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JOURNEY

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Alive!**

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The Dying Living Church

Years ago, I was pastoring a medium-sized congregation that experienced a dramatic demographic shift. Younger families were moving away from our area, and the membership began shrinking as many began attending a larger church in the outlying suburbs. This larger church began some new ministries that drew yet more of our members its way, and I became concerned.

I invited the pastor of the larger congregation to lunch. As I got to know him, the love of God filled my heart and enabled me to let go of my small-mindedness; to trust that God was at work to bless both congregations. Shortly afterward, our church turned a corner and began growing through the addition of new residents from our local area.

Competition. It can make us bitter or better. Within a local church family, for example, members who strive to excel for God may find themselves competing with each other. Our naturally competitive spirits must be tempered by the Biblical call for cooperation. This call is wonderfully demonstrated in the vision of the “Church” with a capital “C”—the universal gathering of believers.

A right view of this Church-at-large does not diminish but actually fuels purpose into our individual ministries.

Without a global understanding of the Church, we can become territorial. With it, we find ourselves following the steps of Paul, who—as a prisoner for the Lord—rejoiced as others carried on the work he had begun even when their motives were not pure (Philippians 1:12-18). Paul was motivated by three analogies for the Church, each of which may be linked to a person of the Triune God and each of which correct misconceptions about the Church:

Wrong Idea #1: The Church is simply a place we attend weekly.

The Truth: Because God is our Father, we are God’s family (1 John 3:1, Ephesians 2:19, 3:14-19). The Church, then, is first and foremost not a place but a people God has chosen to know Him and to make Him known. Being part of this family is a daily reality all over the world.

Wrong Idea #2: The Church is primarily an organization. If this were true, people’s spiritual growth would

not matter as much as would the growth of programs and budgets.

The Truth: Because of God the Spirit, we are God’s body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 26-27). This means the Church is not first and foremost an organization but an organism: living, breathing, and alive. As members of the body, we are called to help each other excel in service to God (Ephesians 4:14-16).

Wrong Idea #3: We don’t need to be connected to the Church with its imperfect people. God is enough.

The Truth: Because of God the Son, we are part of his Bride (2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:7, 21:2). Christ, the Bridegroom of the Church, cares much more for us than we can imagine. He gave His life for his Bride and longs for the coming heavenly wedding (Revelation 19:6-8). We are His and we are one, so let’s stay connected and reach the world.

We are God’s family, God’s body, and God’s Bride. Don’t let anyone tell you the Church is not alive!



WILLIAM P. CAMPBELL
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Host of Beyond Words Radio.



Don't Sit in the Window

Let me ask you a question:
“Is your church alive?”

Let's look at what that might look like. I have always said, “If you aren't growing, you are dead.” Well, an alive church should be growing not only in a membership sense, but each individual within that church must also be growing personally in their relationship with the Lord. The reality is that many of the folks coming to church today or proclaiming their Christianity are not growing, but instead have become complacent and close to death.

In Acts 20:7-12, Paul is preaching late into the night in an upper room. It is stuffy—Scripture points out there were a lot of lamps in the room. The story goes on that there is a young man named Eutychus sitting in the window. He falls out to his death. Paul raises him from the dead, Eutychus returns upstairs, eats with the

group, and the next morning he returns home alive.

To me, this is a good description of what I see happening to a lot of Christians. Eutychus was “at church” listening to the greatest preacher of his time along with other great Christian minds like Timothy. In other words, Billy Graham is preaching and along with him are Francis Chan, Beth Moore, etc. But due to complacency, Eutychus positions himself as far away from the front as possible and takes a seat in a window.

What does a window do? It separates the inside from the outside. In this case, it separates the Church from the world.

And Eutychus places himself as close to the world as he can possibly get. He is complacent. He gets sleepy, losing

his focus. He falls out of church into the world...and dies!

Thank goodness the story does not end here. At least he was still going to church so when he fell, someone noticed and told Paul, and you know the rest of the story. But I guarantee that when he went back into the meeting, he sat on the front row. And he went home the next day ALIVE.

We too can be a part of one of the biggest, active churches in our area but still be toeing the line with the world. This is such a dangerous place to be; very quickly we can become sleepy and wind up in the world again, no better off than before we were saved. If we are lucky (which is what the name “Eutychus” means), we will have folks who will gather round us and breathe life back into us.

Friends, if you, like Eutychus, are sitting in the windowsill, please make sure:

- You are attending a thriving, vibrant church—surrounding yourself by a body of believers;
- Attentively listen to the message being given;
- Get into Scripture daily and develop a hunger for God's Word;
- Develop an active prayer life—asking especially for the Holy Spirit's guidance in your walk with God.

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness (Romans 8:10 NASB).



SUSIE SHIELDS
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The Blessed Hope

Two thousand years of Christianity have not, by all estimations, made the faith any simpler to embrace. New believers who are attracted to the purity, power, and passion of Jesus Christ in the pages of the Gospels are sometimes shocked when they discover how “complicated” Christianity has become. In the face of denominations, doctrines, differences, and divisions, many ask: “What happened to the simple story—that Jesus died, was raised, and is coming again?”

Well, no one set out to make Christianity complicated. But with geographic expansion, the incorporation of a rainbow’s worth of ethnic and cultural differences, and confrontations with secular culture, the faith is admittedly more complex today than when it began. But complex doesn’t have to mean confusing. What always keeps the complex manageable is focusing on the essentials: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity,” said one Puritan writer. In-

deed, complex bodies need central beliefs to keep them moving forward as one. In Christianity, that central belief is the imminent return of Jesus Christ to earth.

In Titus 2:13, Paul calls this church-unifying element “the blessed hope.” Notice he did not say *a* blessed hope, but *the* blessed hope. Indeed, the return to earth of Christ should be an ever-present focus of all believers:

But of that day and hour no one knows...Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:36, 42 NASB)

Christ’s second coming is certainly the hope of the suffering church—those for whom every day is a test of faith and endurance. But it should likewise be the hope of all who understand that this world is not our home—that we are, in the words of the old spiritual, “just a-passin’ through.”

If church history, church government, and church life seem too complex at times, it can help greatly to refocus on the future. An event is coming that will cause all complexities of the Church on earth to pale by comparison—an event by which every believer will be blessed. That “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13) should be our moment-by-moment hope—the *blessed hope*—both of our individual lives and of every corporate body of believers.

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in **one hope** of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4–6 NASB, emphasis added)*



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JOURNEY CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

A Ministry of Scripture Awakening

The Journey Christian Magazine is direct-mailed monthly to Christian households throughout the Carolinas and greater southeast. Our ministry seeks to provide resources to equip you to **READ, STUDY, and LIVE** God’s Word, awakening you to its transformative power for your life, your community, and world.

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Biblical Revivals: It's Time to Revive the Work of God

No doubt about it: America is in deep need of a heaven-sent revival now! Rarely in history have we seen such a sudden and rapid decline in truth-telling, moral living, the practice of real justice, and the availability of solid Biblical teaching for the next generation.

There was another time in history, however, that seemed to match the desperation we face in our day. It was around 520 BC, when the Lord sent his prophet Haggai to the people of Judah. This brief book pivoted around the key text in Haggai 1:4:

Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house [the temple] remains in ruins?

When Judah returned back to Israel after the Babylonian captivity around 536-538 BC, the people joyfully and immediately began setting the foundation for restoring the destroyed Temple of God. There was, however, such an outcry from older folks who had seen the original Solomon Temple that the work was halted for 16 years (Ezra 3:12-13). To remedy this long delay, God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to call God's people to renew the work of God that had languished for too long.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the prophet Haggai issued four calls to the people of his day just as God has called us to renew His work in the Church today.

1. Stop offering excuses as to why the work of God in many areas of the world today continues to languish (Haggai 1:1-4). Haggai knew all too well that despite the fact that the people cried that the time was not right for them to get involved in rebuilding the Temple, they still were able to build their own homes. It was clear that their use of the word "time" was just a pretext for their laziness and failure to obey the call of God. They brazenly blamed God for their state of affairs.

2. Set priorities (Haggai 1:5-6). God's work had to come before their work; otherwise, it revealed the poor religious condition of their hearts. To neglect God's house was equal to committing treason; all who loudly declared that He was "Lord" turned around and refused to do what He called them and us to do. No one cheats God without badly cheating themselves.

3. Get involved in the work of God immediately (Haggai 1:7-12). When we obey, it brings pleasure to our Lord; however, if we choose to disobey, we can expect shortages in wages and materials, plus things such as famine, drought, and the like. But when we obey, the beauty is that the work of God is accomplished, and we are joyful.

4. Receive God's enablement (Haggai 1:13-15). When people are stirred up and enabled by the Spirit of God, there is joy in their midst, and the work gets accomplished.

Finally: We must stop making excuses. We must stop giving to God the leftovers and scraps of our time and talents. We must ask God to hear our plea for repentance and our decision to turn back to Him as we seek His will and work to see His Kingdom come.

Dr. Kaiser is author of Quest For Renewal and Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal.



WALTER KAISER, JR.

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Ability, Disability, and Jesus in the Church

You know you've found a book worth reading when you're engaged before even turning to chapter one. That's precisely what happened as I began my journey through *Jesus in Me*, the latest Anne Graham Lotz release from Water-Brook Multnomah Publications.

The Christian author/speaker wastes no time in getting a point across: the book, framed around the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of each believer, is "Dedicated to the Lonely." That simple declaration echoed in my mind three chapters later when Lotz explained that one role of the Holy Spirit is that of Advocate for followers of Christ. She pinpoints various groups for whom divine advocacy holds particularly special meaning, including people with disabilities.

She made me wonder, among other things, whether we allow space within our churches for the Holy Spirit to advocate through us on behalf of members with disabilities.

I'm not speaking here of making a structure physically accessible to mem-

bers with special needs. Or of holding a door for a quadriplegic. Or of affectionately tousling the hair of someone with a cognitive disability. All of these actions are well and good, but candid statements like the following should have us scrambling to figure out what we're missing.

Her tone is neither dramatic nor bitter when she says it, but I know a person who'll tell you—if you ask her—that "church can be one of the loneliest places on earth for Christians with disabilities." She longs for a worship community who sees and values her capabilities over her disabilities. Unfortunately, her claim is more than a claim when it comes to involving handicapped members in a congregation's servant/leadership roles; for far too many, it's sad reality.

But the saddest reality of all is that, in these situations, the church itself misses an exciting opportunity to see Jesus Christ glorified (see John 9:1-3). Every human has a disability; some are seen, while others are unseen, but we all have them. Equally—if not more so—crucial, however, is the Scriptural truth that every Christian possesses a spiritual gift and is called to use it to serve and glorify Christ (e.g. Romans 12:6; Ephesians 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10).

With that in mind, it seems to follow that Christ's Church carries two responsibilities to its body. Both require our seeking of guidance from the Holy Spirit. In cases where a person's spiritual gift is obvious, we must commit to finding ways to incorporate his or her gift into the life of the Church. In cases where a spiritual gift is not readily known, we must come alongside the person to determine what that gift is, then incorporate it into the Church. Either way, ability and not disability must be the main concern.

This only happens when a worship community chooses to let go and let God's Spirit move. Doing so requires that we lay down our own preconceived notions of why a person can't serve and let God—who created us all in His image in the first place—show us how the person can serve (see Genesis 1:26-27). In other words, we need to welcome the Holy Spirit's desire to "advocate" not only to us, but also through us.

To borrow Lotz's title, this is the epitome of living with *Jesus in Me*.



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Paying it Forward

“Paying it forward” has become a recognized term in recent years, particularly after the 2000 Warner Bros. film *Pay It Forward*, starring well-known actors Kevin Spacey and Helen Hunt. The term, or a similar concept, has been the source of quotes from famous leaders and innovators such as Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and legendary Ohio State coach, Woody Hayes.

Paying it forward is a concept certainly rooted in Scripture. In Luke 10:37, Jesus tells an expert in law to “go and do likewise” as the Good Samaritan did in Jesus’ parable. Also, in John 13:15, after serving His disciples, Jesus tells them, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” A healthy, thriving church will have members that understand and practice this principle.

From a financial planning standpoint, paying it forward can best be demonstrated in our giving. Out of response to the indescribable gift of Jesus that God has so freely given to us, we can freely give to others. While we can demonstrate this throughout our lives in many glorious ways, one of the greatest and most lasting acts of paying it forward can be accomplished through how well we prepare the next generation of stewards that will inherit the material possessions and resources we leave behind after we die. Here are a few suggestions on how to prepare your beneficiaries to carry on your legacy of effective stewardship:

- 1 Offer to match gifts that your heirs make to ministries they are passionate about supporting.
- 2 Plan and pay to take your children and grandchildren on family mission trips.
- 3 Bring your children and grandchildren along with you when you serve at local ministries.
- 4 Create a family giving fund and allow your heirs to make gift proposals to you each year at Thanksgiving. Then gift to those ministries from your giving fund.
- 5 Establish giving funds for each of your heirs and fund them with a portion of your remaining assets after your death. Stipulate that a certain percentage of those funds be distributed to ministries each year. This requires them to exercise regular giving.

These are just a few creative ideas to help you model and train the next generation to pay it forward and be cheerful givers. May the Lord richly bless the legacy of paying it forward that you impart upon generations to come!



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Journey Needs Your Help to Finish Out the Year

Scripture Awakening took over Journey Magazine in February 2019. When we did, we unfortunately missed the end-of-year planning window that previous clients require for their advertising budgets.

Each issue costs about \$2.50 per subscription to produce and mail. We want to keep subscriptions free. Therefore, your donation now would make a difference by keeping the magazine coming to your mailbox.

Below are just a few of the ways that Journey Magazine is making an impact:

- Surplus issues go into prisons
- Articles are used as a basis of discussion for small groups
- Pastors use examples from articles in their sermons

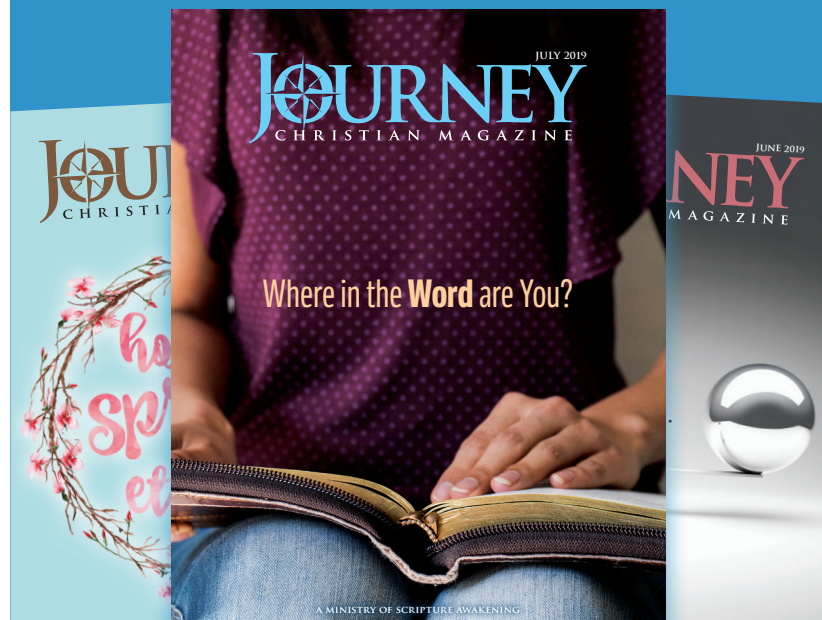
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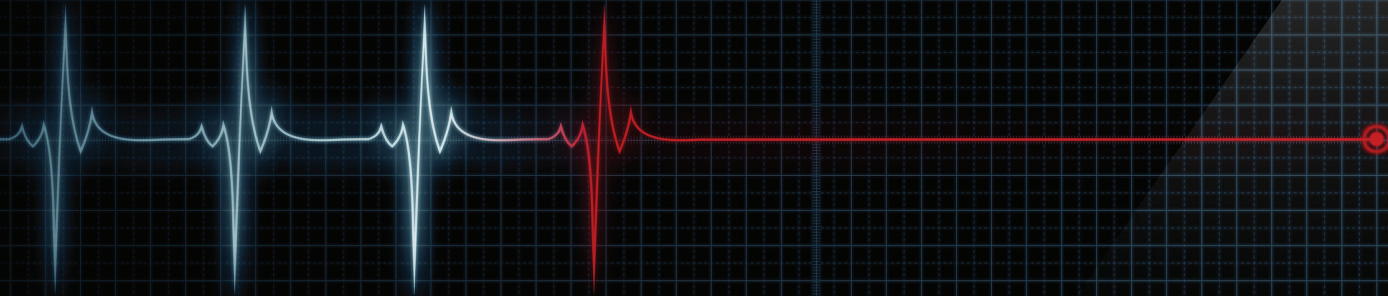
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How Can the Church Be Alive When We Are So Dead?

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near (Hebrews 10:23-25 NLT).

Read those words above again and tell me if you can carry them out by yourself—isolated and alone? Of course not! We need each other in holding on to the “hope we affirm.” We need each other in thinking of ways to “motivate one another to love and good works.” We need each other in corporate worship and fellowship. We need each other to “encourage one another.” Obviously, we can’t do any of these things alone.

With church attendance increasingly waning, many churches are doing everything they can to keep you engaged, but there is good reason for this. Although it’s true that, on the lowest level, churches need your attendance (for numbers) and your tithes (for bills)—I’m going to challenge you not to be so cynical.

Let me remind you, according to the Scripture above, that church attendance isn’t about numbers; it’s about relationships and the importance of being together as the Body of Christ. The point is, we need each other!

So if we isolate ourselves, we become good candidates for the “hardening of the arteries.” Without fellowship and time together our love can grow cold or even die. In addition, faith is the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

The cynical heart doesn’t hope for much; in fact, we keep our expectations and hopes low to avoid being disappointed. Finally, the cynical heart is

that of the Pharisee. We expect much from others that we don’t require of ourselves.

I’ve always found that the cure for these “ailments” is to get the focus off myself and pay attention to other people; to get out and help those in need. If you really want to soften your hard heart, try reaching beyond yourself by connecting with others.

So how about you? Have you been neglecting the meeting together of the Church? Maybe it’s time to step back in, get involved again and engage others by motivating them to “love and good works.” If the Church is really going to be ALIVE, you may just be the catalyst for something good. I encourage you to RSVP this week at the church of your choice.



TIM BRYANT
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Is America a Christian Nation?

Modern claims that America is not a Christian nation are rarely noticed or refuted today because of the nation's widespread lack of knowledge about America's history and foundation.

Contemporary critics who assert that America is not a Christian nation always refrain from offering any definition of what the term "Christian nation" means. So, what is an accurate definition of that term as demonstrated by the American experience?

Contrary to what critics imply, a Christian nation is not one in which all citizens are Christians,

or the laws require everyone to adhere to Christian theology, or all leaders are Christians, or any other such superficial measurement.

What makes a Christian nation? According to former Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer, America was "of all the nations in the world...most justly called a Christian nation" because Christianity "has so largely shaped and molded it." (David J. Brewer, *The United States: A Christian Nation*. Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1905. p. 57.)

Christianity is the religion that shaped America and made her what she is today. In fact, historically speaking, it can be irrefutably demonstrated that Biblical Christianity in America produced many of the cherished traditions still enjoyed today, including:

- A republican rather than a theocratic form of government;
- The institutional separation of church and state (as opposed to today's enforced institutional secularization of church and state);
- Protection for religious toleration and the rights of conscience;
- A distinction between theology and behavior, thus allowing the incorporation into public policy of religious principles that promote good behavior but which do not enforce theological tenets. Examples of this distinction would include religious teachings such as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). All of these principles promote positive civil behavior but do not impose ecclesiastical rites;

- A free-market approach to religion, thus ensuring religious diversity and security for the rights of religious conscience.

Consequently, a Christian nation as demonstrated by the American experience is a nation founded upon Christian and Biblical principles; one whose values, society, and institutions have largely been shaped by those principles.

Thomas Jefferson stated: "No nation has ever existed or been governed without religion. Nor can be. The Christian religion is the best religion that has been given to man and I, as Chief Magistrate of this nation, am bound to give it the sanction of my example" (Hutson, Religion, p. 96, quoting from a handwritten history in possession of the Library of Congress, "Washington Parish, Washington City," by Rev. Ethan Allen).

For a more in depth look at this topic, see www.wallbuilders.com/america-christian-nation.



DAVID BARTON

Founder of WallBuilders.com focusing on America's moral, religious & constitutional heritage.



A Healthy Church Reaches Out

As believers, we are often tempted to get comfortable. We belong to a church and have Christian friends. We give our time and finances to support ministry. We may even feel that our faith is increasing as we read the Bible, pray, and worship God. While all these practices are beneficial, if we aren't careful, we can become disconnected and inwardly focused. Our spiritual growth isn't complete until we share it with others.

Jesus Himself, set the example for us. Reaching out was His primary purpose in ministry. And everywhere He went, people gathered. They were drawn to Him, His words, and His healing touch. The time Jesus spent in prayer and worship didn't just fill Him spiritually. It prepared Him to go out into the world and minister to the needs the people, pointing them to the Heavenly Father.

He made His calling clear. *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners"* (Mark 2:17). Before He left the earth, Jesus told us that our calling was the same—to go and make disciples of all people.

As a church, we can truly be healthy only if we are fulfilling our God-given

purpose. He didn't call us to be comfortable, to sit on the sidelines, and watch others share His Good News. He called us to go and tell others about the free gift of eternal life, so that they too may be saved (see Matthew 28:19-20).

If outreach is so vital, why does it not tend to be our priority? Churches today are pulled in many different directions. Pastors often serve as teachers, disciple-makers, counselors, leaders, administrators, and so much more.

Contrary to what many believers may think, pastors are not the primary ones responsible for evangelism. We are.

It is our responsibility to share Christ with our families, our neighbors, and the people we meet in our communities.

Church-wide outreaches are great, and I encourage them. But evangelism becomes more widespread when believers leave the church building and disperse into their neighborhoods, taking the Gospel with them wherever they go. The

message of eternal life can be shared in line at the grocery store, while waiting for clothes to dry at the laundromat, or with a next-door neighbor.

Many Christians stop short of sharing their faith because of fear. They don't want to be rejected. They don't know what to say, or they don't know how to even start the conversation. But the good news is that these things can be taught. We have found that when people learn how to begin Gospel conversations, answer difficult questions, and share Jesus effectively, they are often excited to share their faith!

When Christians start spreading the best News of all, people's lives are changed for eternity. The Church grows. Our faith is strengthened. Other believers are encouraged to step out in faith and share the gift of eternal life with someone they know who needs hope.

In *Your Story Counts* by John Sorensen, learn how to prepare your story to share with those around you.



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How to Be Witnesses in a Culture Saturated with Science



It's clear to me that we live in a culture saturated with science. It's also clear to me that many think this means they have to stay away from church.

When asked which box to check in response to "What religion are you?," more than one-third of 18 to 30-year-olds mark "none." Why? David Kinnaman of the Barna Group found that one of the six main reasons emerging adults are becoming "nones" is that they think "Christianity is anti-science."¹ Therefore to be a Christian witness in a world of science and technology, we need to disconnect these two words: "Christianity" and "anti-science."

Here are three ways to do just that by looking at the good news in Science:

First of all, I'd remind people to read God's two books together—that is, the book of nature and the Book of Scripture—which are both written by the same Author. Listen to how Psalm 19 puts this together:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1)

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. (Psalm 19:7)

In the book of Scripture, the Lord has written the law to direct human life, and in the book of nature, God has au-

thored the natural world (studied by science) to reveal our Creator's glory.

Secondly, I'd point to great Christian individuals in science of the past and present.

Almost every significant thinker of the 16th and 17th century scientific revolution was deeply affected by the Gospel: Copernicus, Kepler, and Pascal, to name just three. And as science continued to develop, celebrated scientists like Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell stood as witnesses to their faith in Christ as they made their mark on 19th-Century science.

Today this legacy is carried forward by Jennifer Wiseman, who heads NASA's Hubble space telescope, and Francis Collins who guided the Human Genome project and is now the director of the National Institutes of Health. In a debate with the atheist and scientist Richard Dawkins, Collins commented, "I find that studying the natural world is an opportunity to observe the majesty, the elegance, the intricacy of God's creation."²

We learn that Christians have a birthright in the emergence of modern science. Let's not sell that.

Third, I'd show how science can be an act of worship. Jeff Hardin, chair of Integrative Biology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, sees God in his laboratory. "Why be a scientist?" Hardin once asked at a BioLogos science-faith conference. His answer was both succinct and profound: "Worship." Similarly, Jennifer Wiseman, mentioned above, speaks of "science as an instrument of worship."³

Mere Christianity and Mainstream Science

For these reasons, I've taught and preached on integrating mainstream science with "Mere Christianity" (C.S. Lewis). And I've helped other congregations do the same. If we don't witness to this deep integration of Christian faith and science, the listening world might just conclude they don't go together. But for the reasons I've mentioned plus many more, they certainly do. And that's good news.

¹ <https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>

² <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1555132-3,00.html>

³ <https://biologos.org/articles/science-as-an-instrument-of-worship>



GREG COOTSONA

Lecturer in religion and humanities at Chico State University, co-project leader of Science in Congregations.



Christ's Church: Sometimes Struggling, Yet Always Standing

“What...is the most beautiful sanctuary in which you’ve spoken?”

Having preached in more than 2,000 churches worldwide, a variant of the question emerges often; I’d like to share about two of them.

When I think of unforgettably beautiful churches, I think of 50 or so Peruvian worshippers singing praises in a voice more moving than any choir I’ve heard. They huddled into a space too low for anyone to stand with “sanctuary” walls made of shipping pallets nailed together; the roof a tattered blue tarp propped up by a tree branch. Another beautiful sanctuary had twisted, half-burned logs forming the corner posts of an open-air structure. African winds had removed large sections of its grass roof. A candle that burned on a rock pulpit flickered throughout 7-hour worship services but never failed.

If I preached less than three hours, the African men whispered, “These people have walked a long way to hear the Word of God; you need to preach more! They are hungry for the Lord!” The idea that people would walk miles to church and listen for hours to God’s Word is both moving and convicting to this pampered American.

A comforting promise, in our day of hostility toward the Gospel:

Jesus promised, “*I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it*” (Matthew 16:18). Scholars have debated the full import of this verse. Perhaps it means that, no matter how much persecution Satan throws at believers, the world’s remnant of Christians will never be fully extinguished.

Maybe the Lord was saying that His Church would go forth despite hell’s best efforts to obstruct the growth of the body of believers.

It could also refer to the fact that Christ’s Kingdom is coming (c.f. Matthew 11:12). God’s ultimate restoration of all things is a certainty! I believe that the Matthew 16:18 verse implies it.

As I write this article, a number of media report that neither millennials or younger generations value family, childbearing, or patriotism as previous generations have. Religion raises another issue of concern with this group. Sociologists, historians, legal experts, and others ask, “What will our nation be like if these bedrock values aren’t restored, and if in fact, they continue to disappear?”

But the fact is that decades of the promotion of relativism (belief that there

are no objective moral truths) has taken its toll. And the negative outcomes of our national “enforced secularism” cannot begin to be calculated. The tide, quite simply, must be turned. If there is a revival of the Gospel, there will be a corresponding restoration of love for family and country.

While the degradation of America is cause for sadness, there truly are no ultimate worries for Christians. The Church Militant of this world will soon be the Church Triumphant of the next. It will never be vanquished because nothing—not even death—could vanquish its Founder, Jesus Christ!

Constant travel is rigorous but seeing the power of the Holy Spirit manifested in lives internationally makes it all worthwhile. I have observed firsthand that God’s Word does not return void (Isaiah 55:11); it does accomplish the purpose for which God sends it.

Think of it: the Church’s Head exceeds the headlines. In Christ we rejoice; in Him we remain unshakably confident.



DR. ALEX MCFARLAND
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Michelle Coleman

Michelle currently serves as the Promotions Manager at The Cove. Graduate of the University of North Carolina Asheville. She has a Masters in Sports Marketing and Management from the United States Sports Academy. She was Marketing and Communications Director

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The Cove





How to Have a Word-Strong Marriage

What is the secret to a vibrant, strong, successful marriage? Be a tree! Let me explain.

Over the past few years, I have been teaching on one of my newer books, *Discovering Hope in the Psalms: A Creative Bible Study Experience*. The book opens with Psalms 1:1-3:

Blessed is the one...whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

Notice the key to being a fruitful, prosperous tree: Plant yourself by the water; in this case, the water is the Word.

Therefore, delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on the Word day and night.

This prosperous tree is illustrated by date palms that have been firmly planted along irrigation channels that form a refreshing oasis in the middle of a parching, hot, dry desert. That is

what a strong marriage can become—an oasis of love for you and your mate, your family, and your community. The word *fruit* can also mean earnings or reward; *leaves that do not wither* means they do not sink or drop down, languish, or fade. To *prosper* is to advance, succeed, thrive, and gain victory. This is the kind of strong marriage Bill and I set our hearts on when we fell in love at age 19. We both came from homes of dysfunction, chaos, and confusion. Our path out of this brokenness was to plant ourselves in the Word.

We wove the Word into our life by:

- **Creating a time for daily devotions together**
- **Cultivating personal, private quiet times and Bible study**
- **Attending church together**
- **Joining a small group Bible study**
- **Finding a Sunday School Bible class**
- **Filling our home with praise music**
- **Fellowshipping with those who also love and value the Word**

For several years, Bill was Small Groups' Pastor at Shadow Mountain

Community Church where Dr. David Jeremiah is Lead Pastor. One Sunday morning at the Small Groups' ministry table, a young couple approached Bill and me.

"We want a marriage like yours! We have been using your *Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti* video series in our Young Marrieds' Small Group. You two have a vibrant marriage and you seem to enjoy life together. You have so much fun—and you are so funny on the videos!"

We thanked them for their encouraging affirmation. Then I said, "How is everyone liking the Bible Study guide?" They replied a bit sheepishly, "Our group decided they just want to show up and watch the video and not do any homework or Bible study."

Bill and I replied simultaneously, "The power is in THE WORD!" and I added, "The strength you see is the Word of God layered in, day after day, year after year." Plant your marriage tree firmly, then water it with the Word.



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When a Church Needs to Die



In his book, *This is the Day*, Tim Tebow tells the story of Alexis, a young girl who inspired him in her fight with a terminal condition. What stuck in my head about Alexis was that she lived every day as a gift from God right until the end. Her motto, YODO, stands for *you only die once*. When thinking about living every moment to maximize God's potential, YODO puts everything into perspective.

Whether by conditions it created or circumstances out of its own control, a church sometimes faces death as well.

Thousands close every year in the United States for various reasons. While heartbreaking, church death may be a door of opportunity.

How should a church family deal with a declining congregation? Too many decide not to decide and just hang onto a failing situation until the church is functionally bankrupt. It should instead make the important decisions while it still has enough control to do so. Waiting too long puts those decisions in the hands of

others, often with disastrous consequences.

Ask questions to help clarify what the church can do:

- **Is there another church or church plant that could use our facility?** Often a church discovers another work is already reaching the people in its neighborhood. But this church may be new, meeting in rented facilities, or sharing space with others. Start a conversation about passing along facilities or at least sharing space with another congregation.
- **Have conditions changed to require different ministries in the community?** While there may be enough churches in an area, there may be a great need for shelters, food service, education, or crisis pregnancy support. A ministry that may be essential to the community could use the space a dying church occupies. If a partnership can be formed with one of these, it may allow a smaller church to co-exist without footing the bill for the entire facility.
- **Has the area transitioned from residential to commercial?** Sometimes the shrinking population base is due to people moving out where businesses are moving in. The church may

need to consider becoming a landlord to business tenants. While this may seem distasteful to the church, it could open the door to a new ministry in the commercial business arena.


- **Are churches suffering because of a local economic hardship?** A small area may lose significant population due to industries closing/moving, resulting in more churches than the remaining people can support. The Christian community should not be embarrassed about the need to combine and merge congregations of like faith and practice. New strength can be gained from pooling resources and people from the remaining churches into fewer-but-larger ministries.

If your church has been shrinking for some time with no end in sight, it's time to start talking and praying about the options before you. Don't put it off until it's too late. Addressing the situation now may result in a new ministry vision and opportunity for the future.



CRAIG BAILEY

Lead Pastor of Winnsboro First Baptist Church. Leader, Church Revitalization Group.



One Mother's Example

The *Hand That Rocks the Cradle is the Hand That Rules the World* is a poem written by William Ross Wallace in 1865. Seeing motherhood as the preeminent force to change the world, this poem celebrates the blessings and mission of being a mother.

In a day when our children are bombarded with social media, along with a strong pull to fill their lives with activities outside the home, it's important to keep focused on the tremendous impact we have on our kids. God hands to us is a glorious calling and responsibility in being a mother, a grandmother, or an aunt.

One of my heroes of the faith is Susanna Wesley, whose mission of raising her ten children impacted the world.

Yes, I realize she and her young squad stepped through their days 300 years

ago, but the tenets of motherhood she embraced are timeless and inspiring.

She had a QUIET TIME and taught her children to have one.

If you had peered through the window of the Wesley home any day between 1700 and 1720, you would have surely chuckled at the visual of a woman sitting on her kitchen chair with her apron pulled up over her head. Meanwhile her ten children read, studied, or played all around her. There was conversation taking place with a holy God under that apron, and her children knew it. She modeled by example what it meant to pull away with God in the midst of a busy lifestyle.

As soon as the children could speak, they were taught to recite Scripture.

Each child read, memorized, and thought about God's Word before breakfast and at the end of the day.

Giving attention to the Bible was an intentional activity in their home.

Sundays were treated differently than other days of the week.

Reserving time for family discussion and praying together kept them tight and informed about what was going on in their individual lives. This practice helped the children develop self-control and establish personal priorities in caring for God and family.

She was a cheerleader for her children.

Susanna believed that obedient behavior should be commended and celebrated. When obedience was lacking, she believed that parents should sweetly direct the child on how to do better in the future.

There was peace on the home front.

Raising ten children, the stage was set for chaos and disorder; however, the Wesley household was far from chaotic. This mom ran a tight schedule, establishing routines for morning, afternoon, and evening times together. This left little room for ruckus and quarrels among them.

This mother clearly shaped her children's characters and had an impact on countless lives. Her son, John, was the founder of the Methodist Movement. Another son, Charles, wrote many of the hymns we enjoy today.

May you be encouraged, dear friend, by the life of Susanna Wesley as you also invest your time and energy in loving and training your children through the power of Jesus!



CINDI WOOD

Author of best selling Frazzled Female series.
www.FrazzledFemale.com



Healing the Broken Hearted

Upon returning from the desert where He was tempted by Satan, Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth. On that fateful day over 2000 years ago, He was handed a scroll and began to read the opening of Isaiah 61: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

In those few moments, Jesus laid out His vision for His ministry; telling the congregation (and us), “*This is why I was sent and this is what I am going to do.*” These words were the core of His vision, as recorded in Luke 4:18 (KJV):

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.

From there, Jesus left Nazareth and traveled to Capernaum where He delivered a man from an evil spirit and healed Simon’s mother-in-law from a high fever. As the sun set, He healed all who came to Him and cast evil spirits out of many. In the culmination of this action-packed couple of days Jesus tells the residents, “*I must*

proclaim the good news (Gospel) of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43).

Jesus came to earth to proclaim or preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. What did that proclamation look like to those Israelites living along the shores of the Sea of Galilee? It wasn’t so much what they heard. It was what they saw—Jesus implementing His vision where people were healed physically, delivered spiritually, and, I believe, also healed emotionally.

Jesus came to heal! That was His vision and it should be the vision and purpose of His Church—we are called to carry on His Kingdom work.

Through the healing power of Jesus, I have seen men and women of all ages set free from shame, anger, bitterness, fear, sin, and participation in the occult. I have seen them let go of 30 years of spirit-crippling shame. I have seen the Holy Spirit break through hardened hearts, fill-

ing people with a joy, peace, and hope they never, ever thought they would experience. There is no person who doesn’t need some degree of spiritual deliverance, physical healing, and/or emotional healing. Fortunately, Jesus can use any open person who follows Biblical principles and prayer to invite the Lord to bring healing to broken hearts, spirits, and bodies.

I have seen Jesus’ vision played out in hundreds of people’s lives. The Church is called to heal. It is not an optional calling—it is our mandate to release the Kingdom of God into the kingdom of the world. We are called to follow Jesus and do even greater things.

These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying...“And as you go, preach, saying, ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons” (Matthew 10:7,8 NKJV).



JOHN VAN WAGONER

A follower of Jesus. He has traveled the world praying for people to be set free from sin, anger, and shame.



The Church as a Place of Healing

Have you ever considered the power God has given to your church to help others? So many come each week to worship but leave never experiencing the tender love, forgiving grace, and healing touch available to them through the body of Christ. They leave carrying the grief, depression, untold secret wounds, and family issues back home with them, rather than experiencing the prayers of the faithful, the power of God's Spirit, and the touch of the Master. They miss out on the transformation that could be theirs—healing of physical, emotional, and/or spiritual needs.

The truth is, we each need to be encouraged and verbally blessed. That is what the Church, the body of Christ, has been given the privilege—no, the command—to do. The body of Christ, by God's design, through Scripture and the examples of Jesus, is to be the very place where people find help and healing, where we embrace the struggles and speak life-giving and life-affirming words into another.

The Church, as a place of healing, offers hope to those who are struggling spiritually, emotionally, and physical-

ly. Healing is about redemption in all areas of our lives. Is it possible that we, in our modern churches, have neglected this critical part of God's design?

Churches, who make the ministry of healing a part of their DNA, open their doors to broken people.

Jesus understood healing drew people to God and often into the Kingdom. That is why it is so important for our churches to be places of healing. In Matthew 10:8, Jesus commanded the disciples to heal the sick. He told them to pray for each person, but he didn't stop there. Jesus wanted his disciples to be a part of what he was going to do. Essentially, he said to go deeper. Take prayer to the next level. Through my (Jesus') power in you, heal them. Going deeper required them to exercise their faith and to be dependent on God's presence. His same message is for us today.

Healing churches offer broken people resurrection hope and new life

beyond what the world has to offer. Through the ministry of healing, root causes of sin come into the light, chains are broken, the broken-hearted are set free, and the power of God is released in new ways. Healing effects the entire church and its broader community. It strengthens other believers and draws unbelievers closer to God's Kingdom.

Jesus came to set people free. He has called His Church to be a part of that ministry.

God's design is perfect. Is your church moving toward perfection? Is it following in the footsteps of Jesus? Is it a place of healing? May your church be one where hurting people come knowing they can find and touch the hem of Jesus' garment (Matthew 9:21, 14:36).

She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."
(Matthew 9:21)



JANET JOHNSON

Pastor, spiritual mentor, author, and speaker, helping others experience God's love and wholeness.



How Children Keep Our Churches Alive

Oftentimes we hear the phrase, “children are the future of our church.” While children and youth are our future, I believe they are also our present. Churches around the world are continuing to spread the Gospel from the mouth of babes. My mind goes to pictures of children receiving special blessings in Kenya, youth raising their hands to the Lord, and a mother holding her daughter’s hand while singing praises in Mali.

In the U.S., I am often reminded of Vacation Bible School. My mother-in-law is the VBS director at the church my husband grew up in and our family attended for 17 years. Throughout those years, I had the great privilege to work alongside her and many others helping children to learn how great our God is. She would often remind me that without children, there is no life in the church. It becomes quiet, dull, and stagnant.

I must ask myself and all parents, what are we doing now to raise children who will be given the baton from generation to generation? Are churches preparing their children and youth

to take the reins? If not, how can we prepare our young people?

Preparing our children to one day serve or lead the church starts with how we use them in our services. They have something to offer. They have God-given talents that should be used to glorify and worship our Lord.

That same church I spent 17 years in, I saw youth who would sing, a young boy play the piano in a way that would incite such joy, and children speak in front of a large congregation about how God has impacted their lives.

Mission trips are also a way to include children and youth in church today. My son is an 11-year-old farm boy. He loves nothing more than a power tool in his hands or chopping down weeds with the man-sized weed eater. He is just one of thousands of children who are capable of hands-on mission work. Just a few months ago, a mission team

from Hendersonville, NC, traveled up north to help clean up a community. It was amazing to watch these children and youth jump in and work, all while showing the love of God.

So often, I attend churches that choose to only allow children in the nursery or to hold down the pew. As a church, the body of Christ, we are to bring the children to Jesus now. Matthew 19:13-15, we find Jesus blessing the little children. Jesus saw purpose and hope in those children. We need to understand that our children still have a purpose and that that purpose can be harvested at a young age. We don’t have to wait until they reach a certain age to include them.

Children and youth are not only the future but the present. So, I leave you with this question: how will your church stay alive with the help of children and youth?

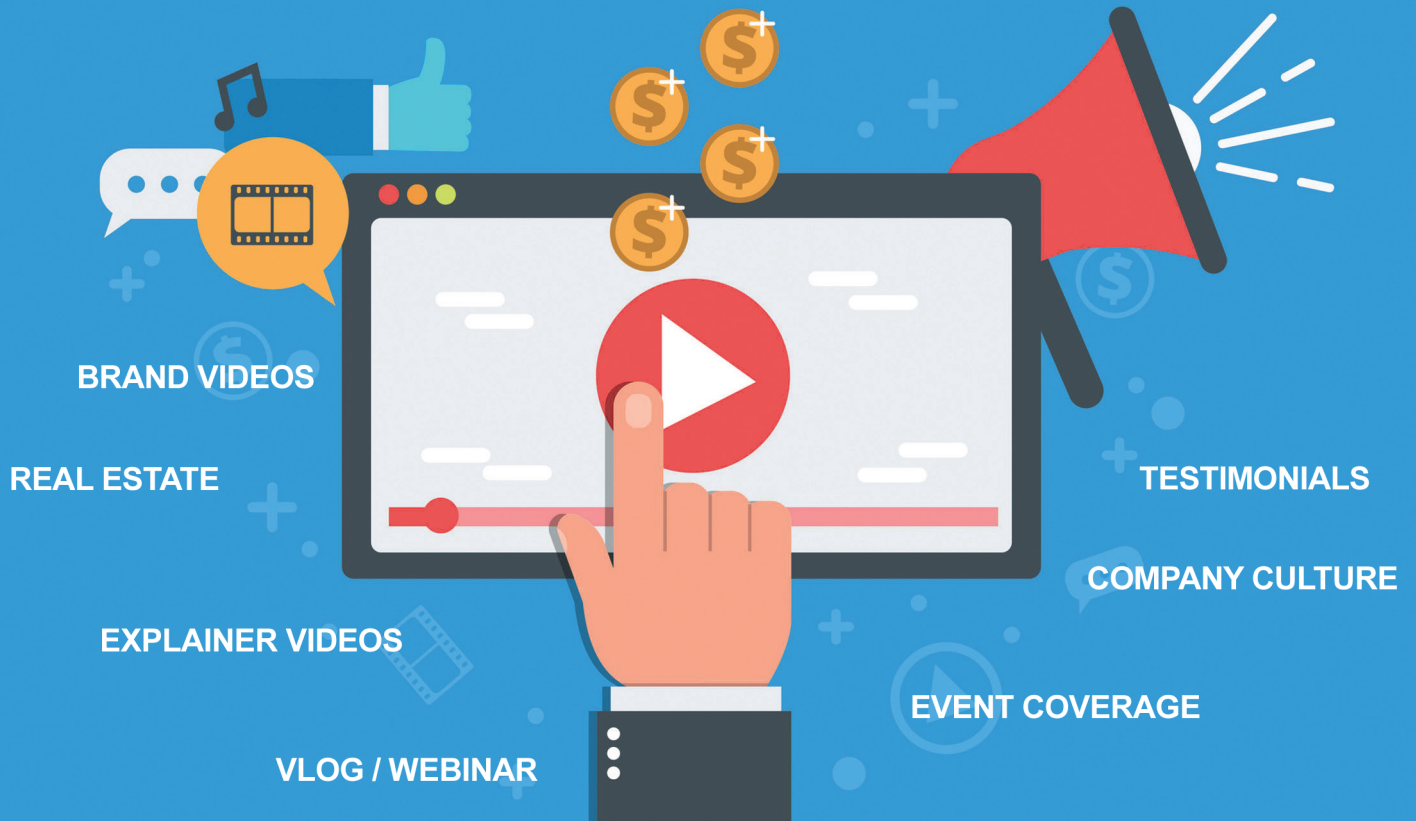


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