



“I don’t think there’s any
essentials of Reformed
of Scripture, the beauty
just an amazing place to
individual who wants to
the rest of one’s life.”

—*Dr. Simon Stokes (MDiv, MAC '13)*
Lead Pastor, Church of the Good Shepherd (PCA)

better place to learn the
theology, the great truths
of the gospel. . . . This is
learn and grow . . . as an
follow the Lord Jesus for

The church multiplies when one generation of pastors invests wholeheartedly in the next. This is illustrated through the story of Covenant Seminary alumnus Simon Stokes. Shaped by the gospel love of his campus minister, a Covenant Seminary graduate, Simon was trained at Covenant and later had the unique opportunity to invest in that same minister’s son, who is now also being equipped for a lifetime of ministry at Covenant.



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 watch Simon’s story and see how this cycle of formation strengthens the church across generations—a legacy of theological training made possible through your support of the Annual Fund.



COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



Covenant Magazine is a publication of Covenant Theological Seminary, the denominational seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America. For 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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(2 Tim. 2:15)

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and Empowered
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How can we minister well to others unless we are constantly growing spiritually ourselves? But we often let past failures and present fears hinder us and sabotage our growth. Philippians 3 offers helpful insights to keep us growing for a lifetime of fruitful ministry.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

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ISSUE 1

Rev. Dr. Tom Gibbs



Ministering the Word of God is a high and holy calling that we often think applies mainly to pastors and others who serve the church in formal ways. But you don't have to be a seminary graduate, a gifted orator, or a renowned Bible scholar to minister God's Word to others. It is the calling of all Christians.

We all have opportunities every day to live out and speak God's truth. Sometimes it's just a kind word or caring prayer for someone in a hard season of life. Sometimes it's simply being a friend to someone seeking the truth but not sure where to turn. And sometimes, it's taking a God-given opportunity to speak words that challenge, but offered in love, to a wayward soul who needs a nudge back onto the right path. This calling is a gift, but one we often shy away from because we fear the opinions of men or feel unprepared to offer "a reason for the hope that is in us" (1 Peter 3:15).

This issue of *Covenant* provides helpful insights on and inspirational examples of the ways in which believers from every walk of life—but most especially those who are called to shepherd and lead the flock of God—can focus their hearts and minds on Christ Jesus and walk humbly with him, by the power of his Spirit, to embody his grace so that we might, through words and deeds, draw others to him.

This is the heart and soul of what we do at Covenant Seminary as we train pastors and other Kingdom workers. We are grateful for the Lord's calling to this mission, and grateful for all those who support and partner with us as we seek to do it for his glory. May his name be praised in all things!

All for Jesus,

Tom

ILLUSTRATION BY STÉPHANE MANEL

EST. 1956 | ST. LOUIS, MO

Covenant.



At The Center
of The Reformed Faith. 

NEWS & EVENTS

VOL. 37

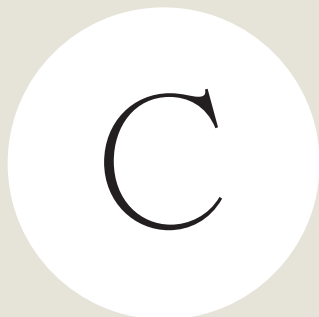
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ISSUE 1



“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 Receives \$9.9 Million Lilly Endowment Grant for Recruiting, Equipping, and Sustaining Future Pastors

● The most exciting news of the past year was that Covenant Seminary in December received a grant of \$9,991,491 from Lilly Endowment Inc. for a new collaborative partnership initiative called Rowing Together: Leveraging Ministry Ecosystems to Reach, Prepare, and Support Pastors for a Thriving Church. Through the initiative, the Seminary will work closely with several sister Presbyterian Church in America agencies and committees, as well as another like-minded Reformed Christian educational institution, to strengthen and expand efforts at recruiting, equipping, and sustaining future pastors for the PCA and beyond. Covenant is one of 45 institutions to receive the grant as part of this round of Lilly Endowment’s Pathways for Tomorrow Large-Scale Collaboration Initiative. It is the largest single grant the Seminary has ever received.

In addition to blessing the Seminary, the grant will also positively impact the entire PCA and future generations of pastors and churches. This award comes in response to countless prayers and is the result of a year-long, coordinated effort of Covenant Seminary and the PCA’s Committee on Discipleship Ministries, Covenant College, Geneva Benefits Group, Mission to North America, and Reformed University Fellowship, along with Geneva College, a Christian college governed by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

As we live and minister in a time of profound cultural polarization and skepticism about the institutional church, this grant provides an opportunity to lead a joint effort focused on addressing issues affecting the overall spiritual well-being and flourishing of the church and its leaders. Though the scope of the grant is expansive, its central objectives are straightforward and seek to address three key challenges to pastoral education today: (1) the fact that fewer candidates are entering the pipeline for ministry training, (2) the need for enhanced ministry preparation for those who have entered seminary, and (3) the need for greater support and training for those in pastoral ministry so they can flourish over the long haul. Among the most important initiatives sponsored by the collaborative grant are:

- The funding of new scholarships for future MDiv students, especially the Thriving Church Scholarship for those intending to serve in pastoral ministry, so we can seek to allay student debt and ensure a sustainable transition into full-time vocational ministry.
- The strengthening of current and sponsoring of new efforts focused on pastoral wellbeing in partnership with Geneva Benefits Group (GBG) for the long-term health and fruitfulness of pastors.
- The creation of the Pathways to Vocational Ministry program in partnership with Mission to North America (MNA), Covenant College, and Geneva College to identify high school and college students who are gifted and called to ministry, and to encourage and equip them through a streamlined BA/MDiv combination program.
- The relaunch of the Seminary’s Center for Ministry Leadership, the mission of which will be to strengthen pastoral leaders for the work of leadership in the church and to support churches as they negotiate leadership challenges.

In addition, the grant will fund several related initiatives focused on addressing the three key challenges to pastoral education noted above. Among these are:

- Expanded summer internship opportunities for students, in partnership with MNA and other organizations.
- Expansion of the Seminary’s student cohort program.
- Creation of a Leadership Track for the Seminary’s MDiv program.
- Creation of an Executive Pastor Graduate Certificate program.
- Development of training opportunities for lay ministry leaders, especially ruling elders, in partnership with the Committee on Discipleship Ministries (CDM).

→ Development of leadership training materials for campus ministry leaders, in partnership with Reformed University Fellowship (RUF).

→ Creation of educational podcasts by MNA's Hispanic Ministries and African American Ministries aimed at reaching and recruiting more potential ministry students.

The work required to submit this application was substantial, time-consuming, and brought together several internal and external partners. We are especially grateful for the leadership of Dr. Jay Sklar, Professor of Old Testament (and, at the time of the writing of the grant, our VP of Academics), whose experience in grant-writing, attention to detail, and giftedness for clarification helped contribute to a successful proposal. Even while currently on a well-deserved sabbatical, Dr. Sklar continues to provide leadership to the Seminary and our partners in the execution of this grant.

Launched in 2021, Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow initiative is designed to help theological schools across the United States and Canada as they prioritize and respond to the most pressing challenges they face in preparing leaders for Christian congregations now and in the future. Since its inception, the program has provided grants totaling more than \$700 million to support 163 theological schools in strengthening their educational and financial capacities, and to assist 61 schools in developing large-scale collaborative endeavors.

Representatives of the Seminary's partner organizations had this to say about their collaboration in this initiative:

We are delighted to partner with Covenant Seminary in this grant and grateful for the opportunities it presents to further clarify, develop, and strengthen important areas of our own mission that intersect with that of the Seminary.

—Mr. Steve Dowling, Interim Coordinator,
Mission to North America

What a blessing to RUF and to the PCA as a whole for us to be involved in this process with Covenant Seminary! We are looking forward to working with them on through the Center for Ministry Leadership and devel-

oping new RUF and pastoral training opportunities.

—Mr. Andrew Rein, Coordinator, Reformed University Fellowship

It is a privilege to partner with the pastor-scholars at Covenant Seminary in this initiative. Our part of the project is especially close to my heart—developing training for ruling elders in the church. I'm eager for us to provide solid theological content in a way that promotes effective pastoral ministry.

—Rev. Dr. Stephen T. Estock, Coordinator,
Committee on Discipleship Ministries

Geneva Benefits Group is thankful for the opportunity to join Covenant Seminary in this important endeavor, and we look forward to working together to enhance existing efforts at fostering pastoral wellbeing and developing new ones that will bless both the PCA and the broader church.

—Rev. Dr. Ed Dunnington, President,
Geneva Benefits Group

Covenant College and Covenant Seminary began side-by-side in St. Louis, and this grant allows us to strengthen that historic bond in new and meaningful ways. Through this partnership, we are developing a BA/MDiv pathway that will streamline the preparation of gifted young ministry leaders, equipping them to serve Christ, his church, and a world in need.

—Dr. Brad Voyles, President, Covenant College

It is a privilege to be asked to join Covenant Seminary's initiative to create expanded pathways for ministry training. We are excited to work with them on the streamlined BA/MDiv option and blessed by the opportunity to learn and grow together for the sake of Christ's church.

—Dr. Melinda Stephens, Provost, Geneva College

We are immensely grateful for Lilly Endowment's support of our proposal, and for the partners who will be involved in this endeavor with us.

Seminary to Launch Special Website to Encourage and Support Compelling Preaching

● As part of our implementation of the \$1.19 million Compelling Preaching Initiative Grant received from

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

Lilly Endowment in 2023, Dr. Thurman Williams, Director of Homiletics, and his staff have been working to prepare a series of preaching resources and a related website that can be used to encourage and revitalize seasoned preachers, and better equip and support young preachers and those aspiring to preach. The website is nearing completion as of this writing and should be ready to launch in the near future. Look for more information to come.

The Compelling Preaching grant has already enabled us to:

- Develop preaching cohort groups to better facilitate peer growth in preaching.
- Begin developing preaching conferences and workshops that will expand on the success of our existing annual Covenant Seminary Preaching Lectures.
- Begin developing opportunities for preachers of all experience levels, ages, backgrounds, and

ethnicities to learn from each other, including bi-vocational pastors who may not have access to seminary-level education due to lack of accessibility and/or affordability.

We are grateful to Lilly Endowment for their generous support of these endeavors.

Celebrating 50 Years of the J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library

● The campus community celebrated this spring the 50th anniversary of our beloved Buswell Library, named for founding Covenant Seminary professor Dr. J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Dedicated in 1976, Buswell Library has undergone many changes in its half-century of existence. From old-fashioned card-file indexing to state-of-the-art online networks that connect dozens of local, regional, national, and international theological libraries; from mostly print to now a vast collection of print, audio/visual, and electronic media, and a variety of rare books and other fascinating

artifacts; and following a major capital campaign in the early 2000s that resulted in an expansion that tripled the size of the Library's space, Buswell has become a major hub of activity on campus and a powerful resource for learning and growth for our students.

The Scribe Writing Center, for instance, offers skilled assistance to students seeking help with academic writing, and the large classroom off the Library lobby (affectionately known as "B111") is often the site for a variety of Ministry Lunches featuring speakers from many PCA-related or other ministries and organizations. The lower level of the Library also houses the PCA Historical Center, a key resource for anyone interested in or doing research on the history of our denomination and its predecessor denominations.

We are grateful for the leadership of Rev. James C. Pakala, Library Director Emeritus, who led the Library for several decades until his retirement

a few years ago, and for current Director Steve Jamieson and his team, who carry on the legacy of Buswell Library for a new generation of students, faculty, staff, and alumni, many of whom make use of the Library on a regular basis. Please join us in praising God for this truly amazing blessing.

The 15th Annual Theological Fellowship Conference: Dr. N. Gray Sutanto on Principles of Reformed Retrieval.

● The student-led Theological Fellowship at Covenant Seminary hosted its 15th Annual Theological Conference in January, featuring plenary speaker Dr. N. Gray Sutanto, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, who spoke on the topic *Principles of Reformed Retrieval: Some Lessons From Herman Bavinck*. The conference also fea-



tured papers presented throughout the day on a variety of topics by Covenant Seminary students, alumni, and faculty. Dr. Sutanto serves as an associate editor of the *Journal of Reformed Theology*, is ordained in the International Presbyterian Church, and has received visiting fellowships at the Theological University of Kampen-Utrecht and Princeton Theological Seminary. He is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and is on the steering committee for the Reformed Theology and History Unit of the American Academy of Religion.

The 2026 David C. Jones Theology Lectures: Dr. Kelly M. Kopic on the Centrality of Christ and Worship.

● The Seminary welcomed Dr. Kelly M. Kopic, Professor of Theological Studies at Covenant College and award-winning author of *Christian Life, You Were Never Meant to Do It Alone*, and *You're Only Human*, as the featured speaker for the 2026 edition of the David C. Jones Theology Lectures in February. Dr. Kopic's lectures focused on the foundational centrality of Christ and the importance of corporate worship for forming and shaping the Christian life. The David C. Jones Theology Lectures are named in honor of the late Dr. David C. Jones, long-time professor of systematic theology and ethics at Covenant Seminary, who passed away in 2017. The lectures honor both Dr. Jones's teaching and influence on generations of our students and the Seminary's Reformed theological heritage by focusing each year on a particular area of theological study with presentations by a contemporary academic authority in that area.

The 2026 Austin Harrington Counseling Lectures: Dr. Seth Scott on Christ-Centered Counsel

● The CTS Counseling Department was pleased to welcome Dr. Seth Scott, Program Director and Assistant Dean of the School of Counseling at Columbia International University, as the featured speaker for the 2026 edition of the Austin Harrington Counseling Lectures. Dr. Scott also serves as Professor of Clinical Counseling, Director of the PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision, and Associate Director of Chinese Clinical Counseling

at CIU, where he has been since 2019. The Austin Harrington Counseling Lectures were established to train and encourage men and women in the field of counseling within a biblical framework. The theme for this year's lectures was *Christ-Centered Counsel: Spiritual and Virtue Formation for Transformative Practice*, for which Dr. Scott explored what it means to be a Christian who counsels, examining how faith and virtue shape both personal formation and professional practice.

The Blessing of Weekly Chapel: Equipped by the Word of God

● One of the primary ways the Lord shapes our campus community for ministry is through worship. Here at Covenant that comes through our weekly Wednesday Chapel services. For the last couple of years, we have enjoyed a renewed emphasis on this weekly time of gathering to hear the Word of God preached by a faculty member or guest preacher. Under the leadership of Drs. Robert Kim and Robbie Griggs, and guided by the Seminary's statement of purpose, our chapel speakers the last few years have been reflecting on and unpacking the meaning of some of the themes and phrases that are at the core of the Seminary's ethos. The spring 2026 theme was "Equipping God's People."

In addition to Covenant professors, speakers for this academic year have included a variety of pastors from the PCA and other churches, such as **Rev. Rodrick Burton**, Senior Pastor, New Northside Missionary Baptist Church, St. Louis, MO; **Rev. Josh Fikkert**, Assistant Pastor of Youth Ministry, Covenant Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO; **Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt**, Senior Pastor, All Saints Presbyterian Church (PCA), Austin, TX; **Rev. Josiah Green**, Lead Pastor, Crossroads Presbyterian Fellowship (PCA), Maplewood, MO; **Rev. Victor Martinez**, Associate Pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA), San Antonio, TX; **Rev. Jeff Norris**, Senior Pastor, Perimeter Church (PCA), Atlanta, GA; **Rev. Dr. Dan Song**, Lead Pastor, Restoration Community Church (PCA), St. Louis, MO; and **Rev. Mark Vroegop**, President of The Gospel Coalition. Award-winning musician and author **Laura Story** also joined us in March to lead music during Chapel and talk with students.

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. David Chapman, Professor of New Testament and Archaeology, **retired in June 2026 after 26 years of service to the Seminary** in order to focus on writing projects and other ministry opportunities. He joined our faculty in 2000 as a member of the New Testament department and demonstrated quickly his thoughtful and thorough concern for any class he taught. During his years at Covenant, Dr. Chapman also cultivated his passions for archaeology and missions. Through his participation in multiple archaeological digs in Abila, Jordan, he was eventually appointed as Director of the W. H. Mare Institute for Biblical and Archaeological Studies on our campus and went on to lead multiple study tours for students and alumni through Israel. He also ministered regularly to our international students, traveled broadly in the summers to visit alumni in international ministries, and currently serves as the Board President for Presbyterian Mission International (PMI), an important Seminary-adjacent ministry that provides a US-based fund-raising vehicle for international graduates of the Seminary in their home countries. We are deeply thankful for Dr. Chapman’s long tenure of teaching in New Testament and Archaeology as well as his ministry to students and alumni alike. Please join us in expressing gratitude for Dr. Chapman and praying for him as he prepares for the next season of ministry.



Dr. Robert Kim, Associate Professor of Applied Theology and Philip and Rebecca Douglass Chair of Church Planting and Christian Formation, announced last year that he would be transitioning to a new role in the summer of 2026—as **Director of Church Planting for Perimeter Church (PCA) in Atlanta, Georgia**. Dr. Kim’s wealth of experience as a church planter and pastor as well as a mentor and trainer of missionaries, church planters, and other mission-minded church leaders make him well-suited for his new role. As an Asian American whose grandmother came to know Christ through the work of Presbyterian missionaries in Korea, Kim felt the missionary impulse while in high school in the United States. In seminary he “came to see that missions was everywhere, not just overseas,” and he began to focus on church planting as a form of missions. This led to the planting of Gracepoint Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which he pastored for 12 years while also overseeing the planting of a daughter church. He later served as Coordinator of the Metro Philadelphia Church Planting Partnership, where he provided guidance, training, and resources for church planters in five presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America. In 2019 Dr. Kim came to Covenant Seminary to direct the Church Planting Track, which offers focused training, mentoring, and internship programs for pastoral students called to church planting. He also serves on the board of Serge (formerly World Harvest Mission) and the Center for Faith and Work Saint Louis. Our students, faculty, and staff have been greatly blessed by Dr. Kim’s love for the Lord and by his immense energy and enthusiasm for planting and growing new churches. Though we will miss having him on our campus,

we are excited to see how God will continue to use his expertise in his new role with Perimeter to expand church planting efforts in the metro Atlanta area and to mold and shape a new generation of church planters for the PCA.



Jenna Nelson joined our staff as Executive Assistant to the President in October 2025, following the departure of Melanie Wood (see below). Jenna is married to Brady, a 2009 MDiv graduate of the Seminary. They most recently served at Faith Presbyterian Church in Brookhaven, MS, prior to which they served six years with Mission to the World in India, where they were also able to work alongside several Covenant Seminary alumni. In addition to significant ministry and administrative experience, Jenna has a background in accounting management, having graduated from the University of West Georgia with a Bachelor of Business Accounting (2009). We are glad to have her on board!



Melanie Wood transitioned out of her role as President Gibbs's Executive Assistant in late August to pursue a new role with the Global Counseling Network. Melanie joined our staff in 2022 and graciously provided administrative assistance to Dr. Gibbs and the Seminary Board through the past few years of change and growth for the institution. Melanie holds a master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Reformed Theological Seminary. The knowledge of systems theory and relationship dynamics learned there instilled in her a passion for understanding the dynamics that contribute to healthy leadership in families, churches, and organizations, and these interests reflect where she focused her efforts (mostly in a volunteer capacity) for 15 years before coming to Covenant. She continues to use and build on these skills now in her new role with GCN. We are grateful for her service to Covenant and ask the Lord's blessing on her future endeavors.

BOOK RELEASE

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ISSUE 1



“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

Faculty Releases

“Six Devotionals on Ezra–Nehemiah”

ESV Applying the Gospel Bible for Men (Crossway, forthcoming in 2026)

● By Dr. Brian Aucker. This thoughtfully designed study Bible helps men encounter Christ in Scripture through gospel-centered study notes, book introductions, insightful articles, and 365 daily devotionals by trusted authors.

“Stranger Things of the Old Testament: The Nephilim”

byFaith Online, October 31, 2025

● By Dr. Brian Aucker. Bible readers have long pondered the identity of “the Nephilim” in Genesis 6. Scripture says so little about them that history is rife with speculation about these mysterious creatures. Dr. Aucker looks at what we can and cannot know about the Nephilim.

“Creating Safe Spaces in an Unsafe World: How Do We Instill Hope?”

Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, October 24, 2025

● By Dr. Suzanne Bates. What does safety mean and look like in our current times? Therapists are in a unique position to reveal the Lord’s compassion and care to others by providing a space where clients can feel safe enough to share their innermost thoughts, fears, and struggles.

“Longing for God’s Deliverance: Psalm 89”

Covenant Magazine 36, no. 2 (Fall 2025)

● By Dr. David W. Chapman. Life’s

seasons of struggle and hardship can often tempt us to despair, but, as Dr. Chapman shows, Psalm 89 offers profound reminders of who God is and how our hope can thrive even in times of sorrow and lament.

“Glorify God in Your Body: 1 Corinthians 6:1–20”

Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review 51, no. 2 (Fall 2025)

● By Dr. Dan Doriani. Amidst all the confusion in the world today about human sexuality, this in-depth look at the apostle Paul’s thinking on the body and its proper place—and use—in God’s created order offers helpful clarity and solid biblical guidance.

“Love is Patient, Love is Kind: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 13:1–7”

Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review 52, no. 1 (Spring 2026)

● By Dr. Dan Doriani. In this essay, Dr. Doriani shows how this important and beautiful passage of Scripture, often taken out of context or unintentionally misused, offers a profound description of the kind of love that should manifest itself within the Christian church.

“The Redeemed Man Laboring at His Work”

Chapter 14 in The Redeemed Man, edited by Joel R. Beeke, Paul M. Smalley, and Richard D. Phillips (Reformation Heritage, 2025)

● By Dr. Dan Doriani. Featuring contributions from trusted pastors, fathers, and husbands, the chapters of this book answer the questions men have as they

strive to glorify God in their relationships, work, and spiritual life. Dr. Doriani offers a biblical perspective on the man’s relationship to his work.

“What Happened to Our Pastor? Moral Failure, Godly Character, and the Challenge of Pastoral Leadership”

Covenant Magazine 36, no. 2 (Fall 2025)

● By Dr. Dan Doriani. Moral failure in pastors damages the church and dishonors the name of Christ. Is the church itself part of the problem? Dr. Doriani explores some possible causes and potential cures of this seeming epidemic.

“Christ Wholly and Always Everywhere: Augustine on Christ *Extra Carnem* in Ep. 187”

Journal of Theological Studies 76 (July 2025)

● By Dr. K.J. Drake. Dr. Drake here examines the great theologian Augustine’s thorough defense and articulation of Christ’s existence “beyond the flesh,” which argues that Christ is both divinely omnipresent, wholly everywhere, and uniquely located in his human body while remaining present to the church, always everywhere.

“Review Essay—On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God, by Matthew Barrett”

Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review 51, no. 2 (Fall 2025)

● By Dr. K.J. Drake. In modernity, the trinitarian faith expressed in the Nicene Creed has

often been denied, attacked, and degenerated. Dr. Drake notes that this collection of essays by a renowned biblical scholar offers a positive defense of classical trinitarianism and a polemic against rival models within contemporary theology.

“Becoming a New Kind of Family: An Advent Reflection on the Gospel of John”

Orthodoxy & Orthopraxy, Covenant Seminary Blog, December 15, 2025

● By Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs. We all love and enjoy the beauty of the Christmas season’s message of joy, peace, and hope. But fa-

miliarity with Christmas can mean it no longer astonishes us. Dr. Gibbs here shows what the infinitely sublime incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ really means and how it should impact our lives.

“The Most Important Mission”

byFaith Online, December 26, 2026

● By Dr. Thomas C. Gibbs. In this reflection based on his funeral sermon for astronaut Jim Lovell, famed for his participation in the Apollo 8 and Apollo 13 moon missions, Dr. Gibbs offers a powerful message of hope about the most important

mission ever undertaken in the history of the world and what it means for us.

“The Word Became Flesh: John 1:1–18”

Covenant Magazine 36, no. 1 (Spring 2025)

● By Dr. Aaron Goldstein. In this Christmas reflection drawn from the Gospel of John, Dr. Goldstein looks the presence of God, the glory of God, and the love of God as embodied in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and the difference these incredible gifts of grace make in the lives of those who trust in him.

“Heralds of Eternal Life:

Titus 1:1–4”

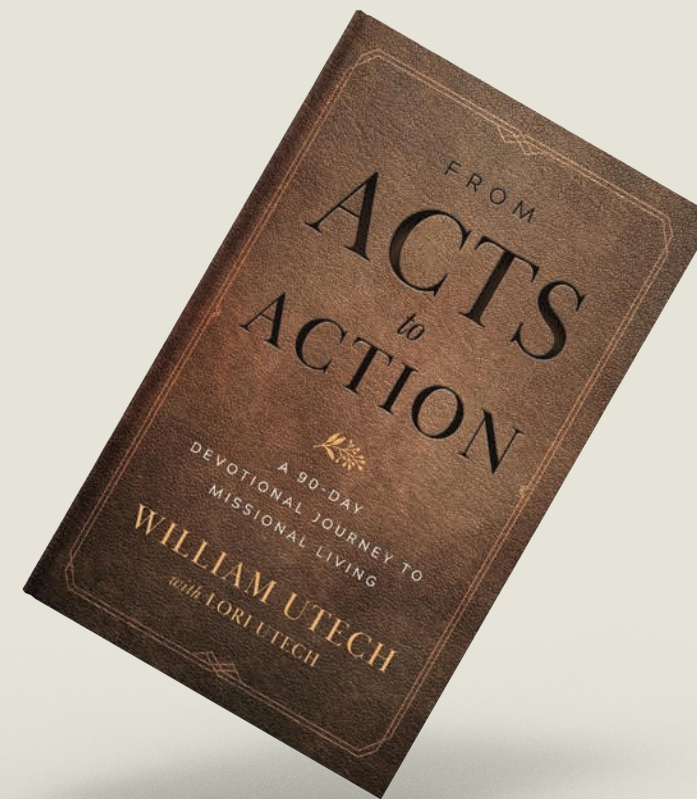
Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review 51, no. 2 (Fall 2025)

● By Dr. Robbie Griggs. Drawing on the classic animated *A Charlie Brown Christmas*—and of course, on Scripture—Dr. Griggs paints an inspiring portrait of what it means for believers in Christ to live as his heralds in a world that needs his grace.

“Kingdom Friendship in a Divided World”

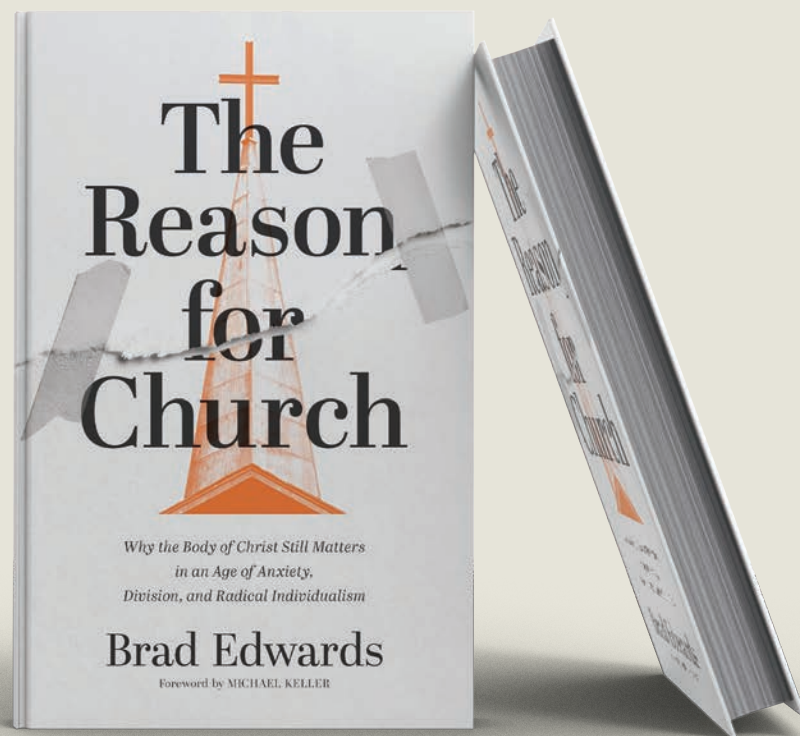
Christianity Today, September 12, 2025

● By Dr. Robert Kim (with Chip Sweney). For many pastors, an early sense of calling eventually gives way to an unexpected reality: feeling lonely and isolated. The busyness of ministry often crowds out the personal care and meaningful relationships they need to thrive. This article kicks off a series addressing these issues.



The more post-Christian society becomes, the more our individuality is rapidly metastasizing into individualism. . . . Though Babel's builders were the first to make a name for themselves, modern individualism bears an uncanny spiritual resemblance.

BRAD EDWARDS, *The Reason for Church: Why the Body of Christ Still Matters in an Age of Anxiety, Division, and Radical Individualism*. —Winner of *Christianity Today's* 2025 Book of the Year Award and The Gospel Coalition's First-Time Author Award



“Tribalism Comes With a Warning Label”

Christianity Today, October 22, 2025

● By Dr. Robert Kim. The mission of God is too important to be hindered by tribalism. Yet even in the church, tribal formation fractures relationships and creates silos of thought, culture, and denomination that prioritize self-preservation over mission. How can we better strive for the unity Christ desires for his church?

“Embodied Development at Christmas”

Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, December 11, 2025

● By Dr. Paul Loosemore. As we wrestle with the intersection of human growth and development and our story in the Bible, Jesus himself, in his coming as a needy child, shows us that our embodied lives are designed for this story and that God made us dependent on the shaping influence of relationships, contexts, and his divine love.

Engaging in Counseling Research With Curiosity and Wisdom: A Christian Integrative Approach

IVP, 2026

● By Dr. Paul Loosemore (with Kristen Kansiewicz). In counseling and psychology programs, students and educators alike often approach research with feelings of apprehension. The authors of this book reveal how research is not only an essential element of mental health work but a unique invitation to curiosity, wisdom, and personal growth.

“Response to: The Threefold Conversion”

Psychology Around the World 23 (2025)

● By Dr. Paul Loosemore. Dr. Loosemore reflects on Werner May's concept of “the threefold conversion”—knowing and trusting God personally, experiencing his Kingdom in the church, and partaking in the great Story throughout all of life—and how it helps to locate and reorient us amidst life's complex experiences.

“What's Often Missed About Emotions”

Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, August 5, 2025

● By Dr. Paul Loosemore. Emotions—what are they? We have sensations in our bodies; we make sense of these sensations as we live and call these sensations feelings or emotions. What does this idea mean for our lives, our growth, our change, and our love for others? This article offers a helpful new way to engage with our emotions.

“What Would Francis Grimké Say to the Church Today About Racial Prejudice?”

Crossway.org, February 13, 2026

● By Dr. Drew Martin. In this short video (with transcription), Dr. Martin discusses famed African American pastor Francis Grimké's thoughts on racial prejudice. Grimké preached on this topic prolifically, and even though his sermons are nearly a century old they contain much wisdom to inform today's thinking on this issue.

“Reformed Catholicity: Challenge Not Consumerism”

Reformed Faith and Practice 9, no. 2 (Spring 2025)

● By Dr. Drew Martin. What is “Reformed Catholicity” and why is it a popular theme in the church today? How can we pursue Reformed Catholicity in a way that reflects thoughtful, careful consideration of past thinkers and contexts, and not succumb to the temptation to “retrieve” ideas or practices that may perhaps be best left alone?

“Spiritual Warfare and Prayer as a Counselor: The Servant in Battle”

Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, January 27, 2026

● By Dr. Mark Pfuetze. The enemy of God's people is real, and he seeks to destroy us by turning us away from the tools and weapons God give us for our protection and aid. One of the most important of these is prayer, which counselors can wield on behalf of themselves and their clients in the midst of the spiritual battle we are engaged in.

“In Counseling as in Life, Relationships Are Key”

Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, November 20, 2025

● By Dr. Jeremy Ruckstaetter. The relationship between counselor and client is the most important factor for progress, growth, and healing. This is true in all of life. Scripture shows that God designed us to be together, grow together, love one another, challenge one another, and bear one another's burdens.

“Is Penal Substitutionary Atonement Biblical? Review of Andrew Remington Rillera’s Lamb of the Free: Recovering the Varied Sacrificial Understanding of Jesus’s Death”

The Gospel Coalition, March 6, 2025

● By Dr. Jay Sklar. When it comes to understanding our redemption, many evangelicals emphasize the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. Not everyone agrees with this idea, however. In this review, Dr. Sklar addresses the issues with one author’s alternative to the doctrine.

“Better Thinking, Better Therapy”
Covenant Seminary Counseling Blog, September 15, 2025

● By Dr. Dan Zink. It is difficult to remember how powerfully our thinking shapes our work. If counselors want to keep growing in effectiveness, a first step is to think again about their beliefs about people, the nature of change, and the choices they make when talking and listening to them.

“Counselor’s Bookshelf”

Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review 51, no. 2 (Fall 2025)

● By Dr. Dan Zink. In this first installment of a semi-regular series, Dr. Zink offers a helpful listing with commentary of important reading for counselors, pastors, campus ministers, and anyone in the business of helping people live life well.

Alumni Releases

Deuteronomy, Reformed Expository Commentary Series

P&R Publishing, 2025

THE CHURCH SHOULD NEVER JUST ACCEPT MORAL FAILURE IN ITS LEADERS, AND YET, WE SHOULD ANTICIPATE IT. 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. . . . WHILE WE NEVER TOLERATE MORAL FAILURE, WE CAN ACKNOWLEDGE AND INVESTIGATE IT.

DAN DORIANI, *“What Happened to Our Pastor? Moral Failure, Godly Character, and the Challenges of Pastoral Leadership”*

● 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 the book with faithful interpretation and application that help readers see God’s grace in the wilderness and Deuteronomy’s enduring relevance.

When It Comes Through Your Front Door: The Parental Grief of LGBTQ+ and the Grace of God

Independently Published, 2025

● By Daniel K. Chinn (DMin ’10) and Sue Chinn. Daniel and Sue have a passion for sharing the gospel and a desire to help other parents like them who are living with LGBTQ+ children and are looking for help, guidance, and support. This book tells their story and offers an approach to this difficult topic.

Paddy the Englishman: Memoir of a Presbyterian Evangelist

Stone Tower Press, 2025

● By Patrick A. “Paddy” Cook (MDiv ’78). For more than 35

years, Paddy the Englishman, as he is known to thousands, has traversed the globe his skills in the building trade and his gifts as a Presbyterian evangelist to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to countless people. This amazing memoir of his journeys will inspire and encourage you.

Island Games: A DI Garreth Benedict Mystery

Independently Published, 2025

● By Luke H. Davis (MDiv ’96). In this second book in the DI Gareth Benedict series, Benedict’s team from Gorse Vale, Wales, receives an invitation to provide security at the Island Games competition in Ynys Môn. Suddenly, athletes from 25 small nations are cast into danger, and malicious violence ensues. Can the team crack the case before the perpetrators escape from the island?

Jonah: A Gospel Journey

Independently Published, 2025

● By Luke H. Davis (MDiv ’96). Part of the Aslockton Bible Studies series, this accessible study outlines the purpose of the book of Jonah, showing that we must identify with the prophet to hear the message of God and allow it to invade our hearts. Once we do, we encounter our Lord afresh and by his Spirit become more faithful followers.

Tides of Death: A DI Garreth Benedict Mystery

Independently Published, 2025

● By Luke H. Davis (MDiv ’96). In the first book in this series, we meet DI Gareth Benedict, who

has spent nearly his entire life in a bucolic haven off the north coast of Wales. After a recent tragedy and extended leave, he returns to the force to contend with team dynamics, a suspicious death, a secret club, a podcast gone wrong, and a hidden killer at St. Brynach’s School.

The Reason for Church: Why the Body of Christ Still Matters in an Age of Anxiety, Division, and Radical Individualism

Zondervan, 2025

● By Brad Edwards (MDiv ’11). Congratulations to the winner of the 2025 *Christianity Today* Book of the Year Award! As *CT* Editor-in-Chief Marvin Olasky noted, the book “lucidly melds the vertical and horizontal reasons for going to church.” The book also won the award in the First-Time Author category from The Gospel Coalition.

Teenagers and Mental Health: A Handbook for Parents, Pastors, and Youth Leaders

New Growth Press, 2025

● By Danny Kwon (ThM ’99) and Monica Kim. Anyone who has regular interaction with teenagers can tell you that there has been an increase in the number of students struggling with mental health issues in recent years. This book offers a comprehensive guide to better understanding the challenges adolescents face and outlines strategies for compassionate, gospel-centered care.

Transformed By Wonder: A Thirty-Day Devotional

Independently Published, 2025

● By Matthew A. Seilback (MDiv ’09). Wonder is a mighty force that can fill us, elude us, or overthrow us when we least expect it. But what if there was something beyond it? Our hearts long for wonder but we will never reach it until we settle on the only Source that fully satisfies: the God of wonder himself.

From Acts to Action: A 90-Day Devotional Journey to Missional Living

Tenth Power Publishing, 2025

● By William Utech (DMin ’06) with Lori Utech. This 90-day devotional leads readers on a guided tour of the Book of Acts to learn anew how God is always working through his people, his leaders, and his local congregations to grow his kingdom. Just as the first-century church changed the world for the better, so the Lord of the church wants to use your twenty-first century congregation to do the same.

Healthy Churches Grow: The Pastor’s Guide to Reducing Chaos, Creating Momentum, and Leading His Church to Health

One King Press, 2025
● By Tucker York (MDiv ’03). Are you weary of mediocrity? Tired of feeling overwhelmed amid the chaos of putting out fire after fire? Longing for more time to focus on preaching, studying God’s Word, and shepherding your people? Whether your church is stalled, stale, or stressed, this guide can help you get unstuck. It offers a wealth of practical advice toward a more effective way for your church to operate.

Building Up the Body of Christ: Getting to Know Dr. Dan Doriani

*And [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists,
the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ. —EPHESIANS 4:11–12*

By Rick Matt



Rick Matt (RM): Thanks for taking time to share your story with our readers. Let's begin with a little background. Where are you from originally, and how did you come to know the Lord?

Dan Doriani (DD): I was born in New York City, but my family moved to Western Pennsylvania when I was in elementary school. We were a church-going family, but our church background was Baptist and Disciples of Christ, which was a very mixed bag. Most people in our particular church seemed to be genuine Christians, but the denomination as a whole was not fully orthodox. My parents were both involved in the church. My mother especially was filled with godly kindness, always teaching a Bible study or caring for people in need, but somewhat individualistic in her understanding of Christianity. My father was a talented but erratic man who had trouble keeping a job and could be hard on his sons. The gap between his professed beliefs and his behavior made it difficult for me to become a Christian.

I had Christian ideas in my mind, but in high school I was sort of a nihilistic, existentialistic theist who thought God probably existed, but I hoped he didn't because I didn't want to go to hell for not being a follower. I didn't think he cared much about this world or about me either.

I did go to a Christian college—Geneva College, a Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCNA) school. You didn't have to be Christian to go there, it was close to home, and they gave me a scholarship, so that's where I went. I had the gift of falling in with a number of bright, athletic, funny, and godly disciples, including an extraordinarily kind and gentle roommate. I also had a professor who did a terrific job of explaining the Bible as a whole. Through all this, I became a Christian, and I would say it was a radical conversion. I devoured the Bible and thought and talked about theology all the time. Within 18 months or so I was even doing some teaching.

RM: Was this as part of a campus ministry organization?

DD: Not a campus ministry per se. It was more like the leaders of the school wanted to make use of Christian students who had leadership potential. I had a summer job with a quasi-independent organization called Coalition for Christian Outreach, a regional ministry covering West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio, which was more a top-down thing, not student-run. A leader there informed me that I was to give a sermon-ish talk soon at a Tuesday night gathering. I did, and before long I was also doing some public teaching and also preaching a bit in area churches. People kept encouraging me to go into ministry. My most beloved professor declared: "You *must* go to seminary." He recommended I go to Westminster in Philadelphia, which was the place to go at the time, so I did.

But there was a brief interim period first because I wanted to get married. My wife, Debbie, is two years younger, so I waited for her to finish college while I worked in a liberal United Methodist Church as a Youth Director and Director of Christian Education. The pastor

had no interest whatsoever in doing Bible studies, so I taught them, mostly to people over 50 who were evangelical. I got a lot of experience through that. Once married, I went to Westminster for my MDiv and straight on to a PhD, which was a joint program with Yale, but awarded by Westminster. I also did some teaching and occasional preaching during that time. I completed my MDiv and all the PhD courses, languages, and research in five years, which I don't recommend to anyone. I managed it pretty well, but I was mildly burned out, and we were expecting our first child, so I decided to take a break from writing the dissertation.

But my "break" actually consisted of taking a call to a church in Maryland, which was what today we call revitalization work. We had a couple of children while there. The church did revitalize, by God's grace, and is still there, small but healthy. I wrote my dissertation at night after fulfilling my pastoral duties during the day. Shortly after finishing my PhD, I got several inquiries about teaching and ended up back at Geneva College for five years. I taught Bible survey classes three or four times a year because they were required for everyone in the school. I quickly realized I'd go insane if I had to keep teaching the same course a hundred times over the next 30 years.

RM: How did you get from Geneva to Covenant?

DD: Around that time, some seminaries asked if I'd be interested in teaching for them, but I didn't feel I could leave Geneva at that point. Eventually, through God's providence, I met Dr. Paul Kooistra, then President of Covenant Seminary, at a church conference. We talked together for two and a half hours. He explained Covenant's philosophy of ministry training based on the pastor-scholar model: those who prepare pastors for the church should not only be strong scholars and academics, but also have real-world experience as pastors in the local church. This vision was unique at the time and resonated powerfully with me. I thought that if I ever taught at a seminary, Covenant would be my first choice.

A year later, at a national conference for theologians, I met Dr. Bryan Chapell, then Covenant's VP of Academics and Dean of Faculty. We were supposed to talk for 15 minutes, but that also went for two hours, ending with an invitation

I like to show leaders how much they have going for them, to help them to see and to use their gifts more effectively. That's a pleasure and a privilege.

to come give a lecture at Covenant and see if I might like to teach there. I did give that lecture and ended up joining the Covenant faculty at the same time that Dr. Bob Yarbrough arrived for his first stint at Covenant. We were both New Testament profs basically coming to restart the department after a period of turnover. For a while we *were* the department.

RM: Your first period at Covenant lasted from 1991 to 2003, correct?

DD: Yes, I was here for twelve years, the first four just as a professor, then four more years as Dean of Faculty and Academic Vice President, then another four as just the Dean of Faculty. For much of that time, I still taught a full load of classes because we didn't have enough faculty to cover everything. It kept me very busy. Eventually, we hired a few more profs and I was able to do more writing and speaking at conferences and churches. During this time, I was often asked to preach at Central Presbyterian Church, a large EPC church in Clayton, Missouri, because they'd had two rough pastoral transitions between 1995 and 2001. Eventually, they asked me to come be their pastor. After a substantial delay, I said yes.

RM: What drew you back to the pastorate?

DD: I love teaching, and I love pastoring, but I have this quirk—when I'm a professor, I miss being a pastor, and when I'm pastoring, I miss being a professor. I had begun to miss pastoring, which made the call attractive to me. I also have a deep conviction that many pastors stay too long at churches when they should retire or do something else. So, I told Central I would be their pastor for eight to twelve years. It ended up being close to 11. By that point I was missing teaching again and wanted to do more writing. The time seemed right, the

opportunity presented itself, so I came back to Covenant as a professor in 2013.

But I also served for eight years as VP for Special Academic Projects, which was a loosely defined role that allowed me to tackle some projects for the Seminary and enabled me to represent the school to various external constituencies—a sort of ambassador-at-large. I spoke at a lot of conferences, wrote books, and met with lots of people to build relationships. Fundraising was not part of the job, and I never asked anyone for money, but a number of those contacts did result in significant (and unexpected) gifts to the Seminary. In those years, I learned that people who are financially successful and generous give for a variety of reasons, but mostly they just want to know that their money will support something or someone they trust and believe in. I'm grateful to have been used by the Lord in that way. I'm back to being "just a professor" now—but with a few side interests.

RM: One of those "side interests" is the Center for Faith and Work St. Louis, which you founded. How did this come about, and what sorts of things does the Center do?

DD: The interest came partly from my father, who was an enormously curious person. Whenever he met someone, he would ask what their job was and follow up with a series of insightful questions about that work. People were often pleased that someone actually wanted to know about what they did.

I also had grandfathers who were totally different from each other. One was both a successful artist *and* a noted opera singer. The other was a very ordinary farmer. He had a degree in agriculture, which was unusual for the time, but he was not financially successful at all. It fascinated me that one man could be connected to the earth, milk cows with his own hands, and plant Christmas trees that he cut down and sold in the town square; and the other man could stand on a stage and sing to thousands of people and also paint beautiful pictures that people still enjoy today.

The faith and work interest took more root when I pastored at Central Pres, where many people had very interesting jobs. I wanted to explore this more, but pastoring prevented me from doing anything systematic with it. Then in 2017 an opportunity came about for me to start the Center

for Faith and Work St. Louis as an independent 501(c)3. It's modest in size, but we have our own board, our own budget, a few employees, and it keeps growing. The main thing we do is a podcast, called *Working with Dan Doriani*, which features conversations with people from all kinds of professions. We discuss their work, their faith, and the intersection of those two things. The podcast is growing by 40% a year, which is significant. We've recorded 85 episodes so far and keep getting better at doing it. These are mostly done through Zoom because I talk with people all over the country, but we try to do them in person when we can.

I also speak widely to represent both the Center and the Seminary. I do maybe a dozen conferences on faith and work each year. And we run cohorts for leaders through Zoom. The current one has people from six different states. Each session is about 75 minutes long, with a time of instruction on biblical principles of leadership and a complicated case study, usually based on real challenges business leaders face, so we can apply those principles. The Center also has lots of resources available on our website, with more to come.

RM: In addition to all this, you also serve on the board of The Gospel Coalition.

DD: Yes, I've been on the TGC board for four years now. It's a great organization that does an enormous amount of work with a very modest budget and an army of devoted volunteers.

RM: One other area I'd like to hear about is interim pastoring. How did you get involved with that?

DD: One way to say it is that some people like to plow a furrow long and straight, and others like to have several furrows going at once. I'm a several-furrows guy. I like a diversity of tasks and challenges. I was first invited to be an interim pastor at the tender age of 27, while working on my PhD. That opportunity basically consisted of preaching twice on Sundays and meeting with the elders occasionally. I liked doing it, and the church grew a bit while I was there.

Basically, I keep getting asked to serve and I keep saying yes. Almost the minute I got to Covenant, Dr. Phil Douglass, whose specialty was church planting, asked if I would help him

co-pastor a church in South St. Louis County, which I did for three years. He did the main pastoral work and some preaching, and I preached maybe 20 times a year. I loved it. When that ended, another church asked if I'd do the same thing for them for several months. Eventually, larger churches started asking me. I was interim at Kirk of the Hills, near the Seminary, twice. That was a delightful experience.

Then, Greentree Community Church in Kirkwood needed an interim pastor. That was a terrific experience too. We addressed several strategic issues fruitfully and found ways to unleash a marvelous staff. After that, Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, the PCA's flagship church, needed an interim after the unexpected death of their longtime pastor Dr. Harry Reeder. I flew down there on weekends for six months while still teaching full time during the week, then my wife and I lived there for 14 months full time, so it was 20 months total. That was a challenging but also delightful experience. We made wonderful friends, and I enjoyed being able to prepare the ground, so to speak, for their next pastor, Scott Redd, who is there now and doing a great job.

RM: What is it about interim pastoring that makes it so enjoyable for you?

DD: I enjoy problem solving. Every church has its problems and flaws, things it needs to work on. You see those more clearly when a pastor has left for whatever reason. All four of the bigger churches I served as an interim had really good foundations, but there was still work that needed to be done. My gifts don't lead me to do start-ups, but to help strong churches that have significant challenges. Churches in need of pastoral assistance can feel pretty low; but in my experience, they are usually healthier than they know. Ideally, the interim names their strengths, resources, and solid foundations, and that allows them to address their issues effectively and restore their momentum. I like to show leaders how much they have going for them, to help them to see and use their gifts more effectively. That's a pleasure and a privilege.

RM: You mentioned before some things about Covenant that brought you here originally. What keeps

you here? What have been some highlights for you?

DD: The most important thing is that we are pastor-scholars training pastors, which has always been the main goal. We do train people for lots of other things too, and our grads serve in kingdom ministry or church ministry in a variety of ways. But with the shortage—I would even say the desperate shortage—of pastors in the church today, our core mission of training pastors remains primary. I believe in that. The best and brightest graduates from many seminaries often become professors or serve in other ways, but the best and brightest from Covenant tend to become pastors; not all, but there's a strong propensity for that. The church needs those pastors. That's big for me.

I also like the way we go about community life. That's not quite the same if you're an online student, but even then, we try to create some sense of belonging to a larger covenantal community. I like how people on campus attend chapel together every week. And students actually come to visit professors during office hours because they want to get to know their profs and are looking for mentors for ministry. Even people who don't intend to be pastors have an interest in how what they're learning here applies to them in whatever way they end up serving. That's outstanding.

For me, the main thing about Covenant is very simple: We're an orthodox, evangelical, Presbyterian, convictional school for future pastors in Reformed denominations. I align with that mission, and I like the people I work with. It's a blessing to know and serve with them.

RM: Is there anything else you'd like to say to our students?

DD: I would say, keep on paying attention to your gifts. If you can find the spot where you're using most of your gifts, drawing helpfully on your experience, and taking to heart the wisdom of your mentors, that's a good place to serve. That's probably your happy place. ■

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

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ISSUE 1

But as for you, O man of God, . . . Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called . . .

—1 TIMOTHY 6:11-12A

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*“Pressing On Toward the Goal”:
Spiritual Formation Through
Forgetting & Pursuing*



Believers often struggle with how to grow in Christlikeness. We practice the spiritual disciplines God gives us, but progress can be slow and frustrating. In Philippians 3, the apostle Paul offers some insights to encourage us along the way.

Illustration by Owen Gent

by Dr. Brad Matthews

INTRODUCTION

THERE WILL NEVER BE A POINT in the Christian life where you or I have arrived at the end of our spiritual growth. Being conformed into the image of our Savior is a life-long process that will come to its culmination in the new heavens and new earth. Yet, our experience of spiritual formation does change over the years. In other words, spiritual growth looks different for those who have been walking with Jesus for 2 years, versus 32 years, versus 62 years.

What does spiritual formation look like when you're a seasoned pastor or ministry leader? What about those who have labored diligently to integrate their faith with their vocations in business, medicine, law, education, and more? Of course, there will always be key disciplines we continue to practice, such as reading Scripture, prayer, corporate worship, fellowship, etc. Nevertheless, if you have been a Christian for decades, there comes a point when you are no longer a "novice" in the Christian life and growth looks and feels different for you.

The apostle Paul had been a follower of the Way for at least 30 years by the time he sent his letter to the church in Philippi. His early years as a believer were spent in preparation, followed by multiple missionary journeys, that gave way to years of imprisonment near the end of his ministry. By that point, Paul was familiar with the rhythms of serving the risen Lord. Nevertheless, he readily acknowledged that he had not yet arrived at the end goal of resurrection life:

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it [i.e., resurrection life] my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:13–14)

We see in the apostle's words a commitment to spiritual growth through two acts: forgetting and pursuing. Those two efforts are represented as continuous and synchronous. And both deserve our attention and reflection.

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into the image of
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FORGETTING

Given all the stories in the book of Acts about the hardship and persecution that followed Paul throughout his missionary journeys, it is surprising that he does not list any of these stories as what he seeks to forget. His commitment to forget "what lies behind" refers back to 3:4–6 where he details past qualifications. Paul has already dismissed such things of the flesh as loss for the sake of gaining Christ. The language of loss and gain came from the sphere of commerce and accounting in the ancient world. While others might put confidence in such things, thereby placing them in the "gain" column of their ledger, Paul now assigns them to the "loss" category because of the "gain" of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.

It's important to state something obvious about what Paul just admitted. He had not "forgotten" all those past qualifications and actions in the sense that he could not recall them to mind. He just listed them out, so clearly, he "remembered" them. Paul's commitment to "forget" such things involved continuously reminding himself that they did not define who he was. They still belong in the loss column. Thus, he reminds us of an essential truth about the challenge of spiritual formation, namely, that it is not ultimately about the external hardships that happen to us throughout life. The challenge is truly more a matter of our own heart. It is about how we understand who the Lord has made us to be—and redeemed us to be—in union with his Son.

How we construct our sense of self is complex. Each of us has our own inherent personality, interests, strengths, weaknesses, habits, besetting sins, and more. And we each have a story that involves moments of joy and triumph, as well as moments of pain and failure. Some of those things compete to occupy the center stage in our sense of who we are. Paul's list indicates at least three realities in which we should be careful not to place our "confidence": failures, successes, and perceptions.

1. Failures. Paul briefly hints at his sense of failure here when he acknowledges that he was a "persecutor of the church" (Phil. 3:6). Yet, the memory that he persecuted Christians prior to his conversion is something that clearly followed him

throughout his ministry. The Bible records Paul explicitly referring to this part of his story five more times in Acts 22:4; 26:9–11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal 1:13; and 1 Tim. 1:13. The fact that Paul formerly persecuted Christians led him to say that he was the "least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9) and the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). It also seems the implicit background to his claim to be the "least of all the saints" in Ephesians 3:8. Clearly, this part of his story informed his self-perception.

As if this were not enough, Paul also acknowledges realities of his own sinful weaknesses elsewhere. For instance, he admits being prone to arrogance if left to his own devices, so much so that the Lord gave him a thorn in the flesh to inhibit that tendency (2 Cor. 12:7). Also, he narrates with astonishing accuracy the experience of sin lying in wait to sabotage any good we want to do; it's an experience to which most Christians can easily relate (Rom. 7:15–25). Simply put, Paul seems to have a clear understanding of his past and present failures.

I have yet to meet a fellow Christian who cannot point to significant failures in his or her past. Likewise, it is not difficult for me to remember my own past failures. Some of them were relatively minor and some of them were significant. To be honest, regardless of the size or extent of each failure, they all try to convince me that there is something deeply wrong with me. For some people, that narrative becomes so strong that they begin to believe their future will be nothing but a series of failures and ensuing hardship.

2. Successes. Several items in Paul's list reveal his former pride in the things that he did well. He took pride in being a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5), citing his genealogy to Abraham within the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Rom. 11:1), as well as being circumcised on the eighth day. He was a Pharisee regarded as blameless before the Law. While we have become used to viewing the Pharisees as self-righteous hypocrites, it's important to remember that they were usually highly regarded amongst the Jews for their rigorous adherence to the Law. A final source of pride was being "educated at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3), who to this day is still a highly regarded rabbi in the history of Judaism.

Beyond the potential for pride in his Jewish origins, Paul also made clear he could take pride

in his apostolic ministry. In 2 Corinthians 11:23, he confronts the super-apostles by saying he is a “better” apostle. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1–10, he commends his ministry to the church as approved by God to the point that he could have made demands of them. Instead, he worked tirelessly so as not to be a burden to them and treated them with parental concern. Such was his ministry that Paul would later commend himself to the church as an example (2 Thess. 3:7–9), just as he did to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:14–20; 11:1). Paul clearly was aware that he pursued faithfulness to the Lord “successfully.”

We also can point to successes in our lives. Many pastors know the temptation to say, “I built this church” to its present state of health. Many counselors hear that they saved marriages and changed an individual’s life around. Leaders establish healthy organizations. Doctors save lives. Teachers become the impetus for others’ life trajectories. Most of us have something we can point to in our past with great pride. That pride is not inherently inappropriate or sinful, but it can begin to whisper to us: “You’re amazing!”

3. Perceptions. In several of his letters, Paul gives us glimpses into his self-experience. For instance, he told the Corinthians that he ministered to them “in weakness and in fear and much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). He was aware that the super-apostles criticized him for sending “weighty and strong” letters when he was physically and rhetorically unimpressive in person (2 Cor. 10:10). Theologians debate whether his reference to writing “with large letters” in Galatians 6:11 implies that he experienced some form of physical limitation. And then there was the reality of his hardships: imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, and more (2 Cor. 11:23–27). To what degree these things informed Paul’s own sense of self is unknown. But he mentions such things enough to indicate that he was clearly aware of how he and others perceived him.

I am not a very athletic person. I’m not good at golf, tennis, basketball, or soccer like many of my colleagues. There are times when I have to remind myself that being unathletic is not a sin. I have not morally failed God and others because I rarely can shoot par on one hole at the golf course. Even so, I still wrestle with feeling like there is something wrong with me because of this. Such

self-perceptions can plague a person. Perhaps it’s being disorganized or idealistic or shy or whatever. There are truths about us that do not count as being “something wrong.” But it feels like it, and that can compete for our sense of identity.

Why does that matter? Because who we believe ourselves to be will inform how we pursue growth into being like Christ. If our sense of self is wrapped up in our failures, our successes, or our perceptions, then those realities will exert power on how we direct our lives. In his commentary on Philippians, Ralph Martin said:

“To forget,” in the biblical sense of the word, is not just simply to obliterate from the mind (if that is indeed possible). It is rather the opposite of “remembering” (*anamnēsis*), which, as a biblical term, carries the important dynamic meaning of a recalling from the past into the present of an action which lies buried in history, in such a way that the result of the past action is made potently present.¹

We can be tempted to “remember” our successes, failures, and perceptions in a way that gives them power to narrate our identity. What Paul calls us to do is to “forget” those things. That does not mean we cannot call them to mind. It means they do not have the power to narrate who we are—and who we believe ourselves to be will inform how we seek to grow.

PURSUING

What should have the power to narrate who we are? What does serve as the guide for our spiritual growth? We find it in the second action of Philippians 3:14: “straining forward to what lies ahead.” For Paul, that which lies ahead is not a code word for wishful thinking about a brighter future. Within the context of Philippians 3, that which is ahead is the resurrection. In other words, it is nothing less than the glorified life promised to us through salvation in Christ. The reality of who we will be is what both informs and drives our spiritual growth. Paul unpacks three features of that new life in Philippians 3.

1. Justification. After Paul articulates the list of his former qualifications, he articulates the recalibration of gain and loss. That which used to be

Paul reminds us that spiritual formation is not ultimately about the external hardships that happen to us but more a matter of how we understand who the Lord has made us to be in union with his Son.

gain (i.e., his past identity markers) was regarded as loss. But he indicates that he must continue to assign such things to the loss column so that only Christ will be in the gain column. This is where his theology of union with Christ shines through completely. The person who has “gained” Christ is also the person who is “found in” Christ (3:8–9). We are so united to Christ that we abide in him as he abides in us.

The first virtue of being united to Christ is that it brings our justification. Paul follows being found in Christ with that explicitly: “Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9). Prior to his conversion, Paul regarded himself as blameless before the Law. But now he does not look to his adherence to the Law as the source of righteousness, but rather to the righteousness provided from God, through faith, in Christ.

Our justification in Christ is not merely an important theological principal. It has the power to disarm the things in our story that we are tempted to let define us. Justification speaks to the whispers of our failures, successes, and perceptions that seek to define who we are and will be. Those things are realities in our stories, but they do not control our story. We have been made right with the God who created us. And within that is both the freedom from our former self and the power from our Lord to pursue a life in keeping with his design.

2. Identity. We are empowered to pursue a life in conformity to Christ out of our union with him. That is why Paul says next that he wants to know Christ and the “power of his resurrection” (3:10). This power is not simply a good example that Jesus provided for us or a Scripture pep talk about how he has already won the battle. Being united to Christ means that we have already participated in all that he has done, even though we have not yet fully experienced it as we wait for the last day. We were raised with Christ when he rose from the dead (cf. Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12; 3:1). Put differently, what is imputed to us in union with Christ is not just his righteousness, but also his resurrection life.

One day, Christ will return and all who are his will be raised into the full culmination of everlasting life. Right now, we experience that in part, and we can see it as through a mirror dimly (cf. 1 Cor.

13:12). Yet, when we speak about our “identity in Christ,” we are ultimately referring to what each of us will be on the last day. That is who we really are already in Christ. And that identity is what each of us is seeking to grow into through the resurrection power of Christ mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. That dynamic is what Paul later describes as “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). The Lord is calling us to live up to the prize of our resurrection self that has been won for us and given to us in Christ Jesus.

That may sound abstract, but it can become very concrete and real in everyday circumstances. When someone cuts you off in traffic, is rude to you at work, or doesn't help pick up the house at home, it can be easy to respond from places of pride, selfishness, or woundedness. Yet, if we can catch ourselves, we can consider how our glorified self would respond: a response that communicates love and patience even as it names harm or injustice. Such a posture becomes all the more important in moments where the stakes are high, like a conversation where a marriage hangs in the balance, or with a rebellious and spiteful teenager, or with a congregant who is dividing the church. Sadly, all of us find it easy to repay evil with evil, but responding to evil from a posture of righteousness takes effort and intentionality.

3. Perseverance. That tendency in all of us is why Paul does not dodge the hard truth: this will be a lifelong pursuit that involves suffering. In the space of three verses, Philippians 3:12–14, Paul says twice that he “presses on” toward this goal and then adds for good measure that he “strains” toward it. The Greek words for those terms could be translated as “pursue” and “exert every effort,” respectively. This indicates that he does not regard growth toward our glorious self as an easy daytime stroll. It takes a relentless pursuit that requires all our effort.

Moreover, he acknowledges that experiencing the power of resurrection life will include with it experiencing suffering. Becoming more like Christ does not only include the glory of his resurrection, but the pain of his death. It means that we will share in the sufferings and sorrow of the Messiah. In part, this is due to the reality that the world is not receptive to God's truth and righteousness. Jesus warned us that the world will

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hate us just as it hated him first (John 15:18–21). The apostle Peter also acknowledged that believers will suffer even for doing good (1 Peter 3:13–17; 4:12–14). It follows then that our spiritual growth may lead to an experience of greater hostility from the world around us.

This is because as we become more conformed to what God intended for humanity to be, we see more acutely the depths and sorrows of depravity. The more we experience life in Christ, the more awful the reality of death in all its forms appears. A child who says “I hate you!” to his or her parents cannot fully understand how hurtful that is, whereas a parent can appreciate just how powerful and damaging such words would be. In the same way, as we grow in our love for God and others, we can see and feel more clearly just how damaging hatred, jealousy, greed, selfishness and other vices are. And that is painful.

The simple fact is that most of us have adopted strategies to avoid pain. We know what things not to say to a friend or an employer if we don't want to be frustrated or hurt. We make vows to ourselves never to be vulnerable about certain things with those we love. We sit in a different part of the sanctuary from those who have offended us or are simply irritating. It is both understandable and even sometimes a mark of wisdom. But it is not what the Lord intended for humanity in the beginning. And it is not what he is redeeming us to in the last day. So, it is left to us, in reliance upon the Spirit's guidance, to discern where and when we are called to risk the possibility of suffering as we are being conformed to the image of Christ.

THE GOAL OF THE PRIZE

As the Westminster Standards remind us, the Lord created humanity to glorify and enjoy him forever. We are designed to be and live in such a way that as we image him, we find our true delight and satisfaction. That means there is something we all desperately long for: glory—life in the presence of the glory of God, and the derivative glorious life that he intended for us. Who would say no to a life where we feel constantly surrounded by those who love us and are fundamentally more concerned for our well-being as we reciprocally love and are more concerned for them? And when all of that is in the presence of our loving God, who would turn

it down? That is the goal of our spiritual growth and the prize that awaits us in glory.

Paul says he moves toward that goal in two ways: by forgetting and by pursuing. We follow him by forgetting in the sense of regarding our failures, successes, and self-perceptions as powerless to define who we are. And we follow him by pursuing that which—and Who—does define who we are: Christ Jesus and our union with him. It takes a lot of effort. It's risky and even painful sometimes. But it's worth it. By God's grace, we seek to make it our own because it is Christ our Lord who has made us his own. Hallelujah! ■

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Endnote

1. Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 160.



THE PREACHER'S LIFE

(2 Timothy 2:15)

The preacher of God's Word has a high and holy calling to represent that Word—and his Lord—well. What implications does this have for his own life? Paul's first letter to Timothy offers some challenging insights.

By

Rev. H. B. Charles Jr.

Rev. H. B. Charles Jr. was the featured speaker last fall at the 2025 edition of the Covenant Seminary Preaching Lectures, focused on the theme “The Preacher’s Life, Labor, and Leadership.” This article is adapted from the first lecture in that series. Full audio of all the lectures is available for free in the Resources section of the Seminary’s website at <https://resources.covenantseminary.edu>.

MAY GRACE AND PEACE BE multiplied to you! I count it a privilege, a joy, and an honor to be with you today to talk about a matter that consumes my life: biblical preaching. Let me say upfront that I am not a scholar. I am not a theoretician. I’m a local pastor with some itinerant ministry. I began my first pastorate at the age of 17, and I am often asked, how does a 17-year-old pastor a church? One answer to that is: he doesn’t. Basically, all they let me do at first was preach. But, in those early days, I discovered that there is power in the pulpit, and there is, more importantly, power in the Word of God. So, as a student of and advocate for expositional preaching, my burden here is to be an aid for those who are in the trenches of ministry and an encouragement to those whose calling and work is gospel proclamation.

The over-arching theme for these lectures is “The Preacher’s Life, Labor, and Leadership.” For this first lecture, I want to focus on the first of those main areas: the preacher’s life.

In 2 Timothy 2:15, the apostle Paul says to Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” In a very real sense, this verse is the bottom line of Christian ministry. “The bottom line” is an economic term referring to how businesses gauge the success or failure of their work. It’s about profit and loss. And, as they say in the business world, “The bottom line is the bottom line.” Every walk of life, really, has some sort of bottom line. In sports, it’s winning games, earning championships. In school, it’s making good grades, going to a good college, getting degrees. What is the bottom line of Christian ministry? I think 2 Timothy 2:15 is a succinct statement of the essence, the heart, and the foundation of Christian ministry. That’s what it’s all about.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR THE PREACHER **“APPROVED BY GOD”**

Over the years, there are three big questions I have asked myself devotionally based on 2 Timothy 2:15. **The first question is:** Is God well pleased with me? Paul tells Timothy to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved.” So, am I approved? Do I study the Word of God? Am I diligent in doing that? Is God well pleased with me?

The second question I ask myself is: Is my work well done? We are called to be workers who have “no need to be ashamed,” so we don’t want to present our work for final inspection with embarrassment, disappointment, or humiliation. We want to present our work with the hope and expectation that our faithfulness to our calling will win a solid “Well done!” from the Lord.

The third question is: Is the Word rightly handled? Paul begins this verse with a very personal statement—“Do your best . . .” You, yourself—each of us who preaches—needs to live in a way that is approved of God, and out of the overflow of one’s devotion to God, we do our work as those who are not ashamed.

One parenthetical note to this: If you want a provocative study on this topic, just read through the writings of Paul and get a sense of his theology of shame. In Romans 1:16 he says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” In Philippians 1, he says, “it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:20–21). And here in 1 Timothy 2:15 he says, he wants to be “a worker who has no need to be ashamed.” Of course, the shame Paul speaks of is God-centered, not man-centered. You can be a smashing success with men and a horrible failure with God. So, he says, “I want to

be a worker who has no need to be ashamed before God.” And the key to that is rightly handling the word of truth, which flows from the starting point of a life that is approved of God.

TEN ANSWERS FOR THE PREACHER **“APPROVED BY GOD”**

What does it mean for a preacher to be “a worker approved of God”? I’ll give ten answers to that question. The worker approved by God is:

1. A Converted Preacher. This may seem obvious or go without saying in a seminary setting like this, but it is not a truth that we should take for granted. The Puritan Richard Baxter said, “Take heed to yourselves, lest you should be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others and be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you preach, and lest, while you proclaim the necessity of a Savior of the world, your heart should neglect him.” So the starting place for a worker who is approved of God is that he must be a converted preacher.

This begins, of course, with trust in the good news of Jesus Christ. I remind us of Romans 1 again, which says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The just [the righteous] shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16–17). So to be a converted preacher is to repent of your own sins and turn to Christ in saving faith and submit your life to his Lordship. In 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, Paul says, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” God forbid!

2. A Called Preacher. One of the earliest pieces of advice my father—who was also my pastor—gave me about preaching was this: If you can keep from preaching, do it. I thought that was the worst advice he could give his young son, who felt a call to preach. I would later understand that he was trying to emphasize for me that the work of the

ministry is a calling that you *beed*, not a vocation that you *choose*. I believe God calls the preacher to this holy and sacred and divine task of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:13 declares this wonderful news: “For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Then, in verses 14 and 15, Paul presents a series of dilemmas that prevent lost people from calling on the Lord for salvation: “How can you call on someone you do not believe in? And how can you believe in someone you’ve never heard of? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent?” (Rom. 10:14–15). So I believe a worker who is not ashamed before God is one who surrenders to a *personal* call to the ministry, a *divine* call to the ministry, and an *affirmed* the call to the ministry. God save us from those who get a Study Bible and Facebook Live in them and that’s their call into ministry! I think “How shall they preach unless they be sent?” has a dual meaning: sent by God and sent by the church.

3. A Qualified Preacher. This is coupled to the business of a call to ministry. Indeed, the preacher should be called, but he also must be qualified. In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul says, “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” The beginning of the work of this noble task comes with a desire—or to state it more strongly—a *burden* to take up this task. But then Paul says right after that in verse 2, “Therefore an overseer must be . . .” and begins to list the qualifications for the role. He says the overseer “*must be*.” So, it cannot stop with one’s desire to preach or desire to lead or desire to pastor. The preacher must be qualified. Of course, the qualifications for ministry are recorded in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus and in 1 Peter 5. Those three lists of qualifications fall into two big categories.

The first category would be *moral qualifications*. Those various passages I mentioned pretty much cover the whole gamut here. Paul and Peter bid the church to consider a man’s relationship to the Lord, to his family, to the church, and to the world around him. There’s a heavy emphasis on moral qualification. The minister must remember that before the Lord who you *are* is infinitely more important than what you *do*. There is a word for one who is teaching and leading and preaching,

but whose ministry does not flow from a heart devotion to God. The word Jesus uses for this is: hypocrite—an actor who pretends to be something before others that he knows he is not before God. So the moral qualifications for a preacher are stated explicitly, and the whole of all three lists is composed of those moral qualifications, with one exception.

The second category consists of *one pastoral qualification*. There is no list of multiple pastoral qualifications, just one simple but high standard. We see it in 1 Timothy 3:2: “He must be able to teach.” This reminds us of the priority in preaching of the role of teaching. In the midst of our pastoral work, we must be able to teach. To be able to teach is about *content*, not communication. It’s not about *how* a man presents, but *what* he proclaims. The question is never, “*Can* a man preach?” The appropriate question is always, “*What* does that man preach?” The priority is to get the gospel *right* before you get it *out*.

4. A Godly Preacher. The qualifications are not an entry level exam that you have to pass so you can get in. It is a calling of life. Thus, 1 Timothy 4:16 says, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save yourself and your hearers.” I think this is the whole ballgame. What is the ministry about? This is a great summary of the whole thing: “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.” Watch your life and your doctrine. Guard your character. Guard your convictions. That’s the whole ballgame.

Now, you might say to me, “But surely there has to be something more than that.” And of course, there is: 1 Timothy 4:16 says, “Persist in this.” The idea is, watch your life, watch your doctrine, and keep hitting “repeat.” The rest of your ministry life is just the cycling of that same commitment to the guarding of your life and the guarding of your teaching over and over again to the end. And the reason why I say that this is the whole ball game is because of the intended result of these instructions: “By so doing you will save yourself and your hearers.” So, on the one hand, you need to watch your character, and there are three independent, external, objective indicators of our devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. Those would be your time, your money, and your relationships. We must guard those three perpetually.

In addition to a love for Jesus and a love for souls, there must be a love for the church. . . . The church is not some necessary evil. The church is the hope of the world.

But not only must we watch our character. We must also watch our convictions. What does that mean? Be clear about what you believe. Be clear about biblical theology, reading and studying the Scriptures with an understanding that the Bible, made up of 66 books, two testaments, written by forty-something men from shepherds to kings, in three different languages, over a period of 1500 years, is one grand story that integrates, progresses, and climaxes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Be clear about systematic theology—how Scripture addresses its themes comprehensively. Be clear about historical theology and the history of interpretation. For any text you preach, the church has been preaching and teaching and writing and debating and arguing about that text for 2000 years. I tell the young preachers around me, “If you have an idea about that text this week that no one in church history has seen in 2000 years, that doesn’t mean you’re deep, it means you’re wrong. The Lord didn’t skip over the church fathers and the Reformers and Spurgeon and give the meaning of that text to you this week.” And then, in the area of practical theology—and really in all of life—we must keep asking as we preach, and study, and seek to understand the Scriptures: How then should we live?

5. A Loving Preacher. First of all, the preacher must have a love for Jesus. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:14–15, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

But there must not only be a love for Jesus; there must also be a love for souls. In his great book *The Preacher and His Preaching*, A. P. Gibbs writes, “A lawyer may develop great ability in his profession without necessarily loving his clients. A physician may enjoy great success without loving his patients. A businessman can rise to great heights of prosperity without loving his customers. But a preacher can never be a real worker for Christ, without a deep passion for the lost souls to whom he preaches the gospel of God’s grace.”

Then, in addition to a love for Jesus and a love for souls, there must be a love for the church. Brother preachers, may the Lord help us to remember that the church is not some necessary evil. It is the best thing going. The church is the hope of the world. Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:15: “The church is the pillar and foundation of the truth.” Ephesians 5 tells us that “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” You cannot have a high view of Christ and a low view of the church at the same time. To love Christ is to love his church.

6. A Praying Preacher. When people ask me, “What do you do for a living?” I say that I am a pastor. If I get the follow-up question, “So, what do you actually do as a pastor?” then, at this stage, I often just answer with the words of Acts 6:4: “My life is devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” I think that devotion of the apostles is an appropriate analogy for pastoral ministry. The pastor is to be devoted to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. It is not accidental or incidental that prayer and the ministry of the Word go together. And I don’t think it’s accidental or incidental that prayer is mentioned *before* the ministry of the Word. Prayer advertises our dependance upon God. Someone may ask, “What is more important, prayer or the ministry of the Word?” Think of it this way. It would be like someone traveling by plane asking, “What’s more important, the left wing or the right wing?” When you’re 30,000 feet in the air, you need both wings to function properly, or you are going down! I would dare not say anything to downplay the devotion we must have to the ministry of the Word, but that devotion needs to be saturated in believing prayer. Yes, we pray because the Word of God commands it. And we pray because it works. But mostly, we pray because prayer emphasizes our dependance upon God. That’s the heart posture with which we

should do our work. This involves both personal and public prayer.

First, a praying preacher is devoted to *personal prayer*. The faithful preacher, the God-pleasing preacher, must prioritize his time in the quiet chambers of his own praying ground, where he spends time with the Lord in prayer and Bible intake. It has been well said that the secret to prayer is secret prayer. I would encourage you to guard your time of daily devotion. Read your Bible. Don’t just study it for classes and for sermons and for lessons you have to teach. Read God’s Word to feed your own soul. Psalm 1:2 says, “His delight is in the law of the Lord, and he meditates on it day and night.”

Second, a praying preacher is devoted to *public prayer*. If you come to the church where I serve from week to week, most likely you will not hear us directly addressing from the pulpit a lot of things that happen in our community and in our culture. But we pray about *everything* in our pastoral prayer. May I commend to you to prioritize that pastoral prayer, the leading of the saints to the throne of grace by modeling the idea that the things that are happening around us in the culture are not merely issues of debate, they are matters of prayer. Weekly, as the preacher, the pastor-teacher leads God’s people to the throne of grace, we should be praying for the government. The Bible commands us to be praying for those who are in authority over us. We should be praying for the advancement of the gospel within our own congregations and the local churches around us, for the work of missionary activity around the world, including especially the persecuted church. We should also be praying for the salvation of lost people. We should be praying for the health of the church—and by that I mean unity of fellowship, fidelity of doctrine, and holiness of lifestyle. We should pray for the afflicted. All of that is the work of a praying preacher.

7. A Prepared Preacher. You should always come to the pulpit prepared, preacher! One illustration of this: A few years ago, a young man who had joined our church asked to meet with me, and in that conversation, he told me that he hoped he got more opportunities to preach at Shiloh than he had at his previous church. There are plenty of opportunities to preach and teach at our church, so that statement in itself didn’t raise a red flag with me. But then I asked him, “Why do you think that

you didn't get more opportunities at your former church?" And he answered me honestly: "Because my pastor said that I didn't study." I asked, "Was he telling the truth?" He said, "Yes, he was." That conversation went for about an hour more, but whatever else we talked about I could not get past that statement. After he left my office, I just sat at my desk staring at the wall for another hour, processing what I had heard. I wasn't able to shake that conversation until this sentence came to my mind: *A passion to preach without a commitment to study is just a desire to perform.*

A worker who is approved of God needs to be a prepared preacher. That involves—especially for those in the seminary phase of formal preparation—getting your arms around the biblical languages, systematic theology, and church history. Charles Spurgeon said, "It is not a sin for a preacher to be without a degree, but it is a sin for a preacher to be uneducated." But not only is there formal preparation; you should also commit yourself to ongoing preparation: conferences, coaching, cohorts, and other means where you can keep sharpening your tools. And then there's sermon preparation. You only really develop your sermon skills through the rigors of weekly preparation, and one piece of advice I give to others that I also have to remind myself of is this: Hard texts make good preachers. The more you dig into the weekly work of studying the Scriptures and preparing yourself carefully will help you grow and develop in your preaching.

8. A Studious Preacher. This is related to number 7 above. The studiousness I'm talking about is focused on the Word. As I've already mentioned, you need to read the Word daily, and need to read the Word devotionally. May I also recommend that you should be memorizing the Word as well? That's one of the best pieces of advice and counsel I received as a young minister because it had both personal and pastoral implications. It has helped my own Christian walk tremendously, but it has also benefited my public ministry more than I can describe.

I grew up in the Black church, which has, for lack of a better word, a certain rhythm to the preaching, and I found that having people turn here in their Bibles and turn there in their Bibles as you're trying to help them understand a passage broke that rhythm and made it hard to keep their attention. But I still wanted to exercise the

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture, so I just determined early on that I would have to do the hard work of memorizing those extra passages and cross-references to avoid having people turn all those pages. I spend a lot of time on that so I can quote chapter and verse pretty tightly. I just view it as a part of the hard work of preparation so that it is easier for people to listen to me. Not everyone will want to do this, but my point is that some measure of Scripture memorization will only be beneficial to you. Being a studious preacher, then, is to read the Word daily and devotionally and to memorize the Word.

But it is also to study the Word—hence the term "studious." Ezra 7:10, which I think is the x-ray of the heart of a true man of God, says this: "For Ezra set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." It says to do three things: Ezra set his heart, first of all, to study the Word of God. But from his study he didn't immediately craft a message and then go find the pulpit. He secondly set his heart not just to study God's Word, but to *do* it. His first priority after he learned the truth was to live out the life of the teachings of God's Word—and only then to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

9. A Pastoral Preacher. Acts 20:28 says, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood." Pastoral preaching involves knowing the flock. It is to love the flock. It is to lead the flock. It is to feed the flock. And it is to protect the flock. I will soon begin preaching through the book of Titus, and in reading and rereading it for the past week and a half getting ready for my final preparations, it has been remarkable to see how

Paul is both modeling for and instructing Titus in his ministry as a shepherd in Crete. He models how to both feed the sheep and fight the wolves who would destroy them. Both are involved in pastoral preaching.

10. A Growing Preacher. I would commend to you that you should always strive to be growing in your preaching. This is a big area, so I'll just mention a few practical ways to help foster growth and progress in preaching. In 1 Timothy 4:15 Paul says, "Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress." You grow in preaching first by studying preaching, and not just formally in school, but also as you launch out into pastoral ministry. I would suggest that at least once a year in your reading list you should work your way through some text on preaching to help you think afresh about the work you have been called to. You grow through studying preaching.

You also grow by preaching. Preaching in a seminary class is important and necessary, but it's essentially basic training. Preaching on Sunday morning is live rounds. It's a whole different ball game. Preacher and author David Helm says, "The preaching is in the preaching." And he's right. You learn to preach by preaching. I've spent a lot of time teaching preaching and much of what I teach is based on hard-earned skills gained in my own ministry. But to be honest, some of it is just that I've just done a lot of reps over the years, preaching week after week. You learn to preach by preaching. I also grew up in the tradition of the Black Baptist Church, where it's like getting your sermon graded while you preach it. If you're doing well, people would be praising God and saying, "Help us, Lord! Help us, Lord!" But if you're not doing well, you hear, "Help him, Lord! Help him, Lord!" So you learn to preach through studying preaching, and you learn to preach by preaching.

Finally, you also learn to preach in conversation with preachers. Jonathan Pennington, who teaches at Southern Seminary, has a recent book out called *Small Preaching: 25 Little Things You Can Do Now to Make You a Better Preacher*. I would commend that little resource as one that has stuck with me since I read it. He has a chapter in there titled "Just a Band of Brothers." The idea is that you grow best in preaching and are better able to persevere over the long haul in community with other preachers. You need a band of brothers to

encourage you along the way. I pray for those in seminary that your experience, and that the cohorts you're participating in, may grow your own development of personal friendships and produce that band of brothers in your lives that will encourage you to be faithful to the end to the calling God has placed on your life.

A HEART OF HUMILITY FOR THE PREACHER "APPROVED BY GOD"

In closing, I would just add that the preacher approved by God should maintain a humble and teachable heart before the Lord. It's easy to let ourselves get puffed up when we preach what we consider a good sermon, but we need to remember that what we do is not done in our own strength or for our own purposes. Every week when I preach, I am still blown away to think that the Lord God would use someone like me to do something as important as this.

During the week as I pray and struggle and wrestle with the text to craft the message, and then when I stand to preach, I feel all my neediness, all my weakness, and know that I can't do what I'm about to do in my own power. I pray that the Spirit will take my preaching and do what he wants with it in people's hearts. I've seen him do it enough that I can't take credit for what only he can produce. No matter how good a preacher any of us may be, we're still a long way off from where we could be. Only prayerful, purposeful dependence on the Lord will get us there. It's by his grace alone that any of us are called to this ministry and by his grace alone that any of us can persevere in it. To God alone be the glory! ■

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ENTRUSTED WITH AND EMPOWERED BY THE GOSPEL

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” was the truth that turned a murderous Pharisee into a gospel warrior; two millennia later, it still has power to do the same with us.

BY DR. K.J. DRAKE

Illustration by Owen Gent



¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, who I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

– 1 Timothy 1:12–20

PAUL'S LETTERS TO Timothy and Titus—commonly referred to as the Pastoral Epistles—offer a wealth of insight into the nature and challenges of pastoral ministry, but they also have application for the broader Christian life. In this particular passage, the seasoned apostle offers his young protégé Timothy some strong encouragement and motivational support for the situation in which he finds himself.

Timothy is in a hard place. He's been called to minister the gospel in Ephesus to a church beset by false teaching, internal struggles, and divisions. He's been tasked with trying to bring this church back to truthfulness, faithfulness, and flourishing, but he's not exactly sure how to do that. Like many of us when facing uncertainties in a difficult situation, Timothy needs a couple of things. First, he needs clarity; he needs to know exactly what he's supposed to be doing. And second, he needs to know that he *can* do it. That's what Paul is offering in this part of his letter. Christ had entrusted Paul with his message and now Paul hands that on to Timothy with the encouragement to continue this good work. But Paul knows that Timothy won't be able to carry out his mission if he relies on himself; it can only happen through a clear sense of what he's called to do and through total dependence on Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul reminds Timothy that he is both *entrusted with the gospel of God* and *empowered by that very same gospel*.

ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL

Paul sets forth this first encouragement in verse 15 when he says, “The saying is trustworthy and

deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” The phrase “a trustworthy saying” is used throughout the Pastoral Epistles and is partially a way of Paul giving an aphorism that we are to store away for future use. It's a way to say, “Pay attention! Remember this. Hold on to this important thing. It's trustworthy. You can receive it and believe it completely. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” Paul is likely reflecting the words of Jesus himself from Mark 2, where Jesus says, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Paul's aphorism is thus in many ways nothing less than a summary of the gospel itself.

Back in verse 11, just one verse before our passage, Paul notes that he has this message “in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.” And just as he has been entrusted with this glorious gospel, he is now giving it over to Timothy, as we see in verse 18: “This charge I entrust to you.” “This charge” is nothing less than the glorious grace of Jesus Christ for sinners. Paul by this command gives clarity to Timothy's mission. The gospel of Christ is what Timothy needs to be about, no matter what is going on around him or what struggles might be taking place at Ephesus. And the same is true for us. Wherever we may be and whatever may be happening around us, we have been entrusted with the same purpose, the same message: “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” Whether we are ministering vocationally or not, the gospel has been entrusted to us because we are followers of Jesus Christ. We are called to embrace that message, to profess it, to proclaim it, and to live it. The saying that was trustworthy and deserving of full

acceptance for Timothy is just as trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance by us today.

But what does Paul's “trustworthy saying” actually mean? Let's look at its content and break it down into three parts. First, we have the agent of the gospel, Christ Jesus, who came into the world. This shows us Christ's glorious identity. Jesus is the Messiah of God who has come to save us. But even more, he came into *this world*. The cosmos cannot contain him. He was before it and is preeminent and transcendent over it. The agent of the gospel is none other than the eternal Son of the Father. And yet he came into this world *for us*. That's why, in verse 17, Paul breaks out in praise: “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever.” He's responding to the gospel of Jesus. Jesus is one with God eternally. The agent of the gospel is none other than the Creator of the world, and his mission—the mission of the gospel—is to save us. Christ's mission is unambiguous. He has the power to deliver us from all those forces that would challenge us, he has the power to deliver us from our sin and from the powers of the evil one, and to deliver us from the powers of the world. And he has the power to lead us into eternal life, as Paul says in verse 16.

But who receives this blessing? Who is the object of this gospel? Who is the one whom Christ saves? The trustworthy saying tells us: Christ came to save sinners, which shows God's mercy and grace. Christ does not come to save the righteous, the upright, or the polite, but sinners, those who have fallen short of the glory of God in every way. There is no preferred race, class, or people group; all stand before God unable, unwilling, and unworthy until Christ saves them. Timothy needed to know this. He needed to know with absolute clarity the message he was entrusted with to go into the world and proclaim. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Paul returns him, and us, to the foundation of the faith and the foundation of everything in our lives, our families, our vocations, and our ministries.

But, as we also see in this passage, being entrusted with this gospel message also comes with a warning. If we have a clear calling to proclaim this gospel no matter where we are, if we stray from that message or that calling, we are straying from God's good and righteous call. That's why Paul is-

sues a very stern warning at the end of this section. In verse 19 he says, “By rejecting this”—meaning the charge given to Timothy—“some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.” Carrying forward the gospel is a weighty calling on all whom Christ brings into his kingdom and enlists in his service, and Paul here is saying that we've got to take this with great seriousness. If you move from the gospel, if you begin to put your trust in other things, you will potentially shipwreck your faith, bring scandal to the church, and destroy that which God has given you to steward. And Paul even names names here—Hymenaeus and Alexander, who apparently brought shame and disaster on themselves through unfaithfulness to the gospel.

There are many ways to disbelieve the trustworthy saying, and many ways to fail to give it full acceptance. Sometimes we begin to forget that we are sinners, just as much in need of this message as the people to whom we are ministering or counseling. Sometimes we begin to think that the gospel is just for baby Christians, that we have graduated to something else, some message beyond or above the gospel that is the real power. There is no such thing. There are many good things in God's world, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is primary for all of our ministry and mission. Sometimes we forget that it's Jesus who saves. Sometimes we begin to take to ourselves the role of savior and forget that he is the only One. Or sometimes we reject the gospel entirely, seeking new strength in rituals or in the spirit of the age and moving away from the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus into false hopes. But we can't do that. We need to be clear eyed. We need to have clarity about the gospel. Whatever the Lord calls us to do, whether that is to the pulpit or the counseling room or the Sunday school classroom or teaching in a Christian school, or working in some other profession, we have to know what the first and most important thing is and cling onto it no matter what. Only when we accept and embrace this glorious entrustment from God can we begin to move forward to carry it out.

But God doesn't leave us alone in this. He not only gives us this gospel; he also empowers us to live it out and proclaim it. How?

EMPOWERED BY THE GOSPEL

Paul's further encouragement to Timothy gives us the answer. He has said that Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and "sinners who have been saved" is true of all of us who are in Christ, which is why we can live this out. Paul tells Timothy that, in carrying out his calling, he must hold to this truth with good faith and a good conscience. In other words, the gospel we have experienced and been entrusted with is itself what empowers us to live out our mission. And to illustrate this, Paul draws on his own life. He is an example of the gospel at work, of how it can transform and empower. Throughout this text, Paul uses his own conversion and life story as an enacted parable to show Timothy what it looks like when Jesus Christ saves a sinner and calls him to service.

In verse 15, Paul refers to himself as the foremost of sinners, and then explains, "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who believe in him for eternal life." Why did he need such perfect patience from Christ? Because, as we are told in verse 13, "formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent." We see that there is a massive dissimilarity here between how Paul has acted toward Jesus and how Jesus acted toward Paul. Paul was opposed to Jesus in every way possible. He denied that Jesus was the Messiah. Instead, he thought Jesus was a blasphemer, a false prophet accused by God. And he expressed that in persecuting the church of Jesus Christ, seeking them out, seeking their death. Remember, too, that Paul was the one who held the cloaks for those who stoned Stephen to death in Acts 7. Then, on his way to Damascus to find more Christians to bring to supposed justice, Paul was stopped in his tracks by the Lord with a blinding light. Jesus reminded him of what was actually at stake here when he said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?" Paul was not just challenging the Christian faith or the people of the Christian church. He was actually persecuting Jesus Christ himself.

And Jesus, rather than giving Paul what he deserved—what we all deserve: to be separated, to be rejected by God—calls Paul into his service. Although Paul was an insolent opponent, a proud

enemy, an arrogant adversary against Jesus, Jesus acted toward him in mercy. There is a stark contrast between Paul's acts of hatred, rejection, and destruction toward Jesus, and Jesus's loving and merciful acts toward Paul: "The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with faith and love that are in Jesus" (v. 14). When Paul was an enemy, Christ not only died for him, but called Paul to himself and brought him from darkness into light. Paul was one of the sinners whom Jesus saved. Paul received mercy. And not only was he saved, but he also received strength from Christ Jesus his Lord and was appointed as a faithful servant (v. 12). Jesus completely turned Paul around from hating him, from opposing him, from killing his people, into a servant beloved of God. The Lord, in his perfect patience, saved the foremost of sinners by his grace and love, and continued to empower Paul's ministry to the end of the apostle's life.

Paul faced many challenges in his missionary journeys—traveling around the Mediterranean region he suffered hardships, beatings, shipwrecks, hatred, misunderstandings, and betrayals. Challenges upon challenges. What gave him strength to go through all this? Nothing but his understanding that he was loved by Jesus and that he was entrusted with Jesus' message. The one who had been the chief of sinners was now forgiven. All of his suffering was worth it because of what Christ had done for him. And that is true for us as well. The power of the gospel transforms and empowers the enemies of God into his beloved servants whom the Father showers with abundant grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you know that you have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but Christ has gotten hold of you, the Father has for you abounding grace and mercy that will empower you despite all the struggles you face whether in seminary or beyond into whatever the Lord might call you to do.

There are many ways that the gospel empowers us. Students here at Covenant Seminary will dig into some of those in their classes on practical ministry. But the chief truth we must cling to is our forgiveness in Christ. One of the reasons many of us struggle in ministry and throughout life is that we still think we are unacceptable to God, that our sins will pile up around us and bear us down to hell. It's true that we do still sin. We do still fall short of the glory of God. There's no

Whether we are ministering vocationally or not, the gospel has been entrusted to us because we are followers of Jesus Christ. We are called to embrace that message, to profess it, to proclaim it, and to live it.

denying that. And yet, God is so merciful. The sin that hobbles our ministries and our lives is forgiven by God. Our flesh and Satan might be telling us that we're not holy enough, we don't love Christ enough, we don't have enough faith, we're envious, we're covetous, we have doubts. We know we are indeed the foremost of sinners, and when our professors or our pastors or our congregations find out, they'll kick us out. They won't love us. They won't listen to us. That's what the enemy tells us all the time.

But it is not true. Christ came to save sinners, not for them to hide their sins or constantly be crushed by them. All that we have done, all that hobbles our ministries, is cleansed by the blood of Christ. Martin Luther was a man who struggled deeply with his own sin. In a letter on spiritual counsel, he wrote,

When we are tempted, when the devil throws our sins up to us and declares that we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: "I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to

eternal damnation? By no means! For I know One who suffered and made a satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where he is, there shall I also be."¹

When we are tempted to see only our sin, we must turn from it to Jesus, who saves us from our sin and leads us in a life that is empowered by him, honoring to him, and moving forward in grace. We know our own sin better than anyone else. We know its depths. We know our inconstancy. But that only empowers us to see that we are no better than anyone else. We are merely beggars going to others to show them where bread is. We cannot be haughty or self-aggrandizing in our ministries. We are not the Savior. We are broken sinners saved by grace, living out this life to his glory. And that gives us hope in ministry. It's not about us or our power or our ability. It's about Jesus Christ, the one who can give us all that we need. He will strengthen us. And we respond just as Paul does: thanking the one who gives us strength through his mercy and grace, and praising him and giving him all honor and glory. The King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only wise God—that is the one we serve and the one who will lead us and empower us no matter where we go or what ministry he calls us to.

LINKS IN THE GREAT CHAIN OF FAITHFUL GOSPEL SERVANTS

In many ways, the gospel we are entrusted with is like a great chain. It was given from Jesus to the apostles and from the apostles to the evangelists and from the evangelists to the generations of those who follow them. And Christ's faithful servants have continued handing it down generation after generation. They were entrusted with the gospel, and they were empowered by it. And you and I are part of that chain now. That's what our faculty and staff at Covenant Seminary and our local pastors in our churches are trying to do: entrust you with the gospel and equip you and empower you. It was given to us and now it's being given to you, and you will give it to someone else. Our call, then, just as it was for Timothy, is to fight the good fight of faith, to wage the good warfare (v. 18). There's a lot wrong in the world, in the church, and in people's lives, and we're being

called by God's grace to go battle the evil one, to shine light into dark places, to repair marriages, to love sinners, to counsel those who are struggling, to comfort the weak and suffering. But none of us do those things on our own or in our own power—but by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of the great links in this gospel chain is Covenant Seminary's own first president, Dr. Robert G. Rayburn, the man for whom our chapel is named. Before coming to Covenant, Dr. Rayburn was a chaplain in the 187th Airborne Regiment that served during the Korean War. In 1956, the same year that the Seminary was founded, he wrote a small book called *Fight the Good Fight*, which is a reflection upon what he learned about the Christian life as a military chaplain on the battlefields of Korea. He offered that book as an encouragement to all who would come after him to take up that good fight of faith. In one section of it, he says,

There is victory for you, my friend, no matter how bitter may have been the defeats of the past. The victory begins with the realization that the flesh of man is just as undependable after he becomes a Christian as it was before he was saved. No man can count on his flesh for anything except a longing for sin. Then, in a purposeful and faithful use of the spiritual weapons that God has supplied through his Son Jesus Christ, and through the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit, the victory is realized.²

These weapons are ours for the taking. We are called into spiritual warfare no matter where we go, and our weapons are not those of the world, as Paul notes; rather, they are the gospel of Jesus Christ and the reliance on his Spirit. With those,

he will give us the victory, we will be empowered to move forward and serve God. The fact that Christ has come into the world to save sinners leads to our confidence in this battle. He has saved us from the power of the world, from the flesh, and from the evil one who struggles against us. He has disarmed their charges against us by forgiving us our sins, and has led us into a new life that we might serve him no matter where he takes us. We fight not with the weapons of the world, but with faith and a good conscience; not with a sword or unrighteous dealings, but with the Word of God wielded in love and faith granted by the Spirit. This gospel we've been entrusted with is our inheritance, our message, and our strength wherever the Lord may choose to lead us. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Amen. ■

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This article is adapted from a sermon Dr. Drake preached in Rayburn Chapel at Covenant Seminary in September 2025 as part of a series (by various preachers) on the theme of "Ministering God's Word."

Endnotes

1. Luther: *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (1960; repr. Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 85.
2. Robert G. Rayburn, *Fight the Good Fight* (Lookout Mountain, TN: Covenant College Press, 1956), 59–60.



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“The Gospel Is the Answer”: Preaching God’s Grace, Building God’s Community

After 20 years of ministering across the lines of social and racial division, pastor Tony Myles is more convinced than ever that the gospel alone has the power to heal and restore.

by Stephen Griffin



THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, a life of learning how to listen for and answer God’s calling. For Covenant Seminary alumnus and current doctoral student Rev. Tony Myles (MDiv ‘06), that journey of listening and answering began the day two Mormon missionaries knocked on the door of the Myles family home when Tony, who was not raised as a believer, was a teenager.

Today, Tony is the Senior Pastor of Christ Central Church (PCA), a multi-ethnic congregation in Charlotte, North Carolina—the most recent call in a four-city tour of duty that has also included St. Louis, Missouri; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is also back in the classroom, finishing a Doctor of Ministry degree in the Compelling Preaching Cohort at Covenant Seminary. It is a long way from where he started.

To his mother’s chagrin, the teenaged Tony opened the door to those Mormon missionaries that day in his native St. Louis. “I sat there with them and talked about religion in general and their religion in particular,” Tony says. “I ended up going to their worship services for a little bit before discovering through a Pentecostal pastor that Mormonism was not orthodox Christianity. I would say that in both of those contexts, I didn’t feel like I connected as much with the message of Christianity as much as I just relationally connected with those folks.”

It wasn’t until a friend invited Tony to a Baptist Church that he understood what it meant to be a sinner in need of God’s grace and what Jesus had come to offer to all those who put their faith in him. Even as the only practicing Christian in his family at the time, Tony remembers, he developed a zeal for the Lord and a serious desire to grow in his faith such that the pastor of that Baptist church took notice and began to help Tony discern a call to ministry. “I didn’t know what that meant at the time. I just had a desire to share my faith with people in more meaningful ways. He started letting me help lead youth Sunday school and other youth meetings, and that grew into eventually wanting to preach and being given the opportunity to do so.”

Tony met his future wife, Tanya, in this context as well. At a Baptist State Convention in Kansas City, after finding out they were both from St. Louis, Tony and Tanya struck up a friendship. They fell out of touch for a few years before reconnecting at the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL), where Tanya was working in the school’s financial aid office, and Tony, who had taken a year off school, was re-enrolling. Tanya helped Tony get back into school where, over time, their rekindled friendship grew stronger. Their mutual love for one another and for the Lord eventually blossomed into the desire to spend their future together serving him, so by God’s grace they were married.

Besides reconnecting with Tanya, it was while at UMSL that Tony also reconnected with a call to ministry. He recalls this period as a time of deep searching—trying to discern what God might do

with the desire he had felt as a young man but seemed to have long since left behind. Tony had taken a job sorting packages at UPS while, providentially, Tanya had discovered the radio ministry of John MacArthur. “He was expounding the Bible in ways I hadn’t heard before,” says Tony. “Tanya and I were both Baptist at the time, so we didn’t know anything about Calvinism or any of that. So, I started listening to John MacArthur. On his website, he was promoting some books by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. I bought those books and started reading them and was just captivated by Calvinism and this Welsh preacher. Listening to his old sermons, I just really fell in love with his teaching. That led to finding R. C. Sproul and some of the other Reformed guys. So, then I said, ‘Okay, I want to go somewhere that teaches this.’ But I didn’t know where that was.”

Two of the other workers on Tony’s sorting line at UPS happened to be students at Covenant Seminary. When they discovered that Tony was a believer and, moreover, considering vocational ministry, they encouraged him to enroll at Covenant. He did, earning his MDiv while Tanya worked on a Master of Arts (Theological Studies). The couple also began attending a PCA church in St. Louis, New City Fellowship, where God was cultivating in them a passion for cross-cultural ministry.

“What I found so refreshing about Covenant was the way the professors taught. You could tell they had very pastoral hearts. They were teaching you great theology, but they taught it as pastors who wanted you not just to connect with the academic aspect of things, but to work that out pastorally in your life and ministry. That shaped a lot of how I think about ministry.”

Tony graduated in 2006, and the couple moved to Knoxville to plant a multi-ethnic church before moving back to St. Louis in 2009, when Tony accepted a call as an Associate Pastor at New City Fellowship. There, he provided pastoral oversight for community groups, adult education and discipleship, and ministry partnerships. He later served as New City’s Senior Pastor from 2017 to 2020.

Tony also spent time at a New City congregation in Grand Rapids before, in 2024, becoming the Senior Pastor of Christ Central in Charlotte. “Much of my ministry career has been in multi-eth-

“I’m more convinced today that the gospel is the answer to all our divisions. The more I read the Scriptures, the more I understand the gospel and what Jesus came to do, the more I realize that the gospel is the answer.”

nic churches—shepherding and pastoring churches that are trying to engage in cross-cultural ministry. So, the vision here is to build a strong church that is multi-ethnic and where people are learning how to live out the good news of the gospel and love each other across lines of division.

“I always have that picture of Revelation 7:9 in my mind. We are trying to—on this side

of eternity—press into that calling to learn how to worship our great Triune God together as a united community of people. That means dealing with the things that seek to divide us from that. And we deal with that through the gospel.”

The desire to think carefully and biblically about the cultural issues that sometimes divide congregations is also what led Tony to consider whether doctoral studies might be helpful to his ministry. At a Mission to North America African American Ministries LDR (Leadership, Development, and Resource) weekend event, he heard a presentation from Covenant Seminary professor Dr. Thurman Williams about the Seminary’s Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Compelling Preaching Cohort. “I had been wanting to do a DMin for years and just never had the time,” Tony says. “But I heard the presentation about this cohort in particular and was really grabbed by it.”

Made possible by a grant from Lilly Endowment’s Compelling Preaching Initiative in 2023, the Compelling Preaching Cohort is designed to help pastors sharpen their preaching skills and communicate the gospel effectively across cultural contexts. The cohort structure means that participants take all their classes alongside one another, coming together in St. Louis a few times a year for a community learning experience. “I just love the cohort approach. It seems like, with our group, it has built a sense of camaraderie. We communicate outside of class—I’m on a text chain of all the guys in the cohort and we’re texting each other about stuff that has nothing to do with the class, just encouraging and praying for each other. So, while we’re learning these really deep sorts of academic, theological things, we’re also building relationships.”

By God’s grace, Tony has already been able to see some of what he has learned in the doctoral program worked out in his ministry, both in the “iron-sharpening-iron” aspect of the cohort experience with fellow pastors, and in the week-by-week preparing and delivering of sermons at Christ Central: “One of the things we did in a recent class was to give each other feedback on our sermons—thinking about ‘What was good? What do I need to work on?’ and trying to put some of that into practice.”

If there is one thing Tony has learned in 20 years of pastoral ministry, it is that a stable, grace-centered, community of support is essential to ministry health and longevity—whether for current or future pastors—and that preachers of the gospel need to be energized and refreshed by the same gospel that they preach.

“I think ministers burn out quickly from lack of support and lack of being able to walk with other ministers. The other thing is that you’re always preaching the gospel, but you also need to be drinking from that same well. If you’re not reminding yourself that gospel truth applies to you and not just to the people you’re preaching to, it’s easier to burn out because you are only seeing yourself as a giver and not as someone who needs to receive.”

The Compelling Preaching Cohort, Tony says, has been helpful for reminding him that as one who preaches Christ, he also needs to hear Christ preached: “One of the things Dr. Williams asked was, ‘Who are you listening to? What preachers are encouraging and inspiring you?’ I was thinking about it and I realized, ‘I’m not listening to anybody right now!’ And that just helped to remind me that I need more than to just preach the gospel. I also need the gospel preached to me.”

Tony’s hope and prayer is that, ultimately, God will use his time as a student at Covenant Seminary not only for Tony’s benefit, but for the building up of those to whom he ministers in Christ’s name. At new student orientation, Covenant students are often told: “You are not the end of your own education.” For Tony, this is just as true as a doctoral student as it was when he first graduated from Covenant two decades ago: “I think I’m more convinced today that the gospel is the answer to all our divisions. The more I read the Scriptures, the more I understand the gospel and what Jesus came to do, the more I realize that the gospel is the answer.” ■

Stephen Griffin is the Director of Communications and Marketing at Covenant Seminary and the 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.

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CLASS NOTES



“Go Therefore and Make Disciples”

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

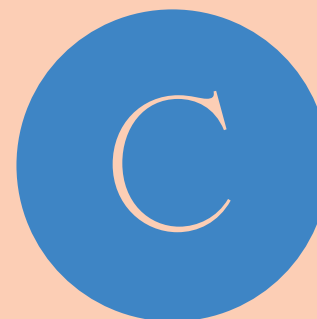


ILLUSTRATION BY VALERO DOVAL

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. 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

After serving 7 years as Director of Women's Ministry and Community Life at Covenant Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, MO, **Mary Bell** (MAEM '17) moved to Chattanooga, TN, in 2024 and is completing her hospital chaplain residency at CHI Memorial. When she isn't working, Mary loves to spend time with her niece and three nephews who also live in Chattanooga.

After 33 years of visionary leadership, **Rev. Carlton R. Caldwell** (MDiv '99) concluded his transformative journey at Galilee Missionary Baptist Church when he retired in May 2025. His legacy at the church in-

cludes immense growth, both spiritual and physical, ranging from sanctuary renovations to accommodate the expanding congregation, the Bread and Loaves Saturday Evangelism effort, the Galilee Community Development Corporation, involvement in global missions, and more. Rev. Caldwell has authored three books and served as an Adjunct Professor at Covenant Seminary.

After 7 years serving as Assistant Pastor of Discipleship at First Presbyterian Dothan, AL, **Caleb Galloway** (MDiv '13) transitioned to the role of Church Planter. Caleb is planting a mother/daughter church in the Taylor/Rehobeth area, which is an ever-growing "village" southwest of Dothan. The vision is to

plant a small town/rural church, with the goal of planting more PCA churches in small towns over the next 30 years. Caleb, Whitney and their 4 girls hope to move to the target area within the next year.

After 14 years serving out-of-bounds in hospice chaplaincy and bereavement, **Steve Gonzales** (MDiv '90) has returned to pastoral ministry as the Senior Pastor at Christ Church (PCA), Ann Arbor, MI. Steve was ordained in 1990 and has served churches in NY, OH, and MI. Steve (a Hoosier) and his wife, Angie (a Spartan), have moved to the Ann Arbor area and are learning to cheer on University of Michigan's "Wolverines." Rev. Robert Knuth (RUF, University of MI) preached Steve's installation

sermon on "The Beauty of the Church" from Ephesians 4:1-12.

After 5 years serving as Senior Pastor at Westfield Presbyterian Church in New Castle, PA, **Bobby Griffith** (MDiv '07) and family have relocated to Edmond, OK, where Bobby is the Associate Pastor of Discipleship and Care at First Presbyterian Church of Edmond. Bobby also teaches a History of American Evangelicalism course for Flourish Institute of Theology and serves on the Standing Theology Committee for ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. Bobby was ordained in the PCA in 2008 and transferred to ECO in 2020. He and his wife, Jennifer, have two sons: Sammy (14) and Xavier (13).

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

After 8 years at Coram Deo in Las Cruces, NM, serving as a Church planter and Senior Pastor, **Dustin Hunt** (MDiv '18) and his family are moving to Dallas, TX, to serve as Pastor of Church Planting for Park Cities Presbyterian Church and Executive Director of the Southwest Church Planting Network. Dustin was ordained in the PCA in 2018. The Hunts have three children: Jayden (11), Owen (9), Claire (4).

After 7 years of serving as a teacher and chaplain at Eton College in the UK, **Arthur Keefer** (MDiv '13) and his wife Emem moved to Melbourne, Australia, in 2023, where Arthur accepted a call from The Scots' Church as an Assistant Minister. He is currently transferring his ordination from the International Presbyterian Church to the Presbyterian Church of Australia, while Emem continues to work as a doctor in respiratory medicine.

After 7 years at Grace Presbyterian Church in Chesapeake, VA, serving as Associate Pastor, **Alvin Lin** (MDiv '18) and family moved to Charlotte, NC, in August 2025, where Alvin is now serving as Associate Pastor at Uptown Church. Alvin was ordained in the PCA in February 2019. Alvin and Sarah Lin have three children: Lydia (5), Miriam (3), and Abigail (18 months).

After 2.5 years at Northeast Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC, **Artis Love** (MDiv '23) has taken a new call at The Vine Community Church in Cumming, GA, as their Youth Pastor. Art is ordained in the PCA in June 2025.

After 17 years planting and pastoring Christ Presbyterian Church in Germantown, MD, **Matt** (MDiv '05) and **Katy** (MATS '05) **Roberts** have been asked to plant a church in Mount Vernon, VA, in partnership with Alexandria Presbyterian Church. The Roberts have four children: Brianna (21), Brooke (18), William (14), and Jonathan (11).

Travis Shafer (DMin '23) took a new call in June 2025 as Pastor of Discipleship and Mobilization at Living Grace Community Church in Cary, IL. Travis and his wife, Morgan, previously lived in Wisconsin, where he pastored a small Presbyterian church for almost thirteen years. Morgan continues her work as a licensed professional counselor in private practice.

Celebrations

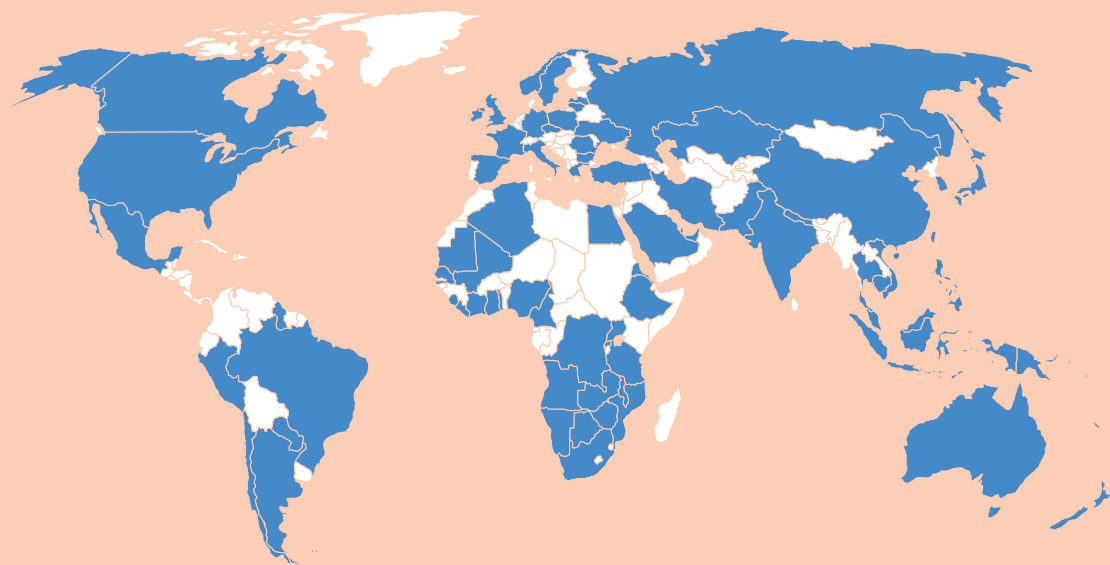
Daniel K. Chinn (DMin '10) is celebrating his 25th year serving at College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, MO, as Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies. He teaches senior-level Christian Worldview courses and the Practical Theology courses in his department. He has also served the college as Campus Pastor. Daniel and his wife, Sue, also recently published their book *When It Comes Through Your Front Door: The Parental Grief of LGBTQ+ and the Grace of God* (see "Book Release" in this issue).

Hannah Crossett (MAEM '16, MAC '17) received her PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision from Capella University, writing her dissertation on "Licensed Professional Counselors' Experiences of Their Own Emotional Regulation While in Session with Dysregulated Clients." Hannah lives with her cat in Jackson, TN, where she counsels clients in Missouri and pursues her counseling license in Tennessee.

Congratulations to **Jeb Ralston** (MDiv '21) on the completion of

Where Our Graduates Go

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his dual-doctoral degree (ThD, PhD) from The University of Geneva and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and completing his doctoral thesis on “Rereading Romans 5 and the Reformation of Original Sin, 1512–1563.” Jeb lives in Jacksonville, FL, working remotely as a researcher with the Swiss National Science Foundation project of the University of Zurich and University of Geneva titled “Sixteenth-Century Exegesis of Paul,” and as an Adjunct Professor in Church History at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

In May 2025, **Justin Schlueter** (MDiv '14) completed his DMin at Covenant Seminary with his dissertation on “How Equipping Laity to Provide Congregational Care Helps Support Long-Term Sustainability for Pastors.” In addition, after 11 years on the pastoral staff at Stephen Ministries, he became the organization’s new Executive Director on November 20, 2025. Justin was ordained in the PCA in 2017. He and his wife, Danielle, have been living in St. Louis for almost 15 years.

Family Updates

Congratulations to **Jenn and Michael Christian Anderson** (MDiv '18) on the birth of their first child, Shepherd Isaac Anderson, on New Years Day 2025. He made the news as the first baby of the year born in that hospital. Michael is in his third year as Associate Pastor at Christ Church PCA in Grand Rapids, MI, serving alongside fellow Covenant grads Andrew Vander Maas (MDiv '99, DMin

'09) and Lucas Mooibroek (MDiv '25).

Condolences

To the family of **Richard Anthony “Ash” Aeschliman** (BDiv '64, MDiv '72), promoted to glory, September 7, 2025. Ordained in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES), Ash’s ministry took him to many places in many roles. He pastored churches in MO and IL then transitioned to a public relations role at Covenant Seminary and later to Director of Development for RPCES’s North Presbyterian Missions. When the RPCES was received into the PCA in 1982, he joined Christian Education & Publications (now Committee on Discipleship Ministries), where he served for more than 25 years.

To the family of **Katherine “Katie” Gordon** (GC '23), promoted to glory, December 13, 2025. Katie is survived by her husband, Eric, her children, her mother, and her sister. Katie was an active member of Twin Oaks PCA in St. Louis and served on the board of Providence Classical Christian Academy for several years. After raising six children, she pursued her dream to get a seminary degree, diligently continuing her studies in the face of a cancer diagnosis and graduating with several certificates in 2023.

To the family of **Richard “Dick” N. Gurley** (MATS '15) promoted to glory, February 17, 2026. Dick is survived by his wife, **Cathy L. Gurley** (MATS '15) and large extended family. Dick was a de-

voted follower of Jesus and a faithful member of Zionsville Fellowship for over thirty years. He and his wife participated in mission work both internationally and locally, and Dick also served as a business manager, pilot, and woodworker.

To the family of **Randall James Middeke** (MDiv '93), 71, promoted to glory, January 20, 2026, with his wife Patti Middeke, children, and loved ones surrounding him while Patti sang “Heavenly Day” to him. Randy was a founding member and elder at New City Fellowship–South in St. Louis. He and Patti started their family and were also longtime members of Christian Fellowship in Columbia, MO, before his love of Scripture led him back to St. Louis and Covenant Seminary to earn his degree.

To the family of **Jean Shaw** (MA '79) on her promotion to glory, November 11, 2025, at the age of 96. Jean was a writer, authoring several books and numerous articles on the book of Ecclesiastes. She was a charter member of Chesterfield Presbyterian Church, in Chesterfield, MO.

Publications

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.

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

—Matthew 9:37–38



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