

FALL 2023

DESTINY

M A G A Z I N E

**GREAT
FOR GOD**

**DLI LAUNCHES
ADVANCED
CERTIFICATES**

**READY FOR
FALL INFLUX?**

**RACING
RESTING
REDEEMING**

**FAITH THAT
OVERCOMES**



Events that Inspire



At Destiny, we understand the need for real, authentic connection within our Destiny family. Pastors and church leaders frequently communicate that "true life change happens within the context of relationships" but often find it difficult to find the time or opportunities to cultivate them. The purpose of our Destiny Connect Events is to do just that: to provide opportunities for life changing connections to happen within the Destiny family and its circle of influence.

This year, Destiny will host 4 Regional Connect Events in the Fall. These events will consist of a 3-day mini-conference hosted in different parts of the country. But we also want to expand our opportunities for engagement and to build relationships throughout the year. In addition to the Regional events we are hosting, we will be launching specialty events that appeal to various interests and activities under the Destiny umbrella.

These specialty events will be hosted by leaders within our Destiny Network. You will find a variety of events from shopping trips and fishing/hunting excursions, to conferences, retreats and seminars. See what our Destiny Family is up to and join in! We are better together. Check out our website for information about upcoming events within our network, or to host your own connect event!

FALL REGIONAL EVENTS

ELLSWORTH, WI **FT. WORTH, TX**
SEPTEMBER 21-23 OCTOBER 26-27

HAMMOND, LA **LANCASTER, PA**
OCTOBER 19-21 NOVEMBER 2-4

VISIT [DESTINYLEADERS.COM/CONNECT](https://destinyleaders.com/connect) FOR MORE INFORMATION
OR TO HOST A SPECIALTY EVENT



A WORD FROM PHIL & CATHY



Welcome to this edition of Destiny Magazine! What a summer it has been! It's been one filled with amazing highs, scary lows (especially for Cath and I), and powerful demonstrations of the power and faithfulness of God!

This edition is filled with great articles designed to equip you to roar into Fall with a fresh zeal and determination to be Great for God! Each writer has written well; they are anointed and clear - offering creative perspectives on important subjects from how to develop mentoring relationships to how to use your time in an effective God-honoring manner to encouraging words about focus, priorities and discipleship. And of course there's lots of information about opportunities that are headed your way this Fall through our Destiny Network. Enjoy!

(On a personal note, Cathy and I want to thank you all for your prayers, love and support during the challenging month of July. Your kindness and determined and focused prayers provided a strong place for us to stand and trust God! We will never forget your strength! We will offer more details from the journey in the days ahead, but just know how much we appreciate you all!)

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Faith that Overcomes



DR. PHILLIP BRASSFIELD

Hebrews 12:1-2

V1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares [us], and let us run with endurance the race that is set before

us,V2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of [our] faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

To really understand Hebrews 12, you must put it in context using Hebrews 11. Hebrews Chapter 11 tells us that, by faith, Abel sacrificed; by faith, Enoch walked; by faith, Noah built; by faith, Abraham obeyed; by faith, Sarah received, and so on. The thing each of the characters mentioned have in common was faith. Right? Yes, but there was something else, adversity.

Yes, faith, in a sense, is the star of the show in Hebrews Chapter 11, but there's another significant character playing a major role in the lives of each of those mentioned, adversity. Adversity was the supporting character that really added depth to the storyline. Everyone mentioned in Chapter 11 walked by faith during times of great difficulty. Their faith

was held in contrast to what they were going through. This is what makes their stories so powerful. When I think of the characters of Chapter 11, I'm reminded of something I once heard the famed Pastor Adrian Rogers say, "A faith that hasn't been tested can't be trusted." The reason we call Hebrews Chapter 11 the great roll call of the faithful is precisely that, each persevered in faith through challenging circumstances. Simply put, they overcame.

But, as Chapter 12 opens, it's as if the writer refuses to leave us as silent spectators of their heroic faith, as if we could watch from a safe distance. As Chapter 12 opens, he thrust us into the storyline when he says, "Therefore we also...." This is a bold and telling statement of inclusion. No, we cannot live lives safely removed from the difficulties and uncertainties of life. We must also walk by faith like they walked by faith. If we are to do this successfully, the writer gives us several pieces of strategic advice.

1. **We should live lives of simplicity.** He encourages us to avoid the complication that the cares of life and unconfessed sin creates. The writer describes it this way: "let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us...." Sin and the cares of life are like a trap designed to hold us out of or slow us down in the race of completing God's purpose for our lives. Sin keeps us out of the peace of God and feeling anxious as we struggle to carry a load of shame, and the cares of life hold us back by weighing us down. Carrying



too much weight reduces speed and agility; every athlete knows that.

2. Embrace the posture of patience. “Let us run with endurance in the race that is set before us...” We don’t always choose “the race that is set before us.” Life does that; people can do that. Sometimes the race set before us involves mountains and valleys we did not see coming or that were unexpected. Endurance is required. Endurance and patience do not suggest an acceptance or surrender to the circumstance, but rather a determination to overcome with an eye for the win. We dig deep and push hard. We meet every challenge with a confidence that God is in control and has planned a pathway to victory. We run knowing that “the win” is in us already and will make its appearance on the other side of endurance. We understand that every great victory is accomplished through the journey of resistance.

3. And keep Jesus as the focus of life. “Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith...” The entire section of Hebrews 11 and 12 is about faith that overcomes. Challenges and difficulties, and we all face them, can cause us to attach our attention to the wrong things. Both pleasure and pressure can isolate us, distract us, and cause us to allow the “Dis- family” to our thoughts. Distraction, Disappointment, Dissatisfaction, Discouragement, Despair. The Dis- family of words has nothing to offer you.

There’s no hope in them. But, Jesus has overcome. He’s already won. He is a proven, unrivaled, and never defeated champion. And He has started with us, is leading us on, and will finish with us. He has become our example and pace setter.

The writer challenges us to keep our focus on His victory instead of our circumstance. “Looking unto Jesus...” The word *looking* means to set your “attention on,” or to “focus on something different”. What we set our attention on, we tend to move toward. (My driving proves that.) The writer knows that endurance requires that you focus on the goal, not the distance or the challenges of the race. Focusing on Jesus keeps the “win” in the forefront of our minds.

As we focus on Jesus, He brings the “win alive in us.” We hear the cheers of those who have competed before us and have become a great cloud of witnesses who believe in Jesus and in the victory God has built into us before we even began the race. This is not mind over matter or the power of positive thinking; it is spirit over flesh and anointing over opposition! Those watching us encourage us to finish, to trust our Champion, and, like a high school football game - when you feel the crowd get into the game, and the anticipation arises with every exciting moment, you begin to feel the win in the crowd before it shows up on the field.

RACING, RESTING, REDEEMING

DR. LANDON GALLOWAY

In his renowned introduction to the Christian faith, "Mere Christianity," C.S. Lewis consistently presents the Christian worldview using a language of "neither this, nor that." This perspective finds its most lucid expression in the chapter called "Two Notes." Within this chapter, he skillfully refutes both radical individualism and complete human uniformity, leading to the following conclusion:

"I feel a strong desire to tell you - and I expect you feel a strong desire to tell me - which of these two errors is the worse. That is the devil getting at us. He always sends errors into the world in pairs - pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors. We have no other concern than that with either of them."

Lewis is aware of the fallen human condition. We perceive our world through a simplistic dualistic lens—constantly pitting one thing against another. Good versus evil. Within this perspective, Christians may distance themselves from the "enemy" and, instead, gravitate towards the most extreme and unconventional opposites to demonstrate their allegiance.

However, what if this approach is subtly perilous? What if evil is genuine, but far more cunning than we've imagined?

From the times of ancient philosophers like Aristotle, virtue has been envisioned as a balanced state between two vices—one of excess and the other of deficiency. While evil manifests in various forms, goodness remains singular. The struggle for morality and truth doesn't merely involve light against darkness, but rather light contending against darkness in its various forms.

I would like to apply the logic of Aristotle and Lewis to the work and rest rhythms of Christian leaders. In recent years, Christian writers, pastors, and thinkers have rightfully reclaimed the Sabbath as integral to Christian discipleship. Sabbath-keeping reflects the good design of God's creative order. God created the world in six days, then rested on the Sabbath. In Genesis 2:3, we find that He blesses this day and makes it holy. In the Creation narrative, living creatures are blessed and told



to increase in number. Human beings are blessed and told to be fruitful and multiply. The Sabbath is a blessed day. It brings multiplication. When we rest, we can get more done in six days than we could if we worked all seven.

God works, and God rests, and He calls us to participate in this sacred rhythm. He commands that we keep it holy, set apart. In fact, God calls the Sabbath holy before He calls anything else holy. For Christians, holy time precedes holy places and holy people. Later in the story of Israel, God adds the nuance of revolt to Sabbath:

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." (Deut. 5:15)

When they were slaves, they worked around the clock. In the Exodus account, Pharaoh repeatedly expressed concern that the Israelites weren't working. The primary task assigned to the Israelites was the building of supply cities, which were used to store their excess stuff. The Sabbath is to set them free from that bondage and to revolt against the worldview that says that life is all about what you can produce.

Pharaoh is alive and well. We are constantly told that we should work more. Technology has demanded that we remain available around the clock. Employers, clients, and church members expect immediate responses. We all know intuitively that the pace of the modern world is unsustainable. If one prefers verifiable data to back up this assertion, all that is necessary is a quick perusal of the statistics surrounding the effects of depression and anxiety on our society.

Christian leaders are especially susceptible to Pharaoh's demands, because we are in the business of saving souls and doing the work of God. The term "pastor" or "minister," is interpreted differently by the various members of our churches, so we find ourselves trying to meet everyone's needs and fulfill everyone's expectations. We feel the pressure to not only do the things on our actual job descriptions, but also all things that others have decided should be on our job descriptions. The result has been burnout, moral failure, and family upheaval. That is why so many books on Sabbath and rest have been published, and that is why you will often hear wise and seasoned preachers say things like, "Don't sacrifice your family on the altar of ministry."

I believe in that message with everything that is in me. I've read all the books and amen'd all the sermons. But, I'm starting to wonder if our sly adversary hasn't pulled the wool over our eyes. To correct the error of overwork, there is a temptation to take refuge in underwork. By standing up to Pharaoh and declaring that we would no longer burn the candle at both ends, have we failed to burn the candle at even one end? Yes, God rested on the seventh day. But, He worked on the other six! This particularly applies to those of us honored enough to receive a paycheck from the church. We need to rest. We need Sabbath. But, we also need to faithfully execute the tasks which God assigns us and for which our church compensates us.

Paul exhorts the Ephesians to live purposefully. He writes: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil," (Eph. 5:15-16). The Greek verb translated here, "look

carefully," is an accounting term. It connotes exactness, accuracy, and diligence. Paul wants his followers to examine their walks, the rhythms of their lives, with the same diligence as an auditor reviewing financial statements. He desires that they "redeem their time." The redemption of the time addresses two common errors of how we view time.

Error One is the "life as a race" mentality that your value is measured by your productivity, so use your time to prove your worth. Start the side hustle. Take the masterclass. Learn all the productivity hacks. Never miss a meeting. Cancel vacations. Work yourself to the bone to build bigger barns, so that you can sit back and say, "Soul, look what I've accomplished." (See Luke 12:19.)

Error Two is the "life as rest" mentality that elevates your needs above everything else. Don't sacrifice your time or energy. Do what makes you happy. Let someone else stress. Take tomorrow off, since you put in a full eight hours today. Even though Jesus says we will be known by our love for *one another*, He surely meant that we would be known by how well we love and take care of ourselves.

The truth is in the messy middle. We work hard, and we work smart, because our days are evil. We go to the office or the library or the factory, because we have meaningful work to do. We set priorities, eliminate distractions, and capitalize on the time we have been given. We schedule space to read, to learn, to create, to produce, and to think. We don't spend the bulk of our time on the urgent. We identify the important tasks, the things that only we can do. And, then we do them with all of our hearts, as to God and not man. We may abhor busy work, but we have no problem keeping busy and doing work.

AND, we rest hard. We seek out self-care and do things that bring us joy. We pursue hobbies and travel as often as our time and budgets will allow. We embrace good food and good art as common graces. We silence our cell-phones. We spend uninterrupted hours with God and evenings with our families as often as possible. We create "not-to-do-lists," so that we aren't always hurried and frazzled. We refuse to allow other people's expectations to control us. Our value is not in whether the project was turned in on time, so we Sabbath guilt-free even when items on the to-do list remain unchecked.

The light of "redeeming the time" pushes back against the darkness of the "life as a race" mentality, and the "life as rest" mentality.

Dr. Landon Galloway has been the director of DLI since 2011. He is responsible for devising DLI's unique, online platform that allows students to obtain formal educational training while gaining practical experience in their own local church.

In addition to his role, Landon has also served as a pastor at Grace Church in Houston, TX since 2017.

He earned the Bachelor of Arts in History at Mississippi State University, the Master of Divinity and the Master of Arts in Biblical Language from Oral Roberts University, and the Masters of Theology and Doctor of Philosophy from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His primary research interest is the rhetorical and literary features of the New Testament narratives, particularly Luke-Acts.

Landon is happily married to Sarada, and they are the proud parents of two daughters, Vanna and Zarra.



READY FOR THE FALL INFLUX?

JEFFREY KENT

Fall is right around the corner. Is your church prepared for the Fall influx? For most churches, it's an exciting time, because with Fall comes an influx of people and activities. Churches tend to see a 15-30% attendance bump in Sunday services in Fall over Summer. Regulars come back from summer vacationing. Guests come in looking for a place to get their families connected.

We all know the usual first response for churches - get some events on the calendar! And most churches certainly will. Fall is a great time for fellowships, outreaches, retreats, small group launches, and the like. Well-planned events can be a great "shot in the arm" for a church wanting to bring a boost of needed energy after a long summer.

However, while churches need plenty of connection opportunities, too many can attest to where the "fill the calendar with events" approach leads - a church calendar

ready to burst and burnt-out volunteers. It's important to recognize that an event-only approach, especially attendee-only style events, does not necessarily equate to healthy, biblical fellowship. Without some well-thought-out strategy, they can lead to more exhaustion than growth in your church culture.

In Acts 2, following the day of Pentecost, Luke records that the first believers were devoted primarily to four areas. Along with teaching, breaking of bread, and prayer, he lists fellowship. The Greek word is *koinonia*. This type of fellowship for the early church was a deep communion with one another, a spiritual solidarity in which members were united in an intimate bond with Christ as the head.

So, how does the Church today protect against an attendance-driven culture of endless events? How do we, instead, foster a culture of *koinonia* fellowship? *Koinonia* culture is something that must be organically attained through genuine connection that allows members to discover their role in the body through the Holy Spirit.

A great place to begin is in how we view people in relation to the Church.

Consider why people come to your church in the first place. Perhaps the location. Their family or friends attend. The size suits them. It could be the preaching ministry. Maybe because of a specific program, such as your kids' ministry or men's ministry. Each of these attractional points is generally attendance driven. The goal is to bring people through the front door.

Attractional services and events are a good thing. The Church needs to have a big front door where people in your area know the church exists and feel welcome to walk through the door. The risk is that if this is the only space the Church exists in, then getting people through the door becomes the primary success measure.

A second risk is that events are ever-changing. When people are solely connected through attendance-driven events, a change in the event can be greatly unsettling. Sunday service times changed! They changed our kids' program! They canceled the choir! These can disillusion church members and tend to be the primary cause of people leaving churches. When a family's connection is the event, much of their identity in the church is tied up in that event as well.

Churches may champion discipleship, but when people showing up becomes the end goal, the church calendar unintentionally gets structured around what gets people to attend. Most events demand little more than showing up and warming up a seat. We celebrate when the crowd comes, and when they leave, we get back to planning to bring them back, all the while wondering why we're not seeing the kind of transformation we are praying for.

Attendees were never the end goal for Jesus. The crowd was the invitation point from which He would call all who would come into a journey of transformation and, ultimately, multiplication. Our churches can have a great front door with attractional events, but if the culture lacks depth and structure, if there is no clear invitation to any room beyond the front gathering room, the result will be a back door just as big as the front.

So, as we plan for the Fall influx, time is of the essence to know that we are ready to engage people and invite them into a journey of authentic growth and *koinonia* fellowship. Three things to keep in mind as you prepare for this Fall:

First, you need attractional events that will engage your surrounding community, but more importantly, invite as many

as possible into the front door and then beyond the front door and into *koinonia* fellowship. Remember, attendance is the invitation, not the final solution! Events should be designed strategically with clear next steps to spur people along in their faith journey.

Beyond dynamic worship services, churches also need engaging church community life throughout the week. Consider age specific gatherings, like themed kids' events, student back-to-school parties, college hangouts, parent date nights with free childcare, and senior-aged day trips. Get creative! A healthy church also needs ongoing effective outreaches to allow church members to practice their giftings. The options are endless there but should involve plenty of engagement beyond dropping a door hanger.

As a side note, as you are planning for people to come onto your campus, take time to review your facilities. Walk around your campus with the eyes of a first-time guest. Is your kids' check-in process clear? Is outdoor lighting adequate in the evening? Do you have spots around campus that need to be freshened up? What about the language on your connection cards? Is it clear and engaging? The areas that you neglect will speak volumes to your guests.

Secondly, follow-up is paramount. This is the distinct difference between treating people like attendees and inviting them into *koinonia* fellowship. Assess your follow-up processes. How do you follow up with first-time guests in a way that feels genuine? Beyond, "Thank you for coming," follow-ups should have an invitation into deeper levels of community. How do you follow up with salvations? Baptisms? Prayer requests? New members? Graduates? Develop processes, and stick to them.

Lastly, have a clear, ongoing pathway for people to discover their gifts and use them. Multiplication will only happen through empowerment. A church committed to gift development must also be okay with things looking a little messy sometimes! The more that things look perfectly polished, the more people become comfortable sitting rather than serving, falsely believing that ministry is for professionals only. Sunday Serve Team is a great launching point, but it cannot be the only avenue. If we are championing community over events, we must also be training members to use their gifts daily.

What greater win this Fall than to not only have great attractional events to bring people in, but to have greater intentionality to train them and send them back out? Fall influx is coming! Are you ready?



Jeffrey Kent is an author, speaker, and the COO of Duck Commander. His heart is for the local church and has been teaching, preaching, and serving churches for over 20 years including nearly 3 years on the mission field in China. Jeffrey and his wife Abigail are passionate about marriage and regularly lead marriage conferences and events across the country.

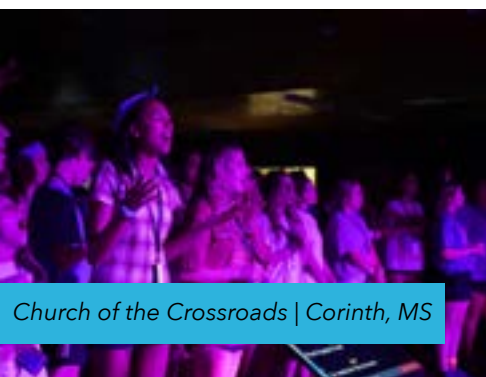
Jeffrey graduated summa cum laude from Liberty University with an MDiv in Discipleship and Church Ministry. He continues to teach the Word of God through weekly men's Bible studies at his home church.

Jeffrey and his wife, Abigail, both live in West Monroe, La, where they are raising their two children. They love spending time with their kids and investing in their church community.

SUMMER 2023 YOUTH MINISTRY REVIEW



C3 Church | Ellsworth, WI



Church of the Crossroads | Corinth, MS



NOW Camps | Texas



Destiny Gathering

The screams of two teens racing against one another down the water slide. The laughter of groups of students playing in the pool in the 100-degree summer heat. The drone of the go-carts on the track. The terror of the kid flying down the zipline wire for the first time. The frantic adrenaline of one tribe competing against five others in the tribe war obstacle course. The relationships forged in the dorms. The stream of the lights through the fog on the stage. The concerted leaping of the crowd in high praise to the name of Jesus. The weeping of tears down the faces of young warriors pursuing God as they are led by the Spirit to places of *the deep*. It's been the summer of '23 and that means youth camp season.

In different locations around the country, Destiny churches are investing in the lives of students. And arguably, there is no greater time to do this than at youth camp.

NOW Camps, drawing churches from both Texas and Louisiana, sold out two weeks in two days and registered almost 800 students. As they challenged the students to *Awaken*, they saw over 155 students give their hearts to Jesus and around 170 filled with the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Mylon Anderson hosted a camp where 94 students from five different churches across Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa came together. Around 50 students said yes to Jesus for the first time and 94 were filled with the Holy Spirit!

In the state of Mississippi, Pastor Jared Hight brought 70 students to his camp from his church alone and encouraged them to go *Beyond* sin, shame, and self. Many committed to Christ and were filled with the Spirit.

At the beginning of the summer, the Destiny Gathering hosted by Grace Church just outside of Houston, Texas saw beautiful fellowship for students, many of them "PKs", teens of pastors attending the conference. Several dozen attended the breakout sessions and were ministered to by Pastors Caleb Rivera, Manny Gonzales, Mikey Faulkner, Michael Money, Jarred Moss, and Geri Gallardo.

Some exciting events coming up during the second half of 2023 are *Destiny Now Youth Conference* hosted by Pastor Jarred Moss at The River in Searcy, Arkansas and the NOW Youth Pastors Retreat sponsored by Heartland Church, The Fellowship of Texas City, and Destiny Ministries in Dallas, Texas, September 28-30th. This free event will be a time of rest, relaxation, and renewal for youth pastors and spouses. Pastors Mikey Faulkner and Kevin Herrin will host the gathering.

We are working to increase our database of those who work faithfully in student ministry. Our hope and desire is that no youth pastor would ever feel alone in this frontline work of the Kingdom. Should you need to talk or need prayer, please feel free to reach out to me. I look forward to meeting you and fellowshiping with you in the days to come.

PASTOR KEVIN HERRIN

Destiny's Director of Youth Ministry




If you are a youth pastor/leader and would like more information on the youth pastors retreat or on how to become more connected with other youth leaders in the Destiny Network, please fill out the **Youth Pastor/Leader** form listed on the **Destiny linktree** by scanning the QR Code.

DESTINYNOW

YOUTH CONFERENCE

December 27-29

THE RIVER CHURCH
SEARCY, ARKANSAS



We are beyond excited to announce, for the third straight year, DESTINYNOW youth conference this winter. Every year, as young people gather, lives are being changed, callings are being revealed, passion is being rekindled, and hearts are being marked by the presence and purpose of God. Additionally, we're excited to announce that this year, DESTINYNOW will be hosted at The River church in Searcy, AR for the first time. Last year, youth groups from six states gathered, and we fully anticipate and expect this year to be the greatest year yet. We invite you to make plans to join us this December 27th-29th in Arkansas for a life-changing week of faith and fun.

MORE INFORMATION COMING SOON AT DESTINYLEADERS.COM/NOW

RENAME

Your pain

STEPHANIE SUBER

Alright...raise your hand if you're thriving! You know, your money's good, and your hunny's good. You are quickly checking off those goals for the year. Your plans are on point, and your dreams are becoming reality. You're blessed in the city, in the country, and in the field. As Rev. Nacho Libre said so succinctly, "My life is good, real good."

First of all, congratulations! I'm very happy for you! We all love those times of life when our minds are clear, and we have a song in our hearts. The birds are singing, the sky is blue, *and* they're having a 50% off sale at Goodwill.

Now...what about those of you who are just surviving? Anybody there? Barely making it, one thing hits right after the other. If it *CAN* go wrong, it *HAS*. The blows just keep coming. Your money's funny, your kids are acting crazy, and your spouse has lost their mind.

Just a reminder, God has you in His hands, and you are going to come out victorious if you put your trust in Him! "We went through fire and flood, *BUT* GOD has brought us into a place of abundance" (Ps. 66:12). It *WILL* PASS!

It may pass like a kidney stone, but it will pass!

And sometimes, we can thrive and survive in the same day! If you've been a Christian for any amount of time, you will know that we are just about always in a trial, coming out of a trial, or about to head into a trial. Why? Because the trying of our faith causes us to persevere and eventually become mature in Christ (Ja. 1:3-4). Thriving and surviving are just two sides of one coin called LIFE. So, it's very important that we honestly talk about both and know that God uses both thriving and surviving for our good and for His glory!



I just came out of a season of trauma. I mean, yeah, for years I was thriving: planting a great church, working on a new building, losing 25 pounds, holding a successful women's conference.... But then, survival mode hit me like a Mack truck. Out of nowhere came sickness, death, loss.... Anybody remember that little pandemic called COVID? Political tensions, racial injustice, people leaving the church if you had church services, and people leaving the church if you didn't have church services. We couldn't win for losin'. Finally, a light at the end of the tunnel, and this time, it wasn't a train. I got a new word for '23 - "reclaim," and I set about climbing out of the hole I had somehow gotten myself into.

I don't know what you may be going through, but I know this - HE SEES YOU. He knows the dark path that you are on, and He is walking alongside you every step of the way!

But, what happens after the trauma? We all deal with difficulty in different ways, healthy or unhealthy. We have crutches that we lean on in tough times, and we get dependent on them supporting us through our day. However, as we come out of those dark times, we have to "transform our lives by renewing our minds" (Rom. 12:2). We can no longer respond to life the way we did in our survival times. That muscle memory that tells us to react the way we have been reacting has to be retrained. "An object at rest will stay at rest." We have been surviving in a certain way for so long that it takes a powerful retraining of our thought patterns to get us back on a track of growth and progress.

Pain has a purpose in our lives. It strengthens us, humbles us, and postures us at His feet in desperation. But, we must stand strong on the Word of God! Christ is our firm foundation when the wind blows and the rain pounds down on us. I encourage you today to reach out to people you can trust when these difficult situations bear down on you. Don't walk this path alone. A lot of times, we are under too heavy of a burden to pray and fast as we should, so we need others to carry the load for us. We simply cry out like Peter did as he was sinking under the waves, "Jesus! Save me!"

We have to learn to rename our pain. When Rachel died giving birth, she named their son "Ben-oni," which meant, "Son of my suffering." Yet his father renamed him "Benjamin," which means, "Son of my right hand." He determined not to live life

constantly reminded of his pain and Rachel's suffering.

What we did to survive is not what we need to do to thrive. We must reclaim our faith, our voice, our identity. We have to lay off those survival mindsets of, "Oh, if I can just make it through this day," or, "I feel like a nobody going nowhere." I believe God is lenient in those times we wallow in self pity, but we don't want to stay there! God has given us big dreams. We have to stretch ourselves out of the posture we've been sitting in for so long and start reaching forward! Don't let triggers, survival tactics, and coping mechanisms keep you from stepping out in faith! God is not condemning you for what you went through.

Look at the people God used in the Bible for great exploits: Moses, David, Paul. Our low times do not have to keep us from great victories.

Joseph is a great example of thriving and surviving. He was favored. His father spoke words of life over him. He had huge dreams. You know what happened, don't you? Thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, falsely accused, sent to prison, forgotten. But when his time came, all it took was a quick shower and shave, and he was in the throne room advising Pharaoh and becoming second in the kingdom. In a short time frame, he was able to set aside his survival mechanisms, mindsets and mentality and thrive.

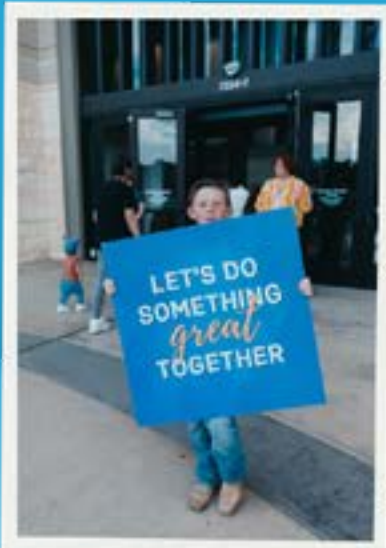
How? He reveals the secret later in his life when his brothers, (the ones who started his season of struggle), came to him for food. When they found out who he was, they just knew he would kill them after what they had done. But, he had learned that to be fruitful and to thrive, he had to forget those awful times of survival. He names his first son "Manasseh," which means, "to forget," and his second son "Ephraim," which means "to be fruitful."

He renamed his pain when he proclaimed that the "evil" done to him had actually brought about "good" in the lives of so many, (Gen. 50:20). We turn our mess into a message, and our testimony becomes a prophecy that others can make it through, because we did. When we rename our pain and realize that everything that has happened to us is for our good and His glory, then we can truly say we have persevered and grown in our faith.



Stephanie is a passionate Christ follower and Kingdom builder. She and her husband, Jonathan, have ministered all over the world for 35 years and are the founding Senior Pastors of Oasis Church in Austin, Texas. They also just launched a new ministry called OMNI - Oasis Ministry Network International - that is a network providing access to ministry for all. Writing, leading and visioneering are her passions, and her favorite places to be are chilling with loved ones, being outside on a spring day, and leading worship in church. Stephanie just released the 20th anniversary edition of her book [My View from the Kitchen Sink](#), available on Amazon.

2023 Gathering Recap





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AROUND THE TABLE

WILLIE ROBERTSON

Whenever I go visit my parents today at their home, the same home that millions of Americans were invited into through *Duck Dynasty*, there is one piece of nostalgia that still grips me to this day - the dinner table. There are some things that the moment you look at them, you're overcome with nostalgia. With just a glance, they can fill your mind with memories and take you back to days long gone.

That dinner table, nowadays, is home to more medicine bottles, reading glasses, books, and other odds and ends than I remember growing up. But, that's the same dinner table I ate dinner at thousands of times. It's the table my brothers and I would toss our book bags on every day after school right before we threw off our shoes and ran to the river for some fishing. I remember when we were making duck calls around that same table, Phil once told us that one day, he was going to sell a million dollars worth of duck calls! It's also the table where we learned to live with gratitude as we prayed before every meal, a tradition that carried on through the show.

Beyond the decades of memories of great food, family, stories, laughter, and building lots of duck calls around that table, other memories still burn in my mind just as strongly. Around that same table, I had the honor of watching Phil and Kay share the Gospel with hundreds of people throughout the years. With the Bible laid out, my dad would boldly share Jesus and offer people a chance at eternal life. So

many of those conversations ended with a short walk down to the river as someone accepted the call and laid their old life down in the waters of baptism. My dad is still using that Bible today and sharing the Gospel just as passionately as he has for so many years.

I think something my parents understood so long ago was that if the Gospel is real and actually has the power to save, then it can't be contained to a once-a-week church service. I recently heard that about 60 percent of Americans say they feel lonely on a regular basis. People today have become so isolated. Phil and Kay understood that a table represents community. It's an extension of family. The table is an invitation into such a cherished part of your life. That's what they were offering to people time and time again, not just a class or a sermon, but community - a spiritual family.

It was people willing to reach out and offer a seat at the table that first transformed our family's story from a complete tragedy to one of redemption. We have a movie coming out this fall entitled, *The Blind*. It recounts the early life of Phil and Kay and how the Gospel completely transformed their lives. I can tell you that it's sure tough watching some of those raw and real scenes play out on the big screen. Before Jesus, my dad was lost in every sense of the word. Their marriage was crumbling, and our family was coming apart at the seams.

As Phil was hiding out in southern Arkansas, my aunt Jan and a young preacher named Bill Smith decided that waiting on

him to show up at church on a Sunday wasn't the solution. If Phil was going to find Jesus, they needed to go find him first. He needed a community that refused to give up on him. He needed people that thought he was still worth sitting down with. Bill got in his car and drove all the way to a bar in another state to sit down with my dad and share the Good News. Sometimes the table might look a little more like a beer and cigarette-littered bar than a family dinner table! But, the seed was planted, and that moment eventually led to his salvation and the restoration of their marriage and our family.

I see the same thing in the New Testament. From Jesus' first miracle at a wedding to His Last Supper with His disciples, how many moments in the Gospels are centered around a meal or while reclining at a table? It was around a table that He proclaimed, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick," and again, that He had, "come to seek and to save the lost." I think the early Church also understood the power of getting around a table. Acts tells us that they were dedicated to regularly sharing meals and praying together.

I wonder how many stories are out there just like my mom and dad's, just waiting on someone to step out and invite them into a community. How many families' trajectories would be forever altered by an invitation to a table? How many "Phils" are out there ready to lead thousands to Christ if someone would make the effort to sit down with them and share the Good News?

At some level, everyone needs to know that their story matters and that someone is willing to listen to them. You can learn so much about a person by just sitting down and listening to them. What you always find is that parts of their story connect with your own. Through sharing, God can then use your spiritual story to begin to rewrite theirs.

You may never stand on a stage or preach an eloquent sermon, but some of the most effective Gospel sharers throughout history never did either. Stop and think about your own "around the table" moments through your life - eating meals, swapping stories, doing homework. Maybe you had moments like I did of a parent breaking open the Word. There is so much power in inviting people to your table, to community, to being heard, to sharing stories of faith.... Who is around your table? Who isn't, but should be? I encourage you to let Jesus lead you to always live with an open door and an open table to a world that needs the Message of hope that we've been given.

Willie Robertson is best known for starring in and executive producing A&E's Duck Dynasty. He is a New York Times best-selling author of several books. He is the founder of Buck Commander and CEO of Duck Commander. Willie expanded his family's small business from a living room operation to a company for all things outdoors and has sold millions of duck calls and merchandise worldwide.

He appeared as the "Mallard" on Masked Singer and many other TV shows, movies, and platforms. Willie also hosted a talk show and podcast. Willie has continued to be an avid outdoorsman and recently founded a Sportsman Camp for young people.

While the Robertsons' story is an excellent example of entrepreneurship and dedication, it is at its core built on faith and family. Willie continues to teach the Gospel to tens of thousands of people worldwide. Willie and Korie live near their children and grandchildren in West Monroe, Louisiana, where he finds himself often cooking the family meals.

Photos courtesy of Tread Lively/Madison Leech and the Robertson Family.



NEW RELEASE



In his debut literary nonfiction, *The Changeover Principle: Mentoring and the Art of Servant Leadership*, Brett Jones shares personal experiences depicting the highs and lows of his time in ministry and dispenses foundational truths for building a life of legacy that will surely inspire you to establish a mentor in your life, serve as a mentor to someone else, and develop your skills as a servant leader throughout every facet of your life. Whether you are a business executive, serving in full-time ministry, a stay-at-home parent, or just looking for ways to improve your communication with the world around you, this book will have application for you.

For more information about the author, visit www.brettfjones.com

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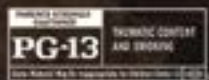
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DON'T MISUNDERSTAND THE SCENE



Pastor Brett Jones is a pastor, speaker, and author of the new book [The Changeover Principle: Mentoring and the Art of Servant Leadership](#). Pastor Brett, along with his wife Gizelle, serves as senior pastor of Grace Church, a multi-campus church with locations throughout the Houston area. Considered a mentor by many leaders, Pastor Brett is a lover of books, leadership, and communication. He has been married to Gizelle for 43 years, and together they have three children and two grandchildren, all of whom bring much joy.

BRETT JONES

During our last Destiny conference, I answered a man who had asked my opinion about a perplexing matter in his life that is still fluid, still in motion. I cautioned against making a final decision before God has done the same. I quoted a line of poetry written by Francis Quarles. It's still in my mind today.

"Judge not the play before the play is done:
Her plot has many changes.
Every day speaks a new scene.
But it's the last act that crowns the play."
-Quarles

We live in a time of strong opinions and quick decisions, and that doesn't always serve the Christian leader well. We watch the unfolding drama of our lives and act as if we know what the script says. We don't. Only the author knows what they've written for any character in their story, and while we know the consensus of the story, there are plot variations and changes in every scene. We know that Jesus is the Author of our story, and He doesn't tell us what all will unfold in our story.

It's doubtful many notable characters in Scripture would have written their story the way it unfolded in reality. David is unceremoniously anointed to be the next king of Israel, and then he is resigned to writing his songs and leading worship for mute sheep who can't appreciate what he does.

Leaving Egypt as a fugitive murderer to end up talking to a burning bush on the back side of the Midian desert would not have been the scene Moses would have written. But, these are the scenes God used in the drama of their lives.

When David was returned to the wilderness to watch sheep with anointing oil still in his hair, and when Moses flees Egypt with a murder warrant chasing him, both characters left the stage they thought was their story. In both stories, the palaces went on with kings and pharaohs, and storylines that never mention David or Moses are written. Both men were effectively written out of the scene.

God may have you written out of a scene right now. If you are watching the play go on, and you are waiting in the dark wings, don't substitute misunderstanding with unbelief. Don't misunderstand the scene where God has you now. You and I often make the wrong call when we try to explain something God is doing. I've learned an expensive lesson more than once. Don't try to speak for God when He is purposely silent.

Recently, I wrote extensively in my book about Elijah, *The Changeover Principle*, and the whole out-of-the-scene scenario that was happening to him. He had a dramatic confrontation with Ahab in the king's palace, and then Elijah was driven into obscurity—and into the worst drought Israel had ever seen. Elijah had no way of knowing that his headline moment in the palace as God's most recent crier would be followed by three years of obscurity.

But God was setting the stage to use Elijah on Mt. Carmel to call fire down from heaven. It seems clear in retrospect God wanted Elijah to have utter dependence on Him before fulfilling such an important mission. But know this—Elijah didn't know why he was separated and alone, far from the palace where his last big scene happened.

It's highly likely Elijah felt God had moved his role in the drama to one of insignificance. If you feel you've been written out of God's script—whether in family, church, business, community, or whatever—remember that your character must go where the Author writes, for He is the only one who knows the whole story.

Elijah was hidden from the center stage for a grand purpose. So was Moses. So was David. So was Jesus. So are you. God's leaders must be separated and prepared. No exceptions. God hides His greatest people while He is preparing them and their situation for a great entrance and miraculous season. Almost every great leader in the Bible has a wilderness period where they are separated and prepared. You will be no exception.

You may be in one of those preparatory seasons of life. If you don't know why God has you in a lonesome place, far from the role you think you are to play, it would be easy to misinterpret God's design. Sometimes, when God moves our character off the center stage, it's easy to mistake God's silence for God's judgment. Don't be discouraged: God is really preparing you.

Your separation is your preparation for another scene. Don't view your present situation as a season of abandonment. You have been called to play a role in God's kingdom masterpiece. But sometimes, when you play your role, the lights go out, and you're in the dark. That darkness on life's stage can be easily misinterpreted—none of us see well in the dark.

However, I have learned a secret: the darkness on the stage is simply hiding the setup for a new scene. It's always dark while the stage is being set. When the stage lights come back on in all their brilliance, the setting for your future role will be in place. And there is no dialogue between scenes. Don't mistake silence to mean the show is over. The lights are going to come back on, and when they do, the scene may not be anything close to what it was when they went dim.

Finally, don't judge the play before the final act. If you walk out on a play at intermission, it is highly likely you'll judge the play incorrectly, because your judgment came too soon. The moment you walk out, the playwright has more development of the storyline, and the characters have more to do.

If you judge what God's doing in your life too soon, you'll likely get it wrong. That's what happened with the disciples. They made a premature decision about the scene that was unfolding the day after Calvary. They walked away in Act 2 of a three-act play. Jesus wasn't done, and they weren't either.

Neither are you.



Finding Your Pearl

APRIL RODGERS

Have you ever met someone for the first time and instantly knew your life would forever be changed for the better? That is precisely the feeling that I had when I met Dr. Debra Douglas, affectionately known as “Pearl.”

After returning from a ministry meeting to the Philippines, my travels had left me feeling exhausted and a little under the weather. However, I was scheduled to attend the wedding of a close friend, and I didn’t want to miss the celebration. So, I strapped on my dancing shoes, and much to my delight, Deb was there officiating the ceremony.

Although I knew of Deb from my seminary days, our paths had not officially crossed until this particular evening. As the reception began to get underway, I made a beeline for her table and awkwardly introduced myself, not thinking through what I would say, only knowing that I wanted to meet this special woman.

And, oh, was she special! Her ministry work reached far and wide from counseling families to leading women’s ministry to rescuing countless women from the claws of sex-trafficking. As we chatted that evening, Deb told me that she wrote a weekly blog called “Ministering in the Messy,” and that I was welcome to write a guest blog for her. However, God had much more in store for the two of us than one blog post. For me, it would ultimately be an opportunity to have a deep and meaningful relationship with a woman who had been in my shoes not so long ago. For Deb, it was a divine appointment to share her pearls of wisdom.

What Deb didn’t know was that I had been longing for a mentor like Timothy had in the apostle Paul. The more I prayed about it, the more God kept bringing Deb to mind. I boldly asked Deb if she would mentor me, and without hesitation, she agreed. This sparked a monthly visit to her hometown to sit over chips and salsa and soak up every word that she was willing to pour into me. Sometimes, the conversation was serious, filled with opportunities for my improvement. Oftentimes, it consisted of how she had ministered to other women that week. But ALWAYS, it included stories of her beloved family, especially her grandchildren.

I knew that Deb had not been feeling well over the summer, yet undeterred, she would often text to let me know that she was praying for me. Even though she had been battling a lengthy illness, this brave woman was still joyful, never letting on that she didn’t have much more time on this earth.

The week before Deb passed away, she suggested that we get together for our monthly lunch saying that we had “much to discuss.” I told her we could wait until she was feeling better, but she insisted that she felt good enough to listen. She bought my lunch at our favorite Mexican restaurant and told me that I could pay for her meal next time. True to her word, there was much to discuss, and we talked and talked until it was just the two of us left in the place. As I was preparing to leave, she hugged me tightly and said, “I’m proud of you, April.” Then she looked into my eyes and said, “And I’m proud of what God’s going to do through you.” I never would have imagined those would be the last words that I would hear from her, but how precious to have been given that gift! They were words of life spoken by a life-giving mentor.



April Rodgers is the published author of *Made to Shine: 90 Devotions to Enjoy and Reflect God's Light* and *Let Your Light Shine: 6-Week Study on God's Light*. After losing her brother in a tragic car accident, April held on to Jesus and allowed Him to turn her darkness into light. Now she lives to encourage others to reflect the Light of Christ in their everyday lives by speaking at conferences and shining God's light on her YouTube channel titled "The Reflecting Light Show." April is a seminary graduate with her Masters of Theological Studies, mom to two sweet daughters, and wife to an amazing man. She is heavily involved in Women's Ministry at Christ Church in West Monroe, Louisiana, and her favorite things consist of coffee, community small groups, and Sunday afternoon naps. Are you looking for a dynamic speaker for your next Women's Event or Conference? April has a passion for helping others live with purpose as they seek to let their lights shine for Christ. April is qualified to speak on topics such as Biblical passages, women's ministry, marriage, grief, and financial planning. Visit aprilroddgers.com today to inquire about April's speaking schedule.

What had started off as a pearl of wisdom here and a pearl of encouragement there was added with a pearl of prayer, and a pearl of accountability, and a pearl of love... until, eventually, there was enough to string a short pearl necklace.

Today, I proudly wear my beautiful pearls that Deb gave to me. And even though I would have loved a longer strand of them, I am grateful for each and every pearl the Lord allowed me to have. They are truly priceless.

In Titus 2, Paul urges the older men to be worthy of respect and sound in faith. Likewise, he lays the foundation for the older women to be reverent and willing to teach what is good to the younger women. Such instruction is the bedrock of discipleship and, if implemented, can have lasting effects within the Kingdom of God.

If you are a younger man or woman who desires a mentor:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal a more mature man or woman who will commit to teach you sound doctrine, keeping in mind that you may meet them in an unlikely place, (i.e. a wedding)
- Be bold and ask him or her to mentor you, offering to drive to where they are and buy their lunch, (if they will let you!)

- Take the initiative to make the meetings consistent, yet be flexible when life happens.

- Start stringing all the different pearls that you are given together.

If you are an older man or woman with the ability to mentor:

- Always point your mentee to what is good, and ask about their true relationship with God. Don't be afraid to get personal.

- Have equal parts of listening, encouraging, and pushing them to get out of their comfort zone, then hold them accountable to the meeting time and topics discussed.

- Don't underestimate the impact that you can have on his or her ministry and life, (even in a short period of time).

- Freely give your pearls away.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it," Matthew 13:45-46 (CSB).



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GREAT FOR GOD

DR. PHILLIP BRASSFIELD

God is calling you, all of us, to be GREAT FOR GOD! I have always loved to read the inspiring stories of great people. People who have met extreme circumstances with a resiliency and the resolve to stand for what they believed to be right and true regardless of the consequence not-with-standing the political, economic, or social climate in which they lived. And if you study history, they are there. You can see them in every sector of human life from business and industry to Christian service, social justice, and government. But, often as I admire them, I wonder if I could ever muster the courage to do the same.

TODAY, I declare that the answer is yes! And not just for me, but you as well. There is greatness in all of us waiting to be discovered and released. And there is no better time than today to allow that to shine through. In our generation, we are living in days that are demanding that we all, each in our own way, and within our own sphere of influence, arise to meet the challenges of our moment in history. You can be, you must be; we desperately need you to be great for God.

So, what's the problem? In my experience, it's most often bondage of some sort. Life happens: a broken relationship, a sinful decision. You did it; they did it. Maybe it was intentional, or maybe by accident; maybe it was just the hard knocks of life. But, you wound up in chains as a result - bound to a circumstance.

Satan's anecdote for you living the life you were meant to live is to chain you up. Like the Maniac Gadara in Luke Chapter 8 who was out of his mind, naked, bound with chains, Satan wants to strip you of your dignity, chain you to some issue, and drive you into the tombs of regret. He wants to shackle you to the bad decisions of the past and throttle down the engines of your purpose. Satan's plan is to limit your potential and destroy your destiny - to put you in a prison cell of loss, making your life a warning instead of testimony.

It's so hard to function when you're bound. Bondage reduces your options, opportunities, and possibilities. Bondage reduces your range of movement and causes pain when you try to press beyond the limits and boundaries of your chains. This is why the enemy is so focused on tying you up.

But Jesus came and sought you out, and He has called you by name! He has come to set you free and to clear the pathway for greatness in your life.

The Apostle Paul said in Galatians 5:1, "It was for freedom that Christ has made us free..."

In the freedom that Christ brings, you can discover the greatness inside of you that's there already. Here's three reasons freedom is the first step to greatness:

1. Freedom allows you to reach beyond the limits of your bondage and become what God has ordained for you to become! When God created you, He began with the end in mind. He knows His plans for you and for your life. Through His freedom, you can experience the joy and confidence of knowing that God always finishes what He starts. He is at work in your heart to bring you to the power of a limitless life.

2. Freedom releases you to realign with God's destiny for your life and a partnership with God on mission! God's plan involves freedom with a purpose. It's not freedom from responsibility or duty. It's not freedom for the sake of self-indulgence or selfish ambition, but rather it is freedom for participation in a greater good and a higher purpose. It is freedom for your lower nature and a release of the nobler you where meaning is found.

3. Freedom encourages you to dream again! And imagine what amazing can look like for you? Freedom encourages you to step away from the "what ifs" and "I wish I had not" complexes and to choose to live in the powerful possibilities of your imagination where your dreams are only limited by the magnitude of God's ability. We need dreamers in every sector, people who can look at possibility and say, "Why not?," and, "Why not me?!"

The freedom Christ brings is your inheritance as a believer and your portion as a son or daughter of God. It is your "clean slate," "starting point" to a life of significance. Freedom allows you to live in the reality of what Paul described in Philippians 3 verses 13 and 14 when he said, "*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*"

Freedom won't guarantee a life of fame, fortune, or earthly ease. No, in fact it may lead to the opposite. Godly freedom will almost certainly lead to a life of service and sacrifice, and sometimes suffering; but, it's the way of the Master, and it leads to the door marked, *Great For God!*



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