

# Facts & Trends

MARCH/APRIL 2015 • FACTSANDTRENDS.NET

## DWELL

*Devotion as a Way of Life*



BEYOND  
THE QUIET TIME

WALKING WITH GOD  
BETWEEN SUNDAYS

HEARING GOD  
THROUGH SCRIPTURE

MIRA  
SORVINO

SEAN  
ASTIN

ALEXA  
PENAVEGA

TED  
MCGINLEY

ANDREA  
LOGAN WHITE

CYBILL  
WITH SHEPHERD

FROM THE CREATORS OF "GOD'S NOT DEAD"



PUREFLIX PRESENTS

# DO YOU BELIEVE?

PURE FLIX PRESENTS A PURE FLIX PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH 10 WEST STUDIOS AND BELIEVE ENTERTAINMENT "DO YOU BELIEVE?"

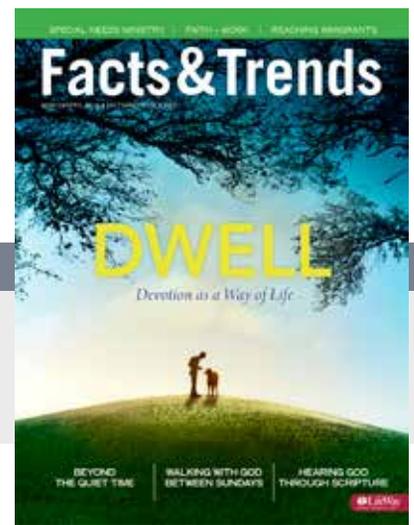
MIRA SORVINO SEAN ASTIN ALEXA PENAVEGA DELROY LINDO TED MCGINLEY ANDREA LOGAN WHITE MADISON PETTIS BRIAN BOSWORTH LIAM MATTHEWS WITH CYBILL SHEPHERD AND LEE MAJORS  
CASTING BY BILLY DAMOTA, CSA AND DEA VISE, CSA PRODUCTION DESIGNER DALLAS MONTGOMERY DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY BRIAN SHANLEY EDITED BY VANCE NULL MUSIC BY WILL MUSSER PRODUCED BY MICHAEL SCOTT DAVID A.R. WHITE  
RUSSELL WOLFE ELIZABETH TRAVIS HAROLD CRONK CO-PRODUCED BY CHUCK KONZELMAN CARY SOLOMON MONA NAHM SCREENPLAY BY CHUCK KONZELMAN & CARY SOLOMON DIRECTED BY JONATHAN M. GUNN

THIS FILM IS NOT YET RATED

[WWW.DOYUBELIEVE.COM](http://WWW.DOYUBELIEVE.COM)

IN THEATERS SPRING 2015

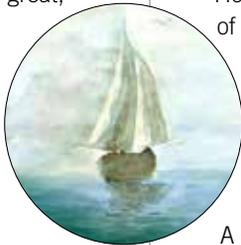
# Contents



## COVER SECTION

### 12 Beyond the quiet time

Having a devotional time is great, but it's not an end in itself. It's meant to be a springboard to an all-day, every day relationship with God. By Jared C. Wilson



### 16 Walking with God between Sundays

Here are six ways pastors and church leaders can keep their hearts in tune with God throughout the week. By Mark Dance

### 18 Can we talk?

Try this simple and effective approach for hearing God speak through Scripture. By Priscilla Shirer

### 21 The power of prayer

An interview with author and pastor H.B. Charles on how and why we should pray. By Matt Erickson



## FEATURES

### 22 Strangers next door

How the church can respond in the age of migration. By J.D. Payne

### 26 Wealth, poverty, and human flourishing: how do we really help?

A conversation with Jeff Palmer and Jerry Daniel. By Mark Kelly

### 30 It's OK to be ordinary

10 ordinary ways to make an extraordinary impact. By Tony Merida



### 34 Stuck like glue

Protecting your closest relationships. By Philip W. Nation

### 36 Drop the juggling act

Coping with busyness without burning out. By Sean Fowlds

### 42 All of life

Equipping Christians for 9 to 5. By Darryl Ford

## IN EVERY ISSUE

### 4 Inside F&T

Recognizing the Shepherd's voice. By Carol Pipes

### 5 From My Perspective

How to get unstuck when your spiritual life is stalled. By Thom S. Rainer

### 6 Insights

Beliefs, issues, and trends impacting the church and our world.

### 25 Calibrate

How to embrace families of kids with special needs. By Joy Fisher

### 38 Groups Matter

The Word in community. By Matt Capps

### 41 Technology

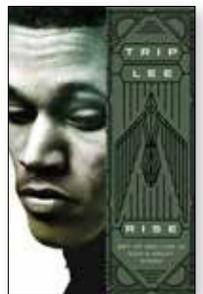
Social media: hashtag do's and don'ts. By Chris Martin and Marty Duren

### 46 On Our Radar

Relevant and practical resources for you and your church.

### 50 The Exchange

A path to spiritual growth. By Ed Stetzer





INSIDE F&T

## Recognizing the Shepherd's voice

**W**hen I was a little girl, I loved running errands with my dad. Whether we were headed to the grocery store, the library, or Hawk's Hardware, I was happy to be in tow. Occasionally, we would get separated in a store and a moment of panic seized me. I quickly learned that all I had to do was be still, and I would hear his voice or the funny way he cleared his throat. I followed my ears straight to him every time.

In John 10, Jesus says He is the Good Shepherd. He knows His sheep, and they know Him. They hear His voice and follow Him. Just as I always recognized my earthly father's voice, followers of Jesus know Him and recognize His voice. For this issue of *Facts & Trends*, we chose the cover image of a sheep with his shepherd to illustrate a life spent with God.

The more time we spend with the Shepherd, the more intimately we will know Him. The intentional practices of prayer, Bible study, personal worship, and Scripture memorization (to name a few) transform us to be more Christlike and draw us into God's presence.

Whether you call them spiritual practices, habits, or disciplines, they help us focus on God, discern His leading, and respond to His Spirit.

In the cover story "Beyond the Quiet Time," Jared Wilson says we often let spiritual practices—like spending time in God's Word—become something to check-off on our daily to-do list. Instead, he explains, they should be part of the natural rhythms of everyday life with Christ.

Additionally, Mark Dance offers six ways church leaders can stay in tune with God between Sundays. Priscilla Shirer shares her own personal approach to reading Scripture. And pastor H.B. Charles talks about how and why we should pray.

And in their columns, Thom Rainer shares the five barriers to spiritual growth common among church leaders, while Ed Stetzer unpacks three marks along the path of spiritual formation.

In this issue, we've provided articles that will refresh you spiritually while providing practical ways to dwell all day, every day in God's presence.

Carol Pipes, Editor

@CarolPipes | Carol.Pipes@lifeway.com

# Facts&Trends

Volume 61 • Number 2 • March/April 2015

*Facts & Trends* is designed to help pastors, church staff, and denominational leaders navigate the issues and trends impacting the church by providing information, insights, and resources for effective ministry.

### Production Team

Editor | Carol Pipes

Managing Editor | Matt Erickson

Senior Writer and Content Editor | Bob Smietana

Online Editor | Aaron Earls

Graphic Designer | Katie Shull

### LifeWay Leadership

President and Publisher | Thom S. Rainer

Executive Editor | Ed Stetzer

Senior Editor | Marty King

### Contributors

Matt Capps, Mark Dance, Marty Duren, Joy Fisher, Darryl Ford, Sean Fowlds, Mark Kelly, Chris Martin, Tony Merida, Philip Nation, J.D. Payne, Priscilla Shirer, and Jared C. Wilson

### Advertising

Rhonda Edge Buescher, director, Media Business Development  
Scott Hancock, advertising production

Send advertising questions/comments to:

One LifeWay Plaza, MSN 136,

Nashville, TN 37234

Email: AdOptions@lifeway.com

Media kits: LifeWay.com/mediaoptions

This magazine includes paid advertisements for some products and services not affiliated with LifeWay. The inclusion of the paid advertisements does not constitute an endorsement by LifeWay Christian Resources of the products or services.

### Subscriptions

For a free print subscription to *Facts & Trends*, send your name, address, and phone number to FactsAndTrends@lifeway.com.

### Permissions

*Facts & Trends* grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for use in a local church or classroom, provided copies are distributed free and indicate *Facts & Trends* as the source.

Contact Us: *Facts & Trends*, One LifeWay Plaza,  
Nashville, TN 37234-0192

FactsAndTrends@lifeway.com | FactsAndTrends.net

*Facts & Trends* is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, copyright 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.



@FactsAndTrends



FactsAndTrends





# Regaining your spiritual momentum

**R**aising boys has given me a great appreciation for the concept of transformation. My wife, Nellie Jo, and I raised three sons. They are all followers of Christ. They have all married godly women and are raising their own families. We watched them move from toddler to preschooler to adolescent to teenager and then to adulthood.

There are times when boys stall out in their maturing from one stage of life to another. Content with the level of care they receive in one stage, they have a hard time seeing the need to mature. In reality, it's not just little boys who get stuck in one stage of life—we all do.

Spiritual transformation occurs in every believer. But there are seasons when transformation stalls. Many things can contribute to a stalled spiritual life, but here are five barriers to spiritual growth common among church leaders.

**Busyness.** Ministers often are so caught up in doing the work of God they neglect being with God. Too much activity has a way of drowning out God's voice. Has your daily time in God's Word become sporadic? Are you forfeiting personal prayer time to visit church members? Are you focusing on the good instead of the best?

**Discouragement.** Often when pastors are hurt by a church member, they retreat into themselves instead of turning to God for healing and guidance.

**Pride.** Success in ministry can lead to a false sense that you no longer need God's daily guidance. Pride can enter into your life often unnoticed. Do you only pray before sermons,

when in great need, or in trouble? Have you stopped praying privately? Do you only spend time in the Bible preparing for sermons?

**Spiritual warfare.** Satan would love to keep pastors from practicing spiritual disciplines. Be careful in discerning Satan's lying voice from God's truth.

**External focus.** Pastors have a tendency to focus more on leading an organization (the church) than on their own spiritual vitality.

**“THE HEALTH OF YOUR PERSONAL WALK WITH GOD AND YOUR MINISTRY ARE DIRECTLY RELATED TO YOUR PRAYER LIFE.”**

— THOM S. RAINER

Each of these factors can lead to a stalled spiritual life. Here are some ways to experience spiritual renewal and maintain a growing relationship with Jesus.

**Be spiritually fresh.** Spiritual fatigue leads to frustration that results in spiritual fruitlessness. Ask God to give you a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Focus on new things God wants to teach you.

**Feed on God's Word.** We tend to be so busy running our lives, our families, and our ministries, we don't take time to hear from God. Engaging God through His Word must be a daily occurrence. I continue to be amazed, but not surprised, how this discipline affects our spiritual health, our emotional health, and our leadership ability.

**Pray regularly and fervently.** The health of your personal walk with God and your ministry are directly related to your prayer life. Unselfish praying releases fresh power that will energize and revolutionize your life and ministry. Pray daily, consistently, and honestly. Go to God not only with petitions for others and for guidance for the challenges you face, but to confess sin, to thank Him for answered prayers, and to praise Him for who He is.

**Fast.** Fasting is a spiritual discipline that calls us to slow down, seek God, confess sin, deny self, and allow God to work through our weaknesses. It is an act of obedience that turns our focus to Christ.

**Share the gospel.** Evangelism has the side effect of reinforcing our confidence in the faith we're sharing.

As physical exercise is a discipline, so is spiritual exercise. The natural order of things is for energy to wane, and things come to a grinding halt. But the Christian life is not intended to operate that way. God creates new life in us and wants to transform our everyday living into a portrait of the gospel's power.

If you find your spiritual life has stalled, it's time to make a decision. Christ's plan for His people is that we become more like Him. Decide today that stalling is no longer an option. Pray, asking God to renew your hope and vision for transformation and spiritual renewal. ■

**Thom S. Rainer** (@ThomRainer) is president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources.



# INSIGHTS

Beliefs, issues, and trends impacting our world

## Background checks pay off

More than 1 in 5 background checks processed by LifeWay's partnership with backgroundchecks.com reveal a serious offense. These numbers are part of the reason a growing number of churches use background checks as a way to better protect those involved in the ministry.



Since 2008, approximately 7,700 churches and religious organizations have conducted more than 142,000 background checks using backgroundchecks.com. Of those checks, almost half (47 percent) contained some type of criminal offense. The majority were for minor incidents, such as speeding tickets or seatbelt violations. But more than 21 percent of the checks discovered misdemeanors or more serious crimes, including more than 9,000 felonies.

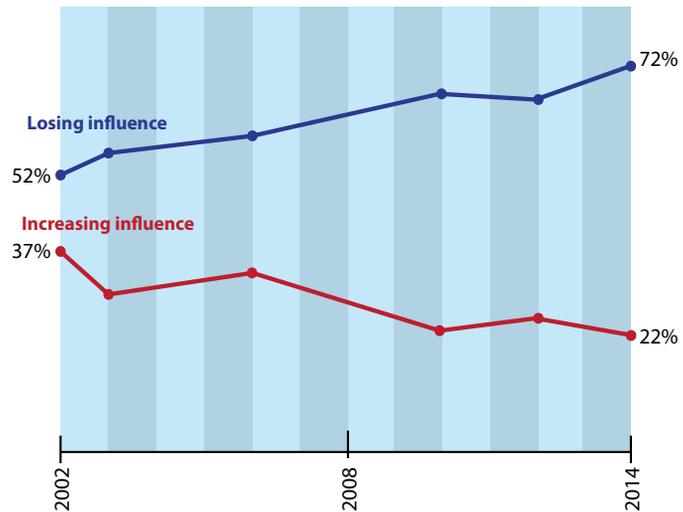
Source: LifeWay Christian Resources

## Public sees religion's influence waning

Nearly three-quarters of the public (72 percent) now thinks religion is losing influence in American life, up 5 percentage points from 2010 to the highest level in Pew Research polling over the past decade. And most people who say religion's influence is waning see this as a bad thing.

Perhaps as a consequence, a growing share of the American public wants religion to play a role in U.S. politics. The share of Americans who say churches and other houses of worship should express their views on social and political issues is up 6 points since the 2010 midterm elections (from 43 percent to 49 percent). The share who say there has been "too little" expression of religious faith and prayer from political leaders is up modestly over the same period (from 37 percent to 41 percent). And a growing minority of Americans (32 percent) thinks churches should endorse candidates for political office, though most continue to oppose such direct involvement by churches in electoral politics.

Do you think religion as a whole is **increasing** or **losing** its influence in present day American life?



Pew Research Center survey conducted Sept. 2014. Don't know or refused responses not shown.

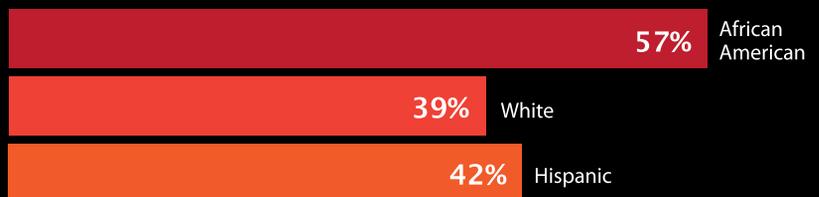
Source: Pew Research

### BY THE NUMBERS: RACE RELATIONS

# 81%

81 percent of Americans agree, "We have a long way to go on racial relations."

Breakdown of those who **strongly agree**:



## Historic high share of never-married adults

The share of American adults who have never been married is at an historic high, reports Pew Research Center. In 2012, 1 in 5 adults ages 25 and older (about 42 million people) had never been married; in 1960, only about 1 in 10 adults (9 percent) in that age range had never been married. About half of never-married adults say they would like to eventually marry.



*istockphoto.com*

- Men are more likely than women to have never been married (23 percent vs. 17 percent in 2012). This gender gap has widened since 1960, when 10 percent of men ages 25 and older and 8 percent of women of the same age had never married.
- The median age at first marriage is now 27 for women and 29 for men, up from 20 for women and 23 for men in 1960.
- About a quarter (24 percent) of never-married young adults ages 25 to 34 are living with a partner.
- 46 percent of Americans say society is better off if people make marriage and having children a priority, while 50 percent say society is just as well off if people have priorities other than marriage and children. (Fully two-thirds of those ages 18 to 29 [67 percent] express this latter viewpoint, as do 53 percent of those ages 30 to 49.)
- Most Americans (68 percent) continue to believe it is important for couples to marry if they plan to spend the rest of their lives together.
- Never-married women place a great deal of importance on finding someone who has a steady job; 78 percent say this would be very important to them in choosing a spouse or partner. Never-married men are more likely to look for someone who shares their ideas about raising children.
- Never-married adults—whether male or female—place a much lower priority on finding a partner who shares their moral and religious beliefs, has a similar educational pedigree, or comes from the same racial or ethnic background.

Source: *Pew Social Trends*

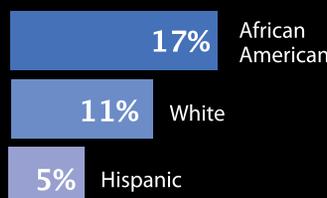
**“I want us to work really hard to live up to our best ideals. I want us to work really hard to figure out and pursue justice, equality, love for neighbor.”**

— *Thabiti Anyabwile, an assistant pastor for church planting at Capitol Hill Church in Washington, D.C. speaking at A Time to Speak, a conference on race relations in evangelicalism*

# 74%

74 percent of Americans agree, “We have come so far on racial relations.”

Breakdown of those who strongly disagree:



# 82%

82 percent of Americans agree, “Racial diversity is good for America.”

Source: *LifeWay Research*



# INSIGHTS

Beliefs, issues, and trends impacting our world

## Adults with children have more joy and stress

American adults who have children younger than 18 at home are more likely than adults who don't live with children to say they smile or laugh a lot on any given day, 84 percent vs. 80 percent. At the same time, by an even greater margin—45 percent vs. 37 percent—adults with children at home also experience greater stress.

Source: Gallup

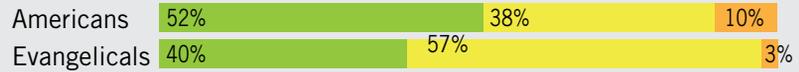


Shutterstock

## American's theological beliefs

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Not Sure

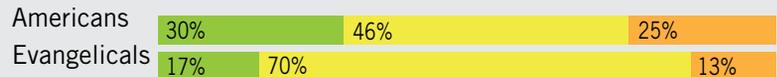
**Worshipping alone or with one's family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church.**



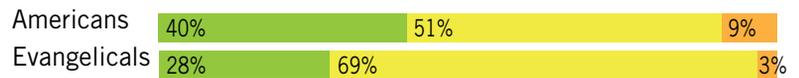
**Everyone sins, but most people are by nature good.**



**People will have a second chance to follow God after they die.**



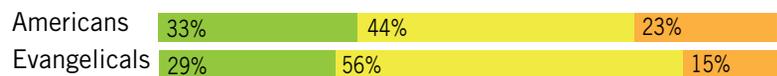
**God loves me because of the good I do or have done.**



**People first seek God, then He responds with grace.**



**God the Father is more divine than Jesus.**



**The Holy Spirit is a force, not a personal being.**



**The Holy Spirit is less divine than God the Father and Jesus.**



Source: LifeWay Research

### BY THE NUMBERS: RELATIONSHIPS

# 45%

## How to Maintain Relationships

45 percent of Americans believe the best way to maintain a relationship with someone is to accept them for who they are. 32% spend time with a person; 9% forgive them; 6% put them first; 3% do kind things; 2% do something else; and 4% don't know.

## Three accelerating trends in local churches

**1. More multi-site and multi-venue churches.** It doesn't seem that long ago that a multi-site church in America was a rare exception. Indeed, many viewed this approach with suspicion because they were uncertain about its efficacy or theological foundations. Today, the multi-site church seems commonplace and normative. The acceleration of the multi-site church is taking place as smaller churches begin to adopt the approach. This strategy was largely adopted by megachurches a few years ago. Today, churches of 300 in attendance and even smaller have adopted the multi-site strategy.

**2. More multi-preacher/teacher churches.** As multi-site churches have increased in number, so have the number of churches with more than one regular preacher or teacher. But the multi-site movement alone cannot explain the accelerated growth of this phenomenon. Again, its adoption by smaller churches has increased the growth rate more than any one factor. Dozens of congregations under 200 in attendance have more than one preacher or teacher.

**3. The rapid increase in large churches functioning as quasi-denominations.** The functions of denominations have historically included missions funding; funding of theological education; providing of Bible study and other resources; and guidance in both polity and ethical issues. Today, many large churches carry out, to some degree, all of these functions. The acceleration of this development seems to have three sources. First, many churches are generally dissatisfied with the direction of their denomination. Second, most denominations have fewer funding dollars to carry out their functions. Third, many struggling churches have elected to become acquired by another church, essentially making the acquiring church act as an oversight body of other churches.

Source: ThomRainer.com

## Broken Relationships

The majority of Americans are not on speaking terms with someone – **most often a former friend (25%) or a sibling (18%).**

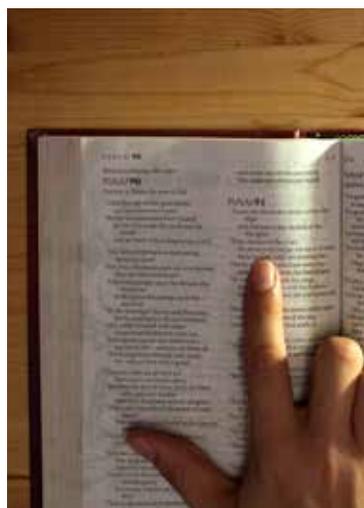


Impiari Ngayawon / World Vision

## 35.8 million adults and children in slavery worldwide

Nearly 36 million men, women, and children are living in modern slavery worldwide in 2014, according to Walk Free's Global Slavery Index (GSI). This estimate includes 5.4 million people in modern slavery identified through Gallup surveys in seven high-risk countries including Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Russia.

Source: Gallup



Lightstock

## Bible reading

One in five churchgoers read the Bible daily. More than half (59 percent) read it at least once a week. 19% read the Bible daily; 26% read a few times a week; 14% read once a week; 22% once a month.

Source: LifeWay Research

## Growing Apart

Top reasons for growing apart from someone in the last two years: **irresolvable differences (26%), a physical move (23%), and changing interests (21%).**

Source: LifeWay Research

# SEPARATE BIBLICAL FACT FROM FICTION

within the onslaught of "Heaven" books.

IN STORES NOW!



Available at LifeWay Christian stores or wherever books are sold.



## MINISTRY SERVING MINISTRY

Nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, just minutes from Asheville, North Carolina, rests the tranquil LifeWay Ridgecrest Conference Center.

Ridgecrest offers you top customer service in a Christian environment. Before you even set foot on the 1,300 acre campus, Ridgecrest's staff has prayed for you – by name. Our mission is simple: we point people to Christ. Lives change at Ridgecrest. Why not come and experience Ridgecrest for yourself?

### CAMPUS OFFERS:

- Accommodations for Groups from 10-2,000
- Standard and Deluxe Accommodations
- Youth Housing
- Multiple Auditoriums and Break-Out Spaces
- On-Campus Recreation

### PERFECT FOR:

- Conferences, Meetings & Events
- Staff Retreats
- Christian School Events
- Personal/Family Spiritual Retreats
- Family Reunions/Weddings

800.588.7222

RidgecrestConferenceCenter.org

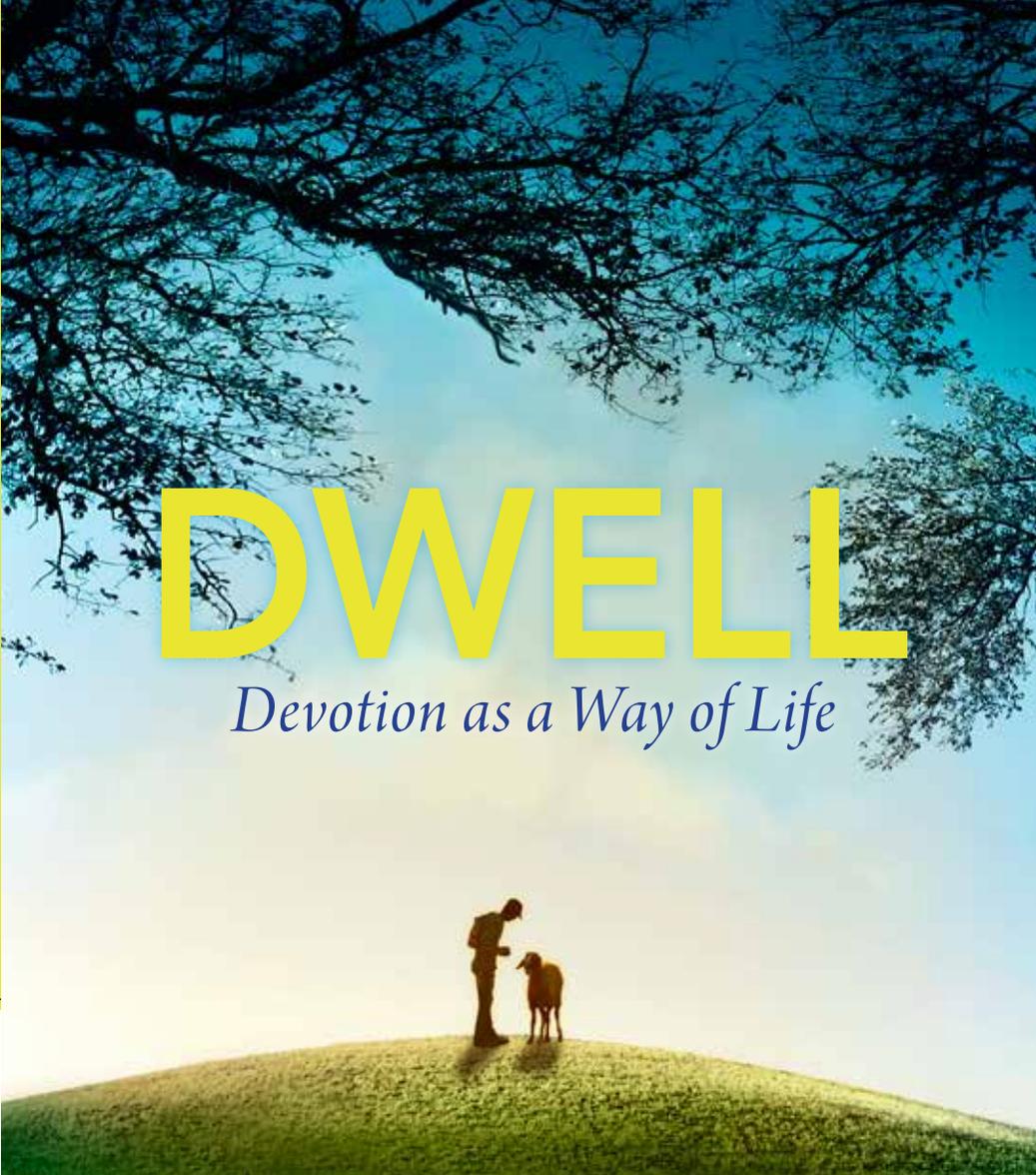


## Stay Connected to your congregation



Connect easily and economically with automated communication using phone, text, email & social media. *No required contracts or monthly fees.*

888.204.1746 | [phonetree.com/LW15](http://phonetree.com/LW15)



# DWELL

*Devotion as a Way of Life*

## COVER SECTION

**M**aintaining a regular devotional life is crucial to spiritual growth. Spiritual practices (or “disciplines”) position us to be shaped by God’s Spirit and God’s Word. Intentionally meeting with God in the morning (for example) for prayer and Bible study can increase our awareness of His presence with us throughout the day. However, it’s easy to become so focused on completing our specifically “religious” practices that we miss the point of it all—to know and love God, and to walk with Him. In this section, we’ve tried to include articles that are gospel-centered and practical. Simply knowing what to do isn’t enough. (After all, it will vary from person to person.) We need to know why we’re engaging in spiritual practices. And we need to know where the power for spiritual growth comes from—God’s grace in Christ.

12

### **Beyond the quiet time**

Jared Wilson explains how all of life is meant to be lived with God.

16

### **Walking with God between Sundays**

Mark Dance suggests six ways pastors and church leaders can keep their hearts in tune with God throughout the week.

18

### **Can we talk?**

Priscilla Shirer provides a simple and effective approach for hearing God speak through Scripture.

21

### **The power of prayer**

Pastor H.B. Charles helps us see that prayer is a privilege and a joy, and when we pray, things change.





# Beyond the Quiet Time

## DEVOTION AS A WAY OF LIFE

by Jared C. Wilson

**T**here are some parts of the Bible that sound great until I realize I don't understand them much at all. Ephesians 5:18 is a prime example. Paul writes, "And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit."

The "don't get drunk" stuff I totally understand. Tell me not to do something, and I can usually handle it. But it's that other part. "Be filled by the Spirit." That's a command of a different kind. It tells me to do something—which is great—but what exactly I'm supposed to do, I have no idea. How do I go about "being filled"? Doesn't the Spirit fill? How can I be something the Spirit does? It sounds as though Paul is telling me to get active about being passive.

And in a way, he is.

When I began pressing into what commandments like "be filled" mean, I began to look at the spiritual disciplines from a different perspective. I grew up in the church, and the exhortations to keep a quiet time were well-worn in my mind. I knew what I was supposed to do. What I couldn't figure out is how to get the devotional time to feel less like something on my To-Do list. How is it that I might actually do it, for lack of a better word, naturally?

I firmly believe every Christian should set apart a special time each day in which to spend with God in prayer and Bible reading. But when I do my due diligence in the quiet time, I end up reading things like "Pray constantly" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and "I have treasured Your word in my heart" (Psalm 119:11). These don't sound like quiet time. If anything, they sound like a quiet life.

Isn't this really what we want? To live out our faith in such a way that spending time with God isn't a checklist item but somehow the quality of our every waking minute? Wouldn't we want to feel like the so-called "spiritual disciplines" are ways of being, and not just things we do?

I think we are more familiar with the idea of “being filled” than we realize. We’re already engaging in active passivity all the time.

### **Where you spend your time shapes you**

Where we live and how we live there, shapes us. The things we occupy our mind with, the things we entertain ourselves with, the things we worry over—all of this is already directing our minds and therefore informing our hearts. And I think that is the same sort of active passivity Paul appeals to in that confusing part of Ephesians 5:18.

Think, for instance, about your neighborhood, the community you live in, and the daily routines you engage in there that on one level are “to do’s” but on another have become pretty

result will be a more natural—which is to say, supernatural—inclination to pray, meditate on God’s Word, fast, evangelize, etc.

Most of us certainly make time for God when we feel we have the time. The problem is God owns all of life, and worshiping God means we must revolve around Him, not He us. God shouldn’t be confined to His own compartment in our schedule. Jesus does not abide in His assigned timeslot; we abide in Him.

In a way, this is a passive thing. We didn’t get “in Christ” by our works. He saved us by His grace; we received Him by faith. The Holy Spirit has indwelled the believer, and therefore the fruit that results from the life of one abiding in Christ is fruit of the Spirit, not of the flesh.

But this is also an active thing. We are told to “be filled.” So what do we do?

### **Focusing on the right work**

What we are talking about here is the process of formation: allowing ourselves to be formed a certain way. Most of us have already done great at being formed by the consumer culture we’re immersed in. We have adapted quite well to the rhythms of a self-centered lifestyle. Sometimes we even adapt our religious activity to that lifestyle. But to cultivate spiritual formation means to find ways to immerse ourselves in the work of the Spirit, to re-sync ourselves to the gospel.

So this is the primary purpose of a quiet time: not to primarily focus on the things to do, but to primarily focus on the reality that the work is done. Spiritual formation will take off with much more energy and much more joy when we are centering first on the finished work of Christ in our quiet times and only secondarily on the ongoing work of obedience.

How quiet can a quiet time be if

*“Jesus does not abide in His assigned timeslot; we abide in Him.”*

— Jared C. Wilson

automatic. Whether we realize it or not, the values of our surrounding environments shape us. They slyly dictate how we think, how we act, how we feel. And they also affect how we follow Jesus. (Or don’t follow Him.)

But Jesus reframes the concept of environment for us. He takes the same concept and applies it to the Christian’s union with Him. He says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me” (John 15:5).

Jesus brings to mind the fact that the believer is situated in Him. (See also Colossians 3:3 and Galatians 3:27.) A Christian is a person who is “in Christ.” When we actively work to remind ourselves of this, the gradual



we're spending it worrying about all the things we have to do for God? This is why I had such trouble keeping consistent devotions as a young man. I felt coerced first of all into keeping the quiet time in order to be a good Christian, and then I spent those quiet times studying more about how I ought to be a good Christian, and the whole time of quiet reflection became a huge spiritual burden. I never felt like I quite measured up.

And of course, on my own, I don't measure up at all. But "in Christ," I do. So when I started meditating primarily on Jesus and His work and less on myself, something counterintuitive happened: I actually wanted to spend more time with God, and I started thinking more about God and His word, and I started living out my faith more authentically because it felt more joyous, lively, delightful, and even natural.

### Striving to rest

As "be filled by the Spirit" indicates, and as Jesus' command to abide implies, there is an intentionality and active participation on our part involved. But the difference provided by a gospel-centered approach to spiritual disciplines is in both the relief and the energy the good news brings.

As an example, imagine if Paul had simply written in Philippians 2:12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." To stop there provides a solid instruction, but there's not much good news in it. But Paul didn't end the thought there. He doesn't just say, "Get to work." He writes in verse 13, "For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose." Now that is good news!

The activity of "being filled by the Spirit" is like sailing. There are roughly 60 working parts on a sailboat. There's plenty of work to do when sailing.

You can break a sweat. You have to stay attentive. Plenty of approaches to spiritual formation stop here. They amount to teaching us how to row our own boat. Some put us in a sailboat, but have us blowing deep breaths into the sail. Consequently, many of us exhaust ourselves on the way to nowhere.

But there are two things you can't control in sailing, and they make all the difference in the world. No amount of hard work will control the tide or bring the wind. You can hoist the sail, but only the wind can make a sailboat go.

So it is not as if there is not work to do. But there's a reason Jesus says, "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). The work we busy ourselves with is meant to remind us the work of salvation is done. And when we focus on Christ and His gospel, we will be transformed (2 Corinthians 3:18). When we intentionally and diligently focus on the finished work of Christ, we find the work of the Christian life becomes less duty and more delight. ■

**JARED C. WILSON (@JaredCWilson)** is managing editor of resources and director of communications at Midwestern Seminary and College in Kansas City, Missouri. Prior to serving in his current role, he served as a pastor in Middletown Springs, Vermont. He is the author of numerous books, articles, and Bible studies.

### DIG DEEPER

- *Abide: Practicing Kingdom Rhythms in a Consumer Culture* (LifeWay)
- *Stand Firm*
- *Journey*
- *Open Windows*
- LifeWay.com/Devotionals
- *God-Life: Discovering How to Live a Christ-like Life*





WALKING  
WITH GOD  
BETWEEN  
SUNDAYS



By Mark Dance

## **W**e all want to have a growing walk with God.

But it's far from automatic or easy—even in the ministry. Those of us who have served on church staff know how much more difficult it is to practice spiritual growth than it is to teach it.

So how do busy church leaders maintain a love for Jesus that's stronger than our love for anyone else, including His bride? I believe ministers benefit from having a healthy degree of separation between our lives and our ministries.

Here are a few practical ideas that have helped to keep my walk with God fresh between Sundays.

### **1. Make Jesus the first appointment of your day.**

Corporate weekend worship helps to fuel our love for God, but I dare say it's not sufficient for the entire week. The more spiritual fuel you use, the more you'll need. About seven years ago, God reminded me of the simplicity and priority found in the first and greatest commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength," (Mark 12:30).

I immediately began to rearrange my schedule so breakfast meetings, workouts, and social media interactions didn't compete with my walk with God. Schedule a daily appointment with Jesus and consider it your most important meeting of the day—because it is.

### **2. Regularly change your routine.**

Mix up your routine by walking or jogging with God, and exercise your body and soul at the same time. My cardio workouts are great for visiting with both of my best friends—Jesus and my wife, Janet. Prayer walking or running may even be preferable to

prayer sitting, especially if you live in a constant state of attention deficiency like I do. For heaven's sake, go outside.

King David wrote that his soul was often restored as he lay down in green pastures and beside still waters (Psalm 23:2-3). When winter's frost blows in, I'll change up my routine again by meeting with God in my favorite chair next to our fireplace.

**“THERE WILL NEVER  
BE A MORE IMPORTANT  
THING FOR US TO DO  
THAN TO LOVE GOD.”**

— Mark Dance

### **3. Read Scripture you're not teaching.**

Your sermon or lesson text is not inferior to a devotional text, but it may be insufficient for your own soul's nourishment. The longer I pastored, the harder it became to read Scripture as a love letter instead of a teaching tool. Prayer and Bible study are connected more to my walk with God than to my work for God, although there will be some inevitable overlap.

Try using a flexible reading plan to avoid becoming frustrated when you get behind on your reading . . . and you will. For several years, I have used the HCSB Study Bible app (available on iTunes). It has one- and three-year reading plans, as well as a chronological option.

### **4. Read books you're not teaching.**

A Christian book can be a healthy supplement to your daily quiet time. Recently, I read one of A.W. Tozer's

books with a young pastor. Over lunch, we talked about some of the insights we gleaned from the book, which was very rewarding.

I suggest you read one book at time. And don't rush. Instead my advice is to "chew slowly and enjoy your food."

### **5. Join a small group you are not leading.**

I was curious how many pastors attend a small group or Bible study they aren't leading, so I sent a Twitter inquiry to some of my followers who are pastors. Few of them said they were in a group they didn't lead.

That's unfortunate. Be careful not to become so impressed with your spiritual wisdom that you forget to learn from other people. I genuinely look forward to being with my small group each Sunday and hearing someone else teach from the Scripture.

### **6. Write down your thoughts and prayers.**

Prayer can be a multi-sensory conversation. Texts, emails, and social media are legitimate ways to stay connected with family and friends. The same can be true for your quiet time. Writing your prayers and thoughts in a journal can invigorate your relationship with God.

There will never be a more important thing for us to do than to love God. So reshuffle your schedule to reflect that priority. ■

---

**MARK DANCE (@PastorDance)** is associate vice president of pastoral leadership at LifeWay. Pastors can connect with him at [MarkDance.net](http://MarkDance.net) and [LifeWay.com/PastorsToday](http://LifeWay.com/PastorsToday).

# Can We Talk?

## Hearing God through Scripture

By Priscilla Shirer

**W**hen Jesus paid for our sin, He stripped away our barriers to God. Suddenly the Holy Spirit could actually occupy a human spirit because the holiness of God had wiped away the sin of His child. God can now fellowship with each believer intimately and immediately wherever that believer may be. This intimacy is the deepest friendship and relationship possible, and the Spirit speaks primarily through the written Word—living, active, and personalized.

The Bible not only establishes the boundaries into which every personal word God gives us will fall; it is the chief means of communication we have with God. Scripture is alive!

The following principles helped me have a conversation with God that challenged my entire ministry. It took me two years to complete the Gospel of John as I carefully looked into one or two verses each day. Using these principles, my once drab quiet time and prayer life grew into an explosion of fellowship and conversation with the Lord.

Pick a verse or verses on a particular topic, a chapter, or book of the Bible. And then try using these five steps to hearing God through Scripture.

### **Position yourself to hear from God.**

Though God can speak to us anywhere and anytime, we find hearing easier when the distractions are limited. Find a spot where you can be alone, even if just for a few moments, so you can more easily have an awareness of God's presence and an ability to hear His voice whispering to you. Don't be afraid of silence. It is in the stillness that we get to know God best (Psalm 46:10).

And expect God to speak to you. Having an intimate, conversational relationship with Him is a privilege that comes with being His child. Go into your time of Bible reading with an expectation that you will get something out of it. Don't limit God by your past experiences.

### **Pore over the passage and paraphrase the major point.**

When you read the Bible expecting God to speak, don't just skim the passage. You are not in a race to finish your lesson. Meander in each verse. If the passage allows, put yourself in the Scripture and see yourself in the story. If one verse seems to resonate with you, don't worry about finishing the rest, stay in the passage and let the Spirit speak to you.



Read the passage a few times, emphasizing different words each time. If a certain word or phrase pops out at you, don't ignore it. Stop and consider why. This is how the Spirit speaks; He causes Scripture to connect with the details of our lives.

Consider the context as you pore over the passage: Who are the major participants? What are they doing? Saying? Where are they going? Why is this happening? How?

#### **Pull out the spiritual principles.**

Spiritualize the major points of the verse. What is God teaching? What is He revealing about Himself?

#### **Pose the question.**

Form a personally directed question from each of the spiritual principles you listed. Ask yourself: Does my life coincide with the message of this

verse? Is anything in my life contradicting this passage? What do I need to do to bring my life in line? How does this apply to my life right now?

As you ask yourself questions along these lines, permit the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Take time to listen for His voice as you quietly consider the answers to these questions. As you sit still in God's presence, you will hear the Spirit whispering to you—encouraging you, convicting you, challenging you, and inspiring you. Record what the Spirit is asking you to do.

#### **Plan obedience and pin down a date.**

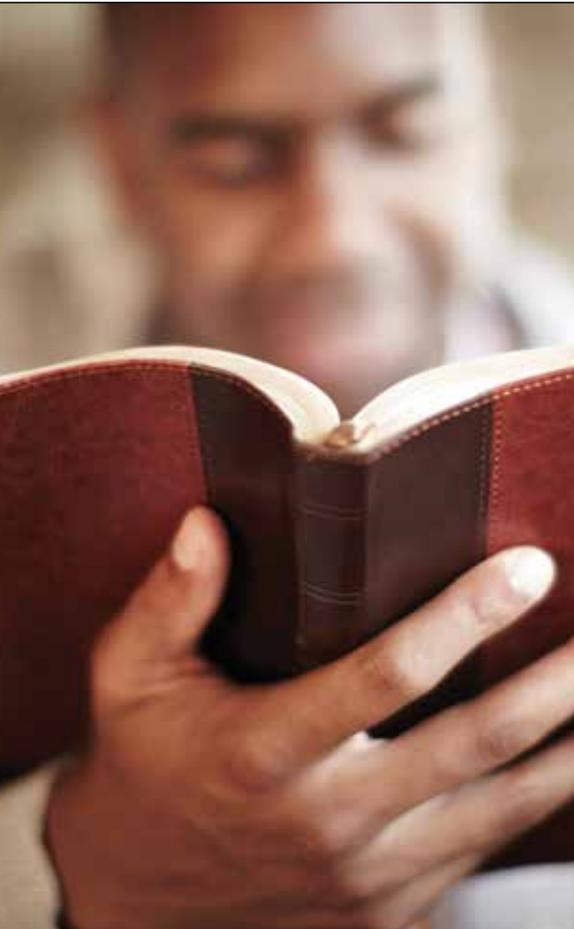
Record the steps you can take immediately to begin responding to what God has said to you in the verses you looked at that day. Recall these steps throughout your day and put them into practice immediately. If obedience requires you to do something specific

such as apologize to someone, record a date and time you will follow through. Let someone else know about your plan so you can be held accountable.

These were once steps to follow, but now they are an automatic way for me to approach the Scriptures. I'm amazed how the Spirit speaks as He applies scriptural passages to the regular stuff of my daily existence. I hope you are ready to have real conversations with God as you look into the Word. The refreshment you find in spending time in God's Word will change your life forever. ■

---

**PRISCILLA SHIRER** is the author of nine Bible studies and seven books, including *The Resolution for Women*. Priscilla and her husband, Jerry, lead *Going Beyond Ministries*. This article is adapted from Shirer's *Can We Talk? Soul-Stirring Conversations with God*.



*Faithful* for Study. *Clear* for Everyday Life.

The HOLMAN CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE is a clear, contemporary English translation that's faithful to the original languages of the Bible. Whether you use it in preaching, group study, memorization, discipleship, private devotions, or corporate worship, you'll find the faithfulness and clarity of the Holman Christian Standard Bible consistently bring God's transforming Truth to life, making it easier to understand, apply, and share with others.

DISCOVER MORE AT [HCSB.org](http://HCSB.org).

  
**HCSB**  
*Faithful and Clear*  
HCSB.org

# THE POWER OF PRAYER

## Q&A with H.B. Charles

By Matt Erickson

**H**.B. Charles Jr. serves as the senior pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Church in Jacksonville, Florida. *Facts & Trends* managing editor Matt Erickson caught up with him recently to talk about his new book, *It Happens After Prayer: Biblical Motivation for Believing Prayer*.

### What were your goals for *It Happens After Prayer*?

**Charles:** First, I wanted it to be a book about prayer filled with Scripture, not stories. Testimonies of answered prayer are inspiring, but don't have the authority of Scripture. Power in prayer comes from a mind and heart saturated with biblical truth, wisdom, and promises.

I also wrote this book to motivate the reader to pray. Some books beat you up about your lack of prayer. But that's not the tone of Scripture. The word of God woos us to pray. And I wanted to write a book that had that same feel.

### Why should we pray?

**Charles:** There are at least two biblical reasons why we should pray. First, we should pray because the word of God commands it. Prayer is an act of obedience. It is a sin not to pray. Second, we should pray because it works. God hears and answers prayers. It is the means by which our heavenly Father provides for His children.

### What's the most important lesson we can learn about prayer?

**Charles:** It happens after prayer. It really does. God hears and answers prayer. There are things we need God to do for us that will not happen until we pray. Sure, there are a lot of things we can do to help the situation after we pray. But there is nothing we can do to help the situation until we pray. When we work, we work. But when we pray, God works.

### Why should we keep praying when nothing seems to be happening?

**Charles:** I was on a red eye flight with a little girl overwhelmed with the experience of her first flight. She asked her mom, "Why are we just sitting in the air?" Of course, we were not. It seemed that way to the girl. But there was someone in the cockpit speeding us to our destination. Prayer is the same way. It may seem nothing is happening. But God is at work. Don't stop praying!

### What kinds of prayers does God love to answer?

**Charles:** In *It Happens After Prayer*, I write (on the basis of Nehemiah 1) that God answers sincere prayer. Prayer that is our first response, not our last resort. God answers reverent, God-exalting prayer. God answers honest, confessional prayer. And God answers believing prayer.

### How can prayer help us deal with anxiety?

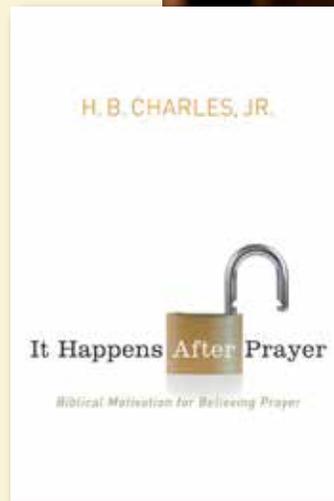
**Charles:** You cannot pray and worry at the same time. Prayer is the remedy for worry. Philippians 4:6-7 teaches us to pray our worries away. Nothing is worth worrying about. But everything is worth praying about. We should take our worries, one by one, to God in prayer. And God promises His peace, "which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

### What are some spiritual priorities for prayer?

**Charles:** In his New Testament prayers, the Apostle Paul teaches us to pray with spiritual priorities. Most



H.B. Charles



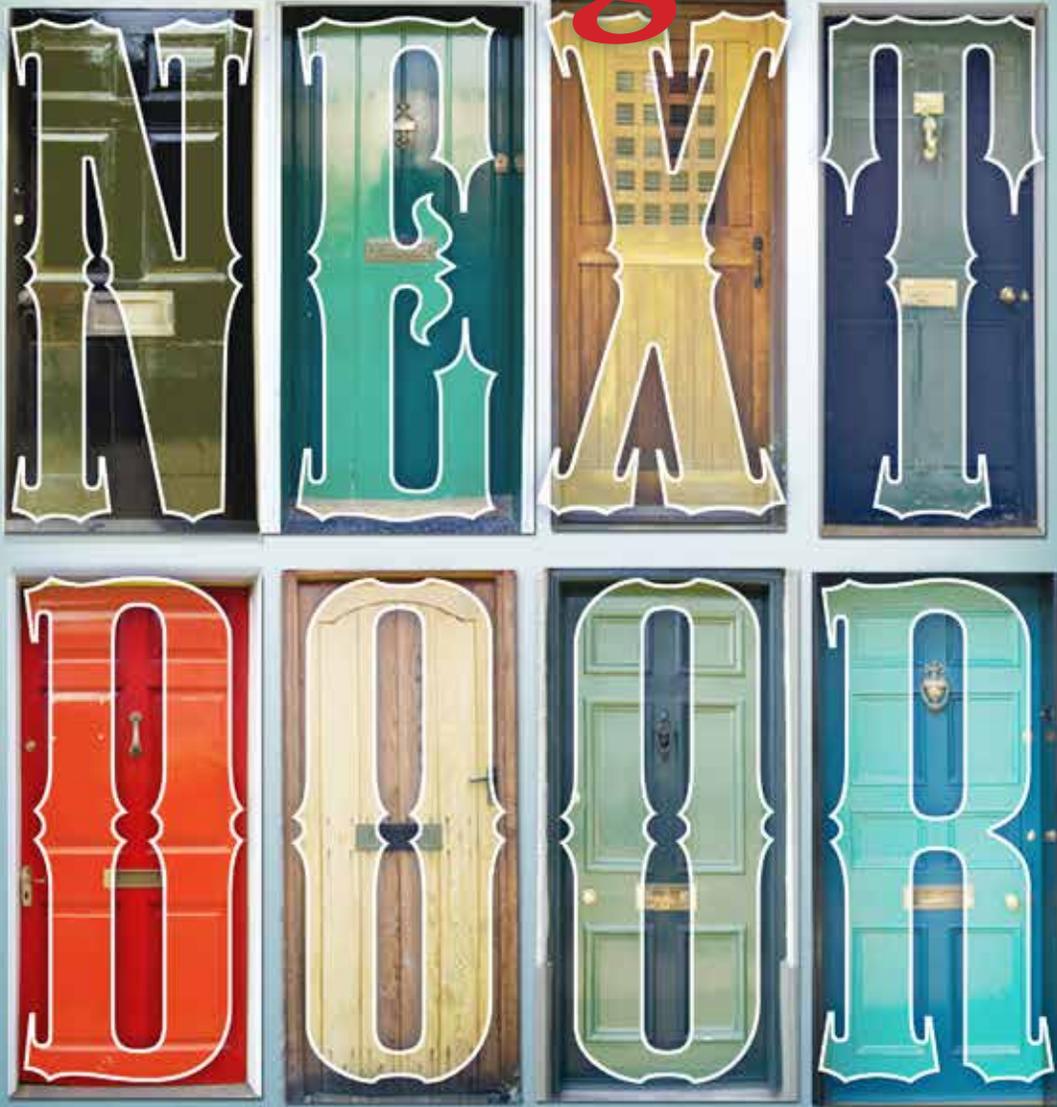
of his prayers aren't centered on physical, material, or financial matters. It's not wrong to pray about those things, but matters of the heart are more important, so we should focus most of our prayers there.

For instance, we should pray that God's name be

hallowed, before we pray about our daily bread. To pray with spiritual priorities is to pray first and foremost for God's will to be done in God's power (see Colossians 1:9-14). When we pray that way, we will see that it really does happen after prayer, and we will be even more motivated to keep praying. ■

**MATT ERICKSON (@\_matt\_erickson)** is managing editor of *Facts & Trends*.

# Strangers



# How the church can respond in the age of migration

By J.D. Payne

**W**e live in the age of migration. More than 230 million people live outside their countries of birth, according to the United Nations. That's 3 percent of the world's population. If this number represented a single country, it would be the 5th largest nation in the world.

The peoples of the world have been—and continue to be—on the move. And the Western world remains a popular destination for these men, women, and children.

The book of Acts reminds us that the Lord is the divine maestro, moving the nations that they may know Him:

“From one man He has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. He did this so they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find Him, though He is not far from each of us.” (Acts 17:26–27).

## Consider the following:

- Between 1990 and 2013, the number of international immigrants worldwide grew from 154 million to 232 million, an increase of 50 percent.
- Almost 6 in 10 international immigrants, or 136 million people, live in the Northern hemisphere.
- One in 5 of the world's immigrants live in the United States, which is home to 46 million immigrants, according to 2013 statistics from the United Nations.
- About 13 million immigrants in the U.S. were born in Mexico, while 2.2 million were born in China, and 2.1 million in India.

While it's easy to get lost in the numbers, we must remember each immigrant is created in the image of God. He or she may be in need of salvation or may already be serving on mission with Him. In light of God's work, the church must ask how she

should respond in the age of migration.

Not only has the Lord told us to go into the entire world, but He is also bringing the world to our neighborhoods. The United States receives 20 percent of the world's international migrants, making it the largest migrant-receiving nation in the world.

Some immigrants arrive in search of a better life. Some come for education or employment. Others run from famine, war, and economic or government instability, seeking security and peace.

Some arrive already knowing Jesus. Some arrive without Him.

**“NOT ONLY HAS THE LORD TOLD US TO GO INTO THE WORLD, BUT HE IS ALSO BRINGING THE WORLD TO OUR NEIGHBORHOODS.”**

— J.D. Payne

Some come to study at universities in the United States. Others come as refugees.

And more than a few represent unreached people groups, which gives churches an unprecedented opportunity to freely share the gospel with them.

## Guidelines for reaching the strangers next door

Here are some principles to keep in mind as your church develops a strategy to reach immigrants in your community.

**Be intentional.** Without an intentional plan to reach the strangers next door, it is unlikely they will be reached in your community.

**Learn as you go.** Research is good,

but there is no substitute for being in the field with people. Listen and observe as you engage in cross-cultural missions. Soak up everything you can about the people you serve.

## Be willing to make mistakes.

Awkward moments and missteps are bound to happen when serving cross-culturally. Remember, the Lord recognizes we are not perfect; He only desires our obedience and will work through our limitations.

**Recognize the bridges of God.** Many immigrants remain in frequent contact with friends and relatives in their home countries. Today's technology allows regular, ongoing communication. If the church works through these bridges of God, then the families, tribes, and governments of the world can be influenced by the gospel from abroad.

**Look for receptivity.** The gospel is not to be withheld from anyone. But as wise stewards—unless the Spirit leads otherwise—we will want to begin working among those who are the most receptive to the good news. People tend to be more receptive to the gospel during times of stress and transition; both situations are common among immigrants.

**Pray in all things.** Reaching the nations requires us to be people of prayer. From this devotion, we receive wisdom and guidance to understand best how to relate to the strangers next door.

**Find connecting points.** Methods of connecting with immigrants will vary by context. Some churches will teach English, driving skills, and cultural-acquisition skills, while providing other practical assistance. Helping people when they arrive in our country will go a long way toward building personal relationships.

The church must not view immigrants as a project or a way to accomplish a goal. Rather, we must understand all peoples are created

## PROTESTANT PASTORS VIEWS ON U.S. IMMIGRANTS & IMMIGRATION



**"Our church is personally involved at the local level in assisting immigrants."**



9% are not sure

**Who strongly agrees?**

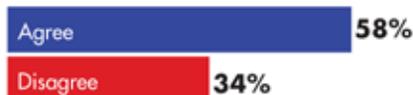
Pastors in churches with 250+ members: **23%**  
 Pastors in churches with 50-99 members: **15%**  
 Overall **18%** of pastors who strongly agree

**79%**  
Agree

**"Christians have a responsibility to assist immigrants even if they are in the country illegally."**

Age 18-44 are most likely to strongly agree at: **50%**  
 Age 65+ are most likely to strongly disagree at: **15%**  
 Overall **40%** strongly agree and **8%** strongly disagree

**"I am in favor of immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship for those who are currently in the country illegally."**



7% are not sure

**Who strongly agrees?**

Mainline pastors: **37%**  
 Evangelical pastors: **22%**  
 Overall **27%** strongly agree



**87%**  
Agree

**"The U.S. government has the responsibility to stop illegal immigration."**

Among Evangelicals:  
**67%** strongly agree vs. **1%** strongly disagree  
 Among Mainlines:  
**48%** strongly agree vs. **4%** strongly disagree  
 Overall:  
**60%** strongly agree vs. **3%** strongly disagree

in the image of God and are to be respected. While we share the love of Jesus and call all people to repent and place their faith in Him, at no time are we to be coercive or manipulative. We are to care for others whether or not they become followers of Christ. Our service is to come with no strings attached.

**Make disciples.** It's important that a church's strategy for reaching internationals involves discipling new believers. Whether new believers are literate or not, they need to know how to apply the Scriptures. They need to understand what it means to be a part of a local church. We also need to provide opportunities for new believers to develop skills in personal evangelism, gathering and leading Bible study groups and churches, and raising up other leaders.

### The need of the hour

The call to reach our international neighbors does not mean we should neglect sending missionaries across the globe. Until churches are willing to reach across cultural barriers to share the love of Jesus, the unreached will remain unreached. Whether it is the Chinese church in San Francisco reaching across the bay area into the Afghan community, the African-American church in downtown Chicago taking the gospel to the Guatemalans in their neighborhood, or the Korean church in rural Georgia preaching the truth among the Fulakunda in Senegal, cross-cultural work is the need of the hour.

No matter its location, the church must become increasingly cross-cultural in her global disciple-making. ■

**J.D. PAYNE (@Jd\_Payne)** serves as the pastor for church multiplication with *The Church at Brook Hills* in Birmingham, Alabama. He is the author of *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission*. Read more from J.D. at [www.jdpayne.org](http://www.jdpayne.org).



## How to embrace families of kids with special needs

By Joy Fisher

**In theory, everyone is welcome at church. In practice, that's not always true for some children. And when parents feel their child isn't welcome, the entire family often stays home.**

The term “special needs” describes people who have developmental delays, cognitive disabilities, physical challenges, and social or emotional differences. Children with special needs, and their parents and siblings, benefit from being part of a church family for the same reasons all families do.

These families need to know God offers salvation through Jesus Christ, of course. But they also need the hope, support, respite, and acceptance that come from being part of a church family. They appreciate the simple joy of showing up to participate in something without making an appointment, filling out paperwork, setting goals, and constantly evaluating progress.

Every person who engages the family of a special needs child has a make-it or break-it chance to ensure the family not only comes back, but has a positive experience week after week. That includes paid staff, Sunday school teachers, kids ministry leaders, and anyone else walking through the church's hallways.

The most basic reason some churches don't embrace these families is they simply don't know how. In many cases, churches develop their special needs ministry network on a case-by-case basis by providing for kids born to families who are already active members of the church. That's not a bad place to start.

Few churches recognize the need

in advance, build the program, and use it as an outreach tool to bring in families that don't feel a part of any church. Such programs can look different for different churches and situations. But here are the two most common ways to organize a special needs ministry:

- Mainstreaming or inclusion.

Learners who have special needs attend a regular class along with their age-group peers and participate in the same activities. They may rely on the assistance of a one-on-one helper for some activities, or, on occasion, they may complete an independent learning activity.

- Self-contained classes for students with special needs. In these settings, the teacher-student ratio is lower, activities are planned for individuals or smaller groups, concepts are simplified, and everything moves at a slower pace.

It's possible to reach, keep, and disciple families with special needs children, but it takes work and being intentional about serving and loving them. ■

**JOY FISHER** is the content editor of Bible Studies for Life: Special Buddies, LifeWay's Bible study curriculum for kids in grades 1-6 who have developmental special needs. Her 16-year-old son, Samuel, has Down syndrome.



Joy Fisher and her family

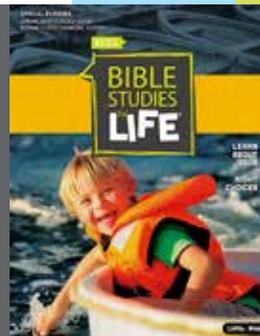
### Five things you can do

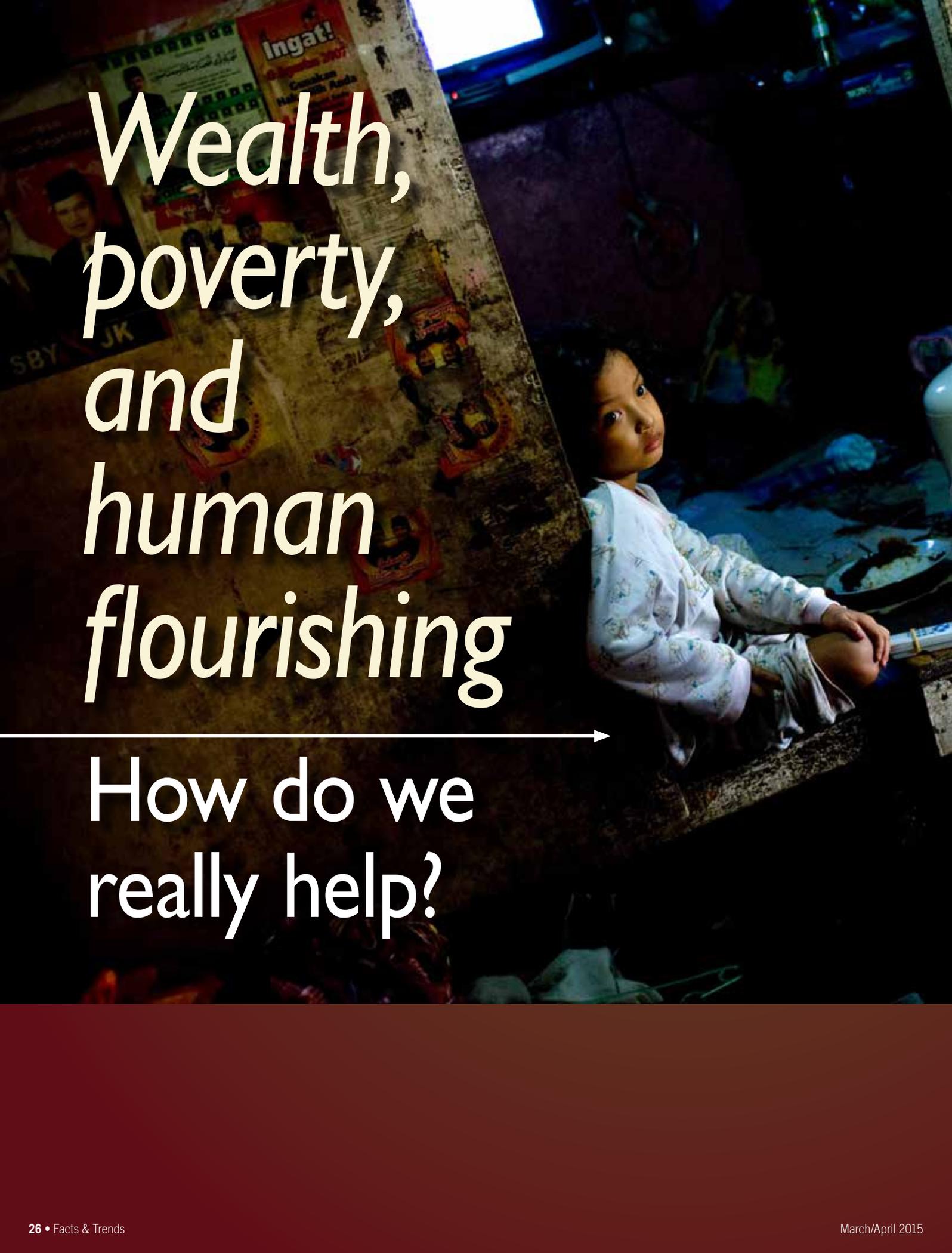
**When you encounter a family of a child with special needs for the first time at church, take the initiative.**

- 1. Offer greetings.** Shake hands with the adults. Stoop to the child's level and say hello, even if you are unsure if she can or will answer.
- 2. Lead them to an appropriate staff member** who can assist them in finding where they need to go.
- 3. Suggest they join you, especially at a fellowship meal or a social event.** Introduce them to other families who have kids of a similar age.
- 4. Be gracious.** Times of corporate worship can be the most difficult for these families. Rest assured they already know their child can be noisy, wiggly, or restless.
- 5. Invite them to come again and mean it.**

### DIG DEEPER

- Special Buddies [lifeway.com/Keyword/Special+Buddies](http://lifeway.com/Keyword/Special+Buddies)
- Access Bible Study for adults with special learning needs <http://www.lifeway.com/Product/access-personal-study-guide-spring-2015-P005075009-2015-SPR>





# Wealth, poverty, and human flourishing

→  
How do we  
really help?



*Squatters live under a bridge in Jakarta, Indonesia. They survive partly by illegally tapping into electricity and water from the city government. Jakarta, the home of Indonesia's richest rich and some of its poorest poor, seems to have everything—except widespread awareness of the gospel of Christ. BGR photo.*

by Mark Kelley

**G**rinding recession drives the jobless and homeless numbers higher. Violence and disaster trap multitudes worldwide in suffocating poverty.

Your church office is getting more calls from people who need help with food or bills. Non-profits bombard you with more heart-wrenching appeals about needy people in faraway places.

Everywhere you look, the poor seem to be falling farther behind, and average families are finding it harder to make ends meet. Yet new high-end subdivisions keep springing up, and luxury car dealerships seem to be thriving.

With so much wealth in the world, why do so many people subsist in dire poverty? What can Christians and congregations do to make a difference?

Looking for insight, we sat down with two leaders who have extensive hands-on experience in combating poverty. Jeff Palmer is executive director of Baptist Global Response ([gobgr.com](http://gobgr.com)), and Jerry Daniel leads the LoveLoud team for the North American Mission Board ([namb.net/LoveLoud](http://namb.net/LoveLoud)).

**Mark Kelly:** Many Christians and congregations try to help people in poverty, and some say that because we misunderstand poverty we often wind up doing more harm than good. What is it that we misunderstand about poverty?

**Jeff Palmer:** We first need to understand our own cultural biases about poverty. Poverty is not fundamentally about economics. At its most basic level, poverty is a failure of relationships. When people love things more than people, poverty is the result.

If poverty is essentially a failure of relationships, we have to realize that those relationships are broken by sin. The relationship between man and God, man and man, man and creation, and man and his own self—all are broken because of sin. That reality is missing from most conversations about poverty.

**Jerry Daniel:** In his book, *Awaiting a Savior: The Gospel, the New Creation and the End of Poverty*, Aaron Armstrong says poverty will persist as long as the heart of man is ruled by sin. Any attack on the problem of poverty must begin with the power of Christ to reconcile and restore broken relationships. As Christians, our job is not to solve the problem of poverty, but to

demonstrate God's love in the midst of the brokenness.

**What are some factors we have to consider when we try to help people find their way out of poverty?**

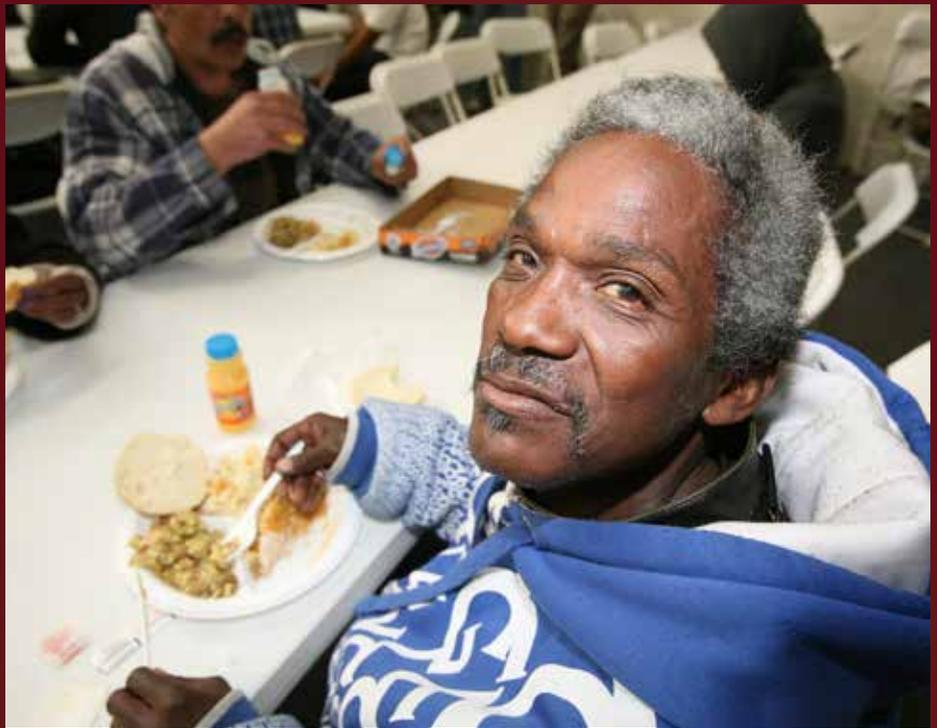
**Daniel:** People are complex, and the reasons any particular person is trapped in poverty are many and varied. Failed educational systems, dysfunctional families, and generational patterns play significant roles, but so do a whole host of individual faults, poor choices, bad influences, and unjust social systems. People in poverty are wrestling with multiple layers of issues. That requires multilayered solutions designed with a particular individual in mind.

**And the problem isn't just the other person's brokenness, is it?**

**Palmer:** Before we can help anyone else, we must first deal with our own hearts. Our motives are not always pure. When it comes to working with people in deep poverty, we have a lot of fear and insecurities to overcome. We don't help anyone if we are riding in on our white horses to "save" them.

It also is tempting to talk about "the poor" in abstract terms, when in reality they are individuals with problems, joys, struggles, and victories, just like us. When we stop seeing the poor through our labels and acknowledge them as people, we take a huge step toward working with them in healthier ways.

**Daniel:** One of those stereotypes is that people in poverty don't have what they need to help themselves. Our first thought is to give them the things we think they need. We make the mistake of trying to serve them first with programs at a governmental or community level. The truth is, their first, best assets to improving the quality of their lives will come from within themselves.



*Top: L.A.'s Skid Row is home to more than 8,000 homeless people. With the help of the World Hunger Fund, Set Free Church was able to provide a hot meal on Thanksgiving last year. Photo by Greg Schneider*

*Directly above: A mother and daughter receive a burrito, apple, and bottle of water from a ministry in Texas that provides groceries, toys, and the gospel to more than 5,000 people. Photo by Kari Crowe*

People who live in poverty can be remarkably resourceful. Think about it: Could you survive on \$12,000 a year? Many people do. They have an amazing capacity for solving their own problems, if you give them a chance and walk with them on that journey.

**However, it's not just about personal issues is it? Don't we have to tackle social systems that keep people in poverty if we want to make a difference?**

**Daniel:** When you get deeply involved with people in a poverty culture, you

understand something important about their lives: They often live in chaos. All the social systems are broken—family, economy, etc. They don't have the avenues out of poverty we take for granted. High school graduation and strong marriage remain the best paths out, but educational and marital failures are at the heart of the chaos in their communities. These failures are often intensified and perpetuated by unjust systems.

**Palmer:** If we understand what the Bible says about poverty, it will stand us on our heads about how we approach it. Hunger and substandard living certainly are not God's desire for people. However, if poverty is measured by a person's relationship with God, then true poverty is a total disregard for God. The truly poor are those still trusting in their own resources, instead of God.

**Daniel:** If we want to effectively help people trapped in poverty, we must address their relationship with God. Yes, we need to walk with them in finding solutions to hunger, illiteracy, unemployment, etc., but the most precious thing we have to share is reconciliation with God. That's the foundation: moving beyond poverty into God's family. Everything short of that is merely remedial, dealing with effects instead of causes.

**Palmer:** The primary relationship that needs restoring for all of us is our relationship with God. Both the poor and the rich—and the in-between—need this because we are all poor and deficient when it comes to salvation. There is only one way to be redeemed out of spiritual poverty, and that is Jesus. When we have that relationship established and we are made right by God's grace, we are freed to find right relationships to other people, our world, and even ourselves.

**When we help a person find his way to right relationships with God and others, how does that affect the advance of God's kingdom in poverty-stricken communities?**

**Palmer:** There is no more effective strategy for reaching a lost and dying world than the strategy of making Jesus known in word and in deed. When people are treated with dignity, and opportunity is presented in the name of Jesus, broad avenues are paved for the kingdom of God to come in the midst of the poor. The poor begin to come out of their poverty both physically and spiritually, and they also joyfully and willingly share their newfound abundant life. God raises them up to become a mighty force for His kingdom in the world.

Because poverty is essentially about relationships, our attacks on poverty must be, first and foremost, relational. We follow Jesus' example of engaging in redemptive, personal relationships with individuals in need. Helping badly broken people out of poverty requires deep personal relationships, and that can be messy and complicated. But it's the only way we learn enough about someone to design a multilayered solution that moves him toward the full, free, and forever life.

At the same time, a community is more than just the sum of its individual parts. Beating poverty requires us to work for social justice. Hard-hearted predators and impersonal social forces oppress the weak. People who care must look hard at the world around them and identify the ways people are suffering. Christians must speak up for those who have no voice and rally the community to find solutions for the problems that plague "the least of these." ■

**MARK KELLY (@Kainos)** is editor of *Multiply Justice* ([multiplyjustice.net](http://multiplyjustice.net)).

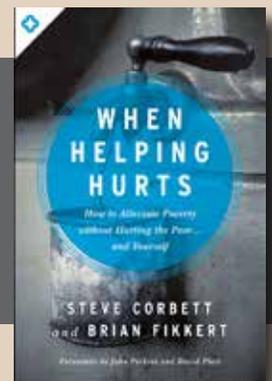
## POVERTY BY THE NUMBERS

- In 2011, roughly 46 million Americans (15 percent) were living below the poverty line. That's only 4 percent below the number in 1964 when Lyndon Johnson declared the "War on Poverty."
- In 2012, an average of 46.6 million Americans received food stamps each month—the most ever.
- Homeless rates tripled in 182 American cities over one eight-year period.
- The incomes of average Americans remain 6.1 percent below where they stood when the 2007 recession began, and median income has declined 7.2 percent since 2000.
- 67 percent of Americans are dissatisfied with the way income and wealth are currently distributed, according to Gallup.
- Almost half the world—over 3 billion people—lives on less than \$2.50 a day.
- The number of people living in extreme poverty—\$1.25 a day in 2005 prices—was cut 50 percent between 1990 and 2010, but some 1 billion people will still live in extreme poverty in 2015.
- About 1.4 million children die each year from unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *Weekly Standard*, National Coalition for the Homeless, *Washington Post*, World Bank, UNICEF

### DIG DEEPER

- *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert (Moody Publishers)





IT'S OK TO BE

# ORDINARY

## 10 ORDINARY WAYS TO MAKE AN EXTRAORDINARY IMPACT

*By Tony Merida*

**P**eople never guess that I'm a pastor and a professor. They typically think I'm in a band, or own a Harley shop or a tattoo parlor. The fact that I have a few tattoos doesn't surprise anyone. But recently, my wife got a tattoo, which surprises people. She's a soft-spoken, diplomatic, professional lady, and a musician. For her thirty-seventh birthday, though, she wanted some ink. She got six words from Micah 6:8:

"Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly."

The whole verse says this: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness [mercy], and to walk humbly with your God?"

I'm not encouraging getting a tattoo of this verse. But I do want to encourage you to tattoo this verse on your heart.

The Hebrew word translated "kindness," "mercy," or "faithfulness" is, without question, one of the most important words in the Old Testament. It speaks of God's loyal, faithful, covenant-keeping love to His people. God uses it to speak of His own nature. The word *justice* is an action word. It's used to talk about punishing oppressors, as well as protecting, and caring for the vulnerable.

These two words, mercy and justice, obviously go together.

How can we, ordinary people, do Micah 6:8 every day? Do you have to be a lawyer, or a missionary, or a podcasted celebrity preacher? No. You need to walk humbly with God, doing justice out of merciful love for others in every way possible.

One of the saddest indications of failure in the area of justice and mercy is our description of those who excel in doing justice. We describe them as radical, as extraordinary. Yes, as we read the Bible together, we find that the Bible treats issues of mercy and justice as anything but extraordinary. Frankly, doing justice is just a normal part of the Christian life.

## DO JUSTICE, LOVE MERCY, WALK HUMBLY

We need Christians focusing on ordinary Christianity—speaking up for the voiceless, caring for the single mom, restoring the broken, bearing burdens, welcoming the functionally fatherless, and speaking the good news to people on a regular basis in order to change the world.

What kind of works are ordinary Christians supposed to be doing? A starting point is with the Great Commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself. Simple enough. What does it look like to love our neighbor, or to do what some call “mercy ministry”? Tim Keller says that ministries of mercy involve “meeting felt needs through deeds.” Simple enough. Individuals and churches should be sensitive to the needs around them, and seek to meet those needs.

Here’s the problem: Not everyone agrees on the nature of or need for mercy ministry! One group promotes social action, but doesn’t preach justification by faith alone. It’s social ministry with no gospel. This group longs to see the needs of the city met—with absolute sincerity—but for whatever reason, the gospel is either overlooked or avoided. Mercy ministry is service, but lacks proclamation.

Another group proclaims the gospel, but shirks back from social action in fear of compromising truth. The idea of laboring for the good of a lost neighbor seems like a waste of time if agreement on the doctrine of justification is not first reached. It might be confusing to the world, for example, if believers and unbelievers are both trying to serve the poor together by serving meals. For this group, real mercy ministry is proclamation, but lacks concern for the social needs of others.

Let me propose some principles for reconciling that tension. First, let’s embrace mercy ministry under the shadow of the cross. Let’s love our neighbor by demonstrating practical love, and let’s love our neighbor by declaring the only message that will save.

Mercy ministry is about alleviating suffering. Those who want to alleviate suffering should want to alleviate more than temporary suffering. They should also want to alleviate eternal suffering, which can only come through faith in Christ.

For those who only champion proclamation, and discard mercy ministry, I want to remind them of a few things. The places of greatest poverty and social need are often the places with the greatest need for gospel proclamation also. We don’t need to argue over whether we should do word ministry or deed ministry; we simply need to go. When we get there, we should serve them in love and speak to them in love.

Let’s do all we can for the weak to

alleviate their present suffering, and let's do all we can to tell them of the glory that is to be revealed to those who are in Christ. Tell them about the King, who will usher in a new kingdom of complete shalom, where the lion plays with the lamb.

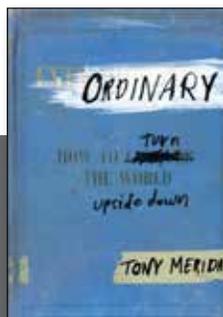
To embrace mercy ministry under the shadow of the cross means to get involved personally. Here are 10 simple ways to get started.

1. Buy groceries for a struggling single mother.
2. Visit a hospital and pray with the sick and the dying.
3. Spend time with the elderly living at a local care center.
4. Volunteer at a homeless shelter.
5. Teach ESL classes for refugees in your community.
6. Sponsor a child.
7. Donate money to aid victims of disaster.
8. Tutor underprivileged youth.
9. Give restaurant or grocery store gift cards to people living on the street.
10. Write a letter to a prisoner.

Who has God made you aware of that needs mercy? Such individuals are all around us. The writer of Proverbs says, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it" (Proverbs 3:27).

We can't do it all, but we can all do something, today and every day. ■

**TONY MERIDA (@TonyMerida)** is pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, N.C. and author of *Ordinary: How To Turn the World Upside Down* (B&H Publishing Group) from which this is adapted.



## DIG DEEPER

- *Ordinary: How to Turn the World Upside Down* by Tony Merida



# AcousticsFirst<sup>®</sup>.com

▲ Materials to Control Sound & Eliminate Noise.™

## Good acoustics start with your room...



## ...not with your gear.

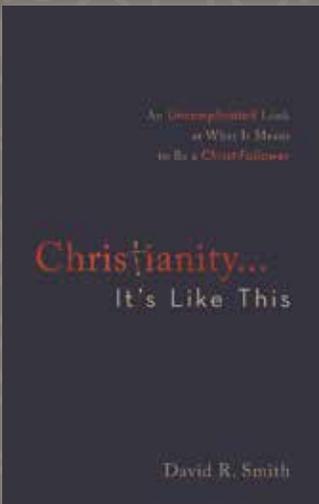
Toll-Free Number:

# 888-765-2900



*New from Pastor David R. Smith*

## AN UNCOMPLICATED LOOK AT CHRISTIANITY



*"Christianity...It's Like This offers pastors, teachers, and church leaders a powerful tool to help others understand biblical truth. Do your small groups a favor and get this book!"*

-Paul Alonso, Senior Pastor of Wahoo Baptist Church

---

**About the Author**  
David R. Smith pastors First Baptist Church in Linden, Florida, where he lives with his wife, Jenn, and their son, Josiah.

Available at LifeWay Christian Stores or Wherever Books Are Sold



# Stuck like glue



## Protecting your closest relationships

By Philip W. Nation

***“Some people make enemies instead of friends because it is less trouble.”***

This statement, attributed to E.C. McKenzie, feels like real life on a lot of days. Sometimes friends are more trouble than they are worth. But as a pastor, I’d rather be surrounded by friends who have my back than by enemies trying to stab me in the back.

Being a pastor can be a solitary experience if you aren’t careful. Ministers need strong personal relationships for support, accountability, and encouragement. We all need a strong circle of friends who enjoy life together and show up when dark clouds are hovering overhead.

To that end, we need to know how to nurture and protect the relationships we have. Here are several ideas, both practical and principled, to help you protect the connections you have with your friends, your spouse, and your kids.

**Listen to your friends and family.** We all need a listening ear at times—whether it's to share our burdens or to chat about how the day is going. But it's easy to zone out when someone we love is talking.

That's especially true at home. As a husband and father, it should be easy for me to listen intently to my wife and two sons. Notice I wrote: "it should be." In reality, the stress of the daily commute, pressures of unfinished tasks, and a million other things seek to distract me from the people who matter most. You and I must choose to listen intently to the people we love.

**Step away from the smartphone.** I heard about a group of friends who regularly go to dinner together. At the beginning of the meal, they stack their phones in the middle of the table. The first one who answers a call, text, or notification has to pay the bill. If no one breaks the rule, everyone buys his or her own meal. It's a silly idea but one that helps the group prioritize their friends over the dinging, whirring, buzzing, vibrating notifications of their smartphones.

**Carry their burdens.** The idea of carrying another person's burdens could be the very definition of having a relationship. Sometimes a friend will actually need you to carry something—especially on moving day. But more likely they need you to be present and attentive when life gets hard. It's in that type of moment you carry another person's burden.

**Let your burdens be carried.** By their very definition, relationships are reciprocal. So, don't keep your troubles secret from your friends. Be

honest about your struggles and ask for help. The lack of humility to admit the need for help and the growing habit of keeping secrets both undermine healthy relationships. Give up your pride and let someone hold you up in the trying times of life.

**Forgive quickly.** Don't keep score. Relationships grow when we hold short accounts with one another. Do you have a relationship that needs mending? Stop reading and go forgive a friend or loved one right now.

**Choose activities that are interactive.** Turn off the television and do something fun with your friends and family. Play a board game with your kids. Go to dinner with some friends. Take a canoe trip with your wife. Activities like these help us interact rather than just spectate. Remember, just because you're sitting in the same room doesn't mean you're together.

**Have fun.** Never underestimate the value of a good laugh. Our relationships require work but they are intended to be fun. So make the choice and enjoy the journey with those you hold closest to your heart. ■

---

**PHILIP NATION (@PhilipNation)** is director of Adult Ministry Publishing at LifeWay and teaching pastor at The Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee.

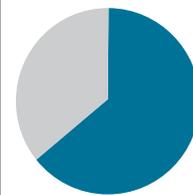


## DIG DEEPER

- *Like Glue: Making Relationships Stick* by Ben Mandrell (Bible Studies for Life)



**30%**  
of Americans  
worry their closest  
relationships won't last



**64%**  
of Americans often  
think about how to look  
after their closest  
relationships

Source: LifeWay Research and Bible Studies for Life

# DROP THE JUGGLING ACT

## Coping with busyness without burning out

By Sean Fowlds



**Read a card once that captures the attitude of many: “Jesus is coming, look busy.” It’d be funny if it weren’t for the fact that many of us are acting too busy for our own good—especially pastors and church leaders. And contrary to popular opinion, it’s not “better to burn out than rust out” because the truth is we don’t need to do either.**

A 2008 survey from LifeWay Research found most Protestant pastors work more than 50 hours a week. They juggle dozens of tasks from sermon preparation and meetings to hospital visitation and counseling. Many are tempted to neglect family life in order to spend more time at work.

We can cope with busyness by leading balanced lives that help us avoid burning out and rusting out.

#### Four keys to coping with busyness

**1. Find balance.** We may be busy, but we can find balance by prioritizing our personal and professional lives according to the principles outlined in Scripture.

“Everything is permissible for me,” wrote the apostle Paul, “but not everything is helpful.” The truth is there is much we could do, but it is often a matter of whether or not we should do it. We need to be able to pass on good ideas in order to pursue God ideas.

Ministers need to discern the difference between something that is good and something that is right. And saying “no” to a good idea or need doesn’t always mean “never.” It simply may mean not right now. Saying no often enables us to say yes to the best God has for us.

**2. Set boundaries.** Another key to coping with busyness without burning out is establishing boundaries, for others and ourselves. Remember, none of us can do everything. If we try, we may end up neglecting the things that really matter in life. We must identify the non-negotiables in our lives and structure our time around them.

**3. Recruit help.** Church leaders don’t have to serve alone. Too many try to do it all themselves instead of equipping members of the church to minister alongside each other (Ephesians 4:11-12). Not allowing members to fulfill their responsibility isn’t good for them, the pastor, or the church as a whole.

**4. Seek Jesus.** One of the most liberating passages in the Bible is Matthew 11:28-30: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me.

Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.” (The Message)

Jesus modeled for us a radical method of ministering to people, and we need to heed His example. It is the power of God operating through each of us that meets the needs of people, not what we do in our own strength. Notice in the passage above that Jesus said the way to learn the unforced rhythms of grace is “to walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it.”

One of the remarkable things about the life of Jesus as recorded in Scripture is that you never see Him overwhelmed by ministry. Even though He had a limited time here on earth to accomplish His mission, Jesus resisted the temptation to sacrifice the important for the urgent. And rather than succumb to peer pressure, even from His parents, Jesus was not ruled by the demands of others.

As pastor Rick Warren says, “The antidote for your overloaded soul is not a plan for time management. It’s not a program for stress reduction. It’s not a philosophy on how to simplify your life. It’s not a pill. It’s a person. Jesus does not say, ‘Come to church.’ He does not say, ‘Come to small group.’ He does not even say, ‘Come to the Bible.’ He says, ‘Come to me.’ The answer for overload is a person.”

And that person is Jesus Christ. ■

**SEAN FOWLDS (@SeanFowlds)** is a writer who lives with his wife, Linda, in Franklin, Tennessee. He is writing a book about coping with busyness. Visit him at [www.seanfowlds.com](http://www.seanfowlds.com).

“Saying ‘no’ often enables us to say ‘yes’ to the best God has for us.”

— Sean Fowlds



# The Word in **COMMUNITY**

*By Matt Capps*

# GROUPS MATTER



## **T**he availability of the Bible for Christians in the West is a blessing.

Most of us have Bibles in various translations at our disposal, ensuring God's transformative Word is always within arm's reach. This affords us the ability to read the Bible any time we choose.

While this personal reading is essential for Christian formation, the practice of individual Bible study in the modern church may have eclipsed the historic practice of reading the Bible in community with other Christians.

Think about it: Before Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, few Christians had access to personal copies of the Scriptures. One could argue it wasn't until the revolution of mass printing that personal quiet times were even possible for the majority of Christians.

Before that time, God's Word was almost always studied in the context of community—primarily as part of a corporate gathering (Deuteronomy 31:12; Nehemiah 8:1; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 13:44). While most of us have the benefit and blessing of reading the Bible personally on a regular basis, we may be downplaying the transformative power of studying the Bible in Christian community.

For the most part, the modern world has exchanged information for intimacy. In our world, relationships are increasingly built through technology like phone calls, video chats, and social media, rather than face-to-face encounters. Yet, we were created for intimate community and fellowship (Genesis 2:18), which take place best when we are together with other people.

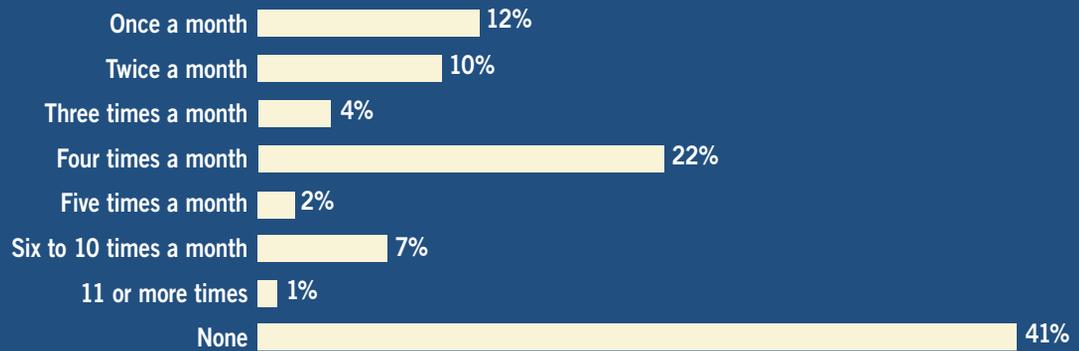
"It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace," Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his book *Life Together*.

The church has a unique opportunity to hold up intimate community and face-to-face fellowship as a value that meets the deepest needs of humanity. Something absolutely beautiful, transforming, and miraculous happens as God's children gather to study God's Word.

The Apostle Paul proclaims in Colossians 3:16 we are to "teach and admonish one another." It's hard to do this when we're not together with other

## More than half of adult Protestants attended Sunday school, Bible study, or other small group at least once in the past month.

### Attendance:



Source: LifeWay Research

members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). Christian sanctification is as much a group project as it is an individual pursuit. Community Bible study guards and guides our beliefs and feelings about God as we hold each other accountable and challenge one another with God's Word.

In community study, we also benefit from the insight, wisdom, and perspective of others. We're able to hear from those who are at different life stages, enabling us to see through the rich prism of the experience of others.

"When people are deeply affected by the Word, they tell other people," Bonhoeffer wrote in *Life Together*. "God has willed that we should seek and find God's living Word in the

testimony of other Christians, in the mouths of human beings. Therefore, Christians need other Christians who speak God's Word to them"

As we study in community, our understanding of God's Word progresses as we grow together. And studying in a group may also improve our personal quiet time.

A recent study, published in the book *Transformational Groups*, found that 42 percent of Protestant churchgoers who are actively involved in a small group say they also regularly study and reflect on God's Word on their own throughout the week. That drops to 10 percent for those who aren't part of a small group.

The Bible is clear: none of us lives to himself (Romans 14:7). We are living stones being built up together

## "Christians need other Christians who speak God's Word to them."

—*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

(Ephesians 2:20, 22). We are to speak the truth in love to one another, as the body of Christ, being conformed to Christ together (Ephesians 4:15-16).

At the center of the biblical picture of spiritual growth is the study of God's Word in the context of community. As J.I. Packer argues in his book *Grounded in the Gospel*, "The church is to be a learning-and-teaching fellowship in which the passing on of what we learn becomes a regular

part of the service we render to one another."

God designed us for community and fellowship. And God gave us His Word as the foundation for our community life. Like jagged rocks thrown into the rock tumbler of community, as we study God's Word together, we will work out the rough edges of our life, and end up as beautiful, smooth stones reflecting the image of His Son. ■

**MATT CAPPS (@MattCapps)** is brand manager for *The Gospel Project*.



## Want to simplify your finances?

Roll over to a GuideStone IRA today.

Call **1-888-GS-FUNDS** (1-888-473-8637) to speak with a customer relations specialist or learn more at [GuideStoneInvestments.com/Simplify](http://GuideStoneInvestments.com/Simplify).



*You should carefully consider the investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses of the GuideStone Funds before investing. A prospectus with this and other information about the Funds may be obtained by calling **1-888-GS-FUNDS** (1-888-473-8637) or downloading one at [GuideStoneFunds.com](http://GuideStoneFunds.com). It should be read carefully before investing.*



# Social media: hashtag do's and don'ts

By Chris Martin and Marty Duren

**I**n the last several years, the hashtag (or # symbol) has become vital for online communication. Church and ministry leaders can use it to better engage their target audience and bring a Christian perspective to popular topics on social media.

Though the hashtag is now used on a number of social media platforms for similar purposes, the symbol first became popular on Twitter in 2007. While it's frequently used today to add emphasis (#Truth) or sarcasm (#Really?) to the end of a tweet or status update, it also allows people to join online discussions about particular events.

The hashtag has become one of the most powerful forces on social media. In 2011, the hashtag helped topple the Egyptian government and catalyze the Arab Spring. Just last year, "#Ferguson" made a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, the center of the online world.

But for the church, they can be used for more than jokes or sending a tweet about the Super Bowl. Hashtags can help churches communicate more effectively and encourage engagement. They show up as a link, and clicking on the hashtag allows anyone to read all the tweets about that topic or join the conversation with their own thoughts.

For those new to social media or even for longtime Twitter users, here are some basic do's and don'ts churches and pastors should be aware of when it comes to hashtags:

**DO use hashtags to encourage interaction with the sermon.** One of the most common uses of hashtags in churches today is for sharing a pastor's sermon series. A church in Austin, Texas, used #FarMore to



Chris Martin @ChrisMartin17 · 1h

Hashtags can exponentially increase the social media reach of the church when used effectively. [#Truth](#)



promote a six-week vision series that included daily devotions the church posted online and linked to on Twitter.

**DO research a new hashtag before promoting.** Do a quick search on Twitter to make others aren't already frequently using your potential hashtag. Also, read the whole hashtag out loud to make sure it can't be misread as something embarrassing. Researching a hashtag before using it will help you avoid miscommunication.

**DO NOT use punctuation, symbols, or spaces in your hashtags. Punctuation, special symbols, and spaces all break hashtags.** If you asked people to hashtag tweets with "#John3:16," only "John3" would be an active link. The same would happen with the apostrophe in the hashtag #God'sLove. Test your tag before promoting it in printed materials.

**DO use hashtags to promote church-wide events.** Perhaps your church is handing out popsicles at the county fair, or hosting a Beth Moore or Priscilla Shirer simulcast. If so, use hashtags to help start conversations about the event. If enough people in your congregation begin to talk about it, people outside of your church will take notice on social media and become curious.

**DO interact with unbelievers in positive ways.** Offer help in times of need. Encourage during a national calamity. Participate in community events being promoted through social media. Last summer, a church in Indianapolis created the hashtag #ForIndy to encourage acts of kindness throughout the city. During their organized time for serving the community, the Summit Church in the Raleigh-Durham area of North Carolina uses #serveRDU to showcase their volunteer work.

**DO NOT try to preach into every hashtag.** Many social media brawls can break out when well-meaning Christians try social media sermonizing. Be sensitive; there's a time and place to share your faith. Social media sermonizing seldom leads to an effective gospel interaction.

Hashtags are useful and fun, and they can exponentially increase the social media reach of a church when used effectively. And that's #Truth. ■

**CHRIS MARTIN (@ChrisMartin17)** is social media facilitator at LifeWay and **MARTY DUREN (@MartyDuren)** is LifeWay's manager of social media.

# All of Life

## Equipping Christians for 9 to 5

by Darryl Ford

**T**he Great Commission is clear—Christ commands us to go beyond making converts to making disciples. Because discipleship is so important, American evangelicals spend a lot of time thinking and writing about the topic. Still, I wonder if something is missing in our approach to discipleship.

I spent several years working for large evangelical churches in Chicago and Atlanta that had growing and transformative small group ministries. I've participated in and led small groups. I've benefited greatly from those groups and have witnessed incredible growth in the lives of some of my closest friends through small groups.

I've noticed, however, that almost

all discipleship strategies focus on the individual believer's personal or "spiritual" life, often at the exclusion of their vocational life. We spent a lot of time in groups talking about our marriages, our families, our single lives, our prayer lives, our quiet times, and whether or not our eyes wandered where they shouldn't. The only time work came up was when someone asked how effective of a witness we were in our jobs.

Please don't misunderstand me here. I'm not saying discipleship doesn't affect our marriages, our families, and our individual spiritual lives. My contention is that discipleship should be much more than those things, especially when it comes to vocation.

As a pastor, I cringe when I hear

people refer to what pastors do as "full-time ministry." Similarly, I cringe when people refer to their jobs as being "secular." I believe we need a robust theology of faith and vocation that ties into our discipleship. Without it, we create an unhealthy and unbiblical sacred-secular divide that neglects or denies the priesthood of all believers. In other words, we are all in full-time ministry, no matter what our job is.

### Historical misunderstandings

This conversation is not a new one. It has appeared in various permutations throughout church history. In the 4th century, Eusebius introduced the concept of the perfect versus the permitted will of God. To Eusebius, perfect meant full-time church work,





which was the only true and sacred calling and only real vocation. Conversely, permitted referred to necessary but still secular or worldly jobs like farming, tentmaking, or tending to the home. They were not real vocations in Eusebius's eyes.

This became the way the church distinguished between these two worlds. Even Augustine made a distinction between the active life and the contemplative life. Augustine affirmed and praised the work of merchants and farmers, but he believed the contemplative life was of greater significance.

Centuries later, reformers like Martin Luther began to reshape the doctrine of vocation to align more with the Bible's teaching about the priesthood of all believers.

"The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured by God by faith alone," wrote Luther. Specific callings to church work weren't minimized, but all other lawful callings were elevated to the same level of dignity and acceptability before God.

The restoration of the doctrine of vocation continues today, but there's still much work to be done to overcome the sacred-secular divide that is more assumed than explicitly taught—and for that reason, more difficult to detect.

### Work through a redemptive lens

As a church planter and pastor, my goal is to foster a culture of discipleship in our church that encourages believers to view their respective vocations through a redemptive lens. This means communicating a theology of work born out of the creation mandate (Genesis 1:28 and 2:15) and in concert with the great commandment to love

your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40).

I want our people to understand our vocations are given to us so we can work in such a way that provides for human flourishing. For me, that means to work as a pastor to shepherd people into becoming more like Jesus. For others, it will look different. The questions I'm asking our folks are these: "What areas in your sphere of influence are the evidence of the fall readily apparent?" and "What gifts and callings has God placed in you that enable you to join Him in reconciling some of these areas back to Himself?"

My friends at Redemption Church, a multisite church in Arizona, do a great job of teaching their people the doctrine of vocation. They've created something called "All of Life" interviews that are conducted on stage every service.

We are hoping to do the same at our church in Atlanta. In our church, we have musicians, recording artists, business owners, pilots, blue-collar workers, people that work in non-profits, and stay-at-home moms. At some point, we'd like to conduct interviews with each of them to see how their vocations allow them to image God.

People in discipleship groups will be challenged with questions about their vocations in addition to spiritual growth questions because they are related. The hope is that people learn to see their work as an integral part of their larger mission and calling.

And my prayer is that we grow in our understanding that all of life is an expression of love to God and service to others, that all legitimate work is sacred when offered to God, and that all work is an occasion for worship. ■

**DARRYL FORD (@DarrylFord)** is the lead pastor of Ikon Community Church in the East Lake area of Atlanta, Georgia.



## WORK & FAITH:

David Barranco, along with his two brothers, owns and manages Barranco Beverage, Inc., a service company specializing in installing, servicing, refurbishing, selling, and leasing food and beverage equipment. They are headquartered in Atlanta. Barranco is a member of Ikon Community Church in Atlanta.

### How do you describe your work?

**David:** Our business helps schools raise money by offering students a healthier alternative to the unhealthy snacks (vending machines items, ice cream, and soda) typically offered on school grounds.

### How does your faith impact your work?

**David:** I think the primary purpose of education is to give students the opportunity to study truth—all truth—from basic math and grammar to advanced literature and physics to the Holy Scriptures and the gospel message. God has given parents, churches, schools, and other institutions the responsibility to impart this truth. These people and institutions must be supported. Our particular focus has been on schools. Many operate on a thin budget and have to raise additional capital to support their programs. I feel God has called us to help these schools thrive. Thriving includes caring for our bodies spiritually, emotionally, and physically. We help with the physical piece as we provide a healthier snack option for students.

### Do you see evidence of the world's brokenness in your work?

**David:** As a business owner, I experience firsthand the temptation of cutting corners to save money in order to bolster the bottom line. I've been on the receiving end of dishonest practices with customers and suppliers alike. Our business has been robbed multiple times by employees and other thieves. And I see brokenness in the schools and institutions we serve. Trusted leaders, principals, and administrators are sometimes tempted by power and greed, and they commit fraudulent acts. Every year it seems we hear about another school administrator trying to cheat the system in some way.

### How does your work provide an opportunity to love and serve others?

**David:** Our employees are our most valuable asset. God has entrusted them to us. I believe my role is to love and serve them first. My desire is to create an atmosphere where they feel valued, loved, and cared for. I want to encourage and “fan the flame” of each employee’s God-given gifts. ■

## HOW CAN PASTORS MOVE BEYOND SUNDAY AND HELP THEIR CONGREGATIONS LIVE OUT THEIR FAITH FROM 9-5?

**Help people find their identity.** Many career-minded individuals define themselves by their work. Help them see their identity in Christ and their work as a context to express that identity.

**Facilitate conversations.** In any church, you'll find employees who represent a variety of industries. Periodically, host discussions about industry specific issues. Look at the issues through a practical and biblical lens.

**Connect members to one another.** If you have several people from your church who work in downtown or teach at the same school, encourage them to meet for lunch or coffee.

**Shepherd your people at work.** Schedule lunch or meet for coffee during the workday. Try to visit church members at their place of business—most would welcome a visit from their pastor.



# ON OUR RADAR

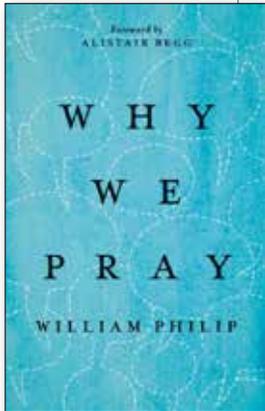
Practical resources for you and your church

## Books & Bible Studies

### **Why We Pray**

By William Philip (Crossway)

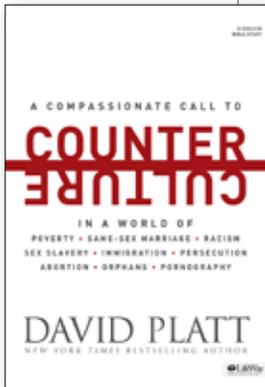
Prayer is foundational to the Christian life, but many people don't really understand it. What is it for? How does it work? Why do we do it? *Why We Pray* is a short, accessible book explaining what prayer is, why it exists, and how it can encourage us in our life of faith. Written by a pastor with years of teaching and counseling experience, the book doesn't simply tell readers why they should pray, but instead focuses on four blessing-filled reasons that will help Christians want to pray. Rather than feeling discouraged and disheartened by their inconsistency in prayer, readers will feel reinvigorated to approach God with confidence and joy, delighted by the privilege of talking directly to their loving heavenly Father.



### **Counter Culture - Bible Study**

By David Platt (LifeWay)

The gospel compels followers of Christ to counter culture on a wide variety of social issues in the world around them. The truths of the gospel inform and compel a contrite, compassionate, and courageous personal response to social issues in the culture such as poverty, slavery, abortion, sexual immorality, the degradation of marriage, the neglect of orphans and widows, racism, and persecution. This book incorporates biblical foundations, practical illustrations, and personal exhortations in a pointed yet winsome call for readers to faithfully follow Christ in counter cultural ways—ways that will prove both costly and rewarding for the contemporary church.

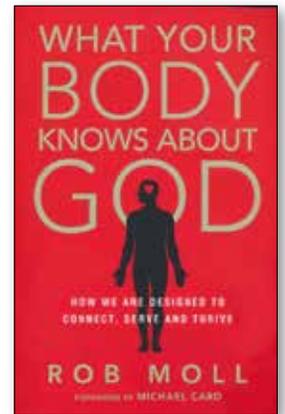


### **What the Body Knows About God: How We Are Designed to Connect, Serve and Thrive**

By Rob Moll (IVP)

Journalist Rob Moll chronicles the fascinating ways in which our brains and bodies interact with God and spiritual realities. He reports on neuroscience findings that show how our brains actually

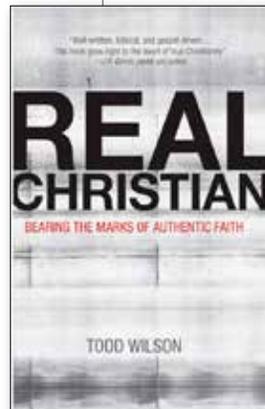
change and adapt when engaged in spiritual practices. We live longer, healthier, happier, and more fulfilling lives when we cultivate the biological spiritual capacity that puts us in touch with God. God has created our bodies to fulfill the Great Commandment; we are hardwired to commune with God and to have compassion and community with other people. Just as our physical bodies require exercise to stay healthy, so too can spiritual exercises and practices revitalize our awareness of God.



### **Real Christian: Bearing the Marks of Authentic Faith**

By Todd Wilson (Zondervan)

Todd Wilson's *Real Christian* biblically defines what it means to be a true Christian, calling readers to look at their own lives and diagnose where they aren't living authentically for God.



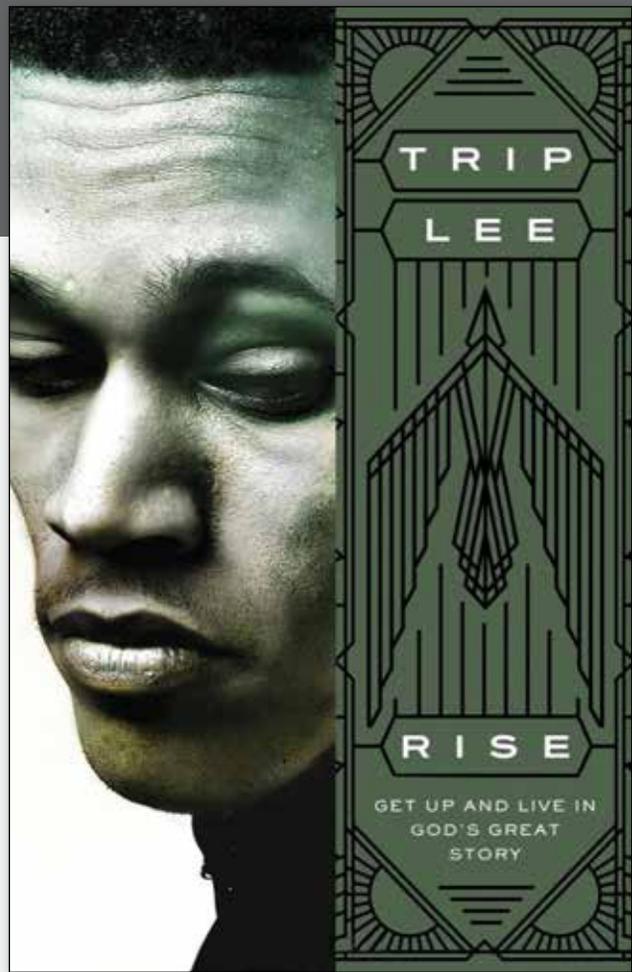
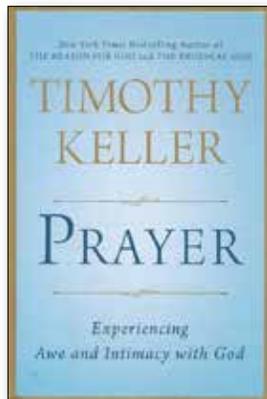
Wilson looks at how we deceive ourselves into thinking we are really living for God through believing the right things or doing lots of spiritual activities. In contrast, real Christians are marked by five key qualities: broken-hearted joy, a humble disposition, a readiness to acknowledge sin, an ability to live balanced and avoid legalism, and a deep spiritual hunger that drives growth. All of these qualities culminate in the single defining mark of a real Christian—love.

### ***Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God***

By Tim Keller  
(Dutton)

Christians are often taught that prayer is the most powerful way to experience God. But few receive instruction or guidance in how to make prayer genuinely

meaningful. In *Prayer*, pastor Keller delves into the many facets of a life of prayer. He describes prayer as both a conversation and an encounter with God and discusses ways to make prayers more personal and powerful. In addition to offering biblical guidance for prayer, the book includes specific prayers for certain situations, such as dealing with grief, loss, love, and forgiveness. The aim is to help each reader establish an effective practice of prayer.



## Reading for spiritual growth

**O**ne of the reasons I want to write books is because God has used books so much in my own life and growth. I remember when a friend of mine recommended I read *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer. I tore through that book and its words tore through my soul. I was never the same. I knew God was big, but that book helped me see Him in a much deeper way.

I know some of us don't like to read, but it's a habit worth cultivating. It can save your life. I've had difficult questions that I've found the answers to in good books. I've gone through dry seasons in my spiritual life, where I felt like I was slipping away, but God used books to pull me back in. Sometimes I don't even know what I need, but God speaks to me through a great Christian book.

I understand reading books is much different from reading the Bible. Reading the Bible is hearing from God. Reading books is more like talking to friends about what God said. Obviously hearing directly from God is more important, but that doesn't mean hearing from others is worthless. I don't know a lot of the guys who wrote my favorite books, but I still consider them "friends."

I have "friends" who are pastors, scholars, and entrepreneurs. There are some I agree with a lot, and other friends I disagree with on some points but can still benefit from. Just like my regular friends, I'll take counsel when it's wise and biblical, and I'll go in another direction otherwise. Reading has been a huge part of my process of going deeper in God's truth. If you don't know where to start, ask someone you trust to point you in the right direction. ■

*Excerpt taken from RISE by Trip Lee. Used with permission from Thomas Nelson, 2015.*



# ON OUR RADAR

Practical resources for you and your church

## Conferences & Events



### The Main Event

**June 19-20, 2015, Nashville;  
July 19-20, Kansas City, Missouri**

Speakers: Mike Huckabee, Jim Kelly, Dr. Tony Evans, David Aker, Jeff Bethke, Derwin Gray, Brian Carter, Mike Hamilton, Stephen Kendrick, Tommy Bowden, Darrin Patrick, Tierce Green, Marty Simpson (Check website for list of speakers at each location.)

Join with men from across the nation for two days of worship, humor, and challenging messages from an amazing group of pastors, leaders, and high achievers—men who have been through the worst and are now at their best.

[LifeWay.com/MainEvent](http://LifeWay.com/MainEvent)

### LifeWay Worship Week

**July 13-17, 2015, Ridgecrest, North Carolina**

Speakers: Jay Strother (conference pastor), Jeremy Busler (worship leader), and featured evening guests including Tommy Walker, This Hope, and Geron Davis & Kindred Souls

Worship Week is designed to equip your worship team with tools and information from some of the most inspiring leaders in church music. Attendees will be encouraged and strengthened for service in all



areas of your church's worship ministry.

[LifeWay.com/WorshipWeek](http://LifeWay.com/WorshipWeek)

### SEND North America Conference

**August 3-4, 2015, Nashville, Tennessee**

Speakers: David Platt, Russell Moore, Eric Mason, Louie Giglio, Ronnie Floyd

The SEND North America Conference is a two-day gathering of church leaders. The heart of this gathering is to see a movement of people from within the church living out the mission of God in their everyday lives. This year's SEND North America Conference offers a special Collegiate Edition, which includes collegiate breakouts, a special late night concert, and a tailgate gathering.



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

### Global Leadership Summit

**August 6-7, 2015, Multiple Locations**

Everybody has influence and the responsibility to lead well. When cultivated in a culture of Christ-centered leadership, your influence can change lives and the organizations in which you lead. The Summit will gather more than 190,000 leaders around the world for a two-day leadership workshop. Leaders leverage the Summit to sharpen their skills and to unleash the full potential of their teams.



[WillowCreek.com/Summit](http://WillowCreek.com/Summit)

# Digital

## Devo Hub

DevoHub is a new way to provide your church with access to daily devotionals—straight to their phones.

Spending time in God's Word has the power to transform lives. As a church leader, you want to be able to provide trustworthy devotional content to your church family and DevoHub allows your church to provide access to daily devotional content catered to every individual's needs.

Your church acts as the "hub" for activation. Anyone who enters your church building is able to activate their DevoHub app and can then access devotional content no matter where they go.

### DevoHub includes devotionals such as:

- *Journey* - a devotional designed to equip women in their daily walk with the Lord
- *Stand Firm* - a devotional for men filled with practical ways to apply biblical truths
- *Open Windows* - a devotional that leads readers to delve deeper into their Bibles
- *Renew Daily* - a devotional filled with biblical truth and encouragement for the reader who wants to know God more

To stay up-to-date on the latest news about DevoHub, visit [DevoHub.com](http://DevoHub.com)



## Online Bible Studies

Looking for a Bible study you can do online? Did you miss the latest video session in your small group?

Enhance your Bible studies with digital solutions from LifeWay, now available in a variety of formats. Listen to audio sessions, download videos, or stream live events from your favorite Bible study leaders as they provide a deeper understanding of God's Word and how you can apply it to your everyday life.

[Lifeway.com/n/Bible-Study/Downloads-&-Online-Studies](http://Lifeway.com/n/Bible-Study/Downloads-&-Online-Studies)



## EricGeiger.com

Vice president of LifeWay Christian Resources, Eric Geiger, writes regularly at his blog about leadership, spiritual growth, and church trends. He also includes helpful links for leaders. We especially appreciate how the blog combines devotional thoughts with practical leadership wisdom.

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



# A path to spiritual growth

**T**his issue of *Facts & Trends* has gone back to the basics a bit. It has aimed to help us understand the gospel better, experience more of God’s love, and be more inspired to live out our calling as His redeemed and empowered people, the church.

Throughout, we’ve looked at ways spiritual growth takes place. I want to stay on that subject, breaking it down into its constituent parts, and thinking a little more about the way it occurs. After all, Christianity is about change and newness of life, and growth is certainly part of God’s plan for every believer.

The truth is, having a desire for spiritual growth is not enough in the Christian life. We must be on the path. We’ve found through Transformational Discipleship research that there is a progression, a path involved in making disciples. Paul writes of this path in his letter to the Colossians:

*“For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven’t stopped praying for you. We are asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9-10).*

**Here are three things that mark the path of spiritual formation:**

## Knowing

Being filled with the knowledge of God’s will is a vital part of becoming a disciple of Jesus and continuing to grow spiritually. We can tell people to be more like Jesus all day long, but if they don’t know Jesus, they won’t be like Him. This means reading the Bible is essential to our spiritual growth.

Show me someone who isn’t reading the Word of God, and I’ll show you someone who isn’t growing deeper as a believer.

The psalmist says to God, “Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105). The path to spiritual maturity is lit by the Word. In fact, true spiritual depth is about understanding the Word of God and living out its truths. And that should be the goal for all of us.

**“IF BEING A DISCIPLE IS ABOUT TAKING ON CHRIST’S TRAITS, PRODUCING FRUIT IS ABOUT EXHIBITING THE PRESENCE OF JESUS.”**

—ED STETZER

## Being

We don’t learn about God to become theological encyclopedias. Rather, we learn and know so we can live out of our new identity, exchanging old desires for new ones, and old ways of thinking for the mind of Christ.

There is a mysterious transfer of spiritual DNA that occurs as a believer walks the path of discipleship. It is a becoming. The more time you spend with a mentor, read a certain author, or listen to a favorite speaker, the more you will begin to think like that person.

In Romans, Paul talks about being. He says, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renew-

ing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). We begin to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord when we emulate His traits.

## Doing

Just as our mindsets are formed by our beliefs and training, our actions flow from who we are.

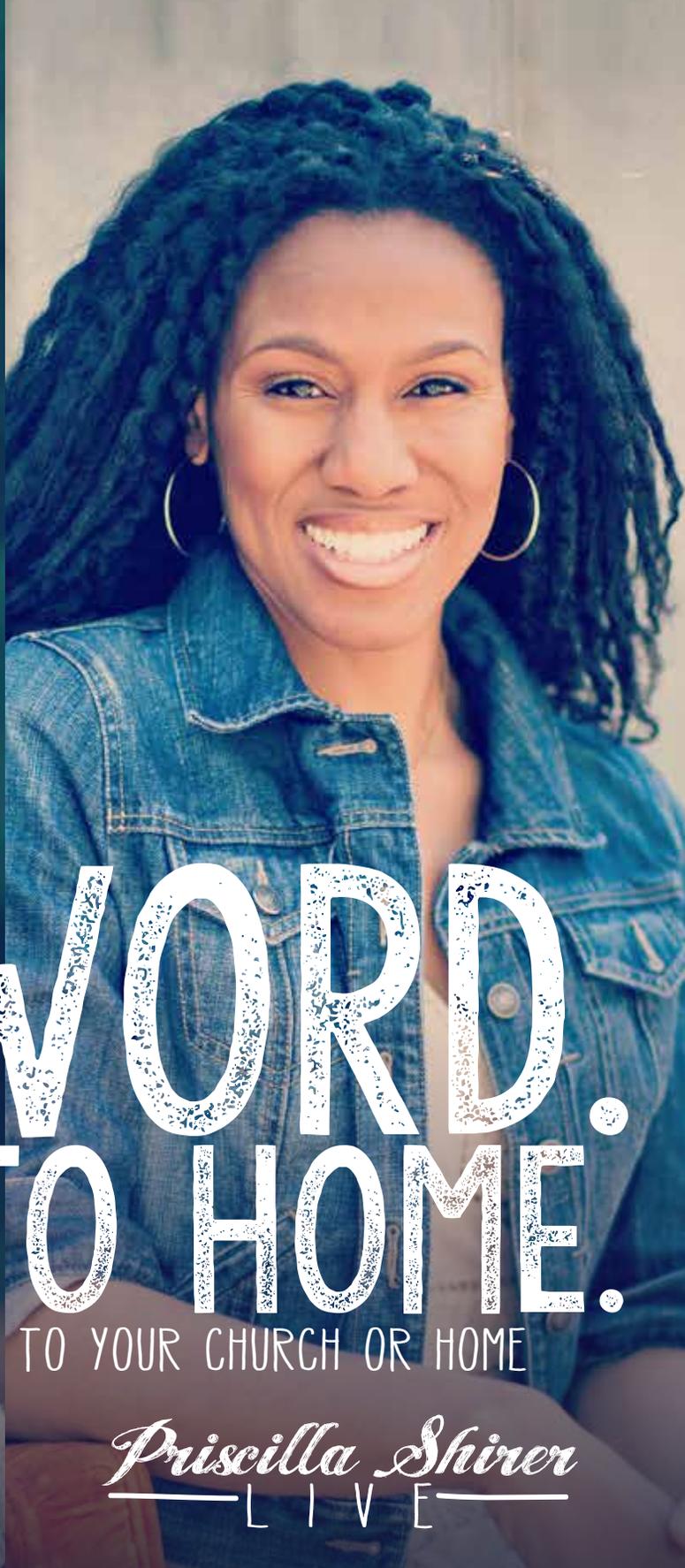
Bearing fruit in every good work is an indicator of development. Just as no one is saved by knowing more about God, no one is saved by doing good things for God. But being a disciple will inevitably result in doing the work of a disciple—not just doing good things but also bearing fruit for God.

We do good works not so good things are done, but as Jesus taught, “So that [people] may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). That’s what bearing fruit looks like—it’s God-centered obedience.

If being a disciple is about taking on Christ’s traits, producing fruit is about exhibiting the presence of Jesus. We were designed to produce spiritually. He is the vine. We are the branches.

Paul tells the church at Ephesus, “For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Fruit is a sign a tree is maturing. Fruit in a believer’s life is a sign that a disciple is growing. And it occurs as we get on the path of discipleship with Jesus. ■

**ED STETZER (@EdStetzer)** is executive director of LifeWay Research. For more visit [EdStetzer.com](http://EdStetzer.com)



# THE WORD. CLOSER TO HOME.

BRING LIFEWAY'S SIMULCASTS TO YOUR CHURCH OR HOME

*living proof*  
LIVE

9.12.2015

[lifeway.com/LPLsimulcast](http://lifeway.com/LPLsimulcast)

*Priscilla Shirer*  
LIVE

4.25.2015

[lifeway.com/PSLsimulcast](http://lifeway.com/PSLsimulcast)

LifeWay Women | events

Events subject to change without notice.

March/April 2015

005175007

# *"Pastor, what is my next step?"*

Now you can have a better answer.

**The question comes in many forms:** What does God want from me? What is God's will for my life? How do I get closer to God? Essentially, they all point to the desire to be a better disciple.

These are not easy questions to answer. But we can help. Just have your congregation take the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA). This simple questionnaire (based on 8 attributes of discipleship that consistently show up in the life of a maturing believer) reveals the specific strengths and weaknesses of your congregation. Individual reports help each person focus on specific areas that need improvement. The group report will help you plan sermons that address the needs that many share in your church.



**Transformational**  
Discipleship Assessment

Learn more at [www.LifeWay.com/TDA](http://www.LifeWay.com/TDA)

