You have established all the boundaries of the earth; you have made summer and winter.

—Psalm 74:17
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2015 STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP
The VOICE Magazine is solely owned and published by IFCA International, Inc. The publication and editorial office are located at 3520 Fairlanes Avenue S.W., PO Box 810, Grandville, MI 49468. The Editor is Dr. Leslie C. Lofquist. There are no bond holders, mortgages or other security holders.

The average circulation for each of the six issues preceding the November/December 2015 is: total copies printed 8,933; total paid circulation 3,989; free distribution 4,517; office use 427.
What I’ve Learned
As A Pastor

Shortly after I became a Christian at the age of 18, I sensed God’s leading into full-time ministry and I enrolled in a Bible institute to begin my preparation. During two of those summers I served as an intern in a small church plant in Utah, the second summer serving as “the pastor” when Ron (my mentor) left for a month of missionary deputation.

Before he left, Ron told me I would have to do everything in the church while he was gone “even a funeral if anyone died.” Needless to say, at 21 years of age I prayed like crazy for the good health of everyone in the church! Much to my relief, God answered those prayers and there were no funerals that month. The second month that followed felt like a breeze compared to the first month when I was all on my own.

It was during those summers in Utah forty years ago that I tasted what it meant to be the pastor of a local church. After graduation from the Bible institute, I continued my education in a Christian liberal arts college and at seminary knowing God was calling me into the ministry as a missionary church planting pastor. All along the twists and turns of the various ministry assignments God has given to us, we’ve loved every one of the last forty years.

Oh, to be sure, there have been plenty of challenges, difficulties and trials I never thought we’d survive. But even in those days of great heartache and desperation, God’s grace has proven to be sufficient, His faithfulness has never failed us and the Holy Spirit has used God’s Word to accomplish some great things in the lives of people. And all of those experiences have provided me quite an education.

Seek to cultivate a majestic view of God in a man-centered society. In a day when churches increasingly emphasize the horizontal dimension of the Christian life (relationships with others, fulfillment of self, growing bigger in size), I have always sought to call the churches I served to the vertical dimension of the Christian life (a lofty understanding of the holy and awesome God).

Whether preaching or praying or counseling, I want to cultivate a majestic view of God whenever I am with the congregation.

I have challenged those in my ministry to recognize our culture’s idols and reorient ourselves to the Majesty on high who says “I am the LORD, and there is no other; beside Me there is no God” (Isaiah 45:5). Whenever I teach, I seek to exalt God in my words and manner. As I’ve led, I have very consciously and deliberately submitted my leadership to God’s sovereign direction and leadership. And as I matured in pastoral ministry, one way my maturity has been evidenced is that my public prayers have deepened. Now whenever I pray from the pulpit, I make sure my prayers truly lift people up to God and are not only heartfelt and genuine but also substantive and worshipful. In fact, I give much more forethought to my public prayers now than when I first started out in ministry because I have grown to understand that I am leading an entire congregation of people to the throne room of the Lord God Almighty. That’s a serious responsibility requiring more than a few shallow and mumbled out phrases (the exact same phrases which we often repeat from week to week in our public praying). Whether preaching or praying or counseling, I want to cultivate a majestic view of God.
whenever I am with the congregation. I believe that pleases Him and gives Him the honor due His holy name. 

People need to hear the Bible taught combined with clear-minded leadership. I have always sought to be a Scripture-driven leader. As a leader, we must choose not only where to lead but also the means by which to attract a following. The Corinthians followed leaders who relied upon the means of superiority of speech, persuasive rhetoric, and the force of an impressive personality; Paul relied upon the Word of God, the crucified Christ, and the Spirit’s power (see 1 Corinthians 2). He demonstrated that it is better to be Scripture-driven and Spirit-empowered than propelled by borrowed secular forces. Our standard must be the Word of God and we must never use it haphazardly, nor substitute for it the methods or opinions of men. Be a Scripture-driven leader who leads the flock with a godly sense of authority. 

Seek to surround yourself with wise people and listen to them. When I was a teenager, my Dad used to tell me to seek out older, wiser people who knew more than I did and follow their advice. How grateful I am for my Dad’s wisdom in that regard and after I became a Christian I learned this is exactly what the Bible instructs younger men to do. I have sought the friendship of godly men, asking them many, many (many!) questions and sought to implement their counsel. I began with my first pastor: he not only led me to Christ but he taught me how to approach the Bible and how and why to be serious about doctrine and how to be faithful in church. But I wanted more and so I went to the Bible institute he recommended, having never before stepped foot on the campus. He recommended the school…I applied, then enrolled, and that was it. At that school, I met life-long mentors and advisers and my roommate who became my best friend in ministry even to this day and my future wife who herself is such a wise woman. And for forty years at each church I’ve been a member of or have pastored, I’ve learned from elders and deacons and Sunday School teachers and church staff members and fellow IFCA pastors in the local Regional. And not too long ago I asked all sorts of questions and listened as a couple of friends opened up over breakfast, one a realtor and one a ditch digger, and when it was over my soul was refreshed. I gained so much from these two brothers – even ditch diggers can teach you a lot if they are wise and godly and you humbly listen to them. 

People will fail. God never will. As I said above, over the years I’ve deliberately surrounded myself with some of the finest people imaginable. Those great folks have given me so much that I’ve often felt overwhelmed with gratitude reflecting on the countless ways I’ve been blessed by others in my life. Yet I also know that people fail (including, and most especially, me). We are all fallen, feeble, frail and broken instruments…but God is great! This truth has helped temper my perfectionistic, unreal, idealistic expectations when I’ve directed them at myself and those around me. I’ve learned to be more patient and forbearing over the years knowing all of us need to receive grace and extend forgiveness each and every day. People are great; people are frustrating. People help us up; people push us down. My actions are good; my actions are bad. In all the variations of our humanity, this one thing is certain: God never changes and He’s always dependable. He will never fail and so we should keep our eyes on Him. 

Maturing and growth happened at the same time while I’ve been serving. I’ve always sensed my own inadequacies and weaknesses and need for personal growth and maturing. I know I have so much to learn and so I’ve devoted myself to life-long learning. Even after four decades in local church ministry, I still want to be a better pastor and I try to take every opportunity to improve my ministry. And I understand that my own personal development and maturing and growth have happened all at the same time while I’ve been serving. So my frequent counsel to young men is to jump in and serve in whatever church you’re a part of and don’t wait to become mature. That will happen as you faithfully serve wherever you are, in whatever ministry assignment you are given. 

Don’t be afraid to labor unknown in obscure places. Since I became a Christian, I have attempted to do the greatest possible good that I could for the greatest possible glory for God…but it is a difficult balance between seeking greatness for God and seeking greatness for self. Because our God is infinitely glorious, we should take on goals and objectives worthy of a lofty view of God who wants to be glorified in all the earth…and this I have sought to do. But I also have sought to guard against my own self-centered ambitions. I have deliberately sought obscurity and trusted that God would expand my ministry in His time and in whatever way He determined. Jeremiah cautioned “Do you seek great things for

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**LES LOFQUIST’S ITINERARY**

**November**

7  Partners In Evangelism International Meeting, Chicago, IL
9  IFCA Leadership Summit, Grandville, MI
10-13  IFCA Board of Directors Meetings, Grandville, MI
21  Wendell Babcock 90th Birthday Open House, Grand Rapids, MI

**December**

6  Eureka (IL) Bible Church

**January**

19-22  BMW Board Meetings, Lawrenceville, GA
31  Faith Bible Church, White Cloud, MI
yourself? Do not seek them" (Jeremiah 45:5). Personal ambition is such a shallow, empty motivation. Yet it captivates all too many men in ministry whose drive for fame consumes them (yes, pastors can think that way). Through the years I’ve deliberately taken entry-level ministry assignments in church, things like set-up / clean-up and regular nursery duty with my wife and teaching First through Third Grade Sunday School and lots of Awana and VBS activities. Those ministries have been wonderful opportunities! They have also kept in check my sinful ambitions for personal ministry glory. Upon seminary graduation, I assumed a church planting ministry in obscure Utah with just twelve people while many of my seminary classmates took large churches. Today I am always eager to speak at churches of every size, even if it involves just a handful of people. I think it important for me never to forget this principle: seek obscurity and humble service. Closely related to all of this is the issue of financial want. I have learned not to be afraid of poverty, which over the years has been another way God has reminded me to be willing to labor in humility. I have made it my philosophy that if God chooses to give me money, position or honor then that is His doing and not because I made it my driving ambition.

**The indispensability of my life’s ministry partner.** Three months after I was saved, I happened to discover a taped series of messages by Dr. Howard Hendricks entitled “The Christian Home.” It was basic Bible teaching to a group of young college-aged adults on marriage, family, the roles of husband and wife and children, parenting, communication, threats to oneness and the joys of marital love. I’d never heard anything like it and I was hooked. I must’ve worn out those tapes listening and learning. I remember Dr. Hendricks’ advice to pray for a godly wife if you were planning to be in ministry. So, for seven months I prayed quite specifically for God’s choice for my wife, and He sent her to me! For these forty years Miriam has walked at my side as a faithful woman of God, trusting Him along with me through all the peaks and valleys of life in ministry. She has constantly been helping, encouraging, strengthening, counsel-

ing, comforting, sacrificing, teaching, serving, cooking, cleaning, disciplining children, discipling women, praying. She has been a noble servant and without my life’s partner I could never have made it in full-time ministry. And today I echo what Dr. Hendricks said those many years ago. You need a godly wife if you’re going to be in ministry.

**Without love your ministry is cold and lifeless.** The message of 1 Corinthians 13 has tremendous implications for those of us in ministry: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2). That couldn’t be any clearer and yet sadly, I have met many love-less pastors and attended many love-less churches. And I’m even sadder to recall the many love-less moments in my own ministry life. D.L. Moody said it this way: “There is no use working without love. A doctor, a lawyer, may do good work without love, but God’s work cannot be done without love.”1 Pastors should love people in the church hallways and in all the places we meet them like restaurants and grocery stores and hospitals. My ditch digging friend said that pastors, from the pulpit, should frequently tell their congregation that he loves them - and I agree. Love is one essential characteristic that absolutely must be found in all Christian leaders.

**We pastors need to learn to forgive.** Local church ministry often involves seeing people at their worst and unfortunately all of us pastors experience times when rocks and arrows are directed at us. We need to forgive others when we’ve been wronged because it’s commanded in the New Testament and because it honors the Lord when we “take the high road.” And we need to acknowledge there are times in ministry when we pastors do or say the wrong thing and we need to admit “I was wrong. Please forgive me.” All of us need to forgive those who have hurt us in church squabbles and get along with them so the Gospel won’t be negatively affected. Unsaved people are watching and need to see how the Gospel has changed us by helping us to truly love and forgive others. Forgiveness is simply the active part of love.

**Submission to authority is for pastors too.** The Apostle Paul frequently wrote that he was a slave of Jesus Christ (see Romans 1:1 for example). Likewise, we pastors must never forget that we are slaves and this should have incredible implications in how we carry ourselves as we do our ministry. If we are slaves of Christ, there should be attitudes and actions that accompany this position. Similarly, God who is our ultimate authority, has delegated authority to different spheres in this world, like government for example (Romans 13:1-2) and elders in church (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17). But many well-intentioned pastors believe that since they are serving the Lord, they need only submit to Him; in other words, they believe they are an authority unto themselves and are always free to pursue their own agendas. This will cause disruption in the work and ministry of that church whenever the pastor’s fellow elders or other leaders in the church raise legitimate questions. I’ve always attempted to lead with strength and decisiveness, while at the same time being willing to submit to the other elders when they’ve raised legitimate questions. I’ve also submitted to the wisdom of Deacons and Nursery workers and Kitchen Coordinators who knew the solutions to problems in a ministry I had little knowledge of. I don’t know everything and I can’t know everything. There are times when I lead with great confidence and times I submit to the advice and counsel of others. Submission is for pastors too.

**Respect what God has done in and through those who precede you.** I have always sought to respect our heritage. I believe we cannot build for the future if we forget the past. In my present ministry I recognize our IFCA forefathers were men greatly used by God who built something eighty-five years ago that still stands today. I have spent many hours in our archives researching photographs and minutes of meetings as well as visiting and interviewing older men. This is out of respect for God’s work in the past generation and out of concern for the future generation. The stones
of remembrance in Old Testament history represented the past (“look what God did”) as well as the present and future (“and He can still do it today or tomorrow”). Look at all the past tense verbs in the Psalms and see their relationship with the present tense and future tense. And when I was a local church pastor I attempted to honor what God did through the men and churches I’ve served in the decades before I ever showed up on the scene. Too many men lead with their insecurities, disrespecting the past or ignoring what God accomplished before they became pastor, almost as if by treating the past with contempt the people will appreciate them all the more. I’ve found just the opposite to be true. People loved it when I honored the earlier blessings of God and entered into their happy recollections of their past. And I found it often resulted in greater respect and appreciation for my own leadership by the congregation.

It’s important to pursue team-building within all aspects of ministry. The accomplishment of ministry is never done alone. New Testament leaders were in plurality in the local churches. Paul wrote to Timothy that the ministry always involves training others who in turn would train others (2 Timothy 2:2). By its very definition, *koinonia* involves fellowship, community, togetherness which is quickly undone by the self-interests of others (most especially the leaders). Work like a team in church because no one, not even the most gifted pastor, can do everything - he needs others around him to fill in the places where he’s weak or not gifted.

Do the quiet work of one-on-one mentoring and discipling. In my ministry I’ve learned that preaching and teaching to a group was the way to appeal to many, but the quiet work of equipping a few was more influential and lasting. It wasn’t more exciting, but it was more productive. Seventeenth century English Pastor Richard Baxter wrote “I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse in half an hour’s close discourse, than they did from ten years’ public preaching. I know that preaching the gospel publicly is the most excellent means, because we speak to many at once. But it is usually far more effective to preach it privately to a particular sinner.” My experience has mirrored Baxter’s, even though we are separated by over three hundred and fifty years. I especially worked on my relationships with the men in the church believing that if I reached the man I would reach the whole family. Years ago I learned that was also Baxter’s method and it became mine as well. I urge all pastors to do the same.

Seek to be balanced between evangelism and Bible teaching. I know all too well how easy it is to get out of balance, leaning always toward our areas of strength and giftedness. And like most pastors, in my gifts and strengths I lean towards Bible teaching and shepherding. I want to feed, lead and protect the sheep God has entrusted to my care. But there are countless others who need to be added to the flock, lost sheep wandering far from God...and they need my attention as well. So I constantly remind myself to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). Often times I just observe people in the mall or at a restaurant and see how desperately they need the Savior. I do that to stir up my passion for evangelism. I also believe that I need to share the simple Gospel more than we IFCA pastors usually do from the pulpit. We need to tell people regularly how to get saved! We need to lift up and encourage the work of the evangelists in our churches and not just exalt Bible study and the Bible students in our congregations. I need to seek a balance between evangelism and Bible teaching...and I think many of our IFCA churches need to do the same.

**CONCLUSION**

There have been plenty of challenges, difficulties and trials in my ministry. But even in the days of great heartache and desperation, God’s grace has proven to be sufficient, His faithfulness has never failed and the Holy Spirit has used God’s Word to accomplish some great things in the lives of people. And all of those experiences have provided me quite an education.

I’m profoundly grateful for the lessons I’ve learned while serving our wonderful Lord.
I became a believer as a fifteen year old high school freshman. Since graduating from high school, my life has been divided into three time periods.

The first twelve years I was an electrician. There was nothing wrong with being an electrician, and I enjoyed certain aspects of that type of construction work. But God caused me to become dissatisfied with the direction in which my life was going. Looking back now I can see God used that time to get me familiar with how a local church functioned and to help me identify with people who do physical labor to earn a living.

The next eight years of my life were spent preparing for the ministry. At the age of thirty-one, I quit my job, sold our home and with a wife of ten years and children ages two and four in tow, set out for Southeastern Bible College in Birmingham, Alabama. I was not sure what God had planned for my life, but I knew that whatever it was, training would be required. Following four years of Bible college, I entered Dallas Theological Seminary where I spent four years earning a Master of Theology degree.

That brings me to the third period of my life. For the next thirty-one years, I pastored two churches. In the first church, I ministered for twelve years; and in the second church, I ministered for nineteen years. While pastoring my first church, I earned a D.Min degree. I have recently retired from the pastorate and in this article I would like to reflect on those thirty-one years as a pastor. They have been wonderful years filled with many blessings and I’m profoundly grateful that I have had the privilege of being a local church pastor.

But in particular, I would like to reflect on what I will miss about the pastorate and what I will not miss as a pastor. The listing of these reflections does not indicate any particular priority.

I will miss teaching/preaching God’s Word. The spiritual gift of teaching is one of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gave me when I was saved. I will not miss not using that gift as often as I did when I was a pastor.

I will not miss the awesome feeling of responsibility when the church was not meeting its budget or the attendance was low. Granted, these situations usually had nothing to do with what I was or was not doing in the ministry. Yet my personality is such that I felt responsible when things were not going as well as they could be.

I’m profoundly grateful that I have had the privilege of being a local church pastor.

I will miss discipling men. I have spent a good part of my ministry developing a leadership training program to disciple men. And preaching and discipling men have brought me great satisfaction. I have jokingly told people that I teach God’s Word and disciple men for free, and I get paid for carrying out the rest of my pastoral responsibilities.

I will not miss trying to fulfill the wide range of expectations that people have for their pastor. A person’s spiritual gifts will usually determine where he/she thinks the pastor should spend his time developing those aspects of the church’s ministry. Having so many ears, eyes, hands and feet in the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-26), it is difficult to meet everyone’s expectations.

I will miss the respect that people gave to me as their pastor. It’s true that I had to do a credible job of pastoring to keep that respect. But as a general rule, people gave me their initial respect without having to earn it. I concluded that if someone comes to your church, they usually come respecting the pastor.

I will not miss seeing a local church as the place where I worked. Pastoring was my calling and whenever I was at church, I was working. It did not matter if it was a church picnic, church
with such needs. But in our case, the people went the extra mile to show us love and concern and to meet our needs.

I will not miss my inability to leave church issues at the office at the end of the day. I had seminary professors who told how, on their way home from work, they would leave their work issues at a certain place on their route home and pick up those issues again on their way back to the seminary. Well, that never worked for me. Perhaps this is a personal weakness of mine but when I was faced with a church problem, I lived with it 24/7. I would think about how to solve the problem in the evenings and even wake up at 1 am or 2 am thinking about the problem.

I will miss the structure of having to study God’s Word and prepare for Sunday sermons and Bible classes. That forced discipline was such a long-term blessing to my soul.

I will not miss working every weekend, except for vacations. Here’s why. With my wife being a nurse during the week and me serving in the church on weekends, we have not had time together on days off as often as we would have liked. This working situation made it impossible for us to take long holiday weekends.

I will miss mentoring men and seeing them develop both spiritually and in their leadership skills.

I will not miss being held personally responsible for every unpopular decision that was made by the Board of Elders.

I will miss the hunger of a believer, or sometimes a new believer, to grow spiritually and their desire to be discipled. These folks were so appreciative of me taking the time and making the effort to disciple them that they seemed to be like a sponge that soaks up every word I say.

I will not miss the hindrances to the church’s ministry and the church’s future because some could not see beyond their preferences. This attitude created a lack of vision for what the church could have become by holding on to what the church was.

I will miss standing guard to protect the doctrines of the church. I considered it an honor and a privilege to stand as “point man” to make sure no doctrine came into the church that was contrary to our written doctrinal statement. The church might have been a little smaller for this, but the church and its people were stronger for it.

Most of all I will miss the opportunities the ministry gave me to share the Gospel with unsaved people. Pastoring a church creates a unique opportunity to share the Gospel. The unsaved that come to the church are there because they have an interest in spiritual things and think the pastor has the spiritual answers. That combination is conducive for sharing Christ. I have had great joy in sharing the Gospel with people and seeing their eyes light up and their facial expression change when they finally understood the simple message of the Gospel – faith alone in Christ alone. I have seen 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 in action where God caused the scales to drop from someone’s spiritual eyes so they could have this understanding. WOW! What an experience. I don’t believe I have the spiritual gift of evangelism, but I took pleasure in “doing the work of the evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). I thank God that He has allowed me to not only plant the seeds of the Gospel but to also pick some of the fruit.

So now that I have retired from the pastorate (I would rather use the word refocus than retire), I am ready to transition from being “the pastor,” “the go to guy,” and “the guy that is responsible for getting the job done” to my new role of being a mentor, a counselor, and an advisor to others, especially younger pastors.

I am at peace with the thought that it is normal to turn this page that will close one chapter in my life and turn the next page that will begin a new chapter.

So with all of this reflection on my thirty-one years of pastoral ministry, I ask myself, “Would I do it all over again if I knew then what I know now?” The answer is a resounding “YES! Without a doubt, I would do it again in a heartbeat.” I cannot tell you how often I lifted a prayer of thanks up to God for taking me out of construction work and placing me into the ministry. I share the sentiments of the Apostle Paul who said in 1 Timothy 1:12, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service.”

I will miss experiencing the blessing of doing God’s work, knowing that I was in His will.
Reflections of a Grown-Up PK

Connie Fink is the daughter of Hermann Braunlin, one of the great men in IFCA’s history who pastored Hawthorne (NJ) Gospel Church for 61 years. Twenty years ago he entered heaven’s glory and his legacy still remains two decades later.

Though Dad was the pastor of a metropolitan church, a pulpit was unnecessary. As a teen, I plopped down on the living room floor in front of his recliner to ask questions that seemed bigger than life. He listened calmly and guided me gently, not knowing he was quietly training a future ministry wife. Dad is in heaven now. The recliner is gone. But the lessons remain unchanged.

His snippets of wisdom were concise, thought provoking, and set a sturdy foundation for my life. The lessons gave me an extraordinary perspective for the ordinary days, and gave me something to grasp when tragedy struck.

Some of those I most remember are:

**YOU DON’T KNOW HOW HIGH YOU CAN JUMP UNTIL YOU START JUMPING.**

If you stay put, things may stay the same; but if you aim for the high bar, you’ll often gain ground in the process. By choosing the option for growth rather than what is most comfortable, you may discover a new ability, a new relationship, and a new level of trust in God. Run in such a way as to get the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24).

**MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS IN THE LITTLE THINGS AND YOU’LL BE IN THE RIGHT PLACE FOR THE BIG DECISIONS.**

A single step leads to a path; a path leads to a place. Little decisions are important, like the choice to respond with respect and compassion when you feel like attacking, or the choice to spend time in prayer when you only have a minute. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:6).

**BE READY TO LEAVE, BUT PLAN TO STAY.**

Every year the church voted on whether Dad would remain as their pastor. One night when I was old enough to realize what a “no” vote would mean to us, I asked him what in the world we would do. He calmly answered, “I’m ready to leave, but I’m planning to stay.” As it turned out, he was pastor of that church for 61 years, setting a stellar example of faithfulness.

As ambassadors of Christ, we should be ready and willing for God to use us wherever needed. Until God changes our assignment, our devotion should remain unchanged whether every pew is filled or only a handful come.

**I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, PHILIPPIANS 4:11**

“What you win them with, you keep them with.”

If we draw people to church with entertainment, he often said, we will need to keep them with entertainment, often resulting in a “what’s in it for me” mindset. But if we build the church on the teaching of God’s Word, the congregation will be prepared to face the world. They will have answers. They will have the eternal perspective. They will have a burden for those who do not know Christ. They will have reverence for God and His Word, and will spend time with Him during the week. Such a focused approach will reduce frenzied pursuits and activity-filled calendars.

**GOD HAS YET GREATER THINGS FOR HIS PEOPLE**

Dad put this statement on the bottom of the church’s letterhead. It was his closing encouragement in many counseling sessions. It was his last sentence of his last sermon. He believed it and lived it. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

**WOULD THIS FOUNDATION STAND?**

Then the testing began. Was the foundation of my life, as taught and modeled by my Dad, sturdy enough to keep me standing?

The phone rang at work. “Hi, sweetheart.” It was Mom. “I have bad news,” she said. “I found a lump in my breast this morning.” She told me of...
her New Year’s prayer a few weeks earlier, that our church would become a praying church. She never expected God to answer this way this soon.

My Dad had been the pastor of the same church for over sixty years: a large New York area church with over one thousand members, over one hundred missionaries, situated on twenty-two acres with nine buildings, a regionally-renown Christian bookstore, a Christian school, an adult evening Bible school, a daily radio program and an annual summer-long conference with countless world-famous Bible teachers and speakers.

Until God changes our assignment, our devotion should remain unchanged whether every pew is filled or only a handful come.

The unity between my parents was clear. They ministered as a team. There were a myriad of ways Mom used her teaching and organizational skills. The congregation leaned on her; she was known in the region. Yet while growing up, I witnessed something more through the keyhole to her bedroom – her quiet, private prayer ministry that resulted in the church’s consistent growth, and guided her personal growth as wife and mother.

Less than five years after mom told me of her New Year’s Eve prayer, she was weakened by a recurrence of cancer. Within months, Lydia Braunlin entered heaven after years as a supportive pastor’s wife, a giving mother, and a suffering patient.

A few weeks later, my second personal tragedy struck. Alzheimer’s had pointed its ugly finger at Dad and its grip began to choke the life out of him. Both parents were gone in a matter of weeks—one physically, the other mentally.

For the next nine years, Alzheimer’s gripped much of my father’s functioning, memory, and relationships. However, two things were untainted by its ugly clench: his character and his spirit. Underneath the confusion and deterioration remained a strong servant, full of humility and kindness. His reverence for God was the strength of his life to the end.

Under the grip of the disease, Dad’s conversations became muddled with confusion. But in prayer, his dialogue with God, there was clarity and focus. He walked the nursing home hallways each day, stopping to sit and read his Bible to lonely fellow-residents. Watching this unassuming, humble man, it was almost inconceivable that he had had such a dynamic ministry. As always, a pulpit was unnecessary for his faithfulness.

The weeks prior to his 91st birthday marked quick and significant physical deterioration. Upon hearing this report, my husband and I knew it was time to board a plane for the 1000-mile trip. As I entered his room, I was told he had slipped into a coma. Reality struck a forceful blow as I caught my first glimpse of a very thin man. I struggled to find his familiar features. Where was my daddy?

The nurse bent down to his ear and said, “Pastor, Constance is here.” No response. Where were the familiar outstretched arms and enthusiastic smile? I waited. I was too late. Wait, what was that? A tear? Yes! It slid down his cheek and his breathing relaxed. He knew me. He knew I was there. Though unable to speak or see, his heart reached through the strong grip of the coma for this moment.

His last words to me were unspoken with a single tear that said, “I love you,” as clearly as if he had spoken the words. Permanently etched in my mind is this picture of our tender relationship where words were often unnecessary to understand the heart. What a privilege to have been with this great man as he crossed the threshold of heaven.

My earthly father’s consistent and genuine exemplification throughout my life gave me a glimpse into the character of my eternal heavenly Father and I recognized His embrace and everlasting love as never before. My Heavenly Father still holds me close. A place I will never leave. A relationship I will never lose. One day I will thank both of my parents for the faithful example they set for my life, marriage and ministry, and we will bow together to the One who is worthy of all praise.

This article originally appeared in the IFCA News Connection in February, 2015.
The Value and Cost of Humility

Humility. It is a character quality the Scriptures teach is a great virtue and a crucial component of the Christian life. Yet, humility is one of the harder characteristics to develop because it is so contrary to our natural pride. People can even become proud about being humble.

I have thought a lot about humility in the last decade, partly due to reaching middle age, that point in life when the young think you’re old because you have gray hair, and those older think you are young because you are not collecting Social Security. More specifically, middle age is when the idealism of youth finally hits the wall of reality and you realize that many of your dreams will not be fulfilled. It is often a time of crisis, but I have found it can be a time of rejoicing for the wisdom that has been gained.

The physical pain of mid-life has forced a wisdom upon me that has freed me from trying to impress others by what I can do. I ask for help much more quickly. I regret some past decisions, yet I rejoice to look back and see that God’s gracious hand has led me to where I am today despite myself. Recognizing I still lack many skills and abilities that I may never gain in this life has also forced me to realize that humility is far superior to pride. I have eaten enough humble pie to appreciate it even if the taste is not sweet.

Humility & The Bible

Years of studying the Scriptures have also caused me to think a lot about humility. This quality of having a low view of one’s importance is crucial to salvation and to living the Christian life. Humility is necessary to salvation since God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6), and salvation comes only by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8). Jesus made it clear that entrance into His kingdom begins with being poor in spirit, which is a very strong description of being humble (Matthew 5:3). Humility is also necessary for Christian living since we are to “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not [merely] look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

As God has graciously allowed me to mature, I have placed an increasing value upon humility. It is my great desire that this will continue since I strive to follow Paul’s example in dying to self and living for Christ (Galatians 2:20), and humility is indispensable to living in a manner that will point all the glory to my Savior. The self-preservation of my natural pride and seeking my own will and glory would prevent that otherwise.

Though pastors are supposed to meet the level of Christian maturity described in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9, pastors are still normal humans and therefore have to deal with issues of pride. It is common at pastor’s conferences to find men trying to size one another up into some sort of pecking order. I have been guilty of this myself. The temptation is to try to find something that would somehow make you feel superior, so questions are asked to determine the number of people in the congregation, the size of the budget, the number of or percentage of support for missionaries and your level of education. Pride is boosted if you are doing better than other pastors in one or more of these areas. If the other man is doing better, then it is not too hard to generate some sort of excuse for difference such as “they may have more people, but our people are more Biblical.” Such is the nature of pride. Sadly, it can also degenerate into envy and its related sins including thinking God is not being fair to give them such blessings and me such hardships.
Humility Applied

Humility is the solution to issues of pride. Humility demands that I rejoice when the other man is more gifted in preaching, teaching and administration and has a larger congregation, a bigger budget and supports more missionaries. Humility puts the purpose of life into its proper focus on the glory of God instead of personal glory and therefore it removes envy. In fact, instead of trying to find an excuse for the disparity in ministry, humility pushes me to seek help to improve the effectiveness of ministry so that God can receive greater glory.

One of the statements of purpose for IFCA International is “To enhance the strength of the Church by equipping for and encouraging toward ministry partnerships to accomplish Great Commission objectives.” This is very crucial to effective ministry both foreign and domestic, yet it is impossible to carry out without humility. This is obvious in foreign missions in which multiple churches and mission organizations cooperate to bring the gospel to a foreign field. When there is humility with all involved, it is much easier to find and implement the best strategies and means for effective planting of healthy churches which will grow and multiply. Most missionaries and pastors are too familiar with the disasters that occur when pride hinders or even destroys a work.

Conclusion

I agree with Paul’s statement, “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Since our spiritual gifts, ministry and empowerment all come from God (1 Corinthians 12), then our part is to serve Christ in His body however He desires. Middle age has helped me learn the humility that removes envy and the pursuit of personal glory so that I can rejoice that my master is glorified regardless of the source. I am thankful for privilege of being A Simple Slave of the Lord Jesus Christ.
How do you talk to your children about sexual sin? That question has become all the more pressing ever since June 26, 2015 when the U.S. Supreme Court enshrined same-sex marriage as the law of the land. This ruling - the latest in a string of victories garnered by homosexual activists - came a little more than a week before Independence Day, summer's unofficial halftime break. So while scores of gay rights celebrations ignited across the country, many families washed down campers and cleaned out coolers in anticipation of midsummer getaways.

But as many families got away the following weekend, they quickly realized there was nowhere to go - at least nowhere they could go to get away from the Supreme Court's ruling. As the homosexual agenda continues to gather speed, the American family can expect to find fewer and fewer safe havens. What was only whispered about in past generations is today broadcast in the mainstream media.

Consequently, our children are hearing more about immorality and homosexuality than ever before. And they are hearing it at an increasingly younger age. Many parents are asking, “How can I talk about these vile subjects with my children?” While these topics may make us uncomfortable, I believe it’s essential we talk about them. Our society has spoken, and our children are listening. We as parents must respond, addressing these issues in a wise, godly, and biblical way.

The Bible as Textbook

But there’s a much more profound issue at stake. The decision of the Supreme Court is but one stop on a continuum of degeneration begun decades ago. The legalization of same-sex marriage is not the end; it is simply the latest installment in an agenda bent on eliminating anything that smacks of Christianity.

While we must address these sins, we must also address the underlying cause. Immorality and homosexuality are the rotten fruit of a total abandonment of God and His Word. They are the symptoms of a society that has totally rejected God. They are also signs of God's total abandonment of a society. In Paul’s letter to the church in Rome, he identifies immorality and homosexuality as twin expressions of God’s wrath unleashed on brazen sinners (Romans 1:24–32).

Our society has spoken, and our children are listening. We as parents must respond.

What our children most need is a solid biblical grounding, a Christian worldview that will help them navigate life long after they’ve left the home. Because of this, any discussion of sexual sin - or any other sin - must begin with what God has said. God has not left us in confusion concerning issues of human sexuality. The first two chapters of the Bible’s first book reveal the foundation of God’s provision of and parameters for sexual intimacy. God’s perfect design, established in the beginning, provides an enduring pattern for marriage, no matter the times.

The ABCs of Human Sexuality

Genesis 1 and 2 have established God’s pattern for marriage.¹

(1) Marriage is between one man and one woman: “A man [masculine, singular] shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife [feminine, singular]” (Genesis 2:24). Polygamy in all its forms is excluded: polygyny (man with multiple wives), polyandry (woman with multiple husbands), and group marriage (multiple husbands and wives together in one family). As is homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22). The confusion of gender distinctions - transsexuality, transvestism, and transgenderism - is also forbidden by God (1 Corinthians 6:9), as gender
tainty, God's condemnation of this unholy union is unmistakable (Genesis 6:5–7).

In the generations following the flood, sexual perversion continued to abound: Abram married multiple wives (Genesis 16:3); the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were filled with homosexuality (Genesis 19:1–29); the daughters of Lot committed incest with their father (Genesis 19:30–38); Shechem raped Dinah, the daughter of Leah (Genesis 34:1–2); Reuben violated his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22; 49:3–4); Judah solicited a prostitute, who turned out to be his own daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:13–19); and Potiphar, the wife of Joseph's Egyptian master, repeatedly tried to seduce her husband's slave (Genesis 39:6–12). All these shameful acts are but a sampling of mankind's sordid past.

So while we may (and should) shelter our family from sins of this nature, it is inescapable that we as parents will have to address these sins with our children at some level.

Our culture continues to hold fast to these sins, reveling in perversion and condemning any who refuse to join in the celebration. So while we may (and should) shelter our family from sins of this nature, it is inescapable that we as parents will have to address these sins with our children at some level. And the place to begin, is in the beginning, where God created a perfect world and joined the first man and the first woman in the perfect union: marriage.

SHOW AND TELL

But then the question arises: “Where do I go from here?” Outside the safety of the Garden, gross sin lurks on nearly every page. You may be wondering, does my four-year-old son even need to know about homosexuality? He does, but he doesn't need to know every last detail just yet. Sometimes it's as much about what's not said as what is said. Children don't need to know everything about a particular sin to understand that it's wrong. For young children, it's enough to know that a general behavior disobeys God's command and will, therefore, incur God's punishment. For a young child, an acceptable definition of homosexuality might be: two men pretending to be married, disobedient to God's instructions.

As children grow, it's the job of parents, not the school or the community, to decide how and when to expand their children's understanding regarding these issues. God has bestowed parents with the unique privilege and responsibility of leading their children through these harrowing topics (Ephesians 6:4). While the manner and pace may vary from family to family, one thing is certain: these conversations must happen and they must happen at multiple points throughout childhood. Timely debriefs are the order of the day. Don't dump everything at once on your child. This is not a one-time conversation. Gauge what your children are hearing, seeing, and experiencing on a daily basis, and speak up! Sometimes the best conversations happen in the midst of decorating a cake, or during a presidential debate.

If we fail to guide our children through these issues, we can be certain that the world will not. Byron Yawn, in his book What Every Man Wishes His Father Had Told Him, writes: “When most parents step back from their careers and schedules long enough to notice the changes [during adolescence], or dads get up the courage to broach the subject, their sons know far more than they imagine. If you choose to remain silent, the world steps in with an explicit crash course on the pleasures of instant gratification.” The wise father prepares his son to judge the world rightly, and in so doing protects him from the enticements of sinners: “My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding...For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.
ways wander, and she does not know it” (Proverbs 5:1, 3–6).

But for everything our children hear, we can be sure they see much more. For most children, the bulk of what they understand about marriage will come, for better or for worse, from their own parents. How can we expect our sons, when they are grown, to love their wives as Christ loves the church - redemptively (Ephesians 5:23), sacrificially (Ephesians 5:25), and uniquely (Ephesians 5:27) - when their own fathers do not? And what about our daughters? Will they see pictures of humble submission (Ephesians 5:22)? One thing is certain: we can be sure that our actions will continue to speak long after our lips have spoken.

A Teacher’s Aide

We must not discount the impact of other godly men and women, too. God has given parents the primary responsibility of raising their children, but the local church can provide valuable encouragement and reinforcement.

At a special ministry event designed to encourage children’s ministry volunteers at Grace Community Church, Pastor John MacArthur described the profound impact children’s ministry has had upon his own life: “I have always been a strong believer in Children’s Ministry from the earliest ages because I was so profoundly influenced as a kid… One of the things that a pastor’s kid looks for is the things he hears from his parents being lived out in the life of somebody else. That’s really important. Because you want to know that this isn’t just something the preacher is serious about. And as I look back in my early years as a kid, I have vivid memories, by name, of Sunday School teachers who impacted my life because they affirmed everything that I heard my dad preach and everything my parents told me from a completely different perspective.”

So while we may not be able to completely shelter our children from sexual sin, we must prepare them to face it. Armed with God’s truth, nourished by faithful examples and emboldened by the testimony of the local church, our children will be prepared to enter an increasingly godless generation, ready to declare God’s Word and defend God’s truth, no matter what the Supreme Court rules next.

ENDNOTES
1. Andreas J. Köstenberger with David W. Jones, God, Marriage, and Family (Crossway, 2010), pages 31-39.
2. Some have argued that they were the sons of Seth. Others, that they were human kings looking to build their harems. Still others identify them as fallen angels who indwelt human bodies.
New Calvinism, Part Two

Editor’s Note: The first part of this study appeared in the last issue of VOICE. This article is the conclusion.

In my first article on the subject of New Calvinism, we explored some definitions and examined the essential ingredient of the movement which is the co-mingling of Calvinistic theology with at least openness to charismatic practices. I believe this to be the unique and defining characteristic of New Calvinism. It is the one feature that all involved have in common. However, there are other traits that are shared by many of those immersed in the system. To these we will now turn.

It should be remembered that those promoting neo-Calvinism are not monolithic in every aspect, and some of the features mentioned below would be true of any number of evangelicals who are neither Calvinistic nor charismatic. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to find these identifying marks embraced by adherents of the movement.

Serious about theology and Christian living

This is the most commendable aspect of the majority of the “young, restless, and Reformed” crowd. All of the leadership, and most of the enthusiasts, are serious students of Scripture and substantial theological works that are concerned with truth. They seek preachers and teachers who deliver solid and thoughtful exegesis. They have little tolerance for sloppy thinking, weak answers and careless preaching. They want to be challenged and they want to be part of the debate, not merely passive consumers. This is a clear improvement over many in the recent past who were content with superficial teaching as long as their “needs” were being met and going to church was light and fun. Many of these young 20 and 30-somethings are reading Spurgeon, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, J. C. Ryle and the Puritans, as well as contemporary authors such as D. A. Carson, John Piper, Michael Horton, John MacArthur and Albert Mohler. Even if we disagree with some of the teachings of such men, this is an important upgrade over those who haven’t read anything deeper than Joel Osteen in their entire lives. If this generation can be guided in the right theological direction and challenged with hermeneutically sound preaching and writings, then the future of evangelicalism is looking brighter.

All of the leadership, and most of the enthusiasts, are serious students of Scripture.

Under this heading, a major emphasis on the gospel is the norm. Preaching the gospel, to others and to ourselves, permeates the New Calvinist’s writings and teachings. If anything negative can be stated about this it would be that the term “gospel” is so widely used that it is difficult at times to determine what is meant. In its broadest form some, like John Piper, have gone so far as to entitle one of his books, God Is the Gospel. But what most are meaning when they encourage focusing on the gospel is that we are to live our lives on the basis of God’s grace. Sinners who have been redeemed by a holy God cannot point to themselves as the means of salvation since there is nothing they can do to win the favor of God. The Lord’s grace is essential to salvation. But many Christians stop at conversion, which is a mistake. Grace is indispensable at every stage of our Christian life. We are not only saved by grace, we also live by grace. We never mature to the point where grace becomes unnecessary. When we sin, we should confess that sin and repent, but our repentance does not win new favor with God, who has flooded us with grace all along. In addition, when we sin we become cognizant afresh that we stand...
in grace alone. Moreover, our Lord is not stingy with dispensing grace at our time of need. The neo-Calvinists have immersed themselves in grace, and rightly so. Unfortunately, as Paul warned in Romans 6:1, some have taken grace too far. There are those so enamored with grace as to see any emphasis on good works, or even obedience, as symptoms of legalism. Some are teaching that the Christian ought not be concerned with growth and maturity, which they say leads to despair, but rather should focus on grace and glory in their weakness and failure.

The New Calvinists have been active in church planting and other means of spreading the gospel and making disciples. The Acts 29 Network, which is the primary organization devoted to planting like-minded churches, has over five hundred churches in thirty countries. It was founded by Mark Driscoll in 1998 who turned over the leadership to Matt Chandler in 2012. According to its website, the stated mission of Acts 29 is to band together churches which, for the sake of Jesus and the gospel, plant new churches and revitalize dead and dying churches around the world. The network publishes the following core values, which demonstrate not only solid theology but the centrality of the local church.

1. Gospel centrality in all of life.
2. The sovereignty of God in saving sinners.
3. The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for all of life and ministry.
4. The fundamental moral and spiritual equality of male and female and to men as responsible servant-leaders in the home and church.
5. The local church as the primary means by which God chooses to establish his kingdom on earth.

Happily, but surprisingly, the New Calvinists reject equalitarianism and embrace complementarianism, as point four above demonstrates. This is in clear contrast to the seeker-sensitive movement which often sees no difference between the leadership roles of men and women in the home and in the church. Perhaps this is due to leading theologians favored by the neo-Calvinism movement such as Wayne Grudem and John Piper who have written extensively defending the traditional biblical understanding of the role of men and women. Nevertheless this is a welcomed emphasis demonstrating both the desire to be Scripturally sound and a willingness to resist the political correctness of the culture when convinced of the truthfulness of their position.

I agree with Jeremy Walker who writes in his book, *The New Calvinism Considered*, “At its best, the new Calvinism is a God-centered movement. Insofar as this is so, we should both recognize it and rejoice because of it.” Unfortunately, as we will see below, we cannot rejoice unreservedly on all fronts.

**Yet, like many others in evangelicalism there is a definite undercurrent within the movement that implies that bigger is better.**

**Pragmatism**

On the positive side, the New Calvinists are willing to use every means possible to spread the good news and their understanding of theology and the church. Many of their leaders are profound and prolific writers, not just of books and magazine articles but of blogs and websites. The Gospel Coalition is one of the primary means of propagating and discussing their views, even though the blog includes more traditional Reformed theologians and pastors as well. Still many could be identified as New Calvinists if we are using the essential two characteristics of Reformed theology combined with charismatic practices (or at least openness to the continuation of the sign gifts). The founders of The Gospel Coalition, D.A. Carson and Timothy Keller, would both fit this description. Neither man could be described as a traditional charismatic, nor do the charismatic gifts play a major role in their theology or writings. Nevertheless both embrace continuationism, which teaches that all the sign gifts (prophecy, miracles, healings, tongues, etc.) are still active in the body of Christ today. The New Calvinists also spread their views via conferences, especially the Together for the Gospel conference, founded in part by C.J. Mahaney and influenced heavily by Sovereign Grace Ministries which is perhaps the best known of the New Calvinist organizations.

Yet, like many others in evangelicalism there is a definite undercurrent within the movement which implies that bigger is better. If a church is successful numerically then it must be doing something right. If a man is well known, popular with the masses, a great communicator and has built a megachurch, he apparently should be followed even if his doctrines or conduct are questionable. The unspoken (and sometimes spoken, as in the case of Driscoll) idea is that what works trumps what is right. This is certainly not an exclusive problem with the New Calvinists but examples within this circle abound.

Take the conduct of Mark Driscoll. From his earliest days of prominence his bullying, anger, abuse of those under his leadership and his coarse, offensive language, not to mention his explicit, virtually pornographic discussion of sex, has been evident. James 3:13-18 makes it clear that such a man is exhibiting a worldly wisdom which is the opposite of godly wisdom described as “first pure then peaceable…” (v. 17). Nevertheless, until recently he has been all but idolized by tens of thousands of admirers and officially endorsed by the likes of John Piper and Paul Tripp. Why? It would appear that the reason is his success. He has built an empire of sorts: he had a church with numerous campuses spread out over several states; he founded a church planting ministry (Acts 29) which has started over 500 churches, and he is an engaging speaker. In other words he has been successful. When he imploded recently, was booted from Acts 29, resigned his pastorate, and watched as his empire unraveled and collapsed, those who had been his allies pointed to the fact that he had been a loose cannon since the beginning of his ministry. Driscoll did not hide who he was, but those who should be guarding the sheep looked the other way because his methods, as ungodly as some of them were, seemed to work.

When James MacDonald decided to legitimize Oneness Pentecostal preach-
er T. D. Jakes and his non-Trinitarian theology, at the now infamous Elephant Room 2 interview, he and Mark Driscoll in effect lobbed easy questions to Jakes so that he would appear to be in agreement with Trinitarian doctrine while maintaining his Oneness views. Those with doctrinal knowledge concerning this debate saw through Jakes, but MacDonald in effect gave him a pass, virtually declaring Jakes “one of us.” In addition, not one word was mentioned concerning Jakes’s prosperity gospel heresy which has led perhaps millions around the globe toward an unbiblical lifestyle. Why was Jakes afforded such charity? It would appear that he is “too big to fail.” His ministry is among the biggest in the world; could he possibly be wrong?

We could move on to John Piper’s endorsement of Rick Warren or Steve Furtick’s mass baptism antics or James MacDonald’s public discipline of elders who dared challenge his leadership style, followed by a public apology some years later for his slanderous actions, or the Sovereign Grace’s and C. J. Mahaney’s cover up of a child abuse scandal. The common denominator seems to be that despite shameful behavior and bad theology, these men and organizations are still being touted as examples to follow because they are successful – what they do seems to work and that is enough for many.

RELEVANCE AND MISSIONAL LIVING

One of the key buzzwords used by a large number of young evangelicals, including the restless and Reformed, is “relevant.” By this is meant that our Christian lives and our churches need to reveal a “authentic” (another buzzword) faith. We need to scratch where people itch. We need to show people that Christ and the gospel are germane to real life. More than that, we need to demonstrate that Christians are real people, with real hurts, pains and problems just like the unsaved. A Christian is not someone who is so different that he cannot relate to unbelievers. The difference Christ has made in our lives is not that we have become perfect or so “holy” that we are weird and unapproachable by the unsaved. In fact, we are like them except that Christ has forgiven us our sins and has become the central focus of our lives.

Much of this philosophy is good, and should be considered seriously. The next step is to learn to relate to unbelievers rather than isolating ourselves from them. The neo-Calvinist believes that we live out this kind of relevancy primarily by being “missional” (yet another buzzword). This word has been so over used and abused that even those who love it sometimes are not sure what it means. Missional usually implies living out a life of love and care for others, serving and ministering in such a way that Christ is glorified in us and people are therefore drawn to Him and His saving grace.

**Missional living, in which believers are seeking the good of others, has a history of becoming an end in itself.**

There is much positive to say about living relevant, missional lives. Many serious Christians have developed a bunker mentality in which they hide from unbelievers as much as possible, hoping to protect themselves from bad influences. If they witness at all it is through unnatural methods such as cold-turkey evangelism in which they engage total strangers with the gospel and then retreat to their bunker. While this methodology has been utilized for years it is often artificial and does not allow the unregenerate to see Christ at work in the believer’s life. The missional approach places Christians in the lives of those who need Christ. As we live authentically the idea is that the unsaved will see the transformation Christ has brought about in our lives and will be drawn to it. Missional is a reversal of isolationism or an occasional foray into “enemy territory.” It is a full engagement in the world in which the unbeliever lives in order to be light and salt to them. This engagement is not purely for evangelism, which is usually viewed as manipulation (this is how the young, restless, and Reformed see so-called “friendship evangelism”). Rather, missional living is involvement with others in order to bless them, whether they come to Christ for salvation or not.

Again, there is much that could be learned from this emphasis on missional and authentic living. But before we wholeheartedly approve of this, some cautions are in order. Missional living, in which believers are seeking the good of others, has a history of becoming an end in itself. This will be discussed below when we look closer at social concerns and the gospel. Just as we can go too far by viewing the unsaved as mere targets or prospects for evangelism, we can go too far in the opposite way and see our temporary blessing of their lives as enough. Certainly showing love to our neighbor is an appropriate end in itself. We should not show such love just to maneuver people into position so that we can fire our gospel missiles at them. But on the other hand loving our neighbor could not be more perfectly expressed than by introducing them to the Savior. Blessing the lives of people, bringing happiness, comfort, and meeting their physical or emotional needs are wonderful things, but they are not a fulfillment of the Great Commission which calls for us to make disciples, not just bless people (Matthew 28:19-20).

And I find it interesting that even when evangelism is still the focus, in their effort to be relevant some of the New Calvinists turn Arminian, at least in their methodology. As will be demonstrated in the next section, many are on the hunt for new approaches that they believe will connect with the unsaved and will therefore win their hearts for Christ. Even as they would claim to believe that the unregenerate do not seek for God (Romans 3:10-18), and that they consider the gospel foolishness until the Lord opens their eyes and draws them to Himself (1 Corinthians 1:18), at the same time they have become dependent on new, relevant means by which to help God win sinners. This can lead to compromise of the truth in order to make the gospel appear attractive to the lost. This is the topic we will take up next.

CULTURALLY ENGAGED/Worldliness

The idea of being culturally engaged has been around evangelicalism for decades. It was perhaps the defining issue that ultimately separated the

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Formal or Non-Formal?

Formal or non-formal? What is the best choice for training church leadership in the Third World and maybe the world in general? Let me suggest that the best answer is both. Each are necessary for advancing the gospel of Christ and enabling church leaders to bring their church members to maturity.

I founded International Training & Equipping Ministries in 2003 for the purpose of providing as many African pastors and church leaders as possible with a biblical and theological foundation upon which to build their ministries. I put together the Institute in the Foundations of Church Leadership, an intense four day, sixteen-lecture seminar for this purpose. One friend refers to it as a “Bible School in a Box.” Little did I know at the time how strategic and necessary such an approach to pastoral training is.

Most of the emphasis given to theological training is on formal training. Over and over we hear about someone or some group starting a school. I applaud those efforts but at the same time I must raise a caution flag.

A study published by the Evangelical Missions Quarterly in 2004 stated that 85% of the leaders in the worldwide evangelical church are untrained and the number is growing by 7000 per day. The study ended with this revealing stat. If every school or institution that trains leaders for the evangelical church was functioning at 120% capacity (highly unlikely) less than 10% of the untrained leaders mentioned above would find a place in one of those schools or institutions. What’s the message? Formal training cannot reach more than 10% of the untrained church leaders in the world. The rest will need to be reached using a non-formal approach.

Formal training trains a relative few. Non-formal training can train far greater numbers. Between 2003 and 2013, I trained over 4,500 at one of our “Bible School in a Box” seminars. But formal training is much deeper and more comprehensive than non-formal.

So here is my idea on how to get the best from both approaches. What I propose is that those involved in training nationals formally partner with organizations offering good, solid, seminar based non-formal training. They should get their students involved in training some of the 90% who will never find a place in a Bible school of any kind. Make it a part of their educational experience. That insures that many of those 90% will get some Bible and theology but it might also find among the 90% others who are motivated by the non-formal training to go on and find a way to enroll at a formal school.

Formal training cannot reach more than 10% of the untrained church leaders in the world. The rest will need to be reached using a non-formal approach.

The best approach to training leadership for the growing evangelical church in the world, in my opinion, is a combination of formal and non-formal training using faculty, students, and graduates who are or have been involved in formal Bible and theological education to conduct non-formal but highly biblical and theological seminars.
Uganda Welcomes Your Library!

Thomas Obunde, Director of Word of Life Uganda wrote the following report requesting any theological books you would like to donate to their school’s library. This is a great way for IFCA pastors to redistribute unused study books to a group of students who really could use them!

The program is foundational for anyone who seeks to live their lives for God’s glory in whatever place he has called them to serve him whether career or Christian ministry. Our core values are: Study, Live and Ministry.

August 1 marked a milestone as Word of Life Uganda celebrated the first graduation at Word of Life Africa Bible Institute (WOLABI). The ministry that started last year was an answer to prayer over the years. Our first enrollment was 16 students from different regions in Africa: South Africa, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia. The class included university graduates who gave one year of their lives to the studying of God’s Word. Every single day of their time at Word of Life Uganda has been a testimony to what God can do in the lives of His children.

WOLABI is dedicated to providing people with a core foundation in Biblical knowledge where students are exposed to 5 hours of study in God’s Word per day, equipping them with the skills needed to interact with it correctly and accurately. Students are taught by well-known teachers from all over the world who provide diversity to their learning experience while staying true to God’s Word.
these six months, the students are taught God’s Word and are equipped with knowledge and skills that will be efficient even as they start their adult journey in life.

Some of the Bible Institute students that we had for our pioneer year were graduates of the Discipleship Training School. It is amazing to see the life-changing journey they have undertaken, and how God’s Word takes effect in their lives as they apply what they have learned to the surrounding communities. Quite a number of students have benefited from this program.

In addition to Camps, Bible Clubs, and Local Church Ministry, we are excited to share the gospel and reaching young people through the Bible Institute and Discipleship training School. And this last September, the National Theological College and Graduate School (NTCGS) began a Bachelor of Biblical Studies program designed to strengthen the ministry of pastors and lay workers in the region. We are excited to host the team that is running the program.

One of our greatest needs is books. They are expensive and hard to find on the market here in Uganda. Our newest Bible Institute Class is comprised of 25 students and we will have about the same number enroll in the training led by NTCGS.

In recent years, many pastors and Christian leaders in North America have begun exchanging their book libraries for electronic libraries. Word of Life Uganda would welcome donations of good reference books (commentaries, Bible dictionaries, Bible Handbooks, etc.) for East African students who desire to deepen their knowledge of God’s Word who will use these books while studying on the campus of Word of Life Bible Institute.

Your donated books may be sent to Word of Life in New York and they will be delivered to Uganda for our use at WOLABI:

Word of Life Uganda Library
Word of Life Fellowship Inc.
71 Olmsteadville Road
Pottersville NY 12860
fundamentalists and the (called at the time) neo-evangelicals (now evangelicals) in the 1950s. The question on the table was how much accommodation to the culture was necessary to engage it? Since the secular culture in general sees the gospel and biblical Christianity as foolishness, the question was: what will we have to do as Christians to get its approval? Fundamentalists eventually chose not to worry about engaging culture and instead focused their attention on rescuing people from a Christ-rejecting world. Their churches became an oasis populated by like-minded believers who wanted to worship God, devote themselves to prayer and the Word and be a beacon of spiritual light to what they called “the lost and dying world.” The danger for the fundamentalist was becoming ingrown and losing a passion for the lost, except during specialized evangelistic campaigns and efforts. The danger for the neo-evangelical was losing the biblical purpose of the church and becoming compromised by the very world they were trying to reach.

Evidence of compromise (not unlike earlier evangelicals experienced) with the young, restless and Reformed movement is readily available, although that evidence can be interpreted a number of ways. What the neo-Calvinists call engaging culture is often termed worldliness by its critics. Here we must define worldliness as the Bible does, not as many conservative Christians do today. Worldliness is not primarily a matter of dos and don'ts, of entertainment preferences or convictions, but a mindset of one who James would say desires to be a friend of the world and its corrupt system of life. In James 4:4 we read, “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” While James is addressing a different context we see that coziness with the world system is spiritual adultery. In the context of engaging the culture just how close can we get before we begin to mimic the world rather than engage it for Christ? Said another way, in order for ourselves and our message not to appear foolish to the unregenerate, what are we willing to compromise in doctrine and in practice? Here are a few concerns that are troubling.

Openness to evolution: Many believe it is hard to be accepted seriously in our modern era and yet subscribe to some form of a young-earth creation account. If we are to engage culture it seems paramount that we accept evolution, but how do we do so and stay faithful to Scripture? Timothy Keller believes he has found the formula. He is representative of many who acknowledge some form of theistic evolution (in his case it is progressive evolution). In his highly-regarded apologetic volume The Reason for God, he writes: “I think Genesis 1 has the earmarks of poetry and is therefore a ‘song’ about the wonder and meaning of God’s creation. Genesis 2 is an account of how it happened...For the record I think God guided some kind of process of natural selection, and yet I reject the concept of evolution as All-encompassing Theory...[quoting David Atkinson], “if ‘evolution’ remains at the level of scientific biological hypothesis, it would seem that there is little reason for conflict between the implications of Christian belief in the Creator and the scientific explorations of the way which—at the level of biology—God has gone about his creating process.”

Keller is unofficially linked with Bio-Logos, an organization dedicated to the promotion of theistic evolution.

Music: When Mark Driscoll started his church, Mars Hill in Seattle, Washington he wanted to be relevant and he wanted his church to grow numerically. In order to do both he realized the power of music to draw the masses. He said, “I envisioned a large church that hosted concerts for non-Christian bands and fans on a phat sound system, embracing the arts...” Virtually any form of music, performed by excellent musicians, regardless of whether they knew Christ, was used to grow the church. At one point the church began to host concerts at an auditorium which, “rarely hosted Christian bands since our main goal was getting non-Christian kids to come to the concerts.”

Driscoll is not alone in advocating the use of secular and often ungodly music and musicians in order to draw a crowd. Keller has the same philosophy concerning using unbelievers to minister at church services because of their expertise. He writes: “First, we use only professional and/or trained musicians for our corporate worship services, and we pay them all...Second, we often include non-Christian musicians in our services who have wonderful gifts and talents... When we invite non-Christians to use their talents in corporate worship, we are simply calling them, along with every creature, to bring their ‘peculiar honors’ and gifts to praise their Creator.”

Many, including myself, would challenge this use of either secular music or unsaved musicians as ministers within the body of Christ. First Corinthians 12 speaks of the Lord giving to the child of God spiritual gifts to minister within the local church, and the Spirit placing each of us within the body of Christ just as He desires (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, 18, 24, 28) for the edification of the church. There is no biblical warrant for using unbelievers, or their godless worldview, via music, simply because it professionalizes the presentation or draws a crowd. The ends don’t justify the means.

Crude ness and drinking: To the extent that Mark Driscoll has influenced the New Calvinism movement it would appear crudeness and profanity are acceptable to many, apparently as a means of relating to unbelievers and being authentic. In his Confessions of a Reformation Rev, we find Driscoll comfortable with barnyard words (pp. 67, 94, 128, 129, 134), sexual innuendos (pp. 59-60, 94-96, 128), and even crude depictions of God such as repeatedly referring to the Holy Spirit as “God the Ghost”
Many heretical understanding concerning Chesterton, all Roman Catholics with Malcolm Muggeridge and G. K. likes to quote Flannery O'Connor, the culture, despite errant teachings Christian leaders that are popular in promoting this new form of Calvinism.”

But there is a looming disaster in pro and come away from the compromises. The doctrines better than their teachers, movement will grasp the implications of the doctrines better than their teachers, and come away from the compromises.

Sociological Compromise

The New Calvinists are quite concerned about social justice, and rightly so. As citizens of this planet we have an obligation to care for the world and the people in it, not only spiritually but physically as well. But many make the mistake of not distinguishing between the mission of individual Christians, as dual citizens of both heaven and earth, and the mandate given to the church as the corporate people of God, which is outlined in the Great Commission. As a result not only can the church lose its unique place in the world as the one institution ordained by God to preach the Word and function as Christ’s body and make disciples, but the gospel itself can be mutated.

Timothy Keller perhaps is the most influential representative of the social agenda approach to ministry within New Calvinists ranks. The official vision statement for the church he pastors, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, in New York City, reads: “As a church of Jesus Christ, Redeemer exists to help build a great city for all people through a movement of the gospel that brings personal conversion, community formation, social justice, and cultural renewal to New York City and, through it, to the world.”

Keller and Redeemer clearly see the mission of the church as having a social dimension in which the church helps to bring about cultural renewal, social justice, elimination of poverty, and more. But I have this concern: confusing the gospel. Drawing from N.T. Wright and the “missional” understanding of Christianity, Keller infuses a social dimension into his gospel definition. Keller’s gospel is more than the good news that Christ has come to reconcile us to God; it is also the call to solve the world’s problems of injustice, poverty and ecological concerns. He quotes N. T. Wright, not Scripture, to support his view: “The message of the resurrection is that this world matters! That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won... If Easter means Jesus Christ is only raised in a spiritual sense—[then] it is only about me, and finding a new dimension in my personal life. But if Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world—news which warms our hearts precisely because it isn’t just about warming hearts. Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things—and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God to implement victory of Jesus over them all.”

Later in The Reason for God, Keller makes clear what he means: “The purpose of Jesus’ coming is to put the whole world right, to renew and restore the creation, not to escape it. It is not just to bring personal forgiveness and peace, but also justice and shalom to the world...The work of the Spirit of God is not only to save souls but also to care and cultivate the face of the earth, the material world.”

Scripture knows nothing of this type of gospel message. Nowhere in the New Testament will you find such a commission given to the people of God. And as E. S. Williams points out, “Of the many works of the Holy Spirit revealed in Scripture, caring for and cultivating the material world for its restoration and purity is not one.” You will, however, find a similar message in the emergent church, N.T. Wright’s “New Perspective on Paul” and those reviving the old “Social Gospel” agenda.
Williams documents that Keller’s book *Generous Justice* speaks of and leans on the teachings of Gustavo Gutierrez and his book, *A Theology of Liberation*. “But he does not tell his readers that Gutierrez was [is] a Dominican priest, widely accepted as the founder of liberation theology.” This should be considered carefully before one follows Keller and others too far down the social justice road as the mission of the church.

As one author writes, “At root...is a question of how to engage the culture without losing one’s soul. Fundamentalism feared losing its soul and did not engage the culture; evangelicalism feared being different from the culture and is in danger of losing its soul.”

**CONCLUSION**

In 2009 Time Magazine published its list of ten ideas changing the world today. Number three on that list was New Calvinism: “If you really want to follow the development of conservative Christianity, track its musical hits. In the early 1900s you might have heard ‘The Old Rugged Cross,’ a celebration of the atonement. By the 1980s you could have shared the Jesus-is-my-buddy intimacy of ‘Shine, Jesus, Shine.’ And today, more and more top songs feature a God who is very big, while we are...well, hark the David Crowder Band: “I am full of earth/ You are heaven’s worth/ I am stained with dirt/ Prone to depravity.” Calvinism is back, and not just musically.

That Time magazine article goes on to point out it is not traditional Calvinism changing the world, but the New Calvinism variety being described in this article. Some of the things I have detailed concerning New Calvinism in this article and in the article in the last issue of VOICE have been positive. But much of New Calvinism is challenging the very definitions of the church, as well as having powerful ramifications on theology. We dare not ignore New Calvinism, but as always it must be examined in the light of Scripture.

**ENDNOTES**

1. http://www.acts29network.org/about/distinctives/
5. Ibid., p. 126, (cf. pp. 68, 93, 100, 158).
11. Ibid., p. 223.
12. E. S. Williams, p.20.
13. Ibid., p. 21.
15. http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html
Appointment with the Wonderful Counselor

I was upset! This young divorced mom we were trying to help was in trouble. She had irrational fears. She thought bugs were crawling all over her and so she tried to tear her clothes off. She thought that some of her clothes were from the Devil so she started throwing her clothes away. She got in such a fearful state that her loving relatives had her commit herself to a private mental hospital where we visited her for several months. They said she was psychotic. She was now drugged but still fearful and hallucinating. She didn't seem better, just slower. I was so concerned that I called a Christian counselor and set up an appointment for her. We had her sign herself out and drove her directly to the Christian counselor’s office. She was in that room for a long time. When she came out, she was at peace. The problem that had been at the root of her symptoms was resolved. She came to our home where her young children were living with us and lived with us for several months. She got a job and an apartment. She eventually married a fine Christian man and has been living for the Lord with no more psychotic episodes.

That Christian counseling session was over 35 years ago. What did that Christian counselor say to her in that 90 minute session that made all the difference in her life? I wanted to find out, so I began to study with that counselor and others. What began with my questions has led to a lifelong study of Christian counseling. Christian counseling deals with sin, forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit to change us. I learned a lot from several Christian counselors who applied the Bible to counseling.

Then, after many years of counseling, God led me into an even deeper understanding. It began with a study of Isaiah 9:6 where the Messiah is predicted to be the “wonderful counselor”. (There is no comma in the original Hebrew). I began thinking about how God Himself counseled individuals as recorded in the Bible. I looked at how God counseled Cain, Hagar, Job, Miriam, the woman caught in adultery, Peter with depression and Paul with his “thorn.”

I noticed how God, the Wonderful Counselor, asked questions, gave encouragement, gave options, warned of consequences and predicted outcomes.

I began to see a pattern of technique that God Himself used to help these individuals with problems like, anger, abuse, affliction, racism, adultery, depression and pain. I noticed how God, the Wonderful Counselor, asked questions, gave encouragement, gave options, warned of consequences and predicted outcomes. Do you know the 23 counseling methods used by God Himself? What a study it has been!

I am so excited about it that I have written a book entitled, “Sixteen Counseling Sessions with the Wonderful Counselor” available from CBD or Amazon in paperback or Digital format. Just “Google” the name of the book. The contents of this book have been taught to missionaries in Ecuador, Germany and Uruguay with Crossworld and Biblical Ministries Worldwide. Also, I have recorded 18 free YouTube lessons available to use in teaching this material to your small groups or adult Sunday School classes. God is using this book to encourage pastors and Christian workers to have full confidence in the Word of God.
For more than fifty years he preached the Precious Blood, the Infallible Book and the Blessed Hope throughout North America, most of the West Indies and in Israel and the Middle East on many occasions. The legacy of his life and ministries will long continue to enrich those who came under his spiritual influence. May God raise up more evangelists in IFCA International like this dear brother from Canada.

Arthur John Durnan

Arthur John Durnan was born July 24, 1933 in Ontario, Canada and suddenly on February 18, 2015 at 10am, the Lord Jesus Christ called Arthur Durnan to his heavenly home peacefully and with much joy. He was reunited with his mother and father (Arthur and Jessie Durnan) and his two sisters in heaven.

Arthur was raised in a Christian home and at the age of seventeen on October 26, 1950 he trusted Christ as his Lord and Savior. His life was changed completely and he had a new course of direction forever. He became an evangelist, ardent soul-winner and pastor as well as loving and faithful husband and godly father.

After his salvation, he became associated with Youth for Christ and directed Barrie, Ontario YFC. He then served as Associate Pastor of Toronto’s Missionary Tabernacle for five years and joined the IFCA in 1961. He was the founding Pastor of Hastings Park Bible Church in Belleville, Ontario where he served for almost eight years. After one of his evangelistic “Days of Decision” Crusades in Bermuda, he accepted the invitation to pastor Calvary Church of Southampton, Bermuda and ministered faithfully there for almost six years. Later, he accepted a call as founding Pastor-Teacher of Cornerstone Church in Belleville, Ontario. All throughout his pastoral ministries and beyond, he also served as evangelist under The Arthur Durnan Ministries / Crusades. He faithfully delivered “Messages For Our Mess Age” sermons until the Lord called him home.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

Prayer is requested for his precious wife Diane and their two daughters Dale-Ann Woznyj and Dawn-Ava (Andrew) Dagys and his five wonderful grandchildren who look forward with keen and prayerful anticipation to meeting him again around the Throne of God in the soon-coming Rapture of the Church. Oh, what a thrilling “Meeting-in-the-Skies” THAT will be! Heaven will be a marvelous place!

His ambassadorship to the world’s lost sheep completed, Arthur was promoted to Glory to be with His Saviour, Jesus Christ. For all who trust Christ, it is never “Good-by,” but only “Good Night, I’ll see you in the Morning!”

Malcolm Gilmour Bicker

After a long illness Malcolm died peacefully at home in Albuquerque, NM on March 13, 2015 at the age of 81.

Malcolm was born April 26, 1933 in Chiclayo, Peru to missionaries Clifford and Ruth Bicker. He graduated from BJU in 1956. He married Patricia Gumm in 1955 and over the years they were blessed with 3 children. He pastored for over 55 years starting in Alliance, NE and continuing in several locations in PA, 10 years in AZ and ending with 22 years at Alameda Bible Church, Albuquerque, NM.

Malcolm loved God and gave his entire life to serving Him in full time ministry. He had the heart of a servant. He loved to write poetry and music and enjoyed playing the piano. He also had a blog at hiddentreasurers.wordpress.com where he would post many of his sermons. Before the end of his life he was happy to see his autobiography Gentle Warrior published. He especially enjoyed visits from his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. His great grandchildren affectionately called him “Bobby”.

Malcom is survived by his wife of 59 years, Patricia Bicker; his three children, 11 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren. He is missed by all of them and by his brothers and sisters in the IFCA.
David M. Holly

David M. Holly, age 89, of Onsted, Michigan and formerly of Tecumseh, Michigan entered into the presence of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whom he loved and served, on August 26, 2015 with his loving family and hospice care givers by his side.

David Holly was born on May 17, 1926 in Montour Falls, NY the son of Jay and Mildred (Smith) Holly. On August 17, 1951, he married Lois Foster in Beckley, WV and together they shared sixty-four loving years together serving Christ.

David graduated from Watkins Glen High School in New York, then attended Cornell University. He later graduated from Moody Bible Institute. David first pastored at Grace Gospel Church in Daniels, WV, then when he moved to Michigan he pastored at Tipton Community Church for a little over three years. He then started Grace Bible Church of Tecumseh where he retired after serving his Lord for over forty years. He was a faithful member of the IFCA, a former chaplain with Hospice of Lenawee and, when he wasn’t helping others, he enjoyed researching ancestry.

Rev. Holly is survived by his loving wife, Lois and three children and one son-in-law, Jerry D. Holly of Adrian, James M. (Tammy) Holly of Onsted, and John R. (Stephanie) Holly of Adrian and son-in-law, James (Brenda) Abbott. He was preceded in death by his daughter Joanna R. Abbott.

We Welcome these Men to our Fellowship

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<th>Mr. Ben D. Olson</th>
<th>Pastor Nathan T. Robbins</th>
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College Station, TX 77845
The Thief
In My Home

There’s this thief I know. Every day I open my doors, lay out the welcome mat and let him waltz into my home. He doesn’t go for my jewelry, look for my laptop or rummage through my drawers. He goes straight for my mind. He binds me up and takes me hostage. He flaunts his successes and parades his achievements. He isn’t purposefully malicious, but he reminds me of my shortcomings and magnifies my flaws. His source of information always seems to be new and fresh. When the day’s done, he releases me and walks out of my house. I turn off the lights, lock the doors, kiss my husband goodnight, and go to sleep. The next morning I wake up, brew some coffee, unlock my doors, and let that thief do his work again. The cycle continues and I welcome it. The thief is my friend. My choice. My daily companion.

The thief is small, I can carry him with me. All day. EVERYDAY. If I was totally honest, in my heart of hearts, I’d admit I don’t think I could live without him. I’m attached no matter how much he distracts me or how small he makes me feel.

This thief that threatens my joy is named social media.

Don’t get me wrong. I love social media. I love drawing inspiration from other photographers and bloggers on Instagram, seeing birth announcements on Facebook, creating dream houses and wardrobes on Pinterest, and catching up with old friends. We are accessible EVERYWHERE. We have tablets, smart phones, laptops and wifi at almost every restaurant, store and work place. You don’t have to search for it. We are always plugged in. Connected. Peering into the life windows of friends and strangers at just the click of a button. Social media is amazing, but if you’re not careful, it can open the door of your mind to thieves. Thieves that steal things a lot more valuable than appliances or jewels. My iphone has been my teacher lately, and here are three things I’ve seen this thief, left unguarded, steal from me.

**He Steals My Joy**

Comparison is an acid. It eats away at our self-worth until there’s nothing left. We place ourselves in recliners and press play to the highlight reels of thousands of peoples lives. My feed is full of moms with perfect children, brand new outfits, glorious hair and Pinterest homes. One friend has a husband who surprises her with personalized love notes written in candles nightly, while another always seems to be a step ahead on the corporate ladder. We compare our mundane daily tasks to the live feed of edited and carefully selected photos of the best moments of someone’s life. It’s easy to forget that behind the picture is a life. A person. A person who isn’t untouched by life’s ups and downs. Immersing ourselves into others happiness can set the perfect arena for wallowing in self pity if we aren’t vigilant. Don’t compare someone’s chapter 10 to your chapter 1. Count your blessings instead. The Lord’s mercies are new each morning.

**He Steals My Time**

I’m always connected. How many memories, opportunities, and hours have I wasted? Forever gone. I’m embarrassed to even try to calculate it. These are waters I’m still learning to navigate. Time is precious, and social media isn’t evil...it’s a balance. I have seen blogs help mend broken hearts, stay at home moms start their own thriving small businesses, and my life has personally been saved on a daily basis by Pinterest and its mind blowing archives full of recipes. The resource is invaluable. The important thing is to be all there, WHEREVER you are.

Social media is amazing, but if you’re not careful, it can open the door of your mind to thieves.
the moment. The newsfeed will be there tomorrow, but the moments will not.

**HE STEALS MY CONFIDENCE**

Constantly being connected to hundreds of people and subjecting yourselves to their opinions and advice can have positive and negative effects. Living your life on a stage in front of your peers is something new to this generation. We have never been so accessible, so widespread. When we expose ourselves we can expect people to make mistakes, to say things they don’t think through. We open ourselves up to more opportunities to get hurt and to make thoughtless mistakes ourselves. It’s easy to judge our worth and popularity based on how many “likes” we get or how many “followers” we have. Our sense of self worth is tied up in what others think, and when those expectations aren’t met we can get shaken. We doubt ourselves. It’s so easy to get lost in the sea of people and forget whose opinion matters.

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*Live in the moment.  The newsfeed will be there tomorrow, but the moments will not.*

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**CONCLUSION**

Everything in life comes with a warning label. Even the best things come with the possibility of a negative side effect. Social media is everywhere. We can’t ignore it or run from it. I choose to embrace it. I embrace it knowing its ups and downs. The thief can lose his power over me when I gain an understanding of how he works. I have to know myself. Set guidelines and ask for accountability. This week I had too much. I was feeling inadequate and struggling with my thoughts. I finally just handed my phone to my husband and told him to hide it. I know myself, and know what things trigger me. I am responsible for me and have to know how guard myself. So what are a few things I can do to keep this thief from stealing?

Use social media as a platform for good. Encourage one another, cheer each other on. You never know who is watching. Make your wall your ministry. Hide friends who focus on negative controversial articles. Choose friends who share truth and speak encouragement over your life. BE ALL THERE. Wherever you are. If you feel yourself getting bogged down, UNPLUG. Put your phone away. Grab a book. Take a walk. In the pages of the Bible, remind yourself who you are and what God thinks you are worth.

Social media is a subject that isn't new. It isn’t some break through, but it’s where I find myself now. These past few weeks I have been reminded that I have control over who I allow into my mind. I don’t want this thief to be allowed to steal my joy, time and confidence. I want to use this gift to be a blessing to others, and I hope you do too. Never forget, you are more than just a screen name.
Being a jail chaplain has its many challenges. August was my fifteenth year at Pinellas County Jail as chaplain. My wife Carol and I were led by God to move from the mountains of Colorado to the beaches of Clearwater, Florida in the summer of 2000. God’s hand in this was evident from the job interviews to the quick selling of our house in Colorado.

Throughout my time at Pinellas County Jail, I’ve served under six different senior chaplains with various doctrinal and religious practices. I’ve had numerous opportunities to share God’s saving Gospel with inmates and staff. When the inmates at our facility, numbering nearly 3000, are locked up, most of the roadblocks to hearing the Gospel are removed and many inmates experience what I like to label “a wakeup call.”

The area I generally work at Pinellas County Jail is what is referred to as “Max,” where most of the seriously charged inmates reside. Some are accused of murder, rape, and robbery while others are awaiting trial for terrorism or drug solicitation and use. All of these inmates have souls that need Christ and the eternal answer He provides. Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes unto the Father but through Me (John 14:6).”

Recently I was ministering to an inmate who had been sentenced to two life sentences for multiple murders. He readily admitted his guilt and asked for prayer to maintain a strong testimony for our Lord while he served his sentence.

Sharing God’s promises in His Word, this inmate leaned on God’s promise to all of His children, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

Another inmate, in and out of prison for twenty-five years for repeated drug offenses, shared that he was tired of the way he had been living his life and needed to make some major changes. I was privileged to share with him that only God can make permanent changes and it begins with confessing sin, trusting Christ and having a personal relationship with God.

Chaplain John Schroder

John Schroder is an IFCA endorsed Chaplain in Clearwater, FL at the Pinellas County Jail where he has served for 15 years.
through Jesus Christ. In his jail cell this middle aged man accepted the gift of salvation by faith and was adopted into God’s family.

As I have opportunities to minister and serve inmates, two things I always share with them are: 1) Every morning thank God that He woke you up, even in Pinellas County Jail, because God has given you another day to serve Him on this earth; 2) Ask God what He wants to teach you today and learn it so He doesn’t have to keep bringing you back again and again.

One of the deputies in the jail drew me aside one day to ask what I could do for his son whose girlfriend had just committed suicide. By sharing the comfort of God’s promises I was honored to help him see the role God places on fathers when their children face a crisis. Divine appointments at the jail are set up by God every day and I do all I can not to miss them. It is such a joy to see God at work in saving someone from beginning to end – to observe God’s grace at work!

One of the hardest parts of serving in a jail setting is giving death notifications to inmates who just lost someone in their family while incarcerated. Some of the inmates react with violent emotional outbursts by throwing chairs or by yelling at the top of their lungs. When the inmate calms down, it is at that time we can minister to their crisis need of sharing the answers God provides for those who turn to Him.

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**Divine appointments at the jail are set up by God every day and I do all I can not to miss them.**

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When we share our faith where God has called us, He will open the doors. As for me, even though I’m in jail most days, I’m truly free in Him! Those men and women locked up in correctional facilities are “free behind bars” when they put their total trust in the saving grace of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection.

Over the tenure of my time at Pinellas County Jail, things have changed as our political climate has slipped into demonstrating little tolerance for Biblical views. Yet God is faithful and as His servant, I am grateful that the open door of ministry hasn’t closed where God has called me to minister in His name. One day at a time is how God commands us to live in sharing His Gospel with a world that desperately needs Him.

Compromise is all around us but God’s Word reveals our roadmap for ministry and if we stay true to it, we will continue on the right path. I thank God that He is Sovereign and the One we will all give an answer to someday. Yes, some days seem endless at the jail and persecution arises, but God will see me through each day until my mission of ministry at Pinellas County Jail is completed!
The 2016 IFCA National Youth Convention will take place at Summit University in Clark Summit, PA. Dates for the Youth Convention are June 26-July 2, 2016.

Our National IFCA Youth Convention is set up to benefit EVERY teen in your church. There is something for everyone and we are so excited to continue encouraging and equipping them to serve in their church today.

One of the ways we plan specifically for this to happen is to keep the cost as low as possible. We don’t want anyone to miss the youth convention because of funds. This is why we price our convention “tight” to budget. However, something we have never done is set up a fund to help those who cannot come to convention and finances are the only reason. In the last few years, we have had some wonderfully generous people who have contributed to help students who needed financial assistance. This has given us the idea to begin the “Send-a-Student” Fund. This fund will be used to aid families that apply for assistance through an application form on our website. Our youth council will look at each application and help make approval for these requests with great care.

Our desire is that if finances are the ONLY reason that a teen can’t make it to our convention, we want to provide assistance and give our constituency an opportunity to help us do so.

If you are interested in contributing towards the “Send-a-Student” Fund, make your check out to IFCA International and enclose it with a little note “IFCA Youth Send A Student Fund.” Then send it to IFCA, P.O. Box 810, Grandville, MI 49468.
Great Parents Walk with God

God has given you a wonderful gift - the privilege of being a parent. As you already know, exciting opportunities and huge challenges lie ahead. The good news is that God wants to lighten your load by partnering with you, so you can become a great parent!

Parenting is very similar to gardening. Children begin as seeds that eventually grow into mature plants—producing both good and bad fruit. In a healthy environment, kids have unlimited growth potential. The satisfaction of nurturing a young disciple who blossoms and flourishes is priceless: “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth” (3 John 4).

Right now, your children are like tender, young plants. To bloom and prosper, they need rich soil plus daily doses of sunshine and water. To become a great parent, you need the same things! The first step to raising a godly child is to be a godly parent. You cannot afford to neglect your own spiritual needs. Parenting requires God’s wisdom and strength. As you stay connected to the Lord, you will establish priorities that build a strong Christian home.

Unfortunately, children rarely rise to a level of spiritual growth that exceeds their parents. Therefore, your first priority is to become engaged in personal disciplines that draw you closer to Christ. If you keep growing, your child will, too. If you stagnate or plateau, it is likely that your child will do so as well.

God abundantly supplies to believers His incredible P-O-W-E-R and He will direct your steps as a parent (see Isaiah 40:31; Acts 1:8; and Galatians 2:20). The Holy Spirit wants to guide every step of your journey (Jeremiah 29:11; John 16:13; Romans 8:28). As you practice these five disciplines, the Lord will live His life in you and through you.

Pray from Your Heart
Prayer is talking openly with God. He eagerly responds to your requests!
(2 Chronicles 7:14; John 15:7; 1 John 5:14-15)

Obey Your Loving Shepherd
God is your Shepherd and your Lord. Things always go better when He’s in charge.
(John 10:27-28; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:23-24)

Worship with Your Church
The Church is your Christian family. Unwrap your spiritual gifts to help you worship God and serve the Church.
(John 4:23-24; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10)

Explain Your Faith to Others
Everyone needs to hear about God’s love and forgiveness. Share your faith with those around you.
(John 3:16; John 14:6; Acts 1:8)

Read Your Bible Daily
The Bible came from God. He speaks to you on every page.
(Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Action Step: Your child will someday blossom into adulthood - the harvest will come. You will reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7-10). Parents who embrace the responsibility to raise godly children must assess their own spiritual condition. First and foremost, Jesus Christ calls you to follow Him. Walking in Jesus’ steps and being His disciple is the Christian’s highest privilege and priority. Embrace God’s invitation to walk with Him every moment of every day!

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