



“I’m grateful for all who give me the opportunities they have provided. I never would have been able to come to Covenant if others hadn’t helped. Their support is impacting my future ministry, my marriage, and my walk with the Lord.”

—Mason Powell (M.Div., Church Planting Track)

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ve provided people like  
been able to come to  
helped. Their support is  
istry, my marriage, and

Mason Powell is from Gillette, Wyoming. He chose Covenant Seminary because of its whole-person approach to ministry training, as well as the scholarship support that made it possible for him and his wife to prepare for future ministry together. After graduation, Mason plans to return to Montana to help plant churches, bringing the gospel to the next generation in the American West.



## Give Now.



Join Covenant in our mission to train pastor-minded students committed to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, the Reformed faith, and obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Mason's story, hear about his experience at Covenant Seminary, and support future ministry leaders like him.

[covenantseminary.edu/give-now](https://covenantseminary.edu/give-now)



COVENANT  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



**Covenant Magazine** is a publication of Covenant Theological Seminary, the denominational seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America. For nearly seventy years, Covenant Seminary has equipped thousands of pastors, counselors and ministry leaders to lead and serve the church globally. This magazine is a testimony to the Lord's work in and through the people associated with Covenant Theological Seminary.

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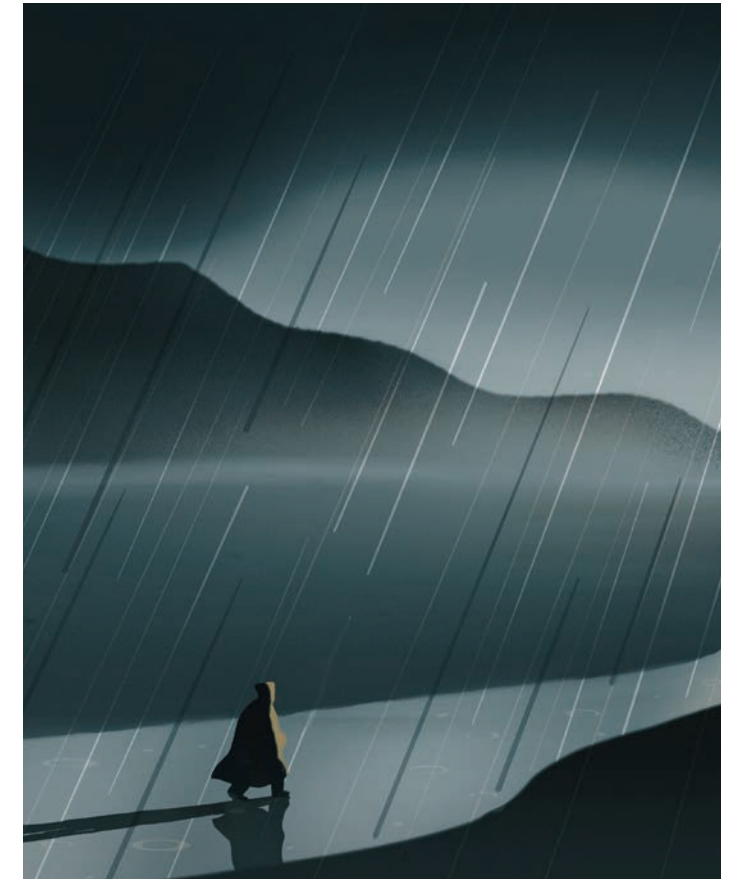
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Even in dark times, we have a God whose character is beyond comparison, . . . and whose deliverance is also sure and certain. We can trust him now and forever.

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Rev. Dr. Tom Gibbs

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As Covenant readers know—and as those highlighted in it can attest—the Christian life is a daily practice of receiving and walking in the power of God’s amazing grace. Wherever we are called to serve, our lives are all of grace from first to last. We receive by faith the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ and live by that grace for his glory and the good of others. This is the good news of the gospel and making this known is the reason Covenant Seminary exists.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul declares, “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” (Rom. 10:13–15).

By God’s grace, we train servants of the triune God to do just that: preach the good news, whether as pastors, church planters, counselors, missionaries, and other ministry leaders in Christ’s church, or as men and women inspired by faith to be ambassadors of the Lord at home, at work, in their neighborhoods, and in all of life. This is a high and precious calling, and we are grateful to share in God’s Kingdom work in this way.

We are grateful, too, for the many congregations and friends who support and pray for us as we do so. It is a blessing and a privilege to co-labor in the gospel with you as we walk together by God’s grace.

All for Jesus,

*Tom*

ILLUSTRATION BY STÉPHANE MANEL

EST. 1956 | ST. LOUIS, MO

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# Covenant.



At The Center  
of Pastoral Calling.



# NEWS & EVENTS

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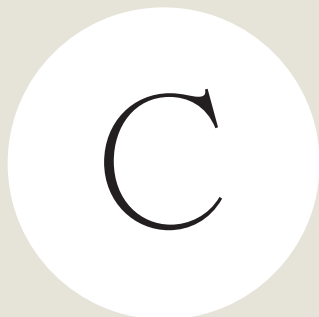
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## “Where Two or Three are Gathered...”

Doing seminary life together is the heart and soul of Covenant.



Community life is an essential part of the Christian experience. At Covenant, we seek to be a living, learning, worshiping community of grace that reflects the biblical values of care for neighbor, service to one another, and the development of deep personal relationships that exemplify the love of Christ and prepare us for a lifetime of fruitful ministry. These values play out in the rhythms of daily campus life and through the many campus and community events that take place here each semester. Here is an overview of notable events and activities from the last several months, along with some upcoming items.

ILLUSTRATION BY VALERO DOVAL

### Seminary Launches New Chaplaincy Track in Partnership with PRCC

● This fall the Seminary launched a new Chaplaincy Track as a concentration area for its Master of Divinity (MDiv) program. Offered in partnership with the Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC), the chaplaincy endorsing body for the Presbyterian Church in America, the Chaplaincy Track is designed to equip students to serve Christ with theological and practical ministry understanding in the military or in civilian institutions.

Available in either residential or hybrid formats, the MDiv Chaplaincy Track provides courses taught by experienced chaplains and PRCC endorsers that engage specifically the call and practice of chaplaincy. In addition to the standard MDiv curriculum, Chaplaincy Track courses include:

- **Introduction to Chaplaincy** — Presents the theological and practical foundations of chaplaincy ministry to develop a biblical understanding of calling to this ministry and build knowledge about the domains of chaplaincy and the skills required for it.
- **Institutional Ministry for Chaplains** — Explores ways of serving as an ambassador for Christ in challenging mission environments like war-fighting institutions, law enforcement, or hospitals, and how to facilitate evangelization in these environments.

Students will complete three-fourths of their required field education hours at an approved chaplaincy site. The residential option offers ample opportunities to take advantage of the Seminary’s location in a region rich with churches, ministries, hospitals, and other settings in which to serve. The hybrid option can be completed without relocating to campus, but includes at least six visits to St. Louis or other cities for week-long intensive coursework. Financial aid is available to help students in the Chaplaincy Track graduate with little or no student debt.

Rev. Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs, President of Covenant Seminary, said, “The need is great for chap-

lains who minister the love of Christ in military and other institutional settings. But chaplaincy has its own unique challenges and blessings, so we are excited to work with PRCC to raise up workers prepared especially for this rapidly growing mission field. We pray for the Lord’s blessing on the Chaplaincy Track and look forward to seeing how he will use graduates of this program to bring the hope and healing of the gospel to those in need.”

For more details and a complete course overview, visit the Chaplaincy Track webpage at [www.covenantseminary.edu/chaplaincy](http://www.covenantseminary.edu/chaplaincy).

### Revised ThM Degree Offers Streamlined Path for Advanced Study

● Earlier this year, the Seminary announced a revision of its Master of Theology (ThM) degree designed to make the program more streamlined—at 24 credit hours instead of 30—without sacrificing quality or depth. Students who wish to strengthen their theological research and writing skills under the supervision of expert scholars now have an option that is more focused in terms of content and more manageable in terms of time—the degree can be completed in as few as 15 months.

The revision is designed to help recent MDiv graduates as well as pastors, chaplains, missionaries, teachers, and others with an MDiv or equivalent degree prepare for further academic study or simply to deepen their exegetical and research skills for use in a ministry setting. The ThM can be pursued in residence at Covenant’s St. Louis campus or via a modular plan comprised of advisor-guided research, independent studies, and several week-long intensive courses on campus. The degree is not available through online study.

The ThM offers two degree tracks:

- **The ThM in Exegetical Theology** helps students sharpen existing exegetical, develop advanced research skills, and potentially test a calling to further academic study. This track requires a written thesis.
- **The ThM in Biblical and Pastoral Theology** focuses on integrating applied theology, biblical

theology, and other theological disciplines to the research of an issue in pastoral theology or practice. This track requires a contextualized writing project unique to the student's ministry setting.

Dr. Robbie Griggs, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the ThM Program, noted, "God has always graciously blessed his church with pastor-teachers and other scholars to help his people better understand his Word and his ways. As a stepping-stone along that path, the ThM provides additional focused training for those the Lord has gifted for this task. We are excited about this revised iteration of the degree and believe the recent changes will make it an even more helpful tool for those who lead and teach God's people."

For more details on program requirements, course overviews, and other information, visit our ThM webpage at [www.covenantseminary.edu/thm](http://www.covenantseminary.edu/thm) or contact our Admissions team.

#### Celebrating Our 70th Convocation and the Installation of Our New Missiologist

● This fall Covenant Seminary was pleased to celebrate our 70th Convocation service along with the arrival and installation of Dr. Richard Joe, Associate Professor of World Missions, as the first occupant of the Paul D. Kooistra Chair of World Missions. Dr. Joe, who joined our faculty this year after many years with Mission to the world as Persian World Regional Coordinator and also served as Persian World Director for MosaiX Multiply, preached a timely Convocation message in September on understanding the glory and grace of Jesus from Matthew 17:1–9.

Then, in October, the Seminary celebrated the completion of the Kooistra Chair and the formal installation of Dr. Joe. Many faculty, staff, board members, and other friends attended the event, including Dr. Joe and his wife, Hye Young, and former Covenant Seminary President and



*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.*

EPHESIANS 2:19

MTW Coordinator Dr. Paul Kooistra, for whom the Chair is named, and his wife Sandi. Dr. Joe's appointment marks the first time in more than a decade that the Seminary has a full-time missiologist on its faculty.

We are grateful for the Lord's continued blessing as we begin our 70th year of ministry, and grateful as well to the many generous donors who made possible the endowment of the Kooistra Chair.

#### Fall Chapel Series Focused on "Ministering God's Word"

● Weekly Chapel services are the heart and soul of the community life of Covenant Seminary, a time when faculty, staff, students, and families can come together in worship and praise to honor the great and glorious God we serve. For the last few years, our services each semester have focused on some aspect of Covenant's purpose statement, which is: *The purpose of Covenant Theological Seminary is to glorify the triune God by training his servants to walk in God's grace, minister God's Word, and equip God's people—all for God's mission.* The fall 2025 theme has been "Ministering God's Word," with our various faculty and guest preachers teaching on that topic from the Pastoral Epistles.

Along with President Dr. Tom Gibbs and long-time faculty members Dr. Brad Matthews,

Dr. Thurman Williams, Dr. Robbie Griggs, Dr. Drew Martin, Dr. Dan Zink, and Dr. Dan Doriani, we were excited to welcome new faculty members Dr. Richard Joe, who preached at Convocation (see above), and newly appointed Associate Professor of Systematic Theology Dr. K.J. Drake.

In addition, the semester featured guest preachers Rev. Victor Martinez, Associate Pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, San Antonio, Texas; Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt, Senior Pastor of All Saints Austin; and Rev. Mark Vroegop, President of The Gospel Coalition.

#### 2025 FSI Conference Featured Dr. Derek Rishmawy on Divine Holiness as the Key to Apologetics

● The 2025 edition of the Francis Schaeffer Institute Conference, held on campus in September, focused on the theme of *Divine Holiness: The Neglected Apologetic in a Pagan Age*. The featured speaker was Dr. Derek Rishmawy, RUF Campus Minister at the University of California, Irvine, and one of the hosts of the *Mere Fidelity* podcast. He is also a frequent contributor to The Gospel Coalition and a Fellow with the Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics.

Dr. Rishmawy's lectures explored the main theme in three parts: (1) "Culture and the Sacred

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*Campus life is a reflection of the brotherhood we have in Christ as we live, work, play, study, worship, and pray together in a covenantal community of faith.*

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Order(s): The Pagan Shape of Our Post-Secular Landscape, (2) “Wrestling with the Flame: The Holy One Among the Late-Modern Gods,” and (3) “Holiness as the Mission and Apologetic Method of the Church.” He contends that for the church to be a powerful and effective witness for truth within our current cultural context we need a renewed and revitalized focus on the holiness of God, which must be central to our own lives as Christians and central to our witness to those around us. The event also featured panel discussions on related topics with Dr. Rishmawy and Covenant Seminary professors Dr. Tom Gibbs, Dr. Brad Matthews, and Dr. Jay Sklar.

See elsewhere in this issue for an article by Dr. Rishmawy adapted from lecture 3 of the series. Complete videos of all the lectures and panel discussions are available to watch for free in the Resources section of the Seminary’s website at <https://resources.covenantseminary.edu/catalog>.

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**Covenant Seminary Preaching Lectures Presented Rev. H. B. Charles Jr. on the Preacher’s Life, Labor, and Leadership**

● The 2025 edition of the Covenant Seminary Preaching Lectures took place in October and featured renowned preacher, speaker, and author

Rev. H. B. Charles Jr., Pastor-Teacher of Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. Members of the Seminary community, local pastors, and others filled Rayburn Chapel to hear Rev. Charles speak on the topic *The Preacher’s Life, Labor, and Leadership*. He also preached for the crowd as part of the annual event.

In addition to his ministry at Shiloh, Rev. Charles speaks regularly at churches, conferences, and conventions around the country and hosts the On Preaching podcast, dedicated to helping pastors preach faithfully, clearly, and better. He is the author of several books, including *It Happens After Prayer*, *On Preaching*, *On Pastoring*, *The Difference Jesus Makes*, and others, and writes about life, preaching, church, books, and other things at [hbcharlesjr.com](http://hbcharlesjr.com).

The Preaching Lectures are just one element in Covenant Seminary’s ongoing mission to prepare pastors for Christ’s church who are faithful to the Scriptures, true to our Reformed confession, and rooted in God’s grace for a lifetime of faithful ministry. The Seminary is working to expand and enhance its training in the area of preaching with the assistance of a recent \$1.19 million Compelling Preaching Grant from Lilly Endowment. The grant is enabling the school to develop additional training opportunities as well as a website devoted to preaching and preaching resources.

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**Theology Summit 2025 Explored Reasons and Resources for Our Polarizing Culture**

● In what has become an eagerly anticipated annual event, Covenant Seminary’s fall Theology Summit, hosted by President Dr. Tom Gibbs, brings together a small group of Covenant alumni to think through important issues facing the church in our time and how the Seminary can better prepare our students to meet the challenges these issues present. This year, in addition to Dr. Gibbs, Covenant professors Dr. K.J. Drake, Dr. Robbie Griggs, and Dr. Bob Yarbrough presented lectures on the growing ideological divide emerging between young men and women across the globe. They looked at how societal and technological pressures have “turbo-charged” this polarization and what theological resources are available to us in God’s Word that equip us to minister effectively and serve as gospel agents of the peace of Christ.

We are grateful for these annual opportunities to reflect on how we can better serve the church, and thankful for the alumni who are able to participate.

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**Looking Forward Together: A Partnership for Preparing Future PCA Leaders**

● Covenant Seminary was proud to be one of the sponsors, along with several of our sister PCA agencies and other seminaries and ministries, for the Looking Forward Together summit for Millennial and Gen-Z men and women in the PCA. The event, which took place at Deer Creek Church (PCA) in Littleton, Colorado, in October, was a dynamic blend of connection, learning, and collaboration designed to prepare PCA leaders for the future. Speakers for the event included Charles McKnight, MNA’s African American Ministries Coordinator and the Executive Director for Kindred Hope Church (PCA) in Atlanta, Georgia; Harrison Ford, Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation at City Church of Richmond, Virginia; Marissa Bondurant, Bible teacher, writer, speaker, and caregiver advocate; and Stephen Spinnenweber, Senior Pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, Florida.

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**Reformed Youth Ministries Hosts RYM Local Event at CTS**

● In November, the Seminary had the honor of being the location for one of Reformed Youth Ministries’ RYM Local events. These energetic events are aimed at training and equipping youth and those working with youth as leaders, ministers, parents, or volunteers to reach others for Christ. Begun in 1972, RYM hosts annual training conferences, multiple regional and local equipping events, produces The RYM Podcast, and offers many other resources for supporting the development of ministry to youth. The theme for this particular event was *Cultivating Resilient Youth*. Featured speakers were Kelly Kapic, Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College; Julie Lowe, Author, Speaker & Licensed Professional Counselor; John Spencer, Next Gen Director, Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church, St. Louis; and Brent Corbin, Executive Director, RYM.

We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with RYM to help disciple the next generation.

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**Hello to Old Friends: Medair CEO and CTS Alumna Anne Reitsema**

● The Seminary community was blessed this fall to enjoy the company of an old friend as alumna Anne Reitsema visited our campus in September. Anne serves as CEO of Medair, an emergency relief organization based in Switzerland that brings needed supplies, resources, and other assistance to more than 53 million people in 43 crisis-affected countries around the world. Anne has held this position since 2023, prior to which she served with the organization for twenty years, leading humanitarian responses in Darfur, Somalia, Angola, Northern Uganda, and South Sudan. As International Director, she oversaw all Medair’s country programs in the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe, and Africa. While in St. Louis recently to visit with friends and supporters, Anne took time to meet and speak with our students, catch up with faculty, and sit in as a special guest for Dr. Dan Doriani’s *Working with Dan Doriani* podcast. Anne is one of 6 siblings, 5 of whom have studied at Covenant Seminary.

# FACULTY & STAFF

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## “For We Are God's Fellow Workers...”

Our faculty and staff enjoy the privilege of co-laboring together for the sake of the gospel.



One of the Lord's greatest gifts to Covenant Seminary is the people who serve as faculty, staff, or trustees. Whether they're here for a short time or a lifetime, we are grateful for each of them and for the blessings they are to the Seminary, our students, and the Body of Christ. Their hard work on behalf of the Seminary, their care for one another and our students on a daily basis, and their godly lives and service in their churches and communities make them powerful examples to each other and the world of Christian faithfulness and love. Here are some faculty and staff updates since our last issue.

ILLUSTRATION BY VALERO DOVAL



**Dr. Suzanne Bates**, Assistant Professor of Counseling, recently **successfully defended her doctoral dissertation and earned her PhD** in Counseling Education and Supervision at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Please join us in congratulating Dr. Bates! In addition to her newly minted PhD, Dr. Bates holds a Master of Arts in Counseling (MAC '99) from Covenant Seminary and a BA in Human Services from Fontbonne University in St. Louis. Dr. Bates is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) who brings a wealth of experience from the counseling field into the seminary classroom. She joined the Covenant faculty as an Adjunct Professor in 2010, becoming Assistant Professor of Counseling in 2018. From 2013 to 2018 she also served as Associate Dean of Students for the Seminary. Dr. Bates also serves part-time as Staff Counselor for New City Fellowship–St. Louis, and, for more than two decades, has offered care and counsel to individuals, couples, and families of diverse populations, including the incarcerated, immigrants, and refugees. We are grateful for the blessing Dr. Bates has been to our students and the entire Seminary community, and we rejoice with her at this new milestone in her professional career.



**Elizabeth Dodd** joined our Development Team in August 2025 as our **Campaign Manager**. She will be focused on coordinating the details and logistics for the Seminary's upcoming capital campaign. For the decade prior to this, Elizabeth had the privilege of working with the elderly and their families in the senior living world and has a heart for serving those with cognitive impairments. She serves on ministries at Central Presbyterian Church (EPC) in Clayton, Missouri, helping unemployed and underemployed brothers and sisters find new job opportunities, as a missionary ambassador via the missions ministry, and as a second soprano in the church choir. Elizabeth studied abroad in Vienna, Austria, completed an MA in Political Science (International Relations) from the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada, and has to date traveled to 31 countries. She currently is pursuing the Doctor of Strategic Leadership degree via the business school at Liberty University.



**Tim Jackson**, Director of Information Technology Services since 2023 and a member of the Seminary's IT staff for three years before that, stepped down from his position in June 2025 to pursue another area of God's calling on his life: church planting. Tim now serves as the **Organizing Pastor of Hope Presbyterian Church**, a PCA mission church located in South St. Louis County, Missouri. Previously, Tim was a church planting apprentice at Trinity Church (PCA) in Kirkwood, Missouri, serving bi-vocationally with his IT work at Covenant. Before that he served as an Assistant Pastor with Chesterfield Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Chesterfield, Missouri, while also working bi-vocationally in various IT roles. He was ordained in the PCA in 2015. Tim is a 2013 MDiv graduate of Covenant Seminary and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry

at Covenant. We pray God's blessing on Tim and his family as they begin this new church planting adventure.



**Lisa Roth** joined our Development Team in August 2025 as **Planned Giving Officer**. Lisa and her family attend Central Presbyterian Church (EPC) in Clayton, Missouri, where she was most recently on staff, giving oversight to business operations, stewardship, and special events. Her career in development began at the YMCA in 1999. She also had the great blessing of serving donors, planning events and writing grants for several inner-city ministries, youth development organizations, and for Central Christian School. Lisa came to know the Lord as an adult due, in great part, to the teaching and nurturing of pastors and counselors trained at Covenant Seminary and is overjoyed to be able to serve the Seminary's mission of preparing future leaders for the church. Lisa is a graduate of the University of North Texas, where she earned a BS in psychology and an MA in Child Development and Family Studies. When not working or spending time with family, Lisa enjoys serving youth at her church, reading, and crafting with friends.



**Anthony Short** joined our Communications and Marketing Team in June 2025 as **Visual Media Producer**, providing production, editing, and support for the team's increasing needs in this area. Hailing from southern Michigan, Anthony holds a BA in Film, Television, and Media from the University of Michigan. Before coming to Covenant, he served for two years as an Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) intern at Washington University in St. Louis. Anthony fulfills a mission-critical need for the team by not only serving as the campus photographer and videographer but also spearheading all visual media production and development for the Seminary and working with our faculty and staff to help communicate effectively the Covenant story, ethos, and brand. We are grateful to have him on the team.



**Paul Wesley** joined the Covenant family in June 2025 as our **Director of Information Technology Services**, succeeding Tim Jackson (see above) in this pivotal institutional role. Paul is a seasoned IT professional with extensive experience in various settings from small non-profits to county government to large financial firms advising on strategic technology deployment and implementing substantial system changes. Previous employers include Wells Fargo Company, Wachovia Corporation, A. G. Edwards & Sons, Inc., and several others. He has also done volunteer technology consulting work for area organizations such as Crossroads Counseling Centers and St. Louis Bridge of Hope. Paul is also active in discipleship ministries at various local churches. We are grateful for Paul and the expertise he brings to a challenging and vital position.

# BOOK RELEASE

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## “Take Up and Read...”

A selection of recent faculty and alumni publications for the growth of the church.



Our faculty's influence reaches far beyond the classroom as professors mentor and disciple students, serve in local congregations, share their teaching and preaching abilities with the larger church in the US and around the world, and engage with the culture of our day from a biblical, gospel-centered perspective. Their books, journal articles, blog posts, conference and seminar talks, and other online resources are a great blessing to the church. The same is true for our growing number of alumni who serve as pastors, church planters, missionaries, counselors, and other ministry leaders in churches and other settings in all 50 states and 51 countries.

ILLUSTRATION BY VALERO DOVAL



Art shows us back to ourselves, and the best art doesn't flinch or look away. Rather, it acknowledges the complexity of struggles like poverty, weariness, and grief while defiantly holding forth beauty—reminding us that beauty is both scarce and everywhere we look.

RUSS RAMSEY, *Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart*

## Faculty Releases

**“Do the Psalms Contain Self-Righteous Boasting? (Pss. 7, 17, 26)”**

*Crossway.org, March 14, 2025*

● Dr. C. John “Jack” Collins. Part of Crossway’s “Tough Passages” series and adapted from Dr. Collins’s commentary on the Psalms in the *ESV Expository Commentary: Psalms—Song of Solomon*, this article looks carefully at passages in several psalms where claims of innocence by the authors seem to read as self-righteous boasting and offers a better explanation that gives us insight into the kind of people the authors were—and the kind of people we want to be.

**“Jack Collins, Part 1: On Three Decades as a Seminary Professor” and “Jack Collins, Part 2: On the ESV, the PCA, and the Future”**  
*by Faithonline.com, April 24 and April 25, 2025*

● Dr. C. John “Jack” Collins interviewed by Hace Cargo. This two-part interview with Dr. Collins provides a wonderful overview of his teaching and ministerial career as well as some reflections on his work on the English Standard Bible translation committee, the PCA, and what may be in store for him next after retiring in June 2025.

**“Ministry at the Intersection of Science, Linguistics, and Faith: Getting to Know Dr. Jack Collins”**  
*Covenant Magazine, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 2025)*

● Dr. C. John “Jack” Collins interviewed by Rick Matt. In this in-depth interview, Dr. Collins

reflects on God’s work in his life, and the path that led him from initially pursuing a scientific career to planting a church and ultimately to teaching at Covenant Seminary for 32 years—and the many highlights and lessons learned along the way.

**“Twenty Ways to Plant Churches in North America,” Parts 1 and 2**  
*Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy, Covenant Seminary Blog, May 27 and June 23, 2025*

● By Dr. Philip Douglass, Professor Emeritus of Applied Theology. In this two-part feature article, Dr. Douglass draws on his extensive experience as a church planter, mentor of church planters, and overseer of church planting efforts for the Missouri Presbytery of the PCA to examine the pros and cons of various models of church planting.

**“The Word Became Flesh (John 1:1–18)”**  
*Covenant Magazine 36, no.1 (Spring 2025)*

● By Dr. Aaron Goldstein. Adapted from a sermon Dr. Goldstein delivered in one of Covenant’s Chapel services, this article looks at the ways in which God’s glory is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ—and what that means for us as believers.

**“What Is Virtue?”**

*Working with Dan Doriani Podcast, July 9, 2025*

● Dr. Robbie Griggs and Dr. Dan Doriani interviewed by Dr. Clay Smith. This episode of the *Working with Dan Doriani*

podcast highlights a discussion on virtue in connection with the recent book *The Death of the Seven Deadly Sins* (P&R Publishing, 2025), edited by Dr. Doriani, and to which Dr. Griggs contributed a chapter on the topic.

**“Shepherd the Flock: Advice to New Elders”**

*The Gospel Coalition, July 1, 2025*

● Dr. Dan Doriani and Various Others. Dr. Doriani contributes his thoughts in this multi-author article offering the wisdom of experienced pastors and elders to younger men about to assume the responsibilities of those roles.

**“Glorifying the Triune God Through Church Planting”**

*Covenant Magazine 36, no.1 (Spring 2025)*

● By Dr. Robert Kim. How are we best to “glorify God and enjoy him forever?” For Jesus, it meant fulfilling the redemptive mission his Father gave him. For us, it means planting more churches to the glory of God. Dr. Kim elaborates in this article that is part of the Seminary’s year-long special focus on church planting.

**“What’s Often Missed About Emotions”**

*Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, August 5, 2025*

● By Dr. Paul Loosemore. Emotions are an important part of who we are and how God made us to be. In this post, Dr. Loosemore guides readers in understanding what emotions really are and how they are meant to function helps us make better sense of our world—and ourselves.

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**“Grimké’s Theology of the Kingdom of God Was a Source of Hope for Racial Equality”**

*Crossway.org, May 14, 2025*

● By Dr. Drew Martin. In this article adapted from his book *Grimké on the Christian Life*, Dr. Martin examines how Francis Grimké’s understanding of the church as the visible representation of the Kingdom of God shaped his view of Christian social interaction: “The one purpose of the church is to extend the Kingdom of God, to draw men out of the world into it, and to make them over after the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.”

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**“The Remarkable Legacy of Francis Grimké”**

*The Crossway Podcast, June 2, 2025*

● By Dr. Drew Martin. In this episode, host Matt Tully talks with Dr. Drew Martin about the life and ministry of Francis Grimké and his lasting impact on American Christian theology. Grimké was a prime example of the kind of grounded, well-balanced minister and civil rights activist that we can still learn from today.

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**“Why You Should Know Francis Grimké”**

*Crossway.org, April 9, 2025*

● By Dr. Drew Martin. In another article adapted from his book on Grimké, Dr. Martin provides a brief overview of this important Christian figure. Born enslaved on a plantation in South Carolina in 1850, Grimké went on to become one of the most remarkable

pastor-theologians in American history, ministering from 1878 to 1928, mainly in the nation’s capital. His story is worth knowing.

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**“Trauma, EFT, and the Role of EMDR in Healing Marriages”**

*Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, July 24, 2025*

● By Dr. Mark Pfuetze. Dr. Pfuetze shows how EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is an underutilized yet powerful adjunct for EFT and other couples therapies that can enhance the therapeutic process by addressing underlying trauma that continually disrupts attempts at relational healing.

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**“Why EMDR Sometimes Doesn’t Work—and How Therapists Can Respond”**

*Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, May 21, 2025*

● By Dr. Mark Pfuetze. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is not universally effective but can often bring about profound healing—yet, in some cases it doesn’t. Dr. Mark Pfuetze explores two common patterns that may explain why EMDR does not always yield positive results.

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**“Cultivating Gratitude”**

*Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, June 17, 2025*

● By Dr. Jeremy Ruckstaetter. Current research demonstrates that as people experience greater gratitude, they have improved mental and physical health, improved relationships, and

even improved sleep. Gratitude seems to be connected to human flourishing. How can we cultivate an attitude of gratitude—for ourselves and those around us?

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**Additional Notes on Exodus**

*Gleanings Press, 2025*

● By Dr. Jay Sklar. This wonderful compilation of additional material on the Book of Exodus is a wonderful complement to Dr. Sklar’s ESV Expository Commentary on the book (see below). In addition to the major insights found there, this volume supplements the commentary so that readers wanting to go even further in their study of Exodus are well equipped to do so.

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**“Exodus,” in ESV Expository Commentary, vol. 1: Genesis–Numbers**

*Crossway, 2025*

● By Dr. Jay Sklar. Designed to strengthen the global church with a widely accessible, theologically sound, and pastorally wise resource for understanding and applying the overarching storyline of the Bible, this commentary series features crisp and theologically rich exposition and application. In this volume, Dr. Sklar, who also serves as one of the general editors for the series, provides comments on the Book of Exodus.

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**“Five Iconic Stories From the Book of Exodus”**

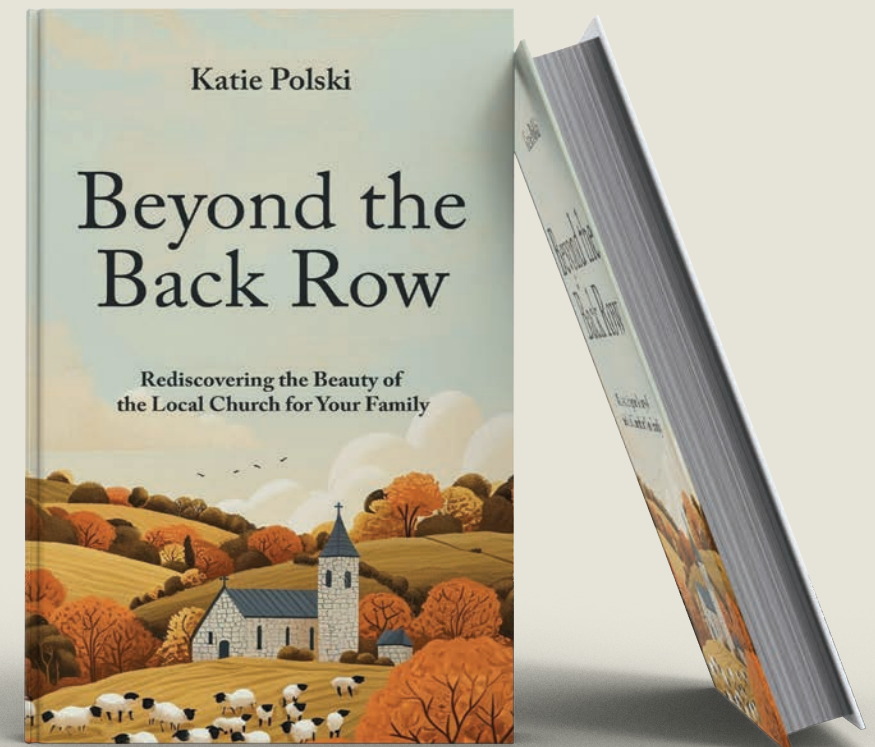
*Crossway Podcast, August 25, 2025*

● By Dr. Jay Sklar. In this podcast episode, Dr. Sklar addresses

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*Our commonality [in Christ] is far greater than any of our differences. Each believer in Jesus represents this Universal church, and there will be a day when we will all worship together in eternity as one, singing praises to our God and Father . . . What a day that will be!*

KATIE POLSKI, *Beyond the Back Row*



key stories and confusing moments from Exodus and offers helpful insight into their meaning and practical conclusions to take away from the book, including how God redeems his people, brings them into a covenant relationship, and gives instructions to the Israelites so he can dwell with them. Based on Dr. Sklar's recent commentary on Exodus (see above).

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**“Responding to a Holy God: How Understanding God’s Holiness Leads to Our Godliness” (Audio)**  
*Covenant Seminary’s Orthodoxy & Orthopraxy Blog, May 22, 2025*

- By Dr. Jay Sklar. What does it mean that God is holy? And how should our lives look different because of it? With a focus on the Torah, the audio of this seminar from The Gospel Coalition’s 2025 National Conference explains how God’s holiness is central to who he is, how it refers to much more than moral purity, and how it calls us to respond with love, fear, and worship.

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**“God’s Good Design for Marriage: 5 Doctrinal Dimensions”**  
*The Gospel Coalition, June 18, 2025*

- By Dr. Robert W. Yarbrough. In our contemporary culture, where marriage is increasingly delayed, if pursued at all, many are not convinced it’s a good idea. Yet, marriage is a God-designed gift for the flourishing of human beings. In this post, Dr. Yarbrough offers a doxological tribute to marriage—a celebration and commendation of God’s good and glorious design.

## COMING THROUGH MY DARK STRUGGLE, LED BY THE SPIRIT’S PERSISTENCE, CHANGED MY WAY OF THINKING [ABOUT COUNSELING]. I LEARNED, IF I CAN PUT WORDS TO IT, TO EXPECT GOD TO SHOW UP, TO BE AWARE OF IT WHEN HE DOES, AND TO FOLLOW HIS LEAD.

DR. DAN ZINK, “The Holy Spirit and Counseling”

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**That You May Believe: Essays on John in Honor of Andreas J. Köstenberger**  
*Kregel Academic, 2025*

- Edited by Dr. Robert W. Yarbrough, Quinn R. Mosier, and T. Desmond Alexander. Biblical scholar Andreas J. Köstenberger’s deep passion and commitment for both scholarly research and faithful living is best exemplified in his study of the book of John. The essays collected here both honor and reflect his influence as a scholar and teacher, providing a foundation for a better understanding John, so that we too can grow in our comprehension and faith.

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**“The Holy Spirit and Counseling”**  
*Covenant Magazine Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 2025)*

- By Dr. Dan Zink. What is the Holy Spirit’s role in the counseling process? In this article, Dr. Zink describes how a paucity of literature on this topic led him on a surprising journey of

discovery and growth, both personally and professionally.

### *Alumni Publications*

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**Deuteronomy, Reformed Expository Commentary Series**  
*P&R Publishing, 2025*

- By Trent Casto (MDiv ’09). Deuteronomy is foundational to Old Testament theology and key to understanding God’s covenantal dealings with his people. In this rich exposition, Trent Casto walks readers through Moses’s final words to Israel—words that renew God’s covenant with them, reveal his steadfast love, and point to the fullness of his redemptive plan through Christ. With careful attention to historical context and the unity of Scripture, Casto offers biblically faithful interpretation and application that helps readers see God’s grace of God in the wilderness and the enduring relevance of Deuteronomy for God’s covenant people today.

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**The Roar of Justice: Hearing God’s Relentless Call in the Book of Amos**  
*IVP Bible Studies, Forthcoming in 2026*

- By Vanessa K. Hawkins (MDiv ’17, DMin ’22). Created by trusted Bible teacher and Director of Community Life at Redeemer Lincoln Square in New York, this eight-week study on the book of Amos invites you to explore why justice is so important to God. *The Roar of Justice* will help you gain a greater understanding of God’s justice and his righteous rule, while simultaneously recognizing his intense love and deep desire for the flourishing of all people. The book is currently available for pre-order at Amazon.com.

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**John Webster’s Vision of Moral Agency: A Study in Theological and Moral Ontology**  
*T&T Clark, 2025*

- By Jeremy Jones (MDiv ’96). Based on Jones’s PhD thesis for the University of Aberdeen, this book explores John Webster’s contribution to one of the most important and contested topics in Christian theology: the relationship between divine and human agency. Through close study of texts ranging from Webster’s early, middle, and late periods, Jones reveals that Webster’s moral ontology is not only a major theme in his thought but is among his most significant contributions to contemporary systematic and moral theology.

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**Mr. Tan’s Grand Plan: A Children’s Rhyming Storybook About Music,**

**Friendship, and Community**  
*Bright Birds Fun, 2025*

- By Tommy Pierson Jr. (MATS ’10). Shaped by the author’s background as a pastor and former politician and inspired by a Children’s Literature class taken at Covenant Seminary, this beautifully illustrated children’s book (aimed at ages 4–8) tells the story of the Bright Birds and their journey to foster community among their neighbors through music and the power of creativity. The book helps young readers learn to take the time to recognize common threads we share with others to make new friends and build stronger communities.

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**Beyond the Back Row: Rediscovering the Beauty of the Local Church for Your Family**  
*Christian Focus, 2025*

- By Katie Polski (MATS ’24). Drawing on Polski’s experiences as a pastor’s wife, mother, and active church member, this book addresses the growing trend of disengagement from church life with empathy and biblical wisdom and offers a timely and inspiring call to renew our love and commitment to the local church. The author acknowledges the challenges and imperfections of church communities while also highlighting the profound beauty and necessity of Christ’s bride.

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**Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart: What Art Teaches Us About the Wonder and Struggle of Being Alive**  
*Zondervan, 2024*

- By Russ Ramsey (MDiv ’00, ThM ’03). In this follow-up to

his *Rembrandt Is in the Wind: Learning to Love Art Through the Eyes of Faith*, Ramsey digs into the lives of many of history’s most celebrated artists to see what art itself has to teach us about the transcendent beauty and sometimes painful suffering of being alive. Each story applies the beauty of the gospel in a way that speaks to the hardship and hope we all face.

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**Aspirational Masculinity: On Making Men Whole**  
*Whithorn Press, 2025*

- By David John Seel (MDiv ’81). Writer and cultural analyst David John Seel reframes the narrative of “toxic masculinity” through a biblical lens, offering a bold and hopeful vision of what masculinity can be. Through this spiritual lens, men can experience an integrated life where identity, vocation, and relationships are seamlessly united to Christ.

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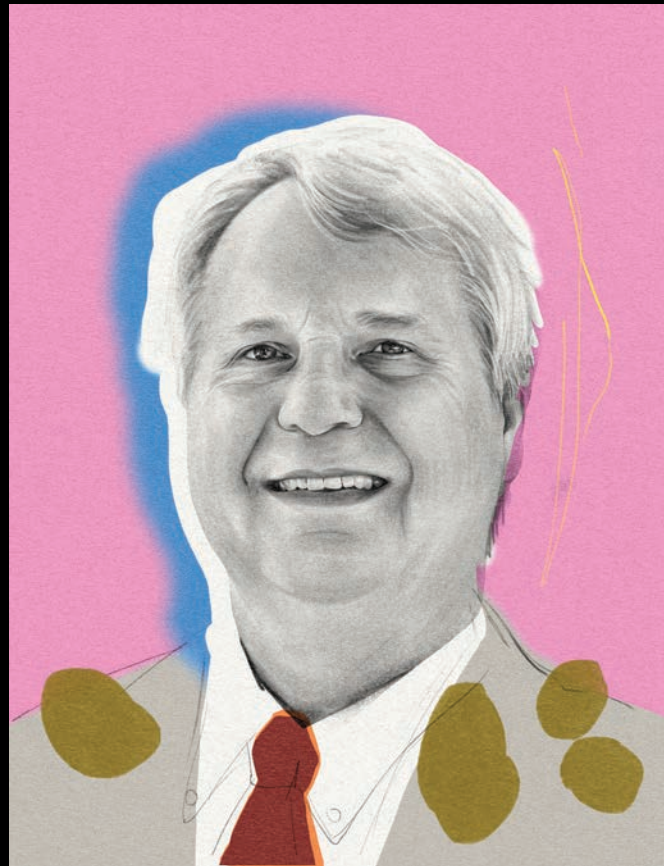
**“Don’t Set a Vision for Your Women’s Ministry”**  
*The Gospel Coalition, March 10 2025*

- By Jamie Voss (MA ’09). When she took over as the director of a church’s women’s ministry, Voss wanted to set some goals and cast a vision that would guide the ministry into the future. What she came to realize was that the mission and vision of the ministry was already set—by the church’s mission and vision—and that her job was to figure out how the women’s ministry could contribute uniquely to that.

## “It’s All About Relationships”: Getting to Know Dr. Dan Zink

*Caring well for others as a pastor or counselor requires both theological understanding and psychological insight, but as Dr. Dan Zink has spent a lifetime learning and teaching, the relationship itself is key.*

By Rick Matt



**Rick Matt (RM):** Thanks for talking with me. I always look forward to these profiles and learning more about our wonderful faculty members. For folks who aren’t familiar with your story, could you please share a little about your background and how the Lord first brought you to Covenant Seminary?

**Dan Zink (DZ):** Thanks for asking me. It’s a long story but I’m happy to tell it. I usually start with the fact that I was born in Wisconsin, but when I was eight, my family moved to Quincy, Massachusetts. So, I call Massachusetts home. I know I don’t sound like I’m from there, but I am. That move was a big change for us, because my father had been the minister of a small Nazarene church in Madison, Wisconsin—a totally different denomination than the Reformed, with a more Wesleyan and Arminian view of things. When he was in college, my father had rheumatic fever and it damaged his heart, so he lived with that rather precariously for years, then died when he was 41. I was only five at the time; my brother Dave was 10, and my oldest brother Chuck was not quite 15. That was a hard loss for a young boy.

My mom thought it was wise that we stay in Madison so my oldest brother could finish high school there, then later she got a job as secretary to the president of the denominational college, a little regional one called Eastern Nazarene, in Quincy, Massachusetts. We moved there when I was 8 and Mom worked there for 10 or 11 years. I was always thankful for that move because it was a great small college with very much of a family atmosphere between faculty and staff. Our church was College Church on campus. My oldest brother, who had been attending Iowa State, ended up transferring to Eastern Nazarene. He played basketball for them, so everybody knew him, and everybody knew me. It was a great environment for a fatherless boy.

I was very much a Nazarene at that time. My oldest brother became a minister in the Nazarene Church and ended up being a well-known denominational figure before he died. I eventually married the daughter of a Nazarene college professor. After graduation, I did a master’s degree in social work at Ohio State University and started working as a social worker. I went to a Nazarene church there, and even ended up on their church board, though I was probably younger than I should have been to do that. In my late twenties and early thirties, I really struggled with theology. I was having conversations with my pastor and with my oldest brother, who had also been a social worker before going to the Nazarene seminary.

Part of my struggle was that as a social worker I was working a lot with kids in foster homes. I watched one time as an office mate and our supervisor arranged for a 15-year-old girl who was in foster care and pregnant to take a bus trip from Columbus, Ohio, to the state of Kentucky so she could get an abortion without parental consent. They facilitated that under the radar. Meanwhile, I was thinking of the 16-year-old girl and others that I was in charge of who were in foster homes, and I knew I might be in a similar position at some point. I knew I did not want to do that. I didn’t feel it was right. But I wasn’t hearing anything from my church in terms of how to

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back up my thoughts biblically. Around that time, I also started reading Francis Schaeffer, and that was a big shift in my life.

Somewhere around the age of 30 or so, after I'd been working as social worker for about eight years, I felt called to go to seminary, but I knew I was not going to go to a Nazarene seminary. I wasn't sure exactly what the Lord was doing. I thought maybe I would go study somewhere and get good theology then maybe be a missionary to Nazarenes. It was probably pretty naive of me. My wife, Carolanne, and I began visiting other kinds of churches, and I would ask some of those pastors for recommendations on seminaries, but I didn't get much help. So, I ended up writing to three people, one of whom was Franky Schaeffer, the son of Francis Schaeffer. Francis had died in 1984, so this was sometime late that year or early 1985. I asked Franky if he could recommend a place that would really teach me the Bible and how it applies to current social issues. Franky actually wrote me back and said, "I'm an artist and not a professional theologian, so take this with a pinch of salt, but if I were you, I'd try Covenant Seminary in St. Louis."

I'd never heard of it, but based on that recommendation I wrote to Covenant. Someone from the school wrote back—this was before the internet and email—and sent me a catalog. This was not like a picture book catalog, but one full of detailed writing about the school and the classes and the professors. My wife and I read it and were pleasantly surprised. We didn't know there were people around who thought like this. It sounded exactly like what I needed. We sold our house and moved to St. Louis so I could do an MDiv because I thought I was going to be a pastor. With my social work background, I eventually got a job working as a counselor to support us, but for a while before that I worked at a grocery store stocking shelves from one to five in the morning, which had an effect on my studies. I still have some of my old class notes where the handwriting trails off as I fell asleep in class on occasion.

**RM:** So, if you came to Covenant to become a pastor, how did you end up as a Professor of Counseling?

**DZ:** Good question. When I graduated with my MDiv, Dr. Paul Kooistra, who was Covenant's President at the time, helped me connect with a

**For me, a counseling program—or any program that prepares people for helping others—has to have at the heart of it the transformation of people.**

church in Dallas, Texas, which was pastored by a guy Dr. Kooistra knew from his years at Reformed Seminary. They needed an assistant pastor, and my brother Dave also lived in Dallas, so Carolanne and I went there. It was the first time Dave and I had lived in the same city since we were kids. Unfortunately, about six weeks after we got there, the church started to struggle, and some months later it split. The pastor got a job somewhere else and our church lost a lot of people. I knew they weren't likely to hire a newbie like me to pastor the church, so I knew I was looking for a job as well.

I called Paul Kooistra and what happened was that Covenant eventually hired me to come back to the Seminary and restart the Student Services department, what we now call Student Life. There had been some staff changes and departures at the time, which had left no one to directly run Student Services; the Academic Dean had been covering it for a year, but that was not sustainable. So, I came back to Covenant to work, which was a surprise to me because I thought I was going to be a pastor for the rest of my life. I ended up running Student Services for five years, working to rebuild it into something that would be beneficial and formative for the students. I had some awesome student workers on my staff—one of whom was Tom Gibbs, now our sixth President; another was Stephen Estock, who is now the Coordinator of the PCA's Committee for Discipleship Ministries. We had a great time.

I was hired to be an administrator, but I also served as an adjunct instructor. In that role, I was like a utility player on a baseball team, playing whatever position was needed at any given time. Mostly I supervised the preaching of MDiv students. I did not expect to be on faculty in the future, but there was a fringe benefit of tuition

reimbursement that you could pay back in years of service. I decided to use that to work on a graduate degree in Marriage and Family Counseling at Saint Louis University, even though I knew it was likely I would not be able to teach at Covenant. But then, in that mysterious way that God does things, during my third year in Student Services, the Seminary was gearing up to start its Counseling program, which Dr. Richard Winter began in 1993. They knew my background in social work, so when Richard arrived, I got to work with him as a sort of consultant on the creation of the program. After it was up and running for two years, it was obvious we'd need a second counseling professor. I wasn't quite finished with my PhD, but getting close, so I applied for the position. By God's grace, I was hired and started teaching in the fall of 1995.

**RM:** And now you've been here for 30 years.

**DZ:** Thirty years as a teacher, but if you tack on my Student Services years and my student years before that, I've been around forever! One interesting thing about that is that I've known or worked with all six of our Presidents in some way. I had a couple of homiletics courses with Dr. Rayburn, knew Dr. Barker a little bit, was a member of Dr. Kooistra's President's Cabinet, and worked with Dr. Chapell, Dr. Dalbey, and now Dr. Gibbs. There aren't too many folks around here now who can say that; maybe Jack Collins.

**RM:** I'm sure you've seen a lot of changes in your years at Covenant.

**DZ:** Sure have. When I first came here as a student, this building we're sitting in, Founders Hall, didn't exist. We still had the old white house that served as our administration building just down the hill. There were no apartments on campus, there was no Archeology Institute, the big Community Center did not exist. The walkway that now runs from Founders and in front of the Chapel over to Edwards Hall was a driveway. Most of the parking lots didn't exist. We didn't have as many students then, either. Everyone was very excited about our entering class in fall 1985 because there were 31 of us—that was the biggest class up to that time. It's a strange feeling to now be in my 70s and know that a lot of the people and things that were so for-

mative for me are not really known by most of our newer students and staff. But that's what happens when you've been someplace for a very long time.

**RM:** As you look back over all those years, what people or events stand out to you? What have you learned or how have you grown as a person and as a teacher during your time here?

**DZ:** It's not particularly Covenant-related, but one thing I've always been extremely thankful for is the fact that I was trained as a social worker before I became a counselor. Social work is a broader training, and it taught me a lot about organizations and what leadership looks like. Most importantly, it taught me that fundamentally you help people most through the relationships you have with them. From the very first course I taught here, I've made it a point to emphasize that the relationship is the vehicle of change. I've basically treated the classroom and the counseling room as the same kind of environment: my students and my clients both need the same thing from me, and that is to create a relationship with them where they know I'm tuned into them, that I'm for them, and that we're collaborating. Because it really is collaborative. It's not just me teaching down or counseling down to them. That has become more and more important to me through the years.

Another thing is that somewhere along the way I recognized that the main foci of my life were teaching, counseling, leadership, speaking, and writing. My professional life has really revolved around those things. My primary focus, though, is on the students. I'm very concerned that the forces of our culture and the information society we've been in for a quarter-century or so, have pressured schools to be about the transfer of information. But for me, a counseling program—or any program that prepares people for helping others—has to have at the heart of it the *transformation of people*. The heart of my work is to be as transforming a force as God allows me to be with the people he puts before me. And with that is hopefully to be a transforming force for the Seminary itself in whatever way I can during the time I have left here.

More directly related to Covenant is something that has been one of the greatest blessings to me personally. About 15 or so years ago the curriculum committee was revising the MDiv curric-

ulum, looking at places where courses overlapped and where we might be able to combine some courses together. One of the things that came out of that was the course God and Humanity: Foundations of Counseling, which brings together elements of the theology of God and man and elements of the basics of counseling, since those two are intimately related. I got to be the counseling professor in that class from the beginning, which means that I've been in that classroom every semester for 15 and a half years.

The blessing of hearing my colleagues Mike Williams and then Robbie Griggs and Drew Martin teaching on the theology aspect and answering questions by going back to creation really formed something very deeply in me. They spoke about the reality that God established in creation and how he ordered things, and part of that ordering is that everything and everyone is in relationship, it's all integrated, it's all of a whole, and the healthiness or unhealthiness of those various integrated relationships affects everything else. It's helped me realize as a counselor that we can't really talk about integrating psychology and theology because they were never really separated to begin with. They were tied together at the start. That's how God made things to work. We can break things apart to analyze them in more specific ways, but we can't really understand creation or human beings unless you see them as a whole, and that includes relationships. We're all individually image-bearers of God but, ultimately, we image him most fully when we are in relationship with others. I'm very grateful for those profound insights and how they have affected my teaching.

Besides these things, there have been so many people, so many colleagues and students and friends and guest speakers along the way who have had a great impact on me: Jerram Barrs, David Jones, and David Calhoun to name just a few. And Paul Kooistra, whose emphasis on grace during his time as President really helped transform the culture, people, and viewpoint of the Seminary in so many ways. All the good things that have been happening around here in recent years are really a continuation of that emphasis on being receivers of God's amazing grace.

**RM:** Amen to that! One last question: We have lots of pastoral students who also do counseling de-

grees. How do you see those meshing together and how is that combination a benefit to the church?

**DZ:** I'll answer that by reiterating what I said a minute ago about the importance of seeing each human being as an integrated whole, and just add that pastoral work, like counseling, is largely about helping people understand that about themselves. My belief is that the MDiv student who pursues a counseling degree can start to see that helping people through the means and context of relationship makes sense. That's the best place to start because that's the way God orders the world; that's the way he made us.

It's also important to not get hung up on thinking in counseling or psychological terminology. I was talking with one of our counseling grads about this recently, and he told me of a supervisor he had who required his people to write their client reports without using any kind of technical psychological jargon but to think in terms of the clients' experience and write something closer to how they might describe that experience themselves. That was a challenge at first, but he soon found that doing it this way transformed the way he thought about people and about counseling. It gave him more of an awareness of who they were and how the things that happen to us in our lives—the good and the bad—happen through the means of relationship. People who hurt us and people who help us can only do so because there is a relationship in which they do that. That's why knowing something of a person's family history is so important.

That conversation just confirmed for me that the starting place for our counseling or our pastoral work is not just our understanding of God, but also how he created us to reflect him, to reflect something of the Trinity itself, which is in constant relationship. My hope is that our counseling students, because they take theology classes, will get that. And I hope that our MDiv students who also do counseling degrees, get it as well. It sounds so simple, but it's so incredibly profound. ■

*Rick Matt is Senior Writer and Editor for Covenant Seminary and loves to tell the stories of what God is doing in and through the lives of CTS students, graduates, and faculty. He also serves as a ruling elder in the PCA.*

# FEATURES

I will sing of the  
steadfast love of the  
Lord forever; with my  
mouth I will make  
known your faithful-  
ness to all generations.  
— Psalm 89:1

What  
Happened to  
Our Pastor?

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Holiness as the  
Mission and  
Apologetic Method  
of the Church

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Longing for  
God's Deliverance  
(Psalm 89)

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# WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR PASTOR?

By Dr. Dan Doriani

Moral Failure, Godly  
Character, and the Challenges  
of Pastoral Leadership

Illustration by Aldo Jarillo

## INTRODUCTION

**I**N RECENT YEARS, the church has suffered numerous reports of catastrophic moral failure by some of its most talented and visible leaders. But it isn't only famous, highly regarded pastors who falter. It happens to all sorts of pastors from churches large, small, and mid-sized. They hail from every nation and every branch of Christendom. Their sins violate all sorts of biblical standards—and not just the most obvious ones of abuse of power and sexual sin; some leave the faith, dishonor authorities, take their own lives, break vows, misuse funds, plagiarize, covet, and more. Why are so many pastors failing in these ways? Is moral failure among pastors really as much of an epidemic as it seems? How can we have confidence in our leaders amidst all the bad news?

As we consider these questions, we'll discuss here four potential explanations that have been offered. Two of these, while having some merit, I believe fail to get at the heart of the matter; the other two, I think, come closer to helping us understand the real issues affecting how and why pastors fail, and the church's own role in that process.

### **EXPLANATION 1: PASTORS DO NOT FAIL IN GREAT NUMBERS; THE PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA FOSTER THE ILLUSION OF A PROBLEM.**

It is tempting to blame the press for publicizing the problem. The argument would be: Most pastors are faithful and honorable, and problems are overreported, since the press loves scandals, especially if they involve leaders. Rising antipathy toward the church also makes signs of hypocrisy appealing to editors. Further, the current fascination with victims prompts publication of allegations of abuse, which often prove false. And social media spreads uncertain allegations even if they never appear in the traditional press.

There is a measure of truth in these points, and exposing corruption and oppression from any quarter has long been an essential part of the press's vocation. But even so, too many pastors do fail both morally and spiritually. And church leaders are not the only ones whose failings are broadcast far and wide; we also hear about those

of politicians, athletes, business leaders, and entertainers. The church cannot complain of preferential mistreatment. The fact is, we do have a real problem. Yes, most pastors are godly men, but I personally have known six or seven who took their own lives, three who were caught in adultery, one or two who were bullies, one who misappropriated funds, and several liars. We cannot blame the press if church leaders violate the very norms they proclaim to uphold.

The church should never just accept such moral failure in its leaders—and yet, we should anticipate it. The Bible clearly and openly recounts the sins of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Peter, and many others, thus preparing us to deal with straying leaders. Some of those leaders may be restored to their positions even after a failure, as those on this list were; others will not. Similarly, Paul instructed Timothy, Titus, and the Ephesian elders to expect godless opposition from within. Therefore, while we never tolerate moral failure, we can acknowledge and investigate it.

It is difficult to track the whole career of any group, pastors included, but some statistics from one group I am associated with helps clarify. Of the eighty members on the board and council of this organization from 2005 to 2022, all but five or six are still faithfully engaged in ministry or honorably retired. Of the other five, one is now de-churched; two saw their calls end, apparently for failure in fulfilling duties; two were dismissed for abuse of power; and one situation is ongoing at this writing. Other prominent pastors have been criticized or accused of errors in leadership or pressured to resign; yet, when no formal charges or investigations take place, allegations are difficult to assess. Many charges are false, malicious, or misguided. Moreover, if charged with "mistakes in judgment," *every* leader might plead guilty.

It is also hard to answer the question, "Was this pastor fundamentally faithful throughout his ministry?" A pastor can be both faithful and imperfect. Pastors face bitter accusations for giving ineffective pastoral counsel, for failing to complete planned projects, even for not performing enough hospital visits. And how shall we regard pastors who left the ministry due to exhaustion? Thus, attempts at statistical analysis are difficult, but it seems likely that (1) the church *does* have a

*The church should never accept moral failure in its leaders and yet it should anticipate it. . . . The church does indeed attract flawed men—because there is no other sort of man.*

problem and also that (2) the press is more likely to report on any troubles than to publish encomia to quietly good men.

### **EXPLANATION 2: THE CHURCH ATTRACTS FLAWED MEN TO THE MINISTRY.**

We can confidently say that the church does indeed attract flawed men—because there is no other sort of man. Indeed, one must declare oneself a

sinner even to join the church, let alone lead it. So, let's refine our question: Does the church especially attract men with specific problems, such as narcissism or a hunger for power? Seminaries rarely detect a desire for power in their enrolled students. Classes in pastoral formation ask students to state and address their flaws; students seem to be generally forthcoming. In that setting, few confess a lust for power. Professors rarely observe it, and the relevant literature hardly mentions it. On the other hand, adults quickly learn about power. They see the value of positional authority, expert knowledge, skill, status, and other assets. Pastors are no different.

In Matthew 23:1–15, Jesus says that men seek the status that spiritual leadership confers. Teachers have authority to command and followers honor them with titles like "rabbi" and "father." Not all leaders seek such status for its own sake, but religious organizations can certainly attract power-hungry men, and those who specifically seek this kind of power are more prone to go astray and to lead others astray. And Scripture is full of warnings of God's displeasure with those who lead his people astray. But does the church especially attract those who yearn for power? Or do pastors learn to seek power because they often feel powerless, like they have as many bosses as their church has members?

Some suggest that narcissism is especially common among pastors. It is surely a vice that many observers believe is increasing in American society, and pastors, like anyone else, can succumb to it. In Paul's vice list, in 2 Timothy 3:2–4, the apostle places self-love at the top: "For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents . . . slanderous . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people." The list begins and ends with false loves: people love themselves, money, and pleasure, rather than God. That both drives and explains the sins that follow—arrogance, brutality, and self-indulgence. A former colleague of mine once noted astutely that "Moral corruption follows from love falsely directed." We may wonder if today's emphasis on narcissistic pastors is exaggerated, as trends often are, but Paul does decry those who put themselves first because they love themselves most.

Chuck DeGroat, in his book *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (IVP, 2022), asserts that narcissism is especially common in pastors, perhaps because head pastors and public theologians enjoy a high profile in their circles. DeGroat says narcissistic pastors inspire their churches with lofty ministry goals, then mislead them by promoting grandiose “we are special” mythologies. If talented, their self-confidence lets them start movements, but their selfishness eventually destroys those movements. Narcissists crave power, admiration, and a stage. Lacking empathy, they exploit, devalue, and discourage others. Lacking humility and self-awareness, narcissists think they do no wrong. Therefore, if anyone calls a narcissistic pastor to account or presses him to repent, it registers as a gratuitous attack, which prompts the pastor’s rage. Meanwhile, churches that profit from the charm and skill of narcissists may rise to defend them, sometimes self-servingly, sometimes out of love for a pastor who has served the church sacrificially in desperate times.

While it is true that some teachers and preachers are vain, narcissistic, self-appointed prophets, Scripture is clear that God himself does call people to preach or speak on his behalf and to do so with authority (Acts 5:42, 9:15, Rom. 10:14–15, 1 Tim. 2:11). Thus, Paul commands Timothy—whose fault was timidity, not vanity—to “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). Paul also says that people preach if God equips and calls them to it: “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20). Moreover, Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, and Amos 7 show that prophets could be most reluctant to become God’s spokesmen. To this day, many pastors testify that they long resisted God’s call. Thus, it is not quite accurate—or fair—to say that the pastorate specifically attracts narcissists.

Indeed, some refer to the necessity of what might be called “healthy narcissism,” which is marked by confidence rather than certainty, and by empathy, clarity, humility, and curiosity. Though helpful, the term “healthy narcissism” may sound like an oxymoron. How are we to assess this? If a professional athlete says he is stronger and faster than most people, is he being

*Paul’s long description of leaders in 1 Timothy accents character more than skills or gifts. . . . For Paul, to do the work one must first be the man.*

narcissistic or simply stating a fact? If lawyers and politicians say they are intelligent and capable speakers, is that narcissism or realism?

In his influential book *The Denial of Death* (Free Press, 1973), Ernest Becker asserts that “a working level of narcissism is inseparable from self-esteem, from a basic sense of self-worth.” Psychologists link healthy narcissism to proper self-protection, a sense of agency, security, adequate self-respect, and the will to make plans. Healthy narcissists may

think they are slightly exceptional, which gives us pause. Yet everyone is exceptional in the sense that each person has a mix of gifts and experiences that equip them to do justice, love mercy, and live faithfully. Perhaps psychologists are too enthusiastic about healthy narcissism, but healthy self-regard seems necessary for leaders in all sorts of vital professions. Pastors especially need confidence, fearlessness, and ego strength lest they collapse under the many pressures and often scathing criticisms they may endure. They need confidence and a capacity to win people in order to stand up in public and preach and teach each week. Those these traits and skills can certainly be abused, and sometimes are, they are not in themselves evil.

Some preachers do love to be the center of attention, but many have a love-hate relationship with preaching, agonizing every Saturday night and every Sunday morning, thinking, “Why would anyone want to listen to me? Surely, this sermon is so disorganized, banal, inconsistent, and inert that I will finally be unmasked.” Most pastors seem to experience similar self-doubt, even self-recrimination. But they persist because they believe God has called them to this work. In short, it is ill-advised to focus on narcissism and neglect its common antithesis: crippling self-doubt. Perhaps we must seek further and deeper for a plausible explanation for pastoral failure.

**EXPLANATION 3: THE CHURCH OFTEN FOCUSES ON SEEKING PASTORAL SKILL OR TALENT INSTEAD OF EMPHASIZING GODLY CHARACTER.**

Scripture demands that potential church leaders show godly character. Unfortunately, a pastor’s maturity can parallel his knowledge of biblical languages—strong at the start, then steadily declining. Meanwhile, churches are too often concerned with a potential pastor’s visible skills and abilities, with too little emphasis on discerning—and helping to promote and foster—his growth in godly character.

The Bible tells us much about pastoral qualifications. In the Old Testament, when God constituted Israel as his holy nation, he established a high code for everyone. The law rarely mentions additional moral qualifications for prophets, priests, or kings, perhaps because the role of

priest and king were hereditary and because the Lord himself called prophets. But the torah focuses on the tasks or duties of these offices and Deuteronomy 17:14–20 says that kings must not live for privilege or wealth as manifested in horses, wives, gold, or silver. Kings must follow the law and must not exalt themselves. Proverbs 31:4–5 directs kings to a heightened standard; instead of indulging themselves (especially in strong drink), they deny themselves so as not to “forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.”

The Gospels weave character and skills together seamlessly. Jesus focused on the character of all disciples, not just the twelve. What he said to everyone applies to leaders, but Jesus uniquely “appointed the twelve . . . that they might be with him” and learn how to minister from his example (Mark 3:15). Then, when Jesus commissioned them to proclaim the kingdom, he charged them to follow his example (Matt. 10:25). The Book of Acts, meanwhile, emphasizes the tasks of the apostles; they witness to Jesus’s person and work (Acts 1:8, 22). Yet, when the church chooses deacons, it accents character traits—wisdom and fullness of the Spirit (6:3, 5).

We see the same dual emphasis on tasks and character in the Pastoral Epistles, but 1 Timothy 3:1–7, Paul’s long description of leaders, accents character more than skills or gifts.

*If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? (1 Tim. 3:1–3)*

When Paul mentions the “task” of an overseer, we expect a description of duties, but he then lists eleven moral traits and names just two skills. This implies that a leader’s first task is character formation. For Paul, to do the work one must first be the man. Notice also that the traits of 1 Timothy 3 correspond to the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5. No Greek word appears in

both passages, but the terms for self-control and gentleness overlap so much that English translations often use the same terms for them. More important, we see the fruit of the Spirit expressed in action in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, Titus 1:5–9, and 2 Timothy 2:24–25.

<b>Galatians 5 Fruit of the Spirit</b>	<b>1 Timothy 3; 2 Timothy 2; Titus 1 – Character Traits</b>
Love	Elders care for family and church; caregiving is a form of love (1 Tim. 3:4-5).
Peace	Elders are not violent and quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3).
Patience	Elders are not quick-tempered (Tit. 1:7). Leaders are patient (2 Tim. 2:24-25).
Kindness	Hospitality is a concrete act of kindness. (1 Tim. 3:2)
Gentleness	Elders are gentle and teach gently (1 Tim. 3:3, 2 Tim. 2:25).
Faithfulness	Elders hold firmly to the word as taught (Tit. 1:9).
Self-control	Elders are self-controlled (1 Tim. 3:2).

This suggests that Paul expects overseers to experience the fruit of the Spirit and to express that fruit publicly. Leaders also manifest character in the world. Paul also states these character requirements for an overseer in a public letter. Because Paul published the list, the church can call leaders to account.

Pastors prove their moral quality in public by the way they treat their families. A man “must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim. 3:4–5). Fathers can get compliance through force and threats, but godly fathers are kind, winning their

children with love that fosters respect, including obedience without grumbling. An overseer must also be the “husband of one wife.” While this could mean that an elder cannot be single, divorced, remarried, or polygamous, the Greek literally says that he must be a “man of one woman” or “a one-woman man,” which most exegetes take to mean he must be a faithful, exemplary husband. Every point Paul makes about parenting and marriage applies to church leadership as well: a man who cannot care well for his own family, whom he knows best and loves most, cannot manage Christ’s church.

If 1 Timothy 3:1–7 implies “character first,” then 1 Timothy 4:12–16 implies that character, skills, and duties belong together. This passage shows that the church rightly seeks skilled leaders. Paul requires Timothy, his protégé, to manifest both character and ability in equal measure. The solution to the problem of high-skill, low-character leaders is to develop leaders with both skill and character. First Timothy 4:12–13 names three skills—speech, exhortation, and teaching—and three virtues—love, faith, and purity: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Keep a close watch on yourself [character] and on the teaching.” Clearly, “speech” and “conduct” touch on both tasks and character. Speech is crucial since pastors talk so much and so publicly. Thus, good conduct enhances a pastor’s speech, which can be a problem area for some. We flatter our friends, slander absent foes, and change our positions to please our hearers. When caught in sin, we spin self-exculpatory tales and disregard our accusers. If we confess, we promise to submit to discipline, then evade it. These sins call for repentance and pastors should be the first to repent.

Paul also charges Timothy to devote himself “to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” These are essential pastoral tasks that includes study and comprehension of, and reflection on the Scriptures, and the ability to exhort people to follow them. To preach and teach effectively, pastors must adorn their words with godly character. Peter’s charge to elders has the same dual emphasis on tasks and character:

*The church rightly seeks assurance that its pastors know and believe Scripture and orthodox theology. But we should also examine their character more thoroughly as well.*

They are to “shepherd the flock of God . . . exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly . . . not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2–4). That is the way of the Lord.

The biblical testimony to the centrality of character is clear. The church knows this and generally pursues men of character, yet many pastors still fail morally. How can this be?

**EXPLANATION 4: THE CHURCH OFTEN FAILS TO EXERCISE THE ONGOING CARE THAT NURTURES LIFELONG FIDELITY AND PREVENTS MORAL OR SPIRITUAL DECLINE.**

A man I know with decades of experience as an elder once said, “Pastors seem like politicians: They start with a sincere desire to reform the system and end up compromised or corrupted by it.” My experience as a professor and pastor corroborates this. Each year, our Seminary faculty evaluates the character of the graduates we send into pastoral ministry. In the past, we typically had concerns about one or two students per year; if only it were that few in recent years! Let’s therefore now ask: Do pastors falter because latent weaknesses surface when they gain authority? Or do churches act in ways that corrupt their pastors? Surely, both are true to some extent.

Churches certainly can mistreat their pastors. In recent years, for example, church wars over politics and vaccines led many to turn on their pastors. Yet, pastors have always faced bitter criticism. After twenty years of faithful and fruitful ministry, an internationally respected pastor had grown so weary of attacks from his congregation that he concluded that he had to build a wall between himself and his people or he had to leave the ministry. Too many pastors I know would resonate with this experience.

But even apart from such attacks, pastors can falter, losing their taste for holiness. Paul Tripp, in his book *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Crossway, 2012), compares them to middle-aged men who say they want to stay fit but gain five pounds per year: the gap between stated and actual values is both manifest and injurious. The loss of gentleness, an essential for pastoral ministry (Gal. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:25), illustrates both sides of the issue. In an effort to guard themselves from criticism, many pastors harden themselves in order to endure, but this eventually makes them harsh toward others. Some seek solace in adultery, deception, or bullying; others simply fall into these sins on their own. They probably met the criteria of 1 Timothy 3 earlier in their ministries, but something went wrong. How can churches help their leaders stay faithful?

First, we can intervene when we see pastors, however talented, start to stray. One year, I arrived

to speak at a pastors' conference and learned that the conference's founder and director had been dismissed days earlier after a long affair with a staffer. The event's remaining leaders berated themselves, for they had seen evidence of misbehavior for years but had refused to identify it. Their leader was talented and charismatic. He had mentored them, so they convinced themselves that they had misread signs of impropriety that were, in retrospect, all too obvious. Willingness on the part of leadership to confront such sins honestly is necessary for the health of the pastor and the church.

It is hardest to correct a rogue pastor when there is no structure for oversight and accountability. Connectional and hierarchical churches have more resources, but they can ignore and hide problems too. Counselor Dan Allender says the church needs prophets to shout that the emperor—the talented leader who strays—has no clothes, no godliness. Prophets must undermine the foolish narratives that serve corrupt or narcissistic leaders, such as: "I am a great man, but my wife resents my status and fails to appreciate my skills and burdens. But behold, I have found an admirer, and she does recognize my eminence. She is tender and encouraging." This can lead to emotional or physical affairs. Proverbs long ago described the seductive flatterer and the sad results (Prov. 5:3).

It is easier to correct a leader with low status. For example, in my younger days as solo pastor of a small church, I once played basketball with church members in a local league. Being tall, I could—and did—easily block many shots by the opposing team. My blocks were all clean, but the referee for whatever reason called every one of them foul. In my frustration, I shouted (rather rudely) to the ref that he needed to pay better attention. A deacon on our team swiftly rebuked me: "You can't shout at the ref like that." I protested, "But he's awful. All those blocks were good." The deacon replied, "We know that, but you're our pastor." I fumed, "When I'm on the court, I'm a basketball player, not a pastor." The deacon corrected me again: "Yes, on the court, you are a basketball player. But you are *always* our pastor." Because he was older and wiser, he felt able to admonish me, and I admitted that he was right. But what if I had been the senior pastor of a very large and influential church in that same situation? Would anyone have dared to call me out on

*Alas, pastors can decline in both skill and godliness. The church rightly notices abuse of authority and sexual sins, but we dare not overlook common sins.*

my rudeness? More likely, excuses would be made and defenses offered.

Americans often assume that church growth is proof of merit. Because gifted preachers, teachers, and musicians spur growth, churches seek people with those skills. No one intends to ignore character issues, but we persuade ourselves that with proper mentoring, we can fix flawed young leaders, so the church can benefit from their gifts. Ample recent evidence shows how church leaders can be seemingly blind to a talented pastor's flaws. Unfortunately, gifts lead to rapid ascent and flaws can cause swift collapse. Many ministries never recover. Therefore, if only for pragmatic reasons, the church should focus on godly character—but chiefly we should do so because God does.

Churches often investigate character when they examine candidates for ordination and when ordained pastors prepare for a new call. These interviews typically focus on traditional topics—

family, spiritual disciplines, and sense of calling. We rarely ask if leaders keep promises, control anger, love wealth, seek reconciliation after breaches in relationships, or practice hospitality. Can the prospective leader both lead and follow? Does he know how to work hard but also know how to rest? Does he have friends? What happens when he disagrees with someone? Does he pray over it? Does he listen to the other party well enough to state the issue in terms the other would recognize?

The church rightly notices abuse of authority and sexual sins, but we dare not overlook the more common sins. Trouble can start so innocently. Consider a picnic that follows the second worship service. The sermon prompts people to seek the pastor for counsel or prayer, which causes the pastor to be last in line for the picnic food. Since he must lead an event that starts soon after, he anticipates missing lunch (again). An observant woman sees this and gives the pastor her slot in line, but a grump snipes: "I thought pastors were supposed to put others first!" That could be a jest, but the pastor detects anger and shudders. His supporters shield and defend him. Slowly, walls go up, and few can correct him. The team also decides to bring meals to his office to prevent food problems. He is so thankful for them at first, but in time comes to expect them, and then requires them. When he travels, he also drifts toward ever nicer hotel rooms; he needs proper sleep to fulfill his duties, right?

It can happen to anyone. When I took my first senior leadership position, a mentor told me, "Now you are important. People will want to do things for you; let them." If he meant, "Make good use of your administrative assistant," he was right. But people also offer tickets to sporting events and the use of second homes for vacations. The gifts come from people who know their pastor's burdens and modest salary. The leader is thankful, but if he is careless, he may come to expect such favors. The problem is real, even if the root is drift, not evil intent.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In considering the root cause of pastoral failures, we reject the idea that we are witnessing a media-driven pseudo-problem. Many leaders have seduced congregants, become impossibly selfish, or abused

power. But we also doubt that the church uniquely attracts abusers and narcissists. The claim merits investigation, but we need to separate "healthy narcissism," or confidence, from unhealthy narcissism. By contrast, the church does seem to seek skill or talent more than character, and too many pastors seem to start well and then falter, perhaps on their own, perhaps because the church damages them. This also merits further study.

In light of all this, it seems right to mention a few ways to help enhance godliness in leaders. First, let the church ensure that pastoral candidates have mentors who regularly inquire after their character and promote it. With 2 Timothy 3 in mind, let's ask if candidates love God and neighbor, or self and pleasure. Let us ask if they can both lead and follow, if people are glad to be on their team, if they know how to work, how to rest, and how to handle conflict.

Second, pastors need friends who know, love, and gently correct them (Gal. 6:1). Such friends will ensure that pastors have time for rest and reflection and will protect them from personal attacks and senseless criticism. This may require a godly intolerance for malcontents whose lives contradict the gospel (Gal. 2:11–14). Throughout, the church must heed truth-tellers who address the enemies of peace. We also need prophets to challenge sycophants who gain status by praising powerful church leaders.

At best, pastors will lead beautiful lives that silence accusers. Personal peace will give them time to pursue godliness and to fulfill their tasks—teaching, preaching, making disciples, praying—from a love of Jesus and his people, not from a desire for self-serving power or status. ■

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**HOLINESS  
AS THE  
MISSION AND  
APOLOGETIC  
METHOD OF  
THE CHURCH**

*Like everything else in the Christian life, the task of apologetics works best when it flows from a faith that rests in the hope of Christ and a life that honors him in word and deed.*

**By Dr. Derek Rishmawy**

Dr. Derek Rishmany was the featured speaker at the 2025 edition of the Francis Schaeffer Institute Conference held at Covenant Seminary in September on the theme of Divine Holiness: The Neglected Apologetic in a Pagan Age. This article is adapted and condensed from the third lecture of that series (part of which was previously published in different form at The Keller Center). Audio files of the complete lectures are available in the Resources section of the Seminary's website at [www.covenantseminary.edu/resources](http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resources).

#### INTRODUCTORY SUMMARY

The first lecture in this series focused on the ways in which our culture has shifted over the last several decades from one grounded to some degree in Christian values and worldview to one more properly considered pluralistic and even pagan. Lecture 2 dealt with the nature of God's holiness and the innate human need for the transcendence and purpose that can only be found in God himself. In this lecture I want to talk about the way divine holiness shapes our approach to apologetics itself, not so much in terms of the arguments we make, but in the way in which we make them—what Francis Schaeffer called “doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way.”

We'll anchor our reflections in the apostle Peter's first letter to the churches in Asia, a text richly infused with themes of holiness. The goal is to show that central to the task of Christian apologetics in a pagan age *there must be (1) a holy people who testify to Christ with (2) holy works and (3) holy words.*

#### HOLY PEOPLE

We don't have to go very far into Peter's letter to find our first point amply attested. Peter addresses his audience in the first verse as “elect exiles” (ESV) or “strangers scattered” (AV) through Asia by God's will, consecrated by the Spirit, and sprinkled with the blood of Christ for obedience—immediately situating this people as distinct from those around them by the providence of God and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit as being in unique covenantal relationship with the Lord.

Peter drives the point home a few verses later, quoting Leviticus 19:2, when he calls people to obedience as children because “as he who called you is

holy, you shall be holy in all your conduct, since is it written ‘you shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15–16). For this reason, they are to “not be conformed to the passions of” their former ignorance, but to conduct themselves with holy reverence of their Father in heaven (v. 17), not in “the futile ways inherited from your forefathers” from whom they had been ransomed by the death of Christ (vv. 17–19).

This is all confirmed and expanded in chapter 2, where Peter says that believers are now “living stones” being “built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:4–5). Indeed, they are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (2:9).

This body of believers made up of first-century Jews and Gentiles has just had applied to them the core theological identity markers and texts associated with the distinctive and unique existence of Israel as Israel in relation to God. The church is pictured here not as a replacement for Israel or a different body than Israel; rather, it is seen as Israel *continued*, Israel *expanded*, Israel being *fulfilled*. In other words, the church has existed since Adam, through Israel, and now continues in the New Testament church. From this we can draw out three points about our created, derivative holiness as the church.

#### 1. Holiness is for the sake of others.

This idea is constant across the testaments. In Exodus 19, when God made the covenant with Israel after the Exodus, he named them a kingdom of priests, a treasured possession, a nation set apart from all the nations in order to serve God on their behalf. Holiness in created things is a *consecration and devotion unto the service of the Lord*. In Israel's case, their unique purpose was to live in relation to God in such a way that brought him glory and testified to the nations what life in relation to the true God was like so that one day they might be drawn to Zion and taught by its people (Isaiah 2; Micah 4). The difference *between* the nations is aimed at making a difference *among* the nations. This has not changed in the New Testament.

#### 2. Holiness is a corporate reality.

This point should be obvious from what has been said so far: individual holiness is of immense, significant, irreplaceable importance, but Scripture

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### Individual holiness is of immense, significant, irreplaceable importance, but Scripture places an equal ultimacy, if not a primacy, on the corporate identity of the people of God.

places an equal ultimacy, if not a primacy, on the corporate identity of the people of God. One can be individually a citizen of a nation, even perhaps a holy citizen; but one cannot be a nation—much less a holy nation—by oneself. Indeed, some of what holiness involves is actually impossible without a shared corporate life.

#### 3. Holiness still marks the people of God as different in important ways.

Obviously, the church is no longer differentiated from the world and the nations by key ethnic, national, or linguistic markers, and is not required to observe circumcision or the dietary laws and or purity rituals of Israel. The events of Pentecost pushed the gospel out to the already-waiting Jewish diaspora churches and the various Gentile nations with their many distinct tongues, languages, and customs. And yet, a difference still remains—there is a distinction, a set-apartness, that still marks out Christians from their neighbors. We have been born of spiritual seed into a living hope. We have an inheritance in heaven. In Paul's language, we are in Christ, while the world is in Adam. Some Christians have understood this apartness as radical separation from the world; others have understood it as varying degrees of being “in the world but not of it.” To flesh this out,

I quote at length a famous passage from the ancient Epistle to Diognetus on the distinctiveness of Christians; it is possibly the best description of such holiness ever written:

*For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity.*

*The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.*

*They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives.*

*They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.* — Epistle to Diognetus 5

Thus, the holiness of the people of God is marked, primarily, by the distinctness of their moral behavior among the various peoples from which they have been drawn, and among whom

they live. That holiness no longer consists in retreating or cloistering in sanctified, set-apart holy lands or communities, or in distinctive ways of dress and speech (except for those that convey modesty or love and loyalty to God). Rather, as the author of the Epistle says later, Christians are in the world in the way the soul is in the body—distinct from it but diffuse throughout it.

Two temptations emerge here. One is for believers to be so intent on living among the nations in a non-confrontational way that they downplay or compromise the more challenging aspects of their beliefs to gain a hearing for the gospel—only to have nothing meaningful to say when they do speak. The other is to over-emphasize our set-apartness and create such a sharp distinction between us and those we're trying to reach that we forget that the difference is supposed to be for the sake and redemption of those others, not our own safety or comfort. Rather than either extreme, our holiness is to be like that of Jesus Christ, who came into the world and lived among people who were his own yet who were unlike him due to their sin. For it to be of any use, his holy set-apartness had to be immanent and among the people. Likewise for us: we are called to live distinctly from our neighbors, but we are also called to live among them for their sake and for God's glory.

This idea comes across clearly in Francis Schaeffer's works of apologetics. He never lost sight of the distinction between the church and the world, the believer and the unbeliever. Yet, he could not have started a ministry like L'Abri or answered people's difficult questions the way he did without also having a distinctive love for the lost and a sense of their deep need for what the church possesses.

#### **HOLY WORDS**

So, we are to be a holy people with hearts for others as we give witness to our holy God through our holy works and holy words. But what exactly does this look like? Again, 1 Peter provides a helpful guide for understanding:

*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles*

*honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* — 1 Peter 2:11–12

We have a clear injunction here that whatever Christian holiness looks like, it will need to include a negative moment—we are to abstain from the passions of the flesh, because they war against our souls. What are these passions? Peter cited Leviticus 19 earlier, but it's worth recognizing that that text is sandwiched by Leviticus 18 and 20, which list the various sins of the pagan nations around the Israelites. Old Testament scholars often talk about the big three, those which caused moral impurity so severe that there could be no ordinary atonement for them: idolatry, sexual immorality, and bloodshed. These sins were rampant in pagan Greco-Roman society; sadly, they still are so in our own time.

In the ancient world, the Christian refusal to bow down before other gods was one significant reason for the persecution they endured. Their steadfastness in their loyalty to the true God brought pain and death to many of them, but it also drew many outsiders to the faith as they saw the courage and grace with which the Christians faced their sufferings.

Sexual immorality of all kinds pervaded the ancient world as well, and the Christian understanding of the sacredness of the human body and the holiness of intimate relations as expressed in marriage between one man and one woman would have been seen as outrageous in many contexts, but the testimony of early church shows us that the Christian view of monogamous heterosexual relations overturned centuries of Greco-Roman thought, brought a deeper equality between men and women, put a stop to the gross sexual exploitation of slaves, brought dignity to victims of sexual assault, and much more.

As for bloodshed—from perpetual wars to the horrors of human sacrifice to all kinds of deadly economic exploitation to the ultimate abomination of abortion—the Christian culture of life, the forbidding of abortion, the erasing of double standards between men and women, the rescuing of exposed children (who were more often female than male), the care and protection of the elderly, and the idea of treating others fairly and equitably in business dealings all ran counter to the

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**Our call is to live with such generosity, integrity, lovingkindness, and faithfulness . . . that even when our lives provoke hostility, slander, or hatred among unbelievers . . . we have a good testimony that cannot be denied.**

prevailing philosophies and practices of the day and eventually brought about positive changes that eliminated or at least mitigated some of the worst of these offences.

The call now as it was then is for Christians to live lives of such generosity, integrity, lovingkindness, and faithfulness, and the doing of such good works among our neighbors, that even when our lives provoke hostility, slander, or hatred among unbelievers—as we are promised in Scripture will happen—we will have a good testimony that cannot be denied. The integrity in us that leads to that hostility must be accompanied by the sort of faithfulness that also provokes astonished praise of God.

Christian history abounds with stories of saints and saintly communities living among their neighbors in a radically loving and holy way. Roman Emperor Julian once complained that his pagan priests should be more like the Christians whose benevolence to strangers and holiness of life were drawing many away from the Roman gods. Or think of the Christians who refused to leave their cities during the plague but stayed to take care of dying neighbors, often dying themselves but leaving behind a legacy of new believers brought to faith by their actions. Such

living is needed now no less than in the past so that holy works provoke glory for God even out of the mouths of those who are most offended by our holiness.

#### **HOLY WORDS**

Holy works are an important part of our apologetic practice. But so are holy words. Once again, 1 Peter provides an anchor for us because it's here that we find our classic text on apologetics. Peter encourages his readers,

*Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

— 1 Peter 3:14–17

Apologetics is fundamentally a matter of testifying wisely, “giving a reason” for the Christian hope within you in a particular way. According to Peter, the central logic undergirding this practice is our ability to “honor Christ the Lord as holy” in our hearts. Scholars note that Peter is alluding here to Isaiah 8, in which, as the southern kingdom of Judah faces imminent invasion from hostile nations to the north, the Lord assures King Ahaz through Isaiah that the counsel of the nations will not stand because God is with his people (Isa. 8:9–10). Thus, God's people should not look at their enemies and “fear what they fear, nor be in dread” but rather, look to the Lord: “him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread” (vv. 12–13).

Giving respect, honor, and ultimate weight to the Lord is what it means to “honor him as holy.” It is to set God apart by recognizing him as the Lord, the King of the hosts of heaven, the One enthroned between the cherubim and hymned by the seraphim (6:3); the consuming fire of Israel, the divine flame whose glory consumes his enemies (10:17); the powerful One whose holy arm had redeemed his people time and again (52:10).

It is to recognize that he alone is God Almighty and he alone is his people's ultimate hope against paltry earthly powers. Peter has this context in view as he urges his suffering readers to take heart in the same way. They should "have no fear" (1 Pet. 3:14) for their opponents can only kill the body. Instead, they should fear the One who is Lord over body and soul (Matt. 10:28).

This has several implications for our apologetic task; we'll note just three.

### 1. Be willing to "suffer for righteousness' sake."

Honoring Christ as holy gives us the willingness to suffer because it cuts the taproot that undermines so much of our apologetic practice—simple fear of man. We are to make our hope known and not to fear what we might suffer at the hands of our opponents. For many Christians around the world today, the temptation to keep their faith private may come with the threat of violence, property loss, public slander, and even death. Most of us in the post-Christian West don't ever face losing their lives, but slander, lawsuits, the loss of a job or, occasionally, imprisonment may loom. For some, the loss of relationships, or the loss of respect in the workplace or classroom may be enough of a threat to keep them quiet. For others, it may be the fear of being seen as awkward, pushy, or uneducated. Those who do speak up may be tempted to concede intellectual or moral points they don't hold, or to massage or dilute certain doctrines seen as "peripheral" or "secondary" in order to share the gospel.

However, such attempts to hedge are merely a form of intellectual cowardice and a lack of conviction that Jesus, the Holy One, is the foolishness of God who is wiser than human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:25). Fearing Jesus Christ as holy includes remembering that the chief revelation of his holiness—his atoning death and resurrection by which he suffered and conquered all we could fear most—truly is the power of God unto salvation. If our fear is Jesus, we know we can lose nothing that his power cannot restore a hundredfold in the coming day of vindication (Matt. 19:29).

### 2. Learn to answer "with gentleness and respect."

Fearing Christ as holy also enables us to defend the faith with "gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15). How? If our aim is to respect and honor

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## For it to be of any use, Jesus's holy set-apartness had to be immanent and among the people. Likewise for us: we are called to live distinctly from our neighbors, but also to live among them for their sake and God's glory.

Christ, we will be attentive to honoring people made in his image, blessing them and not cursing them—even in response to their own curses (Matt. 5:11–12; James 3:9–10). This attentiveness includes honoring the fact that they are made with rational capacities that shouldn't be hijacked with cheap, high-pressure tactics but addressed with appeals that honor both the affections and the intellect.

I have found that most belligerent, disrespectful attempts to defend the faith stem from a basic lack of trust in Christ's power to convert or a lack of assurance of the gospel's truth. Some of the times I have been most tempted to bluster, to browbeat, to speak dismissively, or to engage in *ad hominem* arguments stem from being worried that my own argument isn't working. The reality is that I don't like to be wrong so sinful human pride gets in the way of my witness, making my glory instead of Christ's glory my heart's aim.

In other cases, my anxious anger reveals that I'm struggling to believe Christ really is holy—that his power, not my ability to persuade, saves the sinner. But when I recall that "salvation belongs to the Lord" (Jonah 2:9), this assurance can

allow me to do my best to witness to my Lord and entrust the results to him. At that apologetic moment, my fear needs to be in the God who vindicates himself and sanctifies his own name (Ezek. 39:7). Apologetics that honors Christ as holy sees the apologist not as the prime mover in the event but as a servant of the Lord, a tool in the hand of his ever-effective Master.

### 3. Have "a good conscience" before the Lord.

This is a corollary of the last two points in a couple of ways. First, when you proceed with gentleness and respect out of fear of Christ, there's less chance you can rightly be reproached by your opponents for anything. A key component of answering about the hope within is exhibiting a credible character consistent with that hope, which begins to make critics' accusations look like unbelievable slander.

Second, wanting to honor Christ as holy in all things keeps our focus on the One before whom we're actually giving an account. We may be testifying to our neighbors, but we do so before the face of the Lord Jesus, and while we never want to add unnecessary offense to the gospel, if our chief fear is Christ, not the other person's wounded (and perhaps aggressive) moral sensibilities, we will give clear testimony to the truth of his Word as best we can.

One mistake two different kinds of apologists make here is to assume that the level of another person's offense at what we say is a measure of how faithful we have been in our task. One type of apologist believes that if he does everything right and says everything with love the other person will not be triggered. Another type of apologist believes that unless the other person is triggered in some way by what he has said, he hasn't been faithful to the truth. Neither position is correct.

Third, having a clear conscience in your witness to Christ motivates you to engage more fully in preparation to do so. It is right and good to trust that the Holy Spirit will give you the words you need on the day you're dragged before the authorities (Luke 12:11–12), but that doesn't rule out timely and reasonable preparation for that day by studying the Scriptures, reading apologetic works, growing in your knowledge of theology, and so on, so that you might indeed have an answer at hand when needed.

Finally, honoring Christ as holy constantly involves a reminder that he is the One who "suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). That this is the ultimate source of our clean conscience before the Father. At the end of the day, this keeps us humble before our opponents, over whom we have nothing to boast about, and makes us eager to testify to God's grace.

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## LIVING WITH REVERENT AWE FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

Peter's call to honor Christ as holy isn't a mere abstraction—it's rooted in his encounter with Jesus's holiness in Luke 5 and the reaffirmation he experiences in John 21.

When Peter first witnessed Christ's divine power in a miraculous catch of fish, he fell to his knees like Isaiah before the throne of God and cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Peter recognized Jesus not just as a teacher but as the Holy One who exposed his unworthiness even as he called him into a new life as a fisher of men. And after the resurrection, when Jesus met Peter by the Sea of Tiberias with another miraculous catch (following Peter's cowardly unwillingness to suffer for his Savior), it was another gracious, visible sign of Jesus's holy power still at work and available to him.

That same reverent awe—fearing Christ above all—shaped Peter's call to witness. Just as Peter moved from fearful failure to faithful witness, we too are called to let Christ's holiness embolden us, freeing us from the fear of man and empowering us to testify with both courage and humility. When we anchor our apologetics in the transformative vision of Christ's power, his majesty, and his unique glory, then we don't defend mere arguments—we bear witness to the living Lord who alone is worthy of our ultimate trust. ■

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*Longing*

*for*

*God's*

*Deliverance*



Life's seasons of struggle and hardship can tempt us to despair, but Psalm 89 offers profound reminders of who God is and how our hope can thrive even in times of sorrow and lament.

## Psalm 89

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite

<sup>1</sup> I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

<sup>2</sup> For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness."

<sup>3</sup> You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant:

<sup>4</sup> 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Selah

<sup>5</sup> Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!

<sup>6</sup> For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord,

<sup>7</sup> a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him?

<sup>8</sup> O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you?

<sup>9</sup> You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

<sup>10</sup> You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

<sup>11</sup> The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.

<sup>12</sup> The north and the south, you have created them; Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name.

<sup>13</sup> You have a mighty arm; Strong is your hand, high your right hand.

<sup>14</sup> Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.

<sup>15</sup> Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face,

<sup>16</sup> who exult in your name all the day and in your righteousness are exalted.

<sup>17</sup> For you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted.

<sup>18</sup> For our shield belongs to the Lord, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

<sup>19</sup> Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one, and said: "I have granted help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.

<sup>20</sup> I have found David, my servant;

with my holy oil I have anointed him,

<sup>21</sup> so that my hand shall be established with him; my arm also shall strengthen him.

<sup>22</sup> The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him.

<sup>23</sup> I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.

<sup>24</sup> My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted.

<sup>25</sup> I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

<sup>26</sup> He shall cry to me, "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation."

<sup>27</sup> And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

<sup>28</sup> My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.

<sup>29</sup> I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens.

<sup>30</sup> If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules,

<sup>31</sup> if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,

<sup>32</sup> then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes,

<sup>33</sup> but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness.

<sup>34</sup> I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

<sup>35</sup> Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David.

<sup>36</sup> His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.

<sup>37</sup> Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies." Selah

<sup>38</sup> But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed.

<sup>39</sup> You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.

<sup>40</sup> You have breached all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

<sup>41</sup> All who pass by plunder him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors.

<sup>42</sup> You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice.

<sup>43</sup> You have also turned back the edge of his sword, and you have not made him stand in battle.

<sup>44</sup> You have made his splendor to cease and cast his throne to the ground.

<sup>45</sup> You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame. Selah

<sup>46</sup> How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?

<sup>47</sup> Remember how short my time is! For what vanity you have created all the children of man!

<sup>48</sup> What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah

<sup>49</sup> Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

<sup>50</sup> Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked, and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,

<sup>51</sup> with which your enemies mock, O Lord, with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

<sup>52</sup> Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and Amen.

**H**AVE YOU EVER BEEN IN A SITUATION where you longed for God to intervene? Where life was rough and you cried out for God's deliverance? That's the situation the psalmist finds himself in with Psalm 89. However, the psalmist surprisingly does not open with his appeal for divine deliverance. Rather, he begins with a messianic psalm, singing the praises of the steadfast love of the Lord and voicing hope in God's eternal covenant with David. Yet partway through, the tenor and tone shift dramatically, and we find ourselves amid what feels like a totally different hymn. The Davidic house has been cast off and rejected, the nation of Israel has fallen at the hands of its foes, and we come to realize that this is not primarily a messianic psalm but a powerful and effective psalm of lament—one of many such psalms that constitute the bulk of Book Three of the Psalter.

This is a beautiful psalm, full of gorgeous Hebrew poetry and simultaneously glorious and haunting themes. Since lament plays such an important part in God's Word—and in our own lives—my goal here is not only to enable us to understand this psalm better, but also to help us

comprehend how to lament better, and how to be comforted in the hope of our Messiah even in the midst of that lament.

First though, we must consider how lament is regularly part of God's good purposes for his people in this era.

### THE NEED FOR LAMENT

Each spring, Covenant Seminary holds a chapel service of lament in which we acknowledge and reflect on some of the stories of sorrow in our life together as a community. We do this not only because lamentation is a significant part of our experience of life in this world, but also because God knows that we need psalms of lament. He knows that life can be both joyous and hard for us. So, he invites us to bring our griefs and lament to him as we long for his deliverance. He gives us hymns to sing, both in our joy and in our sorrow. Lament, especially corporate lament, is important when we live in a time of waiting in between the promises that God has given and the ultimate fulfillment of those promises. Godly lamentation is for those long eras when we know God's promises are true, but we don't yet fully experience the reality of them, and we just wish that he would deliver and redeem.

Israel went through many of these eras of waiting. Think of Joseph's story. The small band of people that we call Israel, which at that stage in Genesis was just a single family, was seeking to survive during a famine in the land. Providentially, Joseph was in Egypt ahead of his family because his brothers had tragically sold him into slavery in Egypt, where amid trial and consternation he eventually rose to be Pharaoh's right-hand man. Then God led his people to Egypt, where they found relief from the famine through the work of that very same Joseph. However then, after 400 years of oppression at the hands of the Egyptians, the people called out to God for his deliverance. So, God brought about the great deliverance of the Exodus. Not long after that great event, of course, the people went terribly astray and a whole generation was lost during 40 years of wandering before they were allowed to enter the land of promise. They were waiting yet again.

After the conquest came the time of the Judges, with another long period of wondering when

the promises of God would be fulfilled. Then we read on through the time of Saul and into the reign of David, which brought another wonderful set of promises to the Davidic king. Yet shortly after that, the kingdom of David just seemed to plummet. There are occasional bright spots, but it declined rather rapidly, with centuries of waiting, until finally there was the tragedy of the Babylonian exile. Eventually, God's people return from exile, though there was another long wait before that happened. And after the return, a new temple was built, but it was not nearly as glorious as the one that had come before. The people had to wait again.

Finally, after more centuries pass, the Messiah comes as the incarnate Son of God, the Word of God made flesh, proclaiming the good news to the poor. He teaches, he inaugurates the kingdom and the breaking of the dominion of Satan. He casts out demons and heals disease. Then he dies and rises again, and those acts grant sure and steady salvific hope to those who follow him. However now, again, there have been 2000 years since that time of joy, and his people live in another period of waiting for his promised return.

Lament is well-suited for that sense of waiting, that sense of longing for God's deliverance. We can all relate in some ways to the waiting and perhaps even to the trials and tribulations Israel went through. Thus we can also learn from this psalm not only how to lament, but also how to hold onto the hope we have in God's promises. How, exactly, does this psalm help us persevere even as we long for God's deliverance? Let us focus on three particular ways.

#### **THE PSALMIST REMINDS US TO SING OF THE GLORY OF GOD**

First, we notice that even amid his difficulties, the psalmist proclaims the glory of God. He opens the psalm that way: "I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations." God's "steadfast love" and his "faithfulness" will become running themes throughout the psalm. We encounter them again right away in verse 2 when he says, "For I said, 'steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.'" And in verses 3–4, the psalmist

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### **God knows that we need psalms of lament. He knows that life can be both joyous and hard for us. So, he invites us to bring our griefs and lament to him as we long for his deliverance.**

reminds God (and his readers) of God's covenant: "You have said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your offspring forever and build your thrones for all generations.'"

Yet, the psalmist does not stop there. In verses 5–8 he declares that God deserves our praise. He reminds us that the heavenly hosts sing to the glory of God. God created the world all around us, and he deserves all our praise. In verses nine and following, God accomplishes his mighty purposes, and he rules over the raging of the sea.

In the ancient Near East, the sea was said to be almost demonic because it cannot be tamed and controlled; but the almighty God rules even over the raging sea. In verse 10, he delivers Israel in the Exodus (most commentators consider "Rahab" here a reference to Egypt). In verse 11, we are reminded that the heavens and earth—the whole universe—belong to the Lord because he created them. He possesses all of this by his mighty arm (v. 13; cf. vv. 10, 21). That is Old Testament imagery for kingship. In Egyptian literature, Pharaoh also has a strong arm. But God's mighty arm is the one that cast out Pharaoh (cf. v. 10 and Exod. 3:19–20). And throughout the plagues on Egypt and in the Exodus, by his mighty arm God declared, "This creation belongs to me."

God also manifests a magnificent character. In verse 14 and following we find that God is righteous and just. Again, the psalmist proclaims God's faithfulness and steadfast love (cf. 89:1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 28, 33, 49). In verse 15, his glory exudes from the light of his face and blesses his people. Israel can exult in God's name and his righteousness, in his glory and his strength. Then in verse 18, God is the ultimate shield for his people.

We learn from all this that, even as the psalmist longs for God's deliverance amid the horrors of this world, he first reminds himself and the people who sing this song with him of the marvelous character of God. That is a great way for us to begin as well: whenever we are in the midst of our longing and lament, we should recall who God is and how he has blessed us. But that is only the beginning.

#### **THE PSALMIST REMINDS US TO SING OF THE PROMISES OF GOD**

The psalmist also reminds us, amid the difficulties of our lives, to sing of God's promises. He especially has in mind the Davidic promises, and that is what the psalm intones in verses 19 through 37. He remembers the Davidic covenant, leaning especially into its eternal character. God has promised that he will be continually faithful and that he will display to his servant David his "faithfulness" and his "steadfast love" (v. 24)—there are those theme words again!

To astute Hebrew readers in the psalmist's time, this section would have hearkened back

to 2 Samuel 7, where God establishes his covenant with David. Many of the key elements of the language used there are echoed strongly here in Psalm 89. The psalmist simply repeats back to God truths that God had previously promised, such as that David is "my servant" (cf. 2 Sam. 7:5), that God has "cut off all your enemies from before you" (2 Sam. 7:9) and "I will appoint a place for my people Israel" (2 Sam. 7:10) and that "I will give you rest from all your enemies" (2 Sam. 7:11). Finally, in 2 Samuel 7:12–13, God declares of David, "I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." These are the promises of the Davidic Covenant, including that of an eternal kingdom for the house of David.

But then (rather like Psalm 89), 2 Samuel 7 takes a turn. God says, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with a rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men..." (2 Sam. 7:14a). However, then he states, "but my steadfast love will not depart from him, . . . And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:14b–16).

We hear echoes of all of this in Psalm 89. In verses 19–20, the psalmist meditates on these good promises and on the fact that God has chosen and anointed David as his servant. In verse 21, we learn that God's strength is with David. In verses 22–23, David will overcome all of his foes, all of his enemies. In verse 24, we read again of God's steadfast love and faithfulness to David. Verse 25 envisions David ruling over expansive territory, and David has the privilege of relating to God as a son to his father (vv. 26–27). Indeed, in verses 28–29 the psalmist refers to God's eternal promises to David.

In much of the Old Testament, when the OT writers speak of God's expansive promises to David, they tend to emphasize mainly those promises about the eternal Davidic kingdom (e.g., Pss. 18:46–50; 72:70–72; 132:1–18; 1 Chr. 17:7–14). But here the psalmist does something pretty shocking: he also mentions the iniquity of the house of David and the failure of the Davidic line. We observe this in verses 30–32: "If his chil-

dren forsake my law and do not walk according to my rules, if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes.” The psalmist recognizes these failures. In fact, this is exactly what the psalmist has experienced in his own day. It is the decline in the house of David and the lack of faithfulness in God’s people that have led to punishment on the nation and on its Davidic king.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly when this psalmist writes. Some scholars say it could be as early as the time when Shishak attacked the house of Rehoboam shortly after the time of Solomon. Others suggest it could be as late as the exile. The heading of Psalm 89 mentions its author is Ethan the Ezrahite. The debate has to do with identifying exactly who Ethan the Ezrahite is and when he may have lived. Regardless, the important issue here is that the house of David has regularly failed in its faithfulness to God and his ways. So, it is not really a surprise when in verse 38 we read that horrible statement: “But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed.” And this is where the psalm takes a dramatic turn, leading into the psalmist’s great lament.

#### **THE PSALMIST REMINDS US TO SING OUR LAMENT AND LONGING TO THE LORD**

It is helpful to remember here that, in our era as Jesus’s people, we know even greater promises than the Old Testament house of David received. We have met the true Davidic king, the ultimate eternal messianic king, Jesus Christ. We know him as the Son of David, the Son of God, the very Emmanuel, the Savior of his people, the Great Deliverer. Thus, we have a faith even more firm and confident than the Davidic promises. And yet, even for us, we experience things going south in our own lives or in the lives of others. We observe nations rising up against nations and tragedy upon tragedy. We begin to wonder and question. We can feel (just like the psalmist) that it is time to cry out to God for his deliverance and to plead for him to come through on his promises. The psalmist teaches us that amid the difficulties of our lives, we are to sing our lament and longing to the Lord.

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### **Lament, especially corporate lament, is important when we live in a time of waiting in between the promises that God has given and the ultimate fulfillment of those promises.**

Thus, we enter the third and final section of the psalm. Whatever the situation the psalmist is in and whenever he may have lived in the Old Testament period, we note that he speaks of God’s wrath against the anointed Davidic king (v. 38). We can picture ourselves back in his historical locale and empathize with his worry that the Davidic Covenant has been renounced (v. 39). We can imagine the destruction of the city walls and its defenses (v. 40). We can visualize the plundering of Judah and the scorn of their neighbors (vv. 41–42). And we can lament that the Davidic king-

dom is covered in shame (v. 45). These are horrible days he is living in.

Even now, when we know of the wonderful salvation of our Lord Jesus, the long promised Davidic Messiah, we can feel the psalmist’s pain when we read these verses. Indeed, we can identify with his pain exactly because our Lord has accomplished his salvation. We know that there is a greater hope. Jesus died for our sins. He rose again that we might have eternal life. He has poured out his Spirit. He’s announced good news to the captives. He has promised his return. He has promised an eternal kingdom. That kingdom is inaugurated and present with us, and yet it has not been fully consummated. So, like the psalmist, we live in those days in between, when we have the promised hope of deliverance—and yet, there is pain in this life, a longing for what we know is to come. And in that we can identify not only with the psalmist, but with Israel. We long for God’s redemption.

I think of this often now in a very personal way as, over the last couple of months, I have been sitting with my mom at her nursing home, spoon-feeding her a bite of food at a time, hoping that she will eat even half of the soup that’s in front of her. I feel that pain. I feel that dislocation. I feel the hope of promise and the deep longing for better things. I experience this on the Seminary campus when I hear of students whose families and friends are facing difficult illnesses, who have lost jobs, who are facing a lack of income and wondering what’s next. I see it with many of my friends at this stage in life; when we talk about prayer requests, it can be quite disheartening because there is just so much to pray for. I perceive it in the world around us when I think of a country like Ukraine or northeastern India, where many of our graduates are serving earnestly during ongoing wars and tribal strife. I witness it in our own nation where we hear almost daily about another act of terrible violence, or hatred, or natural disasters, or corruption in high places, or the moral failures of church leaders. We feel the pain of all that. We long for deliverance. We ask: Where is our God?

And yet, we know our God is very present. He has offered us sure and earnest hope in Christ. Our Messiah has come. His death and resurrection grant us a certain guarantee of his eternal coming kingdom. As we wait in this time in between, longing for the consummation of all things, the

psalmist has much to teach us about how to live. I would suggest at least three ways to approach such times of lament, which are basically the same points made above but in reverse order.

1. **Like the psalmist, we can and should engage in lament.** It is good and appropriate for us to sing out to God of our earnest desire for his deliverance.
2. **Like the psalmist, we can in the midst of our troubles remember who our God is.** We can sing our praises of his greatness and goodness, of his steadfast love and faithfulness.
3. **Like the psalmist, we can remind ourselves of those sure promises God made to the house of David of the eternal kingdom.** We know who that eternal King is, and it is his love, his faithfulness, that will bring us through even the darkest of times.

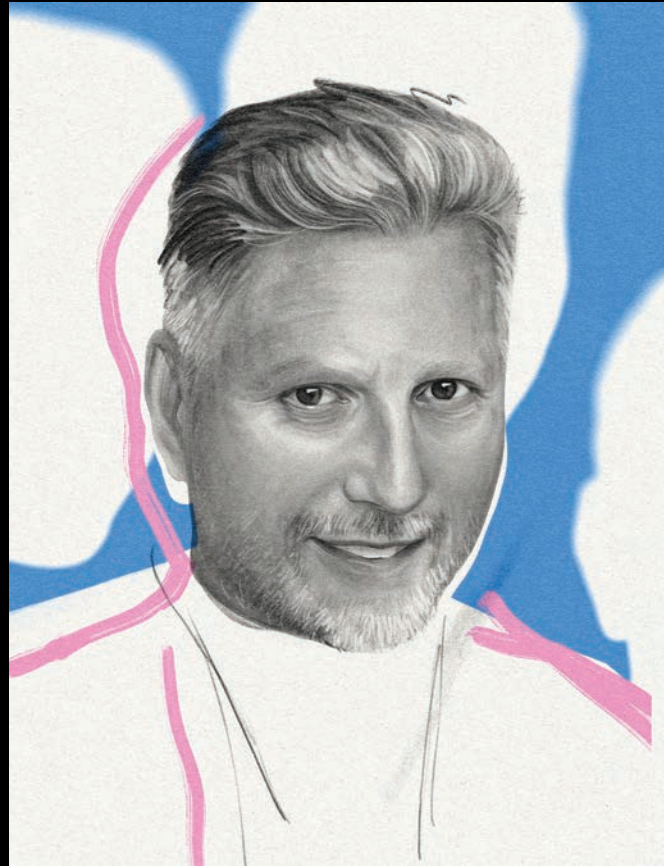
As we sing with the psalmist in our lament, “Where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?” (v. 49), we can also sing with him, ultimately (as he does in the concluding verse): “Blessed be the Lord forever. Amen and amen.” Why can we do this? Because we have a God whose character is beyond comparison, which shines forth from day to day in his glorious creation. We know that he is the one whose steadfast love and faithfulness endure forever. We have the sure promises of our eternal messianic king, who hears us in our lament and whose deliverance is also sure and certain. We can trust him in this time between—and for all eternity to come. Amen. ■

*Dr. David Chapman is Professor of New Testament and Archaeology at Covenant Seminary and Curator of the W. Harold Mare Institute for Biblical and Archaeological Studies on the Seminary campus. He served as New Testament Editor for and a contributor to the ESV Archaeology Study Bible (Crossway, 2018) and has published extensively on the subject of crucifixion in the ancient world. This article is adapted from a sermon he preached in Rayburn Chapel in March 2025 as part of a series (by various preachers) on the theme of “Walking in God’s Grace.”*

# The Gospel in Hard Places

*Community, Context, and Covenant Faithfulness in Ukraine*

By Stephen Griffin



**I**F YOU ASK REV. DOUG SHEPHERD what makes church planting and ministry in Lviv, Ukraine, different from doing it in the United States, and he'll likely say that it's everything—and nothing. Doug and his wife, Masha, both Covenant Seminary graduates, have been serving in Lviv with Mission to the World (MTW) since 2006. Doug is the team leader for a church planting initiative through the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine.

Like many international missionaries, Doug's story didn't begin in the country where he now serves. He grew up in Texas, attending a PCA church with his family. That's where God first started to cultivate in Doug's heart a desire to work in international missions: "The Lord was gracious to me as a covenant child, and I was really convinced of the gospel more deeply when I was around 20. And that's when I started considering that if people didn't know the gospel in other places and some people weren't willing to go, then I was more than willing to go."

Doug considered different avenues for international ministry and went on a number of short-term trips, including one with MTW in Sweden. He rounded out his senior year in college with inner city work in Texas before applying to MTW upon graduation. Doug's first opportunity to serve in Ukraine came rather unexpectedly: "I said, 'Look, I'm young, single, have no debt, and I know Spanish.' And they said, 'How about Ukraine?'"

It was the early 1990s, and the iron curtain had just fallen in eastern Europe. The PCA, alongside other evangelical organizations, was sending workers at the request of the Commonwealth of Independent States to teach a morals and ethics curriculum for their teachers: "I signed up to go for what I thought would be 10 months. I did my job, but I had a lot of young people and college students gathering around to talk about the Bible. At the same time, a church planting team was coming in as a follow-up to this work. I was more interested in something enduring, so I jumped on the MTW church planting team."

The MTW team felt that Doug had a gifting for university ministry and allowed him to attend Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) staff training as a "back door" way to be prepared and equipped for the kind of work he would be doing. This special opportunity helped confirm his call to minister to college students, and the principles and philosophy of ministry he imbibed from RUF translated easily to a cross-cultural context.

During this time, the Lord also began to nudge Doug toward theological education, and—even more specifically—toward Covenant Seminary. "The guys I noticed in that room knew their stuff, but they were also gracious," he says. "Knowing the truth is one thing. Holding and manifesting it in a way that is consistent with the gospel is actually what we're called to. These guys stuck out to me, and I found out they were at Covenant. This was what I needed."

Doug went back to Ukraine after RUF training to work with college students, and the Lord richly blessed the ministry. People

were coming to faith. Eventually, through the work of MTW and other ministries in the region, the Ukrainian Presbyterian denomination was formed. But Doug couldn't shake the feeling that he had all but exhausted the ministry tools he had to work with. He was sure God was leading him to long-term international missions, but he also knew he needed an education that would sustain him for whole-life ministry.

"Covenant was where I was going to go," Doug decided. "So, I trained a girl to be my replacement before I left. That girl ended up being my wife later, by the way." Even after arriving as a student at Covenant, Doug was traveling back to Ukraine for internships. He asked Masha to marry him, and the couple finished their season of work in Ukraine, then both started seminary in St. Louis around 2000.

"Our needs were to be equipped and grounded for a lifelong ministry, and Covenant confirmed this," Doug recalls. "There was intentional community. And the thing that struck us most was that the professors were not primarily interested in being academicians, but practitioners who were academic. They knew their stuff, that knowledge manifested itself into pastorally caring for people wherever they were. And how they taught was a model of what I needed on how to articulate the gospel in a way that was gracious, patient, and clear. If anyone asks us about Covenant—even to this day—that's the main thing we want them to know."

One of the most important practices for a Christian in the mission field is hospitality. Doug speaks of how the "hospitality value" of Covenant Seminary was impressed upon him during his time as a student. "Whether it was being in Dr. Hans Bayer's home or one of the other professors' homes—with them being willing to be accessible and in the community rather than above the community—those personal interactions were foundational. That's just gospel ministry. That allowed us an extra window into their lives that supported the academics. The professors, in these personal interactions, were modeling how to minister—how to care for people."

Masha graduated with an MATS degree in 2002, and Doug with an MDiv in 2003. Doug would also complete a ThM at Fuller Theological Seminary before the couple considered where

the Lord was calling them next. A further need in Ukraine seemed like a natural fit. Doug agreed to lead the church planting team in Lviv, the cultural and intellectual center of western Ukraine, helping to multiply churches and impact the next generation of missionaries in the region. Besides coordinating children's education, Masha uses her training to lead a multi-generational group of women in the church.

Today, the logistics of ministry in Ukraine have changed due to the realities of war. For Doug, even amid violence and trauma, the ability to rightly handle the Word of truth has made all the difference: "If you don't know how to handle the truth well and contextualize Scripture with respect to its first hearers and to your cultural context, then you've really been replaced by Google. There's just no need for you."

Lviv has been significantly affected by the war, and the exegetical, cultural, and contextual skill-sets Doug and Masha learned at Covenant are constantly at play: "In the midst of all this trauma, it's about coming together and saying, 'Okay, what's happening here in 1 Samuel?' or 'What is being said here in 2 Peter?' And how were the first hearers suffering, struggling, or being persecuted?' And then bringing it back to, 'Is Christ here? Does he make promises? Is the gospel real? And who are you in him?'"

The Shepherds' ministry in Ukraine certainly looks different than it did some years ago. Even so, the foundation for that ministry has not changed: "There's no place that the Lord could call us where we wouldn't be equipped with what Covenant gave us. That doesn't mean there wouldn't be hardship or that we wouldn't have something to learn. But we've been put in the most vanilla situations where I do Bible studies and preach, and also in the most horrific, traumatic situations that are some of the darkest—and God's promises have not wavered. The gospel truth is there. We feel Covenant prepared us to be in those places." ■

*Stephen Griffin is Director of Communications and Marketing at Covenant Seminary and Executive Editor of Covenant magazine. He oversees all aspects of the institution's brand strategy. Stephen grew up in the PCA and is delighted to be serving at its denominational seminary.*

# CLASS NOTES

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## "Go Therefore and Make Disciples"

More than 5,000 Covenant alumni serve Christ's church and kingdom in 50 states and over 50 countries.

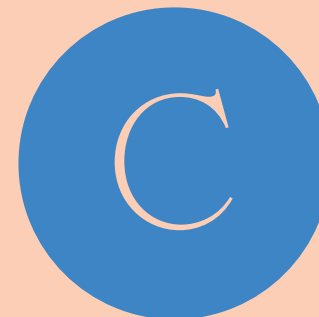


ILLUSTRATION BY VALERO DOVAL

Connections made in the Covenant community extend well beyond the time spent on campus or in classes together. We celebrate the joys and share in the sorrows of our alumni by highlighting some of their life and ministry milestones in each issue of *Covenant*. Additionally, to access the ongoing care and resources we offer alumni, contact Director of Alumni and Career Services Dr. Joel Hathaway at [joel.hathaway@covenantseminary.edu](mailto:joel.hathaway@covenantseminary.edu). From job placement assistance to vocational discernment, we are always happy to assist our graduates as they seek to serve the Lord for a lifetime of fruitful ministry.

## Ordinations, Installations, & Transitions

**Scott** (MA '02) and **Pipit Godefroy** (GC '02), after working north of Washington, DC, for many years, have begun to serve as MTW missionaries. They are now itinerating, together with their daughter Danielle (11), as they prepare to move to Nagoya, Japan, to work with a church planting team there.

After 6 years of ministry in Austin, TX, at All Saints Presbyterian Church (2018–2021) and RUF with the University of Texas at Austin (2021–2023), **Jordan Griesbeck** (MDiv '17) and his family moved to Dallas, TX, where Jordan serves at the Episcopal Church of the In-

carnation. He was ordained to the transitional diaconate in September 2024 and to the priesthood as Priest of Christian Formation on March 20, 2025. Jordan's wife, **Emily Killough Griesbeck** (MAC '16) serves at home full-time with their three children: Samuel (6), Georgia (4), and John (2.5).

**Joe Groeneveld** (MDiv '11) and his family moved to Brighton, Ontario, where he is serving as the Pastor of Faith Formation at Brighton Fellowship (Christian Reformed Church). Joe previously served for 14 years with the Williamsburg Christian Reformed Church in Williamsburg, Ontario. Joe and his wife, Kristin, (MARC '11) have 4 children: Hailey (13), Carter (12), Julia (9) and Grace (7).

After 8 years as Director of Youth and Young Adults at Church of the Ascension in Pittsburgh, PA, **Alex Banfield Hicks** (MDiv '15) became Director of Recruitment and Church Relations at Trinity Anglican Seminary in Ambridge, PA. He was subsequently promoted to VP of Advancement, overseeing all communications, development and recruitment initiatives for the Seminary. Alex's wife, Jane, serves with Haiti H2O, a small nonprofit that partners with pastors in Haiti doing rural development. Alex and Jane have three children: Lydia (13), John (11) and Beatrix (9).

**Tim Jackson** (MDiv '13) recently transitioned to full-time church planter for Hope Presbyterian Church in Crestwood/

Sunset Hills, MO (in south St. Louis County) after serving 6 years in the IT Department of Covenant Seminary (the last two as its Director). Tim was ordained in the PCA in 2015 and is currently a doctoral candidate in Covenant's Doctor of Ministry program. Tim and his wife, Ellen, have four children: Haddon (11), Shaffer (9), Graham (8), and Molly (5).

After 4 years at Western Kentucky University serving with Reformed University Fellowship, **James Jardin** (MDiv '15) and family moved to Huntsville, AL, in 2025, where James is continuing his work with RUF at University of Alabama in Huntsville. James was ordained in the PCA in 2017. His wife, Leah, continues to serve as a homemaker caring for the Jardins' three boys: Solomon (14), Micaiah (14), and Boaz (10).

**Matt Lybarger** (MDiv '08) has recently accepted the position of Senior Pastor at West Springs Church in Ballwin, MO. Previously, Matt served 15 years as a pastor at The Crossing in St. Louis, followed by 4 years as a Spiritual Director with Chesterfield Counseling Associates. Matt's wife, **Samantha Lybarger** (MAC '15), is currently in private counseling practice through Chesterfield Counseling Associates. The Lybargers have three children: Annabelle (9), Jude (7), and Jacob (4).

**Kristy Mitchell** (MAEM '08) moved to the Atlanta area in May 2025 to serve as the Discipleship Engagement Coordinator at Great Commission

Publications. Kristy spent the previous 10 years leading children's and youth ministries in Bradenton, FL.

**Michael Novak** (MDiv '10) has accepted a position with RUF National Staff serving as an Area Coordinator after 8 years of planting and pastoring Trinity Grace Church in San Antonio, TX. In 2010–2017, Michael was RUF Campus Minister at Trinity University in San Antonio, then planted/pastored Trinity Grace from 2017 to 2025. Michael and his wife, Rachel, have three children: Caleb (2008), Abigail (2010), and Katherine (2012).

**Steve Schaper** (MDiv '15) recently transitioned to the role of Lead Pastor of King's Cross Church (PCA) in Cypress, TX, a northwest suburb of Houston, after serving in various ministry roles in St. Louis since 2013, including as Associate Pastor at New City Fellowship West End. Steve and his wife, Grace, are celebrating their 16th wedding anniversary and have 4 wonderful children: Makenna (11), Victoria (9), Macklynne (8), and TJ (3).

**Jacob Virtue** (MDiv '20) and family moved to Murfreesboro, TN, in 2025, where Jacob will serve as the next RUF Campus Minister at Middle Tennessee State University. He previously served 5 years as Assistant Pastor of Senior High Youth at Mitchell Road Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC. Jacob was ordained in the PCA in 2024. He and his wife, Kaitlyn, have two children: Flora (2) and James Shepherd (4 months).

After 5 years as the Pastor of Colfax Center Presbyterian Church in Holland, IA, **Luke Wolfe** (MDiv '15) and family are moving to Billings, MT, where Luke will be Senior Pastor at Rocky Mountain Community Church. Luke's wife Aimee, along with serving in various women's ministries and discipleship roles over the years, continues to care for their 4 children: Caleb (12), Katie (10), Beckham (6), and Graham (2). Luke was ordained in the PCA in 2018.

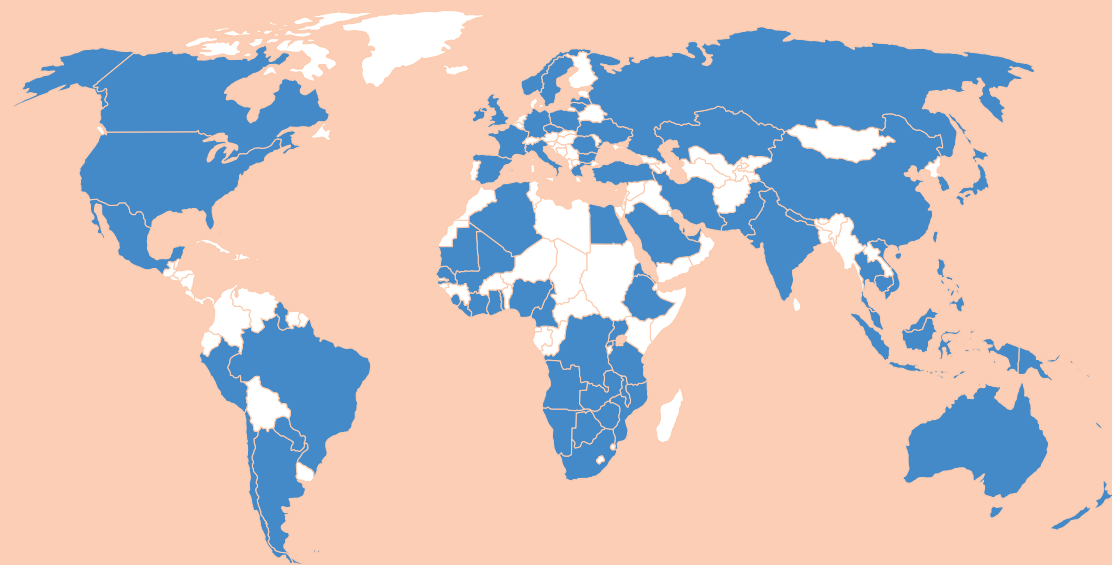
## Celebrations

**Andrew Flatgard** (MDiv/MAC '04) received his DMin from Covenant Seminary after completing his dissertation titled "The Emotional Life of Seasoned Pastors: How Pastors Pursue Emotional Maturity." Andrew was recently installed as a pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Decatur, AL. Dr. Paul Kooistra preached the installation sermon "The Fork in the Road" from Genesis 32:22–32.

**Jeremy Jones** (MDiv '96) received his PhD in systematic theology from the University of Aberdeen in July 2023 after completing his thesis titled "The Delicate Pattern: Moral Ontology and Agency in the Dogmatics of John Webster," recently published by T&T Clark as *John Webster's Vision of Moral Agency* (see "Book Release" in this issue). Jeremy, his wife, Maylon, and their daughter, Irene, live in Memphis, TN, where Jeremy serves as Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean at Memphis City Seminary.

## Where Our Graduates Go

■ ALUMNI PRESENT    ■ TO BE REACHED



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## Family Updates

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**Timothy** (MDiv '15) and **Whitney Chapman** announce the birth of their second daughter, Josephine Jeannette Chapman, on April 22, 2025. The Chapmans live in south-central Nebraska, where Whitney practices medicine and Timothy farms while continuing his doctoral studies in theological ethics at Durham University.

**Ben** (MDiv '18) and **Katie Hoemann** announce the birth of their son, Ezra, in April 2025. Ben and Katie currently reside near Ft. Bragg, NC, where Ben serves as Brigade Chaplain in the 82nd Airborne Division of the US Army.

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## Condolences

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To the family of **Russ Burns** (MA '12) promoted to glory March 20, 2025. Russ had a long career in the workforce before and after his years at Covenant Seminary.

To the family of **Charles "Chuck" G. Dorr** (MA '10), promoted to glory May 9, 2025. Charles was born Feb. 2, 1956, to Mary and Stan Dorr and grew up across the Midwest but settled longest in Iowa. He was a member of New City Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, MO.

To the family of **Jeremy Ross** (MA '03), promoted to glory May 30, 2025, after a battle with pancreatic cancer. He is a graduate of Covenant College and Covenant Seminary, and served twelve years on the mission field in Peru with Pioneers ministries. He is survived by his wife and four daughters.

*Ministry life can be quite challenging. No one can do it alone. That's why Covenant Seminary's Alumni and Career Services staff provides ongoing care and resources for alumni long after graduation.*

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To the family of **Larry Jay Ten-Haken** (MDiv '80), promoted to glory April 15, 2025. Larry served churches in Hudson, FL, and Tintonka, IA, ending his full-time career at New Hope Community Church in Wausau, WI. His shepherd's heart showed itself beyond his pastoral ministry to those he met on many mission trips to other countries, and his passion for the unborn made him instrumental in establishing and serving on the boards of pregnancy resource centers in Wausau and Minocqua.

To the family of **Rev. William R. Wolfgang** (MDiv'70), promoted to glory July 29, 2025. Bill served for three years in the US Army as a chaplain's assistant. He gradu-

ated from Covenant College in 1967 and Covenant Seminary in 1970 before serving as pastor of Fairview Church in Industry, PA. He later served as pastor for 33 years at Cornerstone PCA in Youngstown, PA. He is survived by his daughters and grandsons.

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## Publications

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See the "Book Release" section of this magazine for a list of recent Alumni publications.

*Covenant Seminary's Alumni and Career Services staff provides ongoing care and resources for alumni. To share updates or access alumni support, contact Dr. Joel Hathaway at [joel.hathaway@covenantseminary.edu](mailto:joel.hathaway@covenantseminary.edu).*

# Covenant.



At The Center  
of A Life of Purpose.



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