

SUMMER 2025

DESTINY

M A G A Z I N E

MADE FOR
MORE

CULTIVATING
SHALOM IN
THE STORM

WADE IN THE
WATER

RUNNING TO
A CULTURE
READY FOR
TRUTH

PARTNERING
WITH GOD'S
PLAN

THE WAY OF
THE MASTER

Destiny Leaders



A Word from Phil & Cathy

Welcome to the Summer 2025
edition of Destiny Magazine!

What an incredible time we shared together at this year's Destiny Gathering! Celebrating 25 years of ministry with our Destiny family was nothing short of extraordinary. From powerful worship and insightful teaching to meaningful connections and moments of refreshing, the theme, The Great Adventure, reminded us that the journey of ministry is marked by faith, courage, and God's unwavering faithfulness.

As we move into the second half of the year, we carry the momentum of that gathering into a new season. We're excited to invite you to Autumn Rain, a special fall conference happening October 23-25 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It's a time set apart for spiritual renewal, deep fellowship, and powerful ministry—designed to refresh your soul and realign your heart with God's purpose.

Inside this issue, you'll find stories of impact, leadership tools, and ministry updates that reflect the heart of who we are and where we're headed. Whether you're just joining the Destiny family or have walked with us for years, we're grateful for your partnership in the mission.

Here's to the next 25 years—and to the adventure still ahead.

With love and gratitude,
Dr. Phil & Cathy Brassfield

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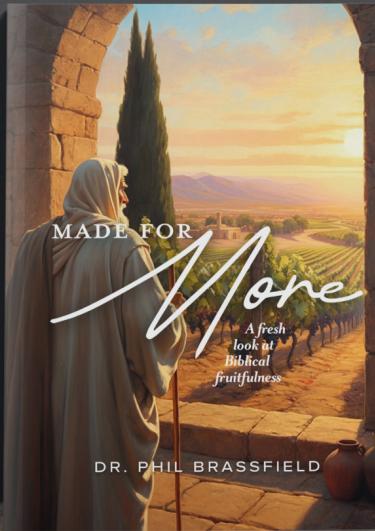
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NEW BOOK

BY DR. PHIL BRASSFIELD



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MADE FOR *More*

An excerpt from Dr. Phil Brassfield's new book, *Made for More*.

DR. PHIL BRASSFIELD

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' capstone speech to the nation of Israel just before his death, delivered over a forty-day period to a new generation of Israelites. This new generation was born mostly during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness after the disobedience of their fathers. They had not seen the miracles of deliverance their fathers had seen. They needed to be reminded of God's intent to be their God and for them to be His people. They also needed to be reminded of God's intent to bless them with a homeland, often called "the Promised Land," and of God's determination to multiply Israel and their families.

Most of all, this new generation of Israel needed to be reminded that God had not changed His mind. He would prosper them in direct relation to their faithful obedience to His commands. The Law, the contract agreement between God and Israel, was the legal instrument by which the Abrahamic blessing would be released to Israel.

Look with me briefly at a few highlights from Deuteronomy 28:

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God: "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out." (Deuteronomy 28:1-6)

In these verses, Moses laid out the promise of a comprehensive blessing that elevates the people of God. He said, "God will set you high above all nations of the earth." According to Moses, this profoundly specific blessing would follow even *pursue*, the people of faith.

For faithful Israel, the promise of blessing would be a constant companion regardless of their location. God would bless them whether they were "in the city or in the field." In ancient Near East culture, this phrase speaks not only of geography but also vocation. People who lived in the city generally made their living from buying or selling a product or service. People of the field were generally farmers or shepherds making their living through crops or herds. Here's the point: God promised that His specific blessing would be upon any industry or vocation in which Israel engaged. No matter where they went or what kind of work they performed, God's elevating, comprehensive blessing would be released solely by their agreement with God, through their faith and obedience.

This is also true for you. Believers who walk with God and obey His commands can expect blessing in every area of their lives. We can anticipate in faith that God's favor and specific blessing of reproduction and multiplication will be on our family, our businesses, our investments and jobs. Regardless of the domain in which we are called to serve, we are blessed to be a blessing. We are *made for more!*

In verse 8, Moses records a powerful statement:

The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 28:8)

God is so passionate about the blessing being released for His people that He will "command His blessing" on them. The blessing will not be accidental or just a mere consequence of the general blessing given to all creation. Rather, God promised that the blessing upon His covenant people will be intentionally reproduced and deliberately multiplied. That's how determined God is to bless you!

Then, Moses continued and spoke in great detail about God's plan for abundance:

And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. (Deuteronomy 28:11-12)

Note the measure and scale of God's promise: "And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity" as He "open[s] to you His good treasury, the heavens." Do you see it? The abundance of your earthly blessing will reflect the wealth of heaven. Heaven, God's domain, is filled with abundance. There is no lack in heaven. It is the realm of *infinitely more!* Heaven's resources are inexhaustible, and they are released into earth through faith and obedience.

God wanted to bless Israel and make them a blessing to the world. This was God's original promise to Abraham, and it is still God's intent today for you. God wants to bless you so that you may become a blessing to the people around you.

Heaven's blessing flows best as a river, not dammed up in a stagnant pond. Heaven's resources will flow into you so that, through you, others may be blessed and become channels for even more blessing. When the nations of the earth see the blessing of God upon those who believe, they will give God the glory. You might wonder, "Can I really claim over three thousand years later the promises given to Abraham and repeated to Israel? Is it a stretch to apply the Deuteronomy 28 promises to us today?" Great questions! And the best way to answer those questions is to remember that Paul taught us in Galatians 3:29 that we have become heirs to the promises of Abraham through faith in Christ.

Also, Paul taught us: *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."* (Romans 15:4)

We stand as the heirs of Abraham through faith, grafted into God's holy people, Israel. As a Christian, you have every right to lay claim to the same blessings God gave to Abraham, the same blessings that we've traced through the lineage of Abraham and his sons to the nation of Israel as it was revealed in the Law. Here's the main thing to remember: Faith and obedience activates the blessing of God in our lives today as it did for Abraham and Israel. As we come into agreement with God, His *made for more* blessings reproduce and multiply throughout the ages and generations to all who believe, to all who were *made for more!*

You can purchase *Made for More: A Fresh Look at Biblical Fruitfulness* by Dr. Phil Brassfield on Amazon or at www.philbrassfield.com. Whether you're looking for a personal read or a resource for your next small group study, this inspiring book is a powerful guide to discovering the abundant life God created you to live. Grab your copy today and begin your journey toward greater fruitfulness and purpose.

CULTIVATING SHALOM IN THE STORM:

Four Storms Every Church Leader Must Understand

DR. LANDON GALLOWAY

In the biblical imagination, the sea was not just a body of water—it was a symbol of chaos. It represented everything unruly, dangerous, and resistant to the order God intended. That's why in Revelation 21:1, John tells us that in the new heaven and new earth, "*there was no more sea.*" He's not saying there won't be oceans or coastlines. He's saying that chaos will no longer exist. Shalom will reign.

Throughout Scripture, storm stories show us how chaos intrudes into human life and divine mission. But they also show us how peace—real, unshakable peace—can be cultivated even in the midst of violent, destabilizing storms. As church leaders, we encounter storms of all kinds. And understanding their origins helps us navigate them with wisdom, discernment, and faith.

1. Storms That I Cause (Jonah 1:1-4)

Jonah was a prophet with a divine assignment: Go to Nineveh and call the people to repentance. But instead of moving toward his purpose, he ran in the opposite direction. His disobedience led him to Joppa, then to a boat bound for Tarshish—and, ultimately, into a violent storm hurled by God, Himself.

This kind of storm arises when we, as leaders, get out of alignment with God's voice. It could be a refusal to address a hard truth, a decision made from fear or ego, or a season where we've drifted from intimacy with God. And when that happens, chaos doesn't stay contained. Jonah's rebellion disrupted not only his peace, but also the peace of everyone on board.

The beauty of Jonah's story is that the storm wasn't punishment—it was an invitation to return. God uses storms to realign what has gotten off track. As leaders, we must cultivate peace not by pretending the storm isn't our fault, but by being honest enough to repent and course-correct. Shalom begins where obedience is restored.

2. Storms That Others Cause (Jonah 1:5-16)

While Jonah slept below deck, the sailors were panicking. They hadn't done anything wrong; they were simply caught in someone else's storm. In their desperation, they threw cargo overboard, prayed to gods that couldn't save, and tried to row their way out. But nothing worked until they released Jonah over the side.

There's a painful truth here for leaders: Sometimes, the chaos in our ministries isn't from our own decisions, but from the people we've allowed too close. Toxic team members, manipulative voices, or partnerships outside of God's timing can create constant storms. And when peace feels impossible, it may be because we've got someone on board who was never meant to sail with us.

Letting go can feel unkind, even unspiritual. But discernment is not cruelty—it's stewardship. The moment Jonah was thrown overboard, the sea grew calm. If you're fighting chaos that won't break, it might be time to evaluate who's influencing your direction. Sometimes cultivating peace means making hard, Spirit-led decisions about your team and your relational boundaries.

3. Storms That My Purpose Causes (Mark 4:35-41)

When Jesus told His disciples, "*Let us go over to the other side,*" they obeyed without hesitation. But obedience didn't keep the storm away. In fact, the storm came because they were heading into divine assignment, into enemy territory to deliver a man tormented by a legion of demons.

This is a storm that comes right before breakthrough. Right before impact. Right before purpose is fulfilled. And often, that's when fear strikes hardest. The wind rises, the waves break over the boat, and even seasoned fishermen feel like they're going under.

In the middle of that chaos, Jesus is sleeping, not out of apathy, but because His peace is not threatened by the storm. When the disciples wake Him, He doesn't just calm the sea—He challenges their perspective. "*Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*"

That question isn't about the existence of faith—it's about the placement of it. They had faith... in the storm. They believed more in the chaos than in the one who calms it. And that's the challenge for us as leaders: When the storm is a direct result of our obedience and assignment, will we see it through the lens of fear or faith?

We cultivate peace by recognizing that storms aren't always signs we've missed God—they may be signs we're right on track. Keep rowing. Deliverance is on the other side.



4. Storms That Just Happen (Matthew 14:22-33)

Sometimes storms aren't caused by rebellion, toxic relationships, or spiritual warfare. Sometimes they just happen. Jesus told the disciples to get in the boat and cross the lake. They obeyed. But even in obedience, they found themselves "buffeted by the waves because the wind was against them."

This is the chaos of a broken world - disease, disappointment, financial strain, loss, fatigue. No one caused it. There's no deeper meaning. It's just life in a fallen creation groaning for redemption.

But even in those storms, Jesus shows up. Not in the way we expect—He doesn't calm the storm right away. He walks on it. The very thing that threatens the disciples becomes the pathway for His arrival. Chaos becomes His platform. The storm that threatens to take you under is under His feet. He shows dominion over the chaos. He isn't just the storm-stopper. Sometimes, He is the storm-stomper!

And Peter? He does the unthinkable. He walks on the water, too—until he shifts his focus. When his eyes are on Jesus, he

stands above the waves. When his eyes are on the wind, he sinks.

This is the invitation to leaders in unexplainable storms: Don't fix your eyes on what's swirling. Fix them on who's walking toward you. Cultivate Shalom by refusing to be defined by your circumstances. Peace is not the absence of pressure—it's the presence of Jesus in the middle of it.

Every storm has its origin. Some are ours. Some are theirs. Some are tied to our calling. And some are just part of being human. But no matter the cause, one thing is true in every case: Jesus is not intimidated by chaos. He speaks to it. He walks on it. He is Lord over it.

You may feel like you're in a season where peace is elusive. But let me remind you: Shalom is not circumstantial—it's Christological. It is found in the person of Jesus, not the condition of the sea.

You don't have to sink. You don't have to throw in the towel. You don't have to fear the wind.

Because the One who stills storms and walks on waves is with you.



WADE IN THE WATER



**BISHOP
PAUL
RUSSELL**

"Take a few steps into the river..." Joshua to the Israelite Priests (Joshua 3:8)

Twice a month, I join a group of pastors in Northwest Houston for prayer. Throughout the years, we have built a relationship that allows us to openly share our struggles, aspirations, and obstacles. A pastor recently expressed his challenges in ministry, including issues like finances, staffing, and church attendance. While praying and worrying aloud about the decline in Sunday morning attendance, he felt the Holy Spirit prompt him, "I'm inviting people to your church. Are you?"

For some reason, those words created a holy moment for all of us. During the next few minutes, we admitted our longing to hear from God in a new way, committing to listen and act in obedience. We concluded our prayer, asking God to instill in us a renewed passion to step beyond the ordinary and into the flow of His purpose.

When I left the meeting, my car radio was set on the Sirius FM Watercolors jazz station. The artist was belting out, "Wade in the water, wade in the water...."

It's an old spiritual sung by enslaved Blacks as they pursued freedom via the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman encouraged escaping slaves with this song, urging them to leave the well-trodden path and enter

the water to avoid detection by the hunting dogs.

When the Fisk Jubilee Singers popularized the song in the early 1900s, it brought to mind the scene of Joshua instructing the Israelites to step into the waters of the Jordan River, anticipating a miracle from God. The priests were to carry the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders, enter the waters, wait for the waters to part, and guide the Israelites to the other side. Also, the phrase, 'God's gonna trouble the waters' alluded to the troubling of the waters of Siloam where Jesus healed the blind man.

God can use music to touch us in the deepest spaces. As the singer wailed, "Wade in the Water, children...God's gonna trouble the waters soon...." I thought about the actions I need to take to align with His purpose for this season.

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

What will your next steps in the ministry be? Can you accept the Psalmist's promise that the Lord is guiding your path? That He takes delight in every aspect of your life? That even when you stumble, you will not fall because He is supporting you?

God is the author of your tomorrows. We do not determine His plans. As God told Joshua, true success and prosperity are found in following Him! We are meant to simply walk in the path He has set for us. Years ago, I heard some good advice from Henry Blackaby "Watch to see where God is

working and join Him in his work."

It is normal for pastors to go through times when you second guess your current assignment. May I reassure you that God has you there for a reason. You are the answer to someone's prayer. Someone in that community needs what you have.

A few years ago, Delia and I decided to follow a God-dream, do it all over again, and move to Cypress, Texas to plant a new church. There are two ways to launch. You can launch like a rocket and take off with three or four hundred people first service. Or you can launch like a fishing boat. Just untie the rope and paddle out into the water. With three or four people. We did the latter.

I admire rocket launchers. I am more of a paddler. There were moments when we doubted the wisdom of leaving the security of a mega-church to begin something new. But I am grateful we kept paddling. God sees to it that provision follows His vision. Just this morning, I sat on the front row, basking in the wonderful worship service, watching our son, Kennis, who now serves as Lead Pastor, skillfully lead the service, and thinking, "I am glad we stepped in the water."

Christopher Wright has pointed out, "It's not that God has a mission for your church, but rather that God has your church for His mission!" Your next steps will not be determined by churchy trends or finally figuring out a twenty-seven-word mission statement. Your next steps will be fashioned by God's design for you.



THE INEXPICABLE MYSTERY OF OBEDIENCE

Joshua got a word from the Lord. All the Israelites needed to do was follow directions. Today, Jesus promises us guidance from the Holy Spirit. Our task is to obey - to do the right thing.

The marvel of obedience is that it creates a vacuum that puts a draw on the favor of God. God does not call us to do something without providing the means to perform. Obedience puts a demand upon divine resources.

Our example of obedience is Jesus, Himself. He said, "I always do what pleases the one who sent me." I wish I could say that I have batted a thousand in this department. I can list too many occasions when I failed to obey Him and paid an abysmal price. But we learn, don't we? Or at least, we should.

Jesus said, "If you obey me, my Father will love you." This passage used to puzzle me. Of course, God loves me! Doesn't He love everyone? But Jesus is pointing to a dimension of God's love that is beyond His mercy for humanity. He is talking about something beyond the Father's tender affection toward us. He speaks here of Affirmation and Favor!

CHALLENGES ESTABLISH YOUR TESTIMONY

The Lord told Joshua, "Today I will begin to make you a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites."

Leaders will always face adversities that define their position before

people. Every endeavor needs the element of leadership. It also needs the component of partnership, friends who come alongside. Someone asked me, "How do you start a church from scratch?" My answer, "You don't." You don't succeed unless someone wants you to succeed. Ministry is not for those who want to be "self-made."

But God needs someone to take the lead. The test of the unknown is an occasion for God to confirm the leader's worth to the mission. Esther's uncle reminded her, "Who knows. Perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this!"

In perhaps one of the best books ever on leadership, Daniel Goleman elaborates on a phrase he coined, 'emotional intelligence.' He says one aspect of EI is self-awareness. Not self-consciousness, but self-awareness, the inner knowing of how we are being perceived by others. Someone is always watching. What do people see in you when the heat is on?

Maybe the current challenge you are facing is God's strategy to elevate you amidst your peers. God intended to venerate Joshua, but Joshua had to be bold and steady. Your hardest difficulty may be your greatest opportunity to shine!

BIG VICTORIES ARE MADE OF SMALL STEPS

Joshua tells the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant to take a few steps into the water. This would be the ongoing narrative of the entire conquest; people obediently taking incremental, deliberate steps.

Some miracles come as unexpected surprises. Others are the result of just doing the right thing at the right time, over and over again.

God had said that He would drive out the inhabitants a little at a time, to give Israel sufficient time to increase and possess the land. As the people matured, they would be able to handle new triumphs. We can be so enamored with 'overnight successes' that we disdain the day of small things. In C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, the devil reveals that one of his most powerful tactics against Christians was their self-destructive 'dread of the mundane.' Ever thought that tomorrow's success may hinge on just being obedient today to the last thing you heard the Holy Spirit say to you?

A young pastor I know assumed the pastorate of a defeated church the month before the Covid pandemic broke out. Forty people showed up to vote him in. He never saw most of them again. But God has used him to rescue a failing work, and today, it is thriving. He has been willing to 'wade in the waters.' Day after day.

Be encouraged. God is at work. Watch. Listen. And take a few steps.

Paul and Delia Russell are the founding pastors of Christ Family Church in Cypress, Texas. They are devoted to raising up the next generation to serve Christ. Their lives are enriched with three grown children and six grandchildren, all serving Jesus. Paul holds a Masters in Practical Theology from ORU and a Doctor of Ministry from SEU.

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WHEN THE SUN GOSSIPED ABOUT MY STOVE



TRICIA EDWARDS

I wasn't asking for a home inspection, but apparently, the sun had other plans.

I was just passing through the kitchen, minding my own business, when a bright beam of sunlight streamed through the window and landed squarely on my stove. It wasn't a soft glow, either—it was one of those unforgiving, high-definition, "let's show every single detail" kinds of lights. And oh, did it reveal the truth! The dust that had quietly settled on the stove over the past few days was now on full display, glinting like little specks of glitter—except not the fun kind.

"Really?" I thought to myself. "Didn't I just clean you? Like yesterday?"

Evidently, the sun had decided it was time for some truth-telling. It was like it was *gossiping* about the state of my stove, loudly announcing, "Look what she missed!" The GALL! It sneaks in ever so quietly, acts all innocent, and then, suddenly, it's running the place! My first thought was to close the blinds. Yeah... that would hide it, and then I could just go about my day. It would not cause any harm, and I could choose when to clean it. It felt as if the dust was glaring at me, practically shouting in a demanding, audible voice, "Clean me!"

I paced past the dusty stove... back and forth, back, and forth. I had things to do, people to see, places to be, and no time for a deep clean. Besides, I know myself—if I started with the stove, I'd have to clean *everything*. And let's be honest, scrubbing the entire house was *not* how I planned to spend this gorgeous sunny day! Nope, not happening.

But as I stood there, staring at the unexpected tattletale that was my kitchen window, I couldn't help but think—how often does God's light do the same thing in our lives? Good thing He's not afraid to roll up His sleeves and help us do some serious soul-spring-cleaning.

Just like that sunbeam revealed the dust I hadn't noticed, God's light often shines into the corners of our heart, revealing things we'd prefer to ignore. Maybe it's a habit we've let creep back in, an unchecked attitude, or a prayer time that's become a little too rushed. Most days, we can move along and pretend we've got it all together—until God's light shows up and lovingly exposes what needs attention.

And just sayin', sometimes that revelation feels just as inconvenient as spotting dust when you weren't planning to clean.

But here's the beauty: God doesn't shine His light to shame us. He's not pointing out the dust to make us feel bad. No, He shines His light because He loves us too much to let things pile up unnoticed. Just like I grabbed a cloth and gave that stove a quick wipe, God invites us to let Him clean up the messes we didn't even realize were there.

The thing about dust? It didn't make my stove any less useful or valuable—it just needed some care. And the same is true for us. When God reveals areas in our lives that need His touch, it's not because we're failing; it's because He's inviting us to experience more of His grace, more of His presence, and more of His transforming love.

But if we ignore the "dust" in our lives—the little compromises, hidden struggles, or unaddressed wounds—it doesn't just stay the same; it builds up. At first, it may seem small, barely noticeable, but over time, it settles deeper, layer upon layer, until what was once a minor issue becomes a full-blown mess.

The longer we put it off, the harder it becomes to clean. But when we let God's light shine into those places, He doesn't just expose the mess—He cleans it up. His grace sweeps through our hearts, renewing and restoring us, turning what once felt overwhelming into something whole and beautiful again.

So, the next time you see a beam of sunlight exposing some dust—whether on your stove or anywhere else—take a moment. Smile, laugh a little, and remember that God's light is always shining, not to gossip about your mess, but to gently call you back to Him.

And hey, maybe keep a dust cloth handy. You never know when the sun will decide to share your secrets again.

Ephesians 5:13 (NIV) "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light."

Tricia Edwards is a passionate pastor's wife, mother, worship leader, and comedian. She and her husband, Kevin, planted Destiny Center Church in Carterville, IL over 13 years ago and continue to pastor the thriving congregation. Known for her powerful voice and quick wit, Tricia brings both heartfelt worship and joyful laughter wherever she goes. Her life is a testimony of faith, service, and encouragement to everyone she meets.



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WHAT'S YOUR FAMILY FLAVOR?

CHELSEA BRIGGS

I rarely step foot in grocery stores nowadays thanks to pickup services, but around Easter this year, I dashed into Target with my kids for some teacher appreciation supplies. As we approached the self-checkout register, the kids spotted the machine that, without fail, always manages to flip on their begging switches, the Icee machine. They were drawn to a brand new, limited edition flavor, Peeps. Yes, you read that right... a Peeps-flavored Icee. But wait! Icees aren't supposed to taste like marshmallows, and Peeps aren't supposed to slush. These had to taste too Peeps for Icee or too Icee for Peeps. I just knew this flavor was going to disappoint, but I happily obliged their request and treated them to this unusual mix-up. I made them pay me their mom tax by letting me try it, and much to my surprise, it was a 10/10 and absolutely delicious.

Although, in a perfect world, we'd like to say we don't struggle with holding these same beliefs about family and ministry, I'm afraid in reality, too many of us are crushing under the weight of expectations from both camps. We sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that valuing one weakens the other. We work hard to navigate the balancing act. But if balance is the goal, then we've forgotten that cliché, timeless truth... God first, family second, ministry third. The very fact that there's an order of priority to our values is evidence that these should not be equally balanced.

The goodness we tasted that day at Target was not an Icee-flavored Peep, but a Peeps-flavored Icee. No competition existed between brands, only complementing, because identity was clearly defined. We knew we had just enjoyed Icees that tasted like Peeps.

In a similar way, we are called to be families who do ministry, not ministers with families. Not family and ministry, but family ministry. At home, at church, and in our community, when we lead from who we are and not from what we do, it is seen, it is tasted, and it is good. Our family flavor should be one that people crave, leaving our presence knowing they enjoyed being around a family that has something they need. **If we view our calling to family and our calling to ministry as mutually exclusive, we miss out on one of the greatest, most effective tools for evangelism.** God only issues us complementing callings, never competing ones.

The only way to have both a healthy family and a healthy ministry is to practice practical evangelism, or ministry on-the-go. This is how the two become mutually *beneficial*. So what are the practicals?

The simplest way to do ministry is by incorporating evangelism into what you already do as a family. More often than not, it's intentionally doing life with your kids' peers and their parents, but this way of living is not limited to young families. My in-laws come back from almost every vacation with life-long connections to people they ministered to, and they aim to have attitudes in their social circles that boast the love of Jesus. As a family, we do this in a variety of ways, whether it's coaching our kids' sports teams while teaching players our values, hosting their practices on our church campus and meeting parents where they are, serving in carpool with Dad's Club on Fridays, or volunteering at school and connecting with teachers. *"Make the most of every opportunity..." (Ephesians 5:16)*

All these things can seem either typical or transformative depending on how you approach them. We like to walk

into these scenarios viewing them as opportunities and thinking of ourselves as undercover agents of the Gospel. As strange as that may sound, it's really just entering these settings with a different set of eyes. We've certainly missed it on more than one occasion, but God moments are happening around us all the time. I could tell you stories about atheists from our sports teams attending our church or crying and praying with a mom in a parking lot after chaperoning a field trip because God made a way for us to turn surface-level conversations into Jesus ones. *"So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us"* (**2 Corinthians 5:20**).

This type of ministry doesn't subtract from time with our family, but instead adds a special value to it. Our kids still get to look up and see our face, hear our voice, know that we are present, and learn from our example.

Ministry has the greatest impact on our family when we move from *including* them to *involving* them.

Sure, we love it even when they're just along for the ride. But in order to build their character, call out their gifts, and foster their love for serving, we have to do more than include them as a *part* and start involving them as a *participant*. They need to consistently be given the confidence key to unlock the belief that they are integral and they have a purpose. *"... For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children"* (**Mark 10:14**).

It doesn't have to be complicated. Start with the obvious and make it fun. This looks like small kids helping the events team pop all the balloons from the photo op, preteens volunteering in the toddler class, teens looking for a guest to befriend, young adults inviting someone to lunch, asking one of your children to pray for the food when you host a dinner, or jumping in as a family to help with physical labor at an event. Go on a mission trip together (I took our oldest daughter to Ecuador last summer and made lifetime memories)! Talk about the WHY. Engagement moves from organic to expected to desirable. There's nothing quite like watching your kids ready to dive head first into joining your team. *"Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road..."* (**Deuteronomy 6:7**).

We have found there's no better way to disciple families than by *inviting* them to see how family is done.

From lead team to key volunteers to your kids' friend groups, be *creatively invitational*. Of course we have nights, days, vacations, and sabbaticals reserved as safe spaces for just our unit. But goodness, I can't tell you the spiritual difference you can make for another person's family by simply making room for them at your table, in your backyard, or at the arcade, ice cream shop, or trampoline park. This is effortless ministry that flows out of being, not doing. Preparations are minimal and even better when imperfect. *"... Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full"* (**Luke 14:23**).

Let's have people lined up at the door for new, limited edition families, offering a blend so surprisingly delightful they keep coming back for more. Let's make every effort to hear our kids say, "I can't believe we GET to do this." This is how we grow.



Chelsea Briggs and her husband, Marcus, have been married for 16 years, and together they serve as Lead Pastors of Riverpark Church in Shreveport, Louisiana. They have three children – Camilla (11), Lettie (9), and Shaw (7), and their dream as a family is to live authentically and show their community who Jesus really is.



DESTINY '25 GATHERING



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Autumn Rain

A FALL GATHERING

**OCTOBER 23-25, 2025 | LANCASTER, PA
JOURNEY CHURCH**

JOIN US IN LANCASTER, PA THIS FALL FOR AUTUMN RAIN!

We're excited to welcome you to **Autumn Rain**, a special Destiny gathering taking place **October 23-25 at Journey Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania**. This fall retreat is designed to be a time of rest, reconnection, and refreshing in God's presence. Whether you've been a part of the Destiny family for a long-time, or are joining us for the first time, this event offers a unique opportunity to slow down, lean in, and experience the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.

Our time together begins on Thursday afternoon with a group outing to the renowned Sight & Sound Theater to see the awe-inspiring live production of Noah. This will be a memorable experience shared with friends and leaders from across the Destiny network. Then, we'll gather for three powerful services—Friday morning, Friday night, and Saturday morning—

featuring impactful worship, life-giving messages, and space for prayer, encouragement, and spiritual growth.

Autumn Rain is intentionally designed to be more than an event—it's a sacred space to receive, recharge, and be reminded of your purpose. The beautiful setting of Lancaster, PA in the fall provides the perfect backdrop for reflection, community, and joy.

We hope you'll join us for this meaningful weekend—refreshed, renewed, and ready for all that God has ahead.

REGISTRATION FEE

Single: \$49

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RUNNING TO A CULTURE READY FOR TRUTH



ABIGAIL DEJARNATT

In a culture of chaos, the Lord is giving us an opportunity with my generation.

Our whole lives, we've been told to "live our truth," "follow our hearts," and "find ourselves." We've grown up in an era of postmodernism, where truth is relative and anything goes. Our hyper-politicized, "love is love" culture tells us we can believe whatever we want, be whoever we want, and love whomever we want-whatever it takes to make us happy.

But we're not.

So, we jump on trends, join social movements, try any self-help tactic or even a new sexuality in an endless pursuit of purpose and identity that ultimately leads to hopelessness and despair. We've tried everything, oftentimes walking away from our faith without ever really asking "why," but it's not working. We're desperately searching for identity, community, belonging, and hope.

But as Christians, we have a living hope—the answer to every question our culture is asking, an identity that can satisfy, and a belonging to a body rooted in purpose—and His name is Jesus.

At Counteract USA, we believe that if the Christians of our generation were prepared and unafraid to stand upon the truth of the Word of God, we could change our culture through the everyday conversations in our everyday lives.

Counteract USA's mission was born with the purpose of equipping young believers to counteract ever-changing cultural and political ideologies with grace and truth, according to the steadfastness of Scripture. We accomplish this by applying Biblical truth to cultural and political issues on social media, the Counteract Podcast, our annual Resolve to Stand National Conference, and, most importantly, we build small cells of like-minded believers across the country who meet regularly and build iron-sharpens-iron communities by discussing the key issues of our day through the lens of a Biblical worldview.

Our goal is that Counteract USA members can then go out and have real, Gospel conversations with real people in the individual spheres of influence God has given each of us. We believe cultural change happens in hearts

and minds, not necessarily in Congress or on the news. Change happens over coffee, in the classroom, and at the dinner table with our friends and family.

If our generation (and all generations) of Christians were prepared and willing to enter into those conversations in those spaces, with grace and truth, for the sake of the Gospel, maybe culture would start to look different, because, ultimately, the only answer, purpose, and identity that will ever satisfy our generation-our nation-is knowing Jesus as Lord.

And in recent days, our mission has become more urgent than ever, more exciting than ever. Since our generation has already tried everything else to find fulfillment and hope, we're entering a moment where young people seem like they just might be willing to give Jesus a try, too.

So the Church must be ready.

Recent reports reflect a rising curiosity about Christianity in younger generations. Contrary to popular belief, we're seeing a shift where Gen Z and Gen A are becoming far more open to religion now than in previous years. A 2023 study from the Barna Group reports that 77% of teens in the U.S. are at least somewhat motivated to learn more about Jesus throughout their lives.

In December, the Wall Street Journal reported that Bible sales are up 22% over recent years (compared to a 1% increase in book sales overall), attributing the spike in-part to people buying Bibles for the first time. The article confirms this dissatisfaction with the self-help, postmodern narratives of our culture, and references a trend of TikTok and Instagram influencers who are turning to Christianity or are becoming more public about their faith.

Just a few years ago, Gen Z was leading the way in the rise of the religious "nones." But outbreaks of revival on college campuses and this recent reporting show a spiritual hunger and openness in Gen Z and Gen A.

The Church must be ready to step into this moment.

In fact, we must be willing to *run* to it.

Acts 8:26-38 begins with an angel of the Lord telling Philip to leave Samaria (where they had just been experiencing a powerful move of God) and go toward the road from



Jerusalem to Gaza—a “desert place.” And without hesitation or questioning, Philip gets up and goes.

Along the way, he notices an Ethiopian official reading the prophet Isaiah, and the Spirit tells Philip to go join the man in his chariot. The Bible says Philip ran to him and asks him if he understands what he’s reading, to which the official replies,

“How can I, unless someone guides me?”

The official invites Philip up into his chariot, who then explains the good news of Jesus to him, and the Ethiopian man turns to Christ and is baptized right there on the road.

God used a moment of obedience to bring about the Ethiopian official’s transformation.

He was ready for the truth. He just needed someone to explain it to him.

In a similar way, my generation—our culture—is at a breaking point. In a postmodern age where everything is true (so nothing is true) and anything we see on the internet could be AI-generated, we long for something authentic. We want something constant in the chaos. We’re ready for something we can sink our teeth into, anchor ourselves in, and build our lives upon.

We’re ready for truth—we just need someone to explain it to us.

And that is where we, as the body of Christ, must, like Philip, be willing to boldly obey the Spirit, running to the moment God has given us and sharing the hope of the gospel as He leads us.

The theme for our third-annual Counteract USA Resolve to Stand Conference is “Running to a Culture Ready for Truth.”

It’s more than a tagline—it’s a *call to action*. Our prayer for this event is that believers of all ages would gather together to be encouraged, equipped, and emboldened to resolve to stand upon the truth of the Word of God, ready to boldly share the Gospel with a culture that might be ready to receive it.

The 2025 Resolve to Stand Conference is set for Nov. 7-8 in Rogers, Arkansas. It’s a weekend of fellowship, worship, conviction, and encouragement. We’ve been overwhelmed by the ways we’ve seen the Lord move in recent years, and are so excited to see what He’ll set into motion this year. Make plans to join us!

You can stay up to date on conference details and all the Lord is doing in and through Counteract USA by following us on social media, signing up for our newsletter at counteractusa.org, or checking out the Counteract Podcast.

It’s going to take all of us, standing and praying together as the body of Christ as we enter into this era of opportunity and revival.

Our generation is ready. We can’t let this moment pass us by.

To Jesus be all glory!

Abigail DeJarnatt is the founder and CEO of Counteract USA, a 501(c)(3) non-profit ministry with a mission to equip young Christians to apply biblical truth to cultural and political issues. Abigail was born and raised in Northwest Arkansas, where she lives and works full-time with Counteract USA.



FALL PLANNING AHEAD



Ashley Clinton serves as the Children's Pastor at Christ Church in West Monroe, Louisiana, where he has been on staff since 2018. A graduate of Destiny Leadership Institute, Ashley is passionate about making a lasting impact on the next generation through creative programming, engaging experiences, and strong team development. He and his wife, Laura—also a DLI graduate—serve together in ministry and share a heart for kids and families. The Clintons have three children and enjoy quality family time, ballroom dancing, and the occasional kitchen dance party.

ASHLEY CLINTON

It's almost here. Can you feel it? Can you smell it? Can you hear it? That slight breeze, the aroma of pumpkin spice and cinnamon and the sounds of your Hobby Lobby cart as you begin walking down the aisles. It's coming, whether you're ready or not. It's the season of fall, and it'll be here before you know it. Are you ready?

As summer comes to a close and the crisp air of fall begins to make its presence known, churches everywhere are gearing up for the start of a new ministry year. Fall is a season of new beginnings - a time when families return to their routines, schools are back in session, and children's ministries and churches see an influx of new and returning faces. This is a great time to set the tone for the year ahead, engage families, and make sure every child feels welcomed and excited to be part of your community. Here are 5 ideas to make the most of this exciting season:

PLACES AND SPACES

First impressions matter, especially for those new families and kids that will be coming to your church. We want them excited about attending, and sometimes, a simple change in your environment can make them feel more comfortable and also get them excited about what's to come. Does it have to be extreme? Not at all - even something as simple as painting an accent wall, a simple photo booth with fun props and using Fall colors and gingham patterns to create warmth and a cozy, inviting atmosphere for all. This is also a great time to change things around in classrooms from moving around your tables and chairs to installing some new wall art and even updating some of those old toys for some new ones. Remember, it doesn't have to be Spring for some Spring cleaning.

EVENTS

It's always fun to plan and create events that will get families excited about the new season and to make getting back into their Fall routines a little easier. Here's some ideas:

Parents Night Out: Parents are the key partners in your ministry, so giving them a few nights off during the season would be greatly welcomed. You can send out invites to the parents to save the date. Then, simply order up some pizza, pop in a movie, and, for some extra fun, grab some movie candy for a fun night with the kids and their friends.

CandyPalooza: This is a fun alternative to Halloween, but on a Sunday. Make some fun and creative invites so kids can bring their friends. Kids will come to church dressed up in their funniest, wackiest and favorite costumes. "Walk the Talk" by making all the lessons about candy, and you could even have a costume contest.

This is a Sunday Funday at its best, and before the kids leave, encourage them to continue to invite their friends back for the next Sunday.

Fall Festival/Pumpkin Fest: This is the classic pumpkin picking event with some frito pies, chili dogs, s'mores and plenty of fun with painting

pumpkins, a few carnival-style games, music and a lot of relationship building with your church family. Rally the entire staff around this event, and if the weather is warm enough, put your pastors in the dunking booth.

LESSONS

One of the backbones of your ministry is the curriculum and content that you choose. During the Fall season, choose lessons that will spark gratitude, encourage thankfulness, invite provision, promote teamwork, involve service and the importance of sowing good seeds in our lives. Fall is also a great time to introduce a new curriculum or even refresh your existing content. There are several curriculum and content resources out there that focus on specific holidays and seasons. For example, pumpkin carving can represent God cleaning us out and making room for His light in our lives.

TEAM APPRECIATION

It's true what they say, "Teamwork makes the dream work." This statement is especially important in children's ministry. During your Fall planning, take the time to invest in your team with game nights, fun nights out at the bowling alley or skating rink, and show them how much they are appreciated and loved through hand-written notes, gift cards to the local coffee shop, or even movie tickets. This season is also a great time to launch some new children's ministry merch - shirts, stickers, notebooks, etc., and when a new team member joins, they get to choose a favorite piece of merch to wear while they serve.

FAMILY TIME

Finally, as you're planning out your Fall season, make sure that family time is a priority. When the calendar seems full with services and events, taking the time to come together as a family will make those busy seasons much easier. As you gear up your ministries for the Fall, ask these questions as a family:

- How do we want to be involved in each of the different commitments and communities we have this Fall? How do we want to "show up" relationally and spiritually in this season?
- How will we be generous with our time, money and other resources to bless and serve those outside our family this season?
- When will we rest? How will we connect with God and reconnect with one another regularly?
- Is there anything important to our family that isn't represented in our calendar this Fall? What might we need to say "no" to in order to make space for that?

Fall is such a wonderful time of year, and I encourage you to pray that God will use you to the fullest this season through your relationships, spiritual growth and investment in the building of His Kingdom. If there's anything we can do to help, please reach out. We're all in this together



FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP:

Financial Planning and Retirement Strategies for Christian Ministers

CHRISTOPHER BAUGH

The financial questions facing Christian ministers are unique to their vocation. Ministers who seek to fulfill their religious duties must also address their practical financial obligations—a dual responsibility, not without its challenges. Those who understand biblical stewardship principles will be capable of managing their resources wisely, thereby achieving financial security for themselves, their family, and their church.

A minister's financial state is complicated by their dependence on donations, which fluctuate based on attendance and congregational support. While the ministerial housing allowance provides valuable benefits, it creates complicated tax processes, and self-employment taxes often exceed standard employee obligations. More broadly, retirement planning is limited to fewer options than secular workers, creating uncertainty about the future.

The Bible defines stewardship as a core element of worship. The management of God's resources by ministers requires both wisdom and discerning decision-making. The Bible consistently teaches us

to avoid debt because it leads to financial slavery (Proverbs 22:7). Thus, religious leaders must find the balance between generosity and responsible stewardship to serve as an example to their followers. Those who demonstrate prudence in their spending will protect their economic well-being and preserve their devotion to the word of God.

A disciplined budgeting system is the foundation of successful financial management. Ministers who receive irregular pay should construct budgets using conservative projections to manage their money during fortunate months, while setting aside savings for periods of lower income. Building an emergency fund, equal to three to six months of living costs, is essential, as it provides protection against sudden financial emergencies. A wide range of budgeting tools and financial applications are available to support these objectives.

Critically, ministers need to understand the ministerial housing allowance to maximize their benefits and comply with IRS regulations. Through this provision, ministers can deduct housing expenses from their taxable income, which reduces tax obligations.

Accordingly, the IRS requires accurate documentation and strict adherence to its rules. Planning for quarterly self-employment taxes can help to avoid unexpected tax liabilities, and seeking the guidance of tax experts familiar with ministry regulations will ensure accuracy and access to beneficial financial strategies.

The process of planning for retirement is made more onerous by the exclusion of traditional pensions and corporate plans. Ministry staff must adopt specialized retirement plans that offer unique tax advantages and benefits applicable to clergy. These include denominational retirement programs, 403(b) plans, and deferred compensation plans, the latter of which allows churches to fund retirement benefits through secure funding channels, even when ministers start their retirement planning later in life. Importantly, ministers participating in Social Security are subject to eligibility conditions and are urged to consult experts in pastoral retirement planning to consider major consequences for future pension benefits.

Ultimately, ministers need investment plans that align with their values. Faith-based mutual funds and socially responsible investment portfolios enable ministers to pursue both spiritual and financial objectives through ethical investing. Every investor, regardless of creed, should diversify their investments among various asset classes to manage risk. Ministers should assess their risk tolerance in order to choose investment plans that support their stewardship goals without excessive exposure. Building a relationship with a financial advisor is a great place to start.

Beyond retirement is one's legacy. Here, ethical stewardship is employed to ensure the financial well-being of family, ministry, and important causes. Proper estate planning through wills and trusts ensures that ministers can direct how their assets are administered, reducing the burden on grieving loved ones, while succession plans and charitable allocations support the longevity of the ministry and its leader's vision. Providing for the organization and providing for family need not be mutually exclusive; however, it is often the case that neither are adequately prepared against the unknown.

The genesis of financial stewardship is biblical. A minister who receives God's resources must manage those resources with integrity, in every domain. Ministers who understand their challenges and apply sound, faith-based principles to strategies informed by experts in tax, retirement, investment, and legacy planning will achieve lasting financial health. This might require a bit of legwork, but ministers should find that resources are plentiful, and the opportunity for spiritual growth is abundant. Why not start today?



**FOUNDER, WEALTH MANAGER
CHRISTOPHER BAUGH, AAMS®**

As the founder of Wealth Stewards, Christopher Baugh brings over twenty-five years of experience to nonprofit organizations and their leadership. His two-plus decades in the industry have refined his approach to financial planning, most notably in long-term pastoral care. In defiance of the status quo, where quantity superseded quality, Christopher made it his mission to forge meaningful, enduring relationships with clients, in harmony with his Christian faith. Catering to the unique needs of churches and pastors called for a dual understanding - that of service and the word of God; Christopher was up to the task, engaging the values that guide his spiritual life in the fulfillment of his profession. Today, he works with ministries across the nation, helping to improve their day-to-day operations.

Beyond his practice, Christopher takes pride in being a husband and father of six. His recreational pursuits include equestrian, beekeeping, and travel, among the disciplines of architecture and mechanics. His latest project is a ranch in Teton Valley, Idaho, where he continues to be a transformative presence. He is a benefactor of several charitable causes rooted in the local community and regularly engages the fellowship and teamwork of innovators across the nation.

QUALIFICATIONS & AWARDS

- Founder of Wealth Stewards Financial, 2024-Present
- RJFS Executive Council, 2010-2023
- Branch Manager/Financial Planner with Raymond James Financial Services, 2005-2024
- Accredited Asset Management Specialist, College of Financial Planning, Denver, Colorado, 2000
- Bachelor of Science (Business Economics), Arkansas State University, 1998



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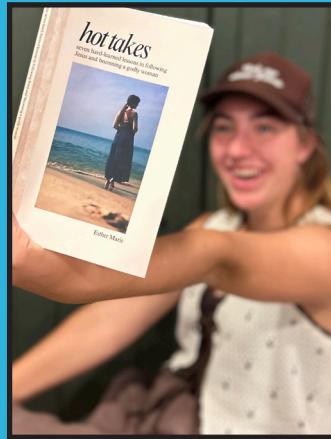
EARN A DEGREE THROUGH DESTINY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE & NELSON UNIVERSITY

Destiny Leadership Institute (DLI) and Nelson University have partnered to offer students a unique, hands-on approach to ministry education. Through this collaboration, DLI students can pursue accredited associate, and bachelor's online at discounted tuition rates while actively serving as interns in their own local church. This model allows students to gain real-world ministry experience while earning degrees in Church Leadership, Human Services, Interdisciplinary Studies, and specialized areas such as Pastoral Leadership, Worship Ministry, and Church Planting.

This partnership makes higher education accessible and affordable, equipping students with both academic knowledge and practical skills. To learn more about how Nelson University and Destiny Leadership Institute are shaping the next generation of church leaders, visit <https://www.nelson.edu/admissions/partners/destiny-leadership-institute>.

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DLI ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: *Esther Deuth*

ESTHER DEUTH

"Is that... a Bible book?"

The sentence shook me to my core. The boy then asked if he could touch and look at the Bible in my hands. In the twelve years of his life, he had never seen one before. I hadn't realized the impact I could make by simply pulling my Bible out of my backpack that day in Cambodia, but it was one more reminder of the vast numbers of people in our world today who have still not heard the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Growing Up

Hey y'all, my name is Esther. I am twenty years old, and I have a passion for sharing Jesus with others! I've been a follower of Jesus my whole life. As a kid, I loved being involved at my church, C3, and found my passion in Kid's Ministry at a very young age. When I was fifteen, I had the opportunity to go on a missions trip to Mexico. While I was there, God met me in a new way, and I felt a clear call from the Lord to go on missions. Ever since then, my prayer has been that the Lord would send me to the people that nobody wanted.

After graduating high school, C3 offered me an opportunity to work in Kid's Ministry. As a part of this, they paid for me to enroll in Destiny Leadership Institute. The DLI classes gave me insight and guidance as I began to lead more people and take on greater responsibilities.

Welcome Home Kids Curriculum

Around this time, I saw a need for different kids' curriculum. I passionately believe there is no 'Jr. Holy Spirit'. I have seen kids meet Jesus in the same powerful and life-changing ways that adults do. Unfortunately, much of the curricula I found did not seem to share this perspective. So, I began writing curriculum. My heart was to write lessons that kept kids engaged with the Word of God while never sacrificing the space for moments where students can meet Jesus and hear Him speak to them personally! I recently made this curriculum available for purchase and you can find it at welcomehomekids.com.

Writing My Book

This past fall, I felt a prompting from the Holy Spirit to write a book aimed toward the young women in my generation. I remember being a young teenager and writing off many authors

as 'too old' or 'out of touch'. While this was not the attitude I should have had, sadly, most young people today often think the same. In my life, I have had many opportunities to learn from wise older people - my parents, pastors, DLI teachers, leaders, and mentors. My goal is to serve as a translator. I have done my best to listen to and learn from the wise people in my life; and through this book, I aim to share that wisdom in a way that is relatable to the young women in Gen Z and Gen Alpha.

This book, *Hot Takes: Seven Hard-Learned Lessons in Following Jesus and Becoming a Godly Woman*, is now available on Amazon!

What's Next?

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to spend two months in Cambodia, living and working with missionaries there and getting to know their sending organization. This July, I'll be stepping into their eight-month training program which leads into a two-year overseas placement. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the places we'll visit, I won't share the name of the organization or the specific places we'll go, but I would be more than happy to share more details should you reach out!

In this season, I am working on building a team of individuals and churches who have the same heart to reach our world for Jesus! I am constantly humbled by the opportunities the Lord has given me and I cannot be more excited about what God has next. But the reality is that while I am a young woman with the ability to pick up my life and GO, I simply cannot generate that kind of money on my own. You can support me by making one time or monthly donations, using Welcome Home Kids curriculum, or by purchasing my book. I would love to partner with you or your ministry. If you are interested, please reach out with any questions or to schedule a phone call or meeting! Thank you so much for taking the time to read my story. Let's go change the world together!

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"

Romans 10:14-15a



Partnering With God's Plan

STEVE PIXLER

Someone once said, "People plan and God laughs." This wry and somewhat cynical aphorism suggests that human plans are futile in the face of God's will. It implies that no matter how much we try to control our future, God's purpose will ultimately prevail, and our best-laid plans may be overturned by divine providence.

So, why plan?

That's a good question—especially as we approach the "planning season" for growing churches everywhere. Fall calendars are brimming with team meetings, planning retreats, and brainstorming sessions, all wrapped around the idea that "failing to plan is planning to fail." And no one wants to fail. So, we plan.

But the real question is: How does God feel about our plans? Is it true, as suggested above, that human plans are futile in the face of God's will? Does God laugh at our whiteboards, our timelines, our yearly preaching schedules? Or does He partner with our plans—or, to

put it more biblically, does He invite us to partner with His plans? Is it possible that God's eternal purpose is incarnated within time and space through our planning? Is it possible that, through our strategic partnership with God, His will is done and His kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven? Can our plans manifest God's plan?

More good questions.

Every church leader on the planet knows that God often disrupts human plans. Anyone who has led a church for more than fifteen minutes knows that God has a wild way of interrupting our regularly scheduled programming. But when God disrupts our plans, it is always because He seeks to better align our plans with His eternal purpose. God does not disrupt our plans because He rejects planning. Indeed, He disrupts our plans because planning is so important to Him that He wants us to get it right. And by "right," I mean planning in partnership with Him.

No doubt, the way God works can be mysterious at times. But the idea that God stands back and chuckles

dismissively while blundering humans attempt to find their way in the world is flat wrong. Indeed, the scope and scale of Scripture indicate the exact opposite: God created humans to collaborate with Him in creative dominion over the cosmos. Run down the list: Adam and Eve; Noah and his sons; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses and Israel; David, Solomon, and the temple; the kings, the priests, the prophets; the apostles and the Great Commission. On and on it goes. God simply will not do His work without people.

Paul the apostle captures the beauty of divine-human collaboration in his powerful letter to the Ephesians. The entire first half of Ephesians 1 is all about the epic plan that God purposed in Christ before time began. For example, Paul said:

[God has made] known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:9-10, ESV)

The word rendered "plan" (ESV) could be more literally rendered "administration" (NASB). In other words, God's eternal purpose must be administered—planned and executed—in real time until heaven and earth are brought into perfect alignment under King Jesus, the one head of all creation.

But here's the kicker: God administers through people! As noted in Ephesians 3:2, Paul received the "administration of God's grace," so that he might facilitate the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles. In other words, the administration of God's eternal purpose was being worked out in real time through the apostolic administration given to Paul.

That's not all. In Ephesians 4, Paul expands the scope of "the administration of grace" given to him to include "the measure of the grace" given to the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers—who then equip the saints for the work of their ministry. And when the ministry of the saints is fully functioning, the body of Christ grows into full maturity. The point is simple: God's eternal plan is administered in the world in partnership with people.

God does not despise our plans. Indeed, He is fascinated by people willing to explore how to make the impossible possible, the eternal temporal, the invisible visible, the heavenly earthly. God is delighted by the sheer audacity of faith. He is drawn to those who lie awake at night imagining how the Kingdom might come and God's will might be done "on earth as it is in heaven." The heart of God longs to find a human heart that beats in sync with His.

God incarnates His eternal plan through our temporal plans. When we spend time in prayerful collaboration with God and our teams, the eternal plan of God takes shape within time and space. Believe it or not, the Spirit of God hovers over our chaos and brings it into the cosmos. He delights in the creative process. God "geeks

out" when we discuss vision and mission, goals and objectives, detailed steps, resources and requirements, timelines and milestones, flexibility and contingencies, accountability, evaluation and feedback mechanisms. God even loves SWOT analysis, StrengthsFinder, and Church Health Assessments!

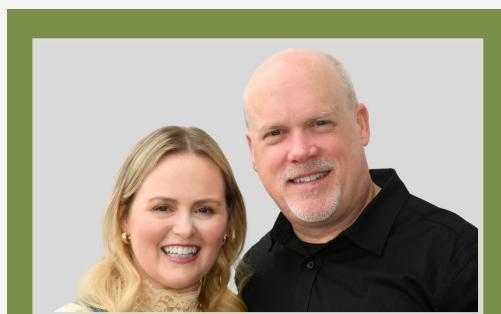
Obviously, all of these planning elements are powerless apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. But when we plan with God, God's eternal plan takes shape in the world. The Word is made flesh in us. God does not bypass us or attempt to work out His will another way. He has no Plan B. People who plan are His plan.

Divine-human planning is a deeply spiritual act. Spirit-led planning is how God has chosen to build His church, advance His kingdom, and overcome the gates of hell. The work of God will not be accomplished without the willing participation of His people. Planning, therefore, is not about displacing the Spirit, but aligning with Him.

As the Fall season arrives and we begin mapping out the year ahead, imagine what could happen if we reclaimed the biblical perspective that planning is not merely administrative, but profoundly spiritual. What if our year-end meetings and retreats became sacred spaces where we seek God's guidance, aligning our plans with His? What if we invited the Holy Spirit to lead our strategic discussions—treating planning as an act of worship and faith?

Yes, people plan and God laughs. But when God laughs at our plans, He is not mocking. God laughs like a father watching his son hit his first home run, or like a mother rejoicing when her baby girl takes her first steps. God delights in our efforts, our creativity, and our willingness to strategize with Him. And He invites us to laugh with Him in the sheer joy of partnering with God's plan.

Have fun planning with God!



Steve and Jeana Pixler live in Mansfield, TX with their six children and a Great Pyrenees the size of a small horse. Steve and Jeana, together with an amazing team of leaders, serve as Lead Pastors at Freedom Life Church in Mansfield.

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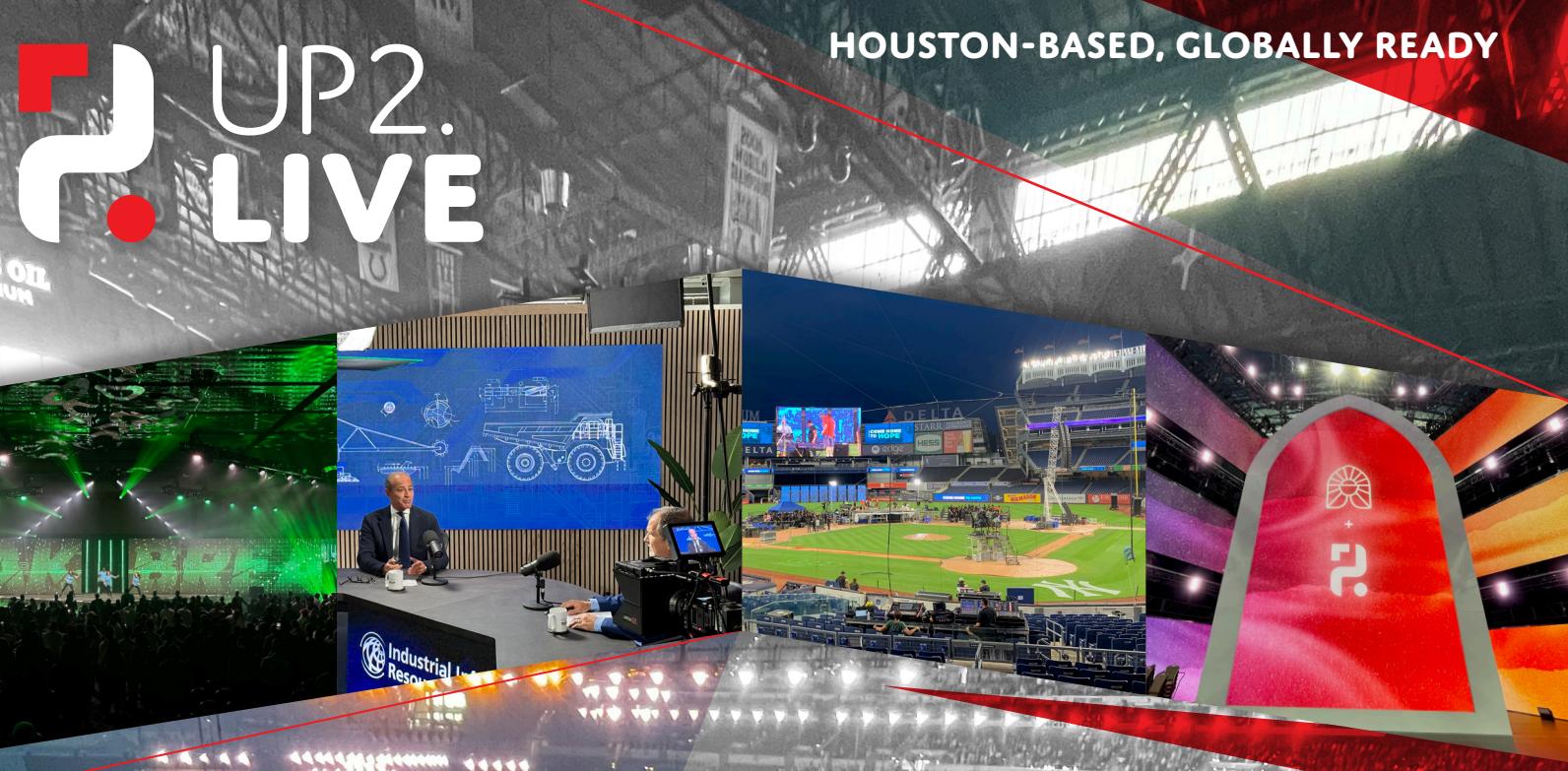
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The Way of the Master

DR. PHIL BRASSFIELD

1st Corinthians 12:31-13:1

12:31 "But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way."

13:1 "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal."

Paul, writing to address a controversy and division in the church in Corinth over the operation of Spiritual gifts, tells the Corinthians that he wanted to show them *"a more excellent way"*. It was the way of the Master; the way he had learned from Jesus Himself; the way of Love.

Love. Never underestimate its power. For love's sake we will do just about anything.

In 1965 Burt Bacharach co-wrote a song recorded by Dionne Warwick. It was a big hit and the iconic lyrics are immediately recognizable, *"What the world needs now is love sweet love, it's the only thing that there's just too little of..."* So true; true then at the height of the Vietnam War when it was written, and still true today as we see our cities ablaze and rioting in the streets. Love is the answer.

Hatred has no political solution; prejudice has no legislative remedy; these sins emanate from the heart of man. The only answer is a change of heart. The only thing that can unlock the deepest recesses of the heart of man is the Master Key of love. This was God's solution, God's answer.

Love does not deny the concept or reality of justice, right and wrong, or truth and untruth. It simply operates in spite of these things.

God's love, not our sin or humanity's depravity, drives the story of redemption. Healing and freedom are its purpose and its focus. Ours should be as well.

The central verse of the Bible makes this quite clear in John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* In this MEGA-verse we see love, sacrifice and rescue. This is the way of the Master.

Later the Apostle John would add a description of God when he wrote:

1st John 4:7 & 8 *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows*

God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

1st John 1:5 *"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."*

It's very telling that the Apostle John describes God in two ways, *light* and *love*. Light is the absence of darkness. Love is the absence of fear. John says, speaking of God, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all..." he goes on to say, "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out all fear".

Hatred and prejudices at every level and in every expression are the products of both darkness and fear. But without a doubt, love overcomes both. Where love is present, fear cannot drive us to hate others simply because they are not like us. Love provides irresistible light that shines into the dark world of self-interest and self-centeredness and illuminates our heart's motives and agendas.

Dr. Martin Luther King once said, *"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."*

Jesus told an amazing story recorded in Luke chapter ten. It's often referred to as "The Good Samaritan". It is a scandalous, racially charged story that Jesus tells in response to a self-righteous man's question as to who he should view as his neighbor. In other words, who is he obligated to show kindness to?

This is indeed interesting since, as in America today, ancient Israel was bitterly divided down political party lines and by racial distinctive. There were three parties in Jesus' day; the conservatives (Pharisees), the liberals (Sadducees), and the Zealots (Nationalists). Then, of course from a racial point of view, Jews and gentiles weren't allowed to even be in the same house together or eat together. There was strict segregation. But, then there was one other group. All the parties considered them lowest on the social class spectrum. They were the racial mixed Samaritans. The Jews called them a "herd" not a nation, denying them any national legitimacy. The worst insult a Jew could speak to someone was to call him or her a Samaritan.

This must be considered when reading the story: Luke chapter 10:25-37.

Read and let the text speak for itself...



Highlights from the story:

1. The ancient road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a winding, down hill, treacherous journey, of some 17 miles. It was the perfect area for an ambush as merchants returned to their home areas after visiting Jerusalem to conduct business or visit the markets with their products.
2. The man's (presumably a Jew) predicament is indicative of life's unforeseen disasters for us all. Hemingway once said, "Life breaks us all".
3. Organized religion without compassion (illustrated by the neglect of the Priest and the Levite) offers no real solutions for the disasters of life. There is, too often, a rational reason as to why we should not get involved. Too often our religious predispositions get in the way of our divine purpose. Religion absent of true spiritual relationship will always pass on the other side and away from hurting people, broken by life. The religious were particularly offended by open nakedness. And if that was not the reason for the neglect, touching a dead body could have caused them to become ritually defiled. Either way, the man's condition would have been a problem, an obstacle and precluded their help. Jesus intentionally pointed this out.
4. The Samaritan came to the rescue. He was someone who believed that he had nothing to loose. Someone who knew what it was like to be a victim of abuse, injustice and pain, and couldn't stand by and do nothing when confronted with someone else's suffering. At this part of the story, there would have been a collective gasp from the audience as they realized that Jesus made the Samaritan the hero of the story.
5. This story Jesus told is filled with symbolism and layered truth, but let me point out some characters in the story:

- a. There is the man who was robbed. (This represents anyone/everyone who has been broken by life's disasters.)

b. There are the Priest and Levite who represent stagnant religion. A religion without compassion or purpose. A system that is driven by form and function that tries to reach to God selfishly without reaching to man in compassion.

c. There is the Samaritan who came to the rescue. (He is a type of Jesus, who came into a broken world and sacrificed and served and funded our rescue with his heavenly bounty.) That's right, Jesus made the Samaritan the hero of the story.

In the Samaritan, we see what Paul called "The More Excellent Way." It is the Way of the Master. And it must be the way of the church during these difficult days.

As I close today, you may ask, "but what about the other character in the story?" You're right! There is another.

There is the Inn and the Inn Keeper. (This is a type of the believer and the church.) Jesus tells him to care for the broken. He has brought to the Inn, that he will return, and if there is additional cost, he will pay.

The Church is the Inn. And you and I are the Innkeepers. What the religious failed to do on the road, we are now commanded to do from the Inn. The Samaritan of the story, Jesus, will return to see how we have cared for the broken. He (Jesus) has given us all we need to support, love and heal the broken in our midst.

This really puts in perspective the question, and we all during these times must answer it, "Who is my neighbor"?

Mother Teresa once said, "*Not all of us can do great things, but we all can do small things with great love.*"



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