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2015



A Journal for Church of God Ministries

engage

IN THIS ISSUE

A Story of YES

Integrity in Leadership

Understanding the Transgender Phenomenon

An Interstaff Affair

Multisite Churches: Craze or Constant?

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Issues for Your Inbox

SINCE ITS LAUNCH in 2009, *Engage* has been a resource for pastors, church staff, and general ministry leaders. The articles are intended to be informative and appealing to this demographic and are submitted by authors who are both solicited and not solicited.

Engage is an outgrowth of the former *Covenant Resources* magazine, which had the same basic purpose. Prior to that, it was *PROFILES*, a packet of flyers and newsletters from departments and ministries that were gathered and mailed in bulk every quarter.

While there have been several metamorphoses over the years, the intent of this publication has been the same: *Church of God leaders desiring to offer meaningful resources*. This is more difficult in this day and age because of the massive amount of material available on the Internet. Because of this instantaneous availability, the printing industry has suffered greatly.

Engage strives to strike a balance by offering an “issue” that is delivered to your inbox, rather than simply emailing

a random list of potentially helpful websites. Yes, *Engage* is no longer printed, but hopefully the presentation of this digital publication on a preset schedule fulfills a fundamental longing of the *arrival* of a publication.

Look for your next “issue” in September! ■

Engage journal is published in the interest of providing resources for Church of God pastors.

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*Jeremy
and Ginger
Robinson*

A STORY OF YES

**A pastor's wife navigates her husband's death
with a church and community**

by GINGER SANDERS ROBINSON

HAVE COME TO BELIEVE there are moments or seasons in life that can only be experienced and never fully expressed in words, experiences of encounters with the living and personal God. Some may be big “miraculous” moments, while others were, “you just had to be there” moments ... to see Him, to feel Him, and to trust Him.

This is what the Robinson family and Bethalto Church of God (BCOG) have experienced over the last two years, beginning in July 2013, with Jeremy, my husband,

and pastor of BCOG. Through this journey, we have no doubt seen the “miraculous,” but more frequently, we have simply been drawn to encounter ... God.

In July 2013, our lives were jolted when Jeremy experienced severe pain, which led to an ER visit. We were informed that Jeremy had a large mass on his kidney. We were to return home immediately. Upon arriving in St. Louis, we made our way through the airport to the Metro Link station. Almost immediately upon stepping onto the train,

Jeremy collapsed into an empty seat. One man asked if he could pray, and he did . . . fervently, “*in Jesus’ name.*” A Washington University medical student on board called ahead to the university’s security staff in order to have a wheelchair ready for him when we arrived at that station.

The next few hours were filled with tests that revealed the tumor on his kidney had actually grown through the renal vein toward the heart and lungs. When running to board the train, three pieces of the tumor had broken off and passed through his heart and into the pulmonary arteries of his lungs. The decision was made to proceed with major open-heart surgery to inspect for heart damage, remove the three tumor clots from his lungs, remove the tumor and right kidney, and determine the extent of any possible cancer. The surgery that was supposed to take 12 hours took only four. The large tumor was removed in one piece. Miraculously there was no damage to his heart. The tumor clots were easily taken from the pulmonary arteries, and there were no signs of any cancer spreading to any other organs or nearby tissue. Within a day after surgery, he was moved out of ICU; and by Sunday, he was discharged with no pain medicines needed. Three weeks later Jeremy returned to worship services at our church and preached for the first time on September 15.

That Sunday he kicked off the fall series, *Not a Fan* by Kyle Idleman. His personal preparation for these messages did something deep within him that translated into

how he lived and how he led. Little did any of us know where this call to be “not a fan, but a follower of Christ no matter what” was leading him, our family, and ultimately our church.

Fall brought new strength for Jeremy and a fresh vision for BCOG. We were positioning for the harvest we knew God was bringing through Jeremy’s testimony and by transforming into “Followers.” However, on January 9, exactly six months from his amazing surgery, we were once again jolted by an unexpected diagnosis revealed in a follow-up scan. Three spots on his lungs and liver were clearly advancing cancer cells and immediate targeted therapy was recommended.

Upon gaining a second confirming opinion from Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) in Chicago, yet a new, fourth spot in the brain became evident and surgery was scheduled. After receiving this new diagnosis, I asked Jeremy if he wanted to have someone else preach that Sunday. Everyone would surely understand. He replied that He needed to hear from God, and our church needed to hear that Word from him. That Sunday he preached, “Questions and Answers in a Crisis,” from Psalm 27. It was also during this time that specific songs ministered to us, and by default also to BCOG. We would often sing, “In Jesus’ Name”; “We Won’t Be Shaken”; “We Believe”; and “Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)” as anthems of faith, especially as the bad reports continued to come.

Communication of the facts and our faith with BCOG was imperative, so before

anything was posted on the Web, Jeremy made sure that after our family, BCOG was the first to be informed. He also developed and made available online a prayer guide of six specific topics for those who wanted to pray with us along the journey. A local teacher told us the prayer guide was on her refrigerator, and it became a guide of how to pray for other needs, not just ours.

In late January, we were informed that an article Jeremy had written in October for the *Evangel*, detailing the events of the previous summer's miracle, was to be published the same week of Jeremy's surgery in February. The last paragraph read, "At the time of this writing, all tests and scans show no evidence of further cancer." Now facing surgery, it seemed to us Satan was mocking our testimony, but we quickly refocused and realized that only God could cause both of these events to occur the same week as a reminder of His sovereignty in our journey.

On February 6, the cancer spot from the brain was successfully removed. Jeremy came out of surgery asking for a T-bone steak and telling the nurses how God had spared his life in July. Unbelievably, the very next Sunday Jeremy preached part 3 of "Questions and Answers in a Crisis." A week later he began a three-month, targeted oral therapy to reduce the spots on his lungs and liver. After results indicating the cancer did not respond to this first treatment, Jeremy began a new eight-week treatment. Despite the bad report, anointing and increasing faith was becoming more and more evident amidst the people of BCOG.

What Jeremy and I began to more fully understand was that this sickness was multidimensional. Of course, it was a personal and family journey, but it was also congregational, and it had become a community journey without us even knowing it. People randomly stopped us to encourage us or be encouraged by the strength God was obviously giving us. The school district administrators had prayer for us. We would drive through Bethalto and church after church would have "Pray for Pastor Jeremy" on their signs. BCOG began to see a greater picture of the body of Christ as reports of prayer for Jeremy and our church would come in from around the world. Our story even ended up on a Catholic blog with over a million followers! Who can humanly manufacture this type of bond across the body of Christ? No one. God wanted HIS story told. God was calling people to follow us as we *followed* Him.

Sensing this unity and moving of the Spirit, Jeremy felt led to host a communitywide healing service with the other area Pentecostal pastors. The church was full, and the power of the Holy Spirit was present. This Spirit continued within the BCOG family throughout the entire month of June. Weekly, people were baptized in the Holy Spirit, with over 15 men being baptized on Father's Day alone. This same anointing was with Jeremy as he preached two nights of the Delmarva-DC Camp Meeting, where again the altar was filled with people experiencing the Spirit's outpouring.

Following these experiences, our faith in God's power to show Himself mighty



was strong as we returned to Chicago in July. Scans revealed the tumors in his liver and lungs continued to resist treatment. It was at the end of this visit that I remember Jeremy putting his hands on the dresser of our motel room, dropping his head and weeping. Shortly, he raised his head, looked directly into the mirror and with conviction began to quote: "Why are you downcast O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? My hope is in the Lord" (see Psalm 42:5). This declaration of hope IN THE LORD, not doctors or treatments, would become a sustaining principle during the difficult months ahead.

We spent the rest of July and the beginning of August diligently researching and dialoguing with experts around the nation, about potential next options. Even at the Church of God International General

Assembly, Jeremy was communicating with doctors and research centers between sessions and at the Resolutions Table, where he served as chairman. By the time he finished, he had thoroughly researched over 20 treatment options, most of which he did not qualify for because of previous treatments or the severity of his diagnosis. After visiting three treatment centers, we finally decided to do the most radical, but most promising at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America in Phoenix.

As the treatments and Jeremy's condition grew more serious, I had to come to grips with *why* I wanted the Lord to heal him. Yes, of course it was personal for our two girls and me. I wanted us to grow old together. I wanted Madray and Mallory to have their daddy. I also wanted Julian to have his son. But as Jeremy and I discussed



Jeremy and Jeff are joined by their father, Julian, at the General Assembly in July 2014.

the unbalanced amount of prayers prayed to keep saved people *out* of heaven versus the number of prayers to get lost people *into* heaven, my “why” expanded. I began to pray the declaration David made as he went to kill Goliath, “So all of this assembly (BCOG, Bethalto, the Riverbend area, CTCA, the Church of God, my children, and my children’s children) will know that there is a God” This became my cry and the cry of our church.

On August 25, my birthday, Jeremy began an aggressive nine-week immunotherapy to embolden his immune system to fight the cancer. The outpatient treatments in Phoenix lasted for five days, and then we returned home for two weeks. We repeated this cycle three times. The days were long, usually 7-9 hours, although the infusion itself was only 15 minutes. The staff soon

discovered that those 15 minutes, and usually longer, were a very sacred time for us. It was as if during those times of medical infusion, our room became a sanctuary where we were being infused with the very presence of our Lord, through our singing, interceding, and praying the list of scriptures that had become so dear to us.

Some days were wonderful with no side effects at all. On those days, Jeremy would sit in his chair or bed, with me beside him and receive the treatments while he would read, work on his computer, or we would just talk. We often laughed and wondered if the staff thought we didn’t believe in TV, because we never once turned it on. There were too many other important things to do with the precious time we had together.

Other days, however, were full of activity and discomfort as the side effects and

rigors of fever, rapid heart rate, and falling blood pressure set in. These were the days that we had to “encourage ourselves in the Lord.” Even amidst the flurry of side-effects care, we found our room to always be filled with peace.

We knew going into this treatment we were at a critical stage. The overseeing physician, Dr. Quan, told us very frankly that whatever treatment we chose, “it had to work”; therefore, the follow-up scans was significant. Although we were hopeful, we couldn’t help but recognize the reality that Jeremy was growing weaker and losing weight instead of growing stronger. The last of October we learned the cancer was aggressively progressing, and while we had a few options to prayerfully consider, it really was a matter of God working a miracle. It was at that visit where Jeremy confidently, yet brokenly looked at Dr. Quan and those who had been caring for us and said, “I will not chase life. I know where I am going, and I am not afraid. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” There were no dry eyes, yet there was peace that passes all understanding.

For Jeremy’s mid-November follow-up visit, we decided to make it a family affair, so we took the girls with us. It was at this appointment that Dr. Quan, who always called Jeremy “Pastor,” stressed the importance of Jeremy blessing those whom he wanted to bless, and seeing those whom he wanted to see, and doing what he needed to do, and do it with haste. We understood.

While in Arizona, we took the opportunity to travel through Sedona and visit

the Grand Canyon. It was taxing on Jeremy physically and on us emotionally, but it is probably one of the best decisions we ever made. We were together... as a family...all four of us. At this point, we knew we could be facing our “lasts.” We didn’t dwell on it, but it was always with us. We cried some. We laughed some. We talked a lot. We also began working with our families to rearrange Thanksgiving schedules. Christmas was not promised.

The elders called the church to a 40-day fast beginning mid-November and ending December 24, just in time for what we hoped would be *our* “Christmas Miracle.” Our hearts were moved as we heard stories of the different ones fasting. Children, the elderly, new Christians and long-time Christians who had never fasted before were fasting and praying for God’s power and glory to be revealed in Jeremy’s life and our church. More fans were becoming followers.

Like his mother, Jeannie, Jeremy did as much as he could as long as he could while battling cancer. If you measured Jeremy’s degree of sickness by his activity level in December, you would have never known how truly far the disease had progressed. He was present for Madray’s knee surgery to repair her torn ACL and meniscus, attended Mallory’s Christmas band concert, the state council meeting, officiated two funerals, preached two sermons, and worked diligently to ensure all of our personal business was complete. However, the effects of the disease were quickly causing extreme weight loss and fatigue.

December 21, 2014, Jeremy preached his last sermon. He was so weak that morning I had to help him dress. However, when he went to the pulpit, he stood for 45 minutes to deliver “The Cost of Christmas.” With a weakened voice, but passionate conviction, he ended his final message with the question, “What cost are you willing to pay in order to have Christ in your life everyday, not just at Christmastime?”

Jeremy asked Doug Bowers Jr. to preach on the last Sunday of December. During the pastoral prayer that day, Jeremy addressed the congregation for about 10 minutes as a shepherd caring for his sheep. “God does not have to heal me for me to know He is a Healer” is how he began what we later would know to be his farewell instructions to his flock. “God is either going to miraculously heal my body or BCOG is about to go to the next level of where God wants to take you under new leadership . . . and very soon.” He believed this, and on January 10, Jeremy had an hour and a half long elders meeting at our house, where he addressed items that needed to be in place for the church to continue to properly function until he was healed or new leadership was secured.

We celebrated Madray’s 16th birthday on January 4. This was also Jeremy’s last Sunday to attend church. He no longer was able to go to the office, though some work was brought home to him. Our house was now full with Jeremy’s dad, Julian and his dear wife, Peggy, as well as my parents, Ray and Kathy Sanders. They had come to be with Jeremy and to help me with

Jeremy, Madray’s recovery, and life in general. Jeremy’s brother, Jeff and wife, Carla, were able to come visit a couple of times during the month. Although many moments were tough during those weeks, laughter also filled the air as we looked through pictures, told stories, and watched Andy Griffith—one of Jeremy’s favorites.

On January 25, 2015, our family and BCOG celebrated our 10-year anniversary as pastor. Jeremy was right there on the front row where he sat every Sunday morning, but this Sunday, it was via face time from our bedroom. The church held nothing back that morning with wonderful worship, humor, video greetings, and kind words. Each presenter looked right into the iPad and spoke directly to Jeremy, not about him as though he were gone (because he was not), but their communication clearly declared their expectation for God to yet raise him up and continue to lead them.

At the end of that service, I shared that though Jeremy daily continued to weaken, we agreed with their faith and had not given up hope in our God. I also communicated that God had been dealing with me about the treasure we individually and corporately were so desperate to obtain. I said: “The treasure is not the healing, though it would be quite a testimony. The treasure is not even Jeremy, though how I personally and desperately desire that. The treasure is the presence of God we have encountered on this journey, because that will never go away and will be what sustains us.” After church, I held Jeremy’s hand as I told him about the service,

The Robinson family at the Grand Canyon weeks before Jeremy's passing



because it was “our” appreciation, and I wanted to share the moment with him.

Late that evening the family felt as if Jeremy might be preparing to pass into everlasting life. We each took turns privately speaking to him. I have never been more proud of Madray and Mallory as they courageously sat next to their daddy, holding his hands and pouring out to him their hopes, dreams, and plans with such brokenness yet passion as they each promised to be a follower, not a fan.

It was a long night, but in the morning, Jeremy asked to sit on the side of the bed, which he did, resting for over an hour. I truly thought we had looked death in the face and were now about to see God’s miraculous power at work. But as the day continued, we saw more signs that his body was

preparing for his spirit’s departure, which was confirmed when a nurse came by to check on him later in the day. State Bishop Dennis Page and wife, Judy, also came by, and when Jeff said, “Jeremy, Bishop Page is here to see you,” Jeremy weakly reached out his hand for Brother Page’s hand.

Throughout the afternoon and evening, family members called to express their love to him. The last call ended around 8:30. Later, Jeff was reading the Psalms to him when Jeremy’s breathing changed. The family all gathered around the bed for no more than 20 minutes before his spirit broke through the heavenlies. We often say someone slipped away or passed, but I choose to think once Jeremy knew he wasn’t staying, he went forward full throttle. Why not? He had not lost the battle; he had won!

As we had previously done, the next morning using the phone tree, I called our church family first. "...This *does not* mean God did not hear your prayers or see your faith." I said, "It simply means that His ways are higher than ours, and we must continue to trust Him without borders ... While the girls and I obviously will miss him supremely and concede we do not understand God's plan, we reaffirm that we will not be shaken. We pray the same for you and the BCOG family as we together seek the treasure of God's presence. We love you and thank you for your continued prayers!"

It was from that call that the Lord began to help me see how important it was for me to tell "The Story of YES." For at that moment, all we could see was that God had said "NO" to our fervent prayers for healing.



Churches across the city of Bethalto united in their prayer for Jeremy's recovery

Now, we as a family, as BCOG, as a community and body of faith needed to see all the YES's God had given us.

It was at the Celebration of Life Service in Bethalto where I was able to first share this story. The crowds that filled the sanctuary, the overflow and the spacious foyer overwhelmed our family. The beauty was not that it was full, but I realized there were nearly as many from the community as there were from the church. During the day, I had reminded God how many people could have been touched by such a great testimony of healing. He revealed to me that there would be people there that night who would *never* come to hear a testimony, but would come to honor a life well lived, and in doing so, hear the gospel and also hear "The Story of YES"—God had said *yes* to the man on the train, in the operating room, and in his recovery. He had said *yes* to minimal side effects, to no brain damage, to strength for weakness, to peace, to no fear, to hope, to a song in the night, to no need for oxygen or medications the last week of his life. He had said *yes* to a fresh anointing, to lost souls coming to Christ, to opportunities to tell the story, to fans becoming followers. And finally, He had said *yes* to a battle won and eternal life gained!

Four days later, I again shared this at Jeremy's Celebration of Life Service at the North Cleveland Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee, to a congregation of mainly believers like myself who needed to be encouraged not to focus on the *no* answer that was so clearly in front of us.



Ginger speaks at the service of transition to Pastor Shea Hughes at Bethalto Church of God

Since Jeremy's services, God has allowed me to share "The Story of YES" to BCOG's Children's Worship, the ladies Bible study, our farewell address, and on a personal level.

Over the next few months, the girls and I began to adjust to our temporary "new normal." The church was gracious and allowed me plenty of time to clean out Jeremy's office, and since we own our home, I didn't have the pressure of vacating a parsonage. We knew the church was in safe hands with Bishop Page, Pastor Bill, and the elders, as they began the process of leading the church in selecting a new pastor. I have been asked several times if Jeremy or I had anything to do with the selection process. My response is simply "no." Jeremy entrusted that responsibility to Bishop Page and the elders. As for my part, I admit I did have one simple and selfish conversation with God, where from my brokenness, I asked that since Jeremy was unable to finish

the vision he had for BCOG, would He allow one of Jeremy's spiritual sons to follow him, as Solomon did David.

I did not know at the time of that prayer who was being considered and I certainly was unaware of Shea Hughes's attendance at a Kentucky youth camp, where Jeremy spoke words of confirmation to him about his calling. Though their relationship was not intimate through the years, Pastor Shea told me that he has always considered Jeremy as one of his mentors. Shea and Abigail Hughes with their three sons began their pastorate at BCOG on Easter 2015, and the girls and I were there to welcome them with the rest of the congregation. God once again said *yes* to bring comfort to me and to a grieving congregation.

One thing I have contemplated through this journey is the grieving of a church. As ministry leaders, we are often trained to help families go through the five steps of the grieving process. Yet, churches often go directly from the first step of shock to the fifth step of moving forward. Unfortunately, there is not time to feel anger, depression, bargaining, or guilt when a congregation grieves for the pastor they loved then lost, whether by death or transfer. Because of the need for leadership, many congregations are asked at the beginning of their grief to select a new person to lead them back through steps two through four.

I have witnessed the pain and process of Bethalto Church of God twice grieving for the loss of their pastor. First, when we came in February of 2005, they were grieving the



Hundreds attended the two memorial services, this one held at the North Cleveland Church of God

sudden death of Jessie Wiggins, a wonderful servant of God who pastored BCOG for over 21 years during two tenures. Jeremy and I observed and walked with them through the shock of not just losing their pastor, but their friend. God certainly granted Jeremy divine discernment and wisdom as he gently guided them through the steps of changes that he sensed God was leading them. We discovered resistance toward change might not be because it isn't needed or even wanted; but rather, it once again pulls at the scab of a slowly healing wound. It was mutually evident that God had brought the Robinsons to Bethalto, yet even that did not answer the question, "Why?"

The second grief came amidst Jeremy's sudden illness and subsequent death. I am not a trained counselor, but I observe the grief like BCOG has experienced coming from three specific losses: (1) The death of their pastor, mentor and friend; (2) The shaking, and in some cases, loss of faith because they *knew* God was going to heal Jeremy, though His plan proved different; and (3) The final loss came when the girls and I decided to relocate to Cleveland to be closer to our family.

In the immediate weeks following his death, I spent much time going through Jeremy's books and then his clothes in preparation for our move. One of the most healing

moments I have experienced was when I set up part of Jeremy's library and invited the congregation to come if they wanted to select a book. What healing took place, as individuals were able to stamp their book with his seal and then take "a part of him" with them. At the same time, I was able to see his things in the hands of those who would cherish it, because they cherished him. I also did this with some of his clothes and have witnessed the pride with which they are worn. My heart is warmed.

Another healing moment came on June 28, when Pastor Shea and Abigail and BCOG graciously honored the girls and me with a farewell. Pastor Shea gave me the privilege to speak to our BCOG family. As Sister Wiggins had done when we came, I tried to assure the church that it was ok to have questions, to not understand, but to once again "trust without borders." We took a fresh look at Proverbs 3:5-6. In conclusion, I shared with them something Jeremy had said shortly after arriving at BCOG. "I believe that God is positioning us for the next phase in the history of this church. With Pastor Wiggins' home going, the process you have gone through, and our coming... it doesn't have much to do with me, you, or Bro. Wiggins, but it has everything to do with the Lord realizing we are in a new phase or chapter for the future." It sounds like something Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:7-8: "It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work togeth-

er with the same purpose" (NLT). So once again, despite grieving, God is taking BCOG to *a new chapter for the future with new leadership, just* as Jeremy had said on December 28.

Over the summer, the girls and I intermittently made our move from Bethalto to a wonderful home the Lord provided for us. We are now starting to make the transition to our "new normal." Though only Jeremy's Dad and Peggy are permanent residents here, it is the gathering ground for our family, both our biological family, as well as our church family.

We have also found Proverbs 27:23-27 to be true. "Know the state of your flocks, and put your heart into caring for your herds... your sheep will provide wool for clothing, and your goats will provide the price of a field" (NLT). Jeremy was a shepherd who practiced this verse; therefore, the girls and I have reaped the blessings. Through the generosity and support of BCOG, our community and the body of Christ, all of Jeremy's bills have been paid and our needs have been met. We are blessed beyond measure.

When asked how we are doing, my most honest response is that we are navigating the ocean waters that rise around us. Sometimes, they are small waves of his empty seat at the table. Sometimes, they are the huge waves of an empty heart or a major decision that I have to make alone. Yet we still "trust Him without borders," because He has "never failed, and He won't start now."

God has not answered my question, "Why?" I really don't think he's going to. Yet, He has comforted me in so many ways. I

know God is sovereign, but He knew I needed to see His sovereignty in *my* situation. So, out of His lovingkindness, He showed His sovereignty to me in a very special way.

While packing his office, I came across a timeline of our transition from Open Door, the church we planted in Kentucky, to BCOG that he had created. I reminisced with each time marker and then I came across, "January 26, 2005—Jeremy and Ginger resigned from Open Door." JANUARY 26! Exactly 10 years earlier than his "resignation" from BCOG. Not the week of or the month of, but the EXACT date, only 10 years prior. I knew there had to be meaning to this, so for days, maybe even weeks I kept this finding to myself, wondering what, if anything, it could mean.

Finally, one night as I lay in bed, I couldn't shake my belief that there was more to this than coincidence, for my God

is not a God of coincidence. I pulled out my phone, and in the midst of the dark, I began to search what "10" represented in Scripture. From that night and further research, I have come to understand, to the best of my ability, that the number 10 represents a complete cycle. This was the comfort I needed from THE Comforter. Jeremy's death, at 10:10 exactly 10 years later than his only other resignation, was in the hands of the sovereign God. He had finished the work he had been created to do. There was not another prayer I could have prayed, another meal I could have fasted, or another word of faith or scripture I could have spoken. Jeremy's cycle was complete.

In his Psalm 27 series, Jeremy said, "Answers to prayer are highly overrated many times. The process of prayer is to change us to become like Him.... where we behold His face." ■



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REALITY LEADERSHIP

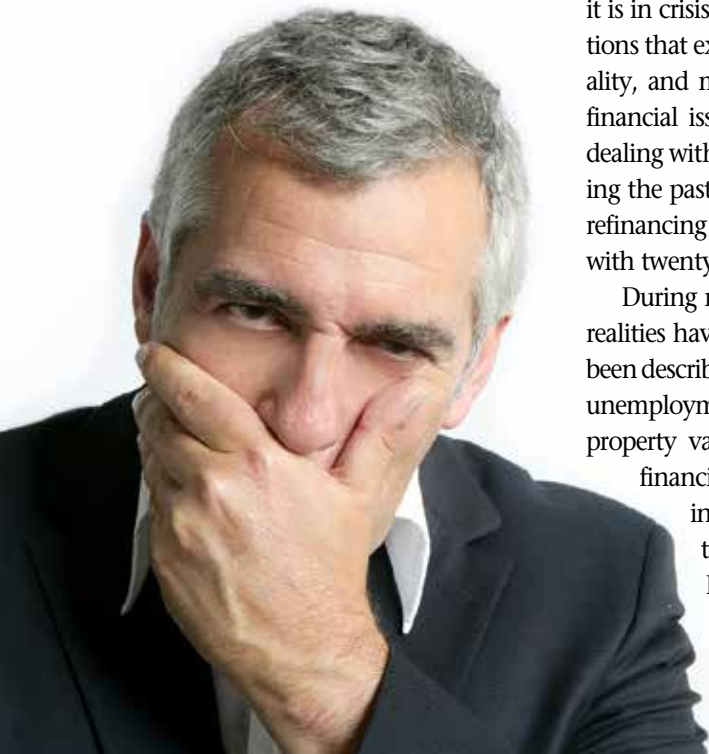
by MICHAEL L. BAKER

What Do You Do When the Mortgage Comes Due?

IT'S MONDAY MORNING. I've just arrived at the office following an extremely heavy schedule throughout the weekend—visiting churches, connecting with leaders, conducting leadership training, working through typical chal-

lenges, and preaching on Sunday. Normally, I like good news on Monday; however, it seems that crises always evolve throughout the weekend, and then I get the call. That call should have come weeks—even months—earlier, but when the call arrives, it is in crisis mode. That's reality—true situations that exist: a real occurrence, a real actuality, and many of these are focused upon financial issues. For me, this has not been dealing with two or three situations, but during the past five years, I have dealt with the refinancing of forty-five church mortgages, with twenty-six of them identified as crisis.

During recent years, changing economic realities have become the *new normal*. It has been described as the “perfect storm”—severe unemployment, volatile economic markets, property values upside down, churches in financial stress, difficulty in refinancing of mortgages, unstable inflation, and precarious interest rates. In addition, there has been the challenge to navigate through



the five years of the reallocation of funds to the International Offices and State/Regional Offices. No one anticipated the convergence of all these variables, but that's our reality.

So, the question resounds loudly in the face of what seems to be an economic tsunami: "What am I going to do?" First, it calls for understanding—what I call, *Reality Leadership*. We live in a society that has been consumed with reality TV. Reality television is a genre that documents unscripted real-life situations and tends to be focused upon drama and conflict. That's a summation of most of the financial crises we face—unscripted, can't believe it's happening, conflict between people and agencies that initially called themselves partners, lots of drama, blame, and ultimately, don't know what to do.

Reality leadership accepts the veracity of any situation so that effective action can be taken and decisions made that conserve the integrity of a local church's spiritual energy to exist, and then delivers results. One of the first concepts of reality leadership is to differentiate between reactive and proactive management. Reactive management has often been characterized as "firefighting," simply waits until problems or crises surface and then tries to come up with a solution. A proactive methodology anticipates the crises, plans ahead, addresses strategies and processes that will provide a solution, and then protect against potential future disaster.

If we grasp the concept of reality leadership, there are a number of principles I have

learned that assist in answering the question, "What am I going to do?" Let's take a look at some of these.

INFORMATION, INFORMATION, INFORMATION

When the call first comes, the immediate quest is for information. I affirm to my staff, it is about *information, information, and information* before we can make qualitative decisions. What information? Call for the details of the financial crisis, including documentation related to the issue. This includes mortgage statements, copy of the mortgage contract with terms, any underwriting and terms, copy of the deed, and—Is it on a standard Church of God Warranty Deed form?—three years of the Financial Balance Sheet and detailed budget parameters for the local church, verification of fulfilled on-time mortgage payments, maturity information for the mortgage, lender contact information, and any unresolved matters. This information process includes face-to-face meeting(s) with the pastor and key local church leadership as needed. An analysis of this information can assist in developing a strategic plan of action to deal with the crisis.

SLOW THE TRAIN DOWN

Inevitably, every crisis situation is extremely time sensitive. In most cases, I am contacted when the circumstances are approaching a deadline without any established real solution. My first action following the gathering of information is to

endeavor to do what I call “slow the train down.” The situation is like a train going full speed and cannot make the curve just ahead, much less pull into the station. The process must be slowed down in order to evaluate and develop the right course of action. If there is impending legal action, I immediately seek legal counsel and submit the issue to legal discourse. This will provide at least a modicum of time to sort out the details.

SEEK PROFICIENT AND SKILLED COUNSEL

While there are common denominators to almost all of the financial crises, every situation has its own unique conditions. One of the most helpful resources to contextualize each individual case is to review with professional counsel the individual case and documentation, focus on determining a solution, address questions of reality both positive and negative, assist in the negotiation procedure, and offer any recommendations to demonstrate a proactive methodology to ensure the future.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

It is always about relationships. When the situation has come to legal action, communication is only between attorneys. This may be necessary and in some cases advantageous, but when no legal dimensions are active, one should work to build relationships between the local church and pastor and the lender. The state office can effectively serve as a catalyst to synthe-

size relationships between the local church, the lender and its representative, and any other entities engaged in the process. By all means, the local church must be transparently informed of the impending crisis and execute a call for covenant commitment.

DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIC PLAN

An important construct of vision is the development and implementation of strategic direction. If you aim at zero, you will hit it every time. Without a plan, a solution for the crisis will eventually lead to disaster. After gathering information, analyzing all the variables, seeking expert counsel, and connect with all the people involved, a strategic plan must be developed. The plan includes purpose of the solution, action steps to take, timeline for implementation, measurement of achievement, communication of the plan with the church, and full engagement of all the team.

MAKE HARD DECISIONS

In some crisis environments, there may not be a preferred solution, and difficult choices must be made. This is never the desired direction; however, after much review, study, evaluation, and counsel, hard decisions must be determined. These decisions could include change of leadership, merger of congregations, liquidation of some holdings to support the primary mortgage, implementation of a capital stewardship initiative, or, as a last resort, sale of property.

EMBRACE SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS

Of all the pieces of the process to find a solution, the paramount step is attention to covenant prayer and calling for God's divine intervention and guidance. In each situation, I find that submitting to spiritual leadership is first and foremost. Spiritual leadership is the ability to see God's presence, power, and plan in spite of the obstacles. When I don't know what to do next, I pray, then I pray, and pray again. I have seen the miraculous transpire. I have seen conflict with leaders evaporate. I have seen favor be given to a local church when it was unexpected. I have seen the provision of God's care demonstrated repeatedly. There may be many people involved in cri-

sis resolution; however, don't face any crisis without the presence of the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide.

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

When all is completed and solutions have been found to secure the crisis, celebrate! Celebrate what God has done, celebrate the covenant commitment of the local church, celebrate the servant leadership of the pastor, and celebrate the connection with leaders and all others who have been part of the challenge. Always celebrate success!

Finally, remember this: *The steel of leadership is forged by the crucible of experience.* You will never enjoy the process, but the strength of your leadership is shaped by the testing of experience. That's reality leadership! ■

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by
JERALD
DAFFE

How Would You Have Answered?

A WIDE VARIETY of inquiries come to the Church of God website. Responding to them is another form of ministry and service to the denomination. The questions normally cover areas dealing with water baptism, tithing, Sunday as the day of worship, and issues surrounding the celebration of Christmas and Easter. There are a few inquiries on doctrinal areas such as Calvinism, sanctification, and Holy Spirit baptism.

In 2011, the first transgender inquiry came across my computer.

I am a believer in our Lord Jesus and have a major issue. Over ten years ago I had a sex change surgery and am asking, what does the Lord say about what I have done? I don't or ever have slept around or anything like that and don't believe in gays or same sex marriage. What does the Bible say about this issue and what should I do to live right before the Lord. It is medically impossible for me to return physically, this is why I am asking you this question. I was brought up in the Church of God and believe in your church and I was

told by one of your pastors that I was welcome to attend but could never become a member of this church. Thank you.

Once again the question arises: How would you have answered? After having read and reread the email dozens of times and prayed, I sent the following response.

Your situation with the sex change operation is not one which is specifically covered in any of the Church of God doctrinal or practical statements. Neither does the Bible project anything on your specific situation, since such radical procedures are of relatively recent medical science. The Bible does indicate clear gender roles as it relates to men and women, husbands and wives.

The first and foremost issue is your relationship to the Lord. He is the one to be pleased with our heart and actions. We know that He forgives even the most grievous sins as well as the small ones. Keep in mind that sin is sin, and it really doesn't matter the type—all separate us from God. However, thank God for His grace which restores and puts us in right relationship with Him.

Now as it relates to church membership, we do not have a stated policy other than your being a member of the body of Christ (a Christian) and are striving to live holy before Him through the power of the Holy Spirit. If that is true in your life, you are eligible for membership as long as you agree to live by our stated standards and practices.

THE FIRST AND FOREMOST ISSUE IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LORD. HE IS THE ONE TO BE PLEASED WITH OUR HEART AND ACTIONS. WE KNOW THAT HE FORGIVES EVEN THE MOST GRIEVOUS SINS AS WELL AS THE SMALL ONES.

It seems to me that there are some practical issues which arise when people know of your sex-change operation. Their hesitancy and even avoidance of you may make it difficult or even impossible to become part of their fellowship. As to your question, "What should you do to live right before the Lord?" I offer a simple response. "Live according to the Word of God in the same manner any other believer would regardless of the situation."

Readers, remember this exchange took place in 2011. Transgender settings have become far more evident in the past four years. We have an obligation to give careful thought to what is occurring and offer Christ's love to each one without compromising biblical truth.

In case you are interested, there was further correspondence concerning dating and marriage. ■

For more on this issue, see the following article.

Understanding the TRANSGENDER Phenomenon

The leading Christian scholar on gender dysphoria defines the terms—and gives the church a way forward.

by MARK YARHOUSE

I STILL RECALL one of my first meetings with Sara. Sara is a Christian who was born male and named Sawyer by her parents. As an adult, Sawyer transitioned to female. Sara would say transitioning—adopting a cross-gender identity—took 25 years. It began with facing the conflict she experienced between her biology and anatomy as male, and her inward experience as female. While still Sawyer, she would grow her hair out, wear light makeup, and dress in feminine attire from time to time. She also met with what seemed like countless mental-health professionals as well as several pastors. For Sawyer, now Sara, transitioning eventually meant using hormones and undergoing sex reassignment surgery.

Sara would say she knew at a young age—around 5—that she was really a girl. Her parents didn't know what to do. They

hoped their son was just different from most other boys. Then they hoped it was a phase Sawyer would get through. Later, two pastors told them that their son's gender identity conflicts were a sign of willful disobedience. They tried to discipline their son, to no avail.

Sara opened our first meeting by saying, "I may have sinned in the decisions I made; I'm not sure I did the right thing. At the time, I felt excruciating distress. I thought I would take my life. What would you have me do?" The exchange was disarming.

I have worked with people like Sara for more than 16 years. Although most of my published research and clinical practice is in the area of sexual identity, I regularly receive referrals to meet with people who experience conflicts like Sara's. The research institute I direct, housed at Regent University in Virginia, published the first study of its kind

on transgender Christians a few years ago. My experiences counseling children, adolescents, and adults have all compelled me to further study gender dysphoria.

From this research and counseling background, I hope to offer the Christian community a distinctly Christian response to gender dysphoria.

DEFINING THE TERMS

Defining terms is important to this study.

(1) *Gender identity* is simply “how people experience themselves as male or female, including how masculine or feminine they feel.” (2) *Gender dysphoria* refers to “deep and abiding discomfort over the incongruence between one’s biological sex and one’s psychological and emotional experience of gender.” Sara would say she lived much of her life as a woman trapped inside a man’s body. When a person reports gender iden-

tity concerns that cause significant distress, he or she may meet criteria for a gender dysphoria diagnosis.

The previous version of the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnostic manual included the diagnosis “gender identity disorder.” It highlighted cross-gender identity as the point of concern. The newest version refers instead to “gender dysphoria,” moving the discussion away from identity and toward the experience of distress. A lack of congruence between one’s biological sex and gender identity exists on a continuum, so when diagnosing gender dysphoria, mental-health professionals look at the amount of distress as well as the amount of impairment at work or in social settings.

It is hard to know exactly how many people experience gender dysphoria. Most of the research has been on “transsexuality.” The term refers to a person like Sara who wishes



to or has identified with the opposite sex, often through hormonal treatment or surgery. The American Psychiatric Association estimates the number of transsexual adults as low as 0.005 to 0.014 percent of men and 0.002 to 0.003 percent of women. But these are likely underestimates, as they are based on the number of people who visit specialty clinics.

The highest prevalence estimates come from more recent surveys that include “transgender” as an option. “Transgender” is an umbrella term for the many ways people experience a mismatch between their gender identity and their biological sex. So, not everyone who is transgender experiences significant gender dysphoria. Some people say their gender resides along a continuum between male and female or is fluid. They do not tend to report as much distress. Prevalence here has ranged from 1 in 215 to 1 in 300.

This means that transgender people are much more common than those formally diagnosed with gender dysphoria, but not nearly as common as those who identify as gay or lesbian, which is 2 to 4 percent of the U.S. population.

While on the topic of homosexuality, let me clarify that gender dysphoria and transgender issues are not about having sex or attraction to the same sex; they are about an experiential mismatch between one’s psychology and one’s biology. People often confuse the two, likely due to transgender being part of the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) discussion.

GENDER DYSPHORIA AND TRANSGENDER ISSUES ARE NOT ABOUT HAVING SEX OR ATTRACTION TO THE SAME SEX; THEY ARE ABOUT AN EXPERIENTIAL MISMATCH BETWEEN ONE’S PSYCHOLOGY AND ONE’S BIOLOGY.

Psychologists and researchers don’t know what causes gender dysphoria. The most popular theory among those who publish on this topic is the brain-sex theory. It proposes that the brain maps toward male or female, which in nearly all cases corresponds with various biological indicators of sex: chromosomes, gonads, and sex hormones. In rare instances, the normal sex differentiation that occurs in utero occurs in one direction (differentiating toward male, for example), while the brain maps in the other direction (toward female). Several gaps remain in the research behind this theory, but it nonetheless compels many professionals.

Recently, a mother came to me, worried about her 7-year-old son. “What can we do?” she asked. “Just last week a woman at the park said something. I couldn’t believe she had the nerve. I’m afraid the kids at school might do worse.”

The mother noted that her son’s voice inflection seemed more like a girl’s and that he pretended he had long hair. Over the past weekend, he had grabbed a towel and put it around his waist and said, “Look, Mom, I’m wearing a dress just like you!”

Whether and how to intervene when a child is acting in ways typical of the opposite sex is a controversial topic, to say the least. It's important to remember that in about three out of four of these cases, the gender identity conflict resolves on its own, lessening or ceasing entirely. However, about three-fourths of children who experience a lessening or resolution go on as adults to identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual—a fact that psychologists don't fully understand at this time.

What happens to children when their gender identity conflict continues into adulthood? Psychiatrist Richard Carroll proposes that they face four outcomes: (1) live in accordance with one's biological sex and gender role; (2) engage in cross-gender behavior intermittently; (3) adopt a cross-gender role through sex reassignment surgery; or (4) unresolved (the clinician has lost contact with the person and doesn't know what happened).

Sara pursued the third outcome. Bert pursued the second. He's a biological male who for years has engaged in cross-gender behavior from time to time to "manage" his gender dysphoria. He wears feminine undergarments that no one apart from his wife knows about. He has grown his hair out and may wear light makeup, and this has been enough to manage his dysphoria.

Crystal pursued the first option. She has experienced gender dysphoria since childhood. It has ebbed and flowed throughout her life, but she's able to cope with it. She presents as a woman and has been married

to a man for 12 years. He is aware of her dysphoria.

Few studies have shown that therapy successfully helps an adult with gender dysphoria resolve with their biological sex. This may be one reason professionals generally support some cross-gender identification in therapy.

As someone with gender dysphoria considers different ways to cope, what might the Christian community distinctly offer them?

THREE LENSES

To answer this question, three cultural lenses through which people tend to "see" gender dysphoria are described below.

Lens #1: Integrity. The integrity lens views sex and gender and, therefore, gender identity in terms of what theologian Robert Gagnon refers to as, "the sacred integrity of maleness or femaleness stamped on one's body." Cross-gender identification is a concern, because it threatens to dishonor the creational order of male and female. Specific biblical passages, such as Deuteronomy 22:5 or 23:1, bolster this view. Even if we concede that some of the Old Testament prohibitions were related to avoiding pagan practices, nonetheless, from beginning to end, Scripture reflects the importance of male-female complementarity set forth in Creation (Genesis 2:21-24).

The theological foundation of the integrity lens raises the same kind of concerns about cross-gender identification as it raises about homosexuality. Same-sex sexual behavior is sin in part because it doesn't "merge or

join two persons into an integrated sexual whole,” writes Gagnon. “Essential maleness” and “essential femaleness” are not brought together as intended from Creation. When extended to transsexuality and cross-gender identification, the theological concerns rest in what Gagnon calls the “denial of the integrity of one’s own sex and an overt attempt at marring the sacred image of maleness or femaleness formed by God.”

The integrity lens most clearly reflects the biblical witness about sex and gender. While it may be challenging to identify a “line” in thought, behavior, and manner that reflects cross-gender identification, people who see through the integrity lens are concerned that cross-gender identification moves against the integrity of one’s biological sex—an essential aspect of personhood.

It should be noted that some Christians do not put gender dysphoria in the same category as homosexuality. They may have reservations about more invasive procedures; however, they do put gender dysphoria or trying to manage dysphoria in the same class of behaviors that Scripture deems immoral.

Lens #2: Disability. This lens views gender dysphoria as a result of living in a fallen world, but not a direct result of moral choice. Whether we accept brain-sex theory or another account of the origins of the phenomenon, if the various aspects of sex and gender are not aligning, then it’s one more human experience that is “not the way it’s supposed to be,” to borrow a phrase from the theologian Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

When we care for someone suffering from depression or anxiety, we do not discuss their emotional state as a moral choice. Rather, the person simply contends with a condition that comes in light of the Fall. The person may have choices to make *in response* to the condition, and those choices have moral and ethical dimensions. But the person is not culpable for having the condition as such. Here, the parallel to people with gender dysphoria should be clear.

Those who use this lens seek to learn as much as they can from two key sources: special revelation (scriptural teachings on sex and gender) and general revelation (research on causes, prevention, and intervention, as well the lives of persons navigating gender dysphoria). This lens leads to the question: *How should we respond to a condition with reference to the goodness of Creation, the reality of the Fall, and the hope of restoration?*

Those drawn to the disability lens may value the sacredness of male and female differences; this is implied in calling gender dysphoria a disability. But the disability lens also makes room for supportive care and interventions that allow for cross-gender identification in a way the integrity lens does not.

Lens #3: Diversity. This lens sees the reality of transgender persons as something to be celebrated, honored, or revered. Our society is rapidly moving in this direction. Those drawn to this lens cite historical examples in which departures from a clear male-or-female presentation have been held in high esteem, such as the Fa’afafine of Samoan Polynesian culture.

Whereas, the biological distinction between male and female is considered unchangeable, some wish to recast sex as just as socially constructed as gender. To evangelicals, those who want to deconstruct sex and gender norms represent a much more radical alternative to either the integrity or disability lens.

To be sure, not everyone drawn to the diversity lens wants to deconstruct sex and gender. What is perhaps most compelling about this lens is that it answers questions about identity—"Who am I?"—and community—"Of which community am I a part?" It answers the desire for persons with gender dysphoria to be accepted and to find purpose in their lives.

A DISTINCTLY CHRISTIAN RESOURCE

I believe there are strengths in all three lenses. Because I am a psychologist who makes diagnoses and provides treatment to people experiencing gender dysphoria, I see value in a disability lens that sees gender dysphoria as a reflection of a fallen world in which the condition itself is not a moral choice. This helps me see the person facing gender identity confusion with empathy and compassion. I try to help the person manage his or her gender dysphoria.

Even as Christians affirm the disability lens, we should also let the integrity lens inform our pastoral care. That lens represents a genuine concern for the integrity of sex and gender, and the ways in which maleness and femaleness help us under-

WHEN I CONSIDER HOW BEST TO COUNSEL MY CLIENTS TO MANAGE THEIR GENDER DYSPHORIA, I ADD THE CAVEAT: IN THE LEAST INVASIVE WAY POSSIBLE.

stand the nature of the church and even the gospel.

Yet, we should reject the teaching that gender identity conflicts are the result of willful disobedience or sinful choice. The church can be sensitive as questions arise about how best to manage gender dysphoria in light of the integrity lens. And we can recognize that we live in a specific cultural context, and that many gender roles vary from culture to culture. When I consider how best to counsel my clients to manage their gender dysphoria, however, I add the caveat: *in the least invasive way possible*.

Christians can also acknowledge how the diversity lens affirms the person by providing an identity not addressed by the other two lenses. The diversity lens emphasizes the importance of belonging. We must remember that the transgender and broader LGBT community are attractive because they answer the bedrock question, "Where do I belong?" Most churches want to be a community where people suffering from any "dysphoria" will feel they belong, for the church is, after all, a community of broken people saved by grace.

LET'S SAY SARA WALKS INTO YOUR CHURCH. SHE LOOKS LIKE A MAN DRESSED AS A WOMAN. ONE QUESTION SHE WILL BE ASKING IS, "AM I WELCOME HERE?"

A few years ago, my research team at the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity conducted the first study of its kind on transgender Christians. We collected information on 32 biological males who, to varying degrees, had transitioned to or presented as women. We asked many questions about issues they faced in their home, workplace, and church, such as, "What kind of support would you have liked from the church?" One person answered, "Someone to cry with me rather than just denounce me. Hey, it is scary to see God not rescue someone from cancer or schizophrenia or [gender dysphoria]...but learn to allow your compassion to overcome your fear and repulsion."

When it comes to support, many evangelical communities may be tempted to respond to transgender persons by shouting "Integrity!" The integrity lens is important, but simply urging persons with gender dysphoria to act in accordance with their biological sex and ignore their extreme discomfort won't constitute pastoral care or a meaningful cultural witness.

The disability lens may lead us to shout, "Compassion!" and the diversity lens may lead us to shout "Celebrate!" But both of these lenses suggest that the creational

goodness of maleness and femaleness can be discarded—or that no meaning is to be found in the marks of our suffering.

Most centrally, the Christian community is a witness to the message of *redemption*. We are witnesses to redemption through Jesus' presence in our lives. Redemption is not found by measuring how well a person's gender identity aligns with their biological sex, but by drawing them to the person and work of Jesus Christ, and to the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us into His image.

As Christians speak to this redemption, we will be tempted to join in the culture wars about sex and gender that fall closely on the heels of the wars about sexual behavior and marriage. But in most cases, the church is called to rise above those wars and present a witness to redemption.

Let's say Sara walks into your church. She looks like a man dressed as a woman. One question she will be asking is, "Am I welcome here?" In the spirit of a redemptive witness, I hope to communicate to her through my actions: "Yes, you are in the right place. We want you here."

If I am drawn to a conversation or relationship with her, I hope to approach her not as a project, but as a person seeking real and sustained relationship, which is characterized by empathy as well as encouragement to walk faithfully with Christ. But I should not try to "fix" her, because unless I'm her professional therapist, I'm not privy to the best way to resolve her gender dysphoria. Rather, Christians are to foster the kinds of relationships that will help us know

and love and obey Jesus better than we did yesterday. That is redemption.

If Sara shares her name with me, as a clinician and Christian, I use it. I do not use this moment to shout “Integrity!” by using her male name or pronoun, which clearly goes against that person’s wishes. It is an act of respect, even if we disagree, to let the person determine what they want to be called. If we can’t grant them that, it’s going to be next to impossible to establish any sort of relationship with them.

The exception is that, as a counselor, I defer to a parent’s preference for their teenager’s name and gender pronoun. Even here, I talk with the parent about the benefits and drawbacks of what they want and what their teenager wants if the goal is to establish a sustained, meaningful relationship with their child.

Also, we can avoid gossip about Sara and her family. Gossip fuels the shame that drives people away from the church; gossip prevents whole families from receiving support.

CHAPTERS IN REDEMPTION

In some church structures, the person’s spiritual life is under the care of those tasked with leading a local congregation. In this case, we have to trust church leadership to do the hard work of shepherding everyone who accepts Christ as Lord and Savior. We trust, too, that God is working in the lives of our leaders to guide them in wisdom and discernment. We trust that meaningful conversations are taking place, and we can add our prayers for any follower of Christ.

In other church settings, it might be us as laypeople who are called into a redemptive relationship with the transgender person. After all, Christians are to facilitate communities in which we are all challenged to grow as disciples of Christ. We can be sensitive, though, not to treat as synonymous the management of gender dysphoria and faithfulness. Some may live a gender identity that reflects their biological sex, depending on their discomfort. Others may benefit from space to find ways to identify with aspects of the opposite sex, as a way to manage extreme discomfort. And of course, no matter the level of discomfort someone with gender dysphoria experiences (or the degree to which someone identifies with the opposite sex), the church will always encourage a personal relationship with Christ and faithfulness to grow in Christlikeness.

Certainly we can extend to a transgender person the grace and mercy we so readily count on in our own lives. We can remind ourselves that the book of redemption in a person’s life has many chapters. You may be witness to an early chapter of this person’s life or a later chapter. But Christians believe that God holds that person and each and every chapter in His hands, until that person arrives at their true end—when gender and soul are made well in the presence of God. ■

Mark Yarhouse is the Rosemarie S. Hughes Endowed Chair and professor of psychology at Regent University, where he directs the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity.



by BILL GEORGE

MULTISITE CHURCHES: Craze or Constant?

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, less than 10 churches in America would probably have self-identified as “multisite congregations,” but a 2014 report by *Leadership Network* estimates that some 8,000 local churches today place themselves in the multisite camp. However else the phenomenon may be branded, one of the favorite labels placed on it in church litera-

ture is “revolution.” It offers a new twist on doing church.

Essentially, a multisite church is one church meeting in more than one location. This may be different spaces on the same campus, different addresses in the same city, different towns in the same region, or even different cities in the same part of the country. The ties that bind the multisite church

together are common leadership, shared vision, and a joint budget.

One multisite church may operate on quite a different model from another. A common prototype is a central, well-established congregation with satellite congregations that may meet in a theater, a YMCA, a school, or another church building whose former congregation has dwindled away. Some of the congregations may have a resident pastor who preaches “live” each time the church meets, while others may have a video-cast message preached once by the senior pastor and repeated in various venues. Some of the churches may have only a worship service, while others host a full range of ministries at each site. There is a great deal of variety.

What motivates a church to adopt a multisite approach? The most familiar answer to that question is the usual response to any evangelistic inquiry: to obey the Great Commission. “We can make more and better disciples, love people greater, and obey Christ more fully if we will go where the people are.”

All kinds of churches have decided to be multisite—old churches, new churches, those in the city and those in the country, mainline and fringe churches, in fact, all kinds. Probably, the most familiar churches found in the multisite camp are medium-sized and larger congregations, and especially those who have faced building constrictions. When the city will not issue a permit for an enlarged building, or when the cost is prohibitive for additional land, one sensible

alternative is to seek an additional kind of space. In that case, the church can look for rental space, a school building, or—as is often the case—an available sanctuary where the previous congregation has died out or is about to close. It can be reclaimed for the Kingdom and used to great advantage. People who have studied the issue declare that it is far more economical to repurpose an existing church building than to build a new one from scratch.

A dozen years ago, Pastor David Ferguson of Community Christian Church in Chicago wrote an article in *Leadership Journal* (Spring 2003, pp. 81-84) about the multisite church. He listed eight paradoxes that this approach to church can offer, as follows:

- Grow larger and grow smaller.
- Brand-new and new brand.
- Staff with generalists *and* specialists.
- Less cost and greater impact.
- New-church vibe and big-church punch.
- Move there and stay there.
- More need and more support.
- More outreach and more maturity.

Not everyone agrees that multisite is the way for a church to go, and some sensible objections need to be considered before a redirection is undertaken. Some who do not agree with multiple congregations under the covering of one church say that it appears to just be a fad; it is an approach that cannot yet be claimed has weathered the test of time. Others complain that this methodology does not permit a pastor to know all his or her people. While it might be answered that there are multiplied circumstances where

people today are not known by their pastors, it is a question worth asking. Another objection is that there may be a tendency in multisite churches to elevate one leader too highly. Others believe this approach to church can transform a worship service into a show or a production. All of these points of view need to be considered.

I do now know of any published resources about multisite congregations that were available 20 years ago, but several good books that are extremely helpful can be purchased today. The multisite phenomenon seems to have originated as long ago as the 1940s, when Pastor Lee Roberson of Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, opened multiple locations for worship. Using a visionary congregation and the zealous students of Tennessee Temple College, his number of locations reached nearly

70. In the 1970s, one of the nation's largest congregations, Mount Paran Church of God in Atlanta, began worshiping in multiple locations, a practice that continued for more than 30 years.

I recommend the following books to a pastor who wants to explore the possibility of establishing one church in more than one location.

- Surrat, Geoff, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird. *A Multi-site Church Roadtrip*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Surrat, Geoff, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird. *The Multi-site Church Revolution*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- Tomberlin, Jim and Tim Cool. *Church Locality: New Rules for Church Buildings in a Multisite, Church Planting, and Giga-Church World*. Bradenton, Florida: Rainer Publishing, 2014. ■



RETIRED MINISTERS Serving as District Overseers

by G. J. CHANDLER



RETIRED MINISTERS serving as district overseers? While some people may question the advisability of this, such an arrangement makes perfect sense for several reasons. Chief among these reasons are more availability, flexibility, and experience.

AVAILABILITY

In most instances where the district overseer is one of the pastors on the district, he also is the pastor of one of the largest churches on the district. This, in itself, limits the availability of the district overseer, since he necessarily must care for his church and the myriad of responsibilities that are part the pastorate. He may not always be immediately available to assist with situations that arise in churches on the district.

However, a retired minister will be able to devote immediate attention to whatever situation arises. Many times, small situations, if allowed to fester, can become large problems. So, being available to deal immediately with problems that may arise can prevent trouble. This availability also makes it possible to develop a closer relationship and connection with pastors, other ministers on the district, and church congregations.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility means “characterized by a ready capability to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*). All churches, pastors, and people are different; what works with one may not be applicable to another. Therefore, it is essential that a district over-

seer be flexible enough in his approach to see each situation as it is and deal with it accordingly. Pastors, ministers, and laity will appreciate a district overseer who is flexible enough to understand their concerns and work with them for a resolution that will be beneficial to all concerned parties.

EXPERIENCE

Retired ministers are a valuable reserve of experience. This experience was acquired through many years of practical ministerial service. Retired ministers often will have experience serving on state youth boards, evangelism boards, and state councils. In addition, they may have served in various appointed positions. Some of them will already have experience as district overseers during their pastoral days. The corps of retired ministers also may include former state overseers. So, retired ministers are a valuable pool of practical ministry experience that will allow them to serve effectively as district overseers.

RELATIONSHIPS

A wise district overseer will establish close connections with the ministers and members on his district. I presently have the privilege of serving as district overseer of the Arab District in northern Alabama. Currently, we hold a monthly meeting with our pastors and their spouses. We also include associate pastors, youth pastors, and their spouses. We have a meal together, conduct any necessary business, and then have a time of fellowship. Also, we hold a

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district camp meeting each year. In addition, I meet regularly with pastors and ministers for a one-on-one discussion of their needs and concerns. In instances where a minister may need correction, I do this in a private meeting so that a minister is never publicly confronted and embarrassed. By meeting privately, I can show the minister that I am concerned about his situation and stand ready to assist him. This builds trusting relationships that pay great dividends.

WHO SHOULD SERVE?

Not every retired minister may be a good choice to serve as a district overseer. Even though a minister may have the qualifications to serve, unless he is willing to devote his time and effort to helping ministers and churches, he should not be appointed to serve as a district overseer. In other instances, while a minister may be willing to serve, and even have a desire for the position, unless he meets the qualifications for a district overseer, he should not be appointed.

The *Minutes* of the International General Assembly sets forth the duties of a district overseer:

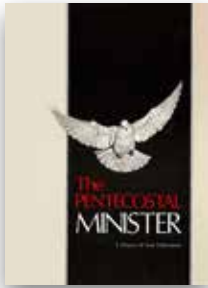
S43. DISTRICT OVERSEERS
II. DUTIES AND AUTHORITIES

The district overseer shall:

1. Conduct conferences in each of the churches on his district. However, he may authorize the local pastor to conduct the conference, (65th A., 1994, Item 7, p. 88).
2. See that a general evangelistic effort is put forth in his district during the year.
3. See that the state program is carried out in the churches of his district.
4. Assist the state overseer in the appointment of pastors, when called upon to do so.
5. Together with the state overseer, pass on the selection, purchase, and construction of all church properties on his district.

As can be seen, the duties of the district overseer require considerable time and effort to carry out the responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Serving as district overseer is an honor for any retired minister who may be called on by his overseer to fill this important position. It is an excellent opportunity for retired ministers to find fulfillment in their “golden” years, while using their experience to bless the “Timothys” whose lives can be enriched by their guidance, encouragement, and mentoring. ■

G. J. Chandler is an ordained bishop who has served the church as pastor, evangelist, district overseer, state board member, state overseer in Southern New England and New York, and national evangelist. Although officially retired (he prefers to call it semiretired), in addition to his district overseer responsibilities, he regularly conducts revivals and special services. He and his wife Carla reside in Cullman, Alabama.



The Pentecostal Minister Flashback will reprint articles from the forerunner of Engage. The articles will be presented as they were originally written, so dates and cultural references will reflect the period. However, most of the advice and research is still applicable to ministry today.

Pentecostal Minister

FLASHBACK

INTEGRITY IN LEADERSHIP

By Ray H. Hughes • Summer 1988

INTEGRITY IS A TERM used frequently in reference to leadership in our society. For example, we often hear it used in campaign speeches: “Elect a man of integrity.” *Integrity*, however, is a word that is overworked and underlived.

The educational goal, or dream, that was to produce an acceptable code of ethics or standard of behavior has failed us. Corruption is evident in all circles of leadership. Justice is obstructed; expediency is the order of the day; honesty and integrity are trampled underfoot. In the words of Isaiah, the statesman prophet: “Truth is fallen in the street . . . Yea, truth faileth” (Isaiah 59:14, 15).

Integrity implies an incorruptible soundness in moral character as displayed in fulfilling trusts. It embodies sincerity, honesty, and veracity with all of their nuances of meaning. It denotes a wholeness of character. For the purpose of this presentation, I am defining *integrity* in terms of sincerity, honesty, and veracity.

SINCERITY

The word, *sincere* derives from the Latin word *sincerus* which means “clean or pure.” It means literally “without wax”—*sin* (without) and *cere* (wax), which refer to the ancient custom of using wax to fill in hairline cracks in pottery or to hide flaws in cloth. These flaws would not be revealed until exposed to heat or sunlight. This is the meaning of the word as used in Philippians



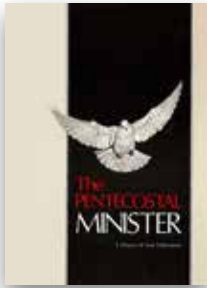
1:10: "That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ." God wants sincere leadership which is the same in actual character as it is in outward appearance—genuine and without pretense.

This was demonstrated when Samuel went to the home of Jesse to select a leader for Israel from among his sons. When Samuel saw Eliab, the eldest son who was tall and handsome and had some of the characteristics of Saul, who stood head and shoulders above his peers, he said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:6, 7).

David, the youngest of his sons and the least likely candidate in the eyes of his brothers, was chosen. Later, the Holy Spirit records, "And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them" (Psalm 78:72 NIV). Woodrow Wilson once said, "A man must be something before he can *do* anything." This is especially true in the ministry. In no profession is the man behind the profession so important as in Christian leadership. A man may perform some tasks well with an impaired character, but not so in the ministry. What one is, to a great extent, determines what he produces and the effectiveness of that production. One cannot divorce lifestyle from leadership.

I have been quite amused at political candidates who plead, "Do not judge me for what I am; judge me according to what I can do and according to my talents." Although every leader is a man of like passions as others, more is expected of the leader because he has accepted the responsibility of leading. Not only is more expected of him: he will also have the greater judgment.

"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). James says, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation [judgment] (James 3:1).



Our leadership is in the light of the coming judgment seat of Christ: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Hebrews 13:17). The word *rule* in this verse means “the one who leads.” He must give an account for the manner of his leadership. This places a great and sobering responsibility upon both the leaders and the followers. The Bible also admonishes us to “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Hebrews 13:7).

So it follows that whether a leader likes the censure or not, he is expected to be an example or model of integrity. Peter says it well: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: Neither as being lords over

God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2, 3).

We would also do well to heed the instruction of Paul to the young pastor, Timothy: “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Timothy 4:12). People are impacted negatively or positively by their leadership examples: “Like people, like priest” (Hosea 4:9).

Isaiah said, “For the leaders of this people cause them to err: and thy that are led of them are destroyed” (Isaiah 9:16). Throughout the history of Israel, they prospered when their leadership did what was right in the sight of the Lord. God has always honored uprightness and shows His approval on that type of man.

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We would do well to refresh our memory of the biblical qualifications of leadership:

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:2-7).

At least ten of these named qualifications speak to integrity. Whatever a man's call to leadership might be, his first call must be to godliness and holiness. His chief business is holy living.

God demands anointed leadership, because His leaders are anointed. Purity always precedes anointing. The writer of Ecclesiastes says, "Let thy garments be always white: and let thy head lack no ointment" (Ecclesiastes 9:8). The allusion to white garments is an exhortation to purity of character. Impure leadership has a debilitating effect and brings out the worst in followers, while godly leadership builds confidence and gives courage and strength to the people. "Godliness is profitable unto all things" (1 Timothy 4:8).

When a leader has a moral breakdown, it gives Satan an occasion to speak evil of the work of God. As in the case of David, who became careless in his lifestyle and committed the great transgression, Nathan, the prophet, told him: "Thou has given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (2 Samuel 12:14).

On the other hand, when a leader walks in integrity, the opposite is the rule. The counsel which Paul gave to Titus, his son in the faith, illustrates the effect of integrity in leadership: "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that



cannot be condemned: that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:7, 8).

HONESTY

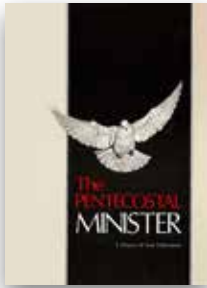
To be honest is to be trustworthy and upright. Honesty is an adherence to moral and ethical principles. This is expected of all Christians and especially of those in leadership roles. It was required of a leader in the New Testament church to have an honest report (Acts 6:3).

The apostle Paul placed great emphasis on honesty in his writings. He urged that prayers be made for all leaders "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:2). He exhorts us to "walk honestly, as in the day" (Romans 13:13) and also to "walk honestly toward them that are without" (1 Thessalonians 4:12), for honesty makes an impact on those who see it in action. The greatest argument against Christianity is the failure of its followers to live it. On the other hand, the greatest argument for Christianity is to see it demonstrated in flesh and blood.

The apostle Paul requested prayer, saying, "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly" (Hebrews 13:18).

Here was a leader of the church who could have rested on the laurels of past successes, but he realized his vulnerability and asked for prayer. His concern was for a conscience void of offense and a willingness to live honestly. The administrative cares and problems did not distract him from the main issue of leadership—integrity.

But many modern day leaders have compromised the biblical standard of honesty. The acceptable standards or norms have greatly affected church leaders. They pattern their leadership after worldly models and are more dependent upon secular managerial skills and administrative techniques than upon spiritual leadership. They excel in mechanics, but fail in dynamics. There is little dependence upon the Lord. However, the Spirit must be



the administrator of the affairs of the church for it to be truly effective.

Honesty must be displayed in every phase of leadership, including finances. The Scriptures speak to this issue in no uncertain terms. Filthy lucre is mentioned five times in the New Testament—each time in the context of the ministry: 1 Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 11; 1 Peter 5:2. Leaders are not to be eager for base gain: it must not influence their decisions, determine their place of ministry or affect their appointments.

There was a policy of openness established in the handling of finances

in the New Testament church. A brother was chosen to travel with Paul and his companion to handle the money which was collected and administered by them. The Scripture says, “Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Corinthians 8:20, 21). His dealings were open to the scrutiny of all men.

Honesty requires openness and accountability. Where there is responsibility, there must be corresponding accountability.

VERACITY

Veracity is “habitual truthfulness.” It means that a person is a man of his word—his word is his bond.

Today’s prevailing climate accommodates duplicity and methods of expediency. The Machiavellian philosophy that “The end

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justifies the means” has permeated our society and has filtered into Christian leadership. Some even justify falsehood if good might come from it. They also do that which is for convenience or advantage rather than that which is right and just.

There is a tendency among some leaders to say what they think people want to hear. Under the guise of diplomacy, men skirt issues and leave people with wrong impressions. A word for this type of action is *deceit*.

When Moses was choosing leaders to assist him, God instructed him to select “men of truth, hating covetousness” (Exodus 18:21). God honors truth in leadership. He made a promise to Israel: “If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee . . . a man on the throne of Israel” (1 Kings 2:4). Therefore, let us rejoice in the truth and not in iniquity.

I read an article by Joseph Ryan titled, “Wanted: People of Integrity,” which posed the question, “When the end comes, what will be your epitaph?”

I want to leave this question with you: “What will your testimony be when men review your leadership? Will it be: He was a good operator; he was clever; he was smooth? Or will it be: He was honest, sincere, and a man of veracity? “Finally, brethren,

whatsoever things are true,
whatsoever things are honest,
whatsoever things are just,
whatsoever things are pure,
whatsoever things are lovely,
whatsoever things are of good report;
If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise,
Think on these things” (Philippians 4:8). ■

Ray H. Hughes Sr., Ed.D. immediate past president of the National Association of Evangelicals, is first assistant general overseer of the Church of God.

Full Page ad



LEGAL NOTES
Dennis W. Watkins

Resources—A Quest for the Best

IT IS MY CONSTANT DESIRE to provide our ministers and churches with the very best resources in the area of legal issues that affect churches. This includes tax information. I am sharing what I consider to be some of the very best church resources available today.

CHRISTIANITY TODAY'S CHURCH LAW & TAX TEAM

While there are many good resources in the market today, for years I have considered the very best to come from our friends with the nonprofit media ministry, Christianity Today. Christianity Today's Church Law & Tax Team publishes two print newsletters, numerous resources, a website, a free blog, and five free eNewsletters, all devoted to helping church leaders keep their congregations safe, legal, and financially sound.

Senior Editor Richard Hammar is an attorney and CPA. In 1987, he helped start *Church Law & Tax Report*, one of those print newsletters. Hammar is a Harvard Law School graduate, and he serves as the general counsel for a large denomination. He is widely considered to be one of the leading authorities on church law, tax, and

risk management matters. It shows with his work in the bimonthly *Church Law & Tax Report*, which covers the latest legal and tax developments for churches. I think reading this publication alone would keep our ministers up to date in these areas.

Church Finance Today, the second print newsletter, was started by Hammar in 1993. Every month, it covers significant developments, trends, tips, ideas, and insights related to the financial management of churches for pastors, business administrators, and treasurers.

In recent years, Christianity Today has launched *ChurchLawAndTax.com*, a website providing free and premium content, including the full archives of *Church Law & Tax Report* and *Church Finance Today*, plus a variety of web-only articles, videos, and infographics featuring Hammar and the Church Law & Tax Team's distinguished Editorial Advisory Board (consisting of trustworthy attorneys and CPAs serving churches nationwide).

In addition, Christianity Today also publishes numerous print and digital resources that are available on *ChurchLawAndTaxStore.com*. Of particular note is the annual *Church*

& *Clergy Tax Guide* written by Hammar, which offers a complete review of the subject. I regularly refer our ministers and church treasurers to these resources.

A SPECIAL OFFER

Because of our relationship with Christianity Today, I am happy to announce a special offer available to the Church of God denomination: A first-year subscription to *ChurchLawAndTax.com* for \$99.95 (a 20-percent savings!). Please visit this webpage for more details: https://w1.buysub.com/servlet/OrdersGateway?cds_mag_code=A09&cds_page_id=190435&cds_tracking_code=CLADM00003&cds_campaign_code=EMAILCLTCOM

AVAIL YOURSELF OF THESE RESOURCES!

When I travel around the country and speak to our ministers about church legal

issues, I notice those ministers who tell me that they subscribe to publications like these, and it brings a level of comfort to me to know that they are keeping up with the issues. Do not hesitate to become one of those individuals! Sometimes, to “be forewarned is to be forearmed,” and arming yourself with necessary information is a great habit!

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, and I will endeavor to point you to the best in resources! Special thanks go out to Matt Branaugh at *Christianity Today* for his assistance in preparing this article. ■

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.





MONEY MATTERS
Art Rhodes

Returning Designated Contributions

MANY, IF NOT MOST, churches have established a specific fund to receive building fund donations and possibly other specific designated funds. These funds are designated solely for building purposes and accumulate money until the project is completely funded. In limited situations, the building project is never started or not started in a timely manner based upon the donor's understanding. The question then arises as to whether or not the church has a legal obligation to refund those designated contributions to the donor. Courts have skirted around this issue for years without providing any clear direction.

In 2003, a state appeals court in Michigan directly addressed this contentious issue. The trial court ruled that the church had a legal obligation to return building fund money that was not used in a timely manner. However, the appeals court reversed the trial court's decision and stated that the dispute was "ecclesiastical" in nature and that the first amendment prohibited a trial court from intervening in such a dispute between a church and its member. The appellate court went on to state that "the decision of when and where to build a church building is exclusively within the province of the church

members and its officials..." See *McDonald v. Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church*, 2003 WL 1689618 (Mich. App. 2003).

Then in 2014, the Mississippi Supreme Court issued two separate decisions that affirmed a church's right to decide, without court intervention, whether a specific project should be built or not, based on the First Amendment's guaranty of religious freedom. However, the Mississippi court went one giant step further, noting that "where a religious society raises a fund ... for a particular purpose, it cannot divert the funds to another purpose, and, if it abandons such purpose, the donors may reclaim their contributions." See *Kinney v. Catholic Diocese*, 142 So.3d 407 (Miss. 2014).

From these cases and others, it is clear that the courts are not going to dictate to a church whether a project should be built or not. The courts have clearly stated that the First Amendment's religious protection prohibit the courts from deciding matters that they consider to be ecclesiastical in nature.

However, on the other hand, the courts, as evidenced by the Mississippi Supreme Court decisions, seem to be clearly moving toward making sure that a church or any other non-profit does not use designated contributions

for another purpose. Further, the Mississippi decision went one step further and said that not only can you not use designated funds for another purpose, if the designated project is abandoned, donors may “reclaim their contributions.”

It is important to point out that these decisions only dealt with the legal obligation of a church to return designated funds when the project was not started within a timely manner or not started according to the projection provided to the donor when the donations were given. While the Michigan case did not go into the ethical or moral obligation that a church might have to refund donations under such circumstances, the Mississippi case again went further, noting that the church not only had an ethical and moral obligation to return the designated contributions, but also that a legal obligation to return the funds existed.

Therefore, when a project is not going to be completed in a timely manner for the specific designated purpose and the donors can be identified, it is suggested that a church adopt an internal policy to contact the donor and offer to return the contribution or seek the donor’s permission to use the funds for some other purpose. The church leadership may decide that the project previously planned is now not in the best interest of the church or, another, and more attractive, opportunity may arise that the church decides to pursue. If the designated funds are not given under a broad designation to cover the new opportunity, then the funds should be returned to the donor, or they should request that they be redesignated for a new project.

There may, however, be situations where the donor of designated contributions cannot be identified. This is often true when donors made contributions of small amounts or where donors made anonymous cash offerings to the designated fund. While contributions must be offered back to donors that are identified, the best method of dealing with unidentified donors is to address the matter in a church conference. The conference should be advised that the funds tied to specific donors have either been returned or offered to be returned, but that a resolution needs to be adopted by the conference to transfer the remaining designated funds either to the general fund of the church or to another specific project.

The direction of a church may change due to a leadership change or due to new opportunities presenting themselves to the congregation. The courts are not going to get into that decision making. However, these recent decisions clearly show that the courts are going to enforce donor designations. If a donor designates a contribution, it must be used for that purpose OR the donation must be returned to the donor, unless the donor allows the contribution to be used for other purposes. ■

Art Rhodes is president and CEO of the Church of God Benefits Board, Inc. You may contact the Benefits Board at (423) 478-7131; toll free at (877) 478-7190; or by email at info@benefitsboard.com. 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. If such advice is desired or required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.



FAMILY FOCUS

Drs. H. Lynn and Mary Ruth Stone

MARRIAGE: Created by God; Defined by Jesus

THE SUPREME COURT ruling on same-sex marriage brought much controversy and confusion. But to the Christian believer, one essential truth never changed. *The biblical marriage covenant was established by God at Creation and defined by Jesus almost two millennia ago.*

When the Pharisees came to Jesus, “tempting him,” they asked: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” (Matthew 19:3). His answer referred back to the marriage covenant in Eden at the time of Creation.

And he answered and said unto them, Have you not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder (vv. 4-6).

Referring to the first two chapters of Genesis, Jesus affirmed seven distinct ele-

ments in a biblical marriage covenant. The following seven essential elements of the Lord’s definition of marriage are based on His answer to the Pharisees.

A biblical marriage covenant . . .

1. Recognizes that God creates every person as a unique *individual* (**personhood**).
2. Is founded on *the beginning* (**paradise**).
3. Is based on God’s creation of man and woman as *equals* (**equality**)
4. Is based on the original purpose of a *helping companionship* (**help meet**).
5. Is based on the *leaving* of the father and the mother (**leaving**).
6. Is based on the *cleaving* of a male and a female (**cleaving**).
7. Is based on a *oneness* of flesh (**sexuality**).

This article focuses on *personhood*: *God creates each man and woman as a unique individual person.* This truth is based on the Lord’s initial words—“He which made them”—and is Christ’s foundational statement for the entire marriage covenant. Future articles will focus on the other six elements.

Two important truths about personhood are seen in the biblical marriage covenant as it was created by God in the beginning and defined by Jesus while ministering on earth.

1. Biblical marriage exalts individual personhood through a Godlike relationship of oneness.

Marriage does not obliterate or mar the individual creation of God. Each marriage partner must always retain his or her full identity as an individual person uniquely created by God and in the image of God.

Furthermore, each marriage partner must *recognize* that his/her *spouse* is also an individual person uniquely created by God and in the image of God.

In other words, the oneness of the biblical marriage covenant does not destroy individual personhood—it only exalts each person to a higher level of living. It elevates the personhood of each partner to the highest levels of human life.

This is the wonderful potential of marriage as it was designed by God. This was His intent when He first created man as male and female in the Garden of Eden. It is to this day a covenant that brings idyllic bliss and marvelous comfort to millions of believing men and women around the world.

True biblical marriage, as defined by Jesus, has a marvelous capacity to magnify the individual personhood of both husband and wife. The biblical marriage covenant does not change one's personal identity—it enhances that identity.

Instead of “swallowing up one's individual personhood,” the Edenic marriage covenant exalts the individual personhood of both spouses. Instead of becoming a mere “possession” of another, a covenant spouse is elevated to an altogether new level of dignity, love, and appreciation.

- He no longer is merely a working man, striving to earn a living on earth—in a biblical marriage covenant, he becomes the king of a domain.

- She is no longer merely a working woman, striving to compete for recognition—in a biblical marriage covenant, she becomes the queen of a kingdom.

- He is no longer merely a suitor chasing a fantasy romance—in biblical marriage, he becomes a lover who is himself loved to the end of life.

- She is no longer merely a sweetheart playing games with paramours—in biblical marriage, she becomes the essence of pure beauty that will be cherished as an aroma from heaven until the grave calls for her body to return to dust.

2. Biblical marriage synergizes individual personhood through a Godlike relationship of oneness.

This “marriage miracle” of personal exaltation occurs because the biblical model of the marriage covenant is a synergistic relationship of oneness.

In other words, it is so designed by God himself that the total positive energy coming from the oneness relationship is more than the simple addition of the energy that could

possibly come from both individuals before they are married.

The wonder of this miraculous synergy is illustrated in the greatest miracle of humankind—the birth of a child. No single human can produce a child.

Furthermore, outside of the sexual relationship—which was designed by God to be the seal of the covenant marriage—no two individuals, nor 200 individuals, nor all 7 billion people on planet Earth, can produce one single new life. Oh, some might argue that the “test tube baby,” or the “human clone baby,” or artificial insemination, or in vitro fertilization prove differently.

But that is not so. These are simply alternatives to the sexual relationship that still, in one way or another, must obtain both the seed of the man and the egg of the woman and bring them together in some type of a “growing relationship” in order to form new human life.

Oh the wonder of the Creator God!

Instead of test tubes, and science laboratories, and genome sequencing, and medical advances, God gave to man and woman a marriage bed—right out of the paradise of Eden.

- The physical seal of the marriage covenant of oneness comes together in the loving act of the most synergistic relationship known to humankind.

- The fullest energy of maleness is multiplied with the fullest energy of femaleness.

- What neither could ever do alone in a thousand eternities, they do together in one loving moment of intense pleasure.

**INSTEAD OF TEST TUBES,
AND SCIENCE LABORATORIES,
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RIGHT OUT OF THE
PARADISE OF EDEN.**

- In an explosive relationship of synergistic oneness, new earthly life is conceived into the glory of eternity.

The birth of a child symbolizes the synergism that is generated in the oneness relationship of biblical marriage. It is a synergy that is totally dependent upon the premise that God creates every person individually.

Both the male and female partners must retain their full identity of personhood. They become one in a covenant relationship—but each one remains fully himself and herself.

This is the pattern of a biblical marriage covenant from Creation which Jesus affirmed. His use of the phrase—“He which made them”—places individual personhood as the primary element in His own personal definition of biblical marriage.

Personhood is the foundation upon which the other six elements of the marriage covenant are based. Such a biblical marriage, through the power of redemption, has the potential to elevate both husband and wife, as well as their children, into a life of family love, harmony, and happiness on earth, and hope of eternal life in the Kingdom to come. ■

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BOOK REVIEW

David Gosnell



ROMANS: A Path to Transformation

LIFE IS—or really should be—about knowing God and living for His glory. As the title implies, this new work by Dr. Arrington shows that the Book of Romans is not something merely to be read, but Romans has relevance to the whole of life. Clearly written and carefully organized, *Romans: A Path to Transformation* is rooted in Scripture and easy to read. Every thoughtful Christian should read this book and every pastor should buy this book for his/her church.

As followers of Jesus Christ, our thinking must begin with the gospel. Arguably, this is truer today than ever, not because the gospel is something new, but because the gospel defines the church's calling and mission in culture. The church has been called to witness the gospel in all spheres of life—family, media, business, government—and every other corner of society. *Romans: A Path to Transformation* helps us grasp the most basic, comprehensive, and foundational teaching of the gospel so that Christians will understand what flows from the Book of Romans and how biblical truth must be embodied and lived out in our culture.

Dr. Arrington is really a pastor with a passion for biblical exegesis. But first he is a world-renown, New Testament, Pentecostal scholar with a heart for the church and pastoral min-

istry. He has carefully woven these two skills together to produce a readable and reliable inductive Bible study that equips the church to understand Romans. Because of this book, any Christian—regardless of background or maturity level—will be able to digest the most fundamental and comprehensive teachings penned by the apostle Paul in Romans. Unlike other expositions on Romans, Dr. Arrington's work emphasizes personal (i.e. inductive) study and reflection, as well as bold, careful interpretation and application of God's word. Perhaps, more than any other work I've seen, *Romans: A Path to Transformation* seeks to explore the dynamic relationship of the gospel and daily Christian living.

I think we would all agree that the church is living at the crossroads. Western culture is shaped as much by modern or postmodern humanism as by the biblical story. Thus, the church exists at the intersections of two stories, both of which claim to be true. How can the church live at these crossroads? It all depends on which of these two stories one chooses. The church is called to demonstrate in its whole life that the gospel is true. It is for reasons such as these I recommend Dr. Arrington's new book. It is a tool to help the church digest one of the most profound letters in the entire New

Testament. Moreover, the style and format of the book embodies the essential, biblical truths of Romans, which will teach the church how to live at the crossroads between two conflicting and often incompatible worldviews.

Like the church in Paul's day, the modern church has often compromised its living out of the gospel, allowing the biblical truth to be subsumed with the opposing modernist worldviews. Throughout his book, Dr. Arrington reminds us that biblical truth is comprehensive in nature. Therefore, if we believe that Jesus is Lord, we must witness to that truth in every area of life and culture. *Romans: A Path to Transformation* is broader than just academic thinking or theorizing in general. Instead, it is a book that is pragmatic and it equips the student to understand the Book of Romans section by section. In a piecemeal manner, it essentially emphasizes two truths: First, that Jesus is the center of the gospel, and second, to follow Jesus is to serve him in all areas of life.

Someone has said "that facts are our friends." Modern research by leading groups has indicated that discipleship is waning while biblical illiteracy is increasing in the church. This does not surprise most of us who observe church culture today. Most people simply are not moving on the spiritual continuum from exploring Christ, to growing in Christ, to living Christ-centered lives. When Paul wrote Romans, he wanted the church in Rome to have a comprehensive belief grid in which to understand sin, salvation, and Christian service, thereby equipping the church for its missional task. *Romans: A Path to Transformation* is an exposition of Paul's biblical worldview,

and it provides specific insights and conceptual tools to live out a Christ-centered life—in the church, the family, and the broader culture.

As a pastor, I recognize that church leadership is like a multifaceted diamond. Leadership really does matter, but church leadership must be acutely aware that all leadership endeavors must focus primarily on discipleship. We must encourage, equip, and inspire people to read and reflect on Scripture. NOTHING has greater impact on spiritual growth and discipleship than understanding and applying the truth of Scripture to everyday life. In our current context of postmodernity, consumerism, and globalization, we must remain resolute in our Christian faith. Dr. Arrington reminds us, albeit implicitly, that there's always a danger of allowing the biblical message to become compromised with the idolatry of any given culture. This is why his book is so important for the people of God today. Our Christian faith must deal with the Bible's foundational teachings, and no other book in the New Testament is more comprehensive and accommodating than Romans.

Arguably, no one has written more for the Church of God than Dr. French L. Arrington. He is known as one of the most respected and prolific New Testament Greek scholars within the Church of God, as well as the broader Pentecostal, Charismatic Movement. We are deeply indebted to him for his continued labor in equipping the church. The ink poured out on each page of this new book will help us to reflect on the ways the gospel can come alive, first in our own lives, and then in the church!

Romans: A Path to Transformation, ISBN: 978-1-940682-40-2, retails for \$16.95 and may be obtained through Adult Discipleship. ■