

ONE LORD ONE VOICE ONE VISION

# ONE magazine

FEBRUARY - MARCH • 2024

**A Bread and  
Water Diet**

*Do No Harm*

*Circling  
the City*

*A  
Serving  
Life*



***Biblical Marriage***

Tearing Down Idols  
in Arkansas?

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**Hand Over Your Mirrors!**

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*To communicate to Free Will Baptists a unifying vision  
of our role in the extension of God's Kingdom*

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# Three Hours

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

While the rest of the world slept, Dad rose quietly each morning, made coffee, and opened the Bible. From 3:00 to 6:00 a.m., six days a week, he studied God's Word. One of my earliest memories is walking into the kitchen in PJs, rubbing sleep from my eyes, and finding Dad still at the table with coffee cup long empty, hair sticking out in all directions, papers scattered everywhere, and a contented smile.

As a teen, I honestly found his early rising a little annoying, especially on the mornings Dad ended his study by playing polka-styled hymns on the accordion. Seriously! Who does that? But as an adult, with a deeper understanding of time constraints, endless responsibilities, weariness, and distractions, I came to respect Dad's dedication deeply. While I don't know exactly when Dad started his study routine, I was around for at least 45 years of it. So, I did the math: 18 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, times 45 years equals 42,120 hours. What an investment into what mattered most!

What did Dad get out of it? Was all the missed sleep worth it? *Absolutely*, I'm sure he would tell you.

**He craved the Word.** The more he studied, the more he wanted to learn. The more he memorized, the harder he worked. Over the decades, he memorized roughly a third of the Bible, entire books including the long ones: Proverbs, Acts, most of the epistles, Revelation, and large portions of Romans. During an induced coma in 2018, after a stroke, an excited nurse came dashing into the waiting room to tell me Dad had acquired savant syndrome (when an amazing ability sometimes manifests after trauma). He was "quoting literature," she said. I smiled at her, walked to his room, and leaned close. Sure enough, he was halfway through Proverbs 6. According to hospital staff, Dad quoted Scripture—without stopping—for 24 hours straight.

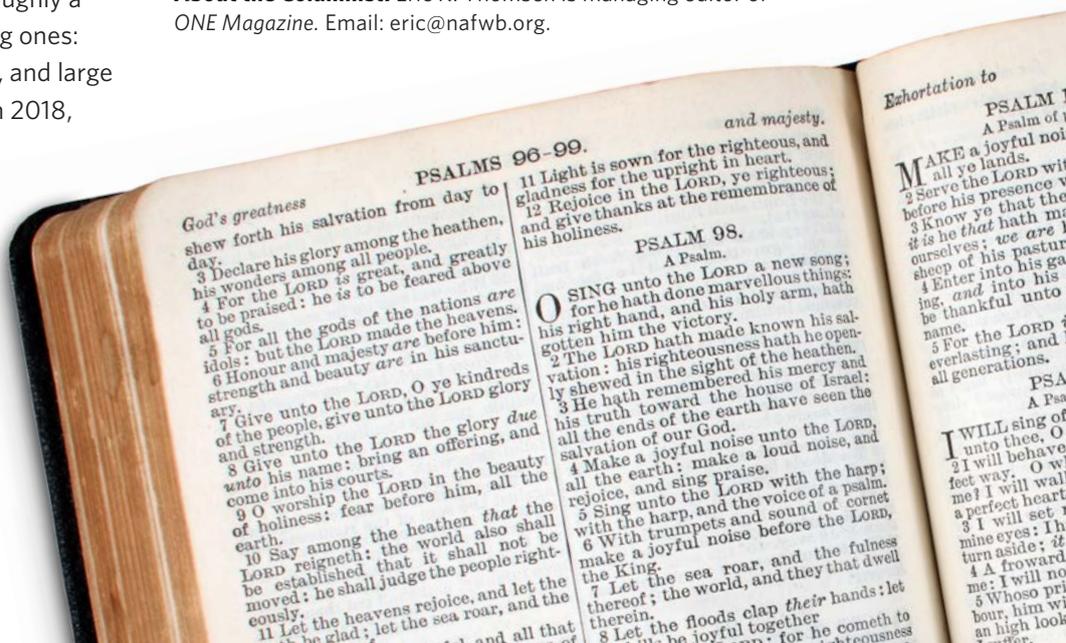
**He shared the Word.** Dad was never happier than in moments he had opportunity to teach a bunch of fifth graders how to memorize Scripture. Or when he took a Sunday School class on a grand tour through Scripture—a "Bible survey" as he described it. Dad read the Word, memorized the Word, and shared the Word...anywhere, everywhere, and with anyone who would listen. Scripture became an innate part of him.

**He finished with the Word.** The morning he died, Dad got up early as usual, finished his Bible study, and then had a stroke at his desk. At the hospital, though weak and sick, Dad recovered enough for us to gather around his bedside. We told him we loved him and made plans for when he got better. Then Dad began to share what he had learned in Bible study, just that morning. He had a new approach to helping young couples grow in their faith, he said. As he talked, words gradually got harder, his speech began to slur, and he couldn't quite put thoughts together.

I gently told him it was okay, that he could tell us later. He squeezed my hand, shook his head, gave a little half smile, and then slipped from consciousness. His final words were about the Scripture and the Savior he loved so well. He never once mentioned missing sleep.

**In loving memory of Neal D. Thomsen (1940-2023) ONE**

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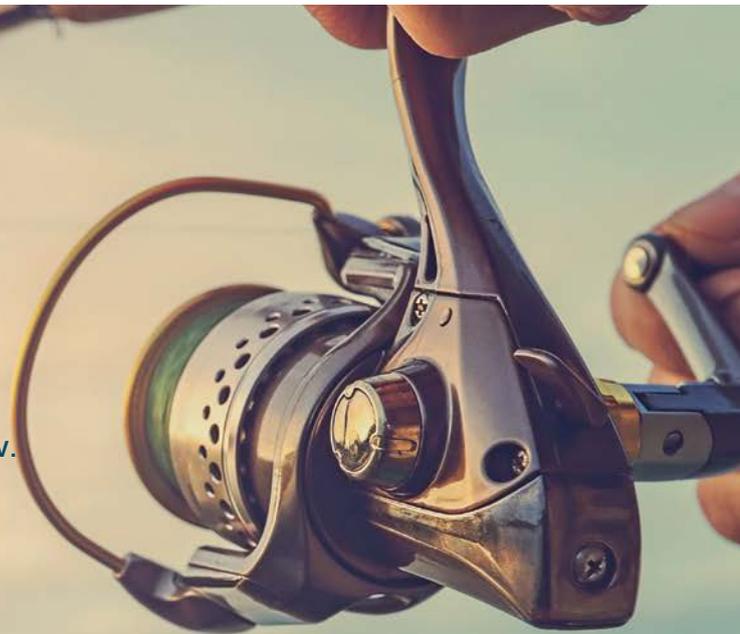
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# A BREAD & WATER Diet

BY BRENDA EVANS

At age 67, Lizzie Dickson was thrown into prison, put on a bread and water diet, and given a death sentence. Her “prison” that year of 1939 was bacterial meningitis.

Lizzie, my maternal grandmother, was legally known as Elizabeth Jane Matthews Hagewood Dickson. For long days she languished in her sick bed on a diet of “the bread of adversity and the water of affliction,” as Isaiah said (30:20). In 1939, bacterial meningitis was deadly. Few, if any, survived. Lizzie’s family doctor in the rural community of Neptune, Tennessee, was Dr. Cunningham, a blunt man with limited medication options. He did what he could and told the truth, whether you wanted to hear it or not. Lizzie would die. A sulfa drug or two were available, he said, but not for this disease. Opioids would blunt the pain but not cure. Penicillin was not released onto the U.S. pharmaceutical market until 1942. Meningitis would kill Lizzie. No medication in Dr. Cunningham’s leather satchel would stop it.

Bacterial meningitis is an infection of the *meninges*—the membrane covering and protecting the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms are severe headaches, high fever, and a painful and stiff neck with limited range of motion. It usually progresses quickly to confusion, bruising, rash all over the body, and severe seizures.

If Lizzie wanted to speak her last words, he told her she should do it immediately. So, before she worsened into unconsciousness and death, Mema—as we grandchildren called her—asked for a tablet and pencil and wrote a letter to her children. This is how she began:

*To My Children*

*October 11, 1939*

*I am going to take a trip in the Good Old Gospel Ship, sometime before too long. In the summer of 1886 (age 14) I was saved. It was at Old Hand's School House. Brother Binkley and Brother Hudgens was holding a meeting. I will never forget the place and the night the Dear Lord for Christ's sake pardoned my sins. It is as fresh on my mind as if it was yesterday. My life hasn't all been sunshine, but I never doubted my conversion at all.*

Fifty-three years had passed since that church meeting at Old Hand’s School House, when her sins were pardoned and she was converted. But Mema was right. Her life had not been all sunshine.



She and her first husband, Nicholas Paschall Hagewood, birthed five children, two of whom died in infancy. Then when Mema was 35, Nicholas was struck by lightning in his farm wagon and killed instantly, along with the team of mules pulling the wagon. Their eldest son, a teenager, and a farm helper riding with Nicholas were uninjured.

Lizzie had three living children at the time of Nicholas' death and another on the way. Four months later, a baby boy was born. She named him after his father, Nicholas Paschall Hagewood, or N.P. as her son was always known. After several years, Mema married again, this time to James Carney Dickson. They had two children, my mother Mary and my Uncle Jim. A dozen years later, when my mother was ten, James died of tuberculosis. Widowed a second time, yet unmarred by self-pity, Mema carried on, ran the farm, raised the children, and served the Lord.

No, not every day of Lizzie's life had been sunshine, but all were drenched in the grace of Jesus, as one writer said.

None of those days had been a bread-and-water death knell until 1939 and bacterial meningitis.

My mother remembered Mema's illness well, especially the letter Mema wrote. It was about 350 words, and Mother read it to me when I was a child. Halfway through, Mema wrote:

*I had the faith of the two blind men who cried out, saying, "Thou Son of David have mercy on us." So, he had mercy on me and by his help and my faith I was saved. I had a hard time raising my dear children but he never left nor forsaken me....I didn't know what to do and this passage of Scripture came to me that He had promised to be a husband to the widow and a Father to the orphan and I just trusted Him and He gave me faith and strength to work and raise them. I tried to raise them right so we will be an unbroken Family around His throne in Glory. I hope and pray my dear children will all meet me in Heaven where there will be no good by.*

Mema lay long languishing weeks near death, yet despite Dr. Cunningham's dire warning, she rose from her deathbed and lived again. Months passed before full recovery. My mother's most vivid comment about the recovery was that Mema "had forgotten how to walk." As Mother described the process, it was not weakness and debilitated muscles that prevented her from walking; Mema's brain had literally lost the muscle memory of *how* to walk.

In simple terms, *muscle memory* is a neurological process that allows us to perform certain motor skills without even thinking. Mema's neural pathways for walking had disappeared completely. But with a son on either side to hold her up, she began. "Mother," they said, "move your feet—one foot, other foot, one foot, other foot—left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot." Gradually, Mema rebuilt those neural pathways. As Mother said, "They taught her, held her up, and finally, she walked again." Mema lived to be 92, despite other periods of "the bread of adversity and the water of affliction" and dreary days with no sunshine.

Mema's bout with bacterial meningitis is one of many "back-yonder" stories about the faith, perseverance, and grace my family has experienced. Our oldest son Jeff knows many of these stories.



He labels them his godly heritage and often reminds me how grateful he is for God-fearing, God-living relatives who came before us.

What about our own “back-yonder” stories? We need to tell them, as both the Old Testament prophets and the psalmists remind us. Isaiah said a father makes the Lord’s *truth* known to his children (38:19). At least a dozen times in Deuteronomy, Moses told the people to *remember* and often he added *tell...teach...talk...write...* regarding what God had done for His people. Echoing Isaiah and Moses, Leroy Brownlow said in *A Psalm in My Heart*: “Handing down the praise of God from generation to generation is a sacred trust. ...a sacred charge...a divinely enforced duty.”

David, Asaph, and the other psalmists were big tellers of “back-yonder” stories. “I will remember...I will ponder your works of old. ...the years long ago,” they said. See Psalms 77 and 78 for examples of their stories.

These storytellers do not recount the past to revisit “the good old days” or to slide into nostalgia or sentimentality. They testify of the past to rewind, as a seamstress with a bobbin of new thread to sew a garment—to press on with

something new, something good, true, and holy. Telling “back-yonder” stories is like that, and to change metaphors from seamstress to farmer, it’s *not* like plowing a field while looking behind you. “Back-yonder” stories teach us how to *look ahead* like those behind us did, how to plow a straight row in new ground, how to press on, how to go forward with the Lord.

I love the follow-up Isaiah gives to the bread and water passage: “Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction...thine eyes shall see thy teachers. And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it...” (30:20-21). That’s what “back-yonder” stories do—both from Scripture and from our own lives. We must speak them, teach them, and write them so our own eyes, our children’s eyes, our grandchildren’s eyes, and our friends’ eyes can see and our ears can hear our Savior’s message: “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

Tell those stories! 

---

**About the Writer:** Brenda Evans lives and writes in Ashland, Kentucky. You may reach her at [beejayevans@windstream.net](mailto:beejayevans@windstream.net).

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# Targeted Lightning

BY PAUL V.

HARRISON

**“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25).**

Anne grew up in the prominent Kentucky home of her father George Kinkead, who, during his lawyer years, once successfully represented Abraham Lincoln. He eventually became a judge. Born in Lexington in 1852, Anne had 13 siblings. The Kinkead family attended First Presbyterian Church, and in her youth, Anne embraced the Christian faith.

Born a year earlier in Lexington, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield also grew up in a well-to-do family. They attended Second Presbyterian Church. He excelled in math and science and loved to collect butterflies and moths. On Sunday afternoons, he memorized Scripture. That and his regular training in the *Westminster Catechism* led to an early profession of faith. His godly mother openly expressed her hopes he might become a minister.

The Kinkeads and Warfields knew each other, both being influential families around town. Benjamin and Anne even struck up a friendship.

As a 16-year-old, the academically oriented Benjamin headed off to the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. Three years later, he graduated at the top of his class. At the urging of his father, he traveled abroad for graduate studies. In 1872, he decided to enter the ministry, surprising his family since he was known to be reticent. Back to Princeton he went, this time to seminary.

Upon graduation, and after resisting the advances of several churches, he connected again with Anne. August 3, 1876, the two became man and wife and set sail for a European honeymoon. Basking in the bliss of matrimony, the newlyweds sometimes walked in the verdant woodlands of the Harz Mountains in Germany. On one outing, lightning

crashed very near the couple and traumatized Anne. She was never the same again. Some claim she became an invalid, but the facts point toward her suffering from a debilitating nervous condition. The couple never had children.

B. B. Warfield took a professor’s job in Pennsylvania, and nine years later his *alma mater* came calling. The couple headed to New Jersey where he served as professor of theology for the next 33 years, eventually becoming known as “the Lion of Princeton.”

Warfield seldom traveled. Anne needed him—sometimes emotionally, sometimes physically. Friends reported he maintained set hours every day to read to his bride. He penned many articles and books and came to be recognized worldwide as a theologian. When out-of-town speaking engagements came calling, no matter the prestige they carried, he declined and stayed home. In one ten-year stretch, he ventured from Princeton only once and that to seek a remedy for Anne’s condition. Two hours was the usual limit he would be absent from her.

Romans 8:28 says “all things work together for good.” How would Warfield understand those words? We need not guess. In a sermon on that text, he stated: “There is nothing that can befall us which is undirected by Him; and nothing will befall those that love Him, therefore, which is not directed by Him to their good.” He added: “The fundamental thought is the universal government of God. All that comes to you is under His controlling hand.” **ONE**

**About the Columnist:** Paul V. Harrison has pastored Madison FWB Church in Madison, Alabama, since 2015. Previously, he pastored Cross Timbers FWB Church in Nashville, Tennessee, for 22 years. He was an adjunct professor at Welch College for 17 years, teaching church history and Greek. Paul is the creator of Classic Sermon Index, a subscription-based online index of over 66,000 sermons, with clients including Harvard, Baylor, and Vanderbilt, among others: [classicsermonindex.com](http://classicsermonindex.com).



HAND OVER  
YOUR  
MIRRORS!

BY RUTH MCDONALD

Exodus 30:17-21; 38:8

## We don't always like what we see in the mirror, but imagine how difficult life would be without it.

On a recent trip to Central Asia, I met a woman who had little. She lived in an abandoned gas station surrounded by dry and desolate dirt. She and her family lived in a building never meant to be inhabited, lacking electricity, running water, with only a primitive toilet. Yet I noticed she had hung a fragment of broken mirror on her adobe wall.

In the ancient world, most women never owned a mirror. Centuries before glass mirrors were invented, wealthy women in Turkey, Egypt, Japan, and China saw their reflections in ornately decorated mirrors of highly polished metals such as copper or bronze. Though not as efficient as glass mirrors, they gave at least a hazy reflection of the person peering into them. These mirrors were carried by women of means and were sometimes used in religious rituals. Often, ancient mirrors included engravings of gods or goddesses.

In Exodus 38:8 we find a fascinating verse, easily overlooked in daily Bible reading: *“And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the lookingglasses [mirrors] of the women assembling, which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”*

### Rags to Riches

After 430 years of slavery in Egypt, the Israelites had been delivered by God's miraculous hand. They experienced the miracles of the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. They ate manna and quail provided by God's hand in the wilderness and drank fresh water from a rock.

Moses received instructions from God Himself regarding how to build a tabernacle for worship. Bezalel, the “he” in Exodus 38:8, was appointed to oversee construction, carefully following all God's instructions.

To accomplish such a project, the people were called upon to make donations. But, after four centuries of slavery, they had little to offer in the way of money, jewelry, or finery...or did they?

In Exodus 12, before leaving Egypt, Moses instructed the women of Israel to borrow everything they could from their Egyptian mistresses. They asked for clothing and silver and gold jewelry. Because God had given the people

favor in the sight of the Egyptians, the Egyptians gave the Israelites what they asked.

This “plunder” came in handy when the tabernacle offering plate was later passed. The first rounds yielded gold and silver jewelry and expensive fabrics used to craft many of the tabernacle's components. In fact, Moses had to tell them to stop bringing in gold. They already had enough! The inventory of their offerings in Exodus 35:20-29 reminds me of the exhibit of Egyptian treasures from King Tut's tomb.

Perhaps more impressive than the monetary value of their offering, however, was the description of the hearts of the people. The passage said their hearts were *stirred, moved, and willing* to contribute their possessions, their skills, and their labor.

After more than four centuries of enslavement, deprivation, and hard labor, they finally came into possession of many beautiful, luxury items, yet they willingly gave up their newfound treasures to build a place of worship. Impressive.

### Women in Ministry

We return to the focus of Exodus 38:8: the mirrors of the ministering women. We can only speculate as to the identity of these “ministering women” and the nature of their service. This single obscure reference leaves many unanswered questions. What was the nature of their service?

The Hebrew verb used for *to minister* or *to perform tasks* is most often associated with military groupings. Perhaps this indicates the women were organized into shifts and their specific service was orderly and continuous. Though only speculation, it is possible that in this era before the formalization of priestly and Levitical functions, women played an assisting role in the tabernacle. It is also possible their service was more of a practical nature, maintaining supplies or cleaning. Some scholars speculate they aided in the preparation of food.

In the context of modern church culture, we tend to imagine them passing out bulletins or greeting those coming in the door, but this seems unlikely to be the nature of their

service. It is better to look at other Old Testament passages for hints of the kinds of service in which women were involved.

Perhaps Moses' sister Miriam gives us an idea. Just after the Israelites miraculously passed through the Red Sea, Exodus 15:20-21 records that Miriam (described as the prophetess, the sister of Aaron) took a tambourine in her hand and led the women in dancing and praising God. Maybe the women gathered at the entrance with their instruments, singing, dancing, and praising God—a kind of prelude to the worship to take place inside.

In truth, we simply do not know the type or extent of their ministry. We only know they were characterized by their consistent service at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

### A Sacrificial Spirit

Perhaps these women are included in Scripture not so much for the tasks they performed as for their spirit of sacrifice. Whatever the nature of their daily tasks at the tabernacle, the significant point is they donated their treasures for its construction.

When it came time to craft the bronze altar, Bezalel passed the plate again. This time, he asked for items of bronze. I like to picture each woman running her fingers over her treasured mirror with a sigh when the plea was made. Another round of sacrifice.

Was it difficult for these women to give up their fancy mirrors? After all, they'd already given up most of the luxury items they carried

from Egypt, and it seems they gave those items willingly.

They willingly used their skills and their time to weave beautiful linens and fabrics for the tabernacle.

As previous slaves, they undoubtedly enjoyed

their beautifully carved and polished mirrors. It must have felt good to see their reflections in the same way the wealthy ladies of Egypt had.

To give up their treasured possessions willingly required a generous heart of sacrifice. After all, they couldn't just go to T.J. Maxx and replace them. They had no hope of ever owning anything else so lovely and fine.

These women are exemplary for giving up their treasured possessions for the sake of the Lord's work. They gladly returned to being women without mirrors, underscoring the truth that their focus was not on themselves and their physical appearance but on their longing to worship God and praise Him in His dwelling place.

### Women Not Allowed

The sacrifice becomes even more impressive when we consider how their mirrors were used. The women themselves would never be allowed to use the bronze basin made from their mirrors. Though we read accounts of prophetesses and other women who ministered in God's house, Scripture leaves no doubt women were forbidden past the outer court of the tabernacle. These ministering women were only allowed at the entrance to the tent of meeting, while the bronze basin was located next to the altar, completely off limits to them. They would never use it themselves.

However, the bronze altar and basin were deeply significant symbols of blood atonement and purification, foreshadowing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. The priests offered a blood sacrifice at the bronze altar for the forgiveness of sins. As we know, this repetitive shedding of blood pointed to the once-and-for-all sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God.

Following the sacrifice, the priests proceeded to the bronze basin made from mirrors. There, they washed their hands and feet before entering the presence of God. They could not come before a holy God with impurity. This important ritual symbolized the ongoing sanctification of those forgiven, and God was very serious about it, stating they were to observe this ritual "that they may not die."

Although the women themselves never washed in the basin, they understood their sins also were forgiven through the sacrifices and ritual cleansing of the priests. Their fear of the Lord and belief in His commands moved them to give their precious items willingly for the making of

### What are your treasured possessions?

Wealthy or not, we all have them. What would you run back into your burning house to retrieve? Whether for sentimental or intrinsic value, we all have things we would be heartbroken to lose. If God required it of you as an act of worship, would you be willing to sacrifice that item for Him?

## Do you have a skill or talent you can offer to the Lord?

In Exodus 35, we read about “all the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill.” Take inventory of your talents and abilities and make them available to your church, local ministry, or community.

the tabernacle furnishings. They held a deep reverence and appreciation for the work the priests did on their behalf. They understood that, unlike physical cleansing, spiritual cleansing was only possible by what took place at the altar and in the Holy Place.

### All One in Christ

This obscure verse about the “ministering women” is so rich in meaning for us today. We can’t help but notice the contrast between the old and the new covenants. By the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross, the bronze altar became obsolete. By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we no longer ritualistically use holy water to purify ourselves from sin. And through His death and resurrection for all who believe, the thick curtain separating us from the

holiest part of the tabernacle has been torn apart.

In Galatians 3:28-29, we rejoice to read: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

As women under the new covenant, we need not stay “outside the gates,” longing to be allowed inside. We boldly enter the very throne room of our Maker, every bit as much “Abraham’s offspring” and “heirs according to the promise” as our brothers in Christ.

Though they lived and served millennia ago and in a completely different culture, our ancient Hebrew sisters still challenge us today. Their mention, though brief, speaks volumes to us about motives, selfless service, and stewardship of our possessions. How do we measure up to their example? **ONE**

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**About the Writer:** Ruth McDonald is executive director of WNAC. She and her husband Donnie served three decades as missionaries to Japan. Learn more: [www.wnac.org](http://www.wnac.org).

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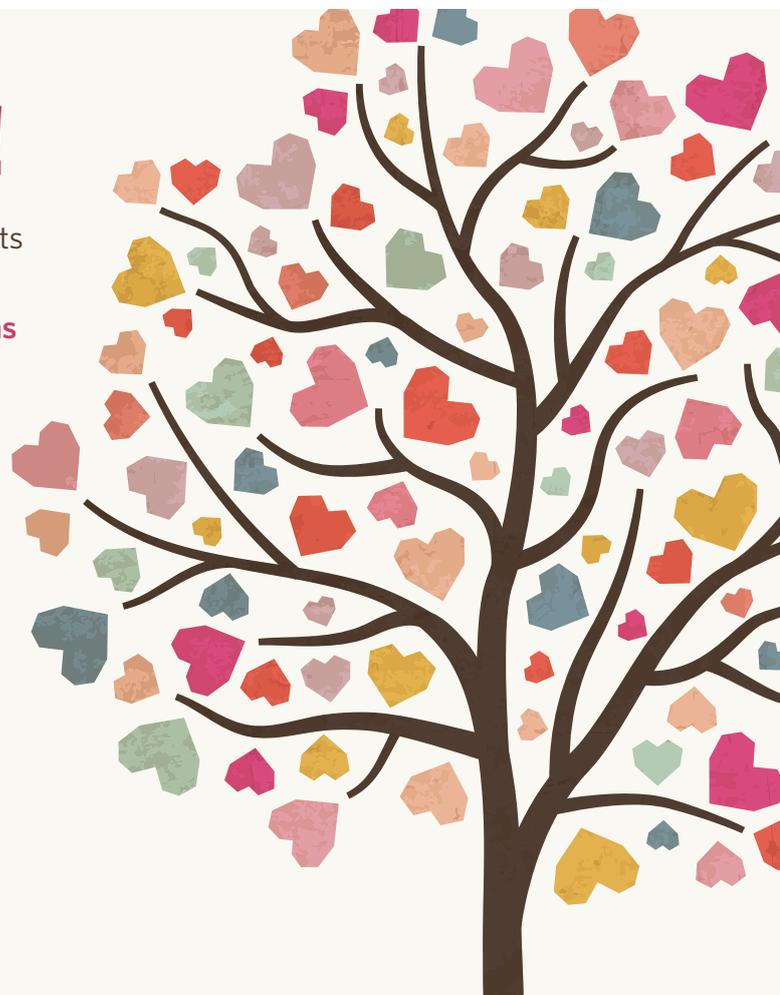
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# Procrastinating on Retirement \$AVINGS

BY CHRIS  
COMPTON

Procrastination is a common behavior. I have been guilty of it, and you probably have been, as well. I get a head start on some things and finish early; others I tend to put off until I must scramble to finish them quickly. Have you ever wondered why we do that?

Many psychological, emotional, and situational factors contribute to procrastination. Some factors include lack of motivation, fear of failure, low self-esteem, being overwhelmed, distraction, lack of consequences, and perfectionism. Whatever the reason, procrastination can impact many areas of life, including retirement savings.

Some put off saving because they don't have large amounts to contribute. They think, "This small amount is not going to make much difference, so I will just wait until I have more." The problem is, some people never get around to saving for retirement. So, should

we start saving if we only have a little to contribute?

Start saving for retirement even if you can only save a little at first. While it's ideal to save a substantial portion of your income for retirement, it's not always feasible, especially when just starting a career or facing financial constraints or debt. However, it is crucial to establish a habit of saving and to get into the mindset of saving for the future. Consider several reasons why it's important to begin saving for retirement:

- **The power of compounding:** The earlier you start saving, the more time your money can grow through compound interest. Small contributions made consistently over a long period add up significantly.
- **Good financial habits:** Starting to save, even limited amounts, helps you establish the habit of saving for the future. As your income grows, you can increase your contributions.



- **Tax advantages:** Some retirement savings accounts, like IRAs and 401(k)s, offer tax benefits. By contributing, you may become eligible for tax deductions or tax-free growth on your savings.
- **Employer matching:** If your employer offers a retirement savings plan with a matching contribution, you're essentially getting "free" money from your employer. Take full advantage of their generosity.
- **Flexibility later:** As your financial situation improves, increase your retirement savings contributions. Starting early with small amounts prepares you to adapt to your changing circumstances.

If you have limited savings potential, don't let that deter you from preparing for your financial future. Start right where you are. To make the most of limited savings:

- Set specific savings goals.
- Create a budget that includes a modest allocation for retirement savings.

- Automate your contributions through payroll deduction or bank draft.
- Reassess your budget and retirement goals as your income and financial situation evolve.

It's never too early to start saving for retirement! Even small contributions make a meaningful difference over time. The key is consistency. Even if you save only a small percentage of your income, the discipline of saving is invaluable. Over time, you can increase your contributions as your income and financial stability improve. Why not take the most important step and start? [ONE](#)

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**About the Writer:** Chris Compton is accounting administrator for the Board of Retirement. He graduated in 2007 with an M.A. in Bible exposition from Columbia International University. A 1998 graduate of East Tennessee State University, he has over 18 years of administrative and financial experience in varied fields, along with seven years in pastoral ministry.

# Build a legacy of faith & financial security.

As you build the foundation of your faith, it is also important to build a secure financial legacy for yourself, your family, and your future ministry. **Start building your retirement foundation today, to ensure your impact lasts for generations.**



[BoardofRetirement.com](http://BoardofRetirement.com)

# I NEED HOW

BY JOHN BRUMMITT

»»»»» \$555,000

The figure above is the minimum recommended amount for retirement savings, ten times the U.S. median income. Most people are shocked to learn that number. Worst of all, only 12% of retirees have saved this much, according to a recent survey by Clever. The survey also found 37% of retirees have no retirement savings. The average retirement savings for a retiree is around \$170,000, far below the minimum recommended amount.

Why does such a low percentage of retirees make it to the minimum? Education and willpower. Often, people start their careers in their early 20s, and retirement is the furthest thing from their minds. When we start thinking about saving in our 30s, family, house, debt, and other life demands often supersede the need for retirement savings. This delay is the most significant detriment to your retirement savings. By age 35, it is recommended you have already saved one to two times your annual salary.

The power of compounding interest helps build your retirement nest egg. The “rule of 72” illustrates this concept well. The formula (72 divided by average earnings rate) can be applied to anything that compounds, allowing you to calculate how long it will take for your money to double. For example, if the average stock market return is 7.2%, plug it into the formula ( $72 \div 7.2 \times 10$  years), and you can see how long your account will take to double with earnings alone. So, with a 7.2% average return, your



# MUCH?

single annual income becomes two times your annual income in ten years, even without additional contributions. The two times becomes four times in another ten years if your average return remains steady.

However, it is rare for Americans to set aside the proper amount of money for retirement early in their careers. It is not possible for us to save enough from our current income later in our working years to reach the minimum—not to mention the retirement contribution limits from the IRS. The later you start saving for retirement, the harder it is to make up the difference.

Since contributions are limited, we try to let investments compensate for lost time. That requires us to take more risk in our portfolios to gain higher rates of return. This strategy can be detrimental since risky assets in your portfolio can cause damage if the volatility overwhelms the return in the short term.

So, be smart! Start saving 10-15% of your annual income during your 20s to start down the path to meeting your retirement target without additional stress or worry. During those first ten years of your career, you could save close to your annual salary with contributions alone. Earnings put you that much further ahead and help to make up the difference in your current salary versus your starting salary in your career. Earnings also help keep up with inflation in our daily cost of living.

If you didn't start saving at the 10-15% mark in your 20s, don't lose heart. Start as soon as possible to get closer to the number you need in retirement. In 2023, the IRS increased contribution limits to \$22,500 for employee contributions (funds held from your paycheck). Individuals over 50 also can contribute an extra \$7,500 annually to their retirement accounts. (These limits apply to 403(b) plans like the one at the Board of Retirement as well as 401(k) accounts). Also, your employer is allowed to contribute on your behalf as well. You can potentially max out total contributions to your retirement account at \$66,000 (\$73,500 after age 50).

The average American retiree will live in retirement for roughly 30 years. Ensuring you have enough savings to make quality of life sustainable and enjoyable requires hard work and discipline during your working years. The earlier you start, the lighter the workload will be. Staying consistent with contributions and allowing investments to compound over an extended period also provides you with resources for the future.

Knowing the target helps you shoot for your financial goals. That's why it's important for young people to know from the outset they will need ten times their annual salary for retirement. When they know how much they need, they can more easily do something about it. 

**About the Writer:** John Brummitt became director of the Board of Retirement in January 2016. He graduated in 2011 with an MBA from Tennessee Tech University. A 2004 graduate of Welch College, he has been with the Board of Retirement since spring 2006. Learn more about retirement options: [www.BoardofRetirement.com](http://www.BoardofRetirement.com).



# Do No Harm,

BY SARAH J. BRACEY

As Christians, we are called to help others (Galatians 6, Matthew 25, 1 John 3, etc.). But, in helping others, we all need to ask ourselves: is our help *really* helping the person? Is it potentially hurting? What help does God want me to provide this person in this situation?

If you've ever tried to help an addict, you may have come across the concept of *enabling*. Enabling has many different definitions, but I believe it can be boiled down to the concept of helping versus harming.

I have an addict in my family. When we finally got her in to see a doctor, he informed the family, "Your help is not helping her. What you've been doing is making her problem worse. You need to help her in a different way."

We were shocked to hear our effort to help was causing harm.

## UNHELPFUL HELPERS

As Christians, we can learn from the examples in Scripture where help was not very helpful. Perhaps no better example exists than the "comforters" in the book of Job.

In chapter 2, we read of the arrival of Job's friends, and, from chapters 4–32, we find a series of speeches between Job and his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These men were convinced Job had committed some terrible sin against God that had brought such suffering upon himself.

As humans, we are prone to sin, which means our thinking is prone to corruption. One faulty way of thinking is belief in the just world fallacy. It's exactly like it sounds: we believe the world is just, a system of cause and effect, crime and punishment, virtue and rewards.

Unfortunately, this is not how the world really works. In the real (and sinful) world, harm comes to good people, and evil acts are sometimes rewarded. Belief in a just

world eventually lends itself to things like superstition, notions of *karma*, and blaming the victim. This was exactly the type of faulty thinking to which Job's friends fell prey in their speeches.

They essentially told Job: if people experience a blessing, it must be a reward for their goodness. If they experience suffering, it must be punishment for their sin. To them, clearly, Job had offended God in some way, and he was being punished.

However, God didn't allow Job's testing and trials because Job had sinned, but because he was just and upright. Therefore, it was wrong to call his suffering the judgment of God. Certainly, we find examples in Scripture where individuals suffered in direct correlation to their disobedience to God. However, we must resist the tendency to assume people's sufferings are deserved. Even when such assumptions are justified, Christ showed us this should not prevent loving, caring for, and helping them.

How many hurting people have been harmed by this just world fallacy? How many times have we fallen prey to this

**A word fitly spoken  
is like apples of gold  
in pictures of silver.**

**Proverbs 25:11**





type of thinking ourselves? If we are to comfort others, we must watch what we say and remind ourselves of James 3:8: “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” and Proverbs 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

### THE RIGHT KIND OF HELP

We eventually find those words aptly spoken in the book of Job. A mysterious third party appears, and Elihu addressed Job’s lament. Job claimed God had been silent through all his lament and grief. In response, Elihu pointed out God speaks to us, but we often aren’t listening, or perhaps we aren’t aware of it. Sometimes, God speaks through our own conscience, but He also speaks through our pain. Elihu also described a merciful mediator who ransoms us from the pit. In other words, God communicates to us especially in our suffering, and He wants to save us.

Elihu explained to Job in chapter 36 that when righteous people like Job are afflicted, God desires to restore them. God speaks to us through our suffering. Elihu concluded: “If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures” (verse 11). Later, Job’s story ends with even greater happiness and flourishing than the torment and pain he had endured.

Elihu also warned Job that those who do not listen “shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge” (verse 12). What knowledge was Elihu describing? The knowledge and wisdom God teaches us through suffering.

God is trying to tell us something. Does this mean suffering is good? Should we just let others suffer? Should we not care if our helping is harming because it may lead to a better relationship with God?

Of course, we don’t want to wish harm or suffering onto someone else! Too much suffering can have the opposite effect. Elihu cautioned Job some will listen and serve God, but others will come to a terrible end. You may encounter those whose suffering was not alleviated before trauma occurred. Or, those who blame God for their suffering, and therefore want nothing to do with Him. Or those who, in efforts to cope with their suffering, have turned to alcohol or substance abuse.

Suffering *can* lead to sin, which is a reason we need to take the suffering of others seriously. We need to be like Elihu, who came alongside Job and was respectful but

loving in his admonition. Elihu didn’t give Job platitudes and say “Hey, everything’s going to be alright.” He focused Job’s attention away from himself and toward God: “O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God” (37:14).

One practical way you can do this for someone hurting is to ask, “Have you spoken with God about what you are going through?” or “Have you sought God’s face in this matter?” You will be surprised by how many say *no*. Or that their prayer sounds much like Job’s early speeches.

Offer to pray right then and there, and pray like Elihu. Offer a lamentation that focuses on God and His wondrous works. Sure, you can take her out for coffee, or you can be the safe place for him to vent. But we must point our hurting brothers and sisters to the ultimate Healer; He is the One who can truly relieve their suffering.

Asking for help when you’re hurting can be difficult. So, when someone is willing to let you in on personal suffering, honor their confidence in you. Avoid repeating their problems and failures to others or falling prone to the sin of gossip (one of the biggest reasons some Christians don’t talk about their sin and suffering). Once you get a reputation for gossip, it is very difficult to earn trust back from people in your life.

Finally, most people aren’t mean; they truly mean well. I would guess that less than 5% would intentionally respond to a heartbroken story in a hurtful way. You will notice I used the word *intentionally*. Your co-workers, friends, family members, and even your spouse may say something that will hurt you when you are in a difficult time. Why? They don’t mean to. They are fallen just like the rest of us and do not always see things the way we see them. Also, most people aren’t trained in how to handle suffering or grief. It makes them uncomfortable, and they say the wrong things. Even with years of training, some of us still say the wrong things.

But don’t let the 5% keep you from missing out on the 95% of people who can help you, support you, and care for you. Sure, they might occasionally make a remark that hurts, but they don’t know what they are saying. They aren’t mean; they mean well.

And, together, let’s continue to strive, as the Body of Christ, to help others rather than harm. **ONE**

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**About the Writer:** Sarah Bracey is chair of the psychology program at Welch College. Learn more: [www.welchcollege.edu](http://www.welchcollege.edu).

**BAND OF**

# HEROES

BY DEREK ALTOM

When I close my eyes, I can picture myself sitting in my grandparents' living room. They had the ugliest carpet I have ever seen. I remember staying over at their house on occasional Saturday nights. Grandma would make popcorn on the stove in an old kettle, and my grandparents and I would watch *Walker, Texas Ranger*.

The plot of every episode was the same. A wicked criminal would break the law. Walker and his band of rangers would investigate the crime, prove who did it, track down the suspect, and apprehend him or her. One thing was always clear: the more wicked the criminal, the greater the heroes needed.

In a world where most students exit the church after graduation, it is evident we are dealing with a wicked enemy, one whose main goal is to “steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (John 10:10). He is on a crime spree to get students to question their faith and doubt the reliability of Scripture. Much like his encounter with Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), our enemy is planting seeds of doubt in the minds of our young people, hoping they will question the Word of God and abandon their faith. In the words of Apostle Peter, our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). To be clear, Satan and his forces will always be on the attack until defeated once and for all by the Lord Jesus Christ. However, if believers continue to sit back and do nothing while Satan and his forces are on



the offensive, the casualties will only increase. We face a wicked enemy, and a band of heroes are needed to thwart his tactics and save the day.

As believers, we must mentor, train, and guide the next generation of leaders. This endeavor involves investing in opportunities that help students *discover their talents, develop their leadership, and dedicate their hearts to faithful service to God*. This is the mission of Vertical Three, a ministry of D6 Family Ministry. Vertical Three includes programs such as the Youth Evangelistic Team (YET), Truth & Peace Student Leadership Conference, and CTS Ministry Expo. All three programs contain components to equip students to trust the Lord, trust His Word, and strengthen their faith.

Faithful financial giving from individuals, churches, and organizations enables these ministries to continue and thrive. Giving enables the next generation of leaders to receive necessary training to assist in placing their faith on a solid foundation that will endure the attacks of the enemy.

Satan and his forces are attacking the next generation. This is not a matter of *if* but *when*. The mission of equip-



For more information about how you can be involved, please visit [D6Hero.com](http://D6Hero.com).

ping the next generation is a task bigger than any one hero can handle. It is a task requiring all to fulfill their roles and do their parts. Are you fulfilling your role and doing your part? Are you investing in the next generation? Are you willing to join the ranks of heroes who make ministries like YET, Truth & Peace, and CTS Ministry Expo possible?

Much like those old episodes of *Walker, Texas Ranger*, a wicked criminal is on the loose. He is on a crime wave to attack the faith and ultimately ruin lives. It is time to band together as heroes and protect the next generation of leaders. Will you join the ranks? [ONE](#)

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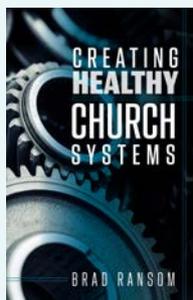
**About the Writer:** Derek Altom is the director of events and development for D6 Family Ministry. Reach Derek at [derek.altom@d6family.com](mailto:derek.altom@d6family.com).

## NEW RELEASES

### **Creating Healthy Church Systems**

by Brad Ransom, D.Min.

*Creating Healthy Church Systems* challenges pastors to examine the health of their churches. This work aims to equip church leaders to implement eight essential systems every church needs to be healthy and how to build and implement those systems in your church.



### **Disciplemaking With Guys**

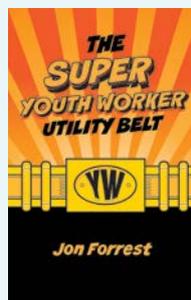
by Jonathan Denton, Ph.D.

*Disciplemaking With Guys* arms readers with research and discipleship strategies to disciple guys of all ages. Denton empowers readers with a solid understanding of how to disciple guys based on their development, drawing from scriptural examples and his own practical experience.

### **First Aid for Your Emotional Hurts: Anxiety**

by Edward E. Moody, Ph.D.

Dr. Moody walks readers through biblical approaches to defeat anxiety. These biblical examples remind us we are not alone in our journey, and the practical exercises provide actions to take to help us grow and achieve victory over crippling anxiety.



### **The Super Youth Worker Utility Belt**

by Jon Forrest

*The Super Youth Worker Utility Belt* has everything from fun games to lessons with depth. Find practical and versatile ideas to use in weekly preparation or when you find yourself with a last-minute teaching opportunity. No Internet connection necessary.

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# RESOURCES A MISSIONARY MUST MANAGE

INVESTING IN ETERNAL BENEFITS

BY KRISTI JOHNSON

I am not an expert in stocks, bonds, and money markets, but I do know a little about investing in the lives of people for eternal benefits.

During the time my husband and I served as missionaries with IM, more than 450 individuals, churches, or associations supported our ministry, giving over \$2.6 million for ministry. That's a LOT of investing! While I experienced the joy of receiving their investment, I also understood the responsibility of making sure those resources were wisely managed.

Here are six things I learned:

## 1. RELATIONSHIPS MISSIONARIES BUILD ARE VALUABLE RESOURCES.

Having a teammate on the field who pushes you toward success and cheers for you when you need it most is a rare commodity. Many times, I struggled with feeling inadequate or thought I'd totally failed at teaching a Bible study. Fellow missionary Lea Edgmon didn't let me stay in those valleys. She always had an encouraging word to remind me she was on my side. Those late-night texts often kept me going when I wanted to give up.

When God allows a similar relationship to form between a missionary and a national believer, it can be even more beautiful. Friendships created in day-to-day life make the most valuable bonds.



*Pray for relationships built on our mission fields, for missionaries to find lasting and sustainable friendships that will give God the ultimate glory.*

## 2. TIME IS NOT A RENEWABLE RESOURCE.

The 24 hours in a missionary's day are a non-renewable resource. Once spent, they can never be used again. Missionaries must prioritize every precious minute they are given.

Many missionaries work in places where survival itself takes much energy. I think of Eddy and Amanda Simmons in a remote area of Kenya. Their solar-powered oven takes all day to roast a chicken or prepare a stew. They probably use their meal preparation time very differently than Joni Hubbard in fast-paced Tokyo, Japan. She can run to the grocery store, buy daily groceries, and cook them in her modern kitchen. But traffic jams or following the Japanese custom of stopping to speak to a neighbor as she returns home may eat up Joni's time. While both the Simmons and Joni have the same number of minutes per day, the way they manage those minutes can be a challenge.



*Pray for missionaries to use their time wisely as they live out their faith in challenging daily life situations.*

### 3. INFLUENCING OTHERS FOR THE CAUSE OF MISSIONS IS A GREAT CATALYST FOR SHAPING THE FUTURE.

What a blessing to learn about missionaries' lives as they post on social media about their daily tasks, their favorite foods, and their ministry activities. We know Matt Price in France loves being with international students and often shows meals they eat together. Miriam Bishop in Japan is great at giving us a sneak peek into her family's daily life and responsibilities. Both Matt and Miriam (and many others) host short-term groups like ETEAM and CMP. They're personally taking part in raising up future generations of "Matts" and "Miriams" who will one day fill our mission fields. Their influence on social media and in real-life situations is changing the future of missions one post, one meal, and one "like" at a time.



*Pray for missionaries who host short-term groups. Ask God to use their efforts to lead more people to the mission field.*

### 4. DIVERSIFICATION SOMETIMES MEANS RISK.

Diversification involves risk, and moving into a new culture is risky. "Will I know which bus to take?" "What if my clothes don't look like everyone else's?" "How will I ever learn the language?"

It's also risky when missionaries diversify their efforts, seeking to create ministries with various types of people. Some will accept the gospel easily, and some will reject it. Each seed planted needs managing, and each gospel "touch" is an investment in people who need to know Christ.



*Pray for missionaries as they take risks to plant gospel seeds in the people they encounter each day.*

### 5. MODELING LEADERSHIP TO A NEW CHURCH PLANT CAN BE HARD WORK.

"The fruit of your own hard work is the sweetest." (Deepika Padukone)

From that cool, February morning when the Alpedrete

Church in Spain first gathered in a gospel-preaching church until today, missionaries have invested in leaders. We faced difficult moments, and the work was hard. Sometimes leaders stumbled, and some even chose to leave the ministry. But each time a new leader steps into the pulpit, prepares the music ministry, or teaches a devotion, the sweetness of the fruit of that hard work is tasted.



*Pray missionaries will embrace the difficult work of developing competent leaders to continue the ministry long after they are gone from the field.*

### 6. THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, ALONG WITH EVERYTHING IN IT.

While money isn't the only resource missionaries must manage, it's an important one. Every year, our IM missionaries make strategic plans, including budgeting transportation costs, ministry funds, evangelistic materials, and more. They factor in fluctuating exchange rates, cost of living increases, and the realization some of their support will likely dwindle or drop off. These are stressful moments for missionaries, especially when faced with a deficit account that may require them to leave their on-field investment to return to the States for extra fundraising.

Missionaries are charged with investing the money placed in their hands—remember, it's not THEIRS, but the Lord's—and using it for His glory.



*Pray for missionaries as they stretch their dollars (and other currencies) to cover vital ministry expenses.*

The eternal benefits of ministry far outweigh the temporal ones of retirement accounts or 401(k) plans. We will only see them when we reach Heaven and are greeted by those who watched as missionaries around the world stewarded their relationships, time, influence, risks, leadership skills, and money. That "great cloud of witnesses" will be even greater because of missionary investments. **ONE**

**About the Writer:** Kristi Johnson serves as the development communications manager at IM, Inc., where she loves getting to help missionaries tell their stories in creative ways. Learn more: [www.iminc.org](http://www.iminc.org).

**IN SEVERAL CHURCHES**

**CIRCLING  
THE  
SPLIT**

**BY DENNIS  
TEAGUE**

# IN FRANCE, WE ARE LIVING EXTRAORDINARY DAYS.

We are seeing things some have never seen. For others, it has been years since we have seen them. Before I describe what God is doing now, we need to look back. These days are built on the labor invested by missionaries and French workers throughout the years.

For decades, France was known as the “graveyard of missionaries.” Yes, we as Free Will Baptists have seen our share of injured warriors. In almost 60 years of work in France, many missionaries left for reasons varying from family needs to health issues. Yet, before they left, they made an impact and laid the foundation of faithfulness upon which we build today. As a result, the Lord of the harvest continues to build His Church in France.

## CIRCLING THE CITY

Several years ago, the Lord gave some of us an awareness of a coming harvest in France. We began to share this awareness, both in France and the U.S. Often, we used the taking of the city of Jericho to illustrate what we believed the Lord was doing. We thought perhaps we were on our second or third day of circling the city. “Maybe it will happen within a few years,” we said hopefully. “Maybe, we are on our fourth or fifth day.”

Then, just a few years ago, we began to sense the sixth day was at hand, that the seventh was coming. This conviction kept us going, even through the COVID catastrophe.

Suddenly, we find ourselves with new personnel. Missionary kids married French ladies and joined the ranks. An American man married a French lady; they engaged in the battle. Our first French national missionaries entered the fray. A single young man enlisted with the team in the south as a career worker. Additionally, we added two new interns on the field and another on the way.

Until the arrival of Joel and Lydie Teague, Matt and Christina Price were our most recent reinforcements, a total of 17 years without new recruits! Suddenly, all these young, new warriors are arriving on the field of battle. How our hearts rejoice!

Oh, there are challenges. The enemy is raising his head, but it is so good to see our Father building our team for the seventh turn of the seventh day. What a shout that will be! Already, we feel the ground shaking. Cracks are appearing in those thick, massive walls. Is it possible the

Lord of the harvest is preparing the people of France, and us, for such a time as this? Is it possible the walls are coming down? Some of us believe so. Let me tell you why.

## CRUMBLING WALLS

About two years ago, a young lady with a baby in her arms walked through the doors of our church in St. Nazaire. Her mother walked beside her. The following Sunday they returned. This time, they brought her stepfather. After church, this middle-aged man asked if he could speak to Matt and me. Of course, we agreed. The first thing he said was, “I am an atheist, but I might want to get baptized.”

What do you do with that? You love him and all the family around him. To make a long story short, today that former atheist, his wife, his stepdaughter, and her husband are all baptized\* believers. Have there been struggles? Are there struggles still today? Oh yes! But it is wonderful to see the “amazing grace” of the Lord at work in this family. Even they are in awe of the changes He has made in their lives. Broken family relationships are being restored. Their marriages are stronger. And it goes on and on.

A young couple walked into our St. Sébastien church one Sunday. Seeking something, but not sure what, they thought they might find answers in this little church. After several conversations, Myriam and David began Bible studies with them. A few weeks ago, the young man was baptized. They continue to participate and are growing in the Lord.

This past weekend at Mosaïque, the new church plant led by Lydie and Joel Teague, was a special weekend with another to follow in a few weeks. What made it so special? In France, we take every opportunity to announce the gospel—including baptisms. We don’t have baptistries, so we use the ocean, swimming pools, or a portable baptistry like those often used by military chaplains. But whatever or wherever, we encourage those being baptized to invite their family and friends to come. And they do.

This past Saturday at 11:00 a.m., a young couple from Mosaïque was baptized in their front yard. What? Yeah, we set up a couple of big tents with the portable baptistry up front and had church right in their yard. Joel shared a good explanation of who we are and why we baptize people who previously had been baptized as babies. After the

service, as good Free Will Baptists, we ate lunch. Of course, we do it the French way. For some of us, it lasted four hours; but for family and friends, who knows what time they left. It was wonderful to see so many people asking questions about the gospel, so many believers sharing their faith. Over 60 of us filled the yard, including children. Only a third of those were from our church. The rest were family and friends with almost no knowledge of the gospel.

Yesterday, at St. Nazaire, I talked to a lady for the first time. She had attended three Sundays in a row, but this was the first time I had an opportunity to talk with her. She told me how much she enjoyed coming to our church. She went on to share a story we often hear these days. She is Catholic and sometimes attends a Catholic church. For some time, she has been dissatisfied, sensing the need for something more. She came to our church after a church member's invitation. She thinks she has found what she was looking for, what was missing in her life.

One Sunday morning at St. Nazaire, a young couple entered the church. We greeted them and noticed the young lady sang easily during the worship service. However, the young man was not at ease. After a few weeks, we began to unravel their story. The young lady was from an evangelical church in eastern France. She moved to the area to live with her boyfriend at St. Nazaire. As a Christian, she knew she was living in sin. Her boyfriend, however, was an atheist with little interest in the gospel. To be with this lady, he conceded to attend church with her. Again, through many difficult times, things dramatically changed for these two and all those around them. They no longer live together. This sister is now a member of the church, involved in the worship team and other ministries. My brother—yes, the former atheist—is now baptized and following the Lord. Through many ups and deep downs, the Lord proves He is still alive and well in their lives as they continue to grow in Him. Oh, how God is patient and faithful!

Bear with me as I give you just one more example of why we believe the walls are coming down. A man in his mid-30s walked into the church at Mosaique. Friendly, he smiled a lot, visited, asked questions, and took some books to read. He and his girlfriend both were seeking answers to their questions. After a few months, they returned. Now attending regularly, this couple often brings friends. He has so many questions but is finding answers that sat-

## IS IT POSSIBLE THE LORD OF THE HARVEST IS PREPARING THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE, AND US, FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?

### IS IT POSSIBLE THE WALLS ARE COMING DOWN?

isfy his soul. In a couple of weeks, we will have his baptismal service on Friday night. He will invite his family and friends. Afterwards, we will hang around ready to have discussions which often open doors previously firmly shut.

I often say we have a highly developed strategy at the St. Nazaire church: we open the doors and let the Lord bring them in. It is so true. Many former missionaries would have loved to see what we are seeing today. They laid the foundation. Now, we have the privilege to watch the Lord build His Church on those foundations.

Yes, France has been known as the “graveyard of missionaries,” and many previous missionaries understand the truth of that statement. It is still a difficult place to minister. However, though the battle may be difficult, the Lord is bringing about changes in the French people and the French culture. He is preparing a time of harvest. I could tell you many more stories of the graciousness of God and how He is bringing people to Himself.

### A CALL TO ARMS

However, as Jesus Himself stated when He saw the crowd of lost people in front of Him, “the harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37). The need for the French to step up has never been more urgent. The time for French national missionaries to step forward has never been greater. We need many more like the Chereau family. We need many more sisters like Lydie and Myriam. The need for church planters has never been greater than it is today. Despite the recent additions of missionaries, many needs remain. The need for workers has never been greater.

It is time for His Church to be more present and visible than ever before. God has prepared. God is calling. Are we listening? 

*\*In France, missionaries complete four pre-baptism sessions with candidates to ensure a clear profession of faith and understanding of what baptism is and why it is for believers.*

---

**About the Writer:** Dennis Teague and his wife Carol have spent most of their lives serving in France. Entering the fight for the hearts of the French people in 1973, they have marched faithfully, preparing for the seventh day. Learn more: [www.iminc.org](http://www.iminc.org).

# Missionaries Appointed in December Board Meeting

**Antioch, Tennessee**—The IM board met December 5-6, 2023, to discuss budgets, strategy, and the future of IM. They expressed great joy over the way God is working around the world through IM’s ministries.

The board adopted a 2024 budget totaling \$16,446,087. “This budget total includes operational ministries, IMpact Projects, THP trips and projects, and Global Partnerships,” noted CFO Robert Conley.

“The board looked closely at resourcing for the General Fund,” stated General Director Clint Morgan, “and is making budgetary adjustments, as well. Yet, additional funding is needed to cover an ongoing General Fund shortfall.”

The board also interviewed and approved interns and career missionaries. Curt Holland, director of field personnel, works closely with candidates as they prepare to meet with the board. “IM is quickly approaching the mark of 50 new interns in the past six-plus years!” he stated enthusiastically. “We are happy to see the Lord use this current, unique group on three continents. Praise the Lord with us!”

**Sam and Lauren Riggs** completed their internship in Spain and were approved for career status. As they look toward their return to Spain, they are excited about the possibilities of working in their community to reach people for Christ.

**Madison Carnes**, a native of Wilson, North Carolina, is the fiancée of **Bradley Mercer**. Bradley began serving with IM at the University of Missouri in August 2023. The board approved her to join the work with international students in Columbia, Missouri, following their marriage in April.

**Dennis and Mary Heath** (Ardmore, Oklahoma) were approved to serve with the Bulgaria church-planting teams. The couple served previously as affiliate missionaries in Germany from 1988-1994.

**Alejandro and Breanna Johnson** will serve in Nantes, France, to help develop a theological training program. Alejandro grew up as an MK in Spain; Breanna is from Muscle Shoals, Alabama.



Back, left to right: Bradley Mercer, Madison Carnes, Alejandro and Breanna Johnson, Emily (Petty) Sakamoto, Sam Riggs, Osam Sakamoto, Lauren Riggs, Dennis and Mary Heath  
Front, left to right: Theo and Emilia Riggs



IM Board, left to right: Darren Walker, Dr. Cameron Lane, Casey Cariker, Jeff Nichols, Dr. Janice Banks, Rodney Yerby, Rick Cason, Mark Price, and Will Harmon

**Osam Sakamoto**, from Tokyo, Japan, was appointed as a missionary intern to continue serving in the Hope Alive church. (He has previously served as the associate pastor at Hope Alive.) He married IM intern **Emily Petty** December 15, 2023.

“Join us in praying for these newly appointed missionaries who will go into the world to share good tidings of great joy,” requested Don Matchett, director of church mobilization, “as well as for God to provide the needs of the General Fund.” **ONE**

# Cashes Obediently Follow God’s Direction

**Antioch, Tennessee**—Ken and Jayne Cash, IM missionaries to Bulgaria, submitted their resignation October 2023. After appointment as career missionaries in May 2020, they left their ministry in the States and followed God’s call to Bulgaria. They served faithfully alongside the Bulgaria team, completing each task given to them. They now feel God leading them back to the States for the next chapter of their lives. Ken and Jayne, once again, choose obedience to God’s direction for their lives.

Initially joining Jonathan and Amy Postlewaite in Pleven, the Cashes moved to Veliko Tarnovo and worked to establish a church plant.

Tim Awtrey, Bulgaria field team leader, says, “Just as Ken and Jayne were an encouragement to the people of North Carolina, so, too, have they been a blessing and encouragement to the Bulgaria team these past few years.” After

spending the summer in the States, they returned to find the small group of believers meeting, doing well, and planning for the future. They felt their task there was completed. “As we prayed, we felt the release to return to the States,” Jayne wrote. “We are saddened because we genuinely love Bulgaria. We do not have a plan, but God does. Pray for clear direction for our next steps.”



Ken and Jayne Cash

“Anyone who knows Ken and Jayne realizes obedience and evangelism are like oxygen and water for them,” stated Director of Field Personnel Curt Holland. “Whether in the United States or during their ministry with IM in Bulgaria, they always followed the leading of the Lord and sought to lead others to their Lord and Savior!” **ONE**



Bryson and Marla Foulks

# Foulks Changes Internship Plans

**Antioch, Tennessee**—Missionary intern Bryson Foulks married his long-time girlfriend Marla November 5, 2023. Initially appointed in December 2021, Bryson graduated from Welch College June 2022 with a B.S. in theological studies and exercise science. He will take a leave of absence from his ministry in France to provide time for their marriage to flourish and enable them to carefully evaluate their next steps.

“We congratulate Bryson and Marla on their marriage,” stated Director of Field Personnel Curt Holland, “and hope they will return to work with our IM family in the future.” **ONE**

**Japan**—While searching for housing for new team members at New Life Church in Hokkaido, Doug Bishop worked with Mr. S., a realtor. Mr. S. is now reading the Bible, and the Bishops gave him a copy of *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis as well. “Please pray God’s Word will not return void,” said Miriam.

**Cuba**—The La Lisa FWB Church organized a senior citizens retreat in early November 2023. Over 80 seniors attended the three-day event, and at least seven accepted Christ as Savior.

**Kenya**—Eddy and Amanda Simmons reported Pastor Francis baptized 12 Samburu people December 4.  
**Brazil**—Four people were baptized at Nova America Church in Campinas, Brazil, December 3.  
**India**—During October 2023, 130 believers followed the Lord in baptism in North India.  
**Pakistan**—Twelve people from two churches were baptized the weekend of November 12.  
**Brazil**—Pastor Alessandro Reis baptized seven people at First FWB Church Uberlândia in November.

**BAPTISMS!**  
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**March 31** • Jesus Died and Rose Again • Matthew 27:32–66; 28:1–15

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# TEARING DOWN IDOLS IN ARKANSAS?

BY HEATHER GONZALEZ

**“And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God: For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment” (2 Chronicles 14:2-4).**

As a child, my church family made Bible stories come to life for me.

With shock, I learned about Aaron, Moses’ own brother, making the golden calf. With a lump in my throat, I empathized with the three Hebrew boys’ dilemma of whether to bow to King Nebuchanezer’s golden statue or die. With regret, I pitied Samson as he tore down Dagon’s temple. With a sense of justice, I imagined the lives of the Egyptians as God sent plagues to show His power over Pharaoh and the false gods. With prayer, I learned about overseas missionaries living in villages, towns, and cities with idols of gold, silver, metal, and stone.

However, in all my years of Bible teaching, learning about missionaries, and listening to sermons, I never considered my own hometown could be harboring idols.

I know what you may be thinking. Yes, we all struggle to keep God first. We can all have “idols” or “high places” as Scripture states, creep into our lives. But I am not thinking about spiritual idols such as placing your personal dreams above God’s plans for your life. I am not speaking about pursuing wealth, conforming to the world to gain

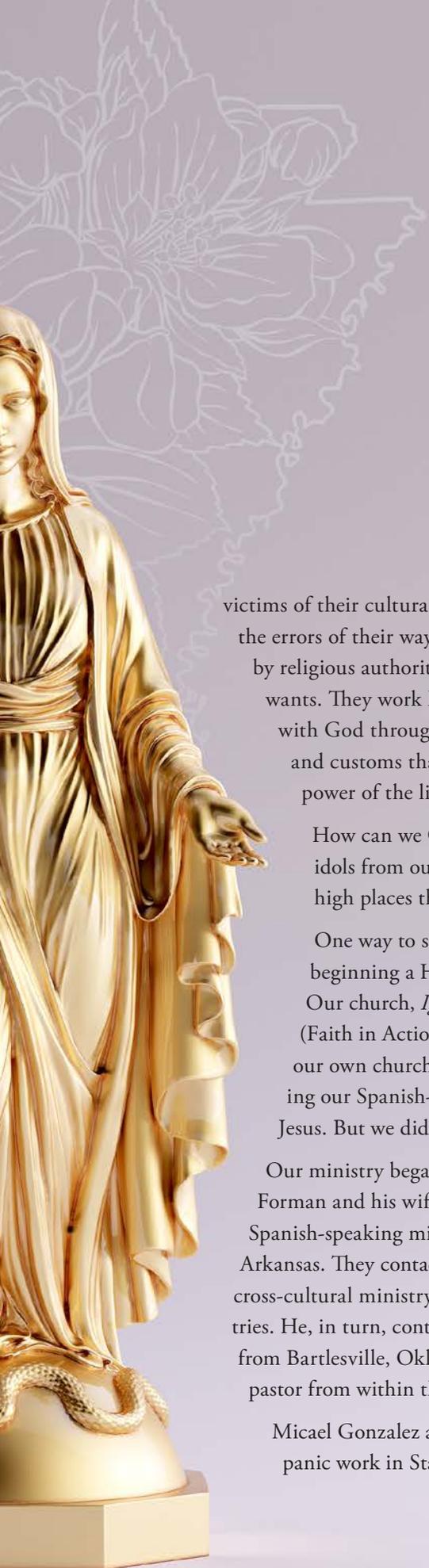
the favor of our friends or colleagues, or striving for the next promotion to gain a sense of self-worth. I am referring to actual idols made with human hands: statues made of gold, silver, glass, plastic, or any other material.

As a pastor’s wife, I now know false gods are present in my hometown. I have seen them with my own eyes and been in homes where they dwell. And, if my small town of two thousand people has graven images, I imagine your community has them as well.

The Roman Catholic church teaches followers to worship the saints, pray to them, and venerate their writings in ways that often conflict with biblical teaching. As a result, in countries where Catholicism is prevalent, many people have statues of saints in their homes. These statues are often surrounded by decorations, paper images, candles, or other items, effectively creating an altar to that saint. The inhabitants of the home then pray to that saint often. These altars may be dedicated to Mary, Peter, John, Paul, the Pope, or any other saint their community has deemed a benefactor.

Sadly, Catholic believers are not alone in this struggle. Numerous religions worship false gods. These precious people for whom Jesus gave His life are





victims of their cultural traditions. They do not know the errors of their ways, because they are taught by religious authorities they are doing what God wants. They work hard to gain righteousness with God through unbiblical, unfruitful rituals and customs that take the place of the true power of the living God in their lives.

How can we Christians, who have torn the idols from our hearts, help tear down the high places that threaten our communities?

One way to start is to prayerfully consider beginning a Hispanic ministry in your area. Our church, *Iglesia Cristiana Fe En Accion* (Faith in Action Christian Church) now has our own church building dedicated to teaching our Spanish-speaking neighbors about Jesus. But we did not start out this way.

Our ministry began in 2014 when Pastor Tim Forman and his wife Sandy felt a call to start a Spanish-speaking ministry in their town, Star City, Arkansas. They contacted Rick Bowling, head of cross-cultural ministry for North American Ministries. He, in turn, contacted Pastor Alfredo Botello from Bartlesville, Oklahoma, seeking a potential pastor from within the Bartlesville congregation.

Micael Gonzalez answered the call to start a Hispanic work in Star City. Pastor Tim's church,

First Free Will Baptist of Star City, volunteered their fellowship hall as a space where the Hispanic church could meet and helped Micael find work in the area. Micael and I met at First Church, and I joined the ministry as his wife in 2015. *Iglesia Cristiana Fe En Accion* became part of the Saline Association, the first Hispanic church to join a Free Will Baptist state association in Arkansas.

Before long, God began speaking to Micael about obtaining a separate church building in which to hold services. God chose a four-plus acre plot on the main highway just south of Star City for His new church. The land is located within two miles of most Hispanic people in the area. In 2020, the Arkansas State Mission Board met with Pastor Micael, and they began discussions concerning how the board could help us build a church. The mission board agreed to loan the church funds for five years until we could obtain traditional financing.

In 2021, the land was dedicated, and construction began in June 2022. At this time, Arkansas Free Will Baptist Women's Ministry chose our work for their state project, providing more funds for construction. The Arkansas State Association and Free Will Baptist Foundation also gave us generous grants. And, of course, several churches and individual brothers and sisters in Christ gave to the project.

Arkansas Missions Director Travis Alexander oversaw the church's construction. He coordinated several volunteer

groups to help, mostly Free Will Baptists from Arkansas and Oklahoma. Even some of the materials were donated, including the baptistry, carpet, chairs, and sound equipment. July 29, 2023, *Iglesia Cristiana Fe En Accion* held an inaugural service to celebrate all God had done and commit the new church to Him.

God has called English-speaking churches to either start or partner with Hispanic churches in eight additional Arkansas communities. Some Spanish-speaking churches have their own buildings. Others meet in English-speaking church facilities. All of God's churches are blessed as a result.

In Star City, we are excited to see how God will use our new church building to teach His Word. We know the Bible has the power to break down strongholds, including deep-set traditions of idolatry. We pray God will build

up generations of believers to continue to tear down the "high places."

We are blessed God saw fit to share this mission with *all* His Church. Our English- and Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters love the Lord and are not complacent concerning spreading the gospel to all nations—doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord.

I ask you to reflect on your own community and ask yourself, "Do the high places still exist where I live?" If so, what can you do about it?

**"Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 37:23). [ONE](#)**

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**About the Writer:** Heather Gonzalez has been married to Pastor Micael Gonzalez for eight years. Together, they serve the Spanish-speaking community in Star City, Arkansas, both at church and through their jobs in the public school system. They have two sons, Elias and Josiah. Contact them at [iglesiacristianafeenaccion2014@gmail.com](mailto:iglesiacristianafeenaccion2014@gmail.com).

# Chocolate, roses, dinner... **estate plan?**

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# Caleb Franks and Christopher Morris Join NAM as Associate Church Planters



Caleb Franks

North American Ministries is pleased to announce the approval of two new associate church planters: Caleb Franks and Christopher Morris.

**Caleb Franks** will serve alongside the Bennetts, the Suggs, and their team as the Next Gen Pastor at Awaken FWB Church in Tifton, Georgia. In this role,

Caleb will minister to teens and young adults while training under Awaken's leadership. Caleb interned with NAM last spring, graduated from Welch College with a pastoral ministry degree in May 2023, and served as a summer intern at Awaken Church before being invited to join their pastoral staff full-time.

**Christopher and Amber Morris** will serve as associate church planters with Terry and Tammy Miller in Colorado. Both grew up in Joelton, Tennessee. They have three children: Benjamin, Charlie, and Natalie. The Millers and Morrises are currently serving in two churches, Highland Hills FWB Church in Greeley, Colorado, and Waypoint FWB Church in Fort Collins, Colorado. Both cities are among the largest in the state, and spiritual needs are evident as 60%-70% of residents claim no religious affiliation at all.



Christopher & Amber Morris

Please pray for these new church planters as they follow God's leading into ministry. **ONE**

# FWBNAM Family Continues to Grow

Last year, North American Ministries welcomed several sweet additions to ministry families. Please pray for each

of these church planter families as they raise their children to love the Lord and follow Him all their days. **ONE**



**Eden Lynn Sherman**, October 7,  
Luke and Dalanee Sherman  
(Ardmore, OK)



**Elias John Phillips**, October 17,  
Brooks and Jennifer Phillips  
(Burlington, VT)



**Lucy James Smith**, October 25,  
Greg and Hailey Smith  
(Ypsilanti, MI)

# California Boot Camp a Success

The California Boot Camp on the Road was a major success! Over 15 churches were represented, and each participant received valuable coaching and practical teaching from speakers Eddie Moody, Brad Ransom, Sam McVay, and Ruth McDonald. Thanks to pastors Mark Harrison and Francisco Vazquez as well as the entire Bakersfield First FWB Church team for their hospitality.

Are you interested in attending future Boot Camp training? Make plans to join us at any of the 2024 Boot Camps

below. For more information, email [nam@nafwb.org](mailto:nam@nafwb.org).

**West Virginia:** March 15-16

**Kansas:** April 12-13

**Nashville, Tennessee:** May 6-7

**North Carolina, Blue Ridge Association:** August 2-3

**Michigan:** August 23-24

**Florida (Hispanic Boot Camp):** November 1-2 **ONE**



# Mission North America Offering

Thank you to every church, group, and individual who gave to the Mission North America Offering in November. Your generous support enables North American Ministries to continue serving church planters, chaplains, churches, and communities across the denomination, North America, and beyond. **ONE**



# Amory, Mississippi, Church Revitalization

In a unique opportunity, North American Ministries is working with veteran church planters Chad and Paula Kivette to lead a church revitalization work at First Free Will Baptist Church, Amory, Mississippi. The Kivettes have been church planters with FWBNAM since 2005, planting churches in Colorado and Tennessee.

As the Kivettes transition into this new role, Marcus and Tonya Stephens will assume the lead church planter position at 24/7 Church in Sevierville, Tennessee. The Stephens have served as associate church planters alongside the Kivettes at 24/7 Church since 2020. They are loved by the church and well-qualified to transition into this leadership role. Please pray God will be glorified through both ministries and both families as this transition takes place.



Chad & Paula Kivette

To learn more about the Kivettes' ministry in Amory or to partner with them financially, visit [www.fwbnam.com/kivette](http://www.fwbnam.com/kivette). **ONE**

# Considering

BY CH (MAJ) LEE FRYE

Billy Graham was asked why he chose to preach the gospel rather than following another career path. He responded, “The only answer I can give is that God called me to be an evangelist, and I could do nothing else but respond to His call.”

This was my own experience when God called me to be a preacher and pastor to soldiers and their families. I couldn’t resist His calling, and I knew this was the only way ahead for me and my family. We have now ministered in the military for 23-plus years. During that time, I’ve served as an enlisted U.S. Marine, as an Army National Guard chaplain, and presently as an active-duty U.S. Army chaplain. Daily, we continue to answer God’s call to serve and share the love of Jesus Christ with our nation’s finest men and women stationed around the world.

I am thankful God calls people to serve Him in specific ways, specific times, and specific places! He called biblical heroes like Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, and Paul, among many others, to accomplish His plans and fulfill His purposes.

Is God calling you to ministry? Perhaps He is calling you to serve Him through the chaplaincy. Are you ready to explore His plan for your life? I am thankful God calls us, He loves us, and we can trust His plan (Jeremiah 29:11). 

---

**About the Writer:** CH (MAJ) Lee Frye serves as a chaplain in the U.S. Army. He has a life-long record of faithful ministry as a service member and pastor. Lee and his wife Blair have two children, Hayden and Lily.

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Are you interested in becoming a Free Will Baptist military chaplain? Visit [www.fwbnam.com/chaplaincy](http://www.fwbnam.com/chaplaincy) to learn about current FWBNAM chaplains, view chaplaincy requirements, and request more information.



# WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

ANSWERING THE CALL OF DISASTER RESPONSE



BY KEN AKERS

The Bible tells us in Mark 13:8 there will be natural disasters in the end times. While I am not necessarily suggesting the end is near, we certainly know it is closer every day.

I jokingly tell people I'm the person they *don't* want to see, because, when Master's Men Disaster Response Teams show up and you see me, something bad has happened.

I won't go into detail again, as I've written about this many times before, but following Hurricane Katrina, I felt our denomination needed an entity to respond to natural disasters. I believed then—and believe even more strongly now—Master's Men was the right entity for this ministry.

We began with just an idea. Soon after, we purchased a work truck. Several people and churches donated tools and equipment. And so, Master's Men Disaster Response Teams began. Since 2005, we have served in 15 states and one foreign country.

Through your generous donations, we also have acquired much-needed equipment and organized Disaster Response Teams (DRT) in several states and regions. We currently have trailers with tools in seven states, with two trucks and a Bobcat skid steer on a trailer. Additionally, we have a Kubota side-by-side, a mobile command center hauler, and a motor home to house volunteers.

While it may sound like a great deal of equipment and tools (and, yes, we have been blessed), we need to continue to expand to better serve hurting communities.



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Team**

For more  
information about  
Master's Men DRT, visit  
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We are often asked what equipment is needed. Consider two important possibilities:

- **Generators** to help in areas affected by power outages. This is especially important because many elderly people have medical equipment run by electricity.
- An additional **skid steer**. Recently, during simultaneous disasters, we needed this important equipment in Florida and Tennessee at the same time.

We understand not everyone can afford to give money for large pieces of equipment, although some can. However, if several people, a church, or an association came together, perhaps we could meet this need.

We also need more volunteers. Though not everyone can participate as a DRT volunteer due to time constraints or physical ability, many can join a regional team or provide support and supplies to one. What is God asking you to

do? How are you stewarding your time, resources, and life to build His Kingdom and show His love? Consider how God is calling you to partner with Master's Men DRT and follow His leading...*before* disaster strikes. 

---

**About the Writer:** Ken Akers began working with Master's Men in 2000. In 2002, Ken became director of the department, and in 2015, Master's Men came under the umbrella of North American Ministries. Master's Men equips men to serve the Lord, their churches, their families, and one another.

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# Dealing With Difficult People

BY TIM YORK

It was the Monday following Easter. The meeting was not called by the pastor but by the deacon board on the pretense they just wanted to talk. When the pastor arrived, to his surprise more than the deacons were present. The meeting was an ambush. Troublemakers had made an alliance with the deacons to attack the pastor, and the assault was on. This is a classic example of dealing with difficult people.

When you hear the phrase “difficult people,” certain faces immediately come to mind: a deacon who uses his position for a power play, a treasurer who becomes gatekeeper rather than keeper of the gate, or an individual who always uses threats to get his or her way.

Our culture condemns bullying at school, in the neighborhood, and at work. Sometimes, it feels the only place bullies are allowed is at church. However, Scripture condemns bullying behavior, commanding unity in the Body of Christ characterized by kindness and forgiveness (Ephesians 4:1-32).

## **PASTORING DIFFICULT PEOPLE IS DRAINING AND DANGEROUS.**

The church boss or bully is often characterized by statements like, “I love *my* church!” or “*They* are saying....” These individuals often come to power during an unhealthy season in the church. Most start by volunteering to help, but once they achieve an authoritative position,

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

**ROMANS 16:17-18**

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

**EPHESIANS 4:31-32**

they become a problem, especially to anyone who might threaten their control.

Some church bullies take a passive-aggressive approach. If challenged about their attitudes or actions, they claim to be a victim or turn to gossip. They are always counting votes and preying on weak believers or the disconnected. Their best friends are those they can control. At the beginning of a new pastor's tenure, the bully/boss may become his first and best friend but quickly will turn against him the moment they disagree.

Instead of truly loving their church, what bullies really love is the control and power they hold in forcing others to do what they want. They simply ignore (or never acknowledge) they are wrong. While most church members don't attend church to fight and fuss, the bully/boss does. Troublemakers assume no one wants conflict, so they continue causing problems, believing victory will be theirs.

Many congregations respond to church bullies by appeasing the troublemakers, giving them a position and/or giving in to their wishes. These domineering personalities can often be found in charge of finances, programs, or boards and committees.

### **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE WITHIN THE CHURCH BODY?**

When the church in Rome went through a period of conflict, the Apostle Paul wrote the Roman thesis. The conclusion of this theological treasure chest has

direct application for dealing with difficult people in the church today.

In Romans 16:17-18, Paul described the "offenses" caused by those who spread disunity and false teaching in the church. The word *offenses* here means *to move the stick*. Like a stick in your path, these offenses create situations where one problem gets solved only to have another brought up right after, obstructing forward motion and tripping up progress.

This unspiritual and self-centered agenda will cause continual disruptions in the church and hinder the work of healthy spiritual leaders and pastors attempting to lead the body toward spiritual health and revitalization.

Paul instructed the church to *mark* those who cause doctrinal issues in the fellowship (Romans 16:17). The word *mark* means to put these individuals under watch. These people should be monitored closely by church leadership and held accountable for their sinful actions. Doctrine is never just philosophic or academic. Right doctrine must be practiced in our daily lives and relationships with others. Troublemakers who sow disunity in the church body are as much a doctrinal issue as false teachers.

### **AS WE DEAL WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH, WE MUST GUARD OURSELVES AGAINST BECOMING PART OF THE PROBLEM.**

In Galatians, Paul taught about the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit. Spiritual people have spiritual motives, while those living for the flesh only want to satisfy the flesh. The works of the flesh cause pain in the Body of Christ, but the Spirit brings love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, and temperance. As Christians, we should be known by the spiritual fruit we bear, not the fleshly fights we so easily get caught up in.

Guard yourselves, your ministries, and your heart against divisions within the body and commit to pursuing unity and peace as you work to fulfill God's calling. **ONE**

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**About the Columnist:** Dr. Tim York pastors The Grove Free Will Baptist Church in Smyrna, Tennessee. He is the moderator of the National Association of Free Will Baptists and president of Big Sandy Bible Institute. York is an adjunct professor at Randall University, Welch College, and Millard College. He and his wife Phyllis have three children and five grandchildren.



# BIBLICAL *Marriage*

BY PHILLIP T. MORGAN

“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:31-33).

Throughout history, Satan and sin have worked consistently to undermine the institution of marriage. As a gift of God, marriage provides us with healthy societies and reflects the nature of the Trinity and Christ’s love for His bride, the Church. For these reasons, we must maintain a robust defense of a biblical understanding of marriage.

## CIVIC MARRIAGE

The institution of marriage is a work of God’s common grace established by Him before man’s fall into sin. As a work of common grace, it is applicable to all men and women, not only Christians. Since the fall, marriage has worked throughout history, along with other common graces, to preserve individuals and communities from withering completely beneath the effects of sin.

In the Garden of Eden, God established the first marriage between Adam and Eve after dividing humanity into two distinct genders. As 17th-century Anglican priest and poet John Donne proclaimed, “Ever since, they are he and she, man and woman. They must be so much; he must be a man, she must be a woman; and they must be no more” than that.<sup>1</sup> They cannot be related to one another, they cannot be bound to any other person in marriage, and they cannot be of the same gender. God makes these limitations very clear throughout Scripture.

Through this mystical union of two people into one flesh—two households united into a new one—God works to preserve harmony and order in the world. Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper explained that the family is the foundation of good society. Its institution preceded both the state and the church.

The family is designed to be the social institution where individuals develop good character and civic courage necessary to serve as valuable members of their communities and remain independent of the state by holding firm to civil liberties. As Kuyper puts it, “marital happiness...constitutes the vigor of our national existence”<sup>2</sup> and elevates the cultural development of our communities.<sup>3</sup>

However, not all marriages are the same. Some so-called marriages are merely caricatures of the true institution: men and women who live together outside of the law;

1 John Donne, “Of Human Marriage and the Marriage of the Soul with Christ; A Wedding Sermon,” in *The Showing Forth of Christ: Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Edmund Fuller (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 90.

2 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace: God’s Gifts for a Fallen World*, vol. 3: The Practical Section, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and J. Daryl Charles, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas (Bellingham, WV: Lexham, 2020), 345.

3 Kuyper, 349.

married couples who bear no affection for one another or their children; and those who lightly and repeatedly divorce do not build “a true family life” but rather “only... work at its destruction.”<sup>4</sup>

While unbelievers and Christians alike can take part in these forms of marriage, Christians who truly follow Christ ought not to fall into a caricature of marriage. Of course, everyone will experience days when our affection for spouse and children is not as it should be, and on those occasions, we must repent.

A second type of marriage exhibits warm affection between spouses and careful attention to the raising of children. These families, whether Christian or not, spread harmony and peace in society.

## RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE

Religious marriage is the fullest form of marriage, exhibited only by Christians whose redemption provides them with God’s particular grace revealed through Scripture. A godly marriage exhibits love and attentive care for each family member. In addition, Abraham Kuyper explains, the “sweet savor [that] emanates from Christian faith” will permeate “all of family life” and bestow “a higher level of consecration upon all relationships within the family.”<sup>5</sup> In short, the Christian ethic guides our familial interactions with one another. In marriage, our spouses become our nearest neighbor, whom we love as ourselves. Beyond this selfless love, the Holy Ghost works in our interactions to assist us in building one another up in the Lord.

Within Christian marriage, our homes become small churches led by the head of the family, the husband. We read the Bible daily, pray together, and sing hymns. In this way, the Christian family “is the ‘family under the sign of the cross.’”<sup>6</sup> It does not replace the gathering of the church but rather prompts family units to seek the fellowship of a broader pool of believers in the local congregation.

The Christian husband and wife realize the union “of [their] two loving hearts” into one flesh is more than what

4 Kuyper, 351.

5 Kuyper, 369.

6 Kuyper, 372.

John Donne calls “love’s strong arts.”<sup>7</sup> As I have written elsewhere, it is, in fact, a type or picture of our union with Christ and the three-in-oneness of the Trinity.<sup>8</sup>

The nature of our relationship with Christ is also revealed in the structure of the marriage. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:33: “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.” The husband is the head of the home, but his headship, like Christ’s, is grounded in sacrificial love for his wife. Christ set aside His glory to be born as a man and then suffered the disgrace of the cross so we might enjoy the riches of His grace.

The husband has the same weighty calling toward his wife. But the husband, not being omniscient like Christ, often finds it difficult to know what is best for his beloved. John Donne referred to women as “mystic books” whose mysteries are revealed to their husbands as they study them over a lifetime.<sup>9</sup> Only then can a man love his wife as his own flesh, which Paul instructs here. To fail to love his wife sacrificially is not only harmful to the woman but even destroys the man.

Puritan theologian Paul Bayne explained, “In not loving [his wife], a man doth kindle such a discontent in himself, which like a gentle fire, doth dry his bones, which doth make him eat his own liver, and after a sort become his own hangman.”<sup>10</sup> More, a cold and tyrannical husband proclaims to the world a false teaching about Christ’s love for His bride.

For the wife, willing submission to her husband’s headship typifies for us the submission of the Church to Christ. Her faithful companionship and respectful support for her husband’s leadership was instituted at the first marriage before the fall. So, the Christian virtue of submission is not a response to sin but an intrinsic aspect of the marital relationship that brings order and harmony to the home and to society.

7 John Donne, “Epithalamions or Marriage Songs,” lines 223–25.

8 See Phillip T. Morgan, “This is A Mystery: Marriage, Sex, and the Trinity” *Helwys Society Forum* (February 15, 2015), Internet, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://www.helwysocietyforum.com/this-is-a-mystery-marriage-sex-and-the-trinity/>.

9 John Donne, “Elegy 19: To His Mistress Going to Bed,” lines 41–43.

10 Paul Bayne, *Puritan Commentary on Ephesians: Volume 2, Chapter 2:11-6:18* (1866; repr., Wilmington, DE: Sovereign Grace, 1959), 522.

Expanding on this thought, in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul explained the submission of the wife to the husband is directly connected to the man’s submission to Christ, and even Christ’s submission to the Father. Thus, it is part of a cosmic chain of order and harmony Paul mysteriously describes as benefiting the angels (11:10).

Thus, if the husband defaults on his leadership, or the wife becomes dissatisfied with God’s design and sets herself up as the head of the home, it disrupts the harmony of the family, society, and even the cosmos. It gives a distorted image of the Church’s relationship to Christ and even Christ’s submissive obedience to the Father as He journeyed toward the cross.

For this reason, it is not surprising churches that embraced an egalitarian understanding of marriage years ago now stand in full rebellion to God’s Word on a host of other issues related to the nature of reality.

## THE PROPHETIC MARRIAGE

Finally, the nature of marriage is important because it foreshadows the final wedding made by God the Father, when the great Bridegroom will receive His bride in glory. When we attend a wedding, we glimpse a shadow of the coming new Heaven and new earth with the holy city of the “new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” (Revelation 21:2). Just as the couple has been preparing for their day of union, we, too, long for the coming Bridegroom.

When we celebrate the uniting of a man and woman, shower them with gifts, and share food with them, we practice for the day we will receive our own glorious inheritance in Christ, the Head over the Church and the fulfillment of all things. We prepare ourselves to sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Our joy, our glory, will be in His riches, His nobility, and His power, not our own. Through the ages, the Father shows the “exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). **ONE**

*\*Adapted from an article published at [helwysocietyforum.com](http://helwysocietyforum.com)*

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**About the Writer:** Phillip T. Morgan is curator of the Free Will Baptist Historical Collection and History Program coordinator at Welch College. Learn more: [www.FWBHistory.com](http://www.FWBHistory.com).

## Rejoice! Ministry Team Announced

The 2023–2024 *Rejoice!* Ministry Team has been selected, according to Daniel Webster, the team’s musical director. “After vocal and instrumental auditions and interviews, we have finalized this year’s team,” Webster said. “We had a great number of quality musicians to choose from, but we finally selected these students to represent us this year.”

Female members of the 12-member team are Malena Campis, Elly Crabtree, Cheyenne Lewis, Abigail McAfee, Brook Proctor, and Rachel Wilkerson. Male members include Marc Edgmon, Silas Houser, Camden Lewis, Jacob Robertson, and Landon Wolfe. Reilly Holloman will serve as the sound technician.

Todd Parrish, vice president for Institutional Advancement, said, “We are excited to introduce the 2023–2024 *Rejoice!* Ministry Team. Their musical ability, along with



The 2023-2024 Rejoice! Ministry Team

their desire to serve Christ and share His gospel, will make them great representatives for the kingdom and Welch College.” **ONE**

## Matthew Barrett Delivers Forlines Lectures November 9-10

Dr. Matthew Barrett, Professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, delivered a series of guest lectures during the 2023 Leroy Forlines Lectures at Welch College, according to President Matt Pinson. Barrett’s topic was “The Reformation as Renewal.”

The Leroy Forlines Lectures began at Welch College in 1993 as a means of bringing well-known speakers to campus to address challenging issues of the day related to theology, philosophy, worldview, world missions, and other topics. The lecture series was named for the late F. Leroy Forlines, long-time Welch professor and dean. The lectureship, which has not been held in the past few years, was reinstated by means of a generous endowment by Forlines’ wife, Dr. Fay Forlines.

“What a privilege it was to host Dr. Barrett on our campus for the Forlines Lectures,” President Pinson said. “He is one of the most distinguished young scholars in the

conservative Protestant movement, and it was a distinct honor having him on our campus and learning from him.”

Founder and editor of *Credo* magazine and host of *Credo Podcast*, Barrett has been published widely, including books such as *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Baker); *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Baker); *God’s Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Zondervan); *Canon, Covenant, and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel* (IVP); *40 Questions about Salvation* (Kregel), and most recently *The Reformation as Renewal* (Zondervan). Currently, he is devoting the next several years to writing *The Doctrine of God* (Baker).

Originally from California, Barrett holds a B.A. from Biola University and an M.Div. and a Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife Elizabeth have four children. **ONE**



# The Great DECHURCHING

PART ONE

BY J. MATTHEW PINSON

The latest bestseller about the decline in churchgoing in America is *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* by Jim Davis, Michael Graham, and Ryan P. Burge.

This project is noteworthy because it consists of wide-ranging, current data targeting a specific problem—what the authors call “dechurching” Americans—former church members who no longer attend church. This decline is critical and unprecedented in the history of this country, and it requires a careful and urgent response from Christian leaders.

This book is also distinctive because its two primary authors are ministry practitioners. Jim Davis and Michael Graham, who minister at Orlando Grace Church near Orlando, Florida, team up with social scientist Ryan Burge, a professor at Eastern Illinois University and also a bi-vocational pastor.

The book combines analysis of recent trends with pastoral wisdom rooted in the Bible and a confessional Protestant approach. In fact, the authors spend a whole chapter talking about the need to be both “confessional” and “missional.”

By *confessional*, they mean giving priority to the teaching and preaching of doctrine and theology from the pulpit (and other mediums), in a way people understand. Confessional preaching grounds listeners deep in biblical truth, even the narrower confessional teachings of a given Christian tradition or denomination. By *missional*, they mean equally prioritizing evangelizing non-believers and keeping them through deep, teaching-based discipleship.

This feature alone makes the book stand out from so many in this genre. That characteristic led Reformed Theological Seminary President Ligon Duncan to say in his endorsement,

“Instead of the mere pragmatism that often characterizes projects like this, the authors offer theological, confessional, and catechetical recommendations with ecclesiological convictions.”

Many pastors never pick up a book like this. They assume it will include more of the same pragmatism that sells books but never seems to foster healthy, biblically-faithful, and outward-reaching congregations. If you fit that skeptical category, you need to get this book. It will be like fresh air. You won't agree with everything the authors say, but you'll find great benefit in this volume.

The book surveys five types of formerly churched individuals to ascertain why they left the church and what could be done to get them back: 1) cultural Christians; 2) dechurched mainstream evangelicals; 3) exvangelicals; 4) dechurched BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color); and 5) dechurched mainline Protestants and Catholics.

## CULTURAL CHRISTIANS

By far the largest group, 52% of the dechurched are “cultural Christians.” Their attitude is “one of apathy with a hint of nostalgia.” (42). These individuals demonstrate little evidence they were ever genuine believers. Only 22% of them affirm the statement “the Bible is the literal Word of God.” They have what the authors call a “low orthodoxy score” but scored higher on the “prosperity gospel” measure.

Members of this group remain religiously active into their late 20s, but the pressures of work and family life gradually lead them to stop going to church. The fact that their initial attachment to Christianity was more cultural than theological and spiritual makes it easier for them to slip away.

This group is the second wealthiest and most educated group of the dechurched (next to ex-mainline Protestants and Catholics). Though they tend to be center-left politically, their nostalgia for their conservative upbringing is evident. For example, 59% of this group were favorable toward the desire to “restore our Christian nation” (45).

But morally, cultural Christians are a “somewhat malleable group,” scoring low on their views on morality compared with the other dechurched categories (46). Cultural Christians “were nominal to begin with in the depth of the knowledge of [Christian] basics. Christianity also no longer conferred to them any benefit in terms of career, social standing, or credibility” (49).

This group tends to be frustrated by what they perceive as their parents’ substituting politics and the “culture war” for their faith, and their parents’ “refusal to listen.” But what did members of this group say were their reasons for quitting church? The top reasons are as follows:

- Friends don’t attend
- Inconvenience
- “Suffering changed my view of God.”
- Gender identity/sexual freedom
- Moved away
- Clergy scandals
- “I worship online.”
- Sermons not relevant to life
- Racism in the church
- Other priorities
- Doubting God’s goodness and existence

Most of the reasons this group left church are “social and experiential” (48). For most of them, what they need is “your dinner table. They probably won’t oblige your nudge or invitation to return to church, as they need more relational connectivity than that” (50).

One interesting part of this chapter is the section “Why Cultural Christians Can Be a Good Thing.” The authors draw on the biblical analogy of the “forecourt of the temple,” where people went who were interested but not fully members. They draw upon historical teaching from Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck for this idea.

The authors quote the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* regarding the “outward and ordinary means of grace” being “all

his [God’s] ordinances [things God ordained], especially the word, sacraments, and prayer.” They rightly point out: “two-thirds of the ordinary means of grace—prayer and the Word—are fully available to anyone, regardless of where they are in their faith journey.” Thus we need to “extend the forecourt,” finding ways to show hospitality to this group to draw them into what the Spirit is doing in the church (50).

But how do we keep people from becoming dechurched cultural Christians? When they were in the church, this group lacked several things, most importantly “authentic friendship and sincere community” with the church and its members. They tend to come from “biblically and doctrinally shallow expressions of evangelicalism.” Their understanding of and commitment to the basics of the gospel, Christian morality, and Christian doctrine are very thin (52).

The authors suggest the best way to keep people from becoming cultural Christians is deep, authentic relationships and community combined with fostering biblically faithful and healthy local congregations “that clearly teach the Bible and catechize on the creeds and confessions” (52). The last thing dechurched cultural Christians need is to be lost in a crowd and served a thin gruel of shallow, culturally driven, non-doctrinal church life. That’s what produced them in the first place.

## DECHURCHED MAINSTREAM EVANGELICALS

Of this group, 20% have converted to Roman Catholicism, and 21% identified with some other expression of Christianity than evangelical (60). They trend center-right politically and are much more likely than church evangelicals to believe we are living in the end times and to accept prosperity gospel.

This group, interestingly, has a more favorable view of evangelicals and scores higher on orthodoxy than church evangelicals. “Their dechurching is simply because a wide variety of circumstances have gotten them out of the habit,” things like “COVID-19, travel baseball, divorce, a new baby, or moving” (58). Their main reasons for leaving church are:

- Moved away
- Inconvenience
- Divorce/family change
- COVID-19
- “I didn’t fit in with the congregation.”
- Not much love from the church

The good news about this group is that 100% are “actively willing” to return to church. Here are the main things they said would get them back:

- New friends
- “God tells me to go back.”
- Finding a church they like
- Feeling distance from God
- “Missing” church
- A good pastor
- Spouse wants to
- Lonely
- “I find a church that takes both doctrine and ethics seriously.”
- “I find a church that cares about justice and compassion.”

## EXVANGELICALS

These individuals said they will never return to an evangelical church. The group is 65% female and 35% male, older (54 years old on average) than the average dechurched person, and typically less wealthy and educated than other dechurched people. They tend to vote center-left but “are the most critical” of any of the groups of “socialism, Marxism,” etc. They tend to be the most non-partisan, independent, and politically disinterested (69–70).

Another surprise is how orthodox exvangelicals are in their doctrinal affirmations. They are the second highest of all the groups of dechurched people who still claim to be Christians. But they feel both secular institutions and the church have “let them down.” They have “fallen through the cracks” both in America and in evangelical churches (73).

The main reasons they left the church are:

- Didn’t fit in with the congregation
- Moved away
- Didn’t experience much love from the church
- Inconvenience
- Negative experiences with church
- Disagreed with church’s/clergy’s politics
- No longer believed what the congregation believed

Here are the things they indicated would lead them to return to church—even though most said they never will:

- “God tells me to go back.”
- “I find a church I like.”
- A good pastor



- Feel distance from God
- Find a church that cares about justice and compassion
- A sense of community
- “Missing” church
- Spouse wants to
- “A miracle”

Survey responses indicate these individuals would be drawn to a church that does not play up partisan politics, is compassionate, values mental health, and expresses “understanding, empathy, and care from pastors and laypeople alike.” This group needs church people “who will commit to establishing authentic, long-term relationships with them even before there is enough substance to invite them to church events” (77).

## BIPOC

The survey seemed to indicate that BIPOC (black, indigenous, or other people of color) people who are dechurched have different backgrounds and needs than the other groups. They represent 14% of those surveyed who left evangelical churches. This group is overwhelmingly black and male, with an average age of 52, and about 38% of them live in the Southeast. This is also the most mobile group, reflecting the largest percentage of people who recently moved.

This group trends slightly more center-left politically, but surprisingly, 57% of them agree the January 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol was “an effort by patriots to protect and restore a Christian nation,” and 54% believe the “racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.” BIPOC respondents also tend to be relatively orthodox compared to the majority of the dechurched. Why did they say they left evangelical churches? (87–92)

- Struggled to fit in/belong
- Found community online or at work
- Wanted to enjoy benefits of surplus finances
- “My faith was not my own, borrowed from family.”

- Life got busy.
- Bad experiences with church/evangelicals
- College education caused doubts.
- Lack of people my age
- “I wanted to explore my sexuality.”

Particularly interesting with this group is what they said their parents could do to try to get them to return to church.

The main things are:

- Listen better
- Embody love, joy, gentleness, kindness, generosity
- Change views on gender and women in leadership
- Engage more charitably with other viewpoints
- Be less political

The main things they said could make them return are:

- New friends/loneliness
- Child/spouse wants to
- Sense of community/“friends invite me”
- Feeling distance from God
- “Missing” church
- Supernatural phenomena
- “Don’t have better options on Sunday morning”

## MAINLINE PROTESTANTS & CATHOLICS

The Catholics in this group are 48% female, while the mainline Protestants are 68% female. The authors explain, “we would have expected greater doctrinal disagreements between dechurched mainliners and dechurched Catholics, but we didn’t see much difference on several key doctrines” (105).

The orthodoxy score on both these groups was like the cultural Christians and dechurched BIPOC groups—much lower than dechurched mainstream evangelicals and exevangelicals.

Why did they leave the church? Their main reasons are:

- Moved away
- Other priorities for time/money
- Didn’t fit in with congregation
- Differed with politics of church/clergy
- Doubted Christianity
- Inconvenience
- Clergy scandals
- Divorce/family changes
- Didn’t experience much love from congregation
- “Faith just wasn’t working”

The main things that could get them back in church are that the church cares about 1) salvation; 2) dialoguing about important questions and strong church education/training; and 3) helping society through outreach and service programs.

This chapter compares this group to two other groups: 1) overall evangelical dechurched and 2) still- church ed evangelicals in a number of standards they seek to follow.

On things like avoiding “discrimination based on race,” the overall evangelical dechurched got much lower scores than dechurched mainline Protestants and Catholics and still-churched evangelicals. However, dechurched mainline Protestants and Catholics were equally motivated to “help the poor and oppressed” (69%) as the overall evangelical dechurched (71%), while evangelicals who still go to church are much more likely (86%) motivated than any dechurched groups to provide for the poor (113).

Regarding aversion to things like lying, stealing, and being greedy, the overall dechurched evangelicals scored the lowest, the dechurched mainline Protestants and Catholics were in the middle, and the still-churched evangelicals were much higher (in the 90s%). When it came to avoiding abortion, dechurched mainline Protestants and Catholics were in the 40s%, overall dechurched evangelicals at 59%, and church ed evangelicals at 77%. Overall dechurched evangelicals and dechurched mainline Protestants were more concerned about pornography (65% and 68% respectively) than dechurched Catholics (54%), but 84% of evangelicals who still attend church regard it important to avoid pornography (113).

When it came to regular prayer, dechurched mainline Protestants and Catholics and overall dechurched evangelicals scored in the 60s-70s% while still-churched evangelicals were at 92%. Yet regarding the importance of regular Bible reading, dechurched mainline Protestants and Catholics emphasized it the least (30s%), with the overall evangelical dechurched coming in at 55% and evangelicals who still attend church at 82% (113).

In the next issue, I’ll introduce what the authors say about ways to deal with the problem of the dechurched. Then, I’ll offer 22 strategies *any* kind of church can employ to keep people from becoming dechurched and to reintegrate dechurched people. **ONE**

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**About the Writer:** J. Matthew Pinson is president of Welch College: [welch.edu](http://welch.edu).

# Pray Without Ceasing

BY BARRY RAPER

## 1 THESSALONIANS 5:17

**A disclaimer at the outset:** my purpose is not to “guilt” anyone into praying. Instead, my goal is to motivate us all to pray. If you are anything like me, you know this is an area where you fall short. But guilt as a motivator does not serve anyone well in the long run. Instead, let’s consider prayer in a way that motivates us to pray and to keep on praying.

As we consider Paul’s short command (two words in the original text) in 1 Thessalonians, “pray without ceasing,” ask three basic questions:

- What does it mean to pray without ceasing?
- Why are we tempted to stop praying?
- What helps us to pray?



### **QUESTION #1: What does it mean to pray without ceasing?**

Of course, this verse doesn’t mean all we ever do in life is pray—24 hours a day, seven days a week. As I write, I hope to do so with an absolute dependence upon God in a “spirit of prayer,” if you will. However, I am writing, not praying. From work and school to shopping and a myriad of other activities in life, prayer is interwoven but isn’t the central activity.

In contrast, this verse also means we should never press the pause button on prayer, not at any stage of our Christian life. We must never stop the *habit* of praying. Prayer was a key component of our entrance into the Christian life, when we asked God to forgive and save us, and prayer must remain central to us if we want to stay awake spiritually.



### **QUESTION #2: Why are we tempted to stop praying?**

Why would we ever take a break from this crucial Christian behavior?

**Because prayer can be hard work.** Sometimes, prayer comes easily. A health crisis, a near death experience on

the highway—in those moments, it is likely you said a quick prayer without even thinking about it. In those moments, it is not hard to pray! Or perhaps you are thinking about God’s goodness to you. Again, it doesn’t take a lot of work to praise and thank Him in prayer.

However, sometimes prayer is hard work. We wrestle with the world, our own flesh, and the devil. If you need an example of this, consider the way the Apostle Paul described Epaphras in his epistle to the Colossians: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Colossians 4:12).

Some translations have translated the word “labouring” as *wrestling*. Meaning prayer was a fight, a spiritual battle for Epaphras. And the original word used in this passage is like our English word *agony*.

**Because we don’t think we have received answers to our prayers.** While country singer Garth Brooks once thanked God for unanswered prayers, sometimes we are tempted to stop praying when we haven’t seen answers, and we don’t know why. Think about it. We are conditioned to look for and expect immediate results in almost every other aspect of our lives in modern culture. We often bring this mindset to our prayer lives. Don’t misunderstand; we *should* go to God expecting, looking for answers to prayer because He is the God who answers prayer. However, prayer isn’t mechanical or formulaic. Sometimes, the answers are delayed. Sometimes, the answers come in ways we don’t perceive. Sometimes, the answer is no.

Further, when you factor in prayers for other people, we must acknowledge those people have free will. If we are praying something specific for a person, and the prayer doesn’t get answered, perhaps they made the wrong choice. These and other misgivings about “unanswered” prayer over extended periods of time can lead us to despair regarding prayer. We must not succumb to this temptation.



The real test  
of our belief in  
prayer is simple:  
**do we choose  
to pray?**



### QUESTION #3: What helps us to pray?

Very simply, God's own promises regarding prayer. Let Scripture speak for itself:

- **MATTHEW 7:7-8:** Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
- **PHILIPPIANS 4:5-7:** Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
- **JAMES 5:13-16:** Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick

among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The next time you struggle to pray, when you question whether your prayers are being answered, lean into the promises of God and make up your mind to obey His command to pray...without ceasing. Many people say they believe in prayer, but the real test of our belief in prayer is simple: do we choose to pray? **ONE**

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

# GIANT IN

## CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND

BY LARRY HAMPTON

“There were giants in the earth in those days...” (Genesis 6:4).

At least that’s the way it seemed to me. All my life I heard of the exploits of men like Jerry Dudley, Wade Jernigan, E.E. Morris, Bailey Thompson, and Reford Wilson. Giants all. And they all had ties to Oklahoma.

This is the story of another giant—Lonnie Evert Davault. When Lonnie (named after Lonnie Ward, a Free Will Baptist pastor) was born October 20, 1923, in a log cabin south of Dibble, Oklahoma, World War I and the Great Influenza Pandemic were still fresh on everyone’s mind. His parents, Bill and Anna Mackey Davault, also had two daughters: Edna their oldest child and Cassie Lee their youngest. In time, the family moved to Moore, where Lonnie graduated from high school.

Before Lonnie served God and His Church, he served his country. March 27, 1942, Lonnie was inducted into the U.S. Army. During the three years, 15 days, and ten hours he was in the military, Lonnie saw combat in France, Germany, Austria, and Belgium. While taking secret orders to the front lines, he was wounded and sent back to the States for recovery. After only 30 days, he was deployed to the Philippines to train for a ground invasion of Japan. After the atom bomb was dropped, the invasion was no longer needed. When the war ended, the Purple Heart recipient took a job with Phillips Petroleum Company

back home in Oklahoma.

January 15, 1950, Lonnie was saved under the preaching of E.E. Morris, a man who greatly impacted his life. Not long after his conversion, Lonnie accepted the call to preach. Morris was a participant in his ordination service. Morris also married Lonnie and Edna, Lonnie’s first wife. Morris urged the young preacher to attend college. Lonnie quit his job, sold his house, and enrolled in Oklahoma Baptist University to prepare for ministry. After two years at OBU, he transferred to Free Will Baptist Bible College (now Welch College) to finish his degree. Later, he earned a second degree in higher education from Oklahoma City University.

While in Nashville, Davault pastored Trinity FWB Church. After graduation, he returned to Oklahoma where he first pastored the Pleasant Hill Church near Norman. While pastoring in Holdenville, the church constructed a two-story educational building, built a parsonage, and renovated the sanctuary. During the dozen years Lonnie





# THE LAND

## MINISTRY OF LONNIE DAVALT

pastored Capitol Hill FWB Church in Oklahoma City, the congregation grew to 300 and engaged in an extensive building program.

During this time, Oklahoma Bible College (later Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College and now Randall University) launched. For some time, the new school met in the facilities of Capitol Hill, and for the next 25 years, Lonnie trained young men and women as a teacher at the college.

Sue Wilcox recently described the spirit that pervaded Lonnie's years at Capitol Hill. "When Allen and I were living with our toddler daughter Susan at Oklahoma Bible College, we became members at Capitol Hill Free Will Baptist Church. Lonnie Davault was our pastor. We first visited there at the suggestion of my daddy, Howard Gage, a fellow Oklahoma Free Will Baptist minister. He said he knew Brother Davault to be a fine man and a fine preacher. That recommendation carried a lot of weight with us. When we visited Capitol Hill, we found Daddy's words to be true. We were warmly welcomed by the congregation. Brother Davault had led them to be a caring group. It was easy to see he was a pastor who cared for his people, and they loved and respected him in return."

Lonnie is first and foremost a preacher. Over the years, he has held countless revivals in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas. In 1984, he preached at the National Convention in Little Rock, Arkansas. His message? "Reaching for Revival."

In addition, Davault was elected to the denomination's Foreign Mission Board. He also served as executive secretary for the Oklahoma State Association from 1972-1985. During that time, the present state office building was erected. Plus, he found time to visit all 287 of the churches in the state association.

Immediately after resigning as executive secretary, Lonnie started Charity FWB Church in Midwest City. He led that church until he was 96. In October 2023, he preached at Charity's homecoming, only days after reaching the century mark!

For over seven decades, a giant in the land has been ministering among us. Like King David before him, Lonnie Davault has served his generation by the will of God. We celebrate his life and ministry. **ONE**

---

**About the Writer:** Shawnee, Oklahoma, native Larry Hampton graduated from Free Will Baptist Bible College in 1969. He enjoyed a long career as an educator, writer, and editor. Larry and his wife Rita live in Antioch, Tennessee, and attend Cane Ridge FWB Church.

# Things to Ponder

BY EDDIE MOODY

Researcher Ryan Burge has pointed out that increasingly churches are located where fewer Americans live, with fewer churches in the places people are moving.<sup>1</sup> This statement is certainly true of the National Association of Free Will Baptists (NAFWB). Twenty-eight percent of all NAFWB churches are located where only 5% of the U.S. population lives. Further, exactly 50% of all NAFWB churches are located where 13% of the U.S. population lives. In sharp contrast, only 1% of NAFWB churches are located where 25% of the U.S. population lives—the largest metropolitan areas with a population of 5 million or more. See the figure below from the U.S. Religious Census.

The NAFWB is viewed as a rural denomination. Out of 372 religious bodies in the United States, the only group more rural is “Amish groups, undifferentiated.” Twenty-eight percent of NAFWB churches are located outside of a Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA). The churches in these areas are in communities of fewer than 10,000 people. Twenty-two percent of NAFWB churches are found in a micropolitan area with more than 10,000 people but fewer than 50,000 people.

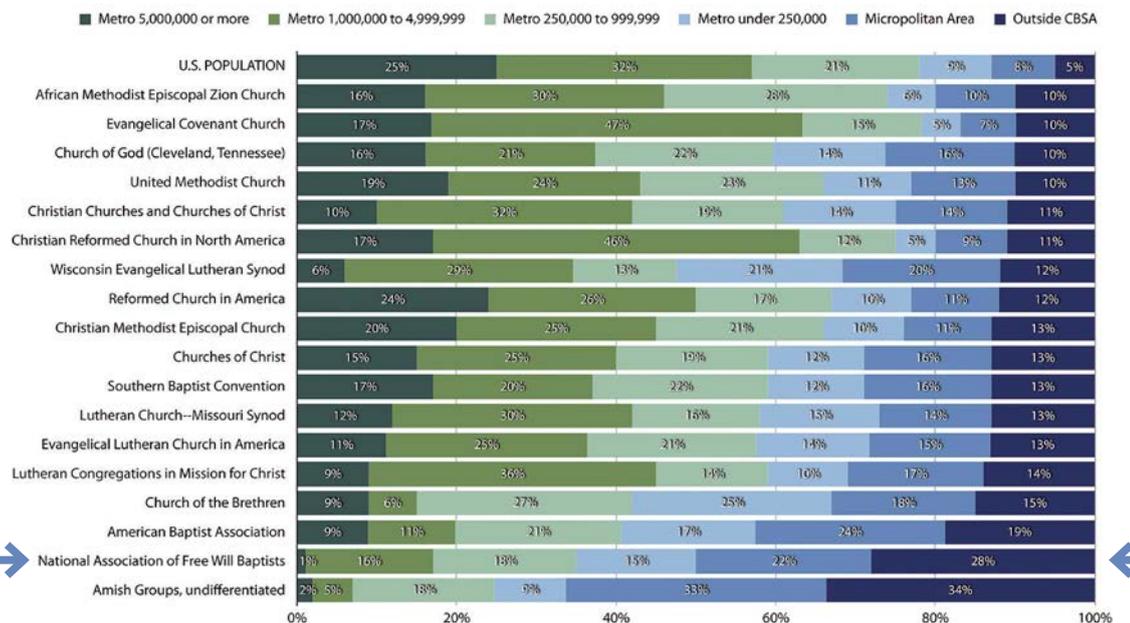
1 Ryan Burge. How Many Religious Congregations Are in Your County? And which counties have been more heavily churched since 2010? Accessed: <https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/how-many-religious-congregations>

## Are These Churches Important?

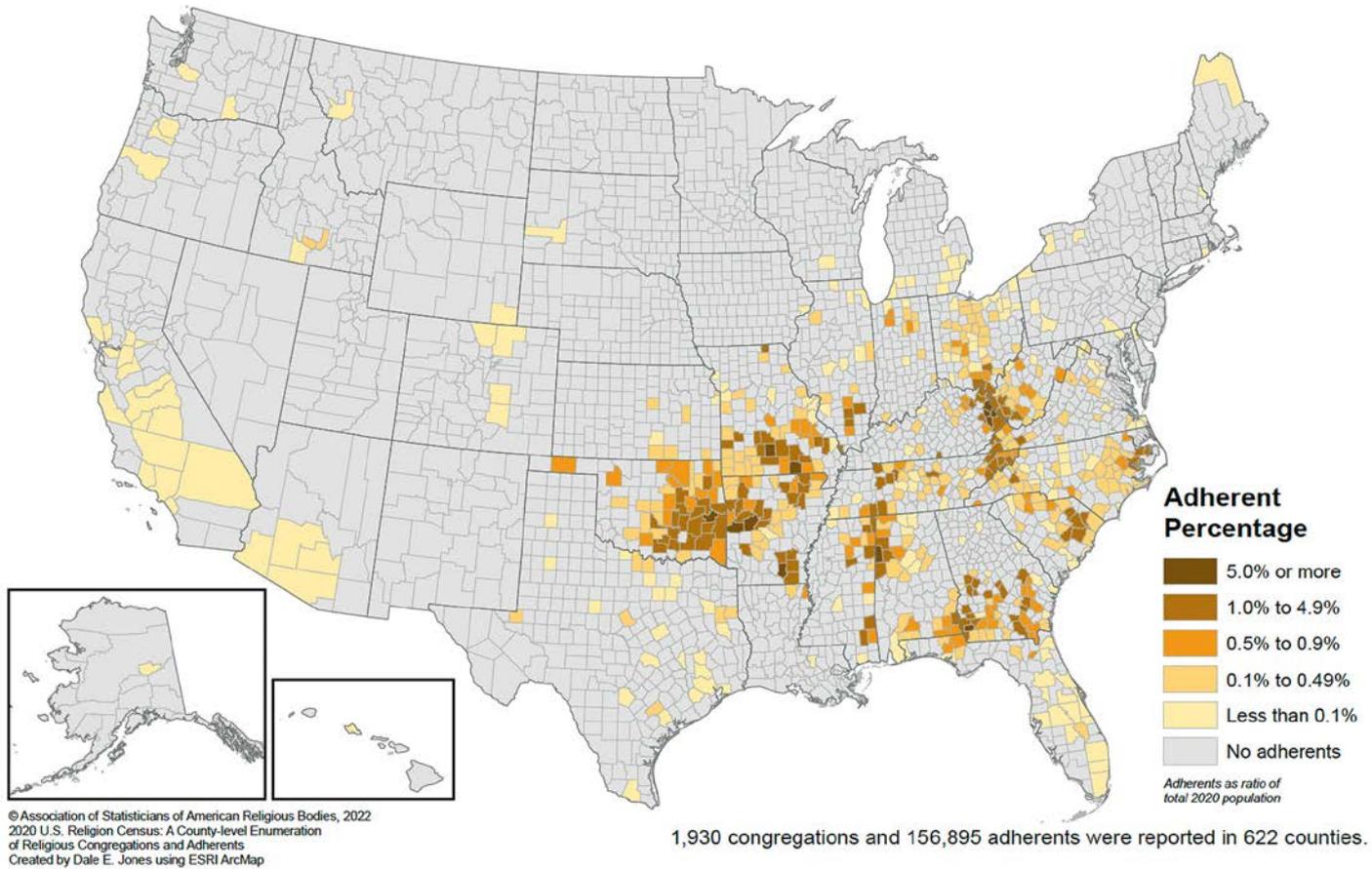
Every church and community is important. Although these churches are in less populated communities, they play a vital role in the vitality of these communities. You might say they are big fish in small ponds. The county map on page 53 (also from the U.S. Religious Census) shows the percentage of Free Will Baptist adherents in U.S. counties. Note the locations of counties where more than 5% of the residents are Free Will Baptist. Although these counties have a lower population (micropolitan or outside a CBSA), the population is significantly impacted by Free Will Baptists.

The top five counties for Free Will Baptists in the U.S. are: Oregon County, Missouri; Johnson County, Kentucky;

Figure 2: Religious Bodies of at Least 100,000 Adherents that are Concentrated in Rural Areas, 2020



National Association of Free Will Baptists:  
Adherents as Percentage of Population, 2020



Lawrence County, Kentucky; Lamar County, Alabama; and Miller County, Georgia.

**Not All Free Will Baptist Churches  
Are in Rural Communities**

The table below shows the other 50% of NAFWB churches

Population Centers	Percent of NAFWB Churches	Percent of Population
Outside CBSA no population center	28	5
Micropolitan 10k to 50k	22	8
Metro 1 under 250k	15	9
Metro 2 250k to 1 million	18	21
Metro 3 1 million to 5 million	16	32
Metro 4 5 million+	1	25

are in more populated areas. Seventeen percent of NAFWB churches are located where 57% of the U.S. population lives (metropolitan areas with a million people or more). This includes Metro 3 areas of

one million to five million people (16%) and Metro 4 areas, where five million or more people live (1%).

The other locations of Free Will Baptist churches can be broken down as follows: Metro under 250,000 or Metro 1 (15%) and Metro 250,000 to 999,999 or Metro 2 (18%). A healthy number of NAFWB churches are in more populous areas of the U.S., except for the most populated (Metro 4). However, these are the fastest growing areas of the country.

**What Are the Implications of This Data?**

**Work Together.** Churches in larger metropolitan areas face significantly different challenges and interact in more diverse communities than those in more rural areas (micropolitan and outside a CBSA). For example, while many Jews (65%), Muslims (53%), Hindus (42%), Buddhists (32%), and Baha'i (25%) live in Metro 4 areas, much smaller percentages are found outside a CBSA: Jews (1%), Muslims (2%), Hindu (2%), Buddhist (1%), and Baha'i (7%). See the figure on page 54. We must understand tension arises

naturally among groups like ours when we minister in such vastly different settings.

**Support and Strengthen Rural Churches.**

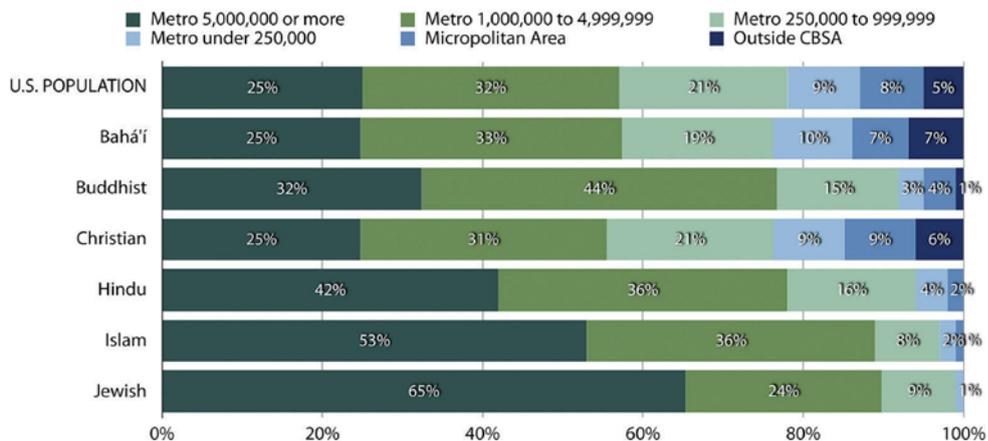
We need strong rural churches. Have you ever wondered how God is working through the pastor shortage? Perhaps He is pushing churches in close proximity together, to become stronger and more effective at reaching and serving their communities. See *Creative Strategies* (nafwb.org/blog). Rural communities have great needs and often have fewer resources than more populated areas.

**Start and Support Churches in Metro 3 and Metro 4 Communities.**

We cannot ignore the cities. Is God calling you to start a church in a metropolitan area? Is He calling you to work or go to school in a large city? Is He calling you to retire there? We all need to pray about these possibilities. God may be calling us to leave our comfort zones just like He called Jonah (Jonah 1:2, 4:11).

Can you support a church located in a metro 3 or 4 area? Note that 86% percent of Muslim adherents are in Metro 3 and 4 areas (where 57% of the U.S. population resides). When a church closes in these areas, it is possible groups

Figure 3: World Religions Classified by Metropolitan Status and Size, 2020



from other religions will become the new tenant. Rather than retreat from these areas, we must expand our gospel footprint. Pray for these churches regularly, support them financially, and get to know them through mission trips.

Wherever we find ourselves, let the influence of the gospel go forward. And let's commit ourselves to supporting brothers and sisters who minister in vastly different contexts. [ONE](https://www.nafwb.org)

**About the Writer:** Eddie Moody is executive secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists. Learn more: [nafwb.org](https://www.nafwb.org).



**MATT. 4:18-22**

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# Steak Sauce or Tartar Sauce?

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

**Warning:** this piece may challenge or offend your culinary preferences, but at the least it will make you hungry. Picture this: I order fish at a restaurant, and the server asks if I want tartar sauce. I can barely conceal my judgment. Why would anyone ruin fish with a dollop of dill-laden mayo? Then it hits me: I sit in the seat of the scorned sometimes when I reach for steak sauce.

Ordering steak has an uncanny ability to categorize you and your culinary companions. Think of all the available cuts: chopped steak, sirloin, hanger, ribeye, porterhouse, filet, or tenderloin. You select the level of doneness (anything beyond medium, and you might as well settle for a bag of beef jerky, in my opinion). Next, you choose the preparation: grilled, smoked, or pan-seared. If you cook your ribeye in an airfryer, stop reading now; we are no longer friends. Just kidding...almost.

The way we enjoy our steak, like many things, is shaped by our culture and honed over time. Culture is the preference of preparation, but strategy is eating the same "Grade A Beef" in different ways.

The famous aphorism (often attributed to Peter Drucker) says, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

However, healthy leaders use strategy to change the culture. The Bonhoeffer Project teaches, "The gospel you preach determines the disciples you make." Do not be the leader who sees only the preferred outcome without contemplating various implications or unintended consequences of the strategic change. To paraphrase the Bonhoeffer Project, the strategy

we champion will influence or determine our future culture. Therefore, be less critical of culture and more attentive to strategy.

It is possible to think you are changing culture when you are "stargazing" at cultural upheaval. What if your favorite



restaurant, Tony's Steakhouse, suddenly transforms into Antonio's Italian Grill, trading steaks for spaghetti to the delight of some and the dismay of others? Let's be more concerned with this kind of strategic change rather than with someone asking for A1. After all, their overdone steak will need that extra flavor. **ONE**



## LEADERSHIP QUOTE

*"Organizational culture gets in the way of strategy every time when they are not in sync."*

—Tabitha Scott

**About the Columnist:** Ron Hunter Jr. has a Ph.D. in leadership and is CEO of D6 Family Ministry. You may contact him at [ron.hunter@d6family.com](mailto:ron.hunter@d6family.com).



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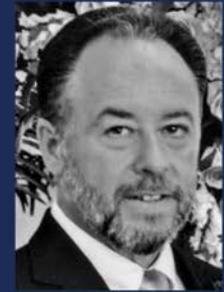
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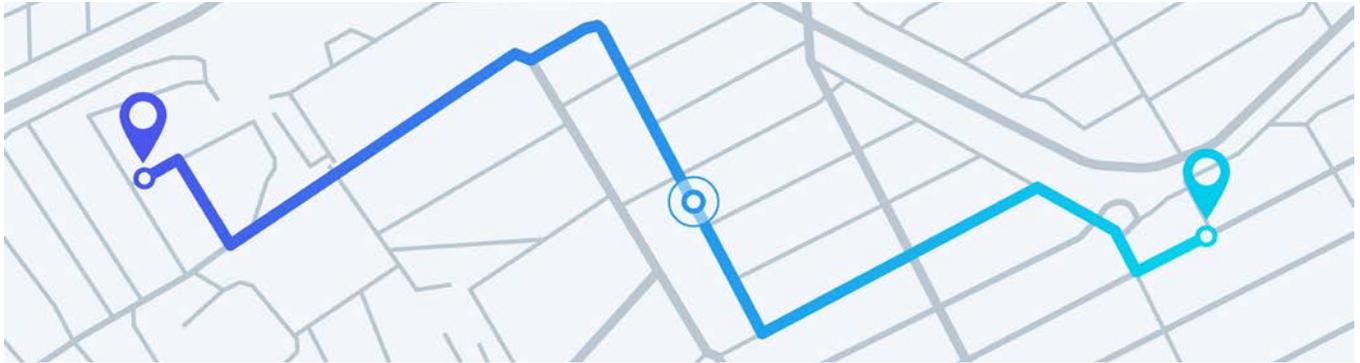


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# Somewhere Between Tucker and New Edinburg

BY DAVID BROWN, CPA



Every time a person is born, he or she becomes an extended part of two families. In my case, it was the Brown family centered in New Edinburg and the Richardson family centered in Tucker, both small towns in Arkansas about 60 miles apart.

I was blessed that my immediate family only lived an hour from both these communities, and growing up, we visited both sides of the family often. When we visited the Browns, the conversations I overheard were more serious—mostly about the work my dad’s brothers and sisters were doing. The Browns were more goal-oriented and set on accomplishing things. I learned hard work is important, and I also inherited a Free Will Baptist history dating back more than 125 years.

Mom’s family, the Richardsons, were more about relationships. Conversations revolved around how family members were doing, and anyone hurting was encouraged. They always wanted to have fun, and the house echoed with laughter. Please understand, I’m not implying the Browns didn’t like to laugh and have fun or the Richardsons didn’t work hard, but these were the differences I observed at family gatherings.

I have been influenced by both families to balance serious hard work with the importance of caring about people, building relationships, and enjoying laughter in my life. As the director of the Foundation, I quickly learned a big part of my job was traveling and getting to know my Free Will

Baptist family. Sometimes, my job involves hard work, but it is about building relationships. Growing the Foundation has been hard work, but I quickly realized the reason I wanted to work hard was not to brag about how big the Foundation has become but rather to bless our ministries.

Over the decades, as the Foundation assets have increased, we have been able to do more for ministries. We developed an estate planning ministry that will one day generate over \$35 million for ministries. We developed a grant program that has given more than \$4.4 million to various ministries over the last six years.

Having an effective ministry among Free Will Baptists includes the hard work of both building our asset base and developing relationships with individuals and ministries to learn how we can help them further the gospel.

During my early childhood in Malvern, Arkansas, it took about the same amount of time to travel to New Edinburg as it did to get to Tucker. Lately, I’ve also come to realize I have lived my life somewhere between the family characteristics of the Browns and the Richardsons.

Thanks, Mom. Thanks, Dad. I’m happy to live somewhere between Tucker and New Edinburg! **ONE**

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**About the Columnist:** David Brown is director of Free Will Baptist Foundation. To learn more about the grants program, visit [www.fwbgifts.com](http://www.fwbgifts.com).

# Introducing 2024 Nominees for Standing Boards and Commissions

**Antioch, TN**—The 2023-24 Nominating Committee has presented the following individuals to be considered for the 2024 Convention election, according to Terry Hinds (IN), committee chair.

**Please note:** bios are included only for new board and commission nominees, not for returning members.

## Executive Committee

Chris Dotson (TN)

Reuben Cason (NC)

James Coffelt (OK)

**James Coffelt** most recently served as lead pastor at Cushing FWB Church (OK) from 2009 to 2023. Active in denominational boards and positions throughout his ministry, James recently accepted the role of executive director of the Oklahoma State Association of Free Will Baptists. He began serving as a state officer in Oklahoma in 1999 and has been the state clerk for 23 years. Ordained in 1993, James pastored three decades in seven churches before accepting his current position as executive director. He holds a B.A. in theology from Randall University.

## Women Nationally Active for Christ

Melanie Franks (AL)

Angie Frazier (FL)

Ashley Alphin (OH)

**Melanie Franks** is coordinator of Alabama FWB Women's Ministries. Her experience as an educator, pastor's wife, and church women's ministries director equips her well to serve women of all ages. An active participant in various levels of women's ministries, she successfully led a *Shine!* conference in 2022. Since 2017, Melanie has served as a team member of Cultivate FWB Church, a church plant in Athens, Alabama. She leads both the women's ministry and nursery and toddler ministry. Melanie earned a B.S. and a M.A. in elementary education from Western Kentucky University.

**Angie Frazier** is WAC coordinator for First FWB Church Tampa (FL). She is a dedicated women's church group leader with a passion for fostering spiritual growth, community engagement, and unity among women. With 23-plus years of experience in ministry, she is committed to serving women and helping them grow in their spiritual walk. She graduated from Welch College with a B.S. in elementary education.

**Ashley Alphin** is vice president for Ohio FWB Women's Ministries and has also been a board member since 2021. For 11 years, she faithfully served in women's ministry as a member and participant of WNAC, OWAC, and her local women's group. She has also been active in Young Women Active for Christ for multiple years. She attends Westerville FWB Church in Westerville, Ohio. Ashley is a 2021 graduate of Welch College with a B.S. in psychology and theology.

## D6 Family Ministry

Kendall Ross (AR)

Kevin Barnett (AR)

Fuad Farhat (NC)

**Kevin Barnett** has pastored Sutton FWB Church (AR) since January 2017. A member of the Arkansas State Executive Committee, he additionally served on the Arkansas Executive Board from 2011-2019. He has been a member of the Social Band Association Executive Board since 2010, the chair for the past 11 years. Kevin has been a supporter of D6 curriculum since its launch and has attended seven D6 Conferences. He earned a B.S. in plant science from Arkansas State University.

**Fuad Farhat** has been on staff at New Life Church (NC) since 2018. He pastors middle and high school students and oversees day-to-day operations and projects. He graduated from Southeastern FWB College in 2017 with a B.A. in Bible. He earned a Master of Theological Studies (MTS), Master of Religious Education (MRE),

and Master of Divinity in biblical languages from the Liberty School of Divinity. Currently, he is pursuing a Ph.D. in New Testament from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**IM, Inc.**

Darren Walker (NC)

Casey Cariker (OK)

Paul Etterling (OH)

**Paul Etterling** has served 21 years at Westerville FWB Church (OH), 16 as the lead pastor. A bivocational minister, he also works as a compliance consultant with Elevate Health, his employer since 1997. An ordained minister since 1993, Paul has been active in the denomination for the entirety of his ministry, serving on multiple boards in both the local conference and the Ohio State Association. Paul is currently serving a second term on the Ohio Home Mission Board as the secretary/treasurer. Additionally, the Westerville Church regularly supports mission efforts around the world through budgetary and special offerings. Paul earned an A.S. from Shawnee State University, a B.S. in religion, and a M.A. in religion from Liberty University.

**Welch College**

Tim Campbell (AR)

Theron Scott (SC)

Josue Suarez (FL)

**Josue Suarez** is lead pastor at Ebenezer FWB Church in Hollywood, Florida, where he also serves as administrator of Ebenezer School, overseeing 20 employees, finances, and daily operations. A member of the Florida State Executive Committee, Josue chairs his district association, Asociación Hispana de Iglesias Bautistas Libres (FWB) de la Florida, and chairs the board of Camp Sunshine. A 2015 graduate of Welch College with a B.A. in pastoral ministry, Josue is currently completing his M.Div. at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**COMMISSIONS**

**Commission for Theological Integrity:**

Cory Thompson (OK)

**Media Commission:**

Josh Owens (TN)

Isaiah Grimes (VA)

**Isaiah Grimes** has been church media director of Great Bridge FWB Ministries (VA) since 2021. An IT administrator and computer instructor for elementary and middle schoolers, Isaiah has a broad range of technical skills and software proficiency, including graphic, web design, and audio and video editing. A graduate of Erie Institute of Technology, he is currently pursuing a B.A. in ministry and business at Randall University.

**Music Commission:**

Kevin Justice (NC)

**Historical Commission:**

Philip Morgan (TN)

**Phillip Morgan** has served as the head curator for the Free Will Baptist Historical Collection since October 2017, after training under Dr. Robert E. Picirilli for three years. In that capacity, he collects and catalogs historical materials, assists researchers, and works with historians and clerks throughout the denomination to promote the preservation of Free Will Baptist history. He has written local church and associational histories and assisted others in similar projects. In 2018, he published a history of Welch College with J. Matthew Pinson. He also has presented numerous papers, articles, and presentations on various aspects of Free Will Baptist and general church history. A graduate of Welch College (B.S.) and Middle Tennessee State University (M.A.), he is finalizing a Ph.D. in history from Kansas State University (ABD; 2019-present).

**Submitted by the Nominating Committee:** Terry Hinds (Chair), Jimmy Lawson, Mark Walker, Lori McCraney, Ken Simpson, John Collier, and Mark Harrison **ONE**

# 2023 Leadership Conference Challenges Churches to Reclaim God’s Glory

**Nashville, TN**—December 4-5, 189 pastors and ministry leaders from 25 states gathered at Sonesta Nashville Airport for the annual Free Will Baptist Leadership Conference. Attendees enjoyed two full days packed with humor, training, fellowship, and business. Keynote sessions featured author and church planter Mark Clifton, who explored the theme “Reclaiming Glory” and areas related to revitalizing struggling and dying churches.

Clifton is the lead national strategist for revitalization/replanting at the North American Mission Board. God has used Mark in planting or replanting more than a dozen churches across the United States and Canada. He is the author of *Reclaiming Glory* and produces a weekly podcast entitled *Revitalize and Replant*. Mark and his wife Jill have two sons, two daughters-in-law, and four grandsons.

During Monday’s opening session, after identifying the characteristics of churches that die, Clifton urged listeners to replant churches that bring God glory. He identified replanting as “an act of worship and requires us to lay down our idols [anything we run to for comfort, security, and meaning].”

Tuesday morning, Clifton detailed four approaches to helping a dying church: 1) give the building to a church plant; 2) share the building with a church plant; 3) merge with a church plant; and 4) replant the existing church from within. Each approach has challenges, but each also can be a solution for the dying church. Tuesday evening, Clifton introduced four key requirements for church planting: 1) passion for the Bible and biblical preaching; 2) being both a disciple and a disciple maker; 3) a passion for the gospel; and 4) a passion for prayer. He concluded by sharing important traits every church replanter should display.

In addition to these keynote sessions, 12 seminar speakers explored a wide range of important topics ranging from strategies for reaching and keeping college students to messy ministry and pastoral mental health, among other topics. Denominational leadership and committees also met for strategy and updates on ongoing initiatives.



However, the conference featured much more than strategy and training. Ballrooms buzzed with animated conversation during banquet-styled meals. In-depth discussions continued long after meals and sessions concluded, spilling over into the hallways and common areas of the hotel. Various boards and committees met in conjunction with the conference, including the Board of Retirement; D6 Family Ministry; the Executive Committee; Free Will Baptist Foundation; IM, Inc.; North American Ministries; Welch College; and state leaders and promotional directors.

North Carolina Promotional Secretary Reuben Cason expressed his enthusiasm: “This year’s Leadership Conference has been invigorating! Listening to our denominational leaders speak about current issues and opportunities

facing our churches today, and how to respond to these issues and opportunities has been challenging, comforting, and convicting. Mark Clifton has done an outstanding job addressing the subject of refreshing, replanting, and revitalizing our churches. It was good to be reminded we have hope for our churches because our Lord has promised to build His church.”

Executive Secretary Eddie Moody announced December 9-10, 2024, as the dates for next year’s meeting. Bestselling author Gary McIntosh will be featured as the speaker, exploring the theme, “Flying Solo: Helping Pastors Survive the Isolation of Ministry.” Visit [www.nafwb.org/leader](http://www.nafwb.org/leader) throughout the year for updates regarding the 2024 conference. **ONE**

## National Offices Building Manager Retires After More Than Three Decades



Steve Pate and Executive Secretary Eddie Moody

**Antioch, TN**—Steve Pate, building manager for the Free Will Baptist National Offices building since 1992, retired in December after 31 years of faithful service to the denomination.

Pate’s responsibilities included building maintenance and supervision, mailing and shipping, and logistics for the National Convention, including driving the 18-wheeler to and from the yearly meeting. However, his responsibili-

ties didn’t stop there, as Executive Secretary Eddie Moody noted while honoring Pate during the annual Leadership Conference. “Steve has done a little bit of everything for us over the years. In addition to his hard work on the building and in the mailroom, since 2020 Steve has also served as lunch breaker for the building receptionist nearly every day. (Perhaps some of you had an opportunity to speak to him.) Whatever the case, Steve has always been willing to do *anything* asked, and we are grateful to him for his service.”

Pate and his wife Vicki live in Smyrna, Tennessee, and attend Corner Stone Free Will Baptist Church. They have one son Chris (Jacy) and two grandchildren. **ONE**

## Foundation Grants Program to Resume

**Antioch, TN**—Free Will Baptist Foundation is pleased to announce the grants program will resume in 2024.

“After the hard decision last year to pause the grants program, the Free Will Baptist Foundation is pleased to make grants available again this year,” said Director David Brown. “We will award \$250,000 in grants, and

applications are now being accepted.”

Brown encourages Free Will Baptist organizations to begin preparing their grant requests to meet the March 15, 2024 deadline. More information regarding the grant program can be found at [fwbgifts.com](http://fwbgifts.com). Download the grant application packet: <https://loom.ly/jiYOyEQ>. **ONE**

# Merging Churches

BY EDDIE MOODY

**“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour” (Ecclesiastes 4:9).**

Dr. Danny Dwyer likes to say, “Merging churches is an idea whose time has come.” Indeed, across America many churches are coming together. One study by the Leadership Network indicated 6,000 churches merge annually, and another 15,000 have talked of merging in the future.

**An Example.** Free Will Baptists have embraced this trend. One recent example is the merger between Legacy and Ada First in Oklahoma. Though only 2.8 miles apart, the churches were very different. Ada First was almost a century old, Legacy only 17 years old. However, both churches ran 35-40 people each Sunday. Most Ada First attendees were over 60, while Legacy had a slightly younger congregation and more young families.

**Why Merge?** Over the years, the two churches discussed joining forces. Seven years ago, when both were without pastors, they evaluated the idea briefly but decided the timing was not right. Four years ago, Legacy pastor Jarrod Presley became burdened about bringing the congregations together. After reading *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work* by Tomberlin and Bird and *Reclaiming Glory* by Mark Clifton, he became convinced the two churches truly would be better together.

**How?** Presley grew up at Ada First. After Legacy Church formed, they asked him to become their youth pastor. He served first in that capacity and later became pastor. His father is a deacon at Ada First, and his mother has been heavily involved in the music program for years. After Pastor Dean Stone resigned from Ada First, Jarrod proposed a merger to his father on Father’s Day.

Ada First came to agree it was time to act. The leadership teams of both churches began to meet about the possibility, both together and separately, and they had a “Worship Together” service August 6, 2023. Ada First voted to call Presley as their pastor, and the next week, Legacy voted to join Ada First. All but four people at Legacy voted for the churches to merge.



**The Result.** The new congregation held its first official service October 8, with 98 in attendance (including the four who voted against the merger). Don Kerr was the first person to arrive. At age 89, he was excited to see what was happening at his church. Unfortunately, he became ill shortly thereafter and was hospitalized. The new unified congregation received word at their second service he had passed away. As they prepared together to celebrate Don’s life, they could already sense a new, growing unity.

Since the merger, the church has never dipped below 80 people in attendance, exceeding their attendance prior to the merger. Early on, someone told Pastor Presley, “God will have to do a lot of little miracles” to bring the merger to pass. He did just that!

It has not always been easy, and the new church will certainly face challenges in the future. But in this upside-down world, this is *exactly* the kind of thing our world needs to see (Psalm 133:1). What an example of being *better together!*

If you are interested in learning more about church mergers, email [questions@nafwb.org](mailto:questions@nafwb.org), and a Refresh team member will reach out to you. 



**Eddie Moody**

Executive Secretary,  
National Association of  
Free Will Baptists



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Arlene Pelicane



Chap Clark



Chad Hoffman



Nate Hartman



Jim Putman



John Mark Yeats



Melissa MacDonald



Ron Hunter



Dr. Shelly Melia



Keith Ferrin



Randy Adams



Matt Markins



Kurt Bruner

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Jim Putman



Arlene Pellicane



Shane Pruett



Carissa Potter



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