

WINTER 2023

# DESTINY

M A G A Z I N E

**THE LIGHT OF  
CHRISTMAS**

**A NEW KIND OF  
RESOLUTION**

**ALL IN, ALWAYS**

**THE POWER OF  
INFLUENCE**

**RENEW YOUR  
MEMBERSHIP  
2024**





**PUBLISHER**

Dr. Phillip Brassfield

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**LAYOUT & DESIGN**

Stephanie Powers

**CONTACT**

Destiny Ministries

PO Box 341

Heber Springs, AR 72543

501.887.9933

destinyleaders.com

**EDITORS**

Diana Brassfield

Cathy Brassfield

Jeannie Abbott

**CIRCULATION**

Amy Dew

Barry Etter

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**A WORD FROM PHIL & CATHY**



This time of year is a favorite around the Brassfield home. Trees are trimmed (multiple), lights go up, garland is placed on the tree and everything else that is sitting still, and on any typical evening

a hot hickory fire burns in the fire place, no matter what the temp is outside. We love the holidays-especially Christmas.

This edition of Destiny Magazine is always special for Cathy and me and the entire staff at Destiny. It is filled with our love for Christ and for you. We pray that you will enjoy this year's Winter edition and that it will serve to remind you that we are here for you. Our entire life and purpose is to serve you and to assist you in being all that God has called you to be! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!





# IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR DESTINY MEMBERSHIP 2024

It's time to renew your Destiny Membership for the year 2024. Renewing your membership has two dimensions. First, there is the annual Certification Fee of \$75 for Ministry Ordination or \$50 for General Ministry License, and then, secondly, making your monthly financial commitment to support Destiny Ministries throughout the year.

Over the years, Destiny has relied on the faithful support of our members to serve the Christian Leaders and churches we love so much. Every day we are engaged in the efforts to provide pastoral care for five-fold ministry leaders, to provide life-giving resources for our members, missions outreaches and opportunities, support for church planting efforts, and training disciples and leaders for ministry service both here and abroad.

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# The Light of

## **DR. PHIL BRASSFIELD**

**Isaiah 9: 6&7** - *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of [His] government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.*

There are over 65 major Messianic Prophecies in the Old Testament with some 300 unique details concerning the coming of the Jewish Messiah. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Prophets foretold all sorts of things, from the virgin birth and place of Christ's nativity, to the fact that He would be betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver- even crucified, a method of execution not known by the Jews at the time. But of all the amazing prophecies from the Old Testament regarding the Messiah, there is one prophecy that has become a Christmas classic. It is the passage above recorded for us in Isaiah chapter 9. And it is beautiful! It describes the fact that as a child the Messiah will be born, but as a son, He shall be given, that the responsibility of the government (God's Kingdom Government) shall be upon His shoulders and that He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. These descriptions are clearly a mix of human and divine qualities and are perhaps the most beautiful list of titles ever compiled. They are inspiring indeed. But before you get to that passage in verse 6 and 7 with its magnificent beauty, there are actually a few amazing details recorded earlier in verse 1 of the same chapter that we don't often associate with Christmas.

There is a fragment of verse 1 that is very telling regarding where the Messiah will live and a description of the nature of His being and purpose. The Prophet says, (1) *...by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles.* (2) *The people who walked in darkness*

# CHRISTMAS

*have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.*" Following His baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus moved His ministry headquarters from Nazareth in the "hill country" to a village on the northwest shore of the Lake of Galilee, called Capernaum. Matthew described Capernaum in his Gospel as Jesus' "own city" (Matt. 9:1), and in an earlier passage he says that Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum in Galilee that the prophecy of Isaiah might be fulfilled (Matt. 4:13-16). Why would Jesus move from Nazareth to Capernaum? Was it just to fulfill a prophecy? Or, was it because of the strategic nature and location of Capernaum? And as the Jewish Messiah, wouldn't it make more sense for Him to base His ministry in the revered Temple precincts of Jerusalem? Let me attempt to shed some light on these questions.

## **Why would Jesus move from Nazareth to Capernaum?**

Palestine was the land bridge connecting three continents - Europe, Africa and Asia. The early Empires of the World traveled this land-bridge to engage in commerce, conquest and to convey information. The two most important roads in the ancient World were located on this land bridge and passed through Galilee, the *Via Maras* and the *King's Highway*. The *Via Maras*, called the "Way of The Sea", traveled along the Mediterranean Sea up into Galilee through Capernaum and on to Damascus; the other was called the *King's Highway* and it moved from Galilee along the trans-Jordan highlands then through the desert toward Arabia. Both of these roads travelled near the Lake of Galilee for practical reasons. The Lake of Galilee with its abundant fish and fresh water offered the best place to refresh between Damascus and Alexandria. This made Capernaum an incredibly important and busy frontier city. It was a hub of travel, information and culture.

Jerusalem, on the other hand, was off the beaten path regarding the World stage. It was situated in the Judean highlands

some 17 miles off the international trade routes, a great distance in biblical times. It was relevant because of its religious and political significance as opposed to its strategic location. To the Jews it was important, as it was the place of their beloved Temple and the center of Jewish religious life. To the Romans of the 1st Century it was important as the leveraging point for maintaining the balance of power throughout the region. One writer compared Capernaum and Jerusalem regarding their connection to the greater world, "Judea is on the road to nowhere, Galilee was on the road to everywhere."

Yes, Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, and the Jewish nation was the platform upon which God chose to reveal Him. But Jesus was also the Redeemer of the entire World. His mission was not to simply reform the Jewish religion; it was to illuminate the World with the truth! I must say that I am always amazed at the strategic nature of God's wisdom. Galilee, specifically Capernaum, was the perfect place to accomplish this mission. And God planned the location of Jesus' ministry hundreds of years before Jesus was even born. It is none other than Capernaum that fits the description from Isaiah's chapter 9 prophecies completely. The phrase *Via Maras* is a Latin phrase that means, "the way of the sea". Capernaum is situated along this road and two miles west of the Jordan River in Galilee with a significant gentile population. There is little doubt that Capernaum is the place that Isaiah said the Messiah would base His ministry. It would be from this place that He would earn the titles mentioned later in the Christmas passage of Isaiah chapter 9.

Over 75% of Jesus' miracles happened in or near this town (within approximately two miles) at the crossroads of the World. There, He would astonish people with His teaching. He worked miracles, fed thousands, taught the Sermon on the Mount, walked on the water, paid temple taxes with miracle provision, healed the woman with the issue of blood, raised Jarius' daughter, healed the Centurion's servant and Peter's mother in law, and

much more. Here, He broke down racial and cultural walls ministering to Jew and Gentile alike as a result of the great cultural diversity of Galilee. No wonder the Prophet said that, "... *by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles (a perfect description of the city of Capernaum). (2) The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.*"

Matthew, when speaking of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, said in chapter 4 of his Gospel, "News about him spread all over Syria." Imagine that, all the way to Syria. With every merchant's caravan and every military regiment travelling the highways through Israel, who while watering the animals, would listen to the messages preached by a young Jewish Rabbi, word spread. As travelers from foreign lands and home folks saw the miracle signs and wonders, word spread. A light of truth and hope was shining to the World from Galilee! Wonderful! Mighty God! Prince of Peace! These pronouncements must have been on the lips of those in the astonished crowds!

We often think of the Light of Christmas being in Bethlehem about a baby, manger, and stable, and about the shepherds of our nativity displays, and it is certainly that. But this Christmas maybe we should be reminded that The Light of Christmas was really the Light of the World! And He was, first, strategically sent to illuminate the entire World from a busy village in Galilee called Capernaum. Let us be reminded that His mission there is still our mission here. Jesus is the Light of the World but He also said that so are you! The light of Christmas still glows from the heart of God and is searching for the lost, those who sit in darkness. Trim your lamp, rekindle the flame of His love and this Christmas remember that you have been sent to a strategic place for a strategic time for a strategic purpose. Light the way. Carry the light. Make Him known! Be the Light of Christmas! Merry Christmas!

# A NEW KIND OF

# RESOLUTION

## *Finding Happiness in the New Year*

### DR. LANDON GALLOWAY

It's that time of year again - the time where we make all sorts of resolutions about how the upcoming year will be different than the year that just passed. We will promise to exercise more, eat less, budget tightly, and give generously. The underlying motive behind our resolutions is the sense that something is off. Something isn't quite right with our lives. We may be content with where we are in general, but there is a nagging sense that we should be better. And, once we identify and fix those weak spots, perhaps we will finally find true happiness.

We are all in pursuit of happiness. The abiding question is why we haven't arrived yet. Why do we feel that there is something lacking? I resolved to fix myself at the beginning of last year, so why do I still need fixing? Is it even possible to find happiness? In a world of tension, injustice, confusion, ambiguity, and uncontrollable chaos, is happiness even achievable?

A wise man once said that happiness is like a cat. The more earnestly you pursue it, the faster it runs and hides. However, if you ignore it long enough and go about your business, you will soon find it cuddled at your feet. Perhaps, we have yet to find happiness, because we are too busy looking for it. What if contentment and joy are byproducts of a life in pursuit of God instead of ends in themselves? Godly happiness is not based

on circumstances, but on our complete satisfaction in God. There is a way to be happy in the new year, but it has little to do with workout plans and budgeting strategies. (But, you should probably do that stuff too.)

Psalm 1 promises happiness to the one who shuns ungodly beliefs and behaviors and clings to God's word. The Psalm starts with, "Blessed is the man." The Hebrew word translated "blessed" is *esher*, which is often translated as "happy." The Psalmist is giving us the path to happiness! If we follow the directives in the Psalm, then we will be on our way to finding blessing and joy in our lives. He gives us three things *not to do* and two things *to do* in order to live a blessed life.

### 3 Things Happy People Don't Do

1. *They don't walk in the counsel of the ungodly.* In other words, they do not accept the prevailing worldview of society. They don't determine what they believe about human sexuality from Hollywood or how they feel about race from cable news. They seek counsel from God's Word and godly leaders rather than their Facebook feed. In sum, they reject the **beliefs** of people who don't know God.

2. *They don't stand in the way of sinners.* The Psalmist shows the progression of sinful behavior. It starts with accepting ungodly counsel and quickly moves to standing alongside sinners on the path to destruction.

Invariably, belief morphs into behavior. Once we accept wrong beliefs, it won't be long until we indulge in wrong behavior. Happy people do not choose this path, because they recall the words of Jesus. Though the broad path seems open and inviting, it does not lead to self-fulfillment, but self-destruction. They choose not to participate in the **behaviors** of people who do not know God.

3. *They don't sit in the seat of the scornful.* The progression continues. Those who believe and behave like sinners will soon become like them. The unhappy person listens to ungodly counsel, succumbs to ungodly behaviors, and eventually takes a seat and identifies with boastful wrongdoers. Have you ever had an epiphany that you had substantially changed for the worse? That a hobby became a habit? That the innocent indulgence had transformed to an enslaving excess? If so, you certainly understand why the happy ones do not **become** like people who do not know God.

The first phase of finding happiness in the coming year is negative. Before we are told what we must do to find contentment in Christ, we are told what we absolutely mustn't do. Before we are told what to add to our lives, we are told what we should take away. This is the opposite of a typical New Year's Resolution. Instead of promising to do more this year, we are challenged to do less.

So, what beliefs should you reconsider? Have insipid thoughts of bitterness, anger, jealousy, materialism, or racism invaded your personal worldview? What behaviors have created unhappiness in your life? Could it be that gossip, immoderation, or procrastination are hijacking your happiness? Have you morphed into a person that you no longer recognize by tolerating destructive beliefs and behaviors?

Fortunately, the Psalmist did not leave us only with the negative. Some Christians think that the godly life is only about removing sin and separating from the world. However, there are no spiritual vacuums. The only way to replace the negative is to flood the space with the positive.

## 2 Things that Happy People Do

1. *They delight in the Law of the Lord.* "The Law of the Lord" is the Psalmist's code for the "Bible." Notice the word "delight." The blessed one does not simply read, hear, or study the Word, he delights in it. What brings you delight? What is your first thought in the morning? What is the content of your daydreams? What do you work into conversation? What do you think about before you go to sleep? That thing is your delight, and it is imperative that you identify it. Because, your delight determines your direction. Many of

us merely tolerate God's word, but happy people delight in God's word.

2. *They meditate on it day and night.* *Meditate* is a strong word. It means to thoroughly digest and to give complete attention to. The Hebrew word can literally mean to "mumble under the breath." We often witness this type of meditation in Israel, where faithful Jews at the Wailing Wall mutter passages from the Torah in the midst of chaos and crowds. They are so absorbed in God's word that they are able to block out all external and internal distractions. Happy people meditate "day and night," refers both to all the time and to specific times. Their minds are occupied with godly thoughts throughout the day, and they set aside specific times to prayerfully read and study the Scriptures.

After we conquer the sinful beliefs and behaviors hindering our happiness, we commit to filling the void with God and His Word. These are the steps to true containment. In fact, we will find ourselves as "trees planted by the river of water, whose leaves do not wither. And whatever we do will prosper." The happy life is positioned by the river, so that our happiness is not located in our efforts, but in our connection with the Source. The happy life is planted, so that our lives are deeply rooted in Him and experience consistency and stability. The happy life is productive, because, as we abide in Him, we bear much fruit. The happy life is prosperous, because He brings life in every season and through every situation.

The happy life is positioned, planted, productive, and prosperous. That's the life I want. That's my resolution for this year, next year, and beyond.

*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.*

**DESTINYNOW 2023**  
**YOUTH CONFERENCE**

**HEAR US FROM**  
**HEAVEN**

**DECEMBER 27-29**  
**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.

**REGISTER NOW AT [DESTINYLEADERS.COM/NOW](https://destinyleaders.com/now)**







# HOSTING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

## 5 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL HOLIDAY PARTY

from Amy Dew

### START EARLY

Here is your permission to go ahead and put your tree up early! Creating a festive and welcoming space for your family and guests will be so much more enjoyable if you are not rushed and worn out. The month of December fills up quickly with commitments, parties, responsibilities etc. Having my home decorated and tidy helps me to enjoy the holiday season and focus on THE reason for the season - even when it gets crazy! With that being said... remember, sometimes, less is more. No need to try and compete with Martha Stewart! Keep in mind what your end goal is - for friends and/or family to feel welcomed and have an enjoyable time while in your home.

### PLAN AHEAD AND KEEP IT SIMPLE

When I am planning for a party, I like to stick with tried and true favorites. Trying a new recipe the day of an event can lead to added stress. If there is something new you want to serve at your next get together, give it a try the week before to avoid surprises. There are many party foods that can be prepared in advance and frozen. Also, not everything has to be "made." Sometimes, it is just as cost effective, (and way easier), to grab a pre-made dip or dessert from Sam's Club or Costco. It's all about the presentation. Select a festive bowl or platter and transfer the contents, and no one will ever know... unless they ask for the recipe!

If someone offers to bring something, graciously accept! Oftentimes, people have a favorite recipe that they enjoy sharing with others, and this gives them an opportunity and helps lighten your load.

### HAVE FUN

If your party will have guests with a wide range of ages, be sure to include something for everyone. A cookie decorating station or an ornament making project will more than likely be a hit with "the littles." If games are on the agenda, select something that works for all ages. Pinterest is a great source for game ideas.

### GET CREATIVE WITH YOUR GIFT EXCHANGE

I don't love a traditional gift exchange. Maybe I am too frugal, (or cheap), but sometimes it seems like a waste of money. I know that sounds very Bah Humbug, but really, what can you find in the \$15-\$20 range? This year, you might try a "Few of Our Favorite Things" gift exchange. The way this works is each participant will purchase and wrap an item that is a favorite item of theirs. It might be their favorite kitchen gadget, coffee blend, candle, electronic gizmo, book, whatever. You can choose from several different games to actually exchange the gifts - Dirty Santa or Roll the Dice are a couple. Again, check Pinterest for ideas. To me, this version makes the gift buying easier and gives you a chance to share with others a little something about yourself by sharing something you enjoy. This year at our family Christmas get together, I want to do a My Favorite Things White Elephant Gift Exchange...Temu Edition...\$5 price limit!

### RELAX

Hosting doesn't have to be stressful. We tend to create stress when we overthink and overcomplicate things. Give yourself grace, and stop with the comparisons! That will rob you of your enjoyment every time. The more relaxed you are, the more comfortable your guests will be, which will, in turn, create the environment for a memorable get together!



Amy came to Destiny almost 16 years ago from the Arkansas Cattlemen's Association with excellent experience in membership organization and special events planning. She assumed the role of Director of Finance and Accounting and DLI Student Services with Destiny Ministries. With a flare for home decor and a creative eye for design, she brings that warmth and creativity ability to Destiny events and environments. She has been married to her husband, EG, for 29 years. They have three children: Micah, along with his wife Kelli, Nate, and Abbi, and three grandchildren: Kara Jane, Daxton, and Gentry.



# #OOTD

## TRICIA EDWARDS

Psst! Hey, there! It's me, again! Why, yes, I'm back to share from my brain and heart to yours! When it hit me what I would share, I got so excited! Okay, I LOVE fashion, clothes, shoes, jewelry... the whole shebang! There is something I do at times on social media and that is to post the #ootd or "outfit of the day." It just lights me up to inspire and share my love for all things fashion to my many many followers. (All 615 of them currently - LOL!)

Before I REALLY get started, I thought I would share a few famous quotes about getting dressed:

*"Dress like you own the bank,  
not like you need a loan from it."*

*"Dressing well is a form of good manners."*

*"Dress how you want to be addressed."*

*"Life is too short to wear boring clothes."*

*"Never wear anything that panics the cat."*

To give you a bit of a background, my grandmother was a true southern belle, full of class and dignity. She would get up every morning and get dressed for the day. I'm talkin' a "slacks and blouse" kind of outfit, hair done, full makeup, jewelry, and shoes (even if just staying home). I don't know that I ever saw her wear slippers or stay in her robe or

pajamas for the day. I always admired her for that and knew that it was important to her. She was very instrumental in my love for fashion.

There are many reasons why we get "dressed." We get dressed because #1, it's not legal to go out and not be dressed. Secondly, we dress to shield our body from the weather elements, and we get dressed for beauty.

Thinking on this, my mind shifted to the spiritual meaning of getting dressed, which is just as important, or more than, getting dressed in the natural. We need our spiritual clothing on at all times.

**2 Corinthians 5:1-3** paints a picture of comparing our earthly and heavenly bodies and ends with the need for the body to be clothed.

***"Our bodies are like tents that we live in here on earth. But when these tents are destroyed, we know that God will give each of us a place to live. These homes will not be buildings someone has made, but they will last forever. While we are here on earth, we sigh because we want to live in that heavenly home. We want to put it on like clothes and not be naked."***  
(CEV)

We all have earthly clothes and spiritual clothes. It shows in our actions and attitudes. Sometimes... well, it's just not

a good-looking outfit. Have you ever said to someone (or thought to yourself VERY loudly), "Oh, HONEY, you should NOT go out looking like that!?"

Let's dive in and take a look at the spiritual articles of clothing that are vital to our Christian walk.

**Colossians 3:8-14 - "But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these; anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."**

This Scripture is really speaking on how we treat others. When we come to Christ, we take off our worldly outfit and put on our new Godly outfit. The worldly clothes are things like anger, rage, malice, and filthy language. We are admonished to take them off and put on the new clothes of compassion, kindness, humility, etc. Our daily outfit should look more and more like Jesus.

So, get rid of all those clothes that don't fit that are hanging in your closet. Ladies, you know, that range of 10 different sizes, "just in case."

There is nothing more fun to me than getting a new outfit, except maybe Disney World and going to the beach. But, you know what I mean. In Spring and Fall, I purge and give away clothes that didn't serve me well or that I just didn't wear, so that I can make room for the new incoming outfits. (Kevin, are you seeing this?)

The adversary will try to lure you back to those old, comfortable clothes. But, don't give in! God has provided us with unique spiritual armor to withstand these temptations.

**Ephesians 6:10-17 - "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the**

**belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."**

A brief synopsis of what each piece represents will give revelation of the importance and how it can help us daily!

**The belt** - God is truth! Tie the truth around us firmly. The belt keeps our spiritual outfit together.

**The breastplate** - I am the righteousness of God through Christ. We need to display right living!

**The shoes** - The shoes are the preparation, or readiness, originating from the gospel of peace. Shoes protect our walk. (I *DEFINITELY* find peace with a great pair of shoes!)

**The shield of faith** - This enables us to extinguish the enemy's flaming missiles. Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of God.

**The helmet of salvation** - When we put on the helmet of salvation, we put on Christ, Himself, which will protect our spiritual mindset.

**The sword of the Spirit** - This represents the Word of God. It is the only piece of the armor that is both defensive and offensive. Like some clothing, it's reversible!

We should wear things like love, compassion, and kindness in dealing with others, and the Armor of God when dealing with the enemy.

In the same way we scrutinize our attire for any imperfections before stepping out, ensuring every button and zipper is in its place and nothing is amiss, we should apply the same level of diligence to our spiritual outfit. Do you take the time each morning and make sure that you are appropriately dressed in your spiritual #OOTD, or do you run out the door spiritually disheveled or naked?

The whole idea of spiritual clothing boils down to walking in faith, hope, and love. If I'm paying attention at all to what I'm doing and to what God is telling me, I'll know if that's how I'm walking. And God will tell me what adjustments to make if I'm not.

Go ahead, look in the mirror, and take notice! Are you dressed and ready for the day? I know you could go to Walmart in that "comfy" outfit, but do you really want to only fit in with the crowd? Just as I post the #OOTD with hash tags pointing to each piece of clothing, we must point the way to God in how we are representing Him every day - physically and spiritually!



Tricia Edwards is a dynamic woman of many talents and a heart for service. As a mother, she brings warmth, love, and stability to her family. Together with her husband, Kevin, they pastor a church in Carterville, IL, which they planted over 12 years ago. As a pastor's wife, she is a true partner to her husband, offering encouragement, support, and prayer to their church community. And together, they also co-host an inspiring weekly podcast called, *WTF! - Walk the Faith*. Tricia's musical gifts are a blessing to all who hear her, as she uses her beautiful voice to lead worship and perform at special events. She is also a talented comedian, using her quick wit and humor to bring joy and laughter to audiences everywhere. With her passion for spreading positivity and spreading the Word of God, Tricia is an inspiration to all who have the privilege of knowing her.



# WHAT IF?

## **JONATHAN A. BUCKLAND**

As we rapidly approach the close of a year, we anticipate the possibility of what lies before us in the year ahead. The closing of one chapter transitions us to the opening of a new chapter that invites us into a new season filled with obstacles, yet pregnant with possibilities. If we are to navigate transition moments well, it requires us to be reflective on lessons learned in our past. We must identify those things in our lives that will never change, while also recognizing the things around and within us that must change.

Transition moments are critically important as they will determine whether we enter the next season with a healthy mentality and momentum working for us. Perhaps you have been as I have, lost in the thoughts of “what if...?” When we are bold enough to begin to dream of what could be, it becomes clarifying as to the hope that we can receive in the season ahead. Maybe my “what if” thoughts will resonate with you. If not, perhaps you could spend a few moments journaling your “what if’s” for the next season ahead.

### **Change Can Happen Through Me**

What if ... you believed that change could happen through you and not simply to you? When we embrace the idea that change can happen through us, we become a willing participant in the transition ahead of us rather than a victim to all of the change that happens around us. While I may not be able to predict the future, I am quite certain that each of us will walk through significant changes. While I may not be given the choice as to whether some of these changes occur, I can choose to be an active participant in stepping into the change with a faith to believe that God will be present with me. The alternative would be to experience the changes around me as an uninvited change occurring to me.

When Jesus called His disciples, He was inviting them to become active participants in instituting the change that needed to occur in our world. While some may wait around for change to occur to them, the invitation is still going out for you to be co-laborers with God in writing a new story in a new season.

### **Choose Significance Over Success**

What if ... in the season ahead, you focused more on living a significant life rather than chasing after a successful life? Success has become the pursuit of our age, but often to the detriment of lives of significance. Significant lives are focused on creating meaning in the mundane, regardless of whether it is viewed as successful by the watching world. The chase for success will often leave one exhausted from the pursuit to catch up and surpass the moving definition of what culture defines as success. If we look around us, we would see opportunities to step into significance abound. Success requires the cheers of the crowd, whereas significance can be accomplished with little more than a belief in the purpose and meaning of what you are pursuing.

I believe our culture desperately desires lives of significance over success. Jesus stated in Matthew 16:25, “*For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.*” He was offering a world that was desperate for meaning the ability to step out of the pressure of success and step into the fulfillment of significance.

### **Prioritize the Internal Over External**

What if ... you placed as much importance on arranging your internal world as you did your external world? Could it be possible that the condition of your inner world could transform your external world? What if the change you have been seeking all along was found in the deep work of your inner world rather than the quick fixes externally we so



often resort to? What would change in this new season if we measured ourselves by the weight of our soul rather than the breadth of our influence? Possibly, we have allowed ourselves to seek a breadth to our lives that cannot be sustained by the depth of our understanding. In the process, we go searching, hoping to find our true selves, only to discover that the search for understanding isn't discovered through our breadth, but through our willingness to peel back the layers we have carefully crafted to cover who we truly are inside. Maybe we can't share ourselves with the world, because we don't know who we are and, therefore, who God has created us to be.

The aged prophet looked at King Saul and stated in 1 Samuel 16:7, *"For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* While we are all familiar with the pressure of external eyes evaluating us, what God truly cares about is the inward condition of our heart. Too often, we find ourselves in situations that require us to dig deep into our souls, only to realize we have little to draw from. Focusing on the internal condition of our souls will lead us to invest more time in His presence and Word in the season ahead. If our soul is full internally, it can buoy us through any external storm we may face ahead.

### **Focus on Direction Over Speed**

What if ... in this next season, we placed less focus on the speed of progress and more on the importance of our desired destination? We always seem to be in a hurry, moving here and there, rapidly firing on all cylinders with little time to even consider that we could be feverishly moving, yet not knowing where we are going. Perhaps, we should be reminded that clarity of purpose is of more importance than speed of progress. Too often, I have seen people arrive quickly to a destination they never intended to go. God has a calling for each of us, but it requires us to embark on the journey He has for us, not on chasing quickly after the things which seem appealing or interesting.

When I look at the life of Jesus, I don't seem to find that He was ever in a hurry. While there were crises happening all around Him and the disciples were trying to get Jesus to understand the urgency of the moment, He always appeared more interested in leading people to a deeper revelation of the clarity of His purpose. Could we be in a hurry to change things around us, only to recognize that the longing of humanity and the appeal of Jesus' call to become a disciple is the unhurried and restful moments where we sit at Jesus' feet and allow the Holy Spirit to remind us that we are loved just as we are in this moment, not on what we will be or accomplish?

What If? A simple question with profound implications. The question invites you to shift your thinking to consider a future much different than your past or even your present situation. I believe the moment we are in could be a fulcrum that shifts momentum and pushes you toward your divine destiny! However, the questions still remain. Will change happen to you or through you? Will you step into significance over success? Will you prioritize your inner world over the external? Will you place more importance on the clarity of your purpose than on the speed of your movement?



*Jonathan Buckland has served as a Missionary, Youth Pastor, Lead Pastor and Church Planter. He holds a Master of Arts in Ministerial Leadership, teaches as an adjunct instructor with Destiny Leadership Institute and serves pastors and leaders through coaching, consulting and mentoring. He, along with his family, reside in Ohio, where he works at Cleveland State University.*

# NOEL



## MICAH SUTTON

The world changed with a single “yes.” A young Hebrew girl said it, and only an angel heard it. It was small and unimportant to most of the world, yet that “yes” released a destiny that impacted the world

like no other. Mary was undoubtedly overwhelmed and humbled as Gabriel began describing the destiny God designed for her. She could not understand what it would all mean or visualize the result, but with admirable faith, she said “yes” to God’s plan.

We know how things started and ended, but we rarely think about the process Mary went through to deliver her God-designed destiny. It didn’t happen in a moment. It unfolded over time. It wasn’t simple. It was complicated. Her destiny was like no other, but it was equally just like all others. Mary was exceptional in her willingness to submit to God’s plan faithfully, but the fact that God had a plan for her wasn’t unique. She was special in that she would miraculously give birth to the Son of God - Savior of the world, but that God would birth something miraculous from her life wasn’t unusual. People called to deliver a God-designed destiny fill the pages of Scripture. History records the names of those who allowed God to do miraculous things through their lives. Yes, Mary was alone in delivering the Messiah into the world. No, she wasn’t alone in being called to deliver a God-designed destiny. You and I are called to produce a God-designed destiny, too!

Giving birth to a destiny is not an event; it’s a process. The story of Mary often focuses on the birth of Jesus, but His birth was not the beginning of the story. It was by process that Jesus was born into the world through her. You have something in common with Mary. Your destiny is different, but your process is the same. Suppose God has designed you to bring a child into the world, give birth to a company, book, movie, invention, friendship, or in fact - anything else. In that case, you will experience a conception, expectation, delivery, and realization. Something is conceived within you. Destiny conceived becomes destiny expected. Expectation becomes your destiny being delivered from within you and into the world. Delivery becomes realization as you begin living in the destiny God designed for you. You are in every one of those stages in some area of your life right now. What does set Mary apart is that she entered the process intentionally. She said “yes” to God’s plan and changed the world.

What difference has God created you to make? What destiny has He deigned to be birthed from your life? Each step of the process includes unique variables and specific mile markers. Stages can’t be skipped or rushed, but must be lived through. There are many stories of those whom God called to leadership roles who never saw their destiny manifested. What if a better understanding of the process could have prevented burnout, sadness, heartbreak, and even a sense of having failed God?

I know how that feels. The first church Kristy and I planted in Lombard, Illinois, did not go how we thought it would. We started with just the four of us, and after three years of great effort, we resigned from a church of around forty people. I felt like the world’s greatest failure. Yes, people had been saved, disciplined, and loved. But, what we left was different from what I had dreamed of when we arrived. Moving into our next assignment on The Big Island of Hawaii, I secretly hoped that things would go so well with secular work and helping in a local church that I would not have to lead another church. That hope dissipated in just a few weeks. The pastor left, and the congregation of seventeen people asked us to serve as pastors. To our amazement, that church grew rapidly. The most shocking part was that while dedicated to the church, I worked a secular job from the beginning. We had given so much more time and personal energy to the church in Illinois, and it struggled. In Kona, our time was limited, yet it succeeded. It took a while, but I realized that what I saw as failure in Chicago was part of a process. God was developing me. I was growing spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. The process was preparing me for a destiny I had not yet realized. The lessons from Chicago set us up for success in Kona. The lessons were hard, the victories were worth it, and my alignment with God’s process was absolutely necessary.

You must live through your process. You hurt yourself trying to bypass God’s plan. There are no shortcuts to destiny. Looking for the easy button will leave you consistently disappointed. When hope is deferred, the heart becomes increasingly unhealthy. If deferment takes too long, you could give up altogether. The entire story of Jesus coming to earth to save His people from their sins reveals God, Himself, working through a process. His goal was to make salvation available to all humanity. It was a big and bold plan worthy of divinity, but it was unrealized until Mary aligned with the strategy and allowed the process to begin and continue within her.



There's too much in Mary's story to unpack in this short article, so let me focus on a critical reality: The process does not stop unless you stop it. A process always starts at the beginning and continues to completion unless it's aborted. The truth is that the abortion of destiny happens every day. Israel was delivered from Egypt, provisioned by God to launch a nation with Egypt's wealth, provided a clear path and a fantastic leader, but aborted the process at the Jordan River. Only Joshua and Caleb said, "No, we'll keep the baby." They are also the only ones who survived the wilderness. They didn't stop the process in their life, and they thrived.

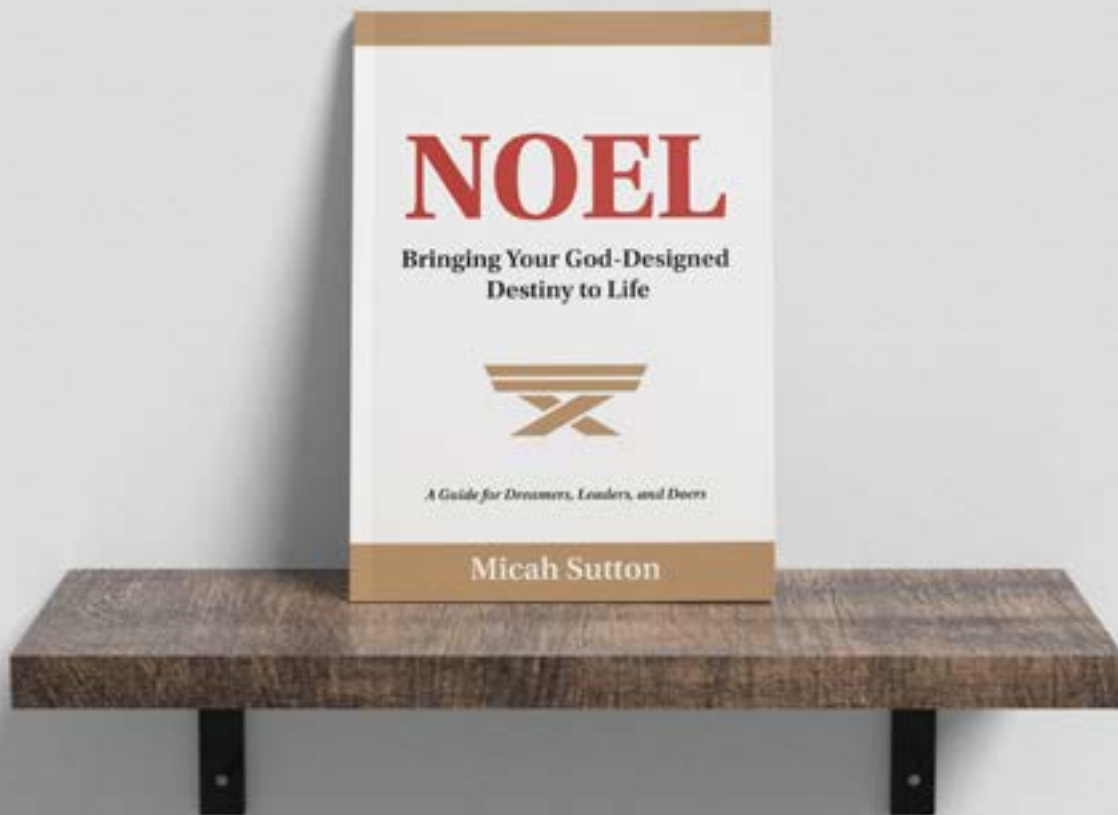
Some stray from God's plan because they decide they know better. They've seen or heard something that interests them, and they're determined to go that direction. Others, like Israel, are afraid. They know what God has designed them to create, but they are so scared of what they see, they walk away. I think most people who abort a God-designed destiny do so simply because they aren't aware enough to track their progress in the process. At a point in time, they believe the process is over. What they see isn't what they dreamed, and they stop moving forward. Don't stop! Your process is not over.

The brutal reality is that the bigger the destiny, the greater the process. An elephant's gestation period of around two years differs significantly from the twenty-day gestation period of a mouse because what's delivered is so much greater. Every moment in utero, your destiny is unseen and unknown, but it's actively drawing resources from your life. We feel the drain; we may fear the future, but we don't yet see the baby. The longer it goes, the more difficult it is to remain in the process, but don't stop. A God-designed destiny is always worth the cost.

Mary was asked to deliver the single most extraordinary destiny into the world. Her process had eternal implications like no other destiny ever would. Her "yes" started a process that all Hell and humanity tried to abort, but Mary remained faithful. At some point, the time of her delivery arrived, and Jesus was born. What was it like watching her destiny heal the sick, raise the dead, and speak hope into hopeless lives? What was it like watching her destiny hang on a cross and die only to rise again? What did Mary think when she walked through the doors of the Upper Room to wait for the Promise of the Father? I don't know what she thought, but I do know that she had heard a promise before. Gabriel had said, "The Holy Spirit will move over you, and you will bring forth a Son and call His name Jesus. He will save His people from their sin." So, I imagine that Mary walked into the Upper Room, and when the wind blew, she smiled and said, "Hello, old friend. My answer is still "yes." And the Holy Spirit moved over her again and conceived a new destiny.

God has a destiny designed for you. I encourage you to say "yes" to the process. It will be the most incredible journey of your life. Because Mary said "yes" many years ago, I say to you today, "Merry Christmas."

*Micah Sutton is a husband, father, pastor, and leader. He and his wife, Kristy, live in Sylvania, Ohio, with their two sons, Talon & Tyrian. He serves as senior pastor of Five Lakes Church. Connect with him at [micahsutton.com](http://micahsutton.com) or on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or LinkedIn.*



## ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY!

When God places a vision, a dream, into your life, it is rarely small. It will almost never seem possible. It will always provoke a sense of destiny. God is calling you to give birth to something unique. Are you willing to say “yes”? God has created a future with you in mind. Something for which He has specifically designed you. There is a job to complete, a destiny for you to fulfill. Your destiny will be unique to you, but the process of giving birth to that destiny will have commonalities with others. Mary had a destiny that only God could design. Using her life as a template NOEL reveals the process of giving birth to destiny that everyone experiences. It explores the tragedies and victories of moving into your future and offers proven solutions to some of the journey’s greatest obstacles. Books about creating almost anything fill bookshelves, but how to positively navigate the process is less accessible. NOEL is your guide to moving intentionally and strategically while remaining healthy through the process. It’s about bringing your God-designed destiny to life.

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# The Essence of Christianity

## 4 RELATIONSHIPS

**DR. DAVID AYER**

*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.* - Luke 19:10 NAS

If you have been in church for any amount of time, you have heard a hundred sermons and thousands of references to this verse. I only ask that you read the rest of this paragraph before you put this article down. Most translations of this verse read, "to save the lost," but about 15 years ago I heard renowned New Testament scholar, Scot McKnight, make a statement that changed my life. He said that the KJV, NKJV, and NAS translations were right when they translated that Jesus came to seek and save "that which was lost." My question instantly became, "What was lost?" My quest for an answer to this question has led me to a few conclusions. In this article, I want to share with you the first and maybe most important:

**The essence of the Gospel and, therefore, Christianity is the healing of broken relationships.**

Humans were created to live in relationship on four primary levels. The first relationship we see in the Creation narrative is the relationship between humans and all the earthly creation both to rule over it and to care for it, (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:15). The second, third and fourth relationships that we see are all related, interpersonal relationships. We were all created to have deep, unhindered relationships with ourselves as individuals, each other as people, and our God. To be honest, we don't see these relationships initially. Instead, they only become evident after they are lost. Take a minute to read Genesis 3:6-11.

What did you notice? Looking closely at the text, first we see the destruction of Adam and Eve's internal relationship with themselves. In verse 7, it says, "At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness." In these words, we see that at the moment Adam ate the fruit, something inside of them became broken. Their "eyes were opened," and they felt shame. This inner brokenness, the destruction of their inner relationship resulting from their rebellion, destroys the second relationship - their relationship with God. This is seen clearly in their hiding from the Lord as He seeks their company, as He walks through the garden (v8). Finally, the destruction becomes complete as the third relationship, the relationship between the husband and wife, is destroyed as Adam casts all of the blame for his failure on Eve: "It was the woman you gave me..." (v12). All of this results in the broken world described in Romans 5:12, "...and death spread to all men, because all sinned."

**The beginning of the answer is that Jesus came to restore these four relationships:**

1. Your relationship with God
2. Your relationship with You
3. Your relationship with Others
4. Our relationship with Our World

### **Christianity is about Healing Broken Relationships**

Everybody you know has relationship problems, and in a very real way, the quality of your life is in direct proportion to the quality of your relationships. Both my wife, Denise, and I were raised in broken homes, and that is just normal today. If Jesus came seeking what was lost, how do we heal these broken

relationships? What is amazing is that God heals these relationships using the one thing we are all most familiar with. He uses sacrifice allowing for forgiveness.

God has always used sacrifice to allow for the forgiveness of the worshiper. Jesus said, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins," (Matt. 26:28). Now, we all know this. Jesus dies to set us free from the reign and penalty of sin and death. In this, He restores our relationship with God. That is a miracle. It is the beginning of what God desires to bring to His people. The problem is, this is where most of us stop, and because of that, this is usually as far as our healing extends. It just doesn't have to.

At New Life Church, we do an inner healing weekend called Encounter. It is what has transformed our church from an aging, dying church of 90 to a vibrant, young church of about 250. The pivotal point of the weekend is always the session on forgiveness. In this teaching, we remind people about the Gospel, that Jesus has forgiven us and expects us to forgive in return. To many, this seems impossible until we teach Isaiah 61:1-3.

### **The Exchange**

You know Isaiah 61:1-3, or you at least know part of it, as Jesus quoted it as His thesis message and purpose of His coming in Luke 4:18-19. Isaiah 61:1 says that Jesus came to proclaim the good news, and the result would be binding up/healing the brokenhearted, freedom for the captives, and release for prisoners. That is what comes from the Gospel/Good News, but verses 2-3 tells us how: "To give them beauty



for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness..." Jesus is going to give the first in exchange for the second in each promise. So, we have to give Jesus something. We have to give him our ashes.

All of us have ashes. Ashes are the things that used to be alive, but are now dead. They are the dreams of being a virgin on your wedding night, destroyed by rape. They are the desire to sow riches into the Kingdom, when you have to declare bankruptcy. Simply, our ashes are all the remnants of our dreams that have been destroyed along the way. To us, they are only the things that remind us of the dreams that were never any more than that. He wants those. He wants to take all those things that you are ashamed of, all those mistakes, and in exchange, He wants to make beautiful. You just have to give them to Him.

So, how do we make this exchange? By forgiving and releasing. Many of you will remember Pastor Chester Wright and his teaching on shame. If you do, you will probably remember the prayer of forgiving and releasing. This simple prayer changed my life, but at the time I did not realize how this was the key to activating the healing of the four relationships.

Forgiveness in the Kingdom of God is best understood as an exchange. That is why the Good News gives people beauty for ashes. It's a trade. This is not just true of healing your first relationship (with God), but of every other relationship in your life. In fact, healing cannot come without the foundation of forgiveness. Let me finish by saying that the healing of relationships God brings into our lives is both sequential and potential. What I mean is, they follow one after

another, though clearly, there is going to be overlap. In other words, you need your relationship with God restored before you can get healed with you. And you need to get healed with your relationship with you to one degree or another before you can get healed with other people, but they are all available to you. That is where the potential part comes in. You have to choose to have these relationships healed. Jesus just gives you the choice to have that potential become your reality. It's your choice, but if you choose it, the world is going to change.

I mean that last sentence literally, as I believe that it represents a present reality that God is inviting us into. You will probably remember that there were four relationships that people were created to enjoy to the fullest. The first three are listed in the previous paragraph, but #4 is Our Relationship to Our World. What is interesting with this relationship is that it reflects God's stated purpose for creating humanity - that we should rule, having dominion as the image of God on the earth, (Gen. 1:26-28). You see, and this is the whole thing - when we get healed in our relationships with God, ourselves personally, and with each other, we open the door to unity. And when WE are healed, when we become ONE, it comes with a promise. Jesus prayed that all His children "may be one... that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). You see, when we get healed in our relationship with our "others," unified, we can begin to extend this healing of peace and wholeness to others around us. This is the equivalent to a New Testament expansion of Eden, which today is the Kingdom of God, to bring healing to Our World - realizing Relationship #4. I believe that this is how we disciple nations. This is the Gospel.

When you look at it this way, suddenly everything makes sense. God is bringing things back into unity with Himself and each other by healing our relationships. That is why Ephesians 1:9-10 says, "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He set forth in Him, regarding His plan of the fullness of the times, to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth."

This is ultimately what the Gospel is about: healing the broken relationships that Satan destroyed through Adam's rebellion. Therefore, that is what the Church is called to do. Jesus said He came to seek and to save that which was lost. This is the beginning of what Jesus did to bring humanity. The key to it all is this simple prayer below. Are you going to begin to reclaim your heart? It starts with a prayer.

**Forgiving and Releasing Prayer:**

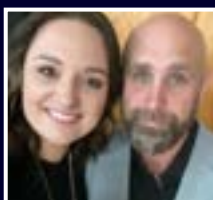
*"I Forgive and Release \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_. "It made me feel \_\_\_\_\_."*



Dr. David Ayer, and his beautiful wife Denise, currently pastor New Life Church near Williamsport, PA. Both have traveled internationally as missionary evangelists and conference speakers. David holds masters degrees in Christian Theology (TEDS) and New Testament (Ashland). His doctorate is in Christian Discipleship in a Postmodern Context (United). David is also the author of the book: *Where Are The Davids?*

# THE POWER OF INFLUENCE

*The Story We Thought We Knew*



*Roger Powers is passionate about sharing the life-giving message of Jesus Christ, and how to find freedom through a personal relationship with Him. He has been married to his wife, Stephanie, for 22 years and together they have three daughters: Selah, Zoe, and Hallie. He is the pastor of Thrive Church, a two year old church plant, in Searcy, Arkansas. Roger began his biblical education journey with Destiny Leadership Institute, and since graduating the program in 2013, has earned a Bachelor of Biblical Studies from Ecclesia College, as well as a Master of Divinity (Theology) from Liberty University. He plans to begin his doctoral program in the spring of 2024.*

## ROGER POWERS

Matthew 2:1-2

*"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'"*

As a Christian family, I think it's a given rule that at Christmas you must display at least one nativity scene somewhere in your home. The nativity scene presents the story of Jesus being born in the most humbling of atmospheres, a stable. A traditional display would include Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, shepherds, angels, and animals. The wise men are usually found somewhere within most people's nativity scenes, but they weren't actually there the night Jesus was born. The gospel of Matthew tells us by the time the wise men visited Jesus, He was no longer in the manger, but in a home. Actually, events of the wise men visiting Jesus could have happened up to two years after He was born. I will admit, when I first learned this, I took it upon myself to make sure to move the wise men in random places throughout my mother-in-law's house to make her nativity scene more historically correct. My intent here is not for you to move your wise men to the other side of your home or to discredit their place in the nativity story, but to give some insight outside of our normal traditions on who the wise men were and how they possibly came to know to be on the lookout for the star in the sky that pointed to the coming of the Messiah—all the while, the religious people of the time had no clue of the events that were taking place.

To answer the question of the wise men's identities, we need to start with where the Scripture tells us they came from. Matthew 2:1 states, *"Behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem."* Most theologians believe they were of Persian descent and that their travels may have started from Babylon, which means they would have traveled over 700 miles. This means their journey would have taken at least a few months! That's dedication to their cause. I mean, as a pastor, I can tell you that some people don't want to take a 10-minute car ride to church on a Sunday morning when there is a chance of rain on Monday, so traveling

for months following a star in the sky takes a great deal of faith.

Tradition has also referred to the wise men as three kings, but that's most likely not the case. The Greek word that our English Bibles translate wise men from is *μαγοι*, which can be translated as 'wise men' or as 'magi.' Magi, I believe, is the better translation. The Magi in that time would have commonly been referred to as astrologers—hence them finding a new star in the sky and following it to find the newborn King just makes more sense than some random kings from the Orient. Also, the Bible never mentions the number of wise men that made the journey. The number three was most likely chosen since there were three gifts that were presented to Jesus. *(We may want to grab several more wise men figurines to place around our nativities to keep accurate numbers.)*

Knowing that the wise men were Magi helps to be able to dig deeper into the story. The Magi are also referenced in the Old Testament book of Daniel. The book of Daniel informs us that Daniel was a Jewish youth that was taken from his homeland and brought into Babylonian captivity under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. Even while under captivity, Daniel's faith never wavered, and because of this, he found favor from God, which earned him influence with the king. Daniel's favor led to him eventually being named the "chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" (Dan 2:48), also known as the Magi.

This is the cool part, where I believe everything ties together. Could it be that Daniel's position and influence with the Magi is the reason that the Magi knew to be on the lookout for a star that pointed to the newborn King? Daniel was in a position to teach the prophetic words and visions that he had been given of the coming of Christ, to those that he had been placed in authority over. Daniel overcame being in a tight spot—he was basically working for the enemy, but was still able to have influence on the people within his reach that was able to stand the test of time. There were over 400 years between the events of Daniel and the birth of Jesus, and to be honest, I can't remember what I had for breakfast this morning, but Daniel was able to teach and reach these men with the Gospel long before the

Gospel took His first breath. God was able to use Daniel and his position to teach the truth about the one true God. He was able to lay a prophetic foundation of the coming Messiah that would save his people, including the Magi. It didn't happen in Daniel's lifetime, but he planted the seed that would be passed down through the generations until the sign in the sky came, right on time, just as the angel Gabriel had instructed Daniel in Chapter 9.

Daniel's testimony to the people pointed them to the coming hope even in the midst of captivity and despair. Daniel never went back to his hometown of Jerusalem, but he did leave a legacy that pointed others to know when the Messiah was to come 453 years later.

I don't know about you, but I believe we live in a time where people are in desperate need of some hope. Today more than ever, believers need to stand firm in God's Word and point people to the true reason for the season, Jesus. The wise men all made a choice to believe a truth that was passed down 400 years before and make a long journey that would demand them to leave the comforts of their homes, a sacrifice of their time and even of their finances. They stepped out on a Word that was planted hundreds of years before by a young man that never had the opportunity to step foot back into his hometown again, but who held true to who God called him to be; those wise men were able to experience Christ, Himself, because of Daniel's faithfulness and courage to speak truth even if it wasn't popular.

The wise men's actions teach to seek the Messiah, no matter the cost, and worship Him with our best gifts because He is ultimately worthy. Daniel's actions teach us about influence. We can never underestimate the power of our influence in the places that God has given us favor.

I hope when you look upon those wise men that are now placed a distance away from the manger, that you see the importance of what God is calling and asking of you this Christmas season. Let's not get so caught up in the busyness of life that we forget to be like Daniel and spread the good news of the Savior that can bring us all great joy and hope in the uncertainty of the times.



# All In, Always

*featuring DLI Graduates, Scott & Jordan Brassfield Dunham*



My husband and I have had this saying since we got engaged almost 10 years ago. We hadn't known each other long, but we both just knew this is where we wanted to be, with each other. One evening, we sat talking about this and that...The conversation turned more serious as we talked about the future. He had been offered a job requiring him to move about an hour away, so change was coming, I just didn't know how much. I encouraged him to take the opportunity and reassured him I wasn't going anywhere; it would work out. He said he wanted me to go with him. As we continued to talk about what that might look like, the conversation ended with a final question, "So are you all in?" My response was, "Always."

This "All in" idea has continued throughout our marriage in various seasons. During the Spring of 2020, a particularly hard season in our lives, I had to be away from home for several months in order to overcome a life of addiction. It was hard to be away, especially after relapsing and the beginning of the COVID pandemic. My relapse was a new low and another notch on the failure side of life for me. All the while, Scott had purchased a cross necklace with "All in" engraved on it for me, and he had, for himself, a cross chain with "Always" on it. Scott was patient with me, and when he gave me the necklace, he reassured me that he hadn't changed his mind, he was still ALL IN, ALWAYS.

In that season, God was drawing us close to Him. He was calling us to know Him. He was preparing our hearts for what was to come. While I was away, Scott began to seek

God for himself. Up to this point, church had not been a priority for us, and his experience and understanding of God was more transactional than relational. In this time, the Holy Spirit began working on us separately. He was drawing Scott closer, stirring in him a hunger for more. The Lord was working in my heart as well. As He began to heal my heart, my hunger for more of Him grew stronger. When I graduated from my program and returned home, we started dreaming again, sharing with each other what God had been doing in our hearts over the last several months. In our excitement and hunger for more of God, we had an opportunity to go through the DLI (Destiny Leadership Institute), and we jumped on it. Again, we were living with our hearts ALL IN to whatever doors God was opening. As my dad says often, "keep your switch flipped to 'YES.'"

Whether we understood the purpose or felt unqualified, we both wanted what God had purposed for us, so we seized the opportunity to complete the DLI program. We completed DLI in December 2022 and graduated at this summer's Destiny Gathering conference. DLI affected so many areas of our lives. It taught us to reevaluate our priorities and open up our eyes, hearts, and lives to seek what God had in store for us. Scott began to realize that, as the head of our household, it was time for him to become the spiritual leader of our family. Our children were impacted, our marriage was impacted. WE were changing. In our obedience and willingness to go ALL IN, God began to move and expand our capacity. DLI urged us to stretch out of our comfort zone and trust that God would see us through any situation.

When we first started DLI, we had to arrange to serve our local church or ministry as part of the program. We talked to Pastor Jarred at The River to see if there was an area in the church where we could be of service. We began as door greeters. This was a perfect opportunity to get our "servant feet" wet. We are pretty goofy, so we had a lot of fun welcoming people as they came into church. This was something that was really out of our comfort zone, but we were committed - we went ALL IN.

After a little time, we were offered an opportunity to participate in one of Samaritan's Purse's ministries, Operation Christmas Child. Scott's heart was moved with compassion for OCC. We started praying that the Lord would lead us into His desire and purpose for our lives. We didn't want to commit to more than we could effectively manage. We were willing to go ALL IN, but we wanted our steps to be ordered by the Lord, so we waited.

It didn't take long, and we felt the tugging in our heart to become a part of The OCC ministry. To know that we could help brighten a child's life from across the globe and to share with them the hope and gospel of Jesus Christ was a privilege. This is our third year to lead as a central drop off location team leaders for five area churches. We couldn't have done any of it without the volunteers giving their time and effort to serve. Last year, with the help of the wonderful people from the Heart of Arkansas team, we were able to collect over 23,000 shoe boxes for children who have never heard of Jesus. Each one of those boxes is a seed that will affect families and generations to come. The harvest is coming, and we are believing God for more.

When I think back to where it all started, I shake my head. Jesus restores all that the enemy has tried to destroy. He set our feet on firm ground as we sought to know Him more. We are thankful that DLI was available to us. We gained so much understanding about the heart of God as we studied the Word of God. You combine those classes with the lectures on servant leadership, and wrap it all up with opportunities to live out what we learned... well, it doesn't get much better than that. If you had asked us five years ago if we would be where we are today, I wouldn't have believed it. We are grateful for all of the opportunities that God has given to us to serve those that He loves! We desire to be the hands and feet of Jesus, bringing glory to His name. Our switch is flipped to "yes," and we are

**ALL IN, ALWAYS.**



# UNANTICIPATED *Revival*



## ABIGAIL DEJARNATT

Within a semester of starting college in 2019, nearly half the people I graduated with from my tiny, Christian high school jumped off the deep end—some fell into the LGBTQ+ lifestyle, some crashed the party scene, and some rejected God entirely. One girl I had gone to school with since the fourth or fifth grade said Christianity was outdated and irrelevant.

It broke my heart. I didn't understand how they were so easily knocked off their foundation—but what God began to show me is that they never learned how to stand. The Christians of my generation have been spoon-fed postmodern and progressive Christian lies on TikTok and Instagram, but haven't been equipped with how to combat them. They only know how to talk about their faith within the context of the church and don't know how to effectively wield the Sword of the Spirit in the spiritual battle that is raging in our nation.

Counteract USA's mission was born in June 2021 with the purpose of equipping Christians to push back against ever-changing cultural and political ideologies with the grace and truth of Scripture. We do this by establishing small cells of Gen Z believers across the country who meet weekly to discuss the issues of our day, always going back to what the Bible has to say about them. We build rapport with one another through these discussions, practically applying our faith to the world around us, and thus developing Biblical, critical thinking on sociopolitical issues. Our vision for Counteract USA is that each cell member would be able to skillfully engage their spheres of influence for Biblical truth and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And God is moving—quickly and overwhelmingly—in and through Counteract USA. What started with five girls in a coffee shop in Springdale, Arkansas, is growing into a movement of hundreds of young men and women across the country. We've traveled to Washington, D.C. to march for life, hosted a sold-out conference in May 2022 featuring Abby Johnson, and have seen members moved by God to pursue careers in the intersection of Christianity and politics. Our leaders are speaking to audiences across the country, as we're writing our own curriculum, engaging



young adults on social media, launching a podcast, and so much more...

But, something we never expected in the months leading up to 2023 was that God was preparing us for an outpouring of His Spirit unlike anything most of us had ever experienced.

In January, our Northwest Arkansas leadership team began to feel inexplicably drawn by the Holy Spirit. We all come from different denominational backgrounds, yet we all felt this same sense of urgency and desire to encounter Him in new, real, deeper, and more intimate ways. As God began to move in our team, with Northwest Arkansas (NWA) acting as a sort of hub for Counteract USA, we started to talk about what total surrender and obedience to the Holy Spirit might look like in Gen Z. After the revival at Asbury, we wondered, "Would it be contagious?"

Because our generation is desperate for something deeper than surface-level, shattering the status quo of casual Christianity. We're desperate to see the Church resuscitated and on fire, alive and engaged. We're desperate for change and ready for revival. We're ready for the Spirit of God to fall upon this place.

And He has. He is.

One by one, our NWA leaders began to surrender to the call and filling of the Holy Spirit, and in a few short months, we've seen His overflow. After Counteract USA meetings, we've seen young adults give their lives to Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit. We've prayed and worshiped into the early hours of the morning. We've witnessed God deliver our friends from strongholds of sin and fear, and prophecies upon prophecies have been proclaimed over our leaders and the ministry God has set into motion here. Some of our leaders and members have seen visions from the Holy Spirit come to fruition-and He has so much more in store.

It's Ephesians 3:20-21 in real time: God is doing far more abundantly than all we could ever have asked or thought possible. None of what we've seen can be explained apart from the power and movement of the Holy Spirit. All we can do is say, "Yes," doing our best to surrender and be obedient as He leads, staying in step with Him and walking through the doors He opens.

And right now, some of those doors look like speaking to young adults across the country, encouraging them



to gently and respectfully engage in uncomfortable conversations, pointing everything back to the Word of God. Other doors look like developing curriculum to come alongside and equip leaders to apply Biblical truth to the critical, hot-button issues of our day.

Because our world is desperately searching for answers, and we have the Answer. They're looking for hope, and we have a Living Hope-our only hope-and His name is Jesus. Our Counteract USA mission verses for 2023 are Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek," and 2 Corinthians 3:12, "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold...."

The calling God has given us at Counteract USA is very clear: we're not a political action group, and we're not a Bible study. Rather, we're a ministry that seeks to embolden believers to stand firm for the truth of the Word of God in their everyday conversations in their everyday lives-because we believe that the conversations that change culture happen in the classroom, the workplace, at home, and with friends. We want what God is doing in Northwest Arkansas to happen everywhere. As we build these iron-sharpens-iron communities where like-minded believers can talk, worship, and do life together, our prayer is that a boldness for the Word of God overflows into all aspects of their lives-and that's where change happens.

That's where revival happens.

*(Counteract USA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. For more information, please visit [counteractusa.org](http://counteractusa.org))*



*Abigail DeJarnatt is the founder and CEO of Counteract USA, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a goal to equip young Christians to apply Biblical truth to cultural and political conversations. Her "why" is to see the church engage culture for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Abigail was born and raised in Northwest Arkansas, where she currently lives and does full-time ministry with Counteract USA, traveling, speaking, writing, and encouraging believers to be bold for the Gospel.*

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# **GROWING YOUR CHURCH IN THE HOLIDAY SEASON:** *Five Ways to Connect*

- 1 STRATEGIZE WAYS TO MEET NEW PEOPLE.** Often, churches and ministries stall in growth, because they fail to have a strategic plan for meeting new people. Creating new relationships is the absolute key to growing your church or ministry. The holiday season is an amazing opportunity to connect with new people. Here are a few ideas to get you started: the obvious, of course, is Christmas parties. They are going on everywhere. This year, make a point to get the names and contact information of the new people you meet during the parties you host or attend. Be subtle for sure, but assert yourself a little. You might be surprised how people will respond positively if you come right out and say, "We are excited to make new friends this holiday season. Tell me more about you." Host a community wide church party. People come to these things. Encourage your members to bring a friend, and have special door prizes for those new to the gathering. Make being new a celebration - have fun and communicate value to those who attend.
- 2 PROVIDE SEASONAL SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY.** As the salt and light of the world, the church is to be visible and influential in the community. This holiday season, find ways for your church or ministry to be engaged in the motion of the community. Find an event at which the church can serve. Offer free gift wrapping services, or host a parents night out and provide free child care, so parents can have a night to Christmas shop without the kids.
- 3 REALIZE THAT THE CHRISTMAS STORY IS THE ANSWER TO THE GREATEST QUESTIONS OF LIFE.** Answer the questions people are asking. Here, relevance is king. The gospel is relevant to every generation, but it's our responsibility to package it in a way that effectively answers the challenges of the culture in which we live and wrap it in a holiday package. Understand the culture, follow the trends and the language of the day, and don't forget technology. People live in cyberspace. Christmas should be a huge celebration of the Gospel as the hope of the world.
- 4 PEOPLE IN THE MARGINS STRUGGLE, ESPECIALLY DURING THE HOLIDAYS.** Be a solution to someone's problem. Seventy percent of people come to Christ in times of crisis and personal trauma. If we refuse to be involved in the lives of troubled people, we effectively eliminate 70% of our harvest potential. This holiday season, get involved with the community in ways that positively impact families. Get your church involved with programs designed to provide gifts for underprivileged children, be a blessing to family shelters, or treatment facilities. Anywhere families are the focus, look for opportunities to serve.
- 5 MAKE YOUR CHURCH CHRISTMAS PROGRAM AN OUTREACH FOR NEW PEOPLE.** Christmas services and programs are the second highest event attended by the unchurched, second to Easter. Don't miss the opportunity. During the program, have a strategy for clarifying your connecting points. "Answer these questions in a clever creative way. What is the church's "why"? Make sure your values are embedded in your event. Help new people see that Jesus Christ and His Church can add peace, meaning, significance and great value to their lives. Make them feel welcome, and help them see themselves in the picture of the Church.

Don't let this Christmas be just another holiday for your church. Make it count. Give it the attention and effort to make it one of the strongest outreach seasons of the year. And watch your church grow as you demonstrate the real reason for the season. Your church will connect with lots of new people, and your members will grow as they focus on others!



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