed to this time of intentional and purposeful prayer.

The answers and the results of this time are too numerous to list in this article. What we can say is that many lives were forever transformed by this prayer campaign. Many said that their prayer lives will never be the same again. That in itself is a great motivation for an undertaking like this and to do it regularly as God leads. God has an amazing tendency to show up when His people pray. And He definitely did that for us. All you have to do to see your life more committed to prayer is to see prayers answered in a big way.

As a result, we experienced a unity in the church, unlike at any other time. Lives were changed, sin was exposed, and many prayers were answered. Today, we are in our new building in a new community. God answered our "capital campaign" prayers, and then some. It has not been without much "blood, sweat and tears," but God has been faithful. We've recently appointed new elders, and God is continu-

***"The best prayers  
have often more  
groans than words."***

***- John Bunyan***

***“I have so much to do that I spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it.”***

***- John Wesley***

ing to work in very real and tangible ways. We know that a life following Jesus will have its challenges and difficulties. If we follow Christ with our whole hearts, we can most assuredly expect spiritual battles and challenges as we seek to reach a lost world for Jesus. But we now know, more than ever before, that when God’s people pray, He goes to work!





BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

## Regional Prayer Times

Pastor Rick Whitney · Manhattan, KS

In the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Lonesome Dove*, the trail scout whose name was Dietz, and a dear character in the book, was tragically killed in what was really an accident.

One reason he was loved was because Dietz was loyal to the Colonel and the Texas Rangers with whom he served.

On his grave marker, Colonel Woodrow F. Call wrote:

*“Cheerful in all weather, Never shirked a task, Splendid behavior.”*

If you have read the book or saw the movie, you know that these words were high praise from the taciturn Call.

They are high praise today. To be **cheerful all the time**, not a complainer or a whiner; to **never shirk a task**, but to always show up and be accounted for; **splendid behavior**, not absent and grumbling.

These are the kind of men I run with in this region. Nothing less. This is the kind of man that leads in this association. I believe that these three phrases help describe what it means to be a real spiritual leader.

One “task” that we carry as elders is to be devoted to prayer. Not only prayer alone as a man, but also prayer all together with other leaders. Corporate prayer was more the rule in the New Testament than the exception. Elders met - then prayed. I don’t know if they talked a lot, but the Bible records that they met and prayed.

So why do we periodically take time to leave our place “on the wall,” pile into vans, and drive several hours to other cities for overnights of prayer? Why do we meet with other men from other towns and do this several times a year? Why have we prayed across all our regions for many, many years as Christian leaders and pastors?

Because it is the right thing to do!

We need to lift up our eyes from our own local work and remember that we are all, like Nehemiah, on the wall together. Even if our places are so far apart that we cannot quite see each other, we will still put down our trowels, travel, and pray.

We come together because we need to. We are together in this business of advancing God’s kingdom. We need each other. We are not alone. And we need to remember this. Therefore, we sacrifice to travel and pray together.

*“Pray as if everything depended on God and act as if everything depended on oneself.”*

*- Ignatius of Loyola*

***“The greatest cause of unanswered prayer is prayerlessness.”***

***- E. M. Bounds***

We pray together because, when we lift up our eyes from our local, up-close work, this also “rests our eyes.” These group GCLI prayer times can help remind us of the larger issues with which we are involved. They pry us away from the “busyness” that so often consumes us, and these prayer times help give us a right, eternal perspective.

We travel and pray because these regionals also challenge us. Sure, there is temptation to compare, to posture, to shrink away from being with fellow leaders, but we fight through it. And God has used these regional times in a strong way to keep us united.

I have had the privilege of being with, and serving alongside big-hearted men for over 30 years. Men who understand these things. Although they are very busy, they still carve out time, several times a year, to travel and meet in the region. And they have had this habit now for decades.

Their behavior is splendid. From the day I first blew a whistle and asked them to come—they came. They never miss. This is their habit.

I have been teased about acting like a drill sergeant in the Northwest region. It is really kind of funny, because I am not really that way. I simply know that we need to meet for prayer. The men I run with also know this and so we all show up.

I remember the first time almost 20 years ago that I asked all 18 pastors to meet me for prayer. I still have the letter, only one paragraph long. I didn’t have to call and “sweet talk” anyone. They just came. And we prayed all night, cheerful in all weather.

Now there are over 60 pastors and we have multiplied into two regions, but they still come, every time I ask. They are soldiers, in season and out, whether it is convenient or not. If these men did not know the value of this kind of sacrifice (in coming together to encourage each other to pray), I would have looked for a better caliber of men long ago.

I never wonder if they will show.

We are loyal and we support each other, not just in word, but also in deed. I am very proud of the habits we have in the region, of helping each other, doing so many conferences together, traveling and praying together, having money to help each other, and just talking to each other. We work at our loyalty.

My goodness, if in the world men will sacrifice family and the comforts of home to travel and meet with other businessmen, surely we can do more! And do it righteously, with balance and concern for our families, our churches, and our shared cause.

This cause is pictured most clearly when we get together between churches and pray for our common good and the advancement of the gospel.

Prayer has been scheduled into every GCLI regional meeting. We cannot afford to plan it any other way. *“Knowledge can puff up, but love edifies”* (1 Corinthians 8:1). Real wisdom comes through shared humility, not by classroom instruction alone.

And so we pray, because prayer is humbling. It is hard on the flesh and at times, can be a labor, a work, and if we are honest we will admit that it can be drudgery. But we will pray because our Lord commands it. So we work at our prayers. And often we are deeply instructed through our shared prayers.

Leaders need to put themselves in front of the train, so to speak, and let God's Spirit run them over. This always happens at our regional GCLI prayer and meeting times. And I am very grateful to God.

***"I have never been  
deeply concerned and  
prayed about anything,  
but that it did not come.  
No matter how long  
the time, somehow, in  
some shape, it came."***

***- Adoniram Judson***



BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

**Exercise**

1. What was a major lesson these testimonies taught you?

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2. Begin a list of at least five motivations you have to pray. Keep it in a visible place to remind you to pray and keep the list growing!

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3. What are some factors which keep your church from being more effective in prayer? How can these obstacles be addressed?

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BUILDING A CHURCH OF PRAYER

**Exercise**

4. Write out a simple plan to help mobilize your church for prayer. Perhaps you have felt God leading you to implement a plan based on some of these testimonies.

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5. What are some reasons that motivate you to attend regional pastors' prayer times?

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GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

**Building a Church Devoted to God's Word**

At the heart of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is the command that we teach Christ's followers to obey all that He commanded us. Therefore, as leaders of God's people we are to have a single focus in building a church that is devoted to the Word of God. The following are testimonies of leaders who have taken steps to ground their churches in the Scriptures.





BUILDING A CHURCH DEVOTED TO GOD'S WORD

## Preaching the Word

Pastor Kurt Jurgensmeier · Cedar Rapids, IA

### Introduction

In what could be considered the last will and testament of the great Apostle Paul, he wrote his successor Timothy:

*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:1-4).*

*"I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."*

-Richard Baxter

Both the context and the wording of this statement have a very sober tone. The Apostle knows his life is near the end (cf. 4:6), and he is giving his last written instructions to the one who is to carry on his ministry. What is it that Paul deems so critical to the success of the churches he has planted, that he includes it in his departing exhortation? What apostolic directive is so vital that he calls upon "God and . . . Christ Jesus" (v. 1) to witness Timothy's reception of it? It is "Preach the word" (v. 2). The intention of this paper is to offer a brief reminder of the pastor's responsibility to do this very thing, particularly as it relates to our teaching.

### What is "Preaching the Word"?

Practically speaking, to "*preach the word*" would seem to have two primary applications. First, our choice of teaching topics should prioritize the main themes of Scripture. Instead of always choosing subjects based on what we perceive to be the immediate needs or wants of our people, we should also trust that God knows their real needs and has inspired Scripture accordingly. For example, if it has been some time since we last taught through the more doctrinal subjects in the first chapters of Romans or Ephesians, then it is possible that we are not providing our people with the balanced diet of truth that will come with preaching the word.

Secondly, Paul's exhortation to "*preach the word*" would surely include using Scripture itself as the main content of our teaching. If our messages are primarily filled with the same things that popular secular speakers rely on (e.g. stories, illustrations, anecdotes, humor, etc.), it is questionable whether the Apostle would think we've honored his command. Along these lines we are reminded that the Apostle Peter exhorts us, "*Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God*" (1 Peter 4:11). What better way is there to ensure this occurs than to be preaching Scripture? A preacher's sermon, for example, can be confidently equated with "the Word of God" only to the extent that it re-



flects the teaching of Scripture. And because it is the word of God that contains spiritual authority, not the words of men, preachers should take this distinction very seriously. Accordingly, the popular evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem has written:

*Throughout the history of the Church the greatest preachers have been those who have recognized that they have no authority in themselves and have seen their task as being to explain the words of Scripture and apply them clearly to the lives of their hearers. Their preaching has drawn its power not from the proclamation of their own Christian experiences or the experiences of others, or from their own opinions, creative ideas, or rhetorical skills, but from God's powerful words. Essentially they stood in the pulpit, pointed to the biblical text, and said in effect to the congregation, "This is what this verse means. Do you see that meaning here as well? Then you must believe it and obey it with all your heart, for God himself, your Creator and your Lord, is saying this to you today!" Only the written words of Scripture can give this kind of authority to preaching.<sup>1</sup>*

***"The greatest proof that the Bible is inspired is that it has stood so much bad preaching."***

***- A. T. Robertson***

With this in mind, it is interesting to note the kind of instruction Paul gives on preaching in the Pastoral Letters. For example, the "professional" speaker might question the wisdom of Paul's instruction to simply "give attention to the public reading of Scripture" (1 Timothy 4:13), which certainly implies the importance of its texts in the content of our messages. Would we trust the power of "the pure milk of the word" (1 Peter 2:2) enough to simply publicly read it for even five full minutes on a Sunday morning? Regardless, it is clear that the make-up of our messages is to be filled with the divinely inspired words of Scripture, instead of our own "inspirations."

In general then, it would seem that to "preach the word" at least means that the subjects of our messages are taken from the topics of Scripture, and the content of our teaching is heavily weighted with the text of Scripture.

### **Expository vs. Topical Preaching**

Before moving on to suggest some reasons why "preaching the word" is important, maybe a word should be said about how we are to do this. The debate can be simplified between topical and expository preaching. Generally speaking, when using the former, the teacher chooses the topic first and then gathers Scriptures to teach and illustrate the topic. In the latter, a text of Scripture is chosen first and the topic(s) are derived from "expounding" the passage.

It is unfortunate and unnecessary that some Christians (particularly the expository camp) claim that only one method is best. First of all, both methods can be found in Scripture itself, although anything even close to expository teaching is rather rare (cf. Romans 4:1-25; Galatians 4:21-31). If Jesus, prophets, and apostles are to be our guide, then it could be said the most "biblical" style of teaching is topical. In fact, all effective teaching, even the expository type, must be topical in some way, and the distinction between the two types of teaching can be over exaggerated. Accordingly, even the Scriptures we use for topical teaching should often be carefully explained in an expository manner. With that said, the advantages of a more expository style should not be ignored. Letting a passage of Scripture choose the

***“Let all your preaching be in the most simple and plainest manner; look not to the prince, but to the plain, simple, gross, unlearned people, of which cloth the prince also himself is made.”***

***- Martin Luther***

topic and form the content of a message is perhaps the best way to ensure that these two goals of “preaching the word” consistently occur in our teaching.

### **The Importance of Preaching the Word**

Finally, we will discuss two reasons why our preaching must be immersed in Scripture. First, in the passage quoted above, Paul implies it is the only strategy that has any chance of preventing the otherwise inevitable and destructive deception of God’s people (notice the “for” at 2 Timothy 4:3). If we share Paul’s concern regarding the danger of doctrinal deception, then we will share his priority on preaching the word because “*sound doctrine*” (v. 3) is found nowhere else. Paul’s particular concern is that the minister would *educate* his people rather than merely entertain them. This is not to say that we ignore the proverb, “*The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable*” (15:2), or even enjoyable. However, we should not miss the Apostle’s deliberate distinction between “preaching the word” and “tickling the ears.” Such a reminder is important for several reasons.

First, there are many church-goers who would evaluate a Sunday sermon based on its entertainment value at least as much as its educational worth. They are not interested in the type of teaching Paul is prescribing. Secondly, many assume that the level of understanding and conviction regarding the doctrines of Scripture is rather high. To the contrary, studies consistently show otherwise.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Paul does not expect the teaching of “*sound doctrine*” (v. 3) to be popular. For all of these reasons, it is important to apply Paul’s exhortation to ourselves and allow the Apostle to “*solemnly charge*” us “*in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus . . . preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*”

The importance of encouraging and educational preaching is not the only reason we are to “*preach the word.*” God is also interested in transformation. Of course, education is part of this process, but we all recognize the difference between preaching that only informs, and that which transforms and changes lives forever. If this is the kind of effect we desire, then once again, “preaching the word” is the best strategy, because no words change lives like God’s words.

The transformational power of preaching Scripture can be illustrated in several ways. First, it is demonstrated in the words of “*the gospel*” because “*it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*” (Romans 1:16). There are no words that change people more than the words of the gospel and those words are best found in Scripture. This unique power of the central topic of Scripture transcends all of the topics and texts of Scripture, making the preaching of the written word of God the most powerful tool He has given us to “go and change lives,” which is the essence of the Great Commission.

Along these lines, we are reminded of the power of Scripture in the context of spiritual warfare. Christ intentionally quoted Scripture in His duel with the devil (cf. Matthew 4:1-11), and Paul reminds us that “*the word of God*” is “*the sword of the Spirit*” (Ephesians 6:17) in the spiritual battles our people face. We have no biblical promises that Satan must yield to our words, or that the Spirit will supernaturally use them. However, the Bible teaches that Satan must yield to God’s word, and the Spirit especially desires to use what He has inspired, and if we desire supernatural power in our preaching, we will use Scripture.

Finally, it would seem our own experience illustrates the life changing power of God's Word, particularly as we think about how concentrated times of teaching have affected us. For example, many of us could testify to leaving a conference as a different person than when we arrived. While we may not remember much of the contents of the messages spoken, we can look back and recognize that somehow those messages changed our lives. I would like to suggest it was primarily because the word was preached. Perhaps the greatest rival to preaching the word is relating interesting, memorable, and even emotionally charged stories. These certainly have their place, but if our goal is changing people's lives in a lasting way, instead of merely entertaining them for a moment, they may be more limited in value than some think. One reason for this may be that the importance we place on people remembering our messages days and weeks afterwards may be unrealistic and overrated. If the Spirit of God does not change a person's life right in their seat in the immediate moment of our preaching, it is doubtful He will often use it to transform them much later by means of recalling the message. And thank God for that, because people don't remember them. But they can still be "transformed by the renewing of [their] mind" as the Spirit uses the Scripture He inspired, and that we preach, to do something supernatural.

***"Defend the Bible?  
I would just as soon  
defend a lion. Just  
turn the Bible loose.  
It will defend itself."***

***-Charles H. Spurgeon***



BUILDING A CHURCH DEVOTED TO GOD AND HIS WORD

## Two Dangers to Avoid as Pastors

Pastor John Hopler · Columbus, OH

As pastors, we have a solemn responsibility to obey and teach the Word of God. Like Ezra who “set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10), we, as shepherds of God’s people, are to be devoted to the Scriptures and are to lovingly lead others to a greater devotion to God’s Word.

We understand that apart from His word, there can be no true transformation of lives. On the other hand, when God’s Word is being multiplied in our church and in our community, we have the confidence that the work that is being done in peoples’ hearts will have a lasting effect.

Having pastored churches for over 20 years, I have noticed that there are two dangers that must be avoided if we as leaders are going to be effective in grounding people in the Scriptures.

### Danger #1—Insensitivity

As pastors, we are authority figures. We teach on Sundays and in other meetings before crowds of people, and people actually listen to us! We give counsel on many areas of life—marriage, parenting, jobs, finances, etc.—and have a great deal of influence on the lives of people. As authorities, our opinions carry a lot of weight with people. For those who look to our leadership, there is at least a presumption that what we have to say is “from God.”

The danger that exists is that we can be insensitive as to whether individuals following our lead are truly in their hearts pleasing God, or us as their pastor. When we give counsel, it is sometimes unclear whether the person listening to us is really making decisions based upon God’s truth—or are they merely following the preferences of an individual.

One time, shortly after I had become a pastor, a young man in the church asked me my views on insurance. At the time, I had a “no insurance” theology, and shared those views with him. It was a casual conversation and I thought nothing of it until a few years later when this young man reminded me of that conversation and told me the effect it had on him. He said that because his pastor had this view of insurance, he was inclined to think at the time that it must have been “God’s view of insurance.” Understand this: In counseling this young man, I never told him it was God’s will that he adopt my views of insurance. But the mere fact that I, as a pastor, shared these with him – and that I had some biblical basis for these views—made him feel that there was no other godly alternative. I apologized to him for being insensitive as to how I had shared my opinions (particularly since my opinions have changed since then!).

*When asked the secret of his success, William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, replied “I will tell you the secret. God has had all there was of me.”*

In our association of churches, God put His finger on this danger in a special way during the late 1980s and early 1990s when we wrote a paper (*The Weakness Paper*) confessing our failures as a movement of churches. We realized that there were many situations where pastors were not sensitive as to how the Holy Spirit was leading an individual. The counsel of the pastor was, at times, equated with the Word of God. As a result, many people made decisions that, years later, they looked back upon and regretted. In the process, there were many lives hurt and many pastors were blamed for those hurts. To what extent the pastors were at fault in each situation is open for debate. But one thing is certain: We learned from this that we as pastors must be more sensitive if we are going to fulfill our responsibility of grounding people in God and His Word.

*“The responsible person seeks to make his whole life a response to the question and call of God.”*

*- Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

At that time, I decided that whenever I gave counsel to people, I was going to be more probing with each person to make sure he or she was truly developing convictions from God. Two simple steps have helped:

1. Urging them to search the Scriptures and to base their decision on those Scriptures; and
2. Urging them to get counsel from others, particularly from godly Christians who might have a different view or perspective than what I have to offer.

Insisting on these two steps has given me greater peace and confidence that I am fulfilling my responsibility as a shepherd of God's people.

### **Danger #2—Fear**

As pastors, we are not only authority figures—we are also brothers in Christ to those we serve. As fellow believers in Christ, there is a natural desire to honor and respect the freedoms of those we serve. We do not want to impose on others our preferences. And in light of what I wrote above, there is a fear against “*lording it over*” (1 Peter 5:3) members of the church.

The danger that arises is that we as pastors can act in fear rather than boldly sharing God's truth. In being a bond-servant to people, we cannot forget that we are first to preach that Christ Jesus is Lord and that we are bond-servants to others for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:5). We cannot be slow to point out to people their disobedience and we cannot be reluctant to question a person's heart to follow Christ if we as pastors are moved by the Holy Spirit to do so.

Right around the time when *The Weakness Paper* was written, I learned that a member in my church had led someone to Christ and was about ready to marry this individual. There were some things about this situation that made me uneasy. The individual's parents (who were believers) were not enthusiastic about the marriage, the engagement happened very quickly, and the fiancée's commitment to Christ was suspect. Another pastor and I discussed it and believed before God that we needed to ask this individual if God was really in this engagement. I was tempted at the time to be fearful to do so. I did not want to impose my opinions on another. I did not want to “lord it over” another person's faith. However, I also realized that I had a responsibility to urge this church member to follow Christ and His Word. I knew God had a plan for this individual—and I knew that God wanted me to at least cause this

***“There will be two kinds of people in the end: Those that will say to God ‘Thy will be done’ and those to whom God will say ‘Thy will be done.’”***

***- C. S. Lewis***

person to pause and to seek God more earnestly before making a marriage commitment. Combining gentleness with boldness, another pastor and I did approach this individual, who decided to postpone the marriage. (To conclude the story, the fiancée responded to the postponement by marrying someone else two weeks later! And the individual who we counseled has since married a devoted follower of Christ and is actively serving the Lord in the church.)

This incident has given me boldness throughout the years to urge members in the church to follow Christ wholeheartedly. 1 Thessalonians 2:11,12 gives us insight into Paul’s bold ministry with others:

*“...just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”*

As pastors we, like Paul, are to be passionately “*exhorting, encouraging, and imploring*” people to walk in faith, love, and obedience. Our culture says that each man is his own master. We disagree. Jesus Christ is the Lord of all, and we are to courageously urge ones to follow His lead, even at the risk of being accused of being “heavy handed.” Yes, we are to be sensitive. Yes, we are to be gentle. And, as I mentioned above, in no way are we to impose our own personal preferences on others. However, we also must not shrink back from exhorting people to follow God and His Word in every decision that he or she makes.

May God grant us as leaders the grace to avoid these two dangers. May He enable us to teach God’s Word and to counsel people with sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s leading in their lives and with a boldness to insist that Jesus Christ and His Word be followed at all costs.



BUILDING A CHURCH DEVOTED TO GOD'S WORD

## Purifying your Church from Immorality

Pastor Mark Hagan · Austin, TX

It was a long, hot summer in more ways than one. What was supposed to be a temporary assignment of not more than a few months would end up becoming a large part of my life's work. I had been asked to try to help a struggling Great Commission church. A steady loss of members, leadership burnout, lack of zeal for the great commission, disloyalty, grumbling, complaining, and reluctance to serve were some of the more obvious maladies.

As I dove into investigating possible root causes using surveys, interviews of church members, and pastoral counseling, a pattern began to emerge. I met with single after single who was involved in some degree of impurity or immorality. Some got angry with me when I gently exhorted them to be pure. One of the leaders, when confronted, argued vigorously that the Bible does not have a negative view toward premarital sex. Within the first three months, I discovered that at least 20% of the singles in the church had recently been or were currently involved in a sexual relationship.

When I felt enough investigation had taken place and those counseling me confirmed this, I brought the issue publicly before the church. I was upset (I hope it was a righteous anger). I understood that this is an area of struggle for many Christian singles, but I was shocked at the pervasiveness in this church. I was appalled that when the sin was uncovered, the response was apathy or anger, rather than repentance. "If you are involved in this sin," I told the congregation, "it would be better for you to come and tell me than for me to find out." I was zealous to excommunicate some unrepentant saint as an example so that holiness would prevail! I knew how Phineas must have felt in Numbers 25, when he drove the spear through both of the immoral offenders! Fortunately, wise counsel encouraged me not to go on a church discipline rampage. Because the standard apparently had been so low for so long, they felt it would be appropriate to give a warning first. Okay, I thought, no spears, but can I just pull out a little of their hair like Nehemiah did in Nehemiah 13:25?

Following the public admonishment, I hoped the sin of immorality had been purged from the church, but I had no idea how deep the roots went! Let me give you a sad biography of the ruin caused by sin in the lives of about ten leaders, many of whom were in full-time ministry. The leader who had argued that the Bible doesn't condemn premarital sex, eventually moved to another church, began a slanderous campaign against those leaders and on the brink of excommunication, left the church. One ex-leader joined another church, jumped into another sexual relationship, would not stop when confronted and eventually was put under church discipline. Another was involved in sexual addictions and perversions; professional counseling was advised, but he bitterly left the church. One married leader was committing adultery, had a child out of wedlock, racked up deep debt while secretly visiting men's clubs — all while leading in significant church ministries (Are you sick yet? Sorry, but read on...). Another was arrested for public sex with a prostitute, involved with drugs, and eventually

*"You may as well quit reading and hearing the Word of God, and give it to the devil, if you do not desire to live according to it."*

*- Martin Luther*

***“Lay hold on the Bible until the Bible lays hold on you.”***

*- Will H. Houghton*

divorced. There was one other adulterer that we know of, and the others have abandoned Christian fellowship altogether and become agnostics or atheists.

*“A little leaven leavens the whole lump”* (1 Corinthians 5:6); especially when it’s *leadership leavening*. A faulty foundation is impossible to build on. We realized we must start over, develop a brand new team of leaders, and basically plant a new church within the dying old one. Ten “wilderness years” later, we have a church of about the same size, yet with only eleven original members remaining. But now, it is a pure, healthy, and happy church family with a strong, righteous leadership team, and a bright future.

Here are *some* of my personal convictions in achieving and maintaining the biblical standard of purity in a church:

1. Leaders should be aggressive in personally asking their members how they are doing in this area, especially singles who are dating, courting, or engaged. A study by Josh McDowell revealed little difference between Christians and non-Christians in the area of premarital sex!
2. Require a period of 1-2 years of abstaining from sexual immorality before appointing elders, deacons, or staff.
3. Do not perform weddings of professing Christians who are involved in impurity and immorality.
4. Preach confidently and regularly on sexual purity and prudence (Proverbs 22:3– *“keeping far away from temptation”*). We must recognize that culturally acceptable standards of physical affection arouse passions that a Christian cannot control.
5. Have yearly church-wide men’s retreats with open discussion on this topic.
6. Maintain high personal standards:
  - Never being alone with a woman who is not my blood relative.
  - Choose entertainment prudently (what leaders do in moderation the members do in excess).
  - Be personally open and accountable to my leaders.

To end on an encouraging note, I, my fellow pastor, and our wives rejoiced greatly this spring when we had the honor of performing the wedding ceremony of two of our leading singles who had been shining examples of physical purity in their singlehood, courtship, and engagement. We wanted to jump for joy when I proclaimed at the wedding, “Now, for the first time ever, you may kiss the bride!” It was a celebration of a new era of holiness in our church!





BUILDING A CHURCH DEVOTED TO GOD'S WORD

## Dealing with the God of Busyness and the Tale of Two Guys

Pastor Rick Whitney · Manhattan, KS

They are good guys. And good men. Both Todd and Robert have wonderful wives and marriages, nice kids, good jobs. They live in a growing neighborhood that is proud of its schools and community spirit. They live the typical American dream.

They are typical men, who are always, chronically, crazily busy with little league, marching band, basketball, school plays, summer vacations, work travel, whatever.

But both men felt that something had to change.

For many years, Todd and Robert have each been considered “pillars in the church.” They and their wives are hard workers on Sunday mornings, helping out with worship and music, as well as teaching Sunday School. They both have led weekly Bible studies in their homes, and are both strongly committed to their church financially.

But it all wasn't enough. Both of these men looked back wistfully on when they were younger in the Lord and God seemed to be even more real. They, like all of us, were looking to see God more active in their present lives. And they had a dream.

For many years they both wanted to see a new church planted in the community where they had bought homes and placed their kids in school. But for many years they have been just too busy with life. And so for the last couple years, I put these guys off with pastoral “spiritual blather.” Delaying words like, “Trust in the Lord”; “Be patient”; “Maybe God will open a door”; “Let's wait on Him.”

And after we had finished our conversation, we would all go back to our own rat race.

Finally, things came to a head when I got their Christmas letters in December 1998. Todd, Robert, and I had lunch together in January, and they both asked me again about starting a new church down south where they lived. I told them that they probably should just forget their dream of planting a church, unless something radically changed in their world and in their availability. We agreed that it would take an incredible amount of effort to establish a new church, above and beyond their present level of service.

But I wasn't sure what could actually “give,” so to speak, in their schedules. It wasn't that they were involved in anything bad. They had not spent all of April fighting with their wives or most of August drunk. As I said, they are good men.

Their lives were just too busy.

*“If we have faith we have everything. Whoever does not have faith has nothing.”*

*- Martin Luther*

***“Obedience is the one qualification for further vision.”***

***- G. Campbell Morgan***

Isn't that always the way it seems in all of our lives? We are so busy we can hardly breathe. And we cannot easily put our finger on what needs to change. We all need more time to do the things that really matter, but we often run out of time, before we even get started!

I asked them to pray about their dream and to seriously sit down and count the cost. About a month later, we got together and they opened up our lunch with these words, “Whatever it takes, we want to see this thing happen. Let's go for it, brother!”

And so, we worked harder than we ever had. We set our table and prepared. We walked and talked and spread the Word. We handed out flyers everywhere. I thought that those two guys could have easily bankrolled a mass mailing, but I did not want to do that. I wanted us all, including our wives and children (us six adults and our nine kids), to be involved with strong effort, lots of sacrificed time, and hard work. I did not think that writing a check was what the Lord wanted.

Then we met that first Sunday in 1999, and prayed in a small circle before our first church meeting and asked God to bless us. I offered a safe prayer along these lines, “Lord if no one comes, we are going to enjoy You and each other.” But the kids weren't satisfied with that prayer. One of them asked for ten families to come! I thought, “Bless their little hearts.”

Guess what? Ten families came! The next week we thought, “Boy Lord, it sure would be nice if some of them came back.” But our prayer circle before church asked for twenty families and guess what, twenty families came! That morning we just kept singing and welcoming the new families as they streamed in. Every chair was filled and our kids wound up sitting on the floor. Three months into this new church plant, twelve weeks into their dream, we averaged 60 souls a week.

A real church family was being formed. Lives were being challenged. Marriages and families were being built up. The gospel was going out and people were listening.

There is now a church where there was not one before. Today, things are happening in a very real way, where earlier there was only the desire. And we three men have been more excited than we have been in a long, long time. As Jesus said, “*Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God*” (John 11:40)?

But the dream requires effort. All dreams take much effort.

May God give us each wisdom in our own lives, as leaders in our churches, to not be caught up in our self-made routines, as natural, “busy,” unsaved men so often are.

Let's take risks and attempt and do those things that are great and eternal.



BUILDING A CHURCH DEVOTED TO GOD'S WORD

## Motivating Your Church to Journal

Pastor Mark Darling · Bloomington, MN

One day, as I was reflecting over the past ten years that I have been in church leadership, I was happy and excited about a number of events and accomplishments. It was encouraging to see how so many people had grown and were helped through the work of the church and through God's influence in their lives. But there were some things I was not happy about. I felt we were falling down in two important areas: 1) the general commitment of our people to read the Bible and 2) the general commitment of people to reach out to friends to win them to the Lord. As I was praying about these concerns, I saw more clearly my responsibilities as a leader. God appointed me as a leader to consider ways to help people succeed. How can I help them in these critical areas?

These problems are complicated by the busy schedules we keep. I recently read that the average American does not even have time any more to pour a bowl of cereal and sit down at the table to eat it before leaving for the day. This is why companies invented breakfast bars—to have breakfast that is convenient and eaten on the go. I started to think about this in relation to helping people succeed in reading the Bible and reaching out to friends. My “clientele” is usually a mom and a dad who both work outside the home, with one or two children, living at breakneck speed. George Barna reports that the average American doesn't read a book in a year. The books on the Best Seller list are not read by the average American. So what does all this mean in relation to the people who attend my church?

The single most important spiritual habit in my life and in the lives of my fellow pastors has been the habit of daily Bible reading. This habit of reading and thinking about God's Word has greatly influenced every area of our lives: our families, our marriages, our finances, our relationships, our judgment and discernment, our joy, our perspectives, and our values. How could we help our people grow this habit in their daily lives? We developed journals designed specifically for the Evergreen and The Rock churches. It's a simple plan to help people succeed in reading the Bible through in a year and writing one verse a day in the journal. These verses will plant seeds of remembrance in our hearts and minds to bear fruit in the future.

Many people begin a new habit only to have it fail. Why? Because they have to face the daunting task of figuring out where to go next and, even harder, where to begin in the first place. They also need a routine or a plan to continue consistently to build a new habit. We were committed to helping people succeed, so we wanted to make it as easy as possible. Kenneth Taylor, author of *The Living Bible*, teamed up with other Bible scholars to make a more literal translation called the *New Living Translation* (NLT). It has been formatted into a doable, easy-to-read one year Bible. It is simple, with a reading plan laid out for the year. No guesswork as to where to start and where to go next! We gave away a journal and

*“For some years now I have read through the Bible twice every year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.”*

- Martin Luther

***“The vigor of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts.”***

***- George Mueller***

a One Year NLT Bible to every person in our church that was in a small group. For everyone else, we made it easy for them to purchase both of these at our book tables.

What makes up the journal? In the introduction, the journal shares one habit that will change your life: daily Bible reading. Each person writes one verse a day, no deep thoughts, just a verse. It only takes 10-15 minutes to do. If you miss a day, do not worry about it. Do not feel guilty. Skip the days missed in the reading plan; do not try to catch up. Read your journal and reflect on the verses written there. After you write the verse, talk to God about it and how it can apply to your life. Take the journal to your small group to share with others. The key to the success here is being relaxed and informal, making Bible reading a natural part of your life.

The second habit talked about in the introduction is one habit that will change someone else’s life: praying for others. The Harvest List bookmark is used as a bookmark in the daily reading as well as a reminder to pray for those who do not know Christ. This is a tool where you list five people you know who are not saved. You commit to pray for each by name each day, praying for an opportunity to help bring them to Christ. This prayer will be life-changing to each person on the list as well as keep you aware of any opportunities open as you are daily involved with their lives.

I feel that this is the most important thing I have done as a pastor. I’ve been doing it for years with my family and have seen it encourage my wife and children, even through difficult times. Carry your journal; read it during downtimes (waiting in line at the bank or store, waiting to catch a flight at the airport, sitting at a red light or while stuck in rush hour traffic). You can start your five or six-year-old on reading through the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. My ten year-old does it every day. We give these journals out during High School Leadership Training. We are hoping to see this idea sweep the nation. A number of churches are already using the idea and it has led to very encouraged people. Many pastors are doing it too—to set an example and also to simply help them get into the Word more.

And we are just beginning to reap rewards. For example, as pastors, we have seen our counseling load decrease. Also, parents are teaching their children the vital life skill of hearing from God on a daily basis. Our churches throughout the world are in a desperate state. Many people attending them have a heathen, secular world view because they do not know how to listen to God. They are not reading their Bibles regularly and cannot live on the teaching they hear on Sundays alone. Getting into God’s Word to learn His view on the world is more than important—it is vital and cannot be neglected any longer! We have available to us a power that is greater than we can imagine. The power of God’s Word and the power of prayer will change and transform many lives.



BUILDING A CHURCH DEVOTED TO GOD'S WORD

## Lee's Summit Discipleship Plan

Pastor Doug Brown · Lee's Summit, MO

### **The church must have a dream or a vision to encourage its people to get into the world.**

*"The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul"* (Psalm 19:7). The Word of God is exactly that—the Word of God. It is not the word of men. God has spoken and revealed Himself to us through His Word. Without the Word we have nothing to say.

We have no authority or standard to rely on. The Word of God is our plumb line, our standard, and our spiritual and moral compass. Without it we are lost. Because of it, we are transformed into the image of Christ. So let's get excited about the Word of God! If we are not excited and motivated by the Word, certainly our people will not be either.

It is important that we communicate the importance of the Word to our churches in what I call a dream or a vision for the church. At Lee's Summit Community Church (LSCC), we have a "Dream Card" with ten items listed as our dream. One of those items relates to the Word of God: "We dream of a church that establishes each believer in the Christian life through various discipleship ministries and small groups (Colossians 2:6-8)." We are building our church on this dream. We hand this card to everybody who attends our Newcomers Class # 101. We send this card to everyone who gives financially for the first time to LSCC. In doing so, we are casting a vision and a cause for their contribution. Once a year, we have a State of the Church address where we review our dream and our commitment to the Word of God.

### **The church must have a plan to help its people get into the Word.**

Although having a dream is important, it is not enough. A dream without a plan is merely a dream. First comes the dream, then the plan. For *"the plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage"* (Proverbs 21:5). The question we need to address is, "How are we going to get our people in the Word of God?"

At LSCC, we encourage our people to get into the Word in a variety of ways:

1. Weekend Worship: Our weekend worship services are an obvious place for us to stimulate God's people in the Word and encourage them to get into it themselves. We do provide a message outline so that people can not only take notes, but also look up the Scripture passages for themselves, or use it as an outline for discussion in a small group setting.
2. Enlist people in Spiritual Maturity Workshop Class # 201: Every attendee of our Newcomer's Class is invited to attend our four-week Spiritual Maturity Course. We also make an open invitation to all in our weekend bulletin. In this course, we cover four spiritual habits: two of them have to do with

*"The Bible is to me the most precious thing in the world just because it tells me the story of Jesus."*

- George MacDonald

the Word (“How to Develop a Quiet Time” and “How to Study the Word of God”).

3. Small groups are a great place to incorporate the Word of God. At LSCC, the small group ministry is the backbone of our church. There are two purposes for our small groups: “We get together to develop relationships centered around the Word of God and to carry out our mission to this world.” They focus on a variety of subjects: practical needs, topical studies, books of the Bible, etc. In every case, the Word of God is central. This in itself relates the importance of the Word of God.

4. The LSCC Survival Guide has become a great tool to help people not only get into the Word, but to help them know how. The Survival Guide is a daily journal to write out a simple prayer, based on the acronym ACTS. It also contains a section called “Search the Word” where observations and instructions are recorded; a place for application to be written out by asking the question, “How am I going to apply this passage?” and a place to write out the HWLW memory verse for the week. HWLW stands for “His Word Last Word.” In the Journal, we have included a list of 52 verses to memorize for the year. This has been a great tool for families to memorize verses together and discuss them at the dinner table or when going to bed at night. The Survival Guide provides our people with a great opportunity to get in the Word so that the Word gets in them.

5. At LSCC, we also sponsor Student Bible Quizzing. This is a national program where children and young teens team up together and memorize books of the Bible and quiz against other teams in a healthy competitive atmosphere.

6. Sending teams of people out to convalescent centers and hospitals to lead worship services and meet people in their rooms to share the gospel and the Word. It has been a great way to help our people see the importance knowing the Word and handling it accurately.

7. We offer a wide range of adult Bible courses as well; including women’s and men’s studies, New Testament surveys, and Old Testament overviews.

8. We have developed a course called Disciples For Life to help establish new or young believers in their faith.

9. We are currently developing the LSCC Institute that will be complimentary to GCLI. The LSCC Institute will allow us to go deeper into areas of theology. This will be a part of our pastoral internship training and available for anyone interested in a particular theological topic.

10. The Word of God is primary in all of our classes from the youngest to oldest.

***“The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.”***

**- A. W. Tozer**

### **The church must model getting into the Word.**

During our once-a-month Sunday evening celebration service, we offer an opportunity for our people to share what God has been teaching them. This is a testimony time that not only is encouraging, but it also establishes a model for all of us to spend time in the Word.

Our desire is to raise up a host of believers who are rooted and grounded in the values of the Word so that they are able to stand against the values of the world and influence this world for Jesus Christ.

*"God hath given to  
man a short time here  
upon earth, and yet  
upon this short time  
eternity depends."*

*-Jeremy Taylor*



BUILDING A CHURCH DEVOTED TO GOD'S WORD

**Exercise**

1. What point(s) did you find most interesting from these testimonies?

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2. Considering the times and culture in which we live, write a statement articulating what place your philosophy of ministry gives to the Word of God

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3. What are some consequences that will come upon individuals and churches that neglect or de-emphasize the Word? List at least five consequences for each.

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BUILDING A CHURCH DEVOTED TO GOD'S WORD

**Exercise**

4. List several ways in which your church is effectively ministering the Word. How can you improve in these areas and do this better still?

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5. Can you identify some areas in which your church is falling short in effectively ministering the Word? What ideas do you have to address these shortcomings?

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COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

**God-Honoring Authority**

As believers in Jesus Christ, we recognize that He alone is our King, our Lord, our authority. We also recognize that Jesus Christ has chosen for us to respect, honor, and obey the authorities that He has put in our lives. The following article by Dave Bovenmyer addresses this very significant topic of God-honoring authority.





## God-Honoring Authority

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer · Ames, IA

American culture seems confused about the need for and place of authority. Over the last quarter century, a steady stream of foreign policy failures, presidential scandals, and corporate abuses has left an entire generation skeptical of authority. As society becomes more open about abuses of authority in families, government, the corporate world, and even the church, our skepticism of authority can seem justified. We can easily begin to question the purpose and usefulness of traditional authority structures.

Yet, as Christians, we are not simply concerned with such abuses; we see a deeper root issue. Every aspect of our world's tragic condition is rooted in the rejection of God's authority. In the garden, Adam and Eve were the first to rebel against authority. Their rebellion and the subsequent rebellion of each of their descendants have alienated man from God and have deeply damaged all human relationships. Even those who use their authority abusively are themselves rebelling against God's authority and command.

The Bible has much to say about authority—the authority of God, the authority of the Scripture, and human authority. In this paper we will primarily focus on what the Bible says about human authority. Because of limits in length, this will only be an introduction to the subject of human authority. Many of the more complex issues will not be adequately addressed. On some points, more questions may be stimulated than answered. Yet practical wisdom for specific questions and situations begins with an overview of God's perspective of an issue, a perspective that this paper will seek to provide. Other Great Commission materials, including other portions of the Great Commission Leadership Institute, help to flesh out how authority is to work in the family, church, and world.

### 1. What is authority and where does it come from?

Authority, as expressed by the Greek word *exousia*, denotes “the right or power to rule and command another...the right to exercise power...or the power of rule or government...the power of one whose will and commands must be obeyed by others.”

As Creator of all, God alone possesses the intrinsic right and sovereign power to expect obedience and enforce compliance:

*“...He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15).*

Yet scripture indicates that He has delegated some of His authority over creation to mankind:

*“...fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).*

*“Authority exercised with humility, and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live.”*

*-C.S. Lewis*

Thus God has given man responsibility to care for His earth and the creatures upon it:

*“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15, NIV).*

In addition to this responsibility to rule and care for the earth, God has also given some people positions of authority in various spheres of relationship with others:

- **Government**—Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God (Romans 13:1).
- **Church leaders**—*“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account...”*(Hebrews 13:17).
- **Husbands**— *“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything”* (Ephesians 5:22-24).
- **Parents**— *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth”* (Ephesians 6:1-3).
- **Masters and, by application, employers**— *“Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ”* (Ephesians 6:5).

Understanding that all human authority is delegated to man by God profoundly affects our understanding of authority. First, receiving a position of authority involves accepting a stewardship—the responsibility to care for what belongs to another. Second, authority is limited in scope and limited in the right to enforce compliance—God ultimately maintains the right to command. Third, authority must be used to fulfill God’s good purposes in the world—to love and to care for that which He has entrusted to us. Fourth, all human authorities will give an account for their stewardship—God retains the ultimate right to judge.

In summary, a helpful definition of human authority might be: “The God-given right, responsibility, and power to care for and direct others, for their good and to fulfill the good purposes of God.”

## 2. What is the purpose of authority and why is it needed?

The purpose of authority may be rooted in the very nature of relationship itself. Since creation reflects the Creator, human relationships were designed to reflect the relationship that has eternally existed within the Godhead. Amazingly, the Divine Relationship, perfect in love and goodness, is expressed through interdependent roles of authority and submission. We get a glimpse of this love between Father (setting the direction) and Son (following the Father’s direction) in Jesus’ earthly life.

*“The authority by which the Christian leader leads is not power but love, not force but example, not coercion but reasoned persuasion. Leaders have power, but power is safe only in the hands of those who humble themselves to serve.”*

*-John Stott*

*"... that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me..." (John 14:31).*

*"...I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does..." (John 5:19-20, NIV).*

*"And a voice from Heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:17, NIV).*

*"He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done'" (Matthew 26:42).*

Furthermore, this Father-Son relationship, with its love, leadership, and submission, is not a temporary characteristic of the Trinity during the time of Christ's humiliation and suffering but will continue throughout all eternity.

*"When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).*

When God created the first man and woman, He decreed that the two should become one (Genesis 2:24), thus reflecting in them His own plural "Us" nature as well as His essential oneness.

*"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness... God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them'" (Genesis 1:26-27).*

When Paul wrote about the relationship between men and women in marriage, he advocated the same sort of relational interdependence of authority and submission as is present in the Trinity.

*"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:3).*

Paul bases his teaching about the differing roles of men and women on God's plan in creation, prior to sin entering the world:

*"For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake" (1 Corinthians 11:8-9).*

*A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve (1 Timothy 2:11-13).*

From this we see that righteous, loving authority and respectful, obedient submission were not instituted as part of the judgment of the curse nor were they a necessary evil or an accommodation to the sinfulness of man. Rather, they were present before the fall of man, both in the first marriage and in the Triune God Himself.

In summary, we can conclude that God's purpose for authority is two-fold. First, it is a delegated stewardship, a responsibility to bring about the good will of God in some area. Secondly, and per-

***"Until the will and the affections are brought under the authority of Christ, we have not begun to understand, let alone to accept, His lordship."***

***-Elisabeth Elliot***

haps more fundamentally, authority and submission seem to be part of God's pattern for relationship. In His nature and plan, the greatest possible love seems to be expressed as one person sacrifices himself to take responsibility for another's welfare (loving, leading, directing, protecting, bringing to good) and a second person sacrifices himself to unite with the purpose of another (respecting, following, submitting). When these are practiced according to God's plan, God's good purposes are accomplished and love and relationship are enhanced.

### 3. What responsibility and accountability come with authority?

Since God is a lover who delights in His creation and since He has given those who rule a stewardship over what He has made, those in authority have a God-given responsibility—to love and care and lead in accordance with God's good purposes. Those in authority will give an account to Him for how well they do so.

Thus civil authorities are ministers "of God to do you good." (Romans 13:4). Church overseers are to "shepherd (care for) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Fathers are to train and instruct their children, for their good (Ephesians 6:4). Mothers are to love their children (Titus 2:4). Husbands are to lay down their lives to nourish and cherish their wives (Ephesians 5:25, 29). All in positions of authority are to use their position of strength and power to love and care for those they lead.

Because authority comes with the right to direct and perhaps even use force, God is particularly angry with those who use their authority to exploit others or selfishly benefit themselves. Such will incur the wrath and judgment of God, as Israel's civil and religious leaders did when they exploited the flock and did not shepherd it.

*"Thus says the Lord God, 'Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?... Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered (Ezekiel 34:4-5).*

Similarly, God warns that He will destroy those teachers and leaders who destroy His church (temple).

*"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).*

For this reason, those who accept the responsibility of care and leadership ought to soberly evaluate their willingness and readiness to do so.

*"God built into the creation a variety of cultural spheres, such as the family, economics, politics, art, and intellectual inquiry. Each of these spheres has its own proper "business" and needs its own unique pattern of authority. When we confuse spheres, by violating the proper boundaries of church and state, for instance, or reducing the academic life to a business enterprise, we transgress the patterns that God has set."*

*Abraham Kuyper*

*“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).*

#### **4. How does authority in God’s kingdom differ from authority in the world?**

Jesus sharply contrasted how authority is exercised in the world and God’s requirement within the kingdom.

*And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’” But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. “For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves (Luke 22:25-27).*

In His contrast, Jesus does not negate authority in the kingdom, nor does He lessen the power or diminish the position of those in authority. Rather He commands those in authority to adopt a different goal and attitude. The world’s leaders tend to disregard the responsibility to love and care and to use their authority for personal gain—to feed their ego, to seek security, or to gain a life of pleasure and ease. They pursue these selfish ends while demanding that people enhance their reputation by calling them “Benefactors.” Leaders in the kingdom are forbidden to use their position for such selfish ends, but rather must love, give, and serve. Jesus requires them to be the greatest servants of all—with fewer rights, more responsibility, and a greater obligation to sacrifice. Jesus demonstrated this attitude Himself. Authority in the kingdom, although no less powerful or compelling than in the world, must be used for the good and blessing of others and for the purposes of God and never for selfish ends.

#### **5. What other benefits and blessings come from authority?**

The Biblical often uses the analogy of a shepherd in regard to both civil and religious leaders. Since sheep without a shepherd are entirely helpless against predators, this analogy emphasizes the need for leaders to protect those they lead. Often, a group’s enemies will target its leaders for this very reason, knowing that if the leaders are neutralized, followers are vulnerable and defenseless.

*“...Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones” (Zechariah 13:7).*

*“But no one can enter the strong man’s house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house” (Mark 3:27).*

The enemy of our souls targets leaders, seeking to make them fall or to undermine their authority so that he can destroy the “little ones.” How many churches have been decimated by immorality in the church’s leadership? How many families have been torn apart when the father turns to alcohol or

***“Our first remark on this subject is that the ministry is an office, and not merely a work. Our second remark is, that the office is of divine appointment, not merely in the sense in which the civil powers are ordained of God, but in the sense that ministers derive their authority from Christ, and not from the people.”***

***-Charles Hodge***



immorality? First of all, leaders must watch themselves, both for their own sakes and for the sake of those they are charged to protect. And those under authority must not rebel against or remove themselves from human authority, or they will lose a major means of God's protection, becoming vulnerable to the devil's schemes.

God spoke to King David about the blessing of righteous leadership, inspiring him to rule in the fear of God for the sake of his people:

*"The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me,  
He who rules over men righteously,  
Who rules in the fear of God,  
Is as the light of the morning when the sun rises,  
A morning without clouds,  
When the tender grass springs out of the earth,  
Through sunshine after rain' (2 Samuel 23:3-4).*

***"He has right to interrupt your life. He is Lord. When you accepted Him as Lord, you gave Him, the right to help Himself to your life anytime He wants."***

***-Henry Blackaby***

Just as with the civil authority that David was wielding, righteous and God-fearing leadership in any realm of authority brings great blessing. The guiding, protecting power of a wise and loving father cannot be overestimated. The security and joy gained by a wife through a strong and caring husband is life-giving. The relational peace produced by humble, God fearing leadership in a business or church is beautiful and catalytic to progress and success. On the other hand, little can be more destructive than the selfish, oppressive, or demeaning use of authority to a child, wife, employee, citizen, or church member.

## **6. How has the fall of man affected the arena of human authority?**

When Adam and Eve sinned, human nature fell from its original state of perfection. Central to human corruption is a sense of pride, independence, and rebellion against our Creator's authority. This inner corruption increases the need for human authority. For example, early civilization rapidly turned to evil and violence (Genesis 6:5), prompting God to destroy the world with a flood. After the flood, God strengthened civil authority by instituting the death penalty (Genesis 9:5-6), apparently to better restrain and punish human wickedness. The Apostle Paul writes that one purpose of civil authority is to restrain evil and promote good:

*"For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil" (Romans 13:3-4).*

Just as the fall of man increased the need for authority, it also increased the potential for sinful men to abuse authority. History is replete with kings, churchmen, employers, husbands, fathers, and mothers who used their authority to exploit, control, and demean others. Such abuse tends to make us suspicious and skeptical of authority, and understandably so. Yet the problem is not with authority, per se, but with selfish, abusive authority. One of God's purposes for authority is to promote love, order, and harmony in this fallen world.

***“He who makes himself his own master subjects himself to a fool for a master.”***

***-Bernard of Clairvaux***

## **7. How does authority relate to leadership and competency?**

Clearly, the exercise of authority is a type of leadership. Yet if authority is “the God-given right, responsibility, and power to care for and direct others...” then authority is more than leadership. It also involves a right, a responsibility, and a power—the right to direct others, the responsibility to care, and the power to enforce. We may choose to follow a leader or imitate a leader’s example, yet not be under that leader’s authority. For example, a wife may choose to follow the leadership of an older woman whom she views as an example, yet not be under that woman’s authority, but rather under the authority of her husband. A child may benefit by following the example and leadership of an older youth, yet not be under that youth’s authority, but rather that of his parents. There are many people whose leadership we can follow for our good and the good of others, yet those leaders may not have the right, responsibility and power to rule and direct us.

Similarly, competency does not automatically give a person the “right, responsibility and power to care for and direct others”—although, in another sense of the word, we may call a person of great expertise and competence an “authority” on the matter. When someone has great wisdom, we are wise when we submit ourselves to their knowledge and direction. Yet the fact that the husband down the street might be kinder, wiser, and more loving than your husband does not put you under his authority rather than your husband’s. The fact that the pastor on the radio might be a better speaker and theologian than your pastors does not place you under his spiritual authority. Authority is more than wisdom or competence; it involves the God-given right, responsibility, and power to care for and direct another.

## **8. How is an authority granted his position of authority?**

As we have seen, all authority comes from God. Yet we enter authority relationships either by birth or by covenant. Children are under the authority of their parents because they were born to those parents. Most citizens are under the authority of their government because they were born in that country. Yet other authority is granted through covenants and agreements. A husband’s authority is granted through the covenant relationship of marriage. An employer’s authority is granted through an employment agreement or contract. The leader of a volunteer organization derives his authority through the agreement of his volunteers to serve that organization. A pastor’s authority is primarily granted through a parishioner’s agreement to be a member of that church. Yet spiritual birth may sometimes be an aspect of pastoral authority, as we see in Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians, “*For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel*” (1 Corinthians 4:15).

## **9. What are the spheres of human authority and how do they differ?**

God has ordered human relationships by establishing five spheres of authority: government, church, husband, parent, and master/employer. Every legitimate human authority relationship seems to fall, at least loosely, within one of these five God-instituted relationships.

Yet the way authority is best exercised in each relationship may be quite different. For example, consider the authority of a parent. Because young children have not yet developed mentally, socially, emotionally, and physically, parental leadership needs to be more directive, constant, and intrusive than an

adult authority relationship. When a parent fails to recognize the need for such constant leadership and care, terrible things can happen, such as a child being run over by a car, burned in a fire, or drowned in a pool. But the same constancy, directness, and intensity in a husband's leadership of his wife would be demeaning, authoritative, controlling, demanding, and resented.

Also, the exercise of authority may be very different even within the same relationship, depending upon the situation at hand. Governmental authority as seen in the military in time of war is much more intense, directive, and absolute than the authority of, say, a mayor in times of peace. Were a mayor to use the same approaches with his staff at city hall as a drill sergeant does with his platoon, he would be considered demeaning, arrogant, and obnoxious. Certainly he would not be re-elected. We understand that a sergeant's abrupt and dictatorial use of authority in combat is appropriate, since the lives of many people may depend on his unit's ability to quickly and cohesively engage in the appropriate action. Yet in times of peace, such an approach in any branch of government would be wholly inappropriate.

Even a husband's or father's authority may, in an emergency, be more like a drill sergeant than a tender, loving husband. He may need to speak to his wife or children in unusually abrupt and urgent ways, perhaps even yelling at them, if the house is on fire or a thief breaks in or a tornado or flood is imminent. Such situations demand immediate and decisive action for survival, and the leadership of the authority needs to look different than when there is plenty of time to quietly discuss possible courses of action and to use language that is sensitive and gentle.

In general, authority should be tailored to the needs, maturity, and character of those being led. Thus in a nation with a relatively moral, god-fearing culture, citizens will govern themselves more than in a godless nation. God-fearing people require less intrusive government, tending to respect the rights of their fellow citizens, to pay their taxes, and to preserve the peace. Similarly, parents might allow their teenager more freedom as he demonstrates responsible, trustworthy character. The need for intrusive leadership and authority decreases as the teen demonstrates that he is becoming a mature adult.

Finally, the extent of power differs with different authorities. As direct and intensive as parental authority is, parents do not have the authority to inflict the death penalty. Even in Israel's theocracy, parents were required to submit to governmental authority and not administer the death penalty independently (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Biblically, the authority to inflict capital punishment seems to be reserved to the government alone. Parents have the power of corporal punishment and can rely extensively upon it, yet physical punishment is largely inappropriate in relationships of authority in adults. In some way, authority is shaped and influenced by the extent of power appropriate for that relationship. Remembering the goal of authority—caring for those God loves according to His plan—will help instruct us concerning the appropriate ways to use authority in various situations.

*“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”*

*-Romans 13:1*

## **10. How does authority relate to the rights, freedom, and dignity of individuals?**

Since human authority is delegated by God, it is limited in its scope and limited in its right to enforce compliance. Those in positions of authority must recognize that God has granted certain rights to individuals. For example, the right to possess private property is founded in the commandment “You

shall not steal.” This prohibition applies to civil authorities as much as to individuals. God has given individuals the right to possess and rule over that which belongs to them and to use what is theirs as they please (as long as it doesn’t violate the rights of others or the law of God). Thus the prophet Micah appealed to a familiar theme in Israel:

*“Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken” (Micah 4:4, NIV).*

Second, since God’s purpose for authority is love, care, and the fulfillment of His good purposes, leaders should seek to help individuals achieve the significance and potential that God desires for them. Leaders must recognize that those they lead are created in God’s image and have great dignity, worth, and potential. Therefore leaders should encourage individuals to express their God-given uniqueness, perspectives, talents, and gifts. As individuals flourish, God’s purposes are fulfilled and His kingdom is advanced. Although individual preference is not supreme—the good of the whole and the will of God are paramount—we must acknowledge that individual creativity and expression are important and glorify God.

Adam is an example of a human authority who recognized the God-given dignity in the one he led. God created Adam first and gave him authority to rule over the earth.

Then God brought various creatures to Adam to assess their usefulness, yet Adam found none to be a suitable helper. But when God created Eve from Adam’s side, he instantly knew that she was different—“bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”—she was his equal. However, he also understood that she was created to be his helper, and he exercised his authority to name her, just as he had the other creatures.

So it is that a husband must treat his wife with dignity and respect as an equal before God, yet as an equal that he has responsibility for—to love, protect, and lead. Peter instructs husbands to treat their wives as equals—as partners and fellow-heirs.

*“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Peter 3:7, NIV).*

In this verse, Peter appeals to a type of equality that goes even beyond basic human dignity. Wives are fellow-heirs and therefore deserve respect as kingdom partners. So, all believers—male and female, young and old, rich and poor—are sons of God and priests in the kingdom.

*“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).*

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).*

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (1 Peter 2:9).*

***“The greatness of a man’s power is the measure of his surrender.”***

***-William Booth***

In other passages, both Peter and Paul affirm the need for human authority structures within the Christian home, church, and community (Ephesians 5:22-6:9, 1 Peter 2:13-3:7). Yet the fact that every believer is a priest and son of God and the fact that we are all one in Christ Jesus ought to shape and inform the use of authority in the kingdom. Christian leaders are not leading people inferior to themselves, but equals and fellow-heirs of the kingdom, who also have access to God and a relationship with Him.

Within the church, pastors should not exalt themselves above those they lead, but must place themselves on a level of equality.

*“And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in Heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:9-12, NIV).*

Jesus mandates that church leaders lead with humility and recognize that those they lead are their equals—brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Even parents must recognize the dignity and worth of their children, as Jesus affirmed, commanding that the children be brought to him and affirming their God-given dignity and equality as fellow-heirs of the kingdom.

*“And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10:13-14).*

## **11. How should authority and relationship work together?**

In modern, technological societies, authority tends to be detached and impersonal. No longer is the policeman known personally by the members of the community, nor does he personally know most of those he serves. Political leaders tend to be distant and detached. It is difficult, if not impossible, for pastors of larger churches to personally know all their church members. Although personal knowledge between an authority and people under authority is not always possible, it should be acknowledged that authority and submission tend to work best when there is personal knowledge of one another. An authority's ability to love and care will often depend upon his knowledge of the needs, preferences, and desires of those he cares for. Parents, husbands, pastors, employers, and civic leaders all must work to understand the needs, desires, strengths and weaknesses of those they lead. Leaders should be good listeners, not assuming that they inherently know the problem and its solution. Leaders should have a humble attitude, seeking advice from those they lead, realizing that their position of responsibility and leadership does not necessarily make them superior in wisdom, knowledge, discernment, or perspective. The solemn responsibility of care should induce in leaders an attitude of fear, lest they make decisions that damage other's lives. Leaders must be learners first and foremost and must find ways to move toward those they lead in relationship.

***“In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch of which the Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, ‘That is mine!’”***

***-Abraham Kuyper***

*"If my life is surrendered to God, all is well. Let me not grab it back, as though it were in peril in His hand but would be safer in mine!"*

*-Elisabeth Elliot*

## 12. How should various human authorities interrelate and work together?

God's ideal is that all authority work together toward the same end—the glory of God, the advancement of His kingdom, and the good of those whom He loves. This working together is best achieved when each sphere of authority operates from a Biblical world view under the authority of God. Unity among authorities is also enhanced when each sphere of authority acknowledges the jurisdiction of the other. For example government should acknowledge that God has given authority to church leaders to lead the church, to husbands and parents to lead their families, and to business owners to lead their businesses. Yet in some situations involving crime or injustice, one institution of authority should step into the realm of another to defend the defenseless or to promote good.

In the Law of Moses we can see examples of situations where the government and religious authorities were required to respect other spheres of authority and yet at times were to intrude into them. Under Mosaic Law, the government supported and enforced marriage vows (Leviticus 20:10), contractual obligations, and property rights (Exodus 22:9-15). Religious authorities were required to honor the authority of a father or husband in relation to a vow made by his daughter or wife (Numbers 30:3-16). The government had authority to protect the rights of wives and children and to provide some protection for slaves.

Examples relating to family rights are 1) upholding a slave woman's right to divorce her master/husband if he refused to provide her with food, clothing, or conjugal rights (Exodus 21:8-11), 2) ensuring the firstborn rights of the son of an unloved wife (Deuteronomy 21:15-17), 3) protecting a wife from false accusations by her husband that, upon marriage, he did not find her to be a virgin (Deuteronomy 22:13-19), and 4) protecting the rights of a divorced woman to remarry by requiring a certificate of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Examples relating to slavery include 1) prosecuting a master who kills or injures his slave during a beating (Exodus 21:20, 26), 2) requiring that slaves also rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 23:12), and 3) limiting Hebrew slavery to seven years (Leviticus 25:39-43).

Even though modern societies are not under Mosaic Law, we can learn from the Law that each sphere of authority must respect the others and yet be prepared to intervene in cases of crime or abuse. Exactly when and how this balance of respect and willingness to intrude are to play out is not an easy question to resolve practically or Biblically, as evidenced by the longstanding question in Western society concerning the proper interaction of church and state. A culture's strength of respect between its authority structures and the specific situations in which intervention is expected will largely determine whether a government, church, or family is considered free and empowering or restrictive and oppressive.

## 13. What is the breadth of authority?

Someone in authority might ask, "What is the breadth of my authority? Does a leader have authority only where the scripture gives specific instruction, or does his authority extend into areas that might be considered grey areas or preferences?"

First it is important to note that even the Old Testament Law, although much more extensive than the New Testament “law of Christ,” did not speak to every specific moral or legal issue. Rather, the Law gives examples that illustrate the spirit behind the law. Take for instance, the following command:

*“When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof” (Deuteronomy 22:8, NIV).*

Behind this command is God’s desire that we value human life. The command does not speak to every instance in which human life might be endangered, but uses one situation as an example of the need to protect life. How the basic principles of the law are to be applied in other situations was left up to the priests and judges in Israel to figure out. Examples of applying this same principle today would be laws governing the speed limit or laws regarding worker safety. Behind these laws is the principle of valuing human life. It is the responsibility of governmental authorities to determine where the principle of protecting life requires a specific law and what that specific standard should be (i.e. 70 miles per hour).

Secondly, God seemed to place confidence in the ability of human authorities, as they sought God’s will, to take the principles of the Law and apply them in diverse situations.

*“If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses. “So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall inquire of them and they will declare to you the verdict in the case (Deuteronomy 17:8-9).*

Thirdly, providing leadership in areas of preference, in grey areas, or in questions of emphasis seems to be one of the reasons God has appointed leaders and given them authority. It may seem somewhat arbitrary what hours a business chooses to be open or what particular brand of product it sells or what style and color logo it chooses. Yet somehow a specific choice must be made. For any group to work together or make progress, a unified goal and plan must be achieved. Someone must be given authority to make the decision and others must follow that lead, or chaos will ensue.

Thus, even with godly, Christ-following families, there will be very different perspectives on various issues resulting in different cultures within the families. These will be based on the strengths and weaknesses of the particular parents and upon the things they choose to emphasize, often in grey areas and areas of preference. Similarly, different churches will have different approaches to ministry and areas of emphasis, resulting in different cultures, again based upon the church leaders’ strengths and upon their convictions and preferences. God instituted leadership and authority to help unite a group not only around the obvious truths of the scripture, but around particular ways and approaches to living those truths out in the kingdom.

#### **14. What should a believer’s response and attitude be toward those who have authority over him?**

First of all believers are to submit, as Peter enjoins in his first letter:

***“The modern world detests authority but worships relevance. Our Christian conviction is that the Bible has both authority and relevance, and that the secret of both is Jesus Christ.”***

***-John Stott***

- “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right” (1 Peter 2:13-14).
- “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable” (1 Peter 2:18).
- “In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives” (1 Peter 3:1).

The word translated “submit” and “be submissive” is *hypotassomai*, and in the middle voice means “to subject oneself,” “to be subservient,” “to submit voluntarily.” Submission is yielding to the authority or will of another. It is following the lead of another in obedience.

Second, accompanying this submission and obedience, Peter calls for an attitude of respect and honor:

- “Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17, NIV).
- “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable” (1 Peter 2:18).
- “...wives, be submissive...as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior” (1 Peter 3:1-2).

The word translated “respect” is the Greek word *phobos*, which means (a) fear, dread, terror, or (b) reverential fear. Such reverential fear comes from a respect for the place and role of the authorities that God has ordained for us and from a healthy fear of the consequences that will come upon those who disobey God’s commands.

Finally, Paul instructs believers to submit to their authorities “as to the Lord.”

- *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22).*
- *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Ephesians 6:1).*
- *Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ... With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free (Ephesians 6:5, 7-8).*

Our attitude toward our authorities should have God in view. We should ultimately submit, not because we love and respect those in authority over us, but because we fear and trust God. Submission takes faith, not primarily in the wisdom or goodness of our human authority, but faith in the wis-

***“It is not you who shape God; it is God that shapes you. If then you are the work of God, await the hand of the Artist who does all things in due season. Offer the Potter your heart, soft and tractable, and keep the form in which the Artist has fashioned you. Let your clay be moist, lest you grow hard and lose the imprint of the Potter’s fingers.”***

***-Irenaeus***



dom and goodness of our God. God often works and leads through very fallible and sinful human authorities. Ultimately, our response to those in authority reflects our fear of and trust in our Heavenly Father and His ability to work for our good through fallen human beings.

### **15. Why do we so often find ourselves resenting authority, resisting authority, and justifying our lack of respect toward authority?**

As fallen human beings, we constantly battle pride and tend to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. We fail to recognize our limitations in knowledge, wisdom, character, moral integrity, and ability. Our tendency is to think, “I don’t need your direction,” or “I’m OK, leave me alone.” We would do well to ask ourselves: “What might I need from my leaders that I don’t realize I need?” The Bible likens believers to sheep, one of the most helpless and dim-witted of farm animals. We need direction and protection, primarily from God, but also from those humans whom He has commissioned to lead us.

Secondly, we have been wounded by authorities. Someone has hurt us and we tend to harbor resentment and fear that it might happen again. We must humble ourselves, acknowledge our resentment and fear, look back at the times where we were hurt, and ask the Lord to help us to better understand His grace and purposes in those situations. We must find peace in the confidence that God will work those hurtful times together for our good. Otherwise our wounds can cause us to doubt God and to be suspicious of those in authority over us, even when we may now have wise and caring leaders.

Thirdly, our culture tends to discount and belittle the need for authority. In some relationships, such as the marriage relationship, even loving, godly authority is viewed as oppressive, selfish, and “patriarchal.” And with the increasing emphasis on children’s rights, the place of authority is being questioned and minimized even within the parent-child relationship.

Finally, we are in a spiritual battle. The enemy of our souls has been a rebel from the beginning. The devil loves rebellion and does what he can to tempt and stir up any inclinations within to question, disrespect, or disobey our human authorities.

### **16. How does our attitude toward authority relate to our growth in faith and maturity in Christ?**

Our response to our human authorities is one of the clearest and most practical indicators of our heart attitude towards God. We may think that we are humble and obedient before God, but be deceived. However, when a human authority gives a directive, pride and disobedience are not as easily hidden. Our true heart is more clearly seen.

Whether we grumble and rebel or respond with joy, honor, and obedience, indicates either a heart of disobedience or of faith and humility toward God. In this way, God can use human authority to develop Christ-like character in us in a very practical way—by revealing the true nature of our hearts before the Lord and bringing us to repentance and growth in our faith.

*“The objective Word, the written Scripture, together with the subjective word, the inner illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit, constitutes authority for the Christian.”*

*-Millard J. Erickson*

*“I can’t help but wonder, are we now seeing the fruit of education that predominantly throughout our country has stopped performing any teaching on the basis of moral principles or what is right or what is wrong?”*

*-Ronald Reagan*

### **17. What should leaders do when they find that they have violated their responsibility to love and care?**

All human leaders, other than Jesus Christ, are fallen, imperfect, sometimes-selfish human beings. Sadly, failures to discharge the duty to lead, care, and protect are inevitable, even with the most dedicated and good-hearted leaders. So, when leaders find that they have acted selfishly, harshly, insensitively, or unwisely, they should not be surprised. Failures, inadequacies, and impure motives should drive us to God and to a more urgent quest for our own life transformation. If we have the humility to look, a position of leadership will help expose what is wrong, twisted, or selfish within and will allow us to confess, repent, and move in the direction of Christ-likeness.

So a godly, humble father and husband won’t be surprised when he often finds himself having to say, “I’m sorry, will you forgive me?” He may find himself needing to say this more than anyone else in the family. Similarly, church leaders, business leaders, and civil leaders must have the humility to acknowledge errors, weaknesses, and faults. Although God gives all of us, including leaders, the grace of covering most of our faults, and we do not have to publicly expose every sin and weakness (1 Peter 4:8), yet many of our failings cannot be hidden and must be openly confessed and repented of. Rather than undermine our respect and leadership, such humility tends to inspire confidence and to teach others how to handle their own weaknesses and sins.

Blatant and consistent violation of God’s directive to love and care are grounds for removal from a position of leadership. Paul instructed that those church leaders who continue in sin should be rebuked in the presence of all (1 Timothy 5:20). A church leader who finds that he does not have the maturity to consistently lead with love and care should—in the fear of God, for his own sake, and for the sake of those he leads—step down from his position of leadership. The same principle ought to apply in all types of authority, civil, family and business. Fathers, husbands, mothers, managers, and civic leaders who find themselves grossly failing in the duty of love and care must humble themselves and urgently seek the help they need from God and others or they can do great damage to those they lead. The question of what practically constitutes abuse of a nature or duration where removal from leadership is required is complex and beyond the scope of this paper, but such a step ought to be considered where the duty of love and care is flagrantly violated.

### **18. What should we do if we disagree with the desires of a person in authority over us?**

When we disagree with an authority’s desire or direction, the first step is to listen carefully in order to clearly understand his perspective and the reasons behind his direction or desires. We should approach a conflict of opinion with humility, acknowledging that our perspective is limited and that God may be giving our leaders understanding and direction that we very much need.

Second, we should seek to clarify the intent of the authority’s desire. Is he giving a suggestion—advice that should be seriously considered—or is he giving a command to be obeyed.

Thirdly, if there is a directive that we truly feel will be detrimental to ourselves, to others, or to the glory of God, we should appeal to the person in authority. Scripture gives many examples of people who respectfully and successfully appealed to those with power and authority over them. A wise and respectful appeal can have great power and will often be appreciated by the person in authority.

Fourthly, we should consider appealing to other authorities. For instance a child might appeal to both his father and mother or even seek the advice and help of a grandparent. A church member might appeal to another of the church's elders or to a denominational leader. An employee might appeal to a higher authority in the organization. Similarly, a citizen might appeal to a higher authority or make an appeal through the court system.

Lastly, if an appeal does not bring about a change of direction, we should submit to any command that is not a clear violation of God's will as revealed in His word, believing that God will use our submission even to a command that we view as harmful. Typically, such submission, even to an unwise or hurtful command, will cause less damage to us, to others, or to the glory of God than would outright disobedience.

*"I would advise no one to send his child where the Holy Scriptures are not supreme. Every institution that does not unceasingly pursue the study of God's word becomes corrupt."*

*-Martin Luther*

### **19. Is human authority absolute? When, if ever, should it be disobeyed?**

Since God is the supreme authority over all His creation and all human authority is derived from Him, human authority is never absolute. The king is subject to the laws of God in the same way that His subjects are. If there is a Creator and Sustainer of all things, then it is never true that "might makes right." Although God raises up one and puts down another (Psalm 75:6-7), and although God can and does often use unrighteous authority for His own purposes (Acts 3:17-18 & Acts 5:27-28), authority can and does deviate from the will and plan of God (Psalm 94:20). Where human authority clashes with the clear, revealed command of God, human authority should be disobeyed.

Throughout the Bible, many people were blessed by God because they feared and obeyed Him, rather than a human authority. Below are a few of many examples.

- *The Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's order to kill every baby boy and were blessed by God because they feared and obeyed Him rather than Pharaoh. But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live... So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them (Exodus 1:20-21).*
- *At the command of God, Moses and the Israelites disobeyed Pharaoh, their civil authority, and escaped Egyptian oppression: They journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians (Numbers 33:3).*
- *The scripture commends Obadiah for disobeying wicked King Ahab and rescuing 100 of the Lord's prophets: Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly; for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the Lord,*

**“The only right a Christian has is the right to give up his rights.”**

**-Oswald Chambers**

*Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water (1 Kings 18:3-4).*

- *The Lord commended the apostles when they chose to obey God rather than men: But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard... And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:19-20, 31).*

Disobedience to an authority should be limited to situations in which the authority is requiring something that is in disobedience to a command of God. In everything else, authorities ought to be obeyed, even when obedience may seem unwise, a waste of money and effort, or threatening to our desires, hopes, and dreams. There are times when we should appeal (see question 18) and there are times when we should remove ourselves from under a relationship of authority (see question 20), but while we are under an authority we should submit to that authority unless to do so would be a clear violation of the will of God.

## **20. Is it ever right or wise to leave a relationship in which we are under authority?**

Some authority relationships are temporary, such as the parent-child relationship. While still having responsibility to respect and honor their parents, when children become adults they leave the authority of their parents and become a family unit of their own as written in Genesis: “*For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24).

As this verse indicates, this release from authority occurs at marriage. But what about a single person or a person who marries later in life? Should there be a releasing of authority even without marriage as a child becomes an adult, and, if so, when should this occur? One factor to consider is the parents’ evaluation of when the child is ready to lead his own life and be out from under parental authority (Galatians 4:1-2). Another factor is if the child is still living in his parent’s home. If this is so, he ought to be under his parent’s authority, at least in regard to life at home (Numbers 30:3). A third factor is whether the child is supporting himself financially. A young person who is still receiving funding from his parents ought to regard himself as continuing to be under their authority.

Even in authority relationships that are intended to be permanent, there may be times when the person under authority must leave the relationship. Since all human authority is derived from the authority of God and since human authority can be so badly abused that it no longer performs the function that God desires, there will be times when leaving an abusive authority relationship is required, whether this be a government, church, business, or family.

Biblical examples include the following:

- Jesus’ parents, following the command of God, fled from the authority of King Herod who sought to kill Jesus (Matthew 2:13-18).
- Moses, at the command of God, led the Israelites out from under the oppressive authority of Egypt (Exodus 3).

- Jehu, at the command of God, overthrew the idolatrous and corrupt government of Ahab and his son Joram (2 Kings 9-10).
- Jehoiada the priest preserved the royal line and overthrew the usurping Queen Athaliah (2 Kings 11).
- In the Mosaic Law, a slave woman was allowed to go free from her marriage to her master/husband if he did not provide her with food, clothing, and conjugal rights (Exodus 21:8-11).
- Also in the Law, a slave who was forced to flee from his master was to be protected and not returned to his abusive master (Deuteronomy 23:15-16).

These examples indicate that it is permissible to flee from abusive authority to preserve life or under severely abusive circumstances. Yet, even when flight is required, authority is still to be honored and not undermined, except in the most extreme cases and then perhaps only at the command of God. For example, for many years, David was forced to flee for his life from King Saul. Yet, out of respect for God and for Saul's position of authority, David twice refrained from destroying Saul when he had the opportunity (1 Samuel 19-26). And even after God removed Saul, David honored Saul's memory out of respect for Saul's position (2 Samuel 1). In the New Testament, Peter commands believers to submit, even to harsh authority (1 Peter 2:13-3:22). So, it seems that leaving a relationship of authority that is designed to be permanent should happen only rarely—to preserve life or in extreme cases of abuse.

### **21. What should we do if we find ourselves in a harmful or abusive authority relationship that God does not want us to leave?**

The Apostle Peter's first letter addresses a proper response to abusive authority or to authority that does not honor God in some way. In chapter 2:18-25 he addresses slaves, who had little or no hope of escaping abusive authority. He encourages them to submit themselves to their masters, even to those who are unreasonable or harsh. He gives the following reasons to do so:

1. This is commendable and will produce special favor with God.
2. We are called to suffer unjustly.
3. Christ set an example through his submission to unjust authorities. He endured suffering without uttering threats or retaliating.
4. Like Christ, we can entrust ourselves to God, who judges justly. Often He will protect and defend us in ways that we would never have humanly imagined.
5. By implication, as Christ suffered unjustly to procure our salvation, our unjust suffering may result in the salvation of others.

*"The very first thing which needs to be said about Christian ministers of all kinds is that they are "under" people as their servants rather than "over" them (as their leaders, let alone their lords). Jesus made this absolutely plain. The chief characteristic of Christian leaders, he insisted, is humility not authority, and gentleness not power."*

*-John Stott*

In chapter 3, verses 1-6, Peter's exhortation to wives whose husbands are not following Christ is similar. For several reasons, wives are to submit to their husbands, even when husbands are disobedient to the will of God.

1. A husband can be won to God and His ways by his wife's submission, pure behavior, and respect.
2. A gentle and quiet spirit will make women beautiful and attractive to their man.
3. Women will be imitating the holy women of old, who were submissive and respectful to their husbands.
4. God will bless them as he did those women, who were obedient and submissive in faith and didn't give in to fear.

Submitting to harsh or unjust authority can result in great suffering—emotionally, spiritually, and even physically. Yet, if the gospel teaches us anything, it teaches that God will sometimes ask those He loves (including His own Son) to suffer, if He knows that suffering will result in a greater good for all. And He knows that suffering is producing incomparably greater glory for those who suffer (2 Corinthians 4:16). As with Jesus, suffering while hoping in God can powerfully influence others and greatly glorify God, both now and forever.

## **22. When, if ever, should a person remove himself from under the authority of church leaders and move on to another church?**

Answering this question is often difficult, with many complex factors. In some cultures, church life and authority are woven into the very fabric of family and community and leaving a church may be viewed as a betrayal of all three—church, family, and community. In other cultures, church membership has become so separated from family, community, and social life that changing churches can seem little more than deciding to shop at a different store. With such diverse circumstances, what principles ought to guide us on this important question?

First we must acknowledge that membership in a particular church is not necessarily intended by God to be a life-long commitment, as marriage and family are. Our commitment to our church should be one of radical love, since God commands us to lay down our lives for our brothers (1 John 3:16). Our love and loyalty to our eternal, spiritual brothers and sisters should be no less than the loyalty shown by members of earthly families or by a band of brothers in combat or by teammates on a championship team. Yet the covenant relationship within a church does not typically carry with it the permanency of the covenant relationship of marriage—'til death do us part. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed—it starts out small and grows large. That reality requires that God's people start new churches and move to new geographic areas, leaving their former church and former leaders behind. Yet God can lead a person to leave a church and join another for many reasons other than church growth. Examples might be differences in doctrinal convictions or core values, differences in vision, a requirement to move to a different city for business or family reasons, or a loss of trust in a church's leadership.

*"The Church is the Body of Christ, and the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. He fills the body, directs its movements, controls its members, inspires its wisdom, supplies it's strength. He guides into truth, sanctifies its agents, and empowers for witnessing. The Spirit has never abdicated His authority nor relegated His power."*

*-Samuel Chadwick*

Second, it would seem ideal that a church's leaders commend the person leaving and even send him out. Just as a father gives his daughter to another man's authority, responsibility and protection, or as an employer might transfer a valuable employee to another office, so it is best when church leaders can commend a person or family to a new ministry outreach or into the care of another fellowship. Evidently New Testament churches would commend those sent on a mission or sent to another church, sending a letter of commendation with them (Acts 15:40, 2 Corinthians 3:1, Romans 16:1).

Third, church leaders will sometimes have hesitations about a person leaving for particular reasons and yet will feel that it is best for them to go. This might be loosely analogous to a father giving his daughter away with hesitations and concerns, yet still believing that it is best, and God's will, that he do so. Such a situation is not ideal, but the reality is that much of what happens in ministry (and life) is not ideal. In situations where someone is not able to wholeheartedly follow the church's vision and submit to its leadership, it is often best, both for the person and the church, that the person move on to a place where he can serve more wholeheartedly. Otherwise the person or family may have left the church and its leaders in their heart while still being actively involved—resulting in an undermining effect. Such a person should respect the doctrine, vision and leaders of the church enough to leave it altogether and get involved in another church where they can be more wholehearted. God honors this more than when a person is maintaining a disgruntled “quasi membership” in a church.

Fourth, a decision to leave a church and its leaders should ideally be made slowly, with careful reflection on whether this is God's will. Where a church is living out the Biblical example and commands of love, unity, commitment, devotion, and loyalty, changing churches is no small matter. A church should be more than a group of people who come together and listen to a message on Sunday morning. It should be a community bound together in love for Christ, in love for one another, and with a common purpose and vision for God's kingdom. Leaving such a committed community is no small thing. It means leaving, not just a Sunday meeting, but your closest friends and comrades in order to join another community, where, hopefully, commitment and belonging to a similar community will develop. Similarly, changing from one group of church leaders to another can be personally and relationally difficult. Even within the same denomination, there can be major differences in core values, philosophy of ministry, and character strengths and weaknesses between the leadership of different churches.

Fifth, leaving a church, especially because of dissatisfaction, should involve careful reflection and self-examination. Being led and inhabited by sinners, every church has major flaws and weaknesses. If a hospital is a valid analogy for a church, we might expect to find more hurting and dysfunctional people there, seeking help, than we might find in the world at large. Yet, every individual considering leaving a church is also a sinner, with major flaws and weaknesses. When a church's weaknesses and an individual's weaknesses combine in such a way that a person wants to leave because of them, it is an ideal time for those weaknesses to be exposed and for growth to occur on both parts. When people bail out too soon, they lose the opportunity to be exposed themselves (and thereby grow in the Lord) and they lose the opportunity to expose the church's weaknesses (and thereby help it to grow).

***“Don't be scared by the word authority. Believing things on authority only means believing them because you've been told them by someone you think trustworthy.”***

***-C. S. Lewis***

***“Modern intelligence won’t accept anything on authority. But it will accept anything without authority.”***

***-G. K. Chesterton***

Sixth, we should realize that one common ingredient in the motivation to start a new church is that some aspiring leaders, in their vision to grow the kingdom, have a passion for a different emphasis or philosophy of ministry and want to give it a try. Differences in vision or doctrine or philosophy of ministry are not necessarily detrimental to the growth of the kingdom. Sometimes they are God’s way of sparking something new and fresh. If church leaders and members are more interested in building the kingdom of God than building their own kingdom, this will help them discern whether God is wanting to do something new or whether the disagreement stems from pride or a lack of submission to God’s will.

Finally, when a person leaves, it is important for the glory of God and His kingdom that he strive to honor his former leaders, both in his heart and with his mouth. In cases where someone (especially a leader) is leaving because of disagreement, it might be important for church leaders and the person leaving to come to agreement on how to best communicate why this is happening. Attempts to pull other people away because of disagreement or criticisms can easily undermine God’s authority structure in the church, promoting strife, division, and discord. Unless the church is not accurately preaching the truth of the gospel, such division should be avoided, since it can be horribly destructive, both to the church, to those who are drawn away, and to the reputation of the Kingdom of God.

### **23. What should elders and pastors be aware of in their use of authority within the church?**

Church leaders must remember that they are caretakers of the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. We must lead and guide God’s flock with the understanding that they are the precious people of God, loved by Him.

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).*

Second, we must remember that we will give an account for our treatment and care of God’s people. What we do for God’s people will not be forgotten, whether it be for good or ill.

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17).*

Third, we must resist temptation to use our place of leadership and authority for selfish advantage, whether that be for personal power, to gratify our egos, or for financial advantage.

*Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:2-4, NIV).*

Fourth, we must take care not to lord it over the flock. We must treat those we lead with respect, using our authority in strong ways only when necessary and never to stroke our own egos.



Fifth, we must be particularly careful when exercising church discipline, the ultimate power granted church leaders. An abuse of church discipline will create a state of unhealthy fear and legalism within the church. Before Great Commission pastors exercise church discipline, they should thoroughly review the scriptures that reference church discipline and read the Great Commission Leadership article regarding the use of church discipline. Additionally, the GCC Articles of Association require Great Commission leaders to seek counsel from regional leaders prior to exercising church discipline.

Sixth, we must be careful to support, uphold, and work in coordination with family authority, business authority, and civil authority and to respect the freedoms of individuals. In the case of a crime, we shouldn't be slow to involve civil authorities. In the case of the family, we shouldn't ignore or circumvent the efforts of husbands or parents. If there is a problem with a young person, we should seek out the parents and work together with them, whether the parent is a part of our church or not. Often parents can be of considerably greater help than we might at first think, even when the parents are not believers in Christ.

Within the church, we should develop a culture that honors and respects the family, seeking to keep families together as much as possible, rather than excessively splitting individuals up into age-segregated groups. And particularly with women's ministries and church youth programs, we should be careful not to inadvertently undermine the authority of husbands in leading their wives or of parents in leading their children. In efforts to encourage faith and godliness in women and children, it is easy to take responsibility and authority that ought to fall on the shoulders of husbands and parents. Even though this pastoral usurpation of family authority might be with the best intentions, it will not produce good fruit in the end. Church leaders must let the load of responsibility and authority fall on those to whom God has ordained it to fall.

Finally, there are times when church leaders should use their authority without flinching and should let no one disregard them. Paul admonished Titus and Timothy to forcefully use their God-given authority in regard to those who contradicted the fundamental truths of the gospel or who advocated behavior that blatantly undermined godliness.

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you (Titus 2:11-15).*

*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:1-2, NIV).*

***“If we and our posterity reject religious instruction and authority, violate the rules of eternal justice, trifle with the injunctions of morality, and recklessly destroy the political constitution which holds us together, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us, that shall bury all our glory in profound obscurity.”***

***-Daniel Webster***

***“It is easy to criticize and find fault with the conduct of kings, and write furious articles against them in newspapers, or make violent speeches about them on platforms. Any fool can rip and rend a costly garment, but not every man can cut out and make one. To expect perfection in kings, prime ministers, or rulers of any king, is senseless and unreasonable. We would exhibit more wisdom if we prayed for them more, and criticized less.”***

*-J.C. Ryle*

*This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:9-12, NIV).*

In a culture suspicious of authority and where tolerance is one of the supreme virtues, the unbending use of authority enjoined in these commands will often be one of the most difficult things for Christian leaders to practice. Yet, people desperately need guidance, correction, reproof, and leadership from living examples—godly leaders who are not afraid to stand up for the truth of the gospel and its implications no matter what the cost.

#### **24. What should our overall hope be in regard to relationships of authority?**

Loving relationships involving authority and submission are beautiful—reflections of the love relationship between God the Father and His only begotten Son. We must not be afraid or ashamed to live out such relationships and teach others to do so. When leaders humbly love and lead according to God's plan and when followers adapt and respond to that lead, a beautiful dance is created.

My fellow pastor loves to tell about the time he attempted dance lessons with his daughter. Hoping to learn the Salsa, they watched as their instructors stepped, turned, swayed, and dipped in graceful, flawless harmony. It was breathtakingly beautiful. Inspired to give it a try, they listened as the instructor told them the first rule—men, you have to lead, and women, you have to follow. My fellow pastor was surprised. He had been so mesmerized by the beauty of the dance that he hadn't even realized that one was leading and the other following. All he could see was the glory of the dance. But he quickly realized that leadership and following are absolutely necessary for two people to be able to dance like that.

So it is in all our relationships. If we want to dance the dance of God, some must have the courage to lead and others must have the courage to follow. To accomplish the good purposes of God, every group and organization needs leadership. Sports teams need coaches, armies need generals, families need parents, businesses need bosses, churches need pastors, and nations need presidents and legislators. The ability of any group to dance the dance of God will largely depend on the faith, strength, and character of the leaders who lead and of the followers who follow.

Leaders whose hearts burn for the glory of God and to advance His kingdom must be willing and eager to lead as God directs them to—to storm the gates of death and Hell and to bring in the glories of life and the Kingdom of Heaven. They must lead with unwavering strength—yet in the fear of God, with the humility that comes from understanding their own brokenness, and with the love that was so powerfully demonstrated in the leadership of our Savior. And those who follow must do so with respect, with confidence in God, and with the submission that our Savior showed towards His own Father.



GOD-HONORING AUTHORITY

**Exercise**

1. How does the fact that all human authority comes from God affect our perspective of authority?

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2. What are the implications of the fact that a relationship of authority and submission are present in the Godhead?

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3. Summarize the approaches and attitudes that God-honoring leaders should have in their use of authority.

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GOD-HONORING AUTHORITY

**Exercise**

4. Summarize the actions and attitudes that followers should have in their submission to authority.

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5. In what practical ways can parents model to their children submission to and honor for authority? What might happen if they don't?

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6. How can church leaders and youth leaders train young people to respect, honor and obey their parents? How much is this a focus of your church's college and youth ministry?

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GOD-HONORING AUTHORITY

**Exercise**

7. When people come to you with concern or discontentment about the teaching or practices of their pastors and church, what should you do? How can disunity and division be avoided?

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8. When a wife confides in a Christian friend, expressing discontentment with her husband, how can these be resolved in a way that avoids gossip and encourages her to be submissive and respectful?

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9. How should we respond when people make sarcastic jokes about the government, their boss, or others in authority?

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COMMITMENT TO GOD AND HIS WORD

**Not Loving the World**

As followers of Christ, we are called to live for the next world, not this world. This is a truth that often is avoided by Christians. But it is vital that we not love the world if we are to be true lovers of God. Take time to pray that God will speak to your heart as you read the following article by Rick Whitney.





## Not Loving the World

Pastor Rick Whitney · Manhattan, KS

### Worldliness: What is it? How do we fight it?

How do you write a paper on worldliness? I have procrastinated for a long time in writing this one. Why? Because no one wakes up in the morning wanting to read about worldliness. Or think about how worldly they might be. Or how worldly they might have become, without recognizing it. It is an unpleasant subject to dwell on.

The topic convicts us. And conviction stops us and causes us to reflect and search our heart and look at our life. When a Christian is asked to think about whether he has become worldly, often he resists and is defensive. We do not appreciate the question or the questioner. As I said, worldliness is an unpleasant topic.

All of us would rather be positively encouraged. “God truly, deeply loves us.” This is a truth we can all appreciate. “Jesus loves me, this I know.” We treasure the thought. “Our Lord is merciful.” Amen!

But what about, “God calls us to guard our heart, lest we unconsciously drift into worldliness.” Who wants to hear that! Yet, this is the warning of 1 John and many other portions of the New Testament and so we are going to talk about it.

*“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15–17).*

First off, worldliness is a little hard to define. So let’s look at some definitions, beginning from Webster’s. The “world” is:

- The earth with its inhabitants and all things upon it.
- People in general; humanity.

But “world” also has other definitions for the Christian:

- Those among mankind who are caught up with their concerns for this present life, without regard to any life to come.

***“The sin of worldliness is a preoccupation with the things of this temporal life. It’s accepting and going along with the views and practices of society around us without discerning if they are biblical. I believe that the key to our tendencies toward worldliness lies primarily in the two words ‘going along’. We simply go along with the values and practices of society.”***

***-Jerry Bridges***



- All values, entertainments, teachings and philosophies, which only seem to care about this world and never think about the world to come.

Webster's also defines the rather archaic term "*worldling*" as:

- A person engrossed in the concerns of this present world.

Webster's continues with "worldly" and defines it:

- Devoted to this world and its pursuits rather than to spiritual affairs.

We agree with Webster's. When we talk about being worldly, we are talking about a personal value system that embraces this world's values, that accepts this world's philosophy of life, that goes along with this world's morals. Worldliness is anything that is causing war against your soul.

This paper is written to help Christians recognize how this world can deeply harm us; to help us identify these worldly values, philosophies and morals - and to judge them rightly.

We are not writing to help you judge others. Our desire is to encourage you to judge yourself and to do it rightly. Not with a spirit of self-condemnation, but hopefully with a good spirit of self-correction. The Lord asks every Christian to correct himself and to come back to His ways, over and over, every day and every week, throughout every season of our life - until we have "finished our course."

*"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12).*

For the serious disciple of Jesus Christ, this self-evaluation of how worldly we might be, can be a tremendously liberating exercise. His grace helps us to not just deny worldly desires, but also helps us to live sensibly, righteously, in real and true freedom. For the serious disciple this is not a fear of man exercise. We do not work to put away worldliness because we fear men. Of course, we are not trying to work our way to Heaven. What we are striving for as serious disciples is finding our Savior, day by day. What we want is to enjoy His presence, and vibrant communion with Him. But to gain this communion, we must understand how worldliness hurts it.

There is a part of us, deep down, that longs to be rid of this world and all its temptations and all its lusts. There is a part of us that, "*longs for glory*," that longs for freedom. But our world is loud and insistent and brassy and constant and has this great, big voice. This world also speaks effectively with a subtle, quiet whisper. With either voice it continues, day and night, lulling us to sleep, beckoning us to gaze, or loudly clamoring for us to pay attention - inviting us always to follow it in the constant pursuit of one thrill after another.

***"The Christian is the most contented man in the world, but he is the least contented with the world. He is like a traveler in an inn, perfectly satisfied with the inn and its accommodation, considering it as an inn, but putting quite out of all consideration the idea of making it his home."***

***-C.H. Spurgeon***

## A Choice is Needed

The Apostle tells us in 1 John 2:15 that we must not love this world. Then John gets even more intense. In what sounds extreme he concludes that if we love this world, the love of the Father is not in us! Shocking thought, isn't it?

We do not want to hear that. We would much rather believe that we can have this world and also have our faith; that we can have our Savior and have our pleasures and why not? Don't we deserve almost anything we could ever dream about? The New Testament answers, "No".

James is painfully honest and direct in laying out this struggle within. Here is how he puts it:

*"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).*

There is only room in our heart to be a friend of one camp or the other. We do not want to admit this, but it is true nevertheless. These verses set up a pretty clear choice. It is either the world or closeness to God.

So what does the Christian first need to do? He needs to decide which voice is right. Is it our culture which teaches us to enjoy everything we see and somehow also fit God into our back pocket? Or is God's Word right when it warns us we cannot have it both ways? We must choose.

Have you ever just felt miserable spiritually? Where you just do not feel comfortable being a denizen of this earth? Have you ever wished you did not always have to fight against your flesh, this world and its values? That you could just fly away from it all?

We know that worldliness and being worldly and acting like a "worldling" are the constant pulls and dangers we fight against while walking on this planet. When we shut off the voices and quiet our hearts and get alone with God – we long for Heaven. If we are relaxed here and at ease, and have no spiritual anxiety, God through His Spirit can bring us back to our senses and to a proper, spiritual, eternal view. He can help get our eyes up off our immediate pleasures and remind us that we are eternal and we can then begin to sort things out with a clearer head.

That is if God is gracious to us.

But the choice is still ours.

There are many Christians who seem to have one foot on a moving train and one foot on the ground. They want both, but they are headed for some pain and a choice. May it not be so with us!

God help us to choose You and choose You today, Lord.

*"The ways, and fashions, and amusements, and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in the heart of a growing Christian. He does not condemn them as downright sinful, nor say that those who have anything to do with them are going to Hell. He only feels they have a constantly diminishing hold on his own affections and gradually seem smaller and more trifling in his eyes."*

-J.C. Ryle

## The Paradox

*“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Ephesians 5:3–5).*

*“The Christian is different not only because he has experienced the new birth, but also because he experiences a new estrangement. Before becoming a Christian he was the enemy of God; he loved the world and the world loved him. But once reconciled to God he becomes estranged from the world. Formerly the world loved him, whereas now it hates him (John 15:18). So man, whether saved or lost, experiences alienation in this life either from God or from the world. Jesus said that every disciple is “not of the world” (John 15:19), but he also said that the Christian is in the world. Had he been removed at salvation there would be no further estrangement. But it doesn’t happen this way. Jesus said that as the Father sent Him into the world, so He has sent His disciples into the world (John 17:18). This is the great paradox of the Christian life; we live in the world but are not of the world.” - Harold Lindsell, The World, the Flesh and the Devil.*

*“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13–16).*

If we are going to try to warn ourselves, guard our soul, protect our spirit from this world and its values; we first need to recognize that there is something to be scared of, something that can hurt us; that we live in a hostile environment.

*“We know that we are children of God and that the world around us is under the power and control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).*

Everything, and I mean everything, is under the control of the evil one who was given mastery over everything from the mountaintops on down. This is where he lives and this is where we live. So there will be struggle. Are we prepared to struggle?

Quoting Harold Lindsell again, “There is little need for the Christian to wrestle with the implications involved in the struggle against the world if he does not intend to struggle.” So are we going to struggle?

Do we recognize that we must struggle? And that this struggle is part of the Christian fight of faith? That it is a good struggle? That it is part and parcel of our walking about this earth?

***“The chief danger of the Church today is that it is trying to get on the same side as the world, instead of turning the world upside down.”***

***-A.B. Simpson***

## Materialism and Wealth and Worldliness

Constantly day and night, even in our churches, the constant drumbeat is that we should have more money and that we should expect to make more money and that we will become wealthier and wealthier and that somehow this is our God-given right. *God forbid that there would ever be a recession. Don't you understand that I have a huge mortgage and a big car payment?*

This kind of thinking is everywhere and strong in the American church. We are weaned on a culture that tells us that we inherently have the right to more and more possessions and in addition, we have the right to live in more ease and more comfort. It would be the odd Christian who ever thought of, much less actually instituted, any personal standards of sacrificial living.

And what do we often do with our ever increasing wealth? We spend it on our pleasures! We sure don't give it away. On any given Sunday, the giving that occurs in the churches of America has, over the last twenty years, hovered at the abysmal two to three percent range of our weekly incomes.

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 2:10, *"And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure."* Thankfully Solomon also concludes in his book that it was, "Vanity and striving after wind."

So too, we Christians must conclude that this world and its values and entertainments are at best suspect, and often diametrically opposed to the health and well-being of our souls. As an example, do we ever pray before we go shopping? It seems a little odd to even ask the question. But maybe we should. And if we do not pray, at least ask a few of these kinds of questions, "How would the Lord have me spend my money? What would the Lord think of this CD? That new outfit? This bracelet? That purse? This movie ticket?" If we do not ask ourselves these simple questions - do not be deceived dear Christian - there is coming a time when our Lord will ask these kind of questions.

*"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ."*  
(Romans 12:2).

For a believer, the life that displeases our Lord is termed worldly. Paul warned the believers of Rome not to be pressed into this worldly mold. Not to let this world get its hooks into them. That if we are imitating this world, we are not imitating God. That if we are concerned about the fashions and the values of this world, we have missed our true spiritual target, our real calling.

### On Saying "No!"

Here is how one Christian mom wrote to her boy and warned him about this kind of pressure, this kind of worldly conformation:

*Whatever weakens your reason  
Whatever impairs the tenderness of your conscience  
Whatever obscures your sense of God  
Whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind  
Whatever takes away your relish for spiritual things...that to you is sin, no matter how innocent it is in itself.*

*- Susannah Wesley in a letter to her son, John.*

*"If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ."*

*-Martin Luther*

Susannah sounds like Thomas Watson. In his book, *A Godly Man's Picture*, he writes: "A godly man will not go as far as he may, lest he go further than he should." For many years, this was the way my wife and I taught our children this same truth. When our kids asked, "Why can't we do it? All our friends are doing it?" We responded, "Others may, we may not." Simple. To the point. We really did not care what others were saying.

There are many, many decisions that we are called upon to make every day. And almost every one of these same decisions deal with whether we will think like this world, talk like this world, value what this world values, believe as this world believes. Or whether we will go a different direction. Obviously, we cannot just follow along quietly with this world. We need to fight and resist this world. In this fight the Bible gives us help and direction.

Here are seven suggested guidelines that have been helpful to many Christians when called upon to make decisions such as, "Should I do this?" "Should I watch this?" "Should I listen to this?" "Lord, help me!"

1. Is there any clear teaching about the area in the Bible?
  2. What would Jesus do in this area?
  3. Is my heart attached to it?
  4. What is the spirit or the atmosphere of the thing?
  5. Will this help or harm my Christian life and walk?
  6. How will this influence and affect others?
  7. And if there is doubt, "Don't."
- Please don't!

Lord, when will some brave brother, some brave sister, just say, "No!"

When Neva and I were young Christians and finishing up college, we were a part of a dear, young church in Ames, Iowa. The average age was probably only 21. And I remember very specifically, during one winter, how that fervent young Bible study debated among ourselves on whether we should go see a particular movie. It had just come out and it was a good one. However there was a scene in the movie where the guy invited his new girlfriend to lay on his bed with him. The couple did not actually do anything immoral on the screen. They were clothed and just laying there, side by side. We did not know if it was proper to support the movie or recommend it, given that one scene.

Today it will seem silly when I mention the title. It is also silly and embarrassing to think of all the movies I have watched in the intervening 30 years since that winter. The movie was "Rocky" and it won the Academy Award for best picture. I still love the movie and sometimes I laugh to think we debated it. Then at other times I wonder if I have lost something in my heart and in my soul. I know one thing. I have been too concerned about being "culturally relevant."

I am so culturally relevant that I can speak all kinds of silly People magazine talk, or Entertainment Tonight trivia. All of us can. And it truly is silly. Often shameful. In our desire to be culturally relevant we opened the door to all kinds of worldly messages, worldly trivia, worldly gossip – just plain worldliness.

***"A wife who is 85% faithful to her husband is not faithful at all. There is no such thing as part-time loyalty to Jesus Christ."***

***-Vance Havner***

*“Those in frequent contact with the things of the world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them, for this world and all it contains will pass away” (1 Corinthians 7:31).*

*The expression “will pass away” is borrowed from theater, and refers to the changing of scenes. It speaks of the transience of life. “All the worlds a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances...” - William Shakespeare*

Sound advice from William. This world is passing away and we should not act like this is all there is. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that we are living here on this earth forever and ever, and that there is nothing “up ahead”. We need to force ourselves to remember the up ahead.

***“Neutral men are the devil’s allies.”***

***-Edwin Hubbel Chapin***

### **The Media and Worldliness**

Specifically, any Christian who is serious about pleasing his Savior, needs to be vigilant about what he watches, reads or listens to. Because almost everything he watches, reads and listens to, comes from this world. Music, movies, magazines, the internet, radio and television. Even downloads, ring tones and images on our little, tiny cell phones. They all carry this worldly message. Just walk through a mall. All the clothes, the shoes, the handbags, all the accessories, all say that if you buy me you will have pleasure and the promise has absolutely nothing to do with God.

When driving down the highway - billboards and advertisements, mile after mile - the world’s message never ceases. The bombardment seems endless. And it is. Because the world is all around us, and it has a very specific value system and that value system is hostile to God. Since we live in this world we will hear its message easily and often. We must be vigilant and evaluate and screen and judge this world lest we think like a worldling.

Following are a few thoughts on the media and its worldly message, taken from a paper written by the pastors of Covenant Life Church located in Maryland:

#### John Piper’s Television Advice

*“Turn it off! It isn’t necessary for relevance. It is a deadly place to rest the mind. You are least capable of critical interaction. Its pervasive banality, sexual innuendo and God-ignoring values have no ennobling effect upon the human soul. It kills the Spirit. It drives away God. It quenches prayer. It blanks out the Bible. It cheapens the soul. It destroys spiritual power. It defiles almost everything.” - John Piper from a sermon*

(On shutting off the TV or actually throwing it out - a thought: Does this sound silly? Are we beyond even stopping and evaluating our time watching it? In Revelations that church in chapter 3 thought they were fine, but God thought they had big problems. Are we actually blind and naked? We often think it would be way too legalistic to throw out our TV all together, but are we just justifying our silly habits? This is the language and thinking of an alcoholic. Alcoholics do this all the time. They say that another drink is no big deal. Just a little drink. And eventually their life is wasted.)

### Straight for the Heart

*“Media rarely if ever attempts to reason with us and convince us to love the world. Instead it stirs up feelings and emotions that bypass our minds and grips our affections. The incredibly wicked power of media is that it can make something evil look good or exciting. It can make sin seem harmless and enjoyable. It can sway our hearts to think that we deserve what we crave, that what we see is all that matters.” - Josh Harris*

***“If all other variables are equal, your capacity to know God deeply will probably diminish in direct proportion to how much television you watch.”***

**- John Piper**

### Poison Pills

*“Trying to figure out how much sinful content from media you can handle and still be “okay” is like a person who takes half a poison pill every day because “only half” won’t kill you. When it comes to what we watch or read or listen to we shouldn’t ask how many halves of poison pills we can take. We need to examine the cumulative effect of our media habits on our attitude toward God and sin and the world.” - Josh Harris*

(Television is not a gray area. Not in 2007. Maybe twenty years ago the Bill Cosby show was innocent and fun, but where is one, half-hour comedy, that is clean today? The medium has changed dramatically from twenty years ago. And changed for the worse.)

### Easily Bored

*“[The] increasingly rapid pace of television’s images makes careful evaluation impossible and undesirable for the viewer, thus rendering determinations of truth and falsity difficult if not impossible. The pace of television’s agenda disallows edification, understanding and reflection. Boredom always threatens and must be defended against at all costs. The over-stuffed and over-stimulated soul becomes out-of-sync with God, others and itself. It cannot discern truth; it does not want to.” - Truth Decay by Douglas Groothuis*

### For Self-Evaluation

*“Cravings of sinful man: Are my media habits encouraging me to want my own way? Is what I’m watching, reading or listening to whispering the lie that these desires are natural, good, harmless when God’s Word says they will destroy my soul? Lust of the eyes: Are my media habits stirring up a covetous desire for more of what this world offers? Is it making me want everything for myself — a beautiful companion, a beautiful home, a beautiful car? Is it leading me to feast my eyes on unlawful sights for the sake of sinful pleasure? Is it causing me to be captivated by the outward and visible with no regard to goodness and virtue?” - Josh Harris*

### **All Sports. All the Time.**

I often get tripped up in this area. It starts with my love for sports. I love almost all sports, I really do. And many times I justify a lot of hours watching sports because I say to myself, “Self, at least you are not watching garbage.” But that’s not the issue, is it? The issue is all the hours and hours spent just watching - even watching my Broncos.

***“Grace will save a man but it will not save him and his idol.”***

***-A. W. Tozer***

A disciple has to ask himself about all those many, many hours. Comparing sports to some stupid movie is not the comparison. The comparison is the hours spent watching, versus the hours that could be spent doing something much more productive.

I hope the Lord would not be against watching a great game of football even if it lasts three hours. And when it comes to basketball, at least in the NBA, you only need to watch the last few minutes anyway. What’s the harm of watching your favorite baseball or hockey team, even if it eats up another three hours? God surely is not against a guy watching his sports, for hours on end? Or is He? Well, maybe God would be against watching three hours of soccer.

The serious Christian disciple must evaluate the amount of time he spends doing anything. We only have one life and God asks us to remember eternity. Not to take away our joy, but to help us fill our life with genuine, joyful purpose. That our weeks and months and years can be looked back on with a sense of genuine accomplishment.

### **What’s the Harm?**

I want to share a very current warning by a dear Christian author, written over 100 years ago. His thoughts are as true today as when they were written in the late 1800’s. The author is J.C. Ryle and the book is his classic, Holiness. Mr. Ryle has also spoken in a timely, eloquent, simple way on raising children. We have used his notes in our parenting seminar for over a decade. So we appreciate J.C. Ryle when he speaks.

*“You may see this deceitfulness [of sin] in the wonderful proneness of men to regard sin as less sinful and dangerous than it is in the sight of God and in their readiness to extenuate it, make excuses for it and minimize its guilt. ‘It is but a little one! God is merciful! God is not extreme to mark what is done amiss! We mean well! One cannot be so particular! Where is the mighty harm? We only do as others!’ Who is not familiar with this kind of language? You may see it in the long string of smooth words and phrases which men have coined in order to designate things which God calls downright wicked and ruinous to the soul. We are too apt to forget that temptation to sin will rarely present itself to us in its true colors, saying, ‘I am your deadly enemy and I want to ruin you for ever in Hell.’ Oh, no! Sin comes to us, like Judas, with a kiss, and like Joab, with an outstretched hand and flattering words. The forbidden fruit seemed good and desirable to Eve, yet it cast her out of Eden. The walking idly on his palace roof seemed harmless enough to David, yet it ended in adultery and murder. Sin rarely seems sin at its first beginnings. Let us then watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. We may give wickedness smooth names, but we cannot alter its nature and character in the sight of God. Let us remember St Paul’s words: ‘Exhort one another daily ...lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin’ (Hebrews 3:13). It is a wise prayer in our Litany; ‘From the deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil, good Lord, deliver us.’”* - Holiness by J. C. Ryle

*“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”* (Galatians 6:7-9).



Here it how John Stott has looked at this Galatians Scripture in the book, *The Message of Galatians*:

*“To ‘sow to the flesh’ is to pander to it, to cosset, cuddle and stroke it, instead of crucifying it. The seeds we sow are largely thoughts and deeds. Every time we allow our minds to harbor a grudge, nurse a grievance, entertain an impure fantasy, or wallow in self-pity, we are sowing to the flesh. Every time we linger in bad company whose insidious influence we know we cannot resist, every time we lie in bed when we ought to be up and praying, every time we read pornographic literature, every time we take a risk which strains our self-control, we are sowing, sowing, sowing to the flesh. Some Christians sow to the flesh every day and wonder why they do not reap holiness. Holiness is a harvest; whether we reap it or not depends almost entirely on what and where we sow.”*

***“Christians should live in the world, but not be filled with it. A ship lives in the water; but if the water gets into the ship, she goes to the bottom. So Christians may live in the world; but if the world gets into them, they sink.”***

***-D. L. Moody***

## The Questions

What we must do is ask ourselves some hard, unpleasant questions. My goodness, our Lord asked some hard questions of His men when He walked this earth. He made some very strong statements to them. Remember where He said in Matthew, “And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into Hell.” Kind of shocking, isn’t it? He intended to shock. It got their attention. And ours.

Here are a few strong questions and clear Scriptures to help us determine whether or not a certain activity is glorifying to God and whether it might be worldly. These are again, from the pastors of Covenant Life Church. They are good, straightforward questions, which I took the liberty to edit a little bit. With these seven questions we don’t tell you where all the lines are, where all the borders are. But if you want to be right with God you need to ask yourself these kinds of questions. Chew on the Scriptures and understand the spirit of what Paul is trying to help us with. Navigating in this crazy world is a hard job! My purpose is to get you thinking.

### 1. Does it tempt you to sin?

*“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Romans 13:14).*

*“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).*

### 2. Is it good for you or bad for you?

*“Everything is permissible for me” - but not everything is beneficial” (1 Corinthians 6:12).*

*“‘Everything is permissible’ - but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible’ - but not everything is constructive” (1 Corinthians 10:23).*

3. Does it enslave you?

*“Everything is permissible for me” - but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me” - but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).*

4. Does it honor and glorify God?

*“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).*

5. Does it encourage others? Would you do it or watch it if you had company?

*“Even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:33).*

6. Does it cause your brother to stumble?

*“Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32).*

7. Are your motives pure when you are involved in it?

*“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it” (Jeremiah 17:9)?*

Here is a litmus test; a kind of spiritual thermometer where you can take your own temperature. How about a media fast? Every fast is for a purpose—either to get closer to God or to increase our prayer life. How about a media fast for a week so that we can be more devoted to the Gospel? More sensitive to the Gospel opportunities He might place in our path. Thinking about these seven questions, a media fast would show you whether a part of your heart has already been overtaken by this world. And a fast would help show us how to get out of the problem. Do you think you could do it?

Actually give up:

- Radios
- TV
- Newspapers
- Movies
- Magazines
- MP3's
- iPods
- Video games
- Cell Phones
- Texting
- Computer usage
- Instant messaging
- Internet use
- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter

My goodness! How would we survive? Maybe we would find out some things about our heart and our soul and our spirit and truly find out some things about our love relationship with our Savior. We did this at a recent HSLT and it was great! 400 Christians (teens and older) heard from God in a special way and we accomplished some things in His Gospel.

A lot of this hand-to-hand combat that God calls us to engage in is defensive and reactive and that's okay. We are to recognize that we live in a hostile world--hostile to God, hostile to our Savior, and hostile to His value system. It will always be a fight to live here. It is the naïve Christian who thinks it is a rose garden here on earth.

***“I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church.”***

***-C.H. Spurgeon***

## Madly In Love

Paul also gives us simple instruction on what to do pro-actively. He tells us to fill our minds with truth. This could be another whole paper, but here are his words from Philippians 4:

*“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).*

This is so clear from Paul. Just chew on what is right! But it is so hard to do. We need to work at it. May we never let the things we can't have, or don't have, or shouldn't have, spoil our enjoyment of the things we do have and can have.

At the beginning of this paper, I mentioned that it would be easier to just talk about God's love, rather than to write about worldliness. But actually, the two topics are probably closely related. As Paul instructs, when we meditate on what is lovely (and God's love is definitely lovely), we begin to understand some things. Understanding God's love helps us to resist this world.

### Tom Brown, one of our pastors, wrote the following:

*“This worldliness stuff is not about religion, but relationship with God. When I think of the admonition to not love the world I think of God's love for me and His intense and jealous desire for my heart. God wants our hearts! So much so that He sacrificed terribly to win them. He loves us! And He wants our hearts to be fully His. In this teaching against worldliness, I hear God's loving voice: “My son, give me your heart.” In my life it is this loving call that motivates me to leave the world behind. The heart behind the negative exhortation is a positive one. You mentioned in the intro that it is easy to talk about (or hear about) God's love, but that this topic of worldliness is hard. Rick, I think the whole point of this topic is God's love for me. The call to this struggle is not impersonal and judgmental and religious, but very personal and loving. It is the plea of a husband madly in love with his wife fighting for her heart. And God is fighting for our heart.”*

Here are two good Scriptures from 2 Timothy. They speak to whether we have cleansed ourselves from certain things. Whether our “house” is in order.

*“Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:20-21).*

Tom went on to mention: “I constantly think about the degree that the world has a hold of my heart. I am afraid that worldliness will creep in and dull my senses and distance me from God. I am afraid that I will not “see God”. I want to experience the power of God in this world. I want to see His kingdom come in my home, in my church. So I fight to remove the world from my heart so that I can be a noble instrument. A clear vision for what I could have with God drives me and gives me persistence in this struggle against worldliness.”

*“I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten its grip on me.”*

*-Psalm 101:3*

*"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."*

-C.S. Lewis

Amen, brother.

God bless you, Christian, in this struggle.

This is "Sanctification 101". You and I are called to be separate. To be distinct. To be different. You and I are called to be holy - in all we think and in all we do. May you win! And win every day and every month, and win more than lose. And keep up the struggle until we see each other on the other side. And only then cease fighting! Remember, the goal is to be like Jesus. If we want to be like Jesus - we cannot be like this world.

## **Addendum**

In this paper I have used a source that was a blessing to Neva and I when we were just beginning as younger Christians. Many years ago, Billy Graham recognized that a lot of the new converts in those early crusades were being crushed by this world. So Billy asked a good friend to write a book on the topic of worldliness. To help Christians make good decisions. Graham turned to Harold Lindsell, the editor of *The Harper Study Bible*. And Harold Lindsell wrote a simple, straightforward book entitled, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*. Although some of the examples in this book written in 1973 sound a little dated, the truths taught are timeless and were a blessing to my life when I first got saved, and still are today.

[Editor's Note: This article is based on the booklet, *The War Against Your Soul*, written by Pastor Rick Whitney. Copies of this booklet are available for order for individual or group study through the GCC website (<http://gccweb.org/media-resources/publications>).]





NOT LOVING THE WORLD

**Exercise**

1. What was the main thing you learned from this article? What is God telling you, or even whispering to you?

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2. Rick defines worldliness as “anything that is causing war against our soul.” By this definition, how do you see worldliness manifest itself in your own life? What are areas in our life that creep in and lead us to think like this world? What are areas where you believe that the world may have crept into the church in America?

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NOT LOVING THE WORLD**Exercise**

3. Take some time to reflect on activities in your daily life. Here are seven questions from a group of pastors who are attempting to help their Christians battle worldliness everyday.
- Does this activity tempt you to sin?
  - Is this activity good for me or bad for me?
  - Does it tend to enslave me?
  - Does this activity honor and glorify God?
  - Does it encourage others (Christians or the lost)? Would you do it or watch it if you had company with you?
  - Could this personal activity cause your Christian brother to stumble?
  - Are your motives pure when you are involved in it?

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4. What are some practical steps we can take this week to help ourselves battle worldliness? Is there anything we can do to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ in this battle against worldliness?

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