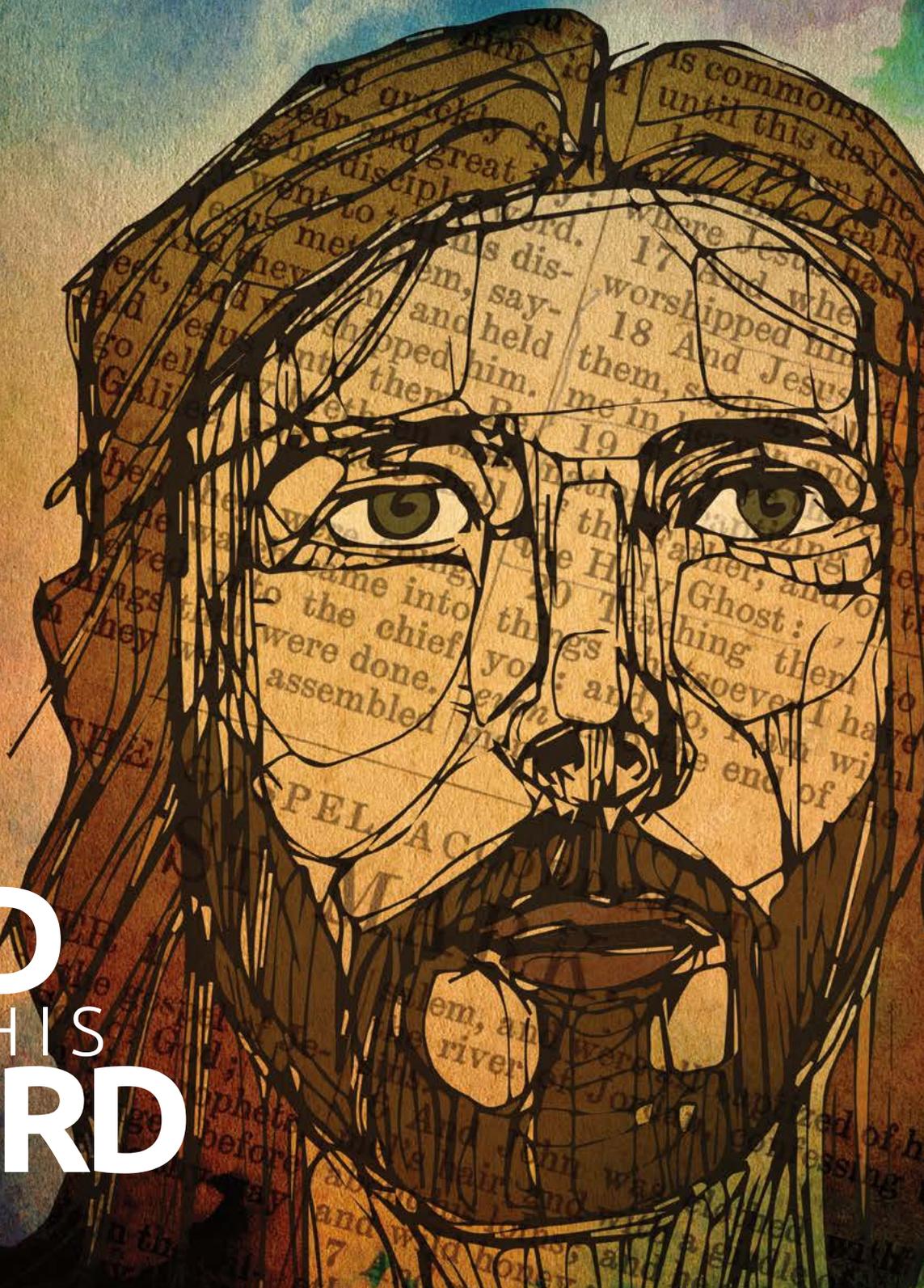


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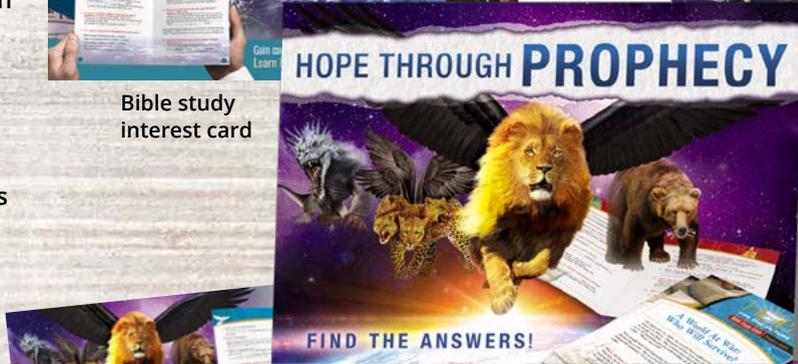
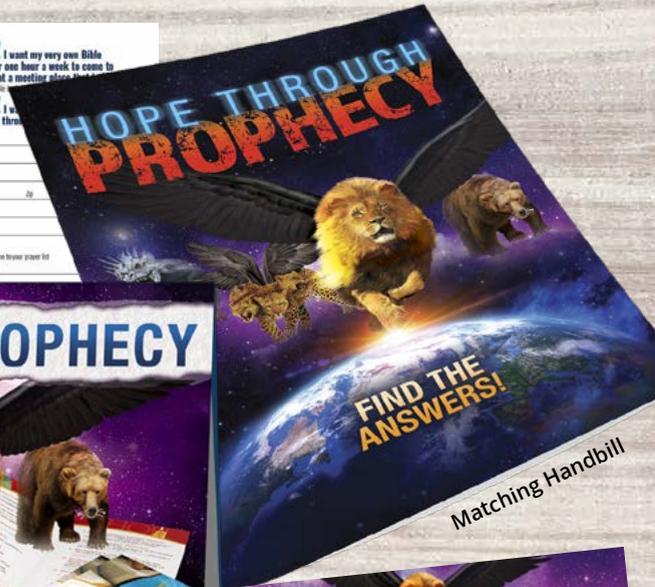
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## 06 Finding the invisible God

W. Floyd Breese

In retirement, a lifelong preacher and trainer of preachers offers a simple sermon of faith and assurance for ministers and those to whom they minister.

## 09 Finding God in community

S. Joseph Kidder and Jonny Wesley Moor

If you are not a part of community, you miss out on many ways God interacts with you.

## 14 Our “unfair” God

Gary Moyer

Away with pastoral bitterness and ministerial jealousy, and receive a fresh outpouring of grace.

## 18 David the Great: Deconstructing the man after God’s own heart

Mark Rutland

As we review Old Testament history, is it time to replace old lenses with new ones?

## 21 The super pastor

H. Jack Morris

Stress can be harmful, but it can also be manageable. You can succumb, or overcome.

## 24 Foundations of preaching

Micheal Goetz

The credibility of preaching rests upon soul-searching theology and its life-changing impact.

## 04 Letters

## 05 Editorial

## 27 Resources

## 28 Dateline

## 30 Practical Pointers

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*“You have been kindly sending me your informative magazine over the years, and I never seem to make time to thank you—so here is that belated thanks.”*

### Rejecting the clichés

Great article (Paul Anderson, “Chaplains—So Who Are We?” July 2018 issue). I hope that we will soon be shaking off unhealthy stereotypes about chaplaincy.

—Her van Dav, email

Great article on the path to chaplaincy! (Lisa Clouzet, “Chaplaincy: Are You Called?” July 2018 issue) I have found many professional chaplains also have a similar, circuitous journey that most of the time is a second career. I would also add, don’t forget an emerging resource for those seeking professional growth and development into the health-care chaplaincy world: Health Care Chaplaincy and the Spiritual Care Association. I am seriously considering become board certified with that organization this year.

—Mark Hansen, email

### Spreading the love

Regarding Fred Hardinge’s article “Always Relate to Others With Love” in the May 2018 issue, Mark 7:18–20 says: “He said to them, ‘Then are you

also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters, not his heart but his stomach, and so passes on?’ (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, ‘What comes out of a man is what defiles a man’” [RSV].

This scripture warns us to be careful not to be beguiled with externals of law-keeping instead of what truly matters, our heart and the internal spiritual law to avoid lustful pursuits, impurity, hatred, etc., and to be filled with true divine love and purity.

—Leslie John, email

### Embracing the city

I am submitting this letter in reference to the September 2018 *Ministry: Living for the City* issue. The articles that renewed my spiritual soul were “By Any Means Necessary: An Urban Ministry Interview With Pastor E. Douglas Venn” by Jeffrey Brown, “I Can’t Breathe” by Robert Davis, and “Invisible People” by Timothy P. Nixon.

Prior to my incarceration, I was called to fulfill the vocation as an

evangelist, but I found myself like Jonah, and the fish that swallowed me was prison. Through it all, the manifestation of God’s mercy is upon me because I have been restored to the fullest extent where the visions are clear and the utterance of the Word is just amazing. In ten months, these doors will open, and I will perform my duties as an evangelist.

In conclusion, I am thankful for God having you as a vessel to bring forth *Ministry: International Journal for Pastors* to reach and teach lives to follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

—William Hinson, New York, United States

In looking at the September 2018 *Living for the City* issue, so long as we make the church larger than the kingdom, we will have a difficult time understanding that God is active before we arrived. But the primary activity of God is in the world, and the church is an instrument created by God to be sent into the world to participate in what He is already doing. To say it another way, God’s church doesn’t have a mission, instead, God’s mission has a church.

—Len Hjalmarson, email

### Passing the baton

You have been kindly sending me your informative magazine over the years, and I never seem to make time to thank you—so here is that belated thanks. I have moved into “Aged Care” now that I am racing towards 94. Here we have a young Pastoral Care helper, and I share your magazine with him. He was ordained in the Presbyterian Rite last month and finds your magazine helpful. Renewed good wishes for the coming year, and God’s blessings on your work.

—Mel Cotter, Franciscan Friars, Australia

Pavel Goia, MDiv, is the editor of *Ministry*.



## Paid in full

The multistory building we were working on had three months' construction still left when the news broke. The president of Romania was coming to visit our city—in *two months*. I was in charge of the hundreds of windows. The engineer responsible for the whole project asked my team to work seven days a week, saying that even if we worked day and night, we could not finish it in time. In a public meeting he declared that, from now on, I would have to come to work every day of the week, even on my day of rest. I refused. I dug in my heels; so did he.

The engineer got so angry that he issued a threat: he would cut my salary and discipline me if I didn't finish within *one month*. I determined that my team would attempt to meet the challenge—by working just five days a week! I prayed continually and, working together, my team and I finished three months' work in *three weeks*. To God be the glory.

The amount of work done equaled that of more than three months. So, my salary for those three weeks was to be greater than the average salary for three months. When I went to pick up the check, it was 10 percent of what it should have been—no explanation. I enquired about it and the engineer intimated that I was docked pay for taking a day of rest. I tried to argue for a fair wage—the number of windows multiplied by the cost per window—I got nowhere. I asked for an audience with the CEO, the highest person in charge of construction in the county. A meeting was scheduled for later that week, but the 8:00 A.M. appointment came with a warning: “If you are even a minute late, you will get no money.”

Long before that incident, I had stopped setting my alarm clock for prayer and studying the Word, claiming the promise, “‘He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned’” (Isa. 50:4)\*. However, the night before the appointment, my cousin and I talked until after midnight, and I did not wake up until 7:50 A.M. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe God had let me down like this. I got up, dressed hastily, and said a quick prayer.

My father, seeing me about to run out the door, asked, “Shouldn't God come first?” His four words that followed forever imprinted themselves on my mind: “*God and His Word.*” At that moment, I chose to give up on the money and spend more than two hours in prayer and Bible study. It didn't make sense, but after my worship I decided to still go to the appointment. What followed was incredible.

I approached the secretary. She looked at her watch and said, “You cannot see the CEO now—but not for the reason you think. A government official arrived unexpectedly last night, and the CEO has been locked in dialogue with him. Even if you had made it at 8:00 A.M., it would have been impossible for you to see him.” As I was about to leave the waiting area, the CEO came through the door. Noticing me, he hurriedly promised to research the salary situation, apologizing profusely that I had been made to wait so long. A week later I got a very nice check. It said, “Paid in full.”

Jesus' high priestly prayer included this amazing declaration: “‘I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do’” (John 17:4). Quality time for prayer and Bible study was important

*At that moment, I chose to give up on the money and spend more than two hours in prayer and Bible study.*

for me in finishing a building. As I finish the work God has now given me, should my time spent in prayer with Him and Bible study about Him be any less important?

Martin Luther said, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours [of the day] in prayer.” *God and His Word* ought to be a platform upon which pastors declare like Luther, “Here I stand, I can do no other.”

Hold on, pastor, because Matthew 6:33 is still true: “‘But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.’” Begin the year right, and one day we will hear, “‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’” (Matt. 25:23). Or—in other words—“Paid in full.”<sup>1</sup>

\* All Scripture in this article is quoted from the New King James Version.

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**W. Floyd Bresee, PhD**, served as secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association between 1985 and 1992. He is retired and resides in Santa Rosa, California, United States.



# *Finding the* invisible God



Imagine for a moment a five-year-old girl we will call Mary. The two things Mary loves the most are her father and her favorite game, hide-and-seek. In fact, one of the many reasons she loves her father is that he sometimes plays hide-and-seek with her.

One evening, Mary begs her father to play her game. Hand in hand, they go out to their big backyard for a little hide-and-seek. She volunteers to be “it,” turns her back, shuts her eyes, and counts all the way up to ten while her father hides. “Here I come, ready or not!” Sure enough, her father has disappeared as he was supposed to do—he has become invisible.

She hunts thoroughly: behind the doghouse, inside the doghouse; behind the tree; around the dollhouse; inside the dollhouse; around the garbage can; and even inside the garbage can. Around and around she goes. By now, the sun is setting. It’s getting dark, and Father is still invisible. Maybe he has gone off and left her! She’s a little frightened. Her smile fades. Tears well up. But Father, hiding behind a big bush, sees and recognizes her fear. He clears his throat—shakes a branch. Mary hears, spots him, and breaks into a big smile as she runs to him.

Perhaps some young person is troubled by doubts about the actual existence of a loving, invisible God. Or a middle-ager is facing some seemingly unsolvable problems and wonders whether the invisible Father really cares. Or a seasoned pastor feels the evening of life approaching and finds the future uncertain. The good news is as promised by our invisible Father in Jeremiah 29:13, “‘You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’”\*

### Finding God is essential

Faith in God is essential in our present world. Jesus promised, “‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’” (John 14:27).

We were designed in Eden to feel at home with God. It’s in our DNA. There’s

a God-shaped hole in the human heart that cannot be filled by anything else. That shape can be filled by God alone, filled by our faith in Him. Faith in God, therefore, is essential in our present world.

Faith in God is our only hope for the world to come. God promises in Jeremiah 29:11, “‘For I know the

‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’” (Matt. 11:28).

God is findable, even in our old age. He promises: “‘Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you’” (Isa. 46:4). Carry

*We were designed in Eden to feel at home with God. It’s in our DNA. There’s a God-shaped hole in the human heart that cannot be filled by anything else.*

plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

Those who study human behavior state that most of us spend about 12 percent of a typical day thinking about the future. Augustine said it dramatically, “We are deafened by the clanging chains of mortality.” But death is not the last word—only next to last. Jesus has the last word: “‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die’” (John 11:25).

### God is findable

God *wants* to be found. Why did little Mary’s father clear his throat and shake that branch? Because he loved her and wanted to make his frightened, unhappy little girl happy again. Our invisible heavenly Father wanted to make us happy, and so He sent us a very visible God, Jesus, who said,

means something special to old people. When we were young, we could hardly wait to get out of Mother’s arms and carry ourselves. In old age, we revert to needing extra help again. Now it’s canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, or someone’s strong arm. God’s offer to “carry” us with His strong arm is a precious promise.

### God is findable by wholehearted searchers

The text from Jeremiah with which we began this meditation assures us that God is findable only to those who search for Him wholeheartedly—“‘You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart’” (Jer. 29:13).

Mary’s father was moved by her wholehearted search: tree, doghouse, dollhouse, garbage can—over and over. Our heavenly Father is moved by our wholehearted search.

But one hour of worship once a week is hardly a wholehearted search!

A half-hearted searcher may never find the invisible God. The irony is that not only do the half-hearted not find God—but because their casual search did not find Him, they usually accuse *Him* of not being findable!

*The Message* paraphrase Bible tenders our text in Jeremiah as, “When you get *serious* about finding me and want it more than *anything else*, I’ll

the Bible! If you have tried daily Bible reading and gotten discouraged with it, I challenge you to try this: Find your favorite Bible version, open it daily, and prayerfully read a few verses from Matthew 5–7. If you did just that daily for the rest of your life, I predict you would learn to know and love the invisible God.

2. *Prayer*. Jeremiah 29:11, 12 says: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,

to appease the conscience. Volunteer for a specific service you and God have chosen together. He will help you find something that fits who and where you are. So long as He gives you air to breathe, He will give you a place to serve. This is the antidote to selfish prayer. Our service to others is how the invisible Father’s love becomes visible to the world.

3. *Nature*. A man contemplating turning atheist noticed his little girl eating in her high chair. He watched her experimenting with ways to get food into her mouth on her own. He heard her blabbering as she was learning to talk. But, of all things, mostly he studied the perfect, intricate form of her little ears, saying to himself, “There’s no way this could all happen by chance. There’s got to be a God.”

Astronomers predicted for months that the temporary alignment of the sun, earth, and moon would produce a “blood moon,” very visible over our home at 5:30 A.M., January 31, 2018. We set the alarm, and sure enough, our big full moon was red. For me, it was an “aha” moment. You see, humankind did not make or maintain that moon. Astronomers did not know how to make it turn red. But they did precisely predict it. The lesson to me was that God is not only mighty but also mighty dependable.

### It’s a promise

Having searched wholeheartedly, Mary receives her reward: to fall joyfully into her father’s arms.

Don’t fear the future. If you have searched wholeheartedly and committed yourself to Christ completely, you have nothing to fear. At the end of the day or at the end of life, you are safe in the arms of Jesus. The arms of your heavenly Father embrace you in eternal love.

Take heart; you can do this. You have God’s word on it. “‘You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’” 

\* All Scripture references in this article, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

*If you have searched wholeheartedly and committed yourself to Christ completely, you have nothing to fear. At the end of the day or at the end of life, you are safe in the arms of Jesus.*

make sure you won’t be disappointed” (emphasis added). What a blessed assurance.

### God is findable by wholehearted, daily searchers

Remember the law of exertion, which says, “Strength requires repetition.” Learn to respect that law. If you ever had an arm or leg in a cast or were bedfast for a few days, you will remember how quickly an unused muscle can weaken. If you never used your legs except for getting to church one day a week, they would quit working. To be strong, both our leg muscles and our spiritual muscles need exercise daily.

There are three places where wholehearted, daily searchers can look for their invisible Father:

1. *A book*. Devotional books are helpful, but you cannot do better than

declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.’” Prayer is one way of searching for God. It has three basic parts:

**Thank.** Thank God for the *air* you breathe, your *heart* that keeps on beating, and the *food* you eat. Our food, after all, does not originate at the market. Basically, it comes from seed, soil, sun, and water—and God provides all four. Food is a very visible proof of an invisible God.

**Ask.** The Jeremiah promise is “You will . . . pray . . . and I will listen.” First, ask for forgiveness. Only after that, remember family, friends, and your prayer list.

**Volunteer.** This is the most neglected part of prayer. Do not just say, “Use me somewhere.” That’s just a way

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# Finding God in community

**D**uring the final night of an evangelistic conference that I, Jonny, was a part of, we discussed finding God in community. After breaking into small groups, we discussed the question “When have you experienced a community of faith true to God’s teachings and the story of Jesus?” I was fortunate to be in a group with a Hindu computer programmer who had sporadically attended our meetings. I was curious about how he would respond, and I was not disappointed.

When he had first attended the meetings, several people made a special effort to connect with him. I had talked to him about finding meaning in life. Then I invited him to join me at lunch later that week, and several days later, we walked through a park together. He had questions about the reasons behind certain painful aspects of his past. We discussed the overarching narrative of the war between God and Satan and how this world is not fair; but it will be one

day. He kept attending the meetings when he could.

A couple weeks later we went out for dinner. Afterward, we continued our discussion, exploring the issue of evil and how God provides the willpower and opportunity to make a choice for eternity, regardless of the brokenness we may struggle with. We talked about how God does not allow any one of us to face more than we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13), but it varies as each of us is on our own unique journey. At the end of our time together, I prayed with him, and he shared how that prayer and the idea of finding meaning and purpose in relationship with God resonated deeply with him.

When asked about experiencing God, my new friend spoke about our little faith community. While he was with us, he explained, he felt a great sense of peace and joy. He talked



about how nice and kind we were, how welcoming and loving. God had used us, despite our imperfections, to reveal Himself to a Hindu man searching for meaning and wholeness. As a result, he found God in community.

Twenty-first-century believers face the constant danger of slipping into the trap of an individualistic Christianity. God and our personal relationship with Him is a private matter. But, as our Hindu brother discovered, human relationship with God is also a matter of community. We who are in the church can easily miss this blessing. This article explores the biblical background for the God-community relationship and how the Christian community is God's conduit to reveal Himself to us through personal correction, healing, and encouragement. God longs for us to find Him, and one vehicle that He has established to aid us in the quest is that of community.

### Biblical background

God exists in community. Before the angels, before the universe, before perhaps time itself, the Father, Son, and Spirit shared a continuous love that can exist only in community.<sup>1</sup> Community is God's primal manifestation of existence and reality. When God created humanity, He intended for us to be able to relate to Him, so the Lord made us male and female (Gen. 1:27), counterparts equal but distinct in community. Jürgen Moltmann argues that truly knowing something involves being able to participate with that entity.<sup>2</sup> For example, rather than learning physics merely to recite formulas and laws, I, Jonny, studied the subject in order to experience it, to glimpse both its beauty and that of the universe it reveals. All true understanding, then, requires ever-deepening participation with reality through the lens of the specific subject. God's lens is one of community. When we participate actively in our human

community, we develop the capacity to grasp God in even more basic ways. This scriptural picture of God and humanity reveals that our interaction with others is fundamental to conceptualizing God, and ultimately finding and experiencing Him.

The Bible demonstrates that God reveals Himself through human community. The priesthood in the sanctuary system represented God and His work to the people (Lev. 1:1-9; 10:10, 11; 16). When Naomi and Ruth returned to the faith community, God used Boaz as His representative to vindicate them and save them from a life of poverty (Ruth). Hosea married a prostitute to become a living illustration of God's love for His people. In the New Testament, Paul calls the church "the body of Christ" and instructs it to live out its Holy Spirit-inaugurated responsibility to speak God's truth and reconcile the world to Him (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19). Perhaps the

best example of the community of faith revealing God to others appears in the book of Acts. It starts with a description of an ideal community as its members encouraged, ate, healed, prayed, and lived together, at the same time gaining the favor of those around them (Acts 2:42–47). Throughout the Bible, not only individuals but also whole tribes or communities demonstrated God to others.

## Finding God through communal correction

One of the challenges that keep us from finding God in community is our aversion to giving or receiving correction from one another. “I do my thing. You do yours.” “It’s not my place to reprove them. The Holy Spirit will convict them if they’re doing something wrong.” The Holy Spirit will convict us, but we forget that He often works through humanity to plant those seeds of conviction. Jethro corrected Moses (Exod. 18:13–27). Nathan confronted David (2 Sam. 12:1–14), which is emblematic of the role the Old Testament prophets took with erring rulers (see Jonah, Jeremiah, etc.). We are not advocating a culture of criticism, but when correction is given with the Spirit’s leading, honest love, and meaningful relationship, God speaks to reorient us to His way of life.

The paradigmatic teachings on correction in the New Testament come from Paul. He told Timothy that Scripture is useful for correcting others (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) and instructed the Ephesians to practice “speaking the truth in love” for the good of the community (Eph. 4:15). Galatians exemplifies such correction. One church leader confronts another. Neither of them had rejected God or performed some heinous sin. Both were extremely influential (in fact they are the main characters of the book of Acts). Paul recounts in Galatians 2:11–14 an altercation between Peter and himself. Paul had been working in Antioch, and Peter came to visit. At first, Peter openly shared table fellowship with everyone, but then some believers arrived from Jerusalem who opposed eating with the

uncircumcised. When Peter altered his behavior to please them, it influenced other members of the community as well, but Paul called him out. He charged Peter with being hypocritical and compromising the gospel. As a result, he needed someone to set him straight. If this were the end of the story, we would not know whether the confrontation was ultimately effective, but 2 Peter 3:15, 16, written years after the book of Galatians, clarifies the nature of Peter’s reaction to Paul. Peter calls Paul a “beloved brother,” and he says Paul’s letters have divine wisdom in them. Sometimes God corrects even the most

be known for having a good character. Then his pain turned into anger. How could the leader judge him like that? He did not know him well enough to talk to him that way. Yet, as Clarence worked through his hurt and anger, he did pray about it, and God convicted him that the official was right.

He discovered that he did have an ulterior motive. Clarence wanted the leader to feel good so that he would like him and appreciate what he did. The younger pastor was operating from an “I accept you, so you should accept me” perspective. The conference official’s words of correction opened

*Divine encouragement through community is particularly important for Christian leaders.*

sincerely converted believers through the voice of the faith community.

Here is a story to illustrate the point. In the tenth year of his pastoral ministry, Clarence’s conference assigned him to help set up camp meeting alongside one of its officials. As they worked, Clarence began to tell the leader how much he appreciated his work. As he offered some gushy compliments about how wonderful of a job the individual was doing, the conference official cut him off. “I don’t feel that what you’re saying is sincere,” the man said. “I feel as if you have a hidden agenda behind what you are saying.”

“No, I don’t have an ulterior motive.”

“Maybe you don’t, but what I would like for you to do is pray over it, see if maybe what I’m saying is true, and then, if it is, you can address it.”

At first, Clarence had a sense of hurt. He feared his superior was thinking horrible things about him. After all, he just wanted to do his job well and to

up a new and amazing phase of life for him. Able to grow so much with God and others, he became conscious of how he manipulated people, surrendered it to God, and allowed the Lord to transform him so that he could stop living in such a dysfunctional way. He still compliments people, but now he has entirely different motives because his correction experience was life-changing. One friend speaking the truth in love was God’s method to reveal Himself to Clarence and alter the entire trajectory of his life.

## Finding God through communal healing

Each week one church had a practice of giving individuals time to share praises, thanksgivings, and requests after worship. Everything was going as usual; but then Jack, a middle-aged church member, nervously stood. “I love God and want to be fully devoted to Him, but I have an ugly aspect of

my life that is keeping me from giving everything to Him.

“I have been addicted to pornography for years,” he continued, “and I want deliverance. I want to be right with God and honor Him in everything.”

Dead silence followed. Everyone knew what to do when someone shared praise or told about a grandmother dealing with illness; but here the silence stretched on and felt like an eternity. No one had any idea what to say.

Then the head elder came forward. Walking up to Jack, he put his arms around him and said, “We love you. You are special to us, and we are going

to seek God’s favor through prayer (Acts 12:5). Late one night, Peter, shackled between two guards, fell asleep, but an angel appeared to him and led him out of prison. The apostle went straight to a safe house, where he found the believers still interceding for him.<sup>3</sup> God worked through them in a mighty act of deliverance, manifesting His desire through, and because of, the community.

One additional point to remember regarding communal healing is that though deliverance is always supernatural, sometimes it feels less miraculous than depicted in the stories of Jack and Peter. God can work

she instructed Mordecai to gather as many Jews as possible to fast for her for three days while she did the same with her entourage (Esther 4:16, 17). After this intense gathering, Esther had the strength to stand up for God’s people in exile. Just as God used community as His conduit to encourage Esther, He does the same thing today.

William, a church leader who was discouraged about some issues in his life, felt that life was unfair. Overwhelmed by his work, he lacked the motivation to completely invest himself in it. His unresolved issues kept him from seeing any way out.

One day in the small Bible fellowship group he belonged to, he had the courage to share his discouragement and doubts about what God could do in his life. The group members surrounded him, shared encouraging Scripture promises, and prayed for him. One of them assured him that in spite of all William’s problems, God was still in control and was making all things work for good in his life. Another friend claimed the promise of Isaiah 43:1–3. He told William that God had a purpose in mind for him. No matter what the problems or the circumstances were, the Lord was with him. All this encouragement brought tremendous joy to William. He had come to the meeting feeling discouraged but left filled with hope and determination, like Esther, to do what God had called him to do. He found God in his small group that manifested the encouragement of community.

Divine encouragement through community is particularly important for Christian leaders. Sometimes in ministry, we become so used to being the one with the answers that we never open ourselves up like William to receive what God longs to give. Before the crucifixion, Jesus took three disciples to pray with and encourage Him. Instead, they fell asleep. Matthew 26:40, 41 depicts a Jesus who needed comfort from others in His darkest hours when God’s love and presence seemed far off. If Jesus longed for and sought out others, should we not do it as well?

*God has given us community so that we can understand who He is and what love is.*

to pray for you.” Then, taking a couple minutes to explain how God was the only One who could deliver him from his problem, he pledged, “We won’t just pray for you today. We are going to keep on praying for you. I am going to pray for you every day.” Next, he invited everyone to come forward and pray for Jack.

A month later, Jack stood up at the end of the prayer meeting and announced, “Praise the Lord! For this past month, I have been free from my addiction. God does answer prayers. He delivered me.”

Deliverance is one of God’s key functions, and it takes many forms. He frees us from our habits, situations, or ways of thinking. Acts 12 gives a wonderful example of another kind of divine deliverance. King Herod had imprisoned Peter because he saw how persecuting the church earned him favor with the Jewish leaders. The believers, on the other hand, gathered together

through community to communicate His grace and love as friends gather around a struggling individual and provide accountability, structure, and prayer.<sup>4</sup> Whether explicitly or implicitly miraculous, God strengthens those in need of healing and deliverance directly through those around them. People find God through healing in community.

### Finding God through communal encouragement

Esther needed God. In order to alter the royal edict condemning her people to death, Esther was contemplating an audacious act: to appear before the king when he did not request her. He had stripped the previous queen of her title for the reverse: failing to appear before the king when he did request her. Esther could be killed. How did she deal with such a high-stakes situation? Esther sought God in the context of community. To bolster her courage,

## Conclusion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together*, wrote about the richness of fellowship, which he, during the imprisonment leading up to his death, had lost. “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. . . .

. . . “[It is] a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. . . . How inexhaustible are the riches that open up for those who by God’s will are privileged

to live in the daily fellowship of life with other Christians!”<sup>5</sup> He adds, “Let him who . . . has had the privilege praise God’s grace. . . . Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.”<sup>6</sup> This is God working in community.

God has so much more for us than isolationist spirituality. Finding Him involves more than solitary experiences, more than what you do in your closet,

at your desk, or on your knees by your bed. God has given us community so that we can understand who He is and what love is. He brings us back to the way of life by giving others words of correction for us. The Lord delivers us from all sorts of bondage through the prayers and support of our community. And He encourages us through the words and actions of others. May we open our hearts and minds and find God in community. |✕|

1 Here are a few biblical texts supporting this point: Isaiah 57:15 contends that God inhabits eternity. Genesis 1 shows that He was active before Creation. James 1:17 and Hebrews 13:8 point out that the Lord does not change. First John 4:8 reveals that God is love. Texts such as Matthew 3:16, 17; 28:19; and 2 Corinthians 13:14 attest to the presence of Three Members in the Godhead. Ellen White also speaks to the nature of the Trinity. She states, “The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. . . .” “The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested. . . .

“The Comforter that Christ promised . . . is the Spirit in all the fulness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour. There are three living persons of the heavenly trio.” “Come Out and Be Separate,” *Testimonies for the Church Containing Messages of Warning and Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists* (1906), Special Testimonies series B, no. 7, 62, 63.

2 Jürgen Moltmann, *Jürgen Moltmann: Collected Readings*, ed. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 73.

3 Though the content is not specified explicitly by the

biblical text here, Ellen White clarifies that these prayers were requests for help and deliverance because of Peter’s importance to the church at that time. *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub.Assn., 1911), 145.

4 Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 121–133.

5 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Brothers Pub., 1954), 19, 20.

6 Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 20.

## Five practical steps to help your church find God in community

1. *Pray earnestly* and daily for the ability to see God through the people around you. Also, pray that God will give this perspective to your congregation. Then take time regularly to recognize how God has answered those prayers. As you embrace this practice, you will begin to model this way of life for your faith community.
2. *Teach the congregation* about finding God in community. As you go through the process, unpack the tremendous spiritual value of actively engaging with others and help your members share their stories of finding God in each other with the rest of the church.
3. *Develop safe and authentic small groups and Sabbath School classes* that do more than talk about the lesson study. Explain to your leaders how safety, authenticity, and acceptance in small groups enable people to experience and extend grace. No sermon can accomplish the transformation in lives that can come from this experience.<sup>1</sup>
4. *Model conflict resolution and forgiveness* as the way to deal with interpersonal difficulties. Some of the greatest barriers to finding God in those around us come from

the conflict we have with them. By your mediating and training members in conflict resolution and forgiveness, attitudes will begin to change, and barriers will come down.<sup>2</sup>

5. *Remember time* is a key ingredient in God’s recipe for growth. One of Jesus’ primary word pictures for working with people is that of plants in the field that grow during long stretches of time (Mark 4:26–29). As you implement these steps, instead of rushing, allow for change and transformation in God’s own timing.

1 For additional resources to foster small group discussions that go below the surface, we recommend *How People Grow* by Henry Cloud and John Townsend and *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby.

2 For additional resources, we recommend *Peacemaker* by Ken Sande, *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* by Alfred Poirier, and *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care* by Tara Klena Barthel and David V. Edling as great books on conflict resolution. *Cleansing the Sanctuary of the Heart* by David Sedlacek and Beverly Sedlacek has an excellent section on the forgiveness process, and *Love, Acceptance, and Forgiveness, the revised and updated edition* by Jerry Cook and Stanley C. Baldwin, is another excellent work on forgiveness.

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# Our “unfair” God



Is God “fair”? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Please forgive me for asking. We ministers have all grown beyond those questions of doubt, haven’t we? At least until we have one of those years when we work hard to win souls for Jesus through visitation, Bible study, and public evangelism, and our baptismal tank does not see a drop of water. Yet, another pastor in our conference, the guy who is always on vacation, never in a hurry, never shows up at worker’s meetings, and never turns in his worker’s reports—practically had people walking into his church off the street and right into the tank! I have been tempted a few times to cry in my tea about God’s apparent unfairness.

So, is God fair? I should confess right up front that this is a trick question, especially when you consider Jesus’ illustration of the workers in the vineyard.

### Fair wages?

Maybe I find the parable particularly interesting because I used to be a member of a labor union when I worked in a factory years ago. Everybody at the same level of work was paid the same rate. “A” operators were all paid one rate, and “B” operators another. The union considered that *fair*. Although I accepted the pay, I knew it was not really fair, because some of us worked harder than others. And some hardly worked at all, which bugged me. I believed that those who work harder, do a better job, or have more experience should be paid more. That is fair. Fair; that is, in the world of work—but not in the kingdom of God. What’s fair for *salary* is not necessarily fair for *salvation*. In fact, in one sense, you could say that God is not fair.

Notice what Matthew 20:1 tells us about our “unfair” God: “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.”\* This text is

really an elaboration of Jesus’ answer to His disciples’ question in Matthew 19:25, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus had just informed the disciples that it was difficult for a rich person (particularly one who *trusted* in riches, as did the rich young ruler) to be saved. This shocked the disciples, for in Jesus’ day, riches were considered a sign of God’s favor. Well, they were in for another shock.

It was an ancient oriental custom for employers, when the harvest came in, to go to the marketplace looking for workers for that day. Men who were waiting in the marketplace to be employed for that

did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?”

“ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“ ‘He said to them, “You also go and work in my vineyard.” ’ ” No unfair labor problems here so far. This was a typical day in Palestine at harvest time. At least it was until the paychecks were handed out.

### The paycheck

“ ‘When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call



*“I’ve been working for this conference for twenty years, and they go and send (fill in the blank) to the Pleasant Pastoring district instead of me!”*

day would then negotiate the wages for that day. Matthew 20:2 goes on to tell us that the employer “ ‘agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.’ ” A denarius was a standard day’s wages for a common laborer. So, at this point, the employer was certainly being fair.

This kind employer still needed more workers, the parable goes on in verses 3–7 to tell us: “ ‘About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, “You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went.

“ ‘He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and

the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.”

“ ‘The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. “These men who were hired last worked only one hour,” they said, “and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day” ’ ” (Matt. 20:8–12).

I can identify with these guys. How about you? *How comes he gets everything*

handed to him, and I've got to work my tail off? There seems to be an unspoken law of life that says that if I do more or do it better than you, I should *receive* more. "I've been working for this company for fifteen years, and now they send in this yuppie out of college and start him at the same salary I'm getting!" "I've been working for this conference for twenty years, and they go and send (fill in the blank) to the Pleasant Pastoring district instead of me!"

Notice how the landowner answers his workers' complaints: "But he answered one of them, "I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?" " (Matt. 20:13).

This employer's response reminds me of John 21, where Jesus was walking along with Peter, having a heart-to-heart talk, revealing to Peter that his service to his Lord would eventually cost him his life. Peter then sees John following and asks Jesus, "What about him?" And Jesus' response in verse 22, as I would paraphrase it, is basically this: "Don't worry about *him*. That's none of your business. I'm talking to *you* right now. You need to follow Me."

Did the landowner pay the first-hour workers what he told them he would? Yes. So, was he not being fair? Yes, and no. Even though he paid the folks who worked all day exactly what he said he would, it still seems unfair that those who worked much less should get the same pay. The key to understanding the meaning of the parable is given in verses 14 and 15: "Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

### God's "unfairness"

If you are looking at this situation only from the standpoint of who *earned* more—the landowner *is* being unfair. But did you notice the words "my money," "give," and "generous"? The landowner is endeavoring to turn the workers' attention away from *their working* to *his giving*. Any of their "pay" is a gift from him. Had he not sought

them out in the marketplace, they would not have received anything from him.

Remember, this parable relates to the "kingdom of heaven" (v. 1). The parable is an illustration of salvation. And the point that Jesus is making is that our salvation comes from God's generosity, not our works! In the world's view, this landowner was being unfair. He gave the 12-hour workers the same pay as the 1-hour workers.

Jesus purposely upset the balance of things here to make His point. The landowner's way of doing things here was preposterous. He purposely paid all the workers the same and even made sure to pay the last (one-hour) workers first so that the other workers would see what he did. Jesus uses this parable to shock us and wake us up to His outrageous grace, to His unconditional love that saves us. God's "unfairness" is His grace.

### In the same boat

Sometimes, after we have been Christians for a while and done a lot of good things, we can subconsciously begin to think that we deserve heaven because of what we have done, what we have attained over time. And maybe, even, that we are somehow *better* than others. But, as the long-haul workers correctly testified in verse 12: "You have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work." Exactly! God is saying here, "The kingdom of heaven, your salvation, is a *gift* from Me, which I hand out to everyone who will accept it." When it comes to salvation, we are all in the same boat—*sunk*—without Jesus. Romans 3:23 reminds us that we have all sinned and fall short of God's glory.

When we understand this, we will not be envious of God's grace to others who have not done as much as us. We won't have *animosity* about God's *generosity*. "But I've done more good works!" Maybe so! But Romans 6:23 says that salvation is a gift.

Is God unfair? In one sense, yes. But that unfairness is His grace. Grace *is* unfair. But that unfairness was

necessary for God to save us. These first-hour workers were upset that the eleventh-hour folks got the same pay as they did. But remember, this is really talking about *heaven*, which we all need and none of us can attain by our works. You see, there is no evidence here that the eleventh-hour converts are harassing the first-hour folks; that is, saying: "Ha, ha! I got to sin longer than you did, and I'm still saved!"

Instead, like the thief on the cross, they are relieved and eternally grateful, saying: "Thank God for His grace. I thought I'd be lost forever!" And, should any of us ever think that folks who come in last got a better deal, we need to remember that it is the first-hour folks who have had the privilege of knowing God longer! The eleventh-hour folks have more scars from sin. For example, I became a Seventh-day Adventist when I was 26. I missed out on the church grade school educational system. I did not have the peace, assurance, and better health that other Adventists had earlier in life.

### Conclusion

All these workers in this parable found out that *their* works had nothing to do with being invited into God's vineyard. It is only because of God's generous grace that *any* of us are saved. As the first-hour workers said to God, "You have made them equal to us." I am so glad that is how salvation works. I am so glad the ground is level at the cross.

No, God's plan of salvation is not "fair." It was not fair that Jesus, the totally sinless One whose works were completely perfect, should come to this earth to be mocked, beaten, and crucified in place of all of us sinners. God in the flesh was treated unfairly so that we could be treated more than fairly.

No, it is not fair! It is *generous*. It is beyond generous. It is AMAZING. Amazing grace. And you know, pastor, I need that reminder once in a while. How about you? 

\* All Scripture references in this article are from the New International Version."

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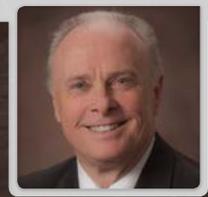
“And this is eternal life,  
that they may know  
You, the only true God,  
and Jesus Christ whom  
You have sent.”

**JOHN 17:3, NKJV**

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# David the Great:

*Deconstructing the man after God's own heart<sup>1</sup>*

I have preached many sermons and presented hundreds of lectures on the life and leadership of King David. I am always impressed with the misconceptions that reveal themselves in question-and-answer sessions. Following such a lecture at a major Christian university, a student prefaced his question with, "I know King David was a great Christian leader but . . ."

"Wait," I said. "Before you ask your question, let's deal with that part. David was definitely *not* a great Christian leader. He was not a Christian at all. He lived a thousand years before Jesus. It's very difficult to be a Christian a millennium before Christ."

## Judging biblical figures by modern rules

I know the boy meant well. I reckon he was substituting the word *Christian* for the proper word *biblical*. Knowing that, I suppose I might have let it pass, but I just could not. The distinction is no small matter. Obviously, David was Jewish, not Christian, but that is not the greater point. Superimposing our contemporaneity on the denizens of the past is chronocentric revisionism that borders on arrogance.<sup>2</sup> It is not possible to make ancient dancers move to modern music. It dehumanizes them to pluck them from the historical and moral context of their times. Judging historical and, for that matter, biblical figures by squeezing them into our modern world tempts us to be too hard on them and too pleased with ourselves. Furthermore, it is dismissive of the age in which they lived, depriving us of its lessons and insights. The Bronze Age can hardly learn from us.

The question is, can we learn from the past and its more prominent citizens? Must we transform David into a sterilized twenty-first-century super-Christian before we can recognize his greatness? When I was working on the manuscript for *David the Great*, I made a trip to Israel. With the manuscript stacked neatly to one side, I was attempting some edits at an outdoor picnic table in Tiberias when an Israeli woman asked what the book was about.

“King David,” I answered, expecting a positive or at least interested response.

Instead, she stepped back and said, “Why in the world would you write about that bloody man?”

Her analysis of David as a “bloody man” was not so very wrong. What was wrong was that she was judging the blood on David’s hands from her own perspective as a twenty-first-century Israeli. David was a Bronze Age warlord. He was a man of violence who lived and led in an unimaginably violent era. War and conquests were the rule, not the exception. David was also a polygamist on a fairly impressive scale with multiple concubines as well as wives. David

beheaded the first man he ever killed and sometime later circumcised the dead bodies of hundreds of Philistines to pay a bizarre bride-price. David was a bloody man in more ways than one. She was right about that. What was wrong was that she, as a twenty-first-century Israeli, was condemning David retroactively through the values filter of her age rather than his.

## Fair analysis and true DNA

To dismiss the great leaders of the past, biblical or historical, because they did not share all our values is just plain too easy. We must, instead, undertake the rigorous task of sorting through their lives in the light of their historical and biblical context. To expect that an ancient warrior chieftain ought to have somehow abided by the modern Israeli Defense Forces’ rules of engagement is patently absurd. To force the Bible onto the procrustean bed of our contemporary and oh-so-American religion is to excuse ourselves from the demanding task of deeper biblical thought and analysis. One preacher recently suggested that contemporary Christians should just cut the reins that keep us “hitched” to the tired and presumably irrelevant Old Testament wagon.

I will not pretend to know all that this brother meant when he proposed such a thing, but on the surface, it is biblically dangerous and intellectually indefensible. For one *huge* thing, if we lose sight of our deep Jewish roots, the plant above ground may well produce the bitter fruit of anti-Semitism. To lose the true DNA of our faith would be tragic.

By the way, that is a mistake the Old Testament itself avoided at no small cost. Rahab’s sordid past was hardly crucial to the story of King David, and leaving it out would have made David’s DNA seem a lot tidier. Why not just call her an innkeeper? Or leave her out? The story of Ruth could have been told without making a big deal of the fact that she was a Gentile. Among the five female ancestors of David between the conquest of Jericho and his birth, two

were Gentiles, one of whom was a former prostitute. The Old Testament, had it indulged in such “unhitching,” would have simply cut the ties between such splotchy DNA and David and, through him, the Messiah. Instead, it included the stories because history and truth are important.

## The truth of history

Furthermore, history should not be sanitized. Neither should Scripture. David’s sin with Bathsheba must be dealt with, as should his far more destructive sin, the massively consequential census. The Bible includes such excruciating stories for many reasons, and one of those is *reality*. David was not perfect. Neither was he a monster. As we study the Scripture, we must steer the barge between the rocks of two equal and opposite errors. One of those errors is to clean it all up, but in so doing, we make gritty biblical and historical reality into frail romantic myth.

The other error is to let the ugly stuff, the stuff we don’t like, invalidate all the rest. We cannot just throw out the Old Testament because it’s complicated and, in places, riddled with dreadful sin and shocking violence. The impulse to just “start with Jesus” is absurd. Without the Old Testament, including such decidedly mixed vessels as David, Abraham, Jacob, Judah, and many, many others, there is no way to fully understand the redemptive story of Jesus. Without David, for example, how can we understand the significance of Bethlehem—or why the New Testament masses called Jesus the Son of David, or why, as Jesus died on the cross, He quoted a psalm of David?

We need the Bible. All of it. We also need all of history. We need the complications, the contradictions, and the inconsistencies. David’s adultery and murderous conspiracy directly cost one man’s life and indirectly the life of David’s baby. Yet none of that obliterates the Bible’s own analysis of David. He was a “man after God’s heart.” That is a bramble bush of a conundrum. Like the Bible, history is full of inconvenient

thorns that prick us but do not alter the greater truth. The awkward fact of Sally Hemings<sup>3</sup> does not invalidate the genius of Thomas Jefferson. Neither does Bathsheba make King David other than what he was: a man after God's heart. Shall we erase David from the Bible because of his sins? Certainly not. Neither should we make him into a perfect paragon of virtue.

We need not fudge the truth of history. John Wesley had a bad marriage.

an action forbidden to Israel. As a result, a horrible plague was unleashed that took the lives of some 70,000 of David's people. Furthermore, though not precisely a sin, David was not a good father. Despite all the things he did well, family was one thing he did poorly and paid a serious price for.

However, David is still a multifaceted genius in multiple genres that are seemingly mutually exclusive. He was a master military strategist,

opposition and desperate adversity with patience and admirable faith.

On the other hand, there is much about David to be admired, including his amazing leadership skills, deep faith, trust in God, and his greatest virtue—loyalty. The man after God's own heart was a complex and deeply conflicted man. David was like Longfellow's girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead. When he was good, he was very good; when he was bad, he was horrid.

Perhaps Michelangelo's statue of David should be hauled down. Should we memorialize such a deeply flawed man as David, let alone call him David the Great? Both Samuel the prophet and, one thousand years later, the apostle Paul called King David a "man after God's heart." In fact, Paul says God testified this of David.

## Conclusion

What shall we say to all this? First, as pastors, we need some statues to flawed heroes. If we blot out the names of all the failed and fallen in the Bible and remove our monuments to history's all-too-human heroes, we may become a self-destructive people who come to believe that we ourselves should be hauled down, blotted out, and erased from memory. And that is graceless and hopeless.

Second, and more important, is the story beyond David's. The story of David is a story about who God is. That God can forgive and use such a person as David gives us hope. We dare not use the failings of biblical and historical heroes to excuse our sins. Yet if we can face their sins honestly and still see the redemptive hand of God upon them, it inspires hope that God can forgive, heal, and use even the likes of us. <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>

*Judging historical and, for that matter, biblical figures by squeezing them into our modern world tempts us to be too hard on them and too pleased with ourselves*

Martin Luther wrote terrible things about the Jewish people. Thomas Jefferson owned slaves. History is made by people who lived when they lived then, thought as they thought then, and sinned as they sinned then.

## On the other hand

David was a mixed vessel, to be sure. There are people who know the phrase *David and Bathsheba* and do not even know their story is in the Bible. David's affair with the wife of one of his most trusted and loyal generals, the pregnancy that resulted, and the plot to dispose of her husband are grievous sins. His most destructive sin is less known. In the grip of ego and hubris, David commissioned a census,

the true founder of his nation—Saul notwithstanding—and the founder of Jerusalem. He was an organizational master who, just before his death, restructured the entire Israeli governmental bureaucracy. He did the same for the religious bureaucracy. He conducted the greatest capital campaign in the Bible and perhaps in all of history. He was a poet whose works have endured the test of time. Even after three millennia, the psalms are still a beloved comfort to millions in two major religions. He was also a musician—a child prodigy, in fact.

On the one hand, the story of David is a cautionary tale. Both of his major moral lapses happened at the peak of his career. David handled lonely, unfair

1 This article is based on the author's book, *David the Great: Deconstructing the Man After God's Own Heart* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2018).

2 Chronocentrism is the assumption that certain time periods (typically the present) are better, more important, or a more significant frame of reference than other time periods, either past or future.

3 Sally Hemings was an enslaved woman owned by President Thomas Jefferson, who may have had children born to him.

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# The ~~superhuman~~ pastor\*

**T**he forty-two-year-old pastor was broken in many aspects of his life—health, marriage, and relationship with the church board and staff. The stress that he was experiencing was inordinate, resulting in distress. His family doctor told him that his current level of stress would be the death of him.

He looked physically fit. His marriage had all the appearances of a couple in love. The church he was pastoring had recently completed a multimillion-dollar worship center, and the Sunday morning attendance had increased from an attendance average of 22 to well over 630.

Like this pastor, many of God's servants are experiencing stress from various sources, and in an effort to repress or cover over our problems, we are compounding our stress. Defeat, discouragement, mental problems, and broken, strained relationships are part of our experience. We feel insecurities, disappointments, fear of failure, loneliness, and the frustration of blocked goals.

## Appreciated and unappreciated

Pastoring is the most appreciated and unappreciated of occupations at once. We can soar to great heights or fall to new depths within moments of an encouraging compliment or a negative remark. I speak from personal

experience, having been a pastor for more than 50 years.

I wish I could say I have loved every minute of pastoring all these years, but I cannot. There have been times I questioned my call, wanted to resign and do something else, wished I were anywhere but where I was. There were occasions I felt very sorry for myself.

I hasten, however, to say I would do it all over again. Being a pastor is who I am and what I do. I could not imagine myself having done anything else with my life. The joys far outnumber the other experiences—outnumber them so much that I have a hard time even remembering the hard times.

Some of the things that caused me the most stress during those years in the pastorate—and I am sure stress most pastors—are the insecurities, disappointments, blocked goals, fears of failure, loneliness, and other situations resulting in physical, emotional, and spiritual debilitation.

Stress is a thief. Jesus said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, NKJV). Stress steals our happiness; physical and mental health; spirituality; marriage and other relationships; and, ultimately, our ministry.



It is God's will for us to live with spirituality, to live overcoming, victorious lives. He also wants us to live with healthy relationships and to be physically and mentally well.

When stress occurs, the brain sends electrical shocks through the nervous system to the endocrine glands from which adrenaline is then released into the bloodstream, increasing the body's energy level.

Too much adrenaline can present serious health problems. The energy level increases significantly when adrenaline goes into the bloodstream, putting the body in a state of *high alert*.

When this happens too often, the result can be high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, headache, the breakdown of the body's immune system, stomach ulcers, and other gastrointestinal problems. In addition to the physical problems, there are mental and emotional problems, such as sadness, depression, and anxiety that result from stress and increased adrenaline in the bloodstream.

## Managed, not eliminated

Although stress cannot be entirely eliminated, it can be managed in a few ways using the five spiritual resources listed here:

1. *Confession*. All Christians occasionally sin—even ministers. They do not sin willingly and purposefully but because of their humanness. There may be an invasive thought, spoken word, action, imagination, or desire that is unbecoming for a follower of Christ. Guilty feelings will result if these are ignored and unconfessed. Guilt is a stressor. Guilty feelings will not go away with time. On the contrary, they dig in deeper and set in motion negative and harmful effects of stress. Confession is the means of dealing with guilt, overcoming it, and moving beyond its harmfulness.

Confession is a spiritual catharsis, cleaning the soul and renewing a person spiritually, emotionally, and physically. God understands how weak and vulnerable humans are. Pastors are human and made out of dust like everyone else (see Psalm 103:14).

2. *The Holy Spirit*. Before Jesus left Earth to return to His Father, He promised that He would not leave His followers alone. He said He would send another Counselor-Comforter from God to remind His followers of Himself and care for them as He did during times of stress and hardship when He was with them physically.

In moments of frustration, insecurity, and inclination toward anger, the Holy Spirit will begin to monitor our thoughts and reorient our thinking. The Spirit of God becomes the equalizer of stressful thinking. Being filled with the Holy Spirit means to have our minds transformed, which, in turn, monitors our thinking. Then our thinking passes through the brain into our nervous system. The Holy Spirit will fill our entire being, which includes the cerebral cortex, the thinking part of the brain. Think of it: every tissue of the brain infused with the Holy Spirit!

3. *Prayer and the Word*. A minister's essential source of strength for handling stress is communion with God through prayer and the Word. Such communion transcends all human effort to survive and overcome stress and ensuing distress.

Through prayer, the minister talks to God—breathing out the stresses he is experiencing. Through the Word, God breathes into the minister the life-giving Spirit, imparting strength to overcome and rise above the mundane of the earthly.

4. *Reading devotional literature*. A great source of spiritual and emotional help for pastors is the devotional writings of the present and past spiritual greats. Their insights and understandings of scriptural passages enliven the pastor's spirit and strengthen his living. These men and women who have searched the Word, communed with God, and now share their experiences bring the reader into spiritual depths and transcending heights of spirituality.

5. *The call*. The call of God and the present ongoing awareness of the call is essential if the pastor is to remain in the ministry; be successful; and have mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

More than anything else, it is the inner conviction, the divine compulsion within the depths of the soul, that one has been called by God that will keep him or her in the ministry when the demands, pressures, and stresses threaten to overwhelm him or her. Ministry is too difficult and demanding for one to enter and remain without that ongoing inner sense of the call of God.

## It can happen to you

A few summers ago, with the approval of the church board, I decided to begin to begin the worship service thirty minutes earlier than during the school months. My reasoning was that the people would appreciate coming to church earlier in the morning in order to go out and enjoy the warmer weather. Nearing summer's end, I did not quickly change the service time back to what it originally was at the beginning of summer.

I got a letter in the mail from a church member accusing me of "deliberately deceiving" the congregation—that I had no intention of ever changing the schedule back to the original time.

I was innocent of her charge; but I felt very threatened. I perceived that this lady and her family could do me and my reputation a lot of damage. My perception of being judged falsely sent me into *red alert*. I became angry, my pupils dilated, my face flushed, and my body tensed. I was on the defensive and ready for action. I was stressed!

All this took place because of my perception. I perceived or interpreted this lady's accusation as threatening my reputation and standing with the congregation. After several phone calls and face-to-face conversations, I am pleased to report that this matter was resolved, the family members are still active in the church, and I am still the pastor.

## Help yourself

The minister can do a lot to help himself or herself with managing stress in his or her personal and professional life.

The following are some tested self-help strategies to manage stress effectively.

1. *Participate in recreation and exercise.* Physical exercise is an excellent way to take care of your body and helps maintain good mental health as well. Ministers need to balance work with recreation and exercise, which are proven means of achieving relaxation and relieving tension. Even a brisk walk burns off stored-up tension. Research has revealed that a fifteen-minute walk could have a greater calming effect than a tranquilizer and produce more energy than eating a candy bar.

2. *Practice relaxing.* When anxiety strikes, the heartbeat rises, and breathing becomes shallow and rapid. By breathing slowly and deeply, the minister can calm himself or herself almost instantly. This is healthy, not mystical. Breathe slowly and deeply through your nose, expanding your abdomen and rib cage as you release your breath through your mouth slowly. Silently say, “Relax” or “Let go.” It is surprising what a two or three-minute break a couple of times during the day will do for you.

3. *Slow down.* Look at your calendar and delete some of those nonessential activities. You do not have to attend every meeting.

4. *Recognize your limitations.* A pastor needs to set realistic goals and to pace himself or herself. Do not try to measure yourself by what other ministers are doing or have done. Everyone has a certain pace and definable limitations. Recognize yours and abide by them.

5. *Learn to say no.* It is hard for a minister to say no. Ministers are generous people, freely giving their time, their resources, and themselves. Learn to say no without feeling guilty. You cannot please everyone and serve everyone’s demands. Say no, and in so doing, take charge of your life and live healthier and happier.

6. *Learn to laugh.* Laughter stimulates the lungs, heart, back, and leg and arm muscles. Laughter helps regulate your blood pressure and heart rate and causes muscle tension to subside.

Laughter is internal jogging. What a brisk walk or jogging does to relax muscles and relieve tension, laughter does for the internal organs of your body.

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Prov. 17:22, KJV). Medical studies indicate that laughter releases chemicals called endorphins in the brain, promoting feelings of well-being.

7. *Talk to someone.* Share your feelings, anxieties, worries, and fears

and stress management. It sounds humorous, but there is much truth in the statement “You are what you eat.” Overeating and eating too many sweets and fast foods can become addictive and contribute to increased weight and stress.

## Good ending

The story of my forty-two-year-old pastor friend has a good ending. Over time, he learned how to manage his

*Defeat, discouragement, mental problems, and broken, strained relationships are part of our experience.*

with a trusted friend or professional counselor. Emotional problems often come when we repress our feelings instead of dealing with them. Talking helps a person clarify and understand his or her feelings.

8. *Organize and develop a schedule.* The minister must not allow himself or herself to be controlled by circumstances and impulsive feelings—his, hers, or someone else’s. An organized person is someone who is in control.

9. *Take time off.* Pastors should take a couple of days a week for themselves and their families. Go on vacation annually. Many churches are now adopting a sabbatical policy for their pastors. A minister will always find something to do (or a parishioner will find something for him or her to do). He or she should leave it and go. It will be there when the pastor gets back.

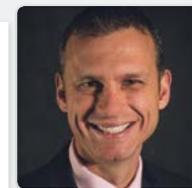
10. *Eat nutritional foods.* Good nutritional habits contribute to good health

stress by two test-proven means: spiritual resources and self-help techniques. He is still pastoring the same congregation and enjoying his work with the staff and church board. His relationship with his wife has greatly improved, and physical wellness is returning.

Stress can be managed, and its harmful physical, mental, and emotional effects stopped and removed from the pastor’s life. You do not have to be a helpless victim to stress. Spiritual disciplines and self-help techniques will help manage and restore what stress has robbed, or is attempting to rob, from you. The minister is not a superhuman, just a human with available resources for living a healthy life and serving the church effectively. ❏

\* The original version of this article was published in the *Christian Counseling Connection* newsletter (vol. 22, iss. 2), a quarterly publication of the American Association of Christian Counselors ([www.AACC.net](http://www.AACC.net)). Used with permission.

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# Foundations of preaching

**F**oundations just do not get the attention they deserve. Really, upon them rests the weight and stability of every piece of the building above them. But those who dwell in or visit structures will rarely be overheard complimenting the foundation while they relax in the living room or discussing it while they share a meal at the dining table. You hear about the creative designs or corners of a building's architecture, paint colors, pictures, and texture—but not the foundation. Yet the entire structure must credit its standing (effectiveness) to the foundation. You really only pay attention to the foundation when something is wrong. Even then many, while realizing something is wrong (cracks in the walls, slanted floor, etc.), would not know to identify the foundation as being the problem.

Preachers are builders, and congregations experience, and are ultimately impacted by, the constructs of what has been built. As in the construction trade, the congregation will never see or examine the foundation.

The two unseen but necessary components of the foundation of preaching are an understanding of the theology and its impact on the personal life of the preacher.

## Theology of preaching

The theology of preaching has two distinct but interrelated aspects. First,

God has chosen to speak—and His Word is powerful, creative, and effective. Second, God calls humans to be surrogate voices in speaking His Word to others. Because of the Holy Spirit, the latter can have the same result as the former.

*God has chosen to speak.* In the opening chapter of the Bible (Gen. 1), the declaration “God said” is used ten times, and “God called” is used five more times. The very first introduction humankind has to their Creator God is that He speaks. Words are clearly very important to God. This first chapter of Genesis also gives us a meter of the power in God's Word. The New Testament agrees that “by faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3).<sup>1</sup> God's word can create ex nihilo—out of nothing.

With the creation of Adam, the importance and power of God's Word become very personal. God forms man from the dirt. However, in order to complete His image in man, He then breathes His breath into the lifeless form. This same life-giving breath becomes what sustains life. Psalm 33:6 makes the connection: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” This parallelism, where the Hebrew poet repeats the same idea

two different ways, marks the terms *God's Word* and His breath as being interchangeable.

God's Word brought everything in this universe into existence from nothing, but it is not just a historical event of the past, it is the breath that sustains, keeps creating life today. It is the Word of God that initiated life and still sustains it.

It is God's Word, His communication, that sets Him apart from all other gods. This is the message communicated over and over in the line “I the LORD have spoken” (Num. 14:35; Ezek. 5:15; 24:14). In Isaiah chapters 41 through 44, God challenges the believers regarding false gods while mocking the gods' origins. “Who would form a god or mold an image that profits him nothing?” (Isa. 44:10). They cut the tree in half, using one half to build a fire and the other is given to the craftsman. The craftsman takes it and, after measuring and planning it, makes it into a figure of a man (vv. 13–17).

It is not just their origin that God points out as weak. In Isaiah 41:21–24, God calls on them to *haggidu* (declare) what has happened or what is to come as proof that they are gods. Even though the gods were made with mouths, they could not speak (Ps. 115:5). Their inability to ever speak is indicative of their worthlessness. God's people would know the true and only God, not by a picture or an act but by His Word. The visual revelation of God, even to a faithful follower like Moses (Exod. 33:14–23), is the exception to how God has presented Himself to be known. The tendency is to major in the visual, and when one is asking for a sign, it is the visual that first comes to mind. Ezekiel describes his encounter with the supernatural and all the glorious

symbolism that he saw, but the visual still climaxes with hearing a voice (Ezek. 1). It is “My words” (Ezek. 2:7), not the vision, that God commissions Ezekiel to take to the people.

It is evident in the temptation of Eve that Satan is aware of the importance of God’s Word. “ ‘Has God indeed said’ ” was the first line from the serpent, attacking what he knew would be their basis for a relationship. Adam and Eve’s rejection of the Word of God was their rejection of Him; obeying and responding to what He had breathed (Word, or breath) had been what had created and sustained their connection.

As has been noted above, God’s Word of authority and relationship at Creation was not in isolation. Through the Old Testament (OT) (Gen. 12:1–4; 1 Sam. 3:7; Deut. 32:46, 47), the Word comes not just as information but as that which “calls for and creates the possibility of fellowship; a relationship of trust, loyalty, and obedience.”<sup>2</sup>

God’s Word reaches its zenith in the New Testament (NT) when Jesus arrives. Hebrews (1:1) recognizes that God had spoken through the prophets in the OT and validates their message as the Word of God. It then addresses (v. 2) Jesus as both the fulfillment and the climax of God’s Word. God speaking “in these last days” through His Son is eschatological language and represents a turning point. God presents Jesus as His final decisive Word of which everything else was preparatory, and anything that follows will be a reflection of it. Jesus is the Word that created the worlds (v. 2) and the powerful Word (v. 3) that upholds them.

John introduces Jesus as the Word (John 1:1–4). That same Word was with God in the beginning and “without Him nothing was made that was made” (v. 3). The Gospel writer describes this on the cosmic level—“all things were made through Him”—making the universe dependent on this Word. Jesus is the personification of the Word, and the theology is clear: “For in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Later in the

Gospels, Jesus speaks the Word—the Word that speaks the Word—setting an example to preachers who follow.

Through the ministry of Jesus, it can be seen that the Word remains the only creative and sustaining power in the universe. Jesus’ Word healed (Mark 2:1–12), controlled nature (Matt. 8:23–27), removed demons (vv. 28–34), and even gave life (Mark 5:40–42; John 11:40–44).

The Word of God has a very significant place in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. God humbled Israel in the OT by permitting them to suffer hunger before providing food for them. The purpose was that they would know that “ ‘man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD’ ” (Deut. 8:3). Jesus quotes these lines in His wilderness battle with the devil (Matt. 4:4), making them the survival code for every Christian.

John, in vision, sees the culmination of the great controversy (Rev. 19). In symbolic and eschatological language, he describes a white horse and victorious rider who is “called The Word of God” (v. 13). It is from the mouth of this Rider that the Word (vv. 15, 21; Isa. 11:4)

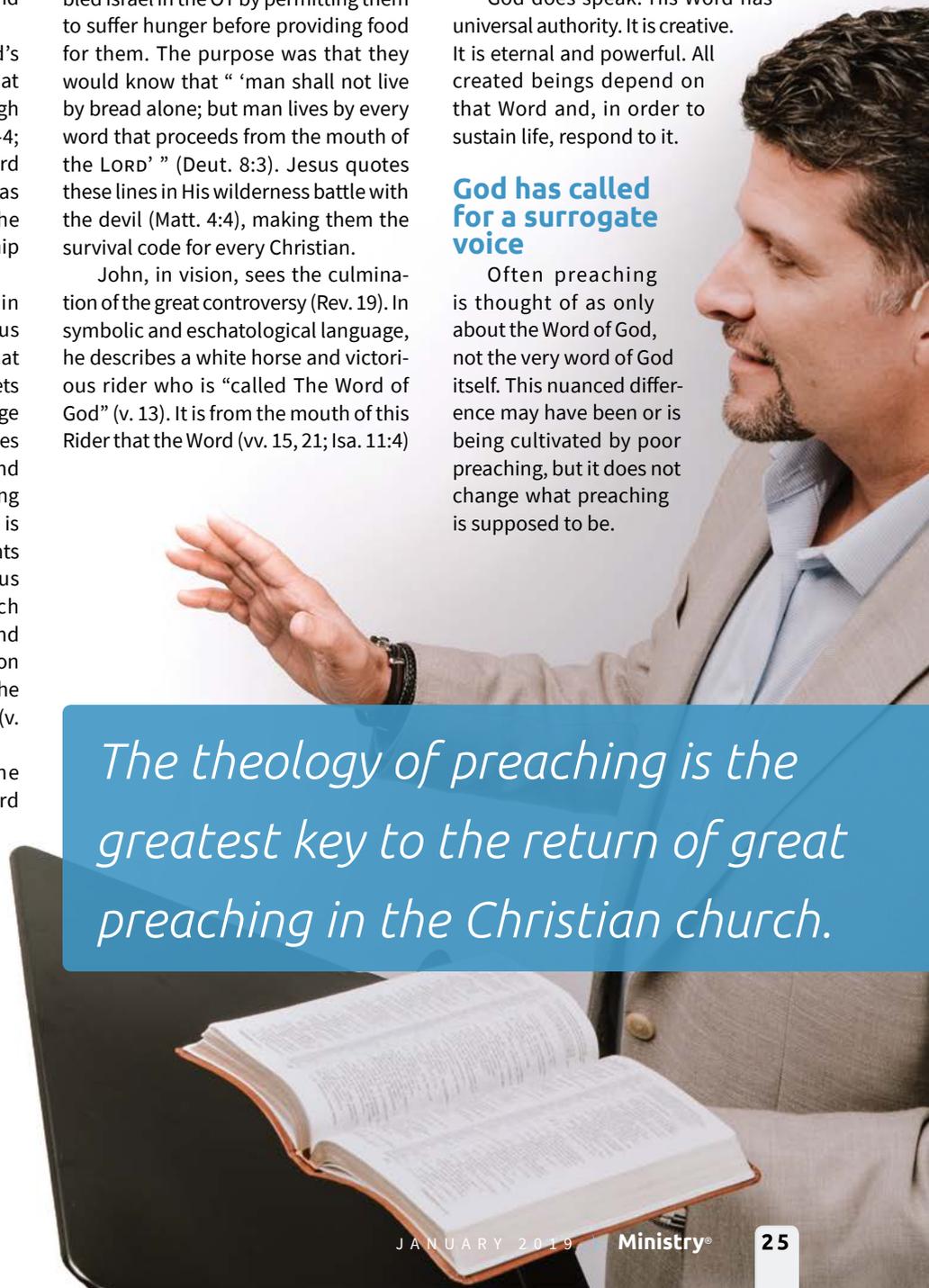
comes to unmask Satan “in front of the universe”<sup>3</sup> and deliver the final blow.

The core passage for the theology of preaching is in Isaiah 55. The cycle of rain and snow (v. 10) resulting in food for mankind is used to teach the effectiveness of God’s Word. Key to the understanding of this is God as the Originator of the Word. When He sends it out (v. 11), it will not return to him void. He is the beginning and the end, and this truth makes the completion of this cycle less about the ability of the preacher.

God does speak. His Word has universal authority. It is creative. It is eternal and powerful. All created beings depend on that Word and, in order to sustain life, respond to it.

## God has called for a surrogate voice

Often preaching is thought of as only about the Word of God, not the very word of God itself. This nuanced difference may have been or is being cultivated by poor preaching, but it does not change what preaching is supposed to be.



*The theology of preaching is the greatest key to the return of great preaching in the Christian church.*

Preaching through the span from Noah in Genesis 6 to the third angel in Revelation 14 includes a side of judgment and destruction. Preaching provides an opportunity for the individual or community to be saved from eternal destruction and, sometimes, even from physical harm. God is love, and He is giving His all for the salvation of mankind (John 3:16). It is fair to conclude that God would make only His best effort to save all (1 Tim. 2:4). According to the biblical account and command, preaching is one of God's primary methods to save us, to such an extent that in Matthew 10 Jesus told the preachers that He was sending them out so that communities would be held accountable in the judgment based on what they had heard preached (v. 15).

Could it be that the word is what we today call preaching? The answer comes in Romans 10. The sequence described in verses 13–16 is that those who are lost need to hear in order to believe and be saved. However, verse 17 summarizes with a parallel sequence: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The position the preacher occupies in the order presented in verses 13–16 and verse 17 clarifies as being the same as the position of the Word of God. In preaching then, the preacher and the Word of God become the same.

If preaching is then the very Word of God, then how one relates to it as a preacher must reflect that. Everything changes if preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God. As a preacher, one must come with a holy, prayerful reverence, diligently studying, preparing, and practicing the sermon in advance so that when the preacher steps into the pulpit, the words spoken are the Word.<sup>4</sup> The preacher's pre-action<sup>5</sup> comes directly from the realization of what God is about to do.

It is in an understanding of the theology of preaching that a preacher is convicted and empowered to preach, no matter the opposition. In the end, the way preachers think, and what they think, does affect how they do it. “Theology affects practice.”<sup>6</sup> The

theology of preaching is the greatest key to the return of great preaching in the Christian church. This takes us to the second footing of our foundation.

*Personal preparedness.* When the guards were sent to arrest Jesus in John 7, they returned empty-handed. When the now-angry commanders asked them where the captive was, they responded (v. 46) that they had never heard a man speak as that Man. Is that not the style of preacher we want at our church? Yet, “never man lived as He lived. Had His life been other than it was, He could not have spoken as He did.”<sup>7</sup>

This has often escaped our thinking: that the power of words comes from one's personal, private life. Timothy Keller gives his voice to this, calling a life filled with deep and rich prayer a “requirement for great and even good preaching.”<sup>8</sup> Here are a few lines from my favorite author on prayer and holy living, E. M. Bounds: “The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men [and women]. . . .

“What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. . . .

. . . “Preaching is not the performance of an hour. It is the outflow of a life. . . .

“The real sermon is made in the closet. The man—God's man—is made in the closet. . . . Prayer makes the man; prayer makes the preacher; prayer makes the pastor.”<sup>9</sup>

Preachers, our lives must be in pursuit of the holiness of which we preach. Preaching is not a personal performance; it is the overflow of the eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent God in you. Our prayer time, lingering in God's presence, must be long and passionate. We have all heard that Martin Luther is known to have said, “If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business, I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.”<sup>10</sup>

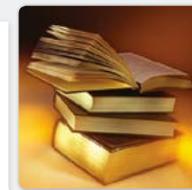
Most would admit that if they were called by a head of state—a president, governor, or prime minister—to travel as the voice for that government, they would prepare with intentionality and purpose, realizing both the weight and the honor of speaking for a government. Then comes the reminder: “The heaven-appointed purpose of giving the gospel to the world in this generation is the noblest that can appeal to any human being.”<sup>11</sup>

## Appeal

That God's Word has always been powerful and creative and that He has chosen to have human voices give that Word must change the personal practice of every one of those under the privilege and responsibility of that calling.

To live in a building without a solid foundation is unwise and unsafe, it is exactly that way in preaching. Preachers, we must know what it is that God has asked of us and discipline our life for this high calling. A sermon without a strong foundation is unsafe to be heard. A preacher without a committed life is unfit to be seen. 

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- 1 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references in this article are quoted from the New King James Version.
  - 2 Louis Venden, “A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Preaching and a Constructive Proposal of Guiding Principles for Homiletical Pedagogy” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1978), 232.
  - 3 Ranko Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2013), 227.
  - 4 This preparation would apply as well to the listener, who, knowing it is the Word of God, will come early (or on time), having lingered in prayer, listening to His voice through Bible study, surrendered in both heart and mind to Him, and petitioned Him for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the preacher and on themselves.
  - 5 The author takes responsibility for using this word that some doubt is a word but that so well fits what personal preparedness is to preaching. Pre-action is what happens before the action—and the opposite of a reaction.
  - 6 Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 35.
  - 7 Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1909), 469.
  - 8 Timothy Keller, *Preaching* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 12.
  - 9 E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 17–21.
  - 10 Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*, 58.
  - 11 Ellen White, *Education* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), 262.



## Make Your Voice Heard in Heaven: How to Pray With Power

By Barry C. Black, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2018.\*

At the 2017 National Prayer Breakfast, US Senate chaplain Barry Black delivered a powerful speech that sparked cheers and brought thousands of attendees to their feet. ‘In order to make ourselves heard in a way that really changes things,’ he said, ‘we must start by calling upon God—the one who holds the ultimate power.’” So reads the flyleaf of Dr. Barry Black’s latest book.

I have heard Barry Black the preacher (including the truly “powerful speech” referenced on the flyleaf). I have also heard Barry Black the lecturer. Dr. Black quotes philosophers as if they are his best friends and subtly sprinkles his presentations with the best principles of psychology and the latest theories of leadership. In a public university graduation speech, he encouraged the students along the path of lifelong learning and informed them that each new work assignment had been, for him, an opportunity for further study. By the time his academic credits were totaled, he had three master’s degrees and two doctorates. Now, enter Barry Black the author. What will we find? Powerful preacher? Erudite scholar?

What I found, instead, was a down-to-earth pastor, a passionate believer, and a biblical expert. Black does not just tell us what he has read; he shares what he has practiced. In 15 delightful chapters, Black expounds on what he sees as the essentials of a vibrant and effective prayer life, and Scripture is his unashamed platform: pray (1) with assistance, (2) the model prayer, (3) with purity, (4) fearlessly, (5) with effectiveness, (6) to escape the squeeze of temptation, (7) when God is silent, (8) when you don’t feel like being good, (9) with patience, (10) with celebration, (11) with intimacy, (12) with fervency, (13) with perseverance, (14) with submission, and (15) with a partner.

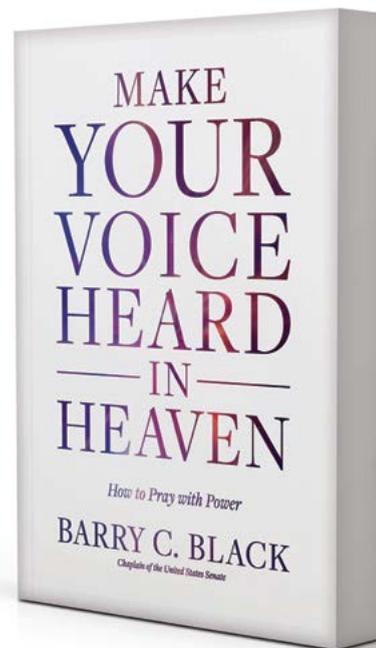
Black is consistently simple but never simplistic. Difficult subjects are dealt with head-on. In addressing how to pray when God is silent, Black offers uncanny counsel: “Sometimes, God doesn’t grant our requests because we are asking for something that doesn’t even exist. . . . The first way to deal with unanswered prayer is to make sure we are praying correctly.”

On how to keep praying when you feel like giving up, Black says, “Joseph spent more than two years in prison before being elevated to Pharaoh’s household. The promise was delayed, but not denied.” I believe the chaplain may be speaking to someone right now through these words.

And can we pray “not my will” and really mean it? Black declares, “There is also the pride of life, which involves our desire to accomplish and achieve, to be appreciated and accepted. We forget that God is more interested in our faithfulness than in our success or failure.”

What wonderful words of comfort with which we can encourage each other! In fact, in his closing chapter, Black states, “Praying with a partner will bring fresh power to our prayers, energizing our intercession. . . . we should pray with a partner because partners can bless and cheer one another.”

Chaplain of the US Senate—first military chaplain, first African American, and first Seventh-day Adventist in that position—surrounded by individuals with influence and intellect, Black never wavers in his purpose: to “offer my observations and advice about how to pray with power and make your voice heard in heaven.” He shared these principles with the entire nation on the occasion of the 2017 United States presidential inauguration. He shares these principles with senators day in and day out as he prays in the US Capitol and ministers to the



senators’ families. He now shares them with us.

I was rather surprised not to see a list of senators who have endorsed the book as I have seen in some previous works. But the absence of such a list turns an apparent deficiency into an appealing blessing: “He must increase, and I must decrease.” This book is less about praying with a Barry Black formula and more about praying with Christ’s formula. “Repeat the prayers of the Bible, praying words that were inspired by the Holy Spirit, prayers guaranteed to be heard in heaven”.

This book on prayer is scripturally sensible rather than being spiritually sentimental—and biblically intimate without being gushingly emotional. Do you sometimes feel your prayers are just hitting the ceiling? If you want your prayers to be heard in heaven—this is your book. ▣

—Reviewed by Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, associate editor, Ministry.

\* The original version of this book review will be published in *College and University Dialogue* 31:1 (2019). Used by permission.

## EVANGELIZING WITH THE WORD

### Total Member Involvement evangelism

**R**epublic of Korea—At the Northern Asia-Pacific Division's 2018 yearend meetings, a new evangelistic plan for 2019 was shared with the delegates, involving 2019 reaping evangelistic meetings throughout the division. One thousand of those meetings are planned to be held in Korea, 770 in China (China has been seriously hindered by new government laws this year, greatly restricting the church's ability to do outreach), 110 in Japan, 110 in Taiwan, and 29 in Mongolia.

All churches in the division are encouraged to plan on evangelism to build up to these reaping meetings. In particular, churches are encouraged to reach out to the community and make friends with nonmembers. This was the method that Jesus used: to make friends, have compassion on them, meet their needs, win their confidence, and, then, offer them the opportunity to follow Jesus (see *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143). [NSD Church Ministry Newsletter]



## PREACHING FROM THE WORD

### H.M.S. Richards Lectureship takes place at Andrews University

**B**errien Springs, Michigan, United States—The annual H. M. S. Richards Lectureship on Biblical Preaching, coordinated by **Hyveth Williams**, featured guest lecturer **Donald Sunukjian** of Biola University. Sunukjian's lectures taught seminarians how to use their words to create pictures in the minds of their audience in order to keep them engaged and attentive. He highlighted the importance of doing this by noting that "today's culture is dominated by images" and stressed that speakers have to know how to take hold of the mind's eye.

Elaborating on this idea, Sunukjian presented three ways for this to be done:

1. Expand on the biblical author's original images so that listeners can form a mental picture of them.
2. Create contemporary images similar to the author's to convey the same meaning.
3. Describe contemporary situations and scenarios where the biblical truth "shows up" in the lives of listeners.



Donald Sunukjian, preaches in seminary chapel, Andrews University.

Photo: Joseph Amaya, University Communication social media intern

Attendees were reminded that these techniques were used by two of the best speakers in the world: Jesus and Paul. "Use your voice," he encouraged, "like men and women of God have used theirs all through time. Forget PowerPoints and movie clips. Rummage through your life and the lives of others for relevant illustrations."

For Monday's worship in the chapel, Sunukjian did just that. He artfully demonstrated the use of storytelling as an attention grabber and a handy exegetical tool. Seizing 1 Corinthians 10:13 as the basis of his sermon, "Quick as a Wink and a Snail's Pace," Sunukjian expanded the meaning of the text and discussed applicable contexts that



highlighted the faithfulness of God and the relevance of the texts to the lives of the audience. During the second portion of his presentation, Sunukjian deftly shifted his presentation style, demonstrating the kind of speaking he had been describing throughout his lectures.

The lecturer-turned-storyteller held the audience in rapt attention as he used his words to re-create scenes from his own experience with

temptation and God’s faithfulness. His was an experience that the seminar-ians could all relate to: ministry envy. The genius of his storytelling lay not in his transparency or humor but in his masterful use of story to explain the innards of the text he had so deftly pried open. Shifting again, the story-teller, now turned pied piper, ended by leading the unsuspecting congregation to feel the weighty sense of honor toward them that God has and desires

to convey in every pre-weighed trial. The apostle Paul’s point was made. With that accomplished, Sunukjian was done, and after a brief pause, his audience erupted in sounds of praise to God and acclamation for having experienced such a meaningful and surprising treat.

DVDs of Donald Sunukjian’s presentations may be requested from Hyveth Williams at [hyveth@andrews.edu](mailto:hyveth@andrews.edu). [Esther Green, seminary student]

## LIVING FOR THE WORD

### Adventists among National Honors recipients in Jamaica

**M**andeville, Jamaica—Pastors **Everett Brown**, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Jamaica Union, and **Aston Barnes**, former treasurer of the West Indies Union, were among 206 individuals who were accorded national honors for 2018.

The appointments were presented to them by His Excellency, the governor general of Jamaica, the Most Honorable **Patrick Allen** at Kings House on National Heroes Day in Kingston, Jamaica, on October 15, 2018.

Pastor Brown was accorded the Order of Distinction in the rank of commander for outstanding contribution to religion, while Elder Barnes received the Order of Distinction in the rank of officer for contribution to the Ministerial Fraternity and to social development, welfare, and philanthropy in Jamaica.

“In accepting this award from the government of Jamaica, I do so with a sense of humility,” said Brown. “I am fully cognizant of the fact that this national recognition is just a reflection of the many lives that my service and ministry has touched through the opportunities given by the church to serve members and the wider society.”

Pastor Brown has served the church for more than 33 years in the Central Jamaica Conference (CJC) as district pastor, evangelist, youth ministries

director, executive secretary, and president.

He also serves as vice-chairman for the Bible Society of the West Indies, is a volunteer chaplain for the Jamaica Constabulary Force, and is a justice of the peace for the parish of St. Catherine.

Pastor Barnes has served the Adventist Church in various capacities over the past 65 years. He served as a teacher, an auditor, the stewardship

Indies Union Capital Development Fund. The fund provides assistance for capital expansion and improvements at low interest rates for churches and medical and educational institutions.

Full of practical knowledge and a passion for seeing to the adequate financing of the mission, Barnes was inspired to author the book *Church Financing: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. This book offers a solution



Everett Brown receives the Order of Distinction.

Photo: Phillip Carell/JAMU

director, and the treasurer of West Indies Union from 1976 to 1980.

Pastor Barnes implemented and managed his brainchild—the West

for financing education and health care in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is marketed both locally and overseas. [Nigel Coke/IAD Staff] ▼

Jennifer Gray Woods, JD, is associate general counsel for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



# Worshiping—or stealing?

In every worship service, some congregations around the globe regularly engage in breaking the eighth commandment. No church leadership would outright ask their members to steal CDs or books to use during worship services; yet every time lyrics are projected on a screen so that the congregation can sing along, or pictures or videos found online are used as an illustration during a sermon, or when a church program that includes music is streamed online without permission from the copyright holder or owner,

*Copyright infringement can carry a number of penalties ranging from monetary damages to prison terms. Are you guilty?*

the Church could very well be engaged in copyright infringement. Copyright infringement can carry a number of penalties ranging from monetary damages to prison terms. Are you guilty?

Copyright is a form of intellectual property that applies to creative works that are fixed in a tangible form of expression. Examples of creative works are music, lyrics, photographs, drawings, videos, and other artistic works. Copyright gives the creators of these works the exclusive right to determine whether and how their works are used. During the life of a copyright, copyright owners have the following rights to their works:

- To reproduce their work, such as in printed publications or by

creating sound recordings of their work

- To distribute copies of their work.
- To display their work
- To publicly perform and broadcast their work
- To make adaptations of their work, such as turning a book or manuscript into a movie or making a new arrangement of a song

Without permission, it is illegal to do any of the above-mentioned actions with copyrighted material.

Copyrights last for a fixed period of time, and once copyright expires, the work enters the public domain, meaning anyone can then use the work. It is not always easy to determine when a work has entered the public domain. In the United States, for example, at the present time, works that were created prior to 1923 are considered to be in the public domain, but works from 1923 onward may still be copyright protected. Other countries have different rules, so individuals are reminded to check the laws in their local jurisdiction.

Using material for religious or non-profit purposes is not a justification to infringe on someone's copyright. Churches can be, and are, sued for copyright infringement. Therefore, it is important for church leaders to be aware of and observe copyright regulations.

When it comes to music, people sometimes believe that they can project lyrics for congregational singing, they can stream the musical portions of their worship services online, or music in the church hymnal or other songbooks is free to use in any way a church sees fit.

The truth, however, is much more complicated. For example, under United States law, there is a specific legislative exemption that allows music to be performed during religious services without additional permissions from the copyright holder. While this

exemption allows churches to engage in congregational singing and special music without having to get permission from the copyright holder, it does not extend to printing or projecting lyrics or to streaming musical performances. Churches that wish to engage in these activities will need to get specific permission or authorization either from the copyright holder of the copyrighted work or through a licensing organization that grants blanket rights for any song within the organization's repository.\* Likewise, permission will be needed for many songs that are in the hymnal because many of these songs are still copyright protected.

Many believe that images found online (using search engines such as Google or Yahoo) are free to use. Additionally, people sometimes assume that if the materials do not have the copyright (©) symbol, they are in the public domain. Both assumptions are incorrect. If you find material online, the assumption should be that it is copyright protected unless you find evidence that it is not. As a best practice, if you would like to use graphics and photos in sermons, presentations, bulletin inserts, or announcements, use material that you have permission to use. Use images labeled as free stock photos and images that are under a creative commons license. In both cases, it is still important to read and follow the terms and conditions for use.

While copyright law can sometimes feel burdensome to churches who are looking to use content to expand and enhance their ministry, we must always remember that using a copyrighted work without permission is stealing. "Thou shall not steal" (Exod. 20:15, KJV). ❏

\* Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) and Christian Copyright Solutions (CCS) are two organizations that offer music licenses specifically for churches.

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