

SPRING/
SUMMER
2019



engage

A Journal for
Church of God
MINISTRIES

IN THIS ISSUE

How Big Is Our Bible?

Speaking in Tongues

Five Ways the Church Can
Help Congregants Ease Their
Financial Stress

Bridging the Gap

Engaging Your Community

SPRING/SUMMER 2019
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A Rich Resource...Made Easier

MORE THAN 25 years ago, the Church of God produced a packet of materials called *Profiles*. Some of you may remember it. It consisted of a thick packet of loose ads that departments and ministries were responsible for designing, printing, and then submitting to the *Profiles* office by a certain deadline. That deadline was firm, because the process involved a staff to stuff the thousands of packets with the ads, as well as a two-color newsletter. The packet was then labeled and mailed to a specific list of ministers and church leaders. The ritual was labor-intensive, time-consuming, bulky, and costly based upon the amount of staff and postage needed to distribute the packet.

Today, that same packet is what you are reading right now. *Profiles* has evolved into the all-digital *Engage*. Departments and ministries still submit ads, but they come instantaneously via email. Deadlines are still there, but last-minute changes are not out of the question anymore. We can literally make changes to the publication minutes before it is distributed. Along with the minimal staff needed to compile it, the ease and speed

of distribution, production of *Engage* has been reduced so much that we are able to offer departments and ministries ad space at no cost.

There is something to say for modern technology. Enjoy this issue! ■

Engage Journal is published in the interest of providing contemporary aids and resources to pastors and pastoral staffs.

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THE JANUARY employment report was a huge bullish surprise. During the longest government shutdown in history, total payrolls jumped by 304,000—more than 130,000 above pre-report estimates and the highest in 11 months. Private payrolls increased by 296,000—about 120,000 above forecasts and the highest in nearly a year. Employment was revised downward a net of 70,000 for the last two months.

Average hourly earnings increased only 0.1 percent for the month, but remained at 3.2 percent for the past 12 months. Manufacturing payrolls increased another 13,000. The participation rate increased to 63.2 percent from 63.1 percent. Work hours remained constant at 34.5 hours per week. The unemployment rate increased from 3.9 percent to 4.0 percent but was likely confounded by government workers who were not getting paid.

The report was almost uniformly good. The report documented a very strong labor market and increasing wages. But the more modest wage hikes of January are unlikely to raise the Fed's inflationary concerns that could lead to another round of higher interest rates.

Economic analysis does not do justice to the changes that a tight labor market is making in the lives of individuals. More than 300,000 people in January, and more than 4 million people during the last two years, now have jobs. People with jobs have a higher standard of living. They consume more, save more, and give more. The employed are more confident, hopeful about the future, less stressed, and more assured. The employed can afford more preventive health care and education. Marital



FIVE WAYS THE CHURCH CAN HELP CONGREGANTS EASE THEIR FINANCIAL STRESS

■ by JAMES RUSSELL

and family discord, when caused by financial stress, are eased with jobs.

Today's church has many believers who are suffering from significant levels of financial stress. Some of these believers need a job. Others need a better job. Many suffer from poor financial planning and management. Others are financially strained, often to the breaking point, due to unforeseen events or circumstances. Regardless of the source, severe financial stress can keep the individual, the

family, and the church from achieving all they were purposed to do.

Financial stress can destroy hope, and hope deferred makes the heart sick. The last thing the church needs is a bunch of congregants with a lack of hope in this life. Sometimes, churches have more compassion for the poor down the street, than lifting up the poor within the church. Could it be a lack of compassion, or even unrighteous judgment, for other members of the body? We should suffer with any part of our body that is suffering.

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12 MEV).

“If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26 MEV).

While the church is not designed to take responsibility for its members’ financial responsibilities, it can do many things at the margin to help. We are expected to be proactive in addressing our hurting members. Some of the areas the church should consider addressing to alleviate financial stress are listed below.

- **Work habits.** Believers should be taught to show up to work on time, to go the extra mile, to do what they say they will do—not gossip, treat others the way they would like to be treated, dress appropriately and modestly, respect authority, and pursue excellence. Do these sound familiar? The same Christian virtues we should be teaching from our pulpits are the characteristics employers desire from their workforce.

- **Work skills.** Churches should link individuals needing to obtain or improve their work skills with resources providing those skills. On-the-job training, free or low-cost Internet courses, trade schools, and formal education are among the many resources available.

- **Personal financial planning and management.** Many churches offer, and others should consider offering, courses in personal financial management.

- **Networking.** Churches usually have a significant number of businesspeople as congregants. These businesses can often be a link between those seeking employment and promotion to job openings and networks.

- **Teach the Word, encourage giving, model prayer, and inspire faith and obedience.** The gospel contains many promises that cannot fail.

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. For you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24 MEV).

Money and finances certainly pale in comparison to the richness of the gospel. However, financial needs in our churches are important. Financial suffering is real. Whatever we can do to alleviate this suffering, we have done it unto Him.

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, even as your soul is well” (3 John 2 MEV). ■

Dr. James Russell is a professor of economics at Oral Roberts University. Reprinted from Charisma Leader, February 6, 2019.



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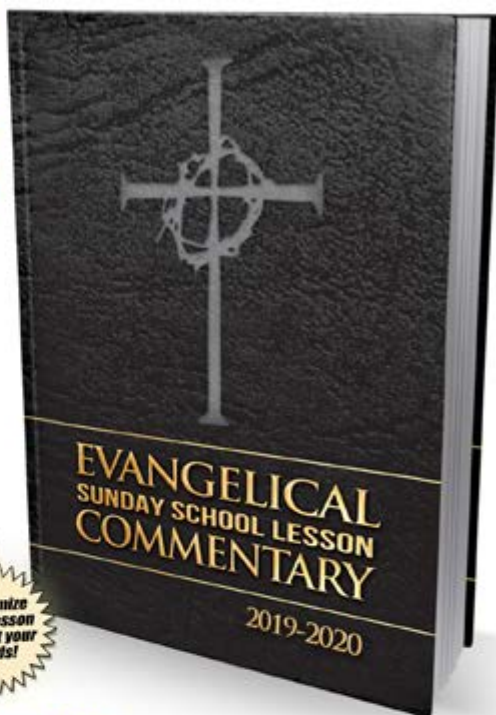
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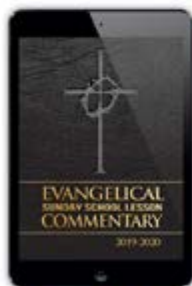
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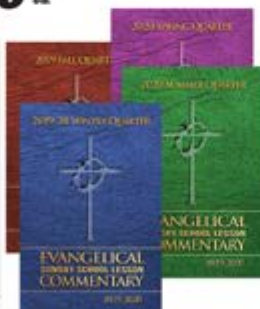
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by TIM HILL

Let's Talk About It . . .

HONORARY DOCTORATES



(This article is the sixth in a series titled, "Let's Talk About It," by General Overseer Tim Hill.)

A TITLE WITH A STORY

Almost every time someone refers to me as Dr. Hill in a one-on-one conversation, especially at the beginning, I'm quick to say, "Please drop the 'Doctor' thing and just call me Tim. I'm not doing brain surgery until next week." Someone with a doctorate in psychology can tell me the real reason I do that, but here's the deal:

In 2006, while serving as secretary general of the Church of God, I was notified by the Church of God School of Theology (now the Pentecostal Theological Seminary) that Dr. Stephen Land, then president of the seminary, had recommended to the Board that I have conferred on me an honorary doctorate degree (or *honoris causa*—Latin for "the sake of honor"). It was stated that this honor was being bestowed to recognize various aspects of my ministry, particularly the songwriting and musical compositions I had created over the previous 30 years. This incredible honor was given to me during the commencement activities in the spring of 2006.

During the weekend of activities associated with commencement, I was called upon to make some remarks at the Friday evening dinner, recognizing faculty and student achievements. I stood behind the podium and looked into the faces of men and women who had "earned" doctorates, in the sense that is typically recognized. Those good folks also had "earned" school bills that tipped the scales anywhere from \$60,000 to \$100,000, depending upon their unique experiences.

I remember saying that night almost to the very word . . .

Thank you, President Land and faculty. I am indeed honored and certainly feel affirmed that you would recognize that my songs are viewed as outlets of ministry that have touched people's hearts and reaped a harvest. I don't take this lightly, but I assure you, I receive this honor for what it is. You have honored me, and I am deeply moved. However, I commit to those of you who have walked these halls, sat at these desks, spent countless hours in research, and years in study, I will not abuse this privilege by loosely touting the nomenclature of "Doctor."

I had previously notified those in charge that I would decline to speak the next day at the commencement exercise, simply because those gathered had come to honor the deserving students. As planned, I did not speak, but I allowed the stole to be placed around my neck while the certificate was placed in my hands. I was indeed highly honored.

A RELUCTANTLY USED TITLE

To this day, I don't sign my letters "Dr. Hill." I don't sign books "Dr. Hill." My wife doesn't call me "Dr. Hill." I tried to enforce that once, and it just didn't go over very well. Just kidding.

Now granted, when you see my name on a publicity piece or video coming from the Church of God or other organizations, you've likely seen "Dr." preceding my name. I don't ask for that and certainly don't require it. Everyone at the office usually refers to me as "Brother Hill." I've even indicated that I still like the name "Pastor." I'd even be fine if most of the time just my first name was used.

Out of deference to the Office of the General Overseer, many people now use the term "Bishop" to refer to me. The bottom line is, I'm not hung up on it. As my good departed friend, Kenny Hinson, used to sing, you can just call me "Gone," and that'll be fine with me.

Now, I have no problem at all with anyone who has received an honorary degree allowing the title to be used reasonably. I do agree, however, with those who say that

it has been abused too often, regardless of whether it came from a "degree mill" or a high and honorable institution, like the Pentecostal Theological Seminary.

We all have gone to school. Some have passed through the Ivy League hallways of higher learning while others have gone through the school of hard knocks. Whether we have an earned degree on the wall or bear the marks of life's experiences on the walls of our heart, we each have a story to tell and a contribution to make. But with that said, many who have invested the time and money to earn their advanced degrees may be strongly offended at anyone who would carelessly lay claim to the title of "Doctor," especially if they established a pretense of equal degree standing. On the other hand, many who have received honorary doctorates may feel their life's work and achievements speak for themselves, and therefore have given them the same privileges of those with an earned degree.

WHAT CAN OR SHOULD BE DONE?

So, taking all this into account, what can or should be done?

- Be up front and truthful about your honorary degree. It is what it is. Nothing more and nothing less.
- Recognize the significance of an honorary doctorate. It means a great deal to the recipient, as well as the granting institution. Credible institutions don't hand them out every day.
- Don't abuse your honorary degree. If you want to let people refer to you as "Doctor," that

is fine; but it should not be demanded—or even expected.

- Remember that not everyone knows the difference. That is why those of us who have a conferred honorary degree need to be careful. I'm not trained in psychology or a thousand other things, so I don't need to act like it. There is no doubt that I've learned much by experience, but I know my limits; and I won't pretend or hide behind a piece of paper, regardless of where it came from.

- Be appreciative. If you have an honorary degree, there is usually a very good reason. You did something that deserves recognition, but accept it, be grateful, and move on.

- Don't use your honorary degree as an excuse to quit pursuing academic excellence. Any degree recognizes a person's accomplishments up to that point in time. If you have a conferred honorary degree, who can stop you from advancing further? If you have an "earned" degree, again, who can stop you from advancing further or gaining another degree in a different field?

- Give mutual respect. Everyone has a story that we should appreciate. Academicians have a story that led to their success. Those who couldn't, or didn't, take advantage of higher educational opportunities also often have an equally compelling story.

EARNING A TITLE

While "earned" in the degree sense is clearly understood, it's probably not a good thing to discredit anyone who may not have walked the traditional educational path by telling them they haven't "earned" what they have.

Admittedly, I do not have an "earned" doctorate degree in the traditional sense. Fresh out of high school, I attended Weatherford College. Then while pastoring a small church, I attended Tarrant County College. I later attended classes at Texas Christian University and then transferred to Lee University, where I graduated in 1988 with a Bachelor of Science degree. Afterwards, I was a student at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary, and have the highest regard for their level of instructional guidance.

To be overly honest and open, I do not consider myself worthy of any honor I have had bestowed upon me. God has been better to me than I deserve, and I'm sure you could say the same. The truth is, many have earned degrees of one kind or another—and some of us have earned some things by degree, a little here and a little there.

CONCLUSION

We've all earned the gray in our hair, if we have any hair left. We've all earned the wrinkles that mark our brow. We've all earned the callouses on our knees from midnight prayer. And by our fallen nature, we've earned the right to admit with Paul, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't" (Romans 7:18 NLT).

Thankfully, God conferred upon us all the cap and gown of His mercy and matriculated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. And now we go from "glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18 KJV).

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HOW BIG IS OUR BIBLE?

Confidence in the Bible for Local Church Missional Leadership

by GRANT McCLUNG



REMEMBER A SCENE from our family story during our early days of missionary service. As a young family in our first term, my wife and I were determined that we would involve our two-year-old toddler in family Bible reading and prayer every night before bedtime. “Little Man” was my designated nickname for him, used almost everywhere we went. Seeking to involve him in family worship one evening, I sent him with the commission, “Little Man, bring Daddy the Bible.”

“The Bible” in question was one of the larger, family style, illustrated versions, prominently placed on the coffee table in the living room. Understandably, it was quite a load for a young child (Hey, it was heavy for me!). Struggling under the weight of it, yet determined to be involved, his declaration was, “Here comes the Little Man with the Big Bible!”

That incident has often been a personal reminder that God’s Word must be big in me, with a heavy bearing on my discipleship and mission as a Christ-follower. John the Baptist’s cry, “He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30 NIV), was a prior way of proclaiming what a two-year-old MK (missionary’s kid) realized—“I’m little, and this heavy Bible is big!”

This childlike confession is our template for humble and fruitful local church missional leadership. Scriptural knowledge and principles have to loom large over every dimension of local church life. It will be the source of strength, effectiveness, and fruitfulness.

The story of the Old Testament revival under Ezra and Nehemiah presents a working model for local church leaders as we seek to recover, restore, and maintain biblical centrality in local church missional

life. From the context of Nehemiah 8–10 (NIV), seven practical guidelines emerge from the actions of those in spiritual leadership toward the Word of God. As you read them and consider their missional outcomes, imagine a discussion of these as action, renewal, and restart steps with your colleagues and family during your next staff or board meeting, leadership retreat, and family worship gathering.

1. They brought out the Book—“They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel” (Nehemiah 8:1 NIV). Think of the new awakening of missional life in our churches as local leaders “bring out the Book,” coming together in prayerful conversation around the central authority of the Bible.

2. They read the Book—“He read it aloud from daybreak till noon...And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law” (8:3 NIV). A revisitation of Scripture requires a reading of the Book—all of it. We must find creative ways for engagement with God’s Word.

3. They opened the Book—“Ezra opened the book . . . and as he opened it, the people all stood up” (8:5 NIV). There will always be a continuing call for the local missional community to “open the Book” and stand together on their journey toward biblical missional life. For this to happen in

our churches, the Word has to remain open, constantly at hand, leading in every decision and new initiative.

4. They explained the Book—“The Levites...instructed the people in the Law... They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read” (8:7-8 NIV). There was a communal reading, reflection, and instruction of God’s Word for those yet untrained. The biblical story must be explained from generation to generation.

5. They celebrated the Book—“... all the people went away...to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them” (8:12 NIV). As God’s Word is brought out, opened, read, and explained in missional leadership, there will be a refreshed love for God’s Word. This echoes the joyful delight of the psalmist: “Oh, how I love your law” (Psalm 119:97 NIV).

6. They confessed and worshiped from the Book—“They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God” (Nehemiah 9:3 NIV). Scriptural truth brought about confession and repentance. What would it look like in terms of change in our local missional leadership when con-

viction from God's Word required a new direction or change of policy?

7. They obeyed and followed the Book—"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement... (9:38 NIV);" "...to follow the Law of God...and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord" (10:29b NIV). Let us make "a binding agreement" to obey and follow. It will revitalize missional church life.

Seeking effectiveness and relevance in local church life, we are constantly tempted toward potentially increased dependencies upon human expertise, church management solutions, and a plethora of successful business models from secular leadership. While we can appreciate and learn from

every arena of life and leadership, let us not forget to pause and ask, "How can we renew and maintain our confidence in the Bible for missional church leadership?"

Local church leaders must ask themselves again: *How big is our Bible?* Let us bring it out, open it, read it, explain it, celebrate it, confess and worship from it, and obey/follow it in every dimension of local church missional life. ■

Grant McClung, president of Missions Resource Group (www.MissionsResourceGroup.org), is the Missiological advisor to the World Missions Commission of the Pentecostal World Fellowship and International Missionary educator with Church of God World Missions.



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- Individual completes and submits the application to the pastor

REQUIREMENTS

- Acquire the Exhorter credential
- Obtain approval of the administrative bishop
- Complete the Ordained Minister and MIP Application

FORMAT FOR MIP

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- Complete four School of Ministry courses

NEXT STEP

- Contact your state/regional office for an application



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by STEVE HALL



THE DANGERS AND UNIQUENESS OF A MINISTRY WIFE

DO YOU IDENTIFY with any items in the following job description?

Always appear happy. Able to be perpetually empathetic. Can handle being in the public eye 24-7. Excellent at making everyone happy when settling conflicts. Always patient. Ready to apologize, even if it is not your fault. Able to bite your tongue, even when the other person is wrong. Have perfect temperament to satisfy all. Willing to pay, and keep paying your dues? Willing to win the people's approval, again, and again, and again. A team player. Not easily offended. Diplomatic when someone speaks poorly of your spouse or kids. Can handle not being liked...by many. Works hard at not complaining and adept at spinning everything toward a positive conclusion. Willing to volunteer for long, hard hours. Embraces lots of heavy/emotional lifting. No start or end time—the job is 24/7.

If you believe the job description requirements above are those of a pastor's wife, you would be wrong. They actually pertain to a politician's wife, but the similarities between the spousal roles of a politician and pastor are uncanny. Even more, the pastor's wife carries the burden of their constituents' eternal souls, something in which a politician's wife has no

stake. Do not discount the uniqueness and danger related to being a pastor's wife.

DANGER ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR HUSBAND'S CALLING

Dual income is usually necessary for most pastoral couples, which leads the wife into a career independent from her husband. However, most pastors' wives would agree she is equally invested in her husband's ministry. Her investment is not just sweat equity, but also involves emotional, mental, and spiritual energy. Professional ministers typically have a dramatic moment in time where they have heard the call of God to enter professional ministry. An equivalent dramatic call to ministry is not typical for most pastors' wives.

If the pastor's wife feels called to ministry, it is likely associated with her husband's call. I know few pastors' wives who would make an appointment with the administrative bishop to secure a church pastorate in the event of her husband's death. It is highly doubtful the wife would create a profile on COG-Harmony.com in order to find another pastor to marry so she can fulfill God's call on her life. The bottom line is that most pastors' wives have not experienced the same unambiguous dramatic

personal calling to professional ministry which her husband has. This makes her more vulnerable to the intrinsic stressors of the above job description.

THE UNIQUENESS OF MINISTRY FOR THE PASTOR'S WIFE

Uniqueness number one: A pastor's wife plays a significant role in her husband's job performance. If a pastor's wife does not perform well in worship, fellowship, discipleship, socializing, or ministry in general, her husband's performance will be questioned. Try to think of a job where this is the case, other than a politician. What electrician, accountant, programmer, or policeman's wife can influence his performance review? Because the wife must worship where her husband works, and her performance in the church environment can make or break her husband's career, this often places unbearable stress on ministry marriages.

Uniqueness number two: The pastor's wife is generally expected to fill the gaps in ministry. Imagine the incredulity of an accountant's wife if his boss called and said: "The office manager didn't show up today, so as the accountant's wife you will need to come in to fill the spot." I know it sounds insane, but this is a common occurrence Sunday after Sunday. Although it is unspoken, the pastor's wife is expected to teach children's ministry when a volunteer doesn't show; she greets, ushers, sings, or makes coffee for the same reason. There is a pervasive, unspoken expectation throughout churches where the pastor and his

wife are hired as a package deal—in effect, two for the price of one. Only a politician's wife can relate...perhaps.

Uniqueness number three: The pastor's wife is interviewed along with her husband for advancement in ministry. In what other career can you imagine this happening? If a mechanic wants to get an advanced certification to move to the next level, is his wife interviewed?

LaDon Hall relates the following incident:

When my husband was being interviewed for the next level of ministry rank, I was required to appear before the Credentialing Committee. After a bit of small talk, a regional council member asked me if I was prepared to meet the sexual needs of my husband. He assured me if I were not, there would be plenty of women who would step forward to compromise my husband and the ministry. I tried not to look embarrassed, and said very straightforward, "Well, I guess I'd better step it up a notch." To which my husband chimed in a hearty "Amen!" What other career scrutinizes a spouse to this degree?

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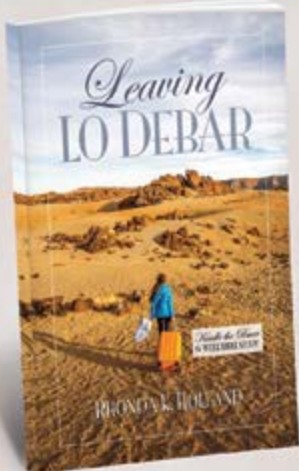
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Steve Hall is lead pastor at Heritage Community Church in Severn, Maryland.

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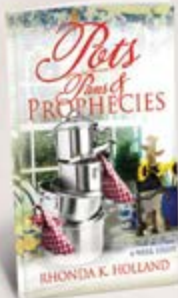


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7 KEY PRINCIPLES TO HELP YOU STEP INTO MINISTRY

by DOUG WEISS

THE PARADIGM OF kings and priests working together to accomplish God's will on earth is clearly illustrated in the rebuilding of the walls in Nehemiah 3. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, a heathen king. When Nehemiah's brother Hanani visited him from Judah, he inquired about Jerusalem. Hanani reported the exiles were in bad shape, and the city's walls were broken down. Note that Nehemiah was a government employee to a heathen king. He was not a priest.

Nehemiah was deeply troubled about those in Jerusalem. I think this is so incredible. He was living and working in a great palace. How many Jews at this time could say they even saw the king? Nehemiah not only saw the king, but he knew the king personally to some degree. How many hundreds or even thousands of hours had he observed the king's conversations, mannerisms, moods, and preferences? And yet his heart ached for his fellow Jews in his homeland.

To solve the largest issues facing our cities will take all of us in the body of Christ. The

priests cannot do it alone and neither can the kings and queens. Solutions will come only by accepting each other for who we are and not lusting after each other's abilities or roles. We should receive our position and focus on rebuilding our cities.

Nehemiah's job wasn't to build the temple. He was a government employee sent on a social project. If kings and priests are to change our culture and influence for the kingdom of God, we must allow people to be themselves and work on the part of the wall for which they have a heart and vision.

Each of us as kings and queens have a part on the wall. In general terms, our role is to love, protect, and minister to others from various arenas of life. For some, our ministry is social. God may touch our hearts to give or volunteer at the Salvation Army, a women's shelter, a teen addiction center, juvenile homes, pregnancy centers, and so forth. For others, our workplace is our kingly or queenly ministry. For some, the ministry is supportive of the local church or parachurch ministry. Whatever your calling, go for it! You are able to touch and love people wherever the Lord has planted you.

Principle No. 1: Be faithful and have a good attitude.

Nehemiah provides a great outline for birthing kingly ministry on the earth. First, Nehemiah was faithful on his present job. He didn't just fly off the handle. He showed up for work day after day. Even though his duty as a cupbearer wasn't one of the more impressive in the palace, he must have maintained a positive attitude for the king to notice the change in his countenance.

Principle No. 2: Have intercessory prayer and an indwelling of God's Word in your life.

Second, we see a heartfelt prayer. Nehemiah identified himself before God with the pains of God's people. He knew God's heart and God's Word. He truly bathed the situation at hand in prayer.

After praying about it, Nehemiah must have done some homework. He must have looked at a map to see which people groups would let him pass through their land. He thought through the need for wood and knew the top man to deal with to obtain the wood. Nehemiah took time to consider the practical aspects of rebuilding the wall.

Principle No. 3: Write down practical aspects.

The third key principle is to sit down with paper and pen and write out the practical aspects that apply to your ministry calling. If it's a building you need, figure out the costs and proper zoning, shop the market, set salaries for employees, know the tax laws, and so on. Whatever the

ministry—social, medical, media, parachurch, or local church—you must get practical.

Research what others have already done in this area of ministry. So much time in the Kingdom is spent reinventing the same wheel over and over. Decide if this is an abundance ministry you are funding or a nonprofit organization. How will it start to create self-sustaining revenue? I know it's not all spiritual to think this way, but this is important if your kingly ministry is going to be birthed.

Principle No. 4: Get practical, and get your facts straight before starting.

The fourth step which Nehemiah presents in his situation is finding a person who can actually do something about it. I find it interesting that this was a heathen king, not a religious group. This was a king talking to a king. Sometimes, it may be as valuable to talk to a few businessmen as it is to discuss an issue with church staffers. Regardless with whom you meet, make sure you are talking to someone who can actually help you get things done.

Principle No. 5: Talk to others in ministry.

Fifth, talk to movers and shakers in your area of ministry who can help you get the job done for the kingdom of God.

The Nehemiah we see is a man of follow-through and motivation of others. He shows up in town, lays out the vision and gets started. He is a persistent king and works hard getting this large task accomplished. Follow-through and the ability to inspire definitely make up the next principle for birthing kingly ministry.

Principle No. 6: Take counsel in the Lord and godly advisers.

Sixth, Nehemiah knew God and God's heart for this ministry of rebuilding the walls. When the neighbors didn't like what was going on, they spread lies about Nehemiah. They repeatedly tested the man of God. They wanted him to become afraid and discouraged. Nehemiah would have no part of their demonic tactics. He stayed focused, responding to attacks practically, but never stopping. He sought God and stayed focused even under pressure.


Principle No. 7: Seek God and stay focused.

This last principle is to stay humble and enjoy the Lord's deliverance. Nehemiah never

took on an air of haughtiness. I think humility is an earmark of those who stay with a ministry from birth to success.

I hope these principles can help you birth, pray through, practically prepare, involve the right people, go through the fire, and see God as a delivering and compassionate God about your kingly ministry. I encourage you to find your place on the wall and advance the Kingdom. Frustrate the devil and change the world. ■

Doug Weiss, Ph.D., is a nationally known author, speaker, and licensed psychologist. He is the executive director of [Heart to Heart Counseling Center](#) in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the author of several books. Reprinted from New Man, 2.27.2019



The spiritual opposition facing the Church is "more fierce than the evening wolves" (Habakkuk 1:8). These wolves love to attack at twilight, for they flourish in a mixture of darkness and light.

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Toby S. Morgan is administrative bishop for the Church of God in Texas.

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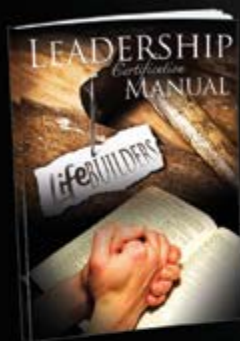
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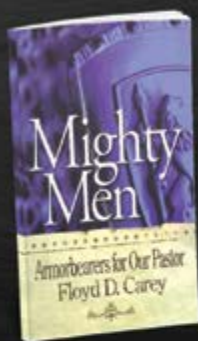
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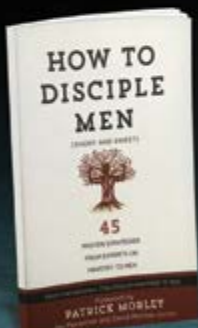


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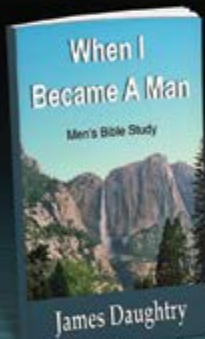
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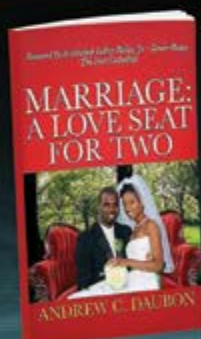
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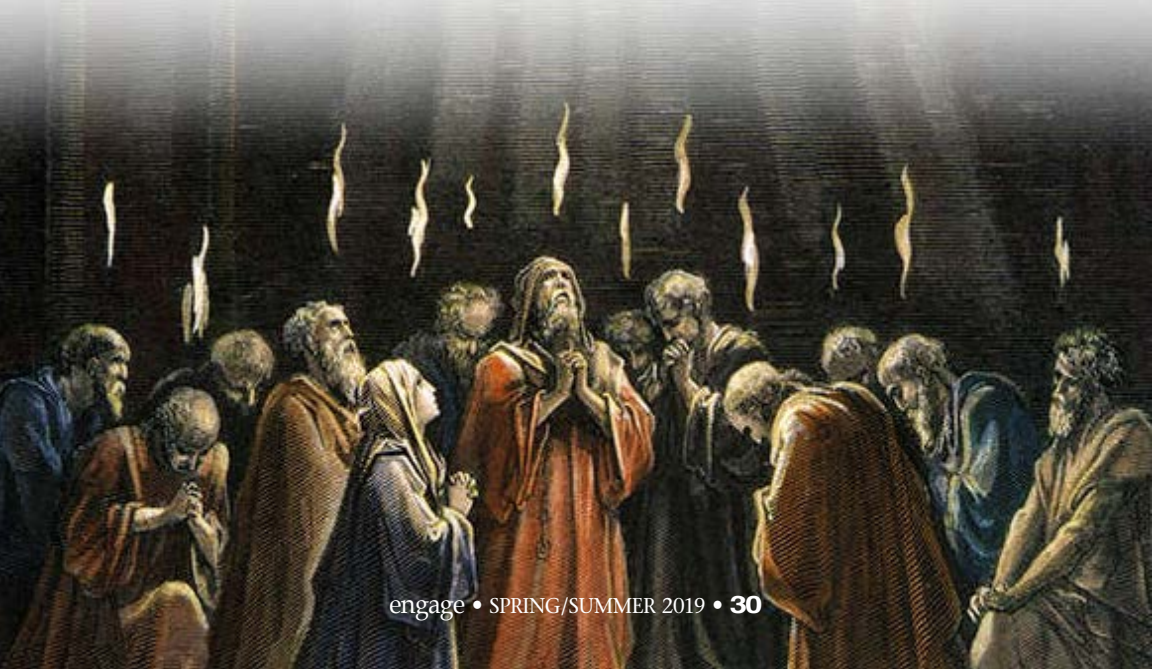
The Initial Evidence of Holy Spirit Baptism

THE GIFT OF THE baptism in the Holy Spirit is available to every Christian believer. “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him” (Acts 2:39 NRSV). Every believer has the privilege, opportunity, and responsibility to pursue the Spirit-filled life.

Holy Spirit baptism signals entrance into the Spirit-filled life. Jesus demonstrated a sense of urgency for His disciples to receive all the Father had promised. He said, “And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised;

so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49 NRSV). Further, He said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8a NRSV). This is a spiritual imperative for the people of God.

Spirit baptism is neither a luxury for a few select individuals nor a spiritual option for the super-spiritual. Spirit baptism is the will of God for every believer in Christ. Just as Jesus was led and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill His mission, believers in every generation need the same equipping of the Holy Spirit.



Disciples of Jesus are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Jesus' witnesses (Acts 1:8). These Spirit-filled believers are being constantly shaped and molded into being Christlike in attitude and behavior. Spirit-filled believers are not victimized by the world-order, a hostile environment, or even sin's allurements. The Spirit who creates those credible witnesses provides courage, boldness, and wisdom to proclaim the gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit guides into all truth (John 16:13); teaches (John 14:26); and makes intercession through the Spirit-filled believer (Romans 8:26). He is empowering the people of God to be all they need to be and to do all they need to do. This charismatic endowment (Spirit baptism) empowers the people of God to accomplish the Great Commandment (loving God supremely: Mark 12:29, 30) and the Great Commission (making disciples: Matthew 28:18-20).

The emphasis on Spirit baptism was continued throughout the Book of Acts. Paul's question to the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:2) captures this emphasis and sense of urgency:

- "Did you receive the Holy Spirit after you believed?"
- "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?"
- "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

The question reveals several things. Paul accepted the fact that as "disciples" they were believers in Christ. He knew that in regeneration they would have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Paul stated, "If anyone

does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9b NIV). All believers are *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit, but not all believers are *filled* with the Holy Spirit. Paul also knew, however, of the possibility that they had not been *baptized* in the Spirit. His question relates to receiving the charismatic endowment of the Holy Spirit that is needed for effective witness. Paul would not have asked the question if it had been unimportant or unanswerable. He expected them to know and be able to answer, "Yes" or "No." He did not expect, "We hope so," or "We think so."

Holy Spirit baptism is a spiritual imperative, and the Scriptures show a sense of urgency concerning the baptism. How then can we have an assurance that we have received Spirit baptism and have entered the Spirit-filled life? The answer does not come from our own experience, others' experiences, or our own faith tradition. The answer comes as Scriptures guide our spiritual journey.

The Book of Acts is a "theological history." Luke presented events in the history of the early church that convey theological principles in the early church. The Holy Spirit guided Luke to show the mission of Jesus Christ continuing in Christ's followers in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Luke reveals that Jesus fulfilled His mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Luke ends, and the Book of Acts begins with Jesus' command that His disciples receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides Luke to recite specific instances of Holy Spirit baptism and some of the results of those fillings.

Let us prayerfully consider the contexts and content of Holy Spirit baptisms in the Book of Acts. Luke uses different terms to describe this experience—baptized, filled, received, come upon, poured out, promises, and gift. According to Acts chapters 1 and 2, the persons gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem were disciples of Jesus Christ who were obeying His command to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the “promise” of the Father. They had received the Word of God, had been separated unto God and unto Christ and from the world-system (John 17.) As they were worshiping God, there was a sound from heaven as a rush of a mighty wind. Divided tongues as of fire appeared among them and rested on each one of them. These phenomena would remind them of Old Testament theophanies in which wind and fire indicated the presence of deity. The disciples were then all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them what to say. People who heard their speaking were bewildered and amazed. Some of the crowd showed a spiritual interest with their question: “What does this mean?” Others in the crowd sneered and said, “They are filled with a new kind of wine.” The Holy Spirit guides Peter’s understanding and response. He said that Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled as recorded in Joel 2:28-29. He did not quote Jeremiah or Ezekiel about a new heart and a new spirit, but he quoted Joel who prophesied about the outpouring of the Spirit. Joel’s prophecy indicates that after lamenting, repenting, and restoring, the outpouring comes. The promise is being fulfilled, and the pattern is being set. Believers in Jesus Christ, obedient to Christ’s command are worshiping

with expectation and total submission. This submission includes speaking what the Holy Spirit gives—words different from their own language.

Acts 8 records the events in Samaria when Phillip, the Spirit-filled evangelist, proclaimed the gospel of Christ. There was widespread acceptance of the message. The people believed and were baptized to show their commitment to Jesus Christ. Many signs, wonders, and miracles were experienced in Samaria. Simon, who practiced magic, also believed and was baptized. He continued with Phillip and was constantly amazed at the signs and miracles.

The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to pray for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit because He had not fallen upon any of them (Acts 8:16). They laid hands on the believers, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-19). When Simon experienced what happened, he lapsed into his profit-seeking mentality and offered money to the apostles to have power to lay hands on people so they would receive the Holy Spirit. Simon, who had witnessed signs, wonders, and miracles through the ministry of Philip, now saw and/or heard something extraordinary. Many scholars, even non-Pentecostals, conclude that “speaking in tongues” was the evidence observed. F.F. Bruce said, “The context leaves us in no doubt that their reception of the Spirit was attended by external manifestations such as had marked His descent on the earliest disciples at Pentecost.”¹

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson said, “This participle (second aorist active of *horao*) shows plainly that these who received the gift of the Holy Spirit spoke with tongues.”²

Johannes Munck said, "Simon, who by virtue of his earlier life closely observed all wondrous faculties and powers, was struck by the apostles' ability to make the baptized prophesy and to speak in tongues by the laying on of hands."³

On the road to Damascus, according to Acts 9, Saul of Tarsus became convinced that Jesus is deity. He committed himself to Jesus and obeyed His instructions. In convincing Ananias of his mission, God said that Saul is praying, that he is God's chosen instrument, and he has been given a vision. Ananias greeted Saul as "Brother Saul" and said that the Lord Jesus had sent him so that he (Saul) might receive sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures do not say that Saul spoke in tongues, but later he said, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (1 Cor. 14:18 NIV).

In light of Paul's statement to the Corinthian church, "I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all" (1 Cor. 14:18 NASB), speaking in tongues must have been part of his experience in Damascus. Luke's primary concern was with God's calling and empowering of Saul for his apostolic ministry. So, Paul's experience was consistent with the purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost and at Samaria. They too were equipped to bear the name of their Lord.⁴

Acts 10 records the filling of the Spirit at Cornelius' house. Cornelius was a devout man, a generous man, a praying man, and one to whom God communicated instructions. He obeyed God and sent for Simon Peter.

As Peter was preaching, he said, "The word which God sent to the children of Israel,

preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached" (Acts 10:36, 37 NKJV). "A strong case can be made that Cornelius and company were members of the people of God as defined by Luke."⁵

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who were hearing his message. The six Spirit-filled men who had accompanied Peter were astonished and knew that these had been baptized in the Holy Spirit because they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God (see Acts 10:44-46).

Peter went to Jerusalem and gave his report of what God did with the believers at Cornelius' house. He said, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 11:15-16 NKJV). 'That tongues are the normative evidence of the baptism of the Spirit is unmistakably clear in this place.'"⁶

Paul's concern that every believer be Spirit-filled was shown in his question to the disciples. The question, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" was referenced earlier in this paper. The disciples to whom the question was asked had become believers through the ministry of John the baptizer. John preached the baptism of repentance and announced and introduced Jesus Christ. John also said, "I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8 NRSV). Through the ministry of John, these were believers in Jesus Christ, but they

did not know of the spiritual dimension of the operation of the Holy Spirit that was available. Paul explained the way more fully showing the connection of John and Jesus. They were then baptized in the authority of Jesus Christ. Acts 19:6 states: "When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (NRSV). No further questions were asked. Speaking in tongues was the sign that these had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

From studying the Book of Acts, it is undeniable that the one repeated pattern, initial evidence, or first sign that Spirit baptism has occurred is speaking in tongues as the Holy Spirit gives the utterance. This is the reason that speaking in tongues is viewed as normative evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This pattern was not culturally engineered nor personally manipulated but divinely set. Some would say, "We cannot put God in a box," but if God chooses to give assurance to believers that they have entered into the Spirit-filled life by their speaking in other tongues, who are human beings to attempt to withstand God? The prevalence of and encouragement of speaking in tongues according to 1 Corinthians 14 give evidence that the believers in the early church put emphasis on the Spirit-filled life. While Paul gave guidelines concerning prophecy, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues in corporate worship, he also extolled the blessings of speaking in tongues in individual worship of God. The person is speaking to God, articulates praises to God, and is being built up spiritually in the process. Paul encourages all to speak in tongues and

emphasizes the importance of interpretation of tongues in corporate worship. So, speaking in tongues signals the entrance into the Spirit-filled life and continues in individual worship thereafter.

An atmosphere of trust and expectation in the community of believers helps believers to submit fully to the work of God in their lives, even to allowing the Holy Spirit to guide what they say. Cornelius told Peter, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (Acts 10:33 NIV). In that atmosphere, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message" (Acts 10:44 NIV).

May God guide each of us to seek Him and to accept all His provisions!

For further study, please consult: Lombard, John A. Jr. and Jerald J. Daffe. *Speaking in Tongues—Initial Evidence of Spirit Baptism* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press), 2005. ■

ENDNOTES

- 1 F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 181.
- 2 A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), 107.
- 3 Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible, eds. William Albright and David Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 75.
- 4 French Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 100.
- 5 Donald A. Johns, "Some New Directions in the Hermeneutics of Classical Pentecostalism's Doctrine of Initial Evidence," in *Initial Evidence*, Gary B. McGee, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 151.
- 6 Howard M. Ervin, *Spirit Baptism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 78, 79.

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CHILDREN are not only hungry for the Holy Spirit and want to operate in the supernatural, but they are also desperate for it. Statistics show that by the time children are 13, they have heard what they describe as the “big Bible stories” repeatedly. You know the ones I’m talking about: Noah’s Ark, David and Goliath, Daniel and the Lions’ Den, Jonah and the Whale, and the Easter story. While these stories are wonderful and worth repeating, the kids who hear them all the time believe they know everything there is to know about God. They make their decision to follow Christ based on a cupful of stories, rather than drinking from the whole well. Barna has done research that suggests what they are taught before they are 14 will determine how spiritual they will become in their adult lives.¹

We live in a society where this generation is bombarded with the dark side of the

supernatural. We want them to operate in the supernatural with the authority of the Holy Spirit, not through illegal demonic influences; so, we must be ready to teach them. That is why it’s imperative that we create an environment for children to be able to experience God, not just hear about Him and be a spectator in services.

There once was an interview with Olympic star Carl Lewis who said by the age of five, he was already jumping cracks in the sidewalk and practicing to make his dream come true to become a gold medal winner in track and field. There are many stories of adults who knew what they wanted to do while still children and began striving for those goals. That’s why kids should be exposed to as many areas of ministry as possible; so as they grow older, their spiritual muscles have been built up for many years, and they are ready to run their race.

This can be accomplished in many ways. Once, we asked the children to bring their favorite stuffed animal to the service. The sermon was on the gift of healing; they pretended the animals were sick, and they laid hands on them and practiced praying for their healing.

The God we serve is too powerful and too mighty for us to limit

His deeds, His gifts, and His meat to adults. Jesus himself said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14 KJV). That verse always niggled at me like someone tapping on my shoulder trying to get me to look at something. A deeper look into the original Greek of this verse revealed that Jesus is saying, "Don't prevent the children from doing things for the Kingdom, for they have the gospel and power that belongs to Me." Children have no natural impediment that would bar the way to receive God's gifts, His blessings, and His power. They are naturally discerning, and the same power that raised Jesus from the grave is not only available to us as adults, but also to every single child . . . for there is no junior Holy Spirit.

But what does that look like in a kids camp? I'm glad you asked!

I was preaching at a kids camp in Eastern North Carolina a few years ago, and the kids were having a few minutes for individual prayer time. A young girl walked up and said that God had just given her a vision. I asked her what it was, and she said that everyone was about to be filled with the Holy Spirit. She was still speaking as my eyes moved from left to right and children began crying out to God,

others fell out with no one touching them, and more began shaking and praying. I looked back at the girl who shared her vision with me, and she just shrugged her shoulders and said, "Told you so." During the course of that three-night camp, more than 70 children began speaking in tongues and operating in the gifts of the Spirit with healings taking place. There were so many children having visions we had to set up a table with crayons and blank paper, because we couldn't write fast enough as they dictated to us the visions they were experiencing. Parents had to carry their children across the parking lot in their arms, because they were limp and still speaking in tongues. It was one of the most supernatural things I've ever seen, but yet it felt like one of the most natural things I'd ever seen.

Once at a kids camp, a 10-year-old began marching around with his hands lifted. As he made his way to me, he told me that God said He was going to heal someone. He called up a 6-year-old child who was having surgery the next day. We all laid hands on him to pray, with the 10-year-old leading it. He prayed these words, "Let the doctors not have to help." The next day the phone rang, and an ecstatic Momma was praising God and explaining that they had to call off the major surgery because they discovered there was no need for it anymore during pre-op tests.

At another service, a girl was distraught about her infant cousin who was in ICU and not expected to live through the night. She had been taught intercessory prayer and what it means to stand in the gap. Her knees hit the floor, and she didn't stop praying for several hours. Everyone in the church had left and the

lights in the entire building had been turned off, but she continued to pray with a handful of children accompanying her. The adults would pray, and then we would observe as they flowed from English to tongues and back again. She was sweating she was praying so hard, and so were the other children as young as five. Then, in a flash, she stopped praying. Her exact words were, "It is done." She didn't shed another tear. She got up and went home, confident. The next morning we got a phone call that her infant cousin was not only moved out of ICU, but was also being released from the hospital with no more symptoms.

At camp, we have the kids break into groups of two or three and practice witnessing to the "unbeliever," and then lead them to Jesus with the sinner's prayer. This one activity alone has seen many kids leading others into the Kingdom once they had confidence to do it.

At another camp, we finished a devotional that had nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, when a group of girls asked about Him. A quick explanation was all that was given, because it was time to go to the next activity—as they were all dressed for pool time. After all, we had a schedule to keep, right? One girl raised her hand and asked if she could receive the Holy Spirit right then. I paused, and then clearly heard the Holy Spirit say: "Now!" We started to pray. Within a few moments, the young girl was speaking in tongues . . . then another . . . and yet another. The presence of God was so thick that as adults came in, they burst out crying and joined us in worship, as we all ended up face down on the floor.

You may read this and think: *Is there a formula for this to happen?* The only regimen is to pray, study, and expect God to do what He says He will do, and give Him every drop of glory when He does it. Then invite the Holy Spirit into the house, and allow Him to have the services.

Jesus clearly states in Matthew 18:3 that unless we become like children, we will never be able to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was embedding secret knowledge in this passage about the power of approaching Him as a child. Children are not self-promoting, prideful, critical, or ambitious. They are humble, simple, willing, and teachable. These are the attributes of the ones who will operate with power in the realm of the supernatural. Because children believe everything they learn about Jesus, they easily become an open vessel into which He can pour His power.

There are Esthers, Davids, Peters and Pauls who are attending our kids camps every year. They are ready and quite capable of operating in the gifts of the Spirit! Jesus said they would lay hands on the sick and they would recover; He never said how old they would be. They just have to believe. All we have to do is provide space for them to grow, invite the Holy Spirit in, and God will do the rest. ■

Jessica Berry is Children's Pastor at Grace Church in Fredericksburg, Va. and serves as the Virginia director for Kids in Ministry International.



¹<https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/>



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by JACQUI SMITH

MARY AND ELIZABETH WERE PREGNANT AT THE SAME TIME

I'VE LEARNED an important lesson from the story of the two famous women found in Luke, Chapter 1. This chapter tells us about the birth of John the Baptist and his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were righteous in God's eyes and obedient in all the Lord's commandments. They were well up in age and unable to conceive. However, God sent a message to

Zacharias while he was performing his priestly duty in the Temple that his wife Elizabeth would conceive and bear a son. This son would prepare the people for the Lord's coming and "go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah" (v. 17 NKJV).

Elizabeth was now in her sixth month when God sent the same angel Gabriel to Nazareth to visit Mary and to give her a



message from God. Gabriel told her she had found favor with God and was chosen to conceive and give birth to a son—a Holy One—who would be named Jesus and also be called the Son of God. How amazing it was that Mary had been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. Before leaving Mary, Gabriel told her that her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant in her old age.

We see these two women had the favor of God resting on them, and it was also the will of God for them to have incredible callings.

Mary then made haste to visit Elizabeth, and when she entered the house of her relative, the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb and immediately she was filled with the Holy Ghost. One thing I saw clearly was how Elizabeth reached out to Mary. Elizabeth was old and never thought she would have a child, but God answered her prayer at the appointed time. You would have thought Elizabeth would have testified to Mary about her miracle, but instead, she praised the Lord and gave her young cousin the honor that was due her. What a humble spirit. This should be a teaching moment for all seasoned ministers of the gospel. There was no jealousy or envy that her young cousin was chosen to be the mother of her Lord. There was no questioning God's choice. I see them both rejoicing that they were able to play a part in God's perfect plan.

The act of comparing is an important subject which we all need to give much thought to as ministers. Mary and Elizabeth could have compared their callings, but they were able to show us what it looks like to love and support one another. They each

had a purpose set out before them, and they affirmed one another without questioning whose calling was better.

We have many women in the Church of God who are chosen and highly favored of the Lord to do mighty things to advance the kingdom of God. We have different talents, giftings, and mantles so we can fulfill our purpose. There is no need to compare ourselves to others who have the same ministry gifts as we do, because if we don't measure up in our own minds to what we think others expect of us, then we become failures. The Enemy puts thoughts in our minds like low attendance at our meetings, not many "likes" on Facebook, we are just not very successful, not pretty, not popular, or he just loves to come around and say something like this: "Jacqui Smith, you are 75 years old now. Who wants to listen to you?" So then we get caught up in self instead of the Lord who called us.

We must guard against the act of comparing or having feelings of jealousy; because, if we do, we will no longer be effective or able to encourage anyone else. I was once told that I was going to be the keynote speaker for a conference. Then, I happened to pick up the *Evangel* and read that someone else was preaching. I confess I was not happy about it, but Holy Spirit led me to get on my face and pray for her that she would be mightily used of the Lord and that I would be the most blessed person in the service. I purposely sat on the front row, and I received one of the greatest blessings in my walk with the Lord.

Mary and Elizabeth both experienced miracles, and each had her own direction to follow. The Lord chose them for individual

assignments. Elizabeth gave birth to the forerunner, and Mary gave birth to our Savior.

I just celebrated 40 years of ministry in the Church of God as an evangelist/ prophetess—a female, African-American, single individual with a specific calling to preach the gospel to bring glory to God, edify the church, and win the lost. In addition to that, I was called to break through racial, cultural, and gender barriers. I thought: *Lord what do You have against me?*

Now we fast-forward and He has added to my assignments within the last few years. He has led me to encourage the younger women in ministry who are coming behind me. Someone came to me one day and said something that really disturbed me. She said, “I see you have been kicked to the curb.” Thank the Lord for the Holy Spirit who helped me that day. I believe we all have our seasons

and our turns. My desire is to serve alongside our young daughters in ministry, and I feel I owe it to them to pray for them and encourage them in every way I can.

I recently had the privilege of sitting with 29-year-old Michelle Smith—a powerful preacher of the gospel. I wanted to hear her heart and speak into her life. I was so encouraged to hear her say that she is determined to do the will of the Lord and make a difference in the Church of God, serving her generation. I expressed to her that I can’t do ministry without her generation and she, too, needs *my* generation. We must do the work of the Kingdom together.

Elizabeth and Mary were pregnant at the same time—being fruitful and productive.

Jacqui Smith is an international evangelist for the Church of God.



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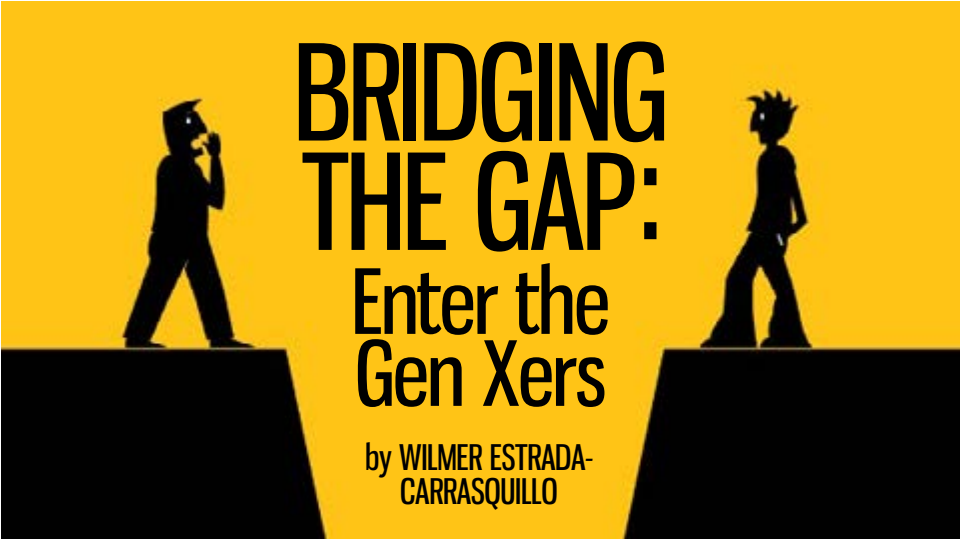
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BRIDGING THE GAP: Enter the Gen Xers

by WILMER ESTRADA-
CARRASQUILLO

AM THE YOUNGEST of four siblings; hence, growing up, I never experienced what it was like to be in the middle. Whatever I knew about the middle-child syndrome came from friends who experienced it. Today, I am a father of three, and in a way, I have become more aware of it.

What I have come to understand from a parent's perspective is that Mía, our middle child, is at the same time too small for something or too big for another. For example, a couple of weeks ago, we took our girls to a park. Kalani, our oldest, was able to drive the adult's go-carts by herself. Valeria, our youngest, was happy because she was able to drive the kiddie's go-carts. However, Mía wasn't able to drive in her own track, she is not quite there yet. She either drives in the kiddie's track or has to be a passenger at the adult's track. According to her, that is not fair!

You may be asking yourself, "*What does*

the middle child have to do with Gen Xers?"

Interestingly, there is some correlation between the two; in fact, I am a Gen Xer. My life span has increased in ways I never expected. As a result, the church is a multigenerational phenomenon. In cases where this is truly embodied, a church's core group may be composed of Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials. Consequently, this makes the Gen Xers the middle child.

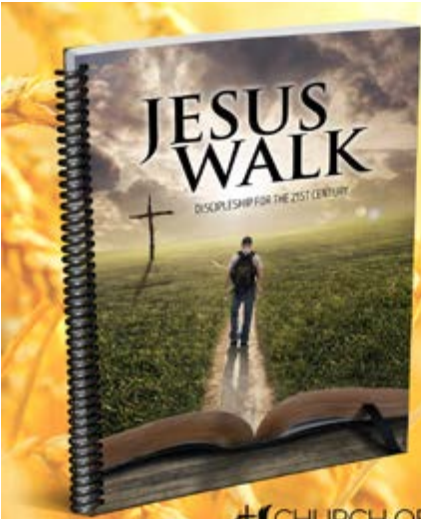
In preparation for this article, I have spoken informally with Gen Xers about their experience in the church. Interestingly, their responses seem to underscore an issue that is common among those who are the middle child; that is, at times it seems complicated to find their place in the church. Yet, due to their convictions, they have weathered the storm. Like Mía, they have learned to drive by themselves in the kiddie's track and to be a passenger in the adult's track.

Now the pressing question is: “Why make this correlation, and why is it important?” Presently, ecclesial organizations are puzzled by the lack of Millennials in our church communities. As a result, these organizations (the Church of God being one of them) are seeking to develop strategies and relevant programs that could reach the Millennials. However, the gap is too broad, and in part, not an issue with the programs implemented; but rather, it is a spatial problem—the generation in one extreme (Boomers) is trying to reach another extreme (Millennials) without a generational bridge. Enter Gen Xers;

What I have learned with Mia is the following: The middle child has an important and undeniable role—she is the bridge that connects her siblings. Among many other things, that is her gift. Similarly, Gen Xers may be the missing link in connecting

Millennials to our churches. Gen Xers are not only spatially closer but also have the ability to adapt and connect with the cultural patterns that define the Millennials—isn’t that the value of X? That is what it needs to be. Maybe it’s time to reconstruct the bridge. Perhaps, this is the space that Gen Xers are called to fill. It doesn’t take much to prove this. The most influential voices among Millennials are Gen Xers themselves; but unfortunately, many of these influential voices go beyond our institutions to bridge the gap. I love my church, and I want the best for her. I believe that we can do much better. We are here and ready to stand in the gap. ■

Wilmer Estrada-Carrasquillo, Ph.D., is the director for Centro para Estudios Latinos (Center for Latino Studies) and professor of practical theology at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary.



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ENGAGING Your Community

by BRETT HOGLAND

THOSE WHO KNOW ME are not shocked to discover that in the mechanical, handyman department, I am not the drawer's sharpest knife. I prefer to hammer out a line or turn a phrase, because when it comes to hammering nails and turning screws, I leave much to be desired. Recently, I climbed aboard my John Deere mower to bring beauty to my yard. With headphones playing tunes for my front-yard concert and the green tractor nicely shined up, I was ready for action. I started it. I steered it. I drove it—for 30 minutes—until I noticed there was no change in the yard. After a few confusing moments, I realized I had forgotten one important step. The cutter was not cutting, and the beauty was not coming, because I had never pulled the little knob that engaged the blade. I was riding, moving, singing, but making absolutely no difference. I was not engaged.

Allow my natural folly to force a spiritual

question: "Are we engaging our community with the gospel?" Christ calls the church to bring beauty to its surroundings—shining light, giving grace, serving the hurting, blessing the broken, practically and purposefully advancing the gospel as the body of Christ in our local community context. No doubt the church of today is shinier, busier, and more aesthetically relevant than ever before. All of that is wonderful, but only ultimately meaningful when we use it to intentionally engage our community with the gospel's message and power. The church exists for more than casual rides in our own front yard, donning headphones to silence the cultural concerns of the day as we serenade ourselves. We are light of the world, salt of the earth, body of Christ, hope for the hurting, and the bridge for the broken. We are the church—brighter than life's darkness and stronger than hell's gates—and when we fully engage our community with Christ, it can be said of us as



it was of the early church: “[They] have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6 NKJV).

While there are many with larger, sharper ministry tractors than ours, the following are a few of the rules we have followed to engage our community.

ENGAGE PURPOSEFULLY

The church garage is the place to get your tank full and engine cranked, so impact can be made outside in the community. Create a desire for your people to love being outside the church walls, viewing ministry in the marketplace as missional and meaningful. Intentionally and consistently cast the vision of your church onto other people. Keep the spiritual blinds up and the windows open; so the world can see in, and the church can shine out. It is a powerful thing when a church falls deeply in love with both the Christ they follow and the city they serve.

ENGAGE PERSONALLY

Before a community is transformed by God’s presence, they are aware of your presence. If we are truly to “Go” as Christ commanded, we must consciously choose to go to those things that matter to our city, and subsequently to us—school events, community meetings, and Christmas parades. Be consistently present and actively involved in your city as you build relationships that become the currency for ministry involvement and enjoyment. It is a glorious thing when your community becomes home.

ENGAGE PRACTICALLY

Christ came to heal the heart, but He also held the children, fed the hungry, ate dinners,

and served others. Our Gospel mandate includes practical points of serving those around us, as we shine Christ’s light and create Kingdom connection points. Here are a few examples of practical service we have successfully witnessed in Scottsboro:

- Providing breakfast for the faculty at all our local schools.
- Serving dinner for the city’s first responders (fire and police).
- Sprucing up landscaping at the local schools, library, adoption agencies, and more.
- Giving free carwashes on a Saturday morning.
- Serving coffee and hot chocolate to Black Friday shoppers.

There are more events, but this is a small example of ways to practically be present, serving, and blessing your community. Each one often opens the door for things deeper and more spiritual. The cup of cold water given in Jesus’ name still makes people thirsty for His living fountain.

ENGAGE PRESENTLY

Community outreach does not have to reinvent the wheel. D.L. Moody was notorious for not only drawing crowds, but also finding where the crowds already were and ministering there. Your city already has movements and events that matter to the people. Do not compete against those; but rather, find ways to be present in partnership with them, thereby supporting and shining at the same time. Our community has annual events like Art in the Park, Fishing Tournaments, and more. We strive to tap into as many of those events as possible, partnering with our city leaders, while giving

out water or hotdogs or offering prayer. Jesus was found among the people; may we be found there as well.

ENGAGE IN PARTNERSHIP

A kingdom divided against itself will fall. The local church is part of a global kingdom. Therefore, we are to compliment, not compete with, other local ministries. Few things create hunger for faith and effectiveness in ministry more than local church teamwork. When the body of Christ comes together—feet supporting hands, eyes helping ears, churches working together—amazing things transpire. If you want to build your church, you can work solo . . . if you want to reach your city, work together. Our community has a pregnancy center that works with abortion-prone ladies, offering training, direction, prayer, counseling, and more. They are excellent at what they do—so we support them, cheer them, and serve them as they serve our city. We strive to do the same with every local church. Once a year, we partner with other community churches for a “Serve Scottsboro” weekend where we canvas the city with service projects and no one church gets the credit or acclaim. The Word still rings true—when the church dwells in unity, the Lord commands the blessing.

ENGAGE PATIENTLY

A pop tart can be ready in seconds, a filet takes some time. Be willing to invest consistency and longevity into reaching your city. Repetition creates reputation, as you prove yourself dependable, stable, and trustworthy. Do not let the weeds of discouragement grow where you have planted the seeds of harvest.

Though you see nothing for a little while, deep roots bring lasting fruits.

ENGAGE PRIVATELY

This one is hard, yet imperative. In our day of social media marketing, resist the urge to publicly promote everything your church is doing. There is a great balance between bringing awareness to your cause, while not always letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing. If we serve for promotion and photo ops, we often miss the greatest impact—one-on-one ministry outside the spotlight, personal connection with a single child or widow, the anointing that comes on floor sweepers and funeral weepers, and the blessing that comes from gaining Christ’s recognition and rewards. True ministry finds promotion from the Lord—His look is better than a thousand “likes.”

ENGAGE PRAYERFULLY

Reaching your community takes rolled up sleeves and bruised up knees. Work as if it all depended on you, while praying as though it all depends on Christ. Ask the Lord to give you and your church a burden of love for your community like never before. He will answer that prayer with the biblical promise that you can do more than go to church . . . you can be the church.

With a canopy of chaos above, and a bothersome backdrop around, Jesus stood with stability in Caesarea Philippi and proclaimed the church. As His disciples took in the depraved darkness of an idolatrous city, their Master pierced that darkness with a providential promise: “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18 NKJV).

He would build a church of power. He would establish a faithful force of fire that would revolutionize the world, while triumphing over the darkness around them. And He did. Through the cross, Christ built a church that has shaken the gates of hell and shone the light of glory. Throughout the years, the blackness of society and sin has been illuminated by the presence of Christ's church. Grace, peace, power, life—all have been revealed by the body of Christ.

They still are today. While our world may be shrouded in the shadows of Satan's snickering, the promise of our Master still rings true. Darkness cannot defeat the church. Trouble cannot trump the church. For Christ has bought the church with His blood, built the church with His power, and established the church as the symbolic body of Christ . . . and the body of Christ always rises!

Into the struggling scene of your life, the promise of Christ careens through the ages. He has a people. He has a power. He has a purpose. He has built His church, and the gates of hell cannot defeat it. This promise is for you. Yet, so is the prescription. In the same breath, Jesus declared He would build, and He described the materials He would use.

His materials for the church would not be bricks and mortar, but men and women. He would take ordinary, common, carnal people, and transform them into faithful, forceful believers. He would build; they would be; and they were. Fishermen, tax collectors, men, women—all who believed on Christ were transformed from lifeless strugglers to living stones, stationed in the house of God, as the people of God, revealing and receiving the

glory of God. If they were willing to reflect God's grace, then they could receive God's power. In simpler terms, if God could get through them, He would give to them.

And He still will. For us, there remains hope and healing and help. The body of Christ is still alive with glory and grace. God is still building the ordinary into the extraordinary. But He is still calling those He builds, to be. If we will shine His light into the darkness around us, it will also pierce the darkness within us. If we will open our hearts to reach someone's need, then it will be open to receive what we need. Alas, the darkness of our community is clamoring for courageous followers of Christ to stand, speak, and show that we are the church, engaged by Christ to engage our community.

When I realized my mower issue, I made a change. Reaching down, I grabbed a lever that so engaged the blades that a roar was released, beauty was brought, and so much dust stirred up that you could see my work's evidence across the neighborhood. I am ready to hear a spiritual roar. I long to see the church bring beauty. I am desperate to stir things up until it becomes obvious to the world that the church is alive, well, strong, loving, powerful, and full of God's grace and glory. What might happen if we become fully engaged—radically, completely, humbly, and unashamedly? We may stir up souls, stir up revival, and stir up a nation. What is that heavenly roar I hear? I believe it is local churches engaging their community like never before. ■

***Brett Hogland** is pastor of Faith Covenant Church in Scottsboro, Alabama. He also serves on the Alabama Church of God State Council.*



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The Danger of 15-Passenger Vans

WE ARE SEEING the same story unfold time after time. “A back tire blows, the van rolls, and people are thrown. Families and church members ask for prayers.” This quote appeared in an August 2018 *USA Today* article posing the question: “Why are churches still using unsafe vans?”¹ Despite the well-publicized, and often tragic, ramifications of utilizing 15-passenger vans, many churches still fail to take necessary precautions regarding the operation of these vehicles.

THE CHRONIC ISSUE

While the *USA Today* article featured the fatal accident of the Faith Chapel Assemblies of God Church near Kansas City, the reality is they are not alone. In fact, from 2007–2016, approximately 509 people were killed as a result of being in a 15-passenger van accident; yet, churches continue to be one of the few remaining users of these vehicles.² Let’s get straight to the point, these vans are a real problem! According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, when

15-passenger vans reach maximum occupancy, the odds of the van rolling over increase by 400 percent as opposed to when there is only one passenger in the vehicle.³ The risk is so great that even school systems are not permitted to use 15-passenger vans, based on a federal law passed in 2005 regarding public transportation vehicles.⁴

While the best-case scenario would be to completely stop usage of 15-passenger vans, I understand that this could be a financial challenge for some churches. With that being said, if churches are unable to purchase new buses or safer vehicles, then there are necessary precautions that should be implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company—the insurance provider for the Church of God International Offices—the following preventive measures regarding 15-passenger vans should be taken:

- Remove the rear seat of the van.
- Add suspension enhancements, such as the Roadmaster Active Suspension Kit.

Churches cannot afford to continue overlooking the dangers that 15-passenger vans pose. Keeping our members safe from preventable accidents should be a priority for every church.

- Inspect tires before, during, and after a trip for pressure.
- All drivers should complete 15-passenger van training.
- Always require seat belts.
- Avoid transporting more than nine passengers.
- Do not store things, such as luggage, in the rear area of the van.
- Do not tow a trailer or store items on the roof.
- Avoid driving between the hours of 12 a.m. and 6 a.m.
- Drivers should rotate every two hours. (See footnote 3.)

Though following these recommendations can greatly improve the safety of your 15-passenger vans, the church insurance companies prefer that churches transition to small buses as alternatives.

CONCLUSION

Churches cannot afford to continue overlooking the dangers that 15-passenger vans pose. Keeping our members safe from

preventable accidents should be a priority for every church. Whether your church has the ability to switch to small buses, or if your church instead chooses to invest in the van it has by implementing the recommendations listed above, take some definitive action to address this issue! ■

Dennis W. Watkins is legal counsel for the Church of God. The writer is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services herein. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

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NOTES

- 1 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2018/08/21/churches-using-unsafe-vans-rollover-crash-teens-killed/1057825002/>
- 2 <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/15-passenger-vans>
- 3 <https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/safety-library/risk-management-articles/vehicles-and-drivers/vans/modify-your-15-passenger-van/>
- 4 <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oi/nonpublic/transportation.html>



Court Finds Housing Allowance Constitutional

IN A SURPRISING unanimous decision on March 15, 2019, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals held that the ministerial housing allowance did not violate the U.S. Constitution. While Court observers were divided on their predictions about what the court's final decision might be, the unanimous decision upholding the "cash" housing allowance took almost everyone by surprise.

For both active and retired ministers, we could not have gotten, or even hoped for, a better decision. There is no doubt that prayer made the difference in this situation. So, we rejoice with our ministers in this incredible victory.

Immediately following the release of the decision, the plaintiffs who brought this case—an atheistic organization called Freedom From Religion Foundation—stated that they were considering all their options, now that the appellate court has ruled against their claim that the ministerial housing

allowance violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Potential options include seeking a review of the decision by all members of the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals or seeking an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court through a writ of certiorari. The chance of success under either option is very limited. By no later than mid-June, the losing party will have to exercise their preferred option on how to proceed regarding this latest decision.

The most likely option will be for the plaintiffs or a similar group to file a new lawsuit in another jurisdiction with the hopes of getting a more favorable decision. It would most likely take several years for a new lawsuit to work its way through the legal system.

The current case, *Gaylor v. Mnuchin*, only dealt with the "cash" ministerial housing allowance paid by churches whose pastors either rent or own their own homes, as well as ministers in retirement who are

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drawing from a “church” retirement plan, such as the Ministers’ Retirement Plan of the Church of God. The same challenge to the parsonage allowance (where a church provides a church-owned home for the pastor’s use) was dismissed early in the litigation due to a technical issue.

The Church of God International Offices and the Church of God Benefits Board—the administrator of the Ministers’ Retirement Plan—were very active in fighting for the ministerial housing allowance, filing a legal brief at the appellate court, along with some 40 other denominations and retirement plans.

Dr. Dennis W. Watkins, legal counsel for the Church of God and a member of the Board of Directors of the Church of God Benefits Board, had this to say about the historic decision: “It is certainly evident that the Seventh Circuit looked very closely at the law supporting the ministerial housing allowance that has been in place for more than 60 years. They also looked at the impact that disregarding that legal precedent would have on both active and retired ministers of the gospel. So, while

this battle is certainly not over, we thank all those who have been praying for this result.”

Additional information on the litigation involving the ministerial housing allowance, along with a copy of the court’s recent decision, can be found at <https://www.benefitsboard.com/housing-allowance>.

T.I.M.E. WITH ART

I would encourage you to visit our website at www.benefitsboard.com to access a new feature called *T.I.M.E. with Art*. You will find short videos and related information on topics of interest. **Tax Information Made Easy** (T.I.M.E.) will hopefully help you take advantages of the tax laws to maximize your church compensation. If you do not see a topic on *T.I.M.E. with Art* that you would like addressed, please contact us so we can discuss your specific needs.. ■

Art Rhodes is president and CEO of the Church of God Benefits Board, Inc. The Board of Trustees and the staff of the Benefits Board are not engaged in rendering financial advice, legal advice, or other financial planning services.



WOLVES AT THE DOOR

TOBY S. MORGAN, who serves as administrative bishop for the Church of God in Texas, has written a timely and thought-provoking book for Christians living in these turbulent and troubled times. The basis of Morgan's book is a phrase found in Habakkuk 1:8: "... more fierce than evening wolves" (NKJV).

Morgan says in the opening chapter:

What an amazing statement! It must have captured the mind of Habakkuk as it did mine. Looking at the horizon and sensing the impending approach of the Babylonians, Habakkuk used several metaphors to describe the nature of the enemies of God's people. Among them was this chilling description: "... more fierce than evening wolves." A more graphic and distressing example of godlessness and opposition cannot be found.

Morgan compares the invasion by the Babylonians, whom Habakkuk described as "more fierce than evening wolves," with the modern-day onslaught against Christianity which attempts to discredit and marginalize the church's gospel message.

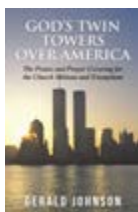
In the book's introduction, Morgan sets the tone for his message: "From the inception of the Christian faith, there have

been those intent on persecuting believers and eradicating the name of Jesus from the earth. No miracle has been able to change that view. In fact, it seems the greater the display of God's power, the more intense the opposition becomes. Even when Jesus raised Lazarus (a noted member of the community) from the dead, such ire was raised that there were not only plots to kill Jesus, but the name *Lazarus* was added to the hit list (see John 12:9-11). No amount of displayed power is sufficient to dispel the hatred the world and Satan have for Christ and His church. The result has always been a constant attack and a never-ending battle between Christ's church and the forces of evil."

Despite the "the ever-loudening howls of the wolves of twilight," says Morgan, "We will, by the grace given us through the Holy Spirit, seek to be ever filled with His Spirit, ever faithful to His Word, ever vigilant in proclaiming the cross of Christ as the way of salvation, and the glory of a heaven to win and horrors of a hell to avoid."

This book is both a warning to the church and a message of the ultimate triumph of the church. It is an excellent resource for both the layperson and the minister. The layperson will find instruction and inspiration, and the minister will find an abundance of material suitable for teaching and preaching.

Wolves at the Door: Triumphant Living in Turbulent Times, ISBN 978-1-64288-038-0, 180 pages, soft cover, is available from Pathway Bookstore, \$16.99. ■



GOD'S TWIN TOWERS OVER AMERICA

GOD'S TWIN TOWERS *Over America*, a new book authored by Gerald Johnson, uses the tragedy of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Towers in New York City as the backdrop for a compelling story of the power of praise and prayer to overcome the enemies of God's work. As author Johnson says:

For more than two hundred years, God has provided a praise and prayer covering for America. The church, militant and triumphant, marches from victory to victory under the divine anointing of God. Nothing in the world compares to the joy of praise and prayer and living high on the Most-High God. I trust you will be encouraged and fully embrace the mountain-moving motivation of God's supernatural power released through your praise and prayer.

Johnson tells of the sense of grief and loss while flying over New York City and looking down at the scene of mass destruction below. Johnson says, "The Holy Spirit spoke into my spirit and said, 'I will use you and those with whom you serve as a mighty weapon of Mass Construction.' God was speaking of the church and particularly that His divine Word is the Sword of Destiny and prayer is the Lance of Destiny He is

using as His weapons of Mass Construction."

Following the introductory chapters, Johnson lays out a section called 21 Prayer Prompters for the 21st Century. Each of the prayer prompters focuses on an aspect of Jesus' ministry, such as, Jesus Is the Master Teacher, Jesus Is the Master Soulwinner, Jesus Is the Great Physician, and so forth. Each prayer prompter opens with a supporting scripture and follows an outline based on . . . A Worship We Must Practice, A Word We Must Proclaim, A Work We Must Pursue, Prayer Wonders We Must Possess, and The Possibility of Prayer. These prayer prompters are excellent sermon starters that ministers will find useful.

God's Twin Towers Over America will be a valuable addition to any minister's library. The book contains much material that provides resources for preaching and teaching about prayer.

God's Twin Towers Over America: The Praise and Prayer Covering for the Church Militant and Triumphant, ISBN 978-1-64288-046-5, 184 pages, soft bound, \$14.95. ■

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CHURCH OF GOD HIGHLIGHTS

Abbreviated news from faithnews.cc between January 16 and May 1, 2019

Plans Underway for GO FINISH 2020 Outreach

A task force has been meeting regularly to plan strategy and resources for GO FINISH 2020—a worldwide movement that focuses on all believers sharing their faith on May 23, 2020.

Initially announced last summer, Church of God General Overseer Tim Hill stated, “This Kingdom initiative will involve all state and territorial offices and all local churches both home and abroad. We are partnering with Global Outreach Day to make it part of our FINISH Commitment. It is truly a Kingdom opportunity where our denomination will join

with multiple worldwide denominations, church networks, and parachurch ministries with the idea of every believer sharing the gospel with at least one person on one day. This is the Great Commission in action!”

To learn more about the 2020 Challenge, visit www.churchofgod.org/gofinish2020.

Ministerial Internship Program Celebrating 40 Years

Cleveland, TN—The 2019 Ministerial Internship Program (MIP) Commissioning Celebration marks a special time in the history of MIP as the celebration will feature the 40th Anniversary. The



services will be conducted at the North Cleveland Church of God on May 17 and 18, 2019.

In the past forty years, more than 25,000 candidates and spouses have completed the MIP, and more than 7,000 pastors have served as supervising pastors throughout the world.

The idea for MIP was birthed by Dr. Robert E. Fisher while he was the administrative bishop in Hawaii between 1967 and 1974. It was further developed during his tenure as administrative bishop in Delmarva-DC, and was launched as an official program from the International Offices in 1978 under the Department of General Education.

Women's Ministries Announces 2019 Faith*Fire*Freedom Dates

For the third year in a row, Church of God Women's Ministries will be hosting Faith*Fire*Freedom rallies to be held at both United States and international locations.

The four locations will be billed as regional rallies and will begin July 27 with Central America in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The three remaining rallies will be held on consecutive Friday nights in October: Nassau, Bahamas, on the 11th; Lexington, Ky. on the 18th; and Pueblo, Colo. on the 25th.

To keep up with the latest of what's happening in Church of God Women's Ministries, you may visit their Facebook page at [cogwomensministries](https://www.facebook.com/cogwomensministries) or the website cogwomensministries.org. For more information, call toll-free (855) 624-4523

Asia Seminary Acquires Property

A beautiful new piece of property has been acquired by Church of God World Missions for

the future new home of the Asian Seminary for Christian Ministries (ASCM) in the Philippines.

According to Dr. David Griffith, the property is "five times larger than ASCM's previous setting, and is ideal for the school's long-term prospects to train and serve students from Asia Pacific and beyond."

"We consider this land as His gift for ministry in Asia Pacific," says Austral Asia Superintendent Dr. Marc Morris, who concurrently serves as chairman and interim president of ASCM. "The process to find and purchase this property has truly been guided by the Lord. The ASCM family is excited about how this property will position the school to have excellent facilities for the next generation."

Lee University's Online Learning Program Ranks in Top 50

Cleveland, TN—Lee University saw its placement rise once again in the popular *U.S. News & World Report's* "Best Online Bachelor's Programs" ranking.

This year Lee's ranking rose 18 spots to a tie for #42 on the list, which, unlike its popular "Best Colleges" rankings, assesses only online programs and rates colleges and universities of all sizes and categories on the same list. Rankings are determined by a measurement of the university's student engagement, services and technologies, faculty credentials and training, and peer reputation.

Other universities in Tennessee were also ranked in "Best Online Bachelor's Programs,"



such as University of Memphis (#58), Carson-Newman University (#259), East Tennessee State University (#264 tie), and University of Tennessee at Martin (#200). Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University of Florida was ranked #1.

Focus 2020: A Decadal Foundation for Great Commission Success

During his tenure of serving as director of Church of God World Missions, Church of God General Overseer Tim Hill testified of a burden and was challenged with the realization that this generation can indeed complete the Great Commission. Hill's burden became the FINISH Challenge with a distinct set of six mandates using the acronym FINISH.

Expounding on the six evangelistic terms of FIND, INTERCEDE, NETWORK, INVEST, SEND and HARVEST, during the four-year period between 2012 and 2016, Hill delivered the specific message to congregations around the globe. Ministers, laypersons, states, regions, and even countries embraced the FINISH Challenge.

When Hill was elected to serve as general overseer in August 2016, he brought with him from World Missions that same burden to FINISH the Great Commission. On the closing night of the 2016 International General Assembly, the new general overseer introduced the next step of this acronymic: the FINISH Commitment. Each letter was defined by a scripture, a challenge, and a set of evangelical commitments. In the ensuing two

years, the Church of God around the globe was able to report success on many fronts, yet with still much more ahead as a movement.

At the 2018 International General Assembly last summer in Orlando, Florida, the focus and framework for the Church of God's efforts to FINISH the Great Commission was set out. In a series of six resolutions, clear guidance was given to the Church of God. The resolutions included:

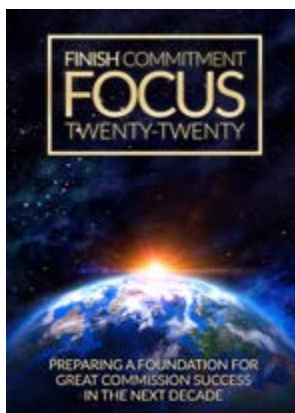
- **Doctrinal Affirmation**
- **Visional Actualization**
- **Ministerial Activation**
- **Generational Assimilation**
- **Structural Acclimation**
- **Spiritual Acceleration**

Through these six resolutions, an aggressive agenda to move toward FINISHing the Great Commission in the Spirit and Power of Pentecost has been established.

On January 22, 2019, Hill unveiled FOCUS 2020 to the International Executive Council as, "Preparing a Foundation for Great Commission Success in the Next Decade."

During the Global Ministry Forums, which began on Thursday, February 7 in Fountain Valley, California, Hill formally introduced the details of FOCUS 2020 and outlined

the strategy which dovetails with the four agenda items at the Forums. Ten articles, all beginning with the letter "A," will include and go beyond the forum agenda. Like the FINISH Commitment, FOCUS 2020 will include three visional commitments each.





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2018 CHURCH OF GOD GENERAL ASSEMBLY MINUTES

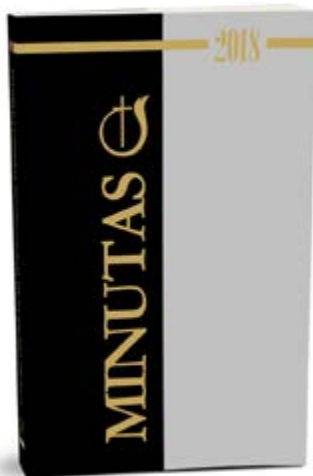
77th Edition

Due to the number of changes
in the *Minutes* effected by the
2018 General Assembly, every
pastor, treasurer, and minister
needs a copy of the *Minutes* to
be aware of, and remain current,
on the polity of the church.



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(ENGLISH-HARDBACK)
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