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the NEXT WAVE

Magazine



Next Wave Magazine - July 2026

A Publication Life College Press and the International Circle of Faith



Focused on the prayer that Jesus prayed for His Church (Jn. 17:21) International Circle of Faith is a Christian World Network representing some 40,000 ministers with an estimated 25 million constituents. These lead tens of thousands of churches, ministries, colleges, universities, orphanages & feeding programs, humanitarian aid organizations, chaplaincies. other charities, Christ centered companies and business interests.

www.icof.net

Cover Story

That truth has been tested for two and one-half centuries.

America has not walked a straight road. We have known brilliance and blindness, courage and contradiction, sacrifice and sin. We have fought wars, endured division, wrestled with injustice, expanded liberty, failed our own ideals, corrected course, and struggled again. The American story is not clean enough for vanity, but it is too consequential for cynicism. It is the story of a nation still being measured by the promises it dared to write.

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The Next Wave Magazine

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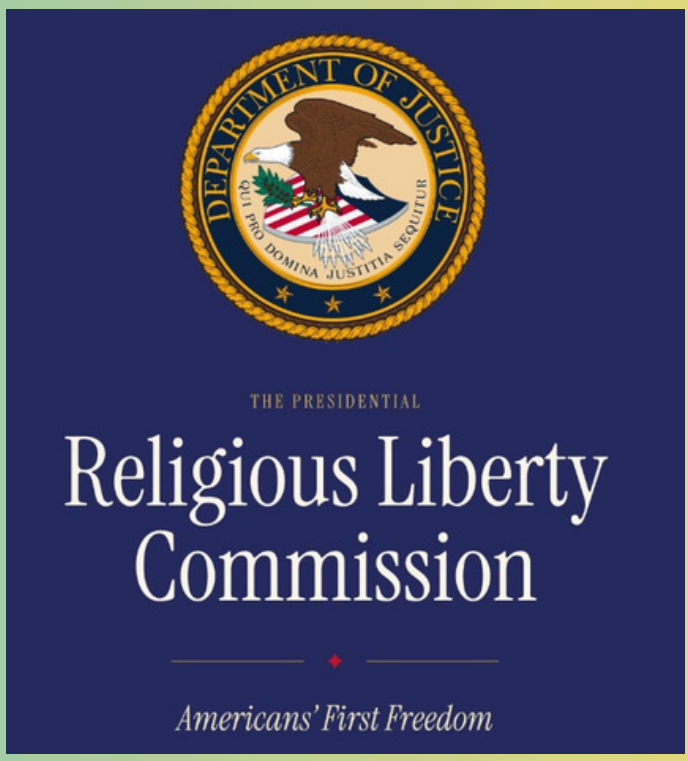
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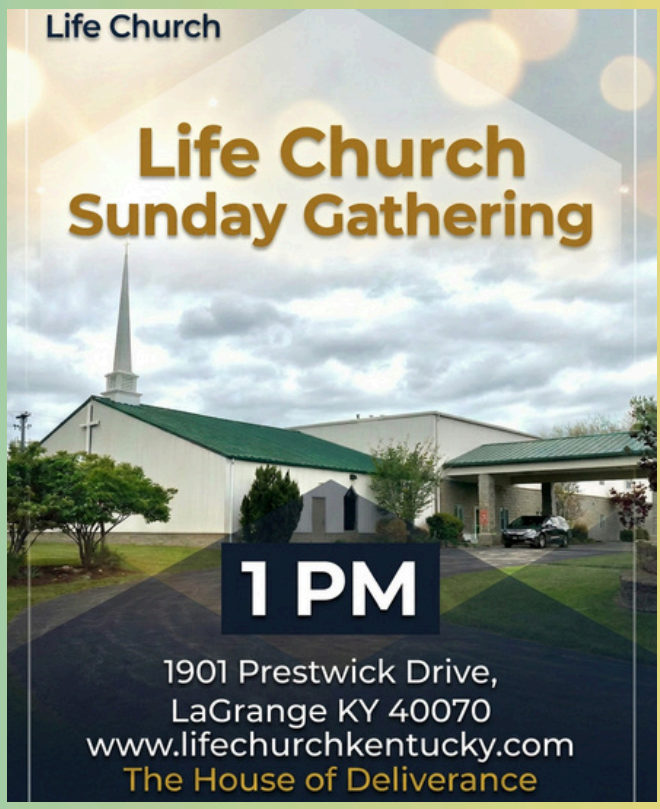


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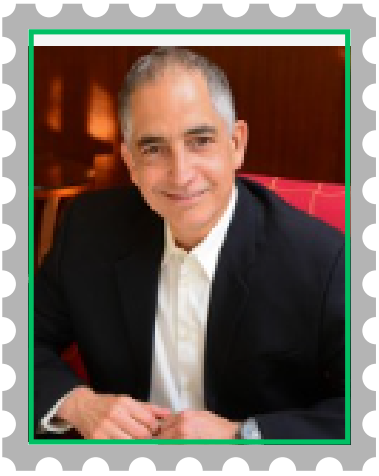
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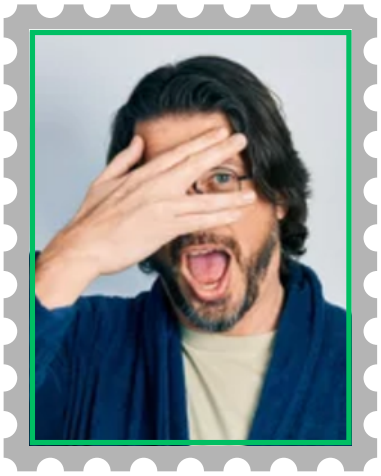
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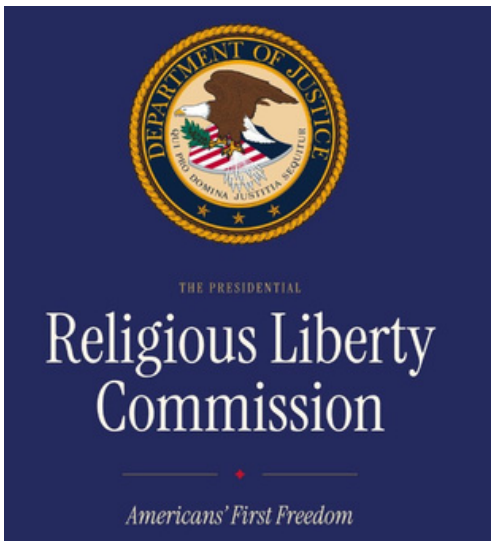


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Solid Rock Bible Church Member





The Religious Liberty Commission Report (in its entirety) AND Part One of Four Summarized by this Publisher for your awareness Can be downloaded here

From the Chief Editor



Dear Beloved Readers,

Across ICOF, the Next Chapter Is Already Moving
As America prepares to celebrate the 250th year of her incredible and unmatched liberty and freedom, we are reminded once again that freedom is never a small matter. It is not merely a patriotic word printed on banners or sung in national songs.
Freedom is stewardship. Freedom is responsibility. Freedom is a sacred opportunity granted by God and preserved by those willing to stand, serve, sacrifice, build, and believe.

This month's cover image, ***"Long May It Wave,"*** is more than a tribute to the American flag. It is a reminder that liberty must continue to wave in the hearts of people who still believe in faith, family, church, conscience, and the right to worship Almighty God without apology. Across this great country, as the National Fair, traveling exhibits, regional celebrations, and national events begin to draw attention to this historic milestone, there will surely be something for every patriot. Yet, for the people of God, this moment must also call us to prayer, gratitude, and renewed commitment.

The International Circle of Faith has never been called to sit quietly on the sidelines of history. We are called to advance the Gospel, strengthen the Church, train leaders, defend biblical truth, and open doors for the next generation. That is not theory. That is happening right now across the ICOF family.

One of the great upcoming moments will be LifeFest 2026, gathering September 5 and 6 in LaGrange, Kentucky. This will not simply be another meeting on the calendar. LifeFest represents a next chapter for Life Church and for the broader family connected through Life College and Seminary, the International Circle of Faith, and the Christian World Network.

When the people of God gather with expectation, something happens. Relationships are strengthened. Vision becomes clearer. Assignments are confirmed. The saints are encouraged. The weary are refreshed. The future becomes less distant because faith begins to put its feet on the ground.

On September 5 at 1:00 PM, we will also celebrate a very special ordination service at Life Church as Bishop Nathaniel and Pastor Jennifer Stutzman are ordained and introduced as the new leaders of Life Church. This is a sacred moment. Ordination is not a mere ceremony. It is not religious decoration. It is the public recognition of a divine assignment, the laying on of hands, the affirmation of calling, and the commissioning of servants who have said yes to the work of the Lord.

The Church needs leaders who understand that ministry is not performance. It is service. It is sacrifice. It is shepherding. It is standing before God on behalf of people and standing before people on behalf of God.

We rejoice with Bishop Nathaniel and Pastor Jennifer, and we invite friends, ministers, family, and the broader Life Church community to join in this celebration. A new chapter deserves witnesses. A holy assignment deserves prayer. A church stepping forward deserves support.

At the same time, the Christian World Network is preparing for another important step forward. Later this month, CWN will make its initial efforts to *soft-launch* the CWN Global Mall, a marketplace where Christians can find goods and services from other Christians. Now, let us be clear. This is not merely a commercial idea. This is a Kingdom idea.

For too long, the Church has been told to gather on Sunday while sending its economic strength everywhere else, Monday through Saturday. Yet Christian families own businesses. Christian professionals provide services.

Christian creators make products. Christian ministries need resources. Christian consumers make purchasing decisions every day. Why should we not create a place where Churchgoers can support the Church through the marketplace? Supporting Christian enterprise is not a replacement for missions, tithing, or generosity. It is another practical way to strengthen the household of faith.

The CWN Global Mall has the potential to become a meeting place for Kingdom commerce, trusted relationships, and values-driven support. We understand that every great work begins somewhere. A soft launch allows us to test, learn, improve, and grow. But the principle is already clear: when believers support one another with excellence and integrity, the whole Body is strengthened.

Last, but far from least, we are excited that The Next Wave Magazine is undergoing yet another upgrade. Our Managing Publisher, David Dunworth, is applying additional creative flair and editorial structure to make the magazine even more useful for our readers. The coming layout will be organized by initiative so readers can more easily find exactly what they are seeking.

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In His Grace,

Bernie L Wade

Bishop Bernie L. Wade, PhD

President – International Circle of Faith



Long May It Wave

On July 4, 2026, America marks 250 years of independence, a milestone few could have imagined when a fragile new nation declared its freedom from England. At the beginning, the odds were long, the future uncertain, and the world was not waiting for America to succeed.

Yet here we are.

Across two and one-half centuries, the United States has endured war, division, injustice, controversy, cultural upheaval, and painful seasons of correction. Our story has never been perfect, but it has remained unfinished. That is part of America's enduring strength. We have stumbled, struggled, repented, rebuilt, and continued reaching toward the ideals written into our founding promise.

Old Glory still flies.

She flies not because America has avoided hardship, but because generation after generation has believed this nation was worth defending, improving, praying for, and renewing. Her stripes remind us of sacrifice. Her stars remind us of union. Her movement in the wind reminds us that freedom must never become still, stale, or taken for granted.

COMING SOON!


DEVOTION
Coffee
PREMIUM COFFEE BEANS
ROASTED WITH PURPOSE
COFFEE THAT GIVES BACK
DEVOTION
Coffee
COFFEE THAT GIVES BACK
CHURCH LOGO
YOUR CHURCH
CHARITY LOGO
YOUR CAUSE
TOGETHER, STRONGER, IMPACT THAT LASTS
FAITH + COMMUNITY + PURPOSE
Beanedict
The Mission Bean
Small bean. Big mission.

What is Really Going on in Central City, Louisiana?

by Bishop Bernie L. Wade Ph.D.

SHOWCASING



'These individuals' actions present as immune to any scrutiny by local authorities.'

For the past several years, a church near the suburban Central City area of East Baton Rouge (Parish), Louisiana, has repeatedly grabbed national headlines. The church is **Life Tabernacle,** 9323 Hooper Road, Baton Rouge.

According to the church website, nearly anyone can get a ride to worship at Life Tabernacle. *"We pick up adults and children alike for services so you can worship with us with our 45 buses that cover the Greater Baton Rouge area, Hammond, Denham Springs, Walker, Plaquemine, Port Allen, Prairieville, and more."*[1] So what has propelled this church to receive so much generally unwanted attention?

Big Brother

Reportedly, a disturbed individual who is a neighbor across the street from the church (allegedly Scott Sherwin - name or alias), his family, and his fellow white supremacists all participate in some self-directed domestic terroristic agenda. These individuals' actions present as immune to any scrutiny by local authorities. Why they are being protected by local law enforcement raises many questions, including but not limited to, why are they surveilling this church? Are they wiretapping the church? Is a local police department constitutionally permitted to run covert operations against a church? Why would a person or persons be given broad surveillance equipment by law enforcement? Why are the people of Life Tabernacle subjected to such intolerance rather than being protected by those *sworn to protect and serve?*

[1] https://www.ltcbr.com/

There is no doubt that the activities by these people violate a plethora of state and Federal laws. According to interviews with Scott Sherwin, he is some kind of paid informant for the FBI. He has been granted special privileges to violate the civil liberties of his neighbors and, by default, everyone who passes his house on the busy road.

All were subjected to his creepy surveillance activities. The Central City News reports that Sherwin interviewed with French television in the spring of 2020 and showed a surveillance system installed at his home (allegedly by the FBI) to spy on members of Life Tabernacle and other neighbors.





Interviews with locals who were willing to speak with us indicate that the neighbors (alias Sherwin) are unofficial spokespeople for a portion of the community. This unnamed portion of the community is apparently the white supremacist portion. These racists accuse the members of Life Tabernacle of fondness for black people and others that these self-styled vigilantes feel are undesirable. To make matters worse, they contend, many black people attend church services and other activities at Life Tabernacle.

When you attend a service at Life Tabernacle, you can see for yourself that the locals are correct. Life Tabernacle, while a predominantly white church, has a healthy representation of other ethnicities, including black people who are worshiping, singing in the choir, playing musical instruments like the drums or guitar for worship, etc. Life Tabernacle does not consider people different based on the color of their skin. This vibrant Pentecostal-style church presents, like most Pentecostal churches, a lot of emotion during its worship. All the attendees that we were able to observe, including the black ones, appear to enjoy the experience.



Pastors Shay & Tony Spell with a young member of their congregation

The current Pastors are Mark Anthony “Tony” and his wife, Shay Spell. Apparently, the Spells are color blind, expecting that God does not prefer one race of people over another. The Gospel they preach is ‘whosoever will”. The Spells obviously do not believe in the “Separate but equal” Jesus. All are welcome at Life Tabernacle.

Life Tabernacle was founded in 1959 by the late Bishop B.A. and Dorothy Spell. The current Pastor, Tony Spell, is Spell’s grandson. The church was originally in the inner city of Baton Rouge on the west end and later relocated to Plank Road near the airport.

Bishop Spell and his family connected with many other families over the decades. Together, those families have served the greater Baton Rouge area for over 60 years. Bishop Spell and Life Tabernacle have been instrumental in the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ nationally and internationally, helping with many missions’ efforts, literacy, and were instrumental in the establishment of Operation Christmas Child.**[2]**

[2]https://www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/the-greatest-journey/?utm_source=Bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=m_YYGJ-B26V&utm_content=TGJad&msclkid=c8176276438f1f8f4959084b66e06d3c&utm_term=operation%20christmas%20child

The move toward suburban Central City, Louisiana, by Life Tabernacle, afforded the congregation a more spacious area where they built a beautiful facility. However, the white supremacists in Centralia are not pleased that Pastor Tony Spell implemented a larger bus program to bring people from other areas of the city to their new church home.

Pastor Spell felt that it was important for Life Tabernacle not to abandon those who live in their former Life Tabernacle locations who may have transportation challenges. In April 2009, Tony Spell became the pastor of his grandparents' church. He felt a burden for the bus ministry starting with one bus. Driving that bus himself. Even within his church, there was pushback from church members over more blacks coming to church. Lots of people left the church in the early years of the current pastor's tenure.



Some of the lily-white community within the city limits of the larger Baton Rouge didn't appreciate hundreds of blacks being bused into their community. Since some are from impoverished areas, Life Tabernacle volunteers feed them breakfast.

Ku Klux Klan

This author toured the Life Tabernacle facility. It is a beautiful campus, made even more beautiful by the plethora of people from a wide variety of ethnicities and backgrounds. It is amazing that this facility, so excellent that you would not be embarrassed to invite the Governor to visit, is open several times a week to the underprivileged.

It is a marvelous testimony to the people of God. Nevertheless, that is the problem. Life Tabernacle does indeed welcome black people to its church. In most places in the United States (in 2026), a church welcoming people of all would seem quite normal. However, this is Louisiana. In Louisiana, the sentiment that fuels the **Ku Klux Klan (KKK)** is still vibrant.

Since before the American Civil War, blacks have been the primary target of self-directed haters. These perpetrate crimes against people with whom they disagree. Sadly, there are other places with the same stained pedigree. One county Sheriff has markers on a map that show where the black people live in that county. Some churches in Louisiana have bylaws that prohibit membership of persons of color. However, Life Tabernacle does not conform to these antiquated visions of racial hatred.



Never fear, citizens! The Central City Police is sworn to **“Protect and Serve”**. However, law enforcement in Central City has demonstrated that protect and serve is reserved for their special friends and family and those who are not friendly with black people from other areas of the Parish.

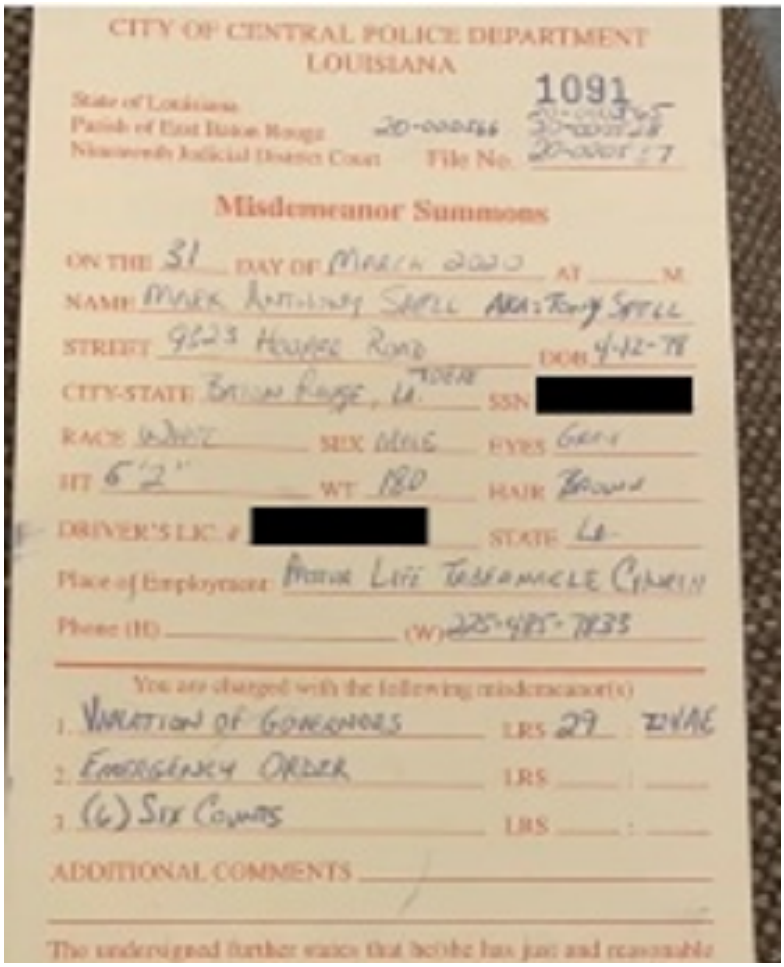
As these events percolated and marinated, white supremacists in the area found a way to run a false flag operation. Pastor Tony Spell not only refuses to conform to the visions of the **KKK** for Louisiana, but he also does not expect that the State of Louisiana should attempt to control constitutionally protected freedom to worship. This type of activity recalls the FBI and other agencies conducting similar operations on historic black churches in the 1960s.

When Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards forced churches in his state to close, Life Tabernacle continued having regular services. The media fueled a plethora of wild accusations about the members of Life Tabernacle all dying from COVID and other scare tactics, but they all proved to be false and irrational.

In fairness, Louisiana was not the only State that took vicious aim at the church. However, the COVID restrictions provided an opportunity for the bigoted agenda of the neighbors of Life Tabernacle. How the FBI came to be involved in targeting Life Tabernacle is a subject that current FBI Director Kash Patel should vigorously investigate (this article has been forwarded to the FBI).

When Life Tabernacle leaders rejected Governor Edward’s edict to stop having church. They complied as best they could in the face of a totalitarian regime. They held services outdoors in a tent. As the COVID hysteria increased, the tent was determined not to be good enough by local law enforcement.

So, the church moved back indoors for services. Then, local law enforcement arrested Tony Spell for having church services. Oddly, no other person was charged or implicated at the large church. Pastor Tony Spell had to wear an ankle bracelet for around two years.



CITY OF CENTRAL POLICE DEPARTMENT
LOUISIANA

1091

State of Louisiana
Parish of East Baton Rouge
Nineteenth Judicial District Court File No.

Misdemeanor Summons

ON THE 31 DAY OF March 2020 AT M.
NAME Mark Anthony Spell AKA: Tony Spell
STREET 9623 Hooper Road DOB 4-12-78
CITY-STATE Baton Rouge, La. SSN [redacted]
RACE White SEX Male EYES Green
HT 6'2" WT 180 HAIR Brown
DRIVER'S LIC # [redacted] STATE La.
Place of Employment Family Life Tabernacle Church
Phone (H) (W) 225-485-7835

You are charged with the following misdemeanor(s)

1. Violation of Governors LRS 29 2014E
2. Emergency Order LRS
3. (6) Six Counts LRS

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The undersigned further states that he/she has just and reasonable

Pandemic-Related Legal Battle

The false flag operation began in early 2020. Pastor Tony Spell held church services at Life Tabernacle on the normal church service schedule times (Sunday morning and evening, and Tuesday evening).

Members were encouraged to follow sanitation guidelines. However, this was in defiance of Governor John Bel Edwards' stay-at-home and indoor gathering limits. In 2021, Tony Spell was arrested while at a prayer service and charged with violating those orders.**[3]**

Law enforcement provided no assistance to help the Spell family or the members of Life Tabernacle. In response to the unprecedented abuse of power, Spell sued state officials, including the Governor, Police Chief Roger Corcoran, and Sheriff Sid Gautreaux, under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and Louisiana state law, alleging First Amendment violations, www.louisianafirstnews.com.

In May 2022, the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled that the state's COVID-19 restrictions violated Spell's fundamental right to exercise religion, finding the orders unconstitutional under strict scrutiny. Spell celebrated the decision as a landmark for religious liberty, calling it a "bad day for Satan, tyranny, communism, and socialism" and a "landmark day for freedom of religion".**[4]**

Local law enforcement is complicit in sophisticated surveillance set up by people in their private home that do not present themselves as sworn officers. Some claim these people are related to law enforcement officials. The home is across the street from the church and the Spell family home from the self-confessing pedophiles across. Allegedly, they even monitor the Spell's privacy in their bedroom. Every time Pastor Tony Spell walked next door to his church, he violated the Governor's unconstitutional edict.

Finally, when he did win at the Louisiana State Supreme Court though they ruled in his favor they gave the legal community that harassed him immunity.

[3] US News | Louisiana Pastor Tony Spell Plans To Sue Over Wrongful Arrests Following Court Victory | Christianity Daily

[4] Louisiana First News | Life Tabernacle church pastor Tony Spell arrested, not taken into custody

Frontal Assault

Emboldened by the lack of consequences to their terrorism, the white supremacist led by the Sherwins has continued their assault on Life Tabernacle members and the Spell family. Media reports verify two very important things:

1. Thousands of verified incidences of the daily attack on Life Tabernacle facilities, members, and the Spell family.

2. A total failure of local law enforcement to respond. Media reports, as we went to press (late June 2026), confirm that local law enforcement agencies **(Police and Sheriff)** have released excuses designed as *"Press Releases"*.

In these documents, they claim they are unaware of all but a few incidents. However, even if that is true, now they know. What are they doing now – the same NOTHING. This total failure by law enforcement to protect US Citizens warrants intervention by the highest levels of the United States Government.

The daily harassment is now on full display. The decision to grant local law enforcement (sic) immunity is on appeal, waiting for the United States Supreme Court. A pastor acquainted with the situation asked, ***"Why haven't these folks been charged with hate crimes for screaming 'N—-R' at those black folks getting off those buses? Six years of this. Threatening to rape little girls."*** Remember, this is apparently ok in Central City and East Baton Rouge Parish.

The truth is, by staying open during COVID, Pastor Tony Spell made lots of pastors look weak in front of their congregations. Tony Spell fought for his constitutional right to assemble. He became the tip of the spear. The stuff his family has had to endure these 6 years is unimaginable.

For the last several years, the neighbor, supported by local police, has terrorized members of the church. He has repeatedly, and daily, provoked all church members. Clear violations in the areas of provocation, harassment, and stalking.

Yet, locally trained law enforcement officers are unable to find any problem. Let's look at this:

Provocation: action or speech that makes someone annoyed or angry, especially deliberately.

Harassment: any unwanted, unwelcome, and repeated behavior that creates a hostile, intimidating, or distressing environment for the person being targeted. It serves no legitimate purpose and causes substantial emotional distress, fear, or humiliation.

Stalking: is a legal and psychological term defined as a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention, harassment, or contact directed at a specific person that causes them to feel fear, intimidation, or substantial emotional distress.

Members of Life Tabernacle have gone on the record that the activities of the Sherwin-led domestic terrorism extend to their private homes and lives. Members of Life Tabernacle are routinely stalked.

Finally, the truth is coming to light. Allegedly, a person with the alias of Tobias *"Toby"* Sherwin and his father (possibly the same Sherwins involved in the lawsuit) are being aided by the local police department to allow their property to serve as a base for **Ku Klux Klan-type** activities. In other words, these white supremacists' threats, intimidation, and any other method to target African Americans, Catholics, Jews, etc. Law enforcement is very protective of this family. The big question is, why is law enforcement so protective of this family and their horrible behavior?

I'm confused!

Recently, this *"Toby"* shouted from a position on the public highway to Pastor Tony Spell, ***"Tony, I am going to rape your wife and your grandchildren."*** Likely, this was a substance-abusing person.

Certainly, no normal person would conduct themselves in such a manner. Especially one protected by local law enforcement. So, Pastor Tony Spell crawled out from under the church bus he was doing maintenance work on and went to see what manner of mess *"Toby"* was projecting today.

These were daily occurrences, but Pastor Tony Spell took *"Toby"* at his word that he would look for an opportunity to come to Pastor Spell's home and rape his wife. Video evidence shows that Pastor Tony Spell jaunted across the busy street and walked up to this *"Toby."*

"Toby" finally got his shot and began throwing punches at Pastor Tony Spell. Although "Toby" is reportedly 20 years old, he found out that Spell, who is a grandfather nearly 50 years old, was well capable of defending himself from the physical assault, but continued as they say to ***"put a hurtin'*** on *"Toby" "Toby"* ran away crying, and the local police in the best impression they could muster of law enforcement officers arrived and arrested Pastor Tony Spell.

Apparently, self-defense is a crime in East Baton Rouge Parish if the person defending himself is a person known to be friendly toward black people, is a member of Life Tabernacle, or is Tony Spell. A concerted media effort has ensued to paint Pastor Spell as the aggressor.

Everyone Considered Him the Coward of the County

The lyric *"sometimes you gotta fight when you're a man"* comes from the classic 1979 country song ***"Coward of the County"*** by Kenny Rogers. In the song, the lyric means that while it is noble to avoid violence and walk away from trouble, there are extreme situations—specifically when protecting the honor and safety of a loved one—where a man must stand his ground and use physical force to defend what is right.

The song tells the story of a young man named Tommy whose father dies in prison. On his deathbed, the father pleads with Tommy never to seek revenge and promises him that *"you don't have to fight to be a man."*

Because Tommy heeds this advice, the townspeople label him a *"coward."* Years later, his wife, Becky, is violently assaulted by three men. Remembering his father's words, Tommy tries to keep the peace, but he realizes that letting such a horrific act go unpunished would make him a bystander to evil rather than a protector. He locks himself in a bar with the three men and severely beats them in a brutal fight.

Afterward, he addresses his late father, acknowledging that he tries to be a pacifist whenever he can, but concluding: ***"And Papa, I should hope you understand, sometimes you gotta fight when you're a man."*** Ultimately, the song explores the complex morality of masculinity, suggesting that true bravery sometimes means stepping up to fight evil when all other options have been exhausted.

The case has captured National Attention. Concerned citizens are shocked. Christians are asking why Life Tabernacle is not being protected. A concerned citizen questioned, six years of racial slurs, indecent exposure of genitalia to members of the church, including small children, guns waved at the congregants, horrible, filthy language screamed at the members as they enter and exit the church, spotlights being shone in their faces, they despise black people and continually scream the *N* word to the members as well as the visitors. You can clearly see who got hauled to jail yesterday! Not the instigator, the pastor did!

While the pastor was trying to change out the dead batteries in church buses, he was screamed at, cursed, and had to listen to this individual tell him how he was going to rape his wife and precious grandbabies. The instigator then told the pastor that he was going to kill his family the next time he went out of town. After being harassed, verbally assaulted, and threatened for quite a while, he then asked the pastor what the F he was going to do about it! The pastor didn't tell him; he showed him. ***FAFO!***

This pastor and his church feed over 500 people a week. They serve over 50 busloads every week. They pack lunches and feed the homeless. Over 27 nationalities are fed, loved, and protected at this church. These precious people should never have to endure 6 years of this abuse!! Everyone deserves to be able to worship freely and safely.

I encourage everyone to contact their representatives and President Donald J. Trump. The abuse of people based on their color is not acceptable.

The Louisiana Legislature has answered

While local law enforcement agencies were quick to harass Pastor Tony Spell and the members of Life Tabernacle, the Louisiana Legislature was paying attention. On June 2, 2026, **ACT 379 (2026)** of the Louisiana legislature went into effect. The legislation protects churches and church members like those at Life Tabernacle.

It will not take a lawyer to understand that *"Toby"* is in serious violation of Louisiana law.

Here are excerpts from the bill:

A. Obstruction of the freedom of worship at a church or other place of worship is committed when a person does any of the following:

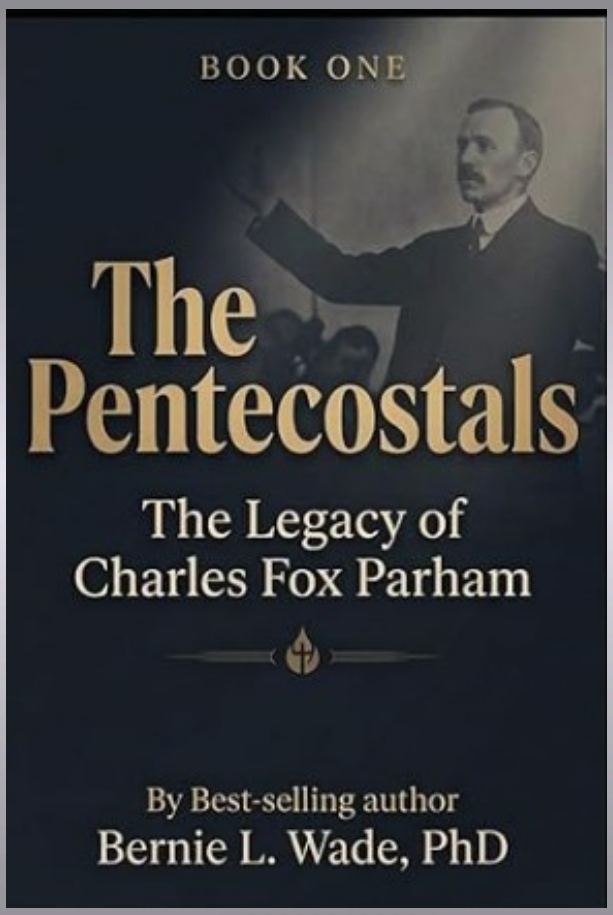
(1) Uses force, the threat of force, physical obstruction, intentional injury, or attempted intentional injury, to intimidate or interfere with any person lawfully exercising or seeking to exercise the right of the free exercise of religion at a church or other place of worship that is protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, and by **Article XII, Section 17** of the Constitution of Louisiana. Local law enforcement in Central City and East Baton Rouge Parish are complicit in ignoring the law and protecting Life Tabernacle, their clergy, and members as clearly outlined in the legislation.

This case was developing at our print deadline.

For those interested in the fair and equitable support of Life Tabernacle Church and its Pastor, Family, and Congregation, please donate at: https://www.ltcbr.com/legalfund

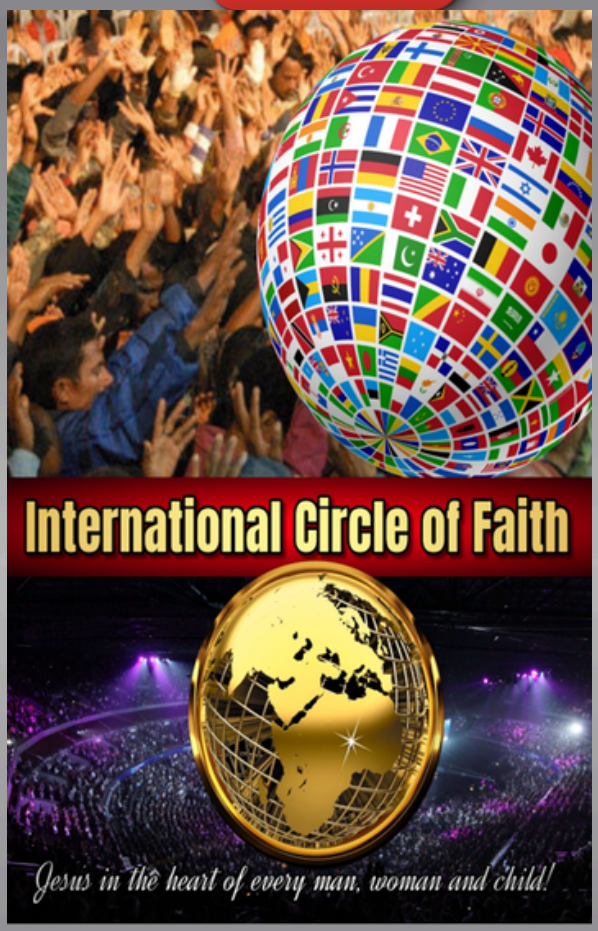


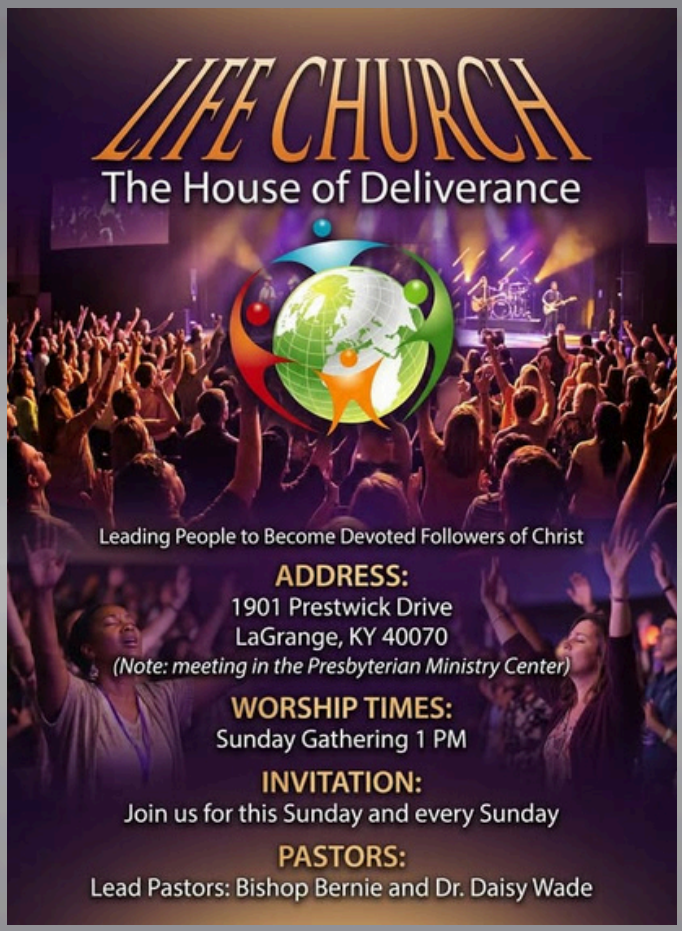
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Recognizing Progress And Achievements of our International Ministry Affiliates

by John Losh II

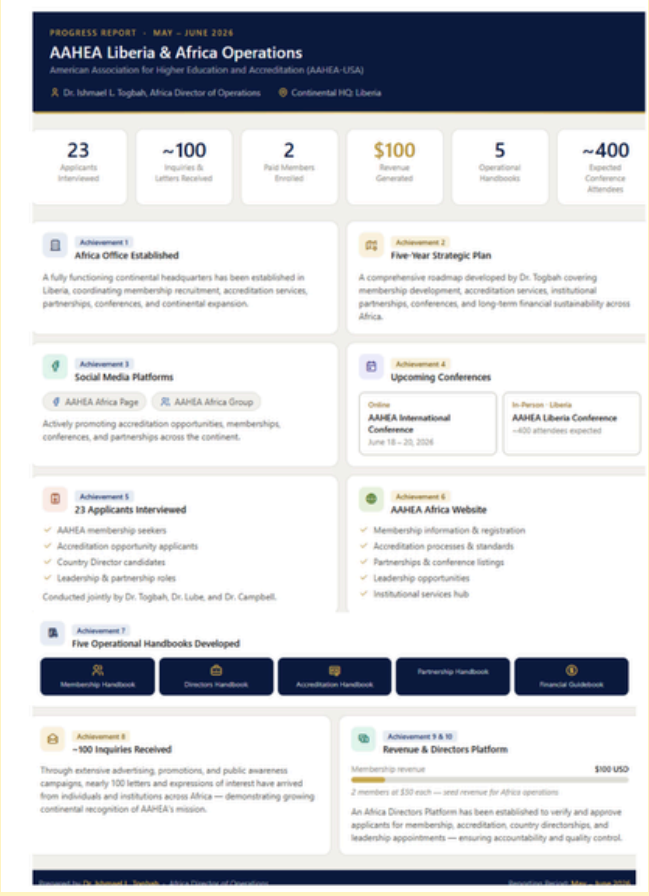
As with any organization, be it Christian or secular, the Ministries of the American Association for Higher Education and Accreditation, and the International Circle of Faith could not exist and have ongoing International impact in the work of the Gospel, without the ever-important contributions of our International Affiliate Team Members.

And we always want them and everyone who is exposed to the ministries to know how much we appreciate and value their service for Christ's Kingdom.

So, I'd like to recognize two of them at this time who have taken the time to send me updates on their work.



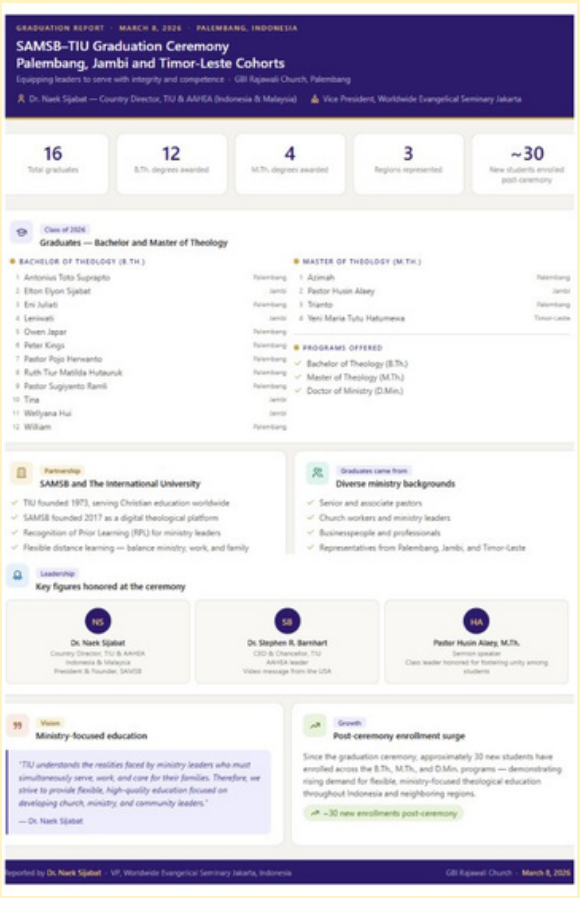
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Next Chapter

Life Church



Bishop Nathaniel *and* Pastor Jennifer Stutzman

Ordination Service — September 5 at 1 PM

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Bishop Nathaniel and Pastor Jennifer
Stutzman have officially joined Life Church.
They will be ordained as our new Lead Pastors.
We ask all our friends and ministers to take time to join us in this celebration.

Refreshments during the “Meet & Greet” after the service.



A Positive Relationship

by Father Richard Rohr OFM

Father Richard describes relationship as the nature of God and reality:
The Christian belief in the Trinity says that God is absolute relatedness. God is our word for the ultimate ecosystem that holds all things in positive relationship (see Colossians 1:17). As long as we're in honest and loving relationship with what is right in front of us, the Spirit can keep working in us, through us, and for us.

Jesus comes as a naked, vulnerable baby, totally dependent upon relationship with others. Naked vulnerability means that we allow otherness to influence and change us. When we think that otherness can't change us or teach us anything, we don't give other people any power over our lives. When we block them by thinking we can stand alone, we are spiritually dead. It's true that nothing stands alone! We are intrinsically like the Trinity, living in an absolute relatedness. We call this love.

We really were made for love, and outside of love, we die very quickly. If we are going to start with Trinity, then loving relationship is the universal pattern, the nature of our being. When we start with a philosophical concept of being and then try to convince everyone that this being is, in fact, love, we don't have a lot of success. I've been a priest for over fifty years and can say that more Christians seem to be afraid of God than in love with God. Sadly, Christians aren't more loving than anyone else; sometimes, we're even less loving than other people! In some ways, that's inevitable if we're basically relating to God out of fear, if we haven't been drawn into the love between the Father and the Son by the Spirit.

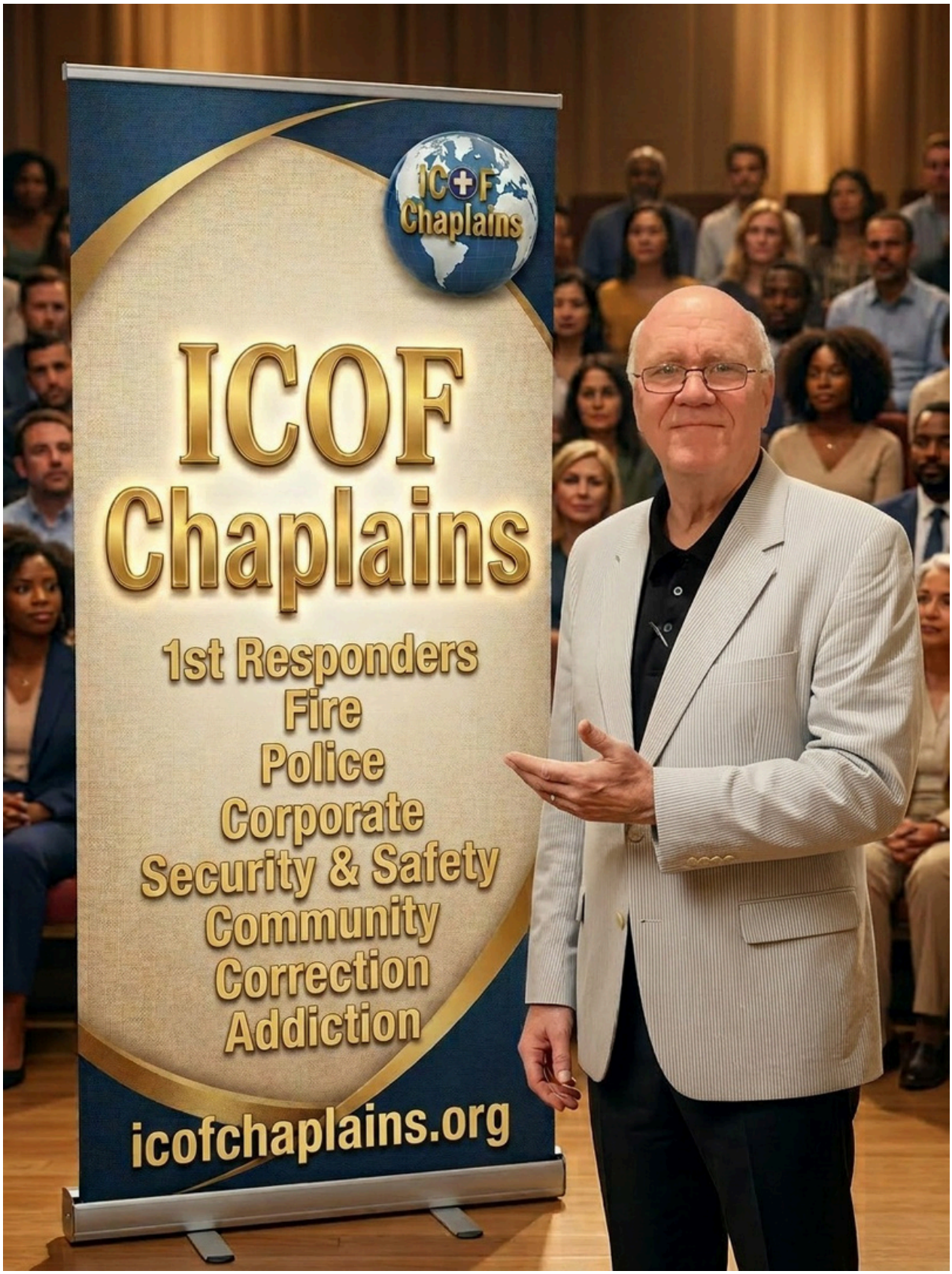
In some ways, the Spirit is the hardest to describe. Jesus says, ***"The Spirit blows where it will"*** **(John 3:8)**. Jesus's message to us is clear: Don't try to control the Spirit; don't try to say where it comes from, where it goes, or who has it. It's group narcissism to believe that only our group has the Spirit or the truth. At less mature levels, every group will try to put God in their own pocket and say God only loves their group, but such a belief has nothing to do with the love of God. It isn't a search for Truth or Holy Mystery, but a search for control. It's the search of the small self, the search to make myself feel superior and to stand alone.

I'm not in control or in charge of this Holy Mystery. I don't presume to understand it; all I know is that I'm forever being drawn through everything. Each manifestation or epiphany of God calls for surrender, communion, and intimacy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Richard Rohr, OFM is an American Franciscan priest and writer on spirituality based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was ordained to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church in 1970, founded the New Jerusalem Community in Cincinnati in 1971, and the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque in 1987


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"A Place for All: Jesus' Radical Inclusivity"



In the heart of the Gospel lies a message so profound, so revolutionary, that it continues to resonate through the ages with a power that cannot be diminished: the inclusion of the outcasts. Jesus Christ, in His life and ministry, embodied a radical inclusivity that defied the norms of His time and turned the social order upside down. The movement He began was not one of exclusivity or elitism, but one of open arms, where those who were marginalized, rejected, and deemed "impure" by the law were welcomed with love and dignity.

The society in which Jesus lived was deeply divided along lines of wealth, power, and religious purity. The poor, the landless, public sinners, tax collectors, and women were often relegated to the fringes, considered unworthy of full participation in the religious and social life of the community. The law, as interpreted by the religious authorities, created barriers that kept these individuals at a distance, reinforcing a system that valued some lives more than others.

In this context, Jesus proclaimed a message that was nothing short of revolutionary. "The last will be first, and the first will be last," He declared, turning the accepted notions of social status and worth on their head. This principle was not merely a promise of future reversal; it was an immediate call to action, a redefinition of how worth and value were to be understood in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus did not simply preach about inclusion; He lived it. He sought out those who were marginalized and welcomed them into His circle. The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus dining with tax collectors, speaking with women in public, and touching the untouchable. These actions were more than acts of kindness; they were profound statements about the nature of God's Kingdom—a Kingdom where love, mercy, and grace were extended to all, regardless of their social or religious standing.

The inclusion of women in Jesus' ministry is particularly striking. In a patriarchal society where women were often seen as inferior and relegated to the background, Jesus treated them with respect and dignity. He spoke with them openly, taught them, and even entrusted them with significant roles in His ministry. The story of Mary and Martha, where Jesus commends Mary for choosing to sit at His feet and learn from Him, is a powerful example of this. In doing so, Jesus was breaking down the barriers that kept women from full participation in religious life, affirming their worth and potential as disciples.



‘ The last will be first, and the first will be last," He declared, turning the accepted notions of social status and worth on their head.’



Similarly, Jesus' interactions with tax collectors and sinners were acts of radical inclusion. Tax collectors were despised by their fellow Jews, seen as collaborators with the Roman occupiers and betrayers of their people. Yet, Jesus not only associated with them, but He also called them to be His disciples.

The story of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector who climbed a tree just to see Jesus, is a poignant illustration of this. When Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus' house, He was not only extending a hand of friendship but also offering a path to redemption and transformation. Zacchaeus' response, a commitment to restitution and generosity, is a testament to the life-changing power of Jesus' inclusive love.



Jesus' inclusivity extended beyond individuals to entire groups who were considered "impure" or unworthy. Lepers, who were forced to live in isolation due to their illness, found in Jesus someone willing to touch them, heal them, and restore them to community. The Samaritan woman at the well, who was not only a woman but also a member of a despised ethnic group, discovered in Jesus someone who spoke to her with respect and revealed deep truths about God and worship.

These encounters were not just personal acts of compassion; they were declarations that in God's Kingdom, there are no outsiders.

The principle that *"the last will be first"* encapsulates this inclusive ethos. In God's Kingdom, the world's values are turned upside down. The poor, the marginalized, and the *"last"* in society are given a place of honor, while the powerful and privileged are called to humility. This is not just a future hope but a present reality that Jesus inaugurated through His life and ministry. It is a call for His followers to live in a way that reflects this Kingdom, breaking down the barriers that divide and creating communities where all are welcomed and valued.

The inclusivity of Jesus' movement was not merely a social or political statement; it was a profound theological declaration about the nature of God. God, as revealed in Jesus, is a God of love, mercy, and grace, who seeks out the lost, the broken, and the marginalized. The inclusivity of the Kingdom is a reflection of God's own heart, a heart that is open to all and that desires for all to be brought into the fullness of life.

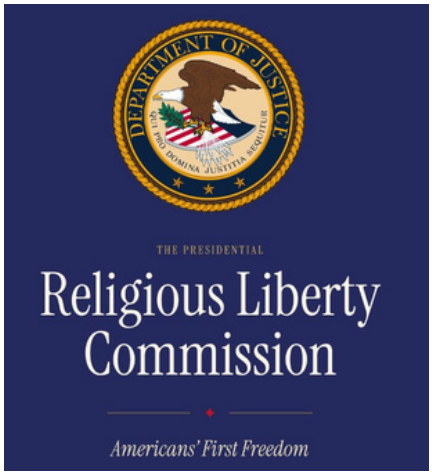
For the early Christian community, this message of inclusion was both a challenge and a comfort. It challenged them to break away from the exclusionary practices of their society and to create a new kind of community, one where Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female were all one in Christ. It comforted them with the knowledge that in Christ, they were loved and valued, regardless of their social or religious status.

Today, the call to inclusion remains as urgent as ever. In a world where divisions based on race, class, gender, and religion continue to create barriers, the message of Jesus challenges us to live out the inclusivity of the Kingdom. It calls us to reach out to those who are marginalized, to welcome the stranger, to embrace those who are different from us, and to see in every person the image of God.

Inclusion is not just about tolerance or acceptance; it is about creating a community where all are valued, where the last is given a place of honor, and where the love of God is made manifest in our relationships with one another. It is about living in a way that reflects the radical inclusivity of Jesus, who welcomed the outcast, embraced the sinner, and declared that in God's Kingdom, there are no outsiders.

As we seek to follow Jesus, may we be inspired by His example to live lives of inclusion, to break down the barriers that divide, and to create communities where all are welcomed and valued. May we embody the inclusive love of God in our words and actions, and in doing so, may we bear witness to the truth that in God's Kingdom, the last will be first, and all are invited to share in the fullness of life?





The Religious Liberty Commission Report (in its entirety) AND Part One of Four Summarized by this Publisher for your awareness

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Wisdom in the Wilderness:

“ *A Call to Obedience"*



In **Jeremiah 9:12-14**, the prophet Jeremiah calls upon the people to reflect on the devastation that has befallen their land. Through his words, a profound question is posed: *“Who is wise enough to understand why this has happened?”* This passage is rich with meaning, as it deals not only with the physical destruction of the land but also with the spiritual collapse of the people of Israel. The ultimate reason for the devastation is given directly by God, who speaks through the prophet, saying, *"It is because they abandoned my instruction, which I set before them, and did not obey my voice or walk according to it."*

The theme of this passage centers around spiritual disobedience and the consequences of abandoning God’s instruction. It reflects the recurring biblical narrative that disobedience to God leads to physical and spiritual ruin, while faithfulness brings life and blessing. This passage speaks both to the historical context of Israel and its

exile and to the broader spiritual truths that apply to the human condition across time.

The Consequences of Spiritual Disobedience: *A Reflection on Jeremiah 9:12-14*

In the book of Jeremiah, the prophet stands as a beacon of truth during a time of great turmoil and destruction. Israel, once a proud and prosperous nation, finds itself in ruins, and Jeremiah is tasked with delivering a message explaining why. **Jeremiah 9:12-14** encapsulates a moment of introspection—a moment in which the people are asked to understand the cause of their downfall. God's response, as recorded by Jeremiah, is simple but cutting: the people have abandoned His instruction. They no longer heed His voice, nor do they walk in His ways.

This disobedience has not only led to spiritual decay but also physical devastation, as the land is described as "scorched like a wilderness, so no one can pass through." Here, we see the intimate connection between the state of the soul and the state of the land—a theme deeply rooted in biblical thought.



The metaphor of the wilderness, used in this passage, is particularly poignant. In the Bible, the wilderness is often a place of both testing and revelation. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years after their exodus from Egypt, a period in which they were tested, but also shaped as a people by their reliance on God.

The wilderness is a place where God speaks to His people, but it is also a place of barrenness, where life struggles to survive. In Jeremiah's time, the land had become a wilderness not just because of external invasion or disaster, but because the people had turned their backs on God. The barrenness of the land mirrors the barrenness of their souls.

The abandonment of divine instruction is a key element of this passage. God's laws and commandments were meant to be a guide for the people, a way of life that would lead them to prosperity, peace, and a close relationship with Him. Yet, when these instructions were ignored or outright rejected, the people were left adrift. Without God's voice guiding them, they stumbled, and their society crumbled from within. The wilderness is not just a physical space but a metaphor for the spiritual desolation that occurs when humanity distances itself from the divine.

The voice of God, which the people refused to obey, is another critical aspect of this passage. Throughout the Bible, God speaks to His people, whether through prophets, through scripture, or through direct revelation. His voice is a source of wisdom, instruction, and comfort. Yet, in this instance, the people had grown deaf to God's call.

They had allowed other voices—those of idols, of foreign nations, of their desires—to drown out the voice of the One who had brought them out of Egypt, who had given them the Promised Land. In this disobedience, they severed their connection to the source of life itself. Just as a tree withers when its roots no longer draw water, so too does a society wither when it no longer draws on the wisdom and instruction of God.

This passage also raises a critical question: Who is wise enough to understand this? Wisdom, in biblical terms, is not merely intellectual knowledge but a deep understanding rooted in reverence for God. The wise person, in this context, is the one who listens to God's voice and walks according to His instruction. Wisdom is portrayed as the ability to discern the deeper spiritual truths behind physical events. The land's destruction is not just a natural consequence; it is a spiritual symptom of the people's disobedience. True wisdom, then, is recognizing that the material world is intimately connected with the spiritual and that human actions—particularly in relation to God's commandments—have profound consequences.

The message of **Jeremiah 9:12-14** is timeless. Though it was written in a specific historical context, its themes resonate across the ages. Humanity still grapples with

the same fundamental issues of obedience, wisdom, and the consequences of turning away from divine instruction. In our modern world, where many voices clamor for our attention, the challenge remains to discern God's voice amid the noise.

Like the Israelites, we are faced with choices that lead either to life and prosperity or to desolation and wilderness. The key, as Jeremiah so powerfully reminds us, is to listen to the voice of God and to walk in His ways.

In conclusion, the wilderness described in **Jeremiah 9:12-14** is both a literal and metaphorical space—a barren land reflecting the barren souls of those who have abandoned God's instruction. The devastation of the land serves as a visible sign of the spiritual devastation caused by disobedience. Yet, implicit in this passage is also a hope: the possibility of restoration if the people turn back to God and once again walk in His ways. Wisdom is found in recognizing this truth and responding to God's call with faithfulness and obedience.

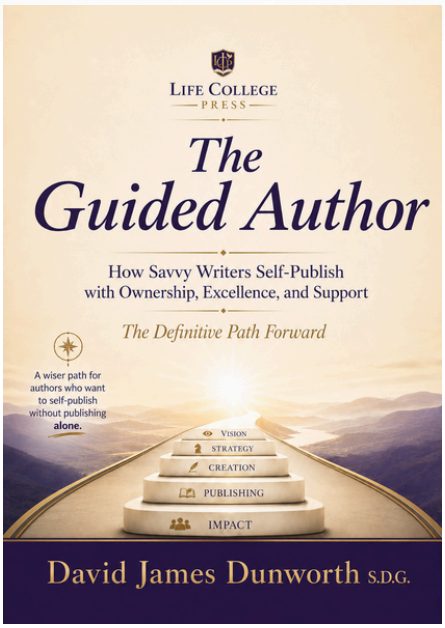
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10 Ways We Can Make Faithful Disciples in a Secular World

by Bishop Joseph Mattera

SHOWCASING



"True effectiveness comes not from increasing attendance, but from transforming lives through intentional disciple-making."

The gospel is relevant in every culture and every generation because Jesus created the human heart, and His Word speaks powerfully to it in every context. The gospel of the Kingdom is transhistorical, transcultural, and multi-generational—it endures forever.

When we align with His method, we will see lasting impact: Jesus did not commission us to build crowds, but to make disciples. True effectiveness comes not from increasing attendance, but from transforming lives through intentional disciple-making.

1. **Establish the Absolute Lordship of Christ**

Discipleship begins with a revelation of Jesus as Lord—not merely Savior.

Jesus declared: ***"Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"*** **(Luke 6:46)**

"You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am." **(John 13:13)**

We are not calling people to add Jesus to their lives—we are calling them to surrender their lives under His rule.

The early church did not preach a therapeutic gospel but a royal proclamation: Jesus is King. Until this is settled, discipleship will remain shallow and conditional.

2. **Prioritize Incarnational Discipleship Over Institutional Programs**

In a skeptical age, people are not looking for polished programs—they are looking for authentic lives.

"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (**Matthew 4:19)**. This is formation before function.

"I have called you friends… for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." **(John 15:15)**.

This is transparency and shared life.

He lived life with them daily, not just in teaching moments (Luke 8:1). Disciples are formed through proximity, observation, and shared life. We must move from platform-based Christianity to life-on-life discipleship.



3. **Develop a Robust Biblical Worldview**

Postmodernism has discipled an entire generation to reject truth, redefine identity, and idolize personal autonomy.

This is why Paul commands:
'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' **(Romans 12:2)**.

Discipleship today must include intentional worldview formation—teaching believers how to think biblically about truth, identity, sexuality, purpose, and culture. As Augustine of Hippo articulated, history is shaped by two competing loves: the love of God and the love of self. Every culture reflects one or the other.

4. R**estore the Fear of the Lord and the Pursuit of Holiness**

We cannot make faithful disciples without calling people to holiness. Scripture is clear: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. In a culture that normalizes sin and celebrates compromise, holiness becomes a prophetic witness. Grace does not eliminate the call to holiness—it empowers it.

5. **Anchor Disciples in Scripture as the Final Authority**

Postmodern culture elevates feelings over facts and experience over truth. This is why we must ground disciples in the authority of Scripture. Progressive Christians interpret the scriptures through the lens of culture instead of interpreting culture through the lens of Scripture.

Paul wrote: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*" **(2 Timothy 3:16-17)**.

Without a deep commitment to the Word, disciples will be shaped more by culture than by Christ.

The Word of God must not just inform our sermons—it must form our lives.

6. C**enter Discipleship Around the Table of the Lord and Spiritual Rhythms**

In a distracted and fragmented world, disciples need sacred rhythms that anchor them in Christ.

The early church practiced **Acts 2:42.** These rhythms created stability, identity, and spiritual depth. Ignatius of Antioch referred to Holy Communion as *"the medicine of immortality."*

We must recover the power of communion, prayer, and shared life as central to discipleship—not optional extras.

7. **Form Disciples Through the Cross, Not Comfort**

Modern Christianity often produces consumers instead of disciples because it avoids the cost of following Jesus. But Jesus made it clear: We need to take up our cross and follow Him.

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily..." **(Luke 9:23)**

Discipleship requires death to self, not self-fulfillment. Tertullian famously declared, *"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."* The early church grew because believers were willing to suffer—not because they were comfortable.

8. **Build Strong, Counter-Cultural Communities**

In an age of isolation and digital connection without real relationships, the church must model true biblical community. Jesus said: ***"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*** **(John 13:35).** Disciples are not formed in isolation—they can only be formed in covenant community.

The early church stood out for its radical love, generosity, and unity amid a fragmented society.

9. E**quip Every Disciple to Be a Witness**

Discipleship is incomplete until it becomes missional. Jesus said in Acts 1:8 that every believer is called to be a witness—not just clergy or full-time church. We must raise up disciples who see their workplace, neighborhood, and city as their mission field.

10. **Cultivate a Christological Ecclesiology**

Ultimately, discipleship must flow from a Christ-centered understanding of the church.

Paul reminds us that the church is not built around personalities, brands, or movements—it is built around Christ.

A Christological ecclesiology ensures that:

- Christ is the focus.
- Christ is the standard.
- Christ is the source of life and authority.

When the church reflects Christ, disciples will be formed into His image.

Conclusion

We are living in a moment of great cultural upheaval—but also great opportunity. The early church transformed a pagan empire not through political power or cultural influence, but through making faithful disciples who embodied the life of Christ.

If we return to:

- the Lordship of Christ
- incarnational discipleship
- biblical worldview
- holiness
- the authority of Scripture
- sacramental rhythms
- the way of the cross
- covenant community
- missional living
- and a Christ-centered church

We will not merely survive this postmodern age—we will shape it. The goal is not to grow bigger churches, but to raise up faithful, mature, Spirit-formed disciples who reveal Jesus in every sphere of society. This is the call of the hour.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bishop Joseph Mattera is an internationally known author, consultant, and theologian whose mission is to influence leaders who influence culture. He is the founding pastor of Resurrection Church and leads several organizations, including The U.S. Coalition of Apostolic Leaders and Christ Covenant Coalition. Dr Mattera is the author of 13 bestselling books, including his latest, “The Purpose, Power, and Process of Prophetic Ministry,” and is renowned for applying Scripture to contemporary culture. To order his books or join the many thousands who subscribe to his newsletter, go to josephmattera.org



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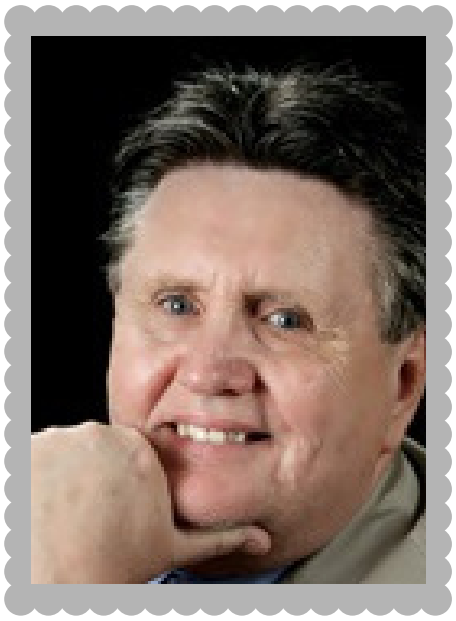
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When the Burden Becomes the Voice

How Worry Can Drown Out the Spirit, and How the Weary Soul Can Learn to Listen Again

by David James Dunworth SDG

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



"Burdens speak, but they do not get the final word. Fear speaks, but it is not Lord. Discouragement speaks, but it is not Shepherd."



There are seasons when trouble does not simply visit the heart. It moves in, settles down, and begins taking up emotional space that once belonged to peace.

A burden can become so loud that prayer feels distant, Scripture feels difficult, and hope feels more like a memory than a living strength. Many believers know this place. They have not stopped believing in God. They have not abandoned their faith. They have not turned their backs on the Lord. Yet somewhere along the way, worry has become the louder voice.

That is one of the quiet dangers of discouragement. It rarely announces itself as rebellion. More often, it enters disguised as exhaustion, responsibility, pressure, fear, disappointment, or unanswered questions. Then, little by little, it narrows the soul's vision until the problem appears larger than the promises of God.

In those moments, the Holy Spirit may still be near. He may still be comforting, correcting, strengthening, and guiding. Jesus told His followers that the Holy Spirit would teach them, remind them of truth, and give a peace different from the peace the world offers.[1] But the anxious heart may struggle to recognize His help because the burden has taken center stage.

The issue is not always that God has been silent. Sometimes the problem is that distress has become the loudest voice in the room.

A financial concern can do this. So can ministry pressure, family conflict, health uncertainty, business anxiety, grief, loneliness, or the private ache of waiting for an answer that has not yet come.

The Bible remains true, but the heart feels too tired to reach for it. Prayer remains available, but the words feel trapped. Worship remains powerful, but the soul feels too heavy to rise.

This is why believers must be watchful in seasons of pressure. A burden may not destroy faith all at once, but it can dull spiritual attention. It can make endurance feel impossible. It can persuade a weary heart to interpret delay as abandonment, hardship as failure, and weakness as proof that God is far away.

But Scripture gives us another way to understand these moments.

Paul prayed that believers would be filled with the knowledge of God's will, strengthened with God's power, and equipped for patient endurance with joy.[2] That reminder matters because Christian endurance is not merely human determination. It is not spiritual stubbornness. It is not pretending the burden is small when it is clearly heavy.

Christian endurance is dependence.

It is the weary soul saying, *"Lord, I cannot carry this rightly without You."*

It is the anxious heart admitting, **"I need Your strength more than I need the illusion of control."**

When discouragement begins to take over, pause and ask:

1. ***What burden** has become the loudest voice in my life right now?*
2. ***Am I interpreting** God through my circumstances, or am I interpreting my circumstances through God's truth?*
3. ***Have I allowed** exhaustion to keep me from Scripture, prayer, worship, or godly counsel?*
4. ***What promise of** God do I need to remember today?*
5. ***What would it** look like to endure this season with patient faith instead of silent resentment?*



It is the believer remembering, “This trial is real, but it is not greater than my God.” Yet when discouragement takes over, joy is often the first thing to disappear. Gratitude becomes difficult. Thanksgiving feels unnatural. The heart begins to focus on what is unresolved rather than what is already secure in Christ.

This is where many believers quietly struggle. They try to endure by gritting their teeth, forcing themselves forward, and calling it faith. They keep going outwardly, but inwardly they become tired, tense, and spiritually dry.

Joyless endurance can become another form of self-reliance.

God does not merely call His people to survive hardship. He invites them to endure with a deeper awareness of His presence, His strength, and His eternal promise. The Lord does not ask the burdened believer to deny pain. He invites the believer to bring pain into the presence of truth.

So, the question becomes deeply personal:
Am I being led by the Spirit, or am I being ruled by the weight I am carrying?

That question is not meant to shame the weary. It is meant to awaken them.

When worry becomes dominant, the soul must return to what is true. God has not forgotten His people. The Spirit has not abandoned the discouraged. The Father has not withdrawn the inheritance promised to His children. The kingdom of light has not dimmed because today feels dark.

This is why Scripture matters so deeply in the life of a burdened believer. The Word of God does not merely give information. It reorders attention. It reminds the heart of what trouble wants us to forget.

Trouble says, *“You are alone.”*

Scripture reminds us that the Lord is near to the brokenhearted.[3]

Fear says, *"This will break you."*

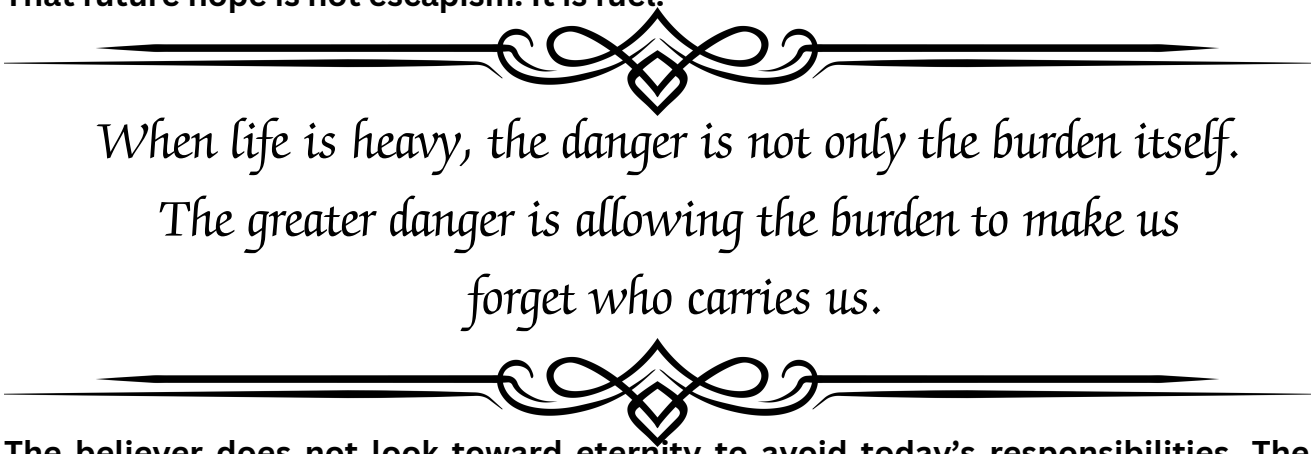
Faith remembers that God gives strength to the weary and renews those who wait upon Him.[4]

Discouragement says, *"There is no way forward."*

The Spirit helps believers in weakness, even when they do not know how to pray as they ought.[5]

There is also a home beyond this heaviness. There is a kingdom untouched by anxiety. There is a day coming when shadows will give way to glory, when burdens will no longer press upon the heart, and when every faithful act of endurance will be gathered into the joy of God's presence.

That future hope is not escapism. It is fuel.



The believer does not look toward eternity to avoid today's responsibilities. The believer looks toward eternity to remember that today's burdens are not ultimate. The pain is real, but it is passing. The pressure is real, but it is temporary. The struggle is real, but it is not sovereign.

Christ is.

Until that day, the believer must resist the temptation to let trouble become the interpreter of truth.

Burdens speak, but they do not get the final word.

Fear speaks, but it is not Lord.

Discouragement speaks, but it is not Shepherd.

The Spirit of God still comforts, strengthens, convicts, and leads. He may work through Scripture, through a trusted friend, through a quiet conviction, through remembered truth, through worship, through prayer, or through a renewed awareness of eternity. But the weary heart must learn to listen again.

When life is heavy, the danger is not only the burden itself. The greater danger is allowing the burden to make us forget who carries us.

The Lord does not despise the burdened believer. He does not turn away from the tired heart. He does not shame the soul that is struggling to rise. His grace is sufficient, and His strength is made perfect in weakness.[6]

Instead, He calls His people back to Himself, back to truth, back to gratitude, back to patient endurance, and back to the quiet confidence that His grace is still enough.
The burden may be loud today.

But the Spirit is still speaking.

And the child of God can learn to listen again.

Scripture References

{1} John 14:26–27
{2} Colossians 1:9–12
{3} Psalm 34:18
{4} Isaiah 40:29–31
{5} Romans 8:26–28
{6} 2 Corinthians 12:9–10

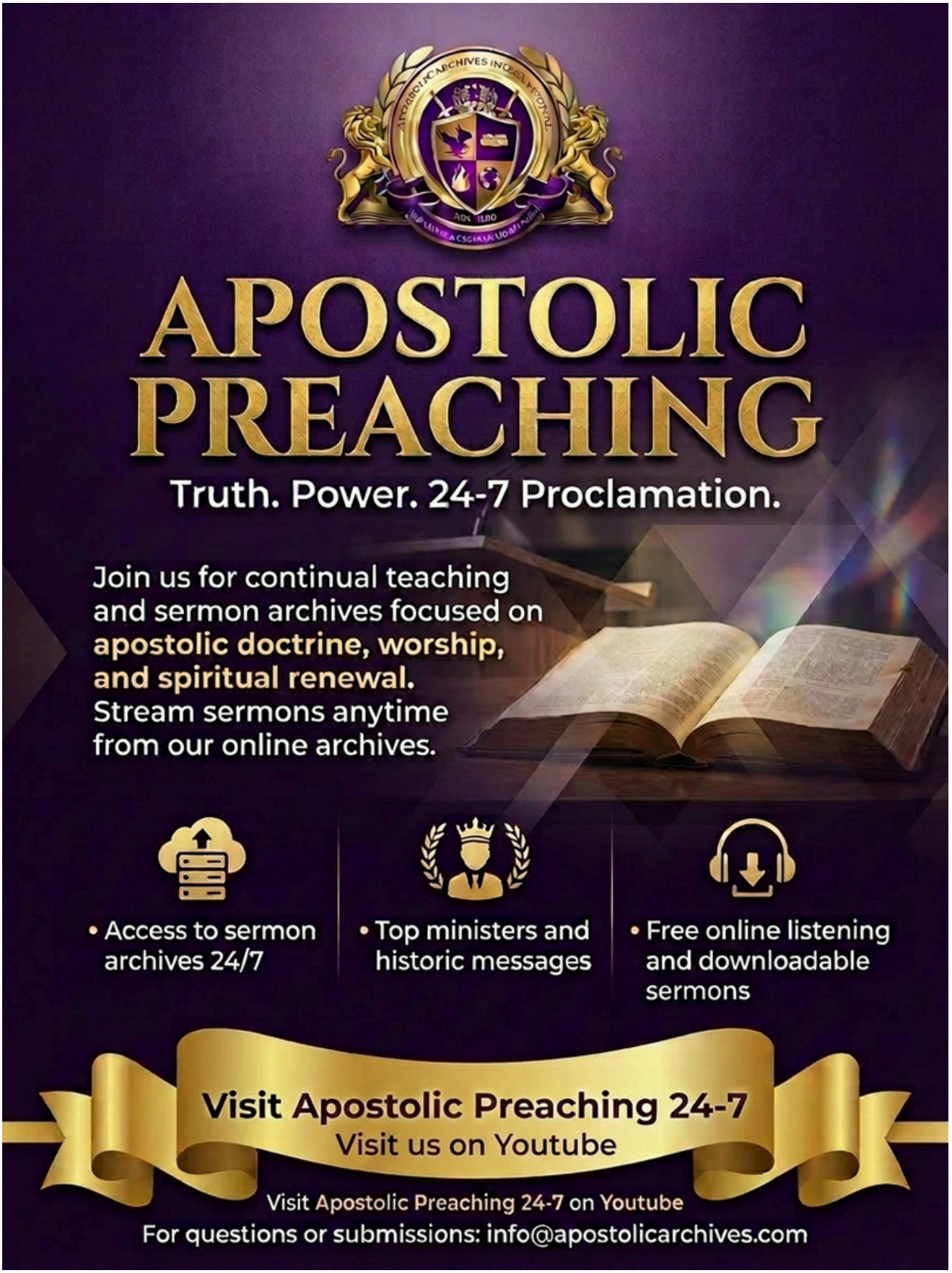
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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SDG = Soli Deo Gloria. *To God Be the Glory*

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Faith And Space Travel

By John W Losh II

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



'The Apollo 11 Moon Landing (prophetically spoken by President Kennedy in his speech on May 25th, 1961) happened in my Birth Year.'

For those that don't know this: Fun Fact: I'm a lifelong Space Fan.

Since God first spoke the words and the universe, including the earth, was created, man quickly developed a fascination with and desire to explore the heavens.

The National Aeronautics & Space Agency was founded on July 29th, 1958. The Apollo 11 Moon Landing (prophetically spoken by President Kennedy in his speech on May 25th, 1961 happened in my Birth Year.

Star Trek: The Original Series started the year my Wife was born, and its original run also ended in my Birth Year. But years later, I watched every episode in syndication. **Thank you, Lucille Ball!** If it weren't for her, Star Trek wouldn't have survived past its original pilot.

I watched Flash Gordon, Space 1999, Lost In Space, the original Star Wars Trilogy, the 1980's Battlestar Galactica, and the spinoff Battlestar Galactica 1980 and Buck Rogers In The 25th Century.

I collected the toys, trading cards, comics, the VHS tapes, DVDs, and more.

I've watched and am still watching many of the other Star Trek series that have followed.

My Current favorite is Star Trek: Enterprise. The theme video depicts a lot of real-life aircraft and space travel history. And while they don't refer to a Christian context, I love the lyrics:

It's been a long road, getting from there to here
It's been a long time, but my time is finally near
And I can feel the change in the wind right now
Nothing's in my way
And they're not gonna hold me down no more
No, they're not gonna hold me down

[Refrain]

Cause I've got faith of the heart
I'm going where my heart will take me
I've got faith to believe. I can do anything
I've got strength, of the soul
And no one's gonna bend or break me
I can reach any star
I've got faith, I've got faith
Faith of the heart

Did you know there is an International Star Trek Fan Association called Starfleet? Its member groups are referred to as ships.

Many Astronauts have chosen the profession because of Star Trek. The very first Space Shuttle (though not used in space), because of overwhelming letters from Trek fans, is named Enterprise. Lots of technology has come from things conceived in TV shows. A large model of the original series Starship Enterprise hangs in the Smithsonian.

Scripture was read during Apollo 11, but it happened privately inside the lunar module before the moonwalk, rather than over a public broadcast.

Astronaut Buzz Aldrin, an elder at Webster Presbyterian Church, chose to read scripture to mark the monumental occasion of landing on the moon.

Key details of the reading include:

The Passage: Aldrin read from a note card with **John 15:5** *("I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.")*

The Context: Aldrin requested a few moments of silent thanksgiving and proceeded to take Holy Communion on the lunar surface using elements pre-packaged by his church. Neil Armstrong observed quietly but did not participate.



During the Space Shuttle Years, I watched every launch and landing I could. My heart broke for all of us affected by the shuttle disasters.

I've watched numerous SpaceX launches. I definitely watched the launch and splashdown of Artemis II. I posted lots of NASA and SpaceX-related articles on social media.

I have YouTubes and blogs by the self-appointed names Space Punk and KC Trekkie. I own lots of NASA, Trek, and other space-related items, including but not limited to T-shirts, Ball caps, a pair of tennis shoes, and a jacket given to me by my Pastor's Dad.

My family and I have visited Space Center Houston, the Air & Space Museums in DC, and more. Recently, just as Star Trek envisions a better future in space, God gave me the idea of what if the planets were all colonized. Folks there would need to hear the Gospel, too. So why not a Starship to take Missionaries, Pastors, their families, and supplies there?

So came the idea for the ESS (Evangelical Starship) **M.A.V.E.R.I CK**. Ministering as Victors, Evangelizing Radically, Instructing Christ's Kingdom that would take "Light Into The Unknown" bearing the registry GSC (Gospel Salvation & Commissioning) 1281 (the month and year I came to Faith in Christ) Launched by the Interplanetary Circle Of Faith (based on our own International Circle Of Faith)

I had AI create an image of the ship, several rooms in it, and even a shuttle craft, and as it did, it provided lots of specs on each. A local friend of mine even created a 3D model. Stay tuned for future adventures of the ESS Maverick.

The Christian faith and space travel are deeply intertwined, with many viewing exploration as a way to fulfill humanity's creation mandate to understand and care for the universe. Astronauts frequently report that viewing the cosmos deepens their faith, and historic milestones—like Buzz Aldrin taking communion on the moon—highlight this ongoing intersection.



Theological Perspectives on Exploration

The Creation Mandate: Many Christians see space exploration as a continuation of humanity's God-given calling to explore, steward, and appreciate the vastness of creation.

The Overview Effect: Looking at the Earth from space has a profound spiritual impact on many astronauts. They describe seeing the planet as a divine gift and a delicate jewel suspended in darkness, which reinforces a sense of awe and providential care.

Extraterrestrial Life: The possibility of intelligent life elsewhere sparks rich debate. Many theologians and organizations, such as the Vatican Observatory, embrace science and suggest that discovering life would only further reveal the grandeur of God's creation, while others interpret scripture as placing humanity's redemption narrative solely on Earth.

Faith in Orbit

Christian astronauts have consistently integrated their faith with their missions, serving as a reminder that science and religion can coexist in extreme environments:

Scripture in Deep Space: Astronauts like Victor Glover (Artemis II) have openly carried Bibles into deep space, using the platform to reflect on creation and unity.

Communion in Space: Following Buzz Aldrin's historic communion on the Apollo 11 mission, Catholic astronauts on various Space Shuttle and International Space Station missions have also brought consecrated hosts to receive the Eucharist in orbit.

A Source of Resilience: Astronauts, such as Butch Wilmore, have publicly credited their Christian faith with providing vital strength, resilience, and solace during unexpected technical hardships in space.

Navigating the Frontier

As humanity edges toward permanent residency on other planets, the dialogue between faith and aerospace science continues to grow. Organizations like Answers in Genesis and progressive theology centers debate how to bring biblical ideologies and ethical frameworks into the solar system. Exploring the heavens is seen by many believers not as a distraction from earthly duties, but as a path to knowing the Creator better.

While NASA does not formally survey or officially track the religious affiliations of its astronauts, history shows that dozens of astronauts are professing Christians. Several key figures from the early Apollo era to modern missions have actively practiced their faith, with an estimated 30% to 40% of astronauts in the Apollo program identifying as Christian.

Some of the most prominent professing Christians include:

Victor Glover: Pilot for the Artemis II mission. A devout Christian who famously conducted communion in space and regularly shares messages of love and faith.

Butch Wilmore: Commander and Space Shuttle/ISS veteran. He is an elder at his church and consistently credits his faith in Jesus for providing strength during his mission.

Jim Irwin: Apollo 15 astronaut who walked on the moon and later became an evangelical minister and public speaker.

Buzz Aldrin: The second man to walk on the moon, who famously took private communion on the lunar surface right before stepping out of the Apollo 11 lunar module.

Charlie Duke: Apollo 16 astronaut and strong Christian advocate who has shared how his lunar experience deepened his relationship with Jesus.

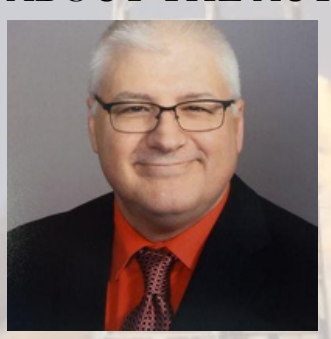
Michael S. Hopkins: A Catholic astronaut who arranged to take consecrated hosts to the International Space Station so he could receive the Eucharist weekly while in orbit.

Rick Husband & Michael P. Anderson: Devout Christian astronauts who tragically lost their lives on the Space Shuttle Columbia in 2003.

While there are also astronauts of other faiths and secular beliefs, a large number of U.S. astronauts have publicly attributed their scientific endeavors and their awe of the universe to their Christian faith.

It is my personal hope that the world (and certainly Born Again Christians) continue to explore space for many more centuries and experience the wonder of that vast part of God's creation, and share God's Word in the process, taking Light...Into The Unknown.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



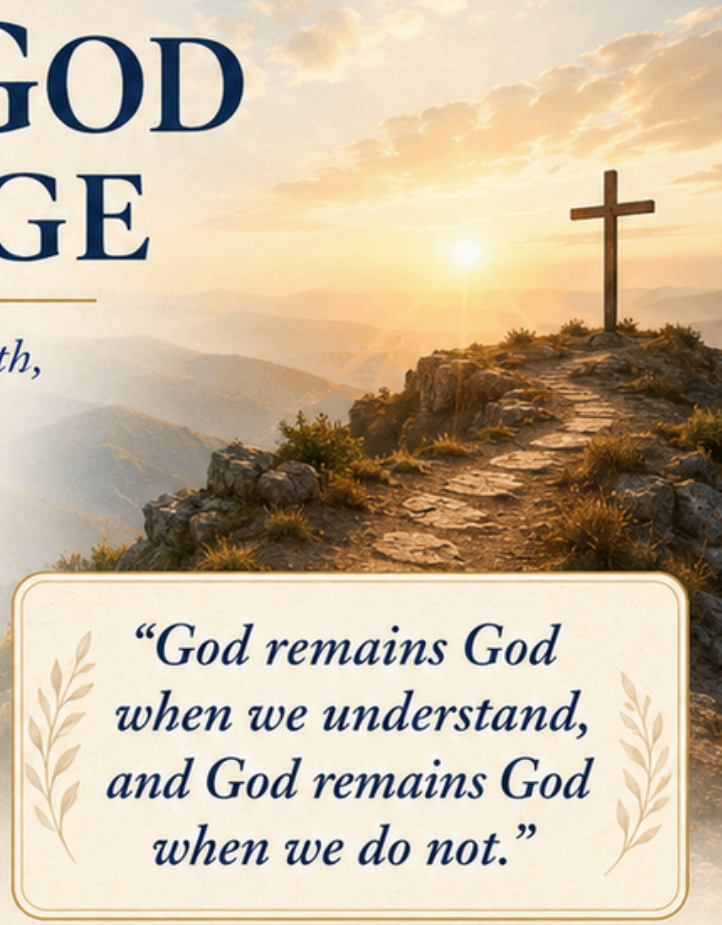
J**ohn W. Losh II** is a lifelong Kansas City, Missouri, resident, born-again believer, husband, father, author, media host, and ministry servant. With a background in public service, security, broadcasting, writing, and Christian media, John serves as Administrative Assistant and Chief News Correspondent for AAHEA while supporting ICOF, ICOF Chaplains, and Life College & Seminary.

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Devotion Coffee Opportunity Summary
COFFEE-FIRST CHURCH AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION
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Church-branded coffee
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Real church and community opportunities.

Trusting God at the Edge

A One-Week Devotional Journey of Faith, Humility, Courage, and Surrender



When life brings us to the edge of what we know,
God invites us to trust Him with what we cannot yet see.

There are seasons when old certainties feel less certain, familiar answers feel too small, and the next step is not yet clear. This one-week devotional invites you to trust God through mystery, correction, growth, love, calling, and surrender.

God is present in what we understand, and He is also present at the edge of what we do not yet understand.

> *"God remains God when we understand, and God remains God when we do not."*



DAY ONE *Trusting God Beyond the Limits of the Mind*

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 3:5-6

Some things are too large for the mind to control. Faith begins when we stop leaning only on our own understanding and begin resting in the wisdom of God.

Trust Step: Name one area where you are trying to figure everything out. Offer it to God and ask Him to lead you.



DAY TWO *Trusting God Beyond the Lines We Draw*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55:8-9

God's thoughts are higher than ours, and His ways are greater than our ways. His love cannot be trapped inside human boundaries or personal assumptions.

Trust Step: Ask God to reveal one boundary, judgment, or assumption that may need to be surrendered to Him.



DAY THREE *Trusting God When We Discover We Were Wrong*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 25:4-5

A faithful life is not built on the need to always be right. It is built on the willingness to be taught by God. Correction does not destroy us. It can guide us.

Trust Step: Pray this simple prayer: 'Lord, teach me Your ways.'

Church / Ministry: _____

Website / Contact: _____

Continue the Journey

Trusting God in the Becoming, in Love, in Calling, and at the Edge

Read one section each day. Pause. Reflect. Pray. Take one step of trust.



DAY FOUR *Trusting God in the Becoming*

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 3:18

We are not finished beings. We are being formed. God is still shaping, healing, strengthening, and transforming us from glory to glory.

Trust Step: Write down one old label or limiting belief you need to release. Ask God to help you receive what He is forming in you.



DAY FIVE *Trusting God Through Fierce Love*

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:33-34

Real love crosses the road. It moves toward the wounded with courage, mercy, and compassion. God often meets us as we move toward others.

Trust Step: Ask God to show you one person or situation where compassion is needed.



DAY SIX *Trusting God Enough to Let Your Light Shine*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:14-16

God places light within each person for a purpose. Gifts, wisdom, testimony, and compassion are not meant to be hidden. They are meant to serve others and glorify God.

Trust Step: Name one gift, word, or act of service you have been holding back. Ask God for courage to use it faithfully.



DAY SEVEN *Trusting God at the Edge*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 46:10

The edge can feel uncertain, but it can also become holy ground. God is not absent from the unknown. He remains faithful when the next step is not yet visible.

Trust Step: Sit quietly and name the edge where you are standing. Pray, "God, You are here, and I trust You."

This Week, Ask Yourself

- Where is God inviting me to trust Him beyond what I understand?
- What fear, assumption, or old label may need to be released?
- What faithful step can I take this week?



Closing Commitment Prayer

Lord God,

I place this week and this unfinished life into Your faithful hands. Teach me to trust You beyond the limits of my understanding. Help me release the need to control every answer, explain every mystery, and defend every certainty.

When I stand at the edge of what I know, remind me that You are already there. Give me humility when I am corrected, patience while I am becoming, courage when love calls me forward, and faith when fear tells me to hide.

I trust You in the known and in the unknown. I trust You in the waiting, the learning, the loving, the serving, and the surrendering.

Lead me with wisdom greater than my own. Make my heart open, steady, courageous, and faithful.

Amen.



Let the World See Our Love Again

When Persecution Rises, the Church Must Recover Its Most Unmistakable Witness

The early church lived under suspicion, yet love became its visible mark.
In a hostile and wounded age, the modern church must do more than defend the faith with words.
It must make the love of Christ visible again.



In the first centuries of the church, Christians lived under suspicion.

They were watched. Questioned. Mocked. Misunderstood. Accused. At times, they were hunted. They were not welcomed by the Roman world as respectable guardians of public order. They were often viewed as strange, disruptive, and even dangerous.

They refused to worship Caesar. They rejected the moral assumptions of the empire. They gathered around a crucified Lord. They called one another brother and sister across lines of class, ethnicity, wealth, gender, and social rank. They cared for widows, orphans, prisoners, the poor, the sick, the abandoned, and the dying.

And at the center of their witness was love.

Not sentimental love. Not decorative love. Not the kind of love that sounds beautiful in a devotional but costs nothing in real life. The love of the early church was visible, disciplined, sacrificial, and often dangerous. It was rooted in the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, who did not merely speak of love but embodied it in humility, truth, mercy, forgiveness, and the cross.

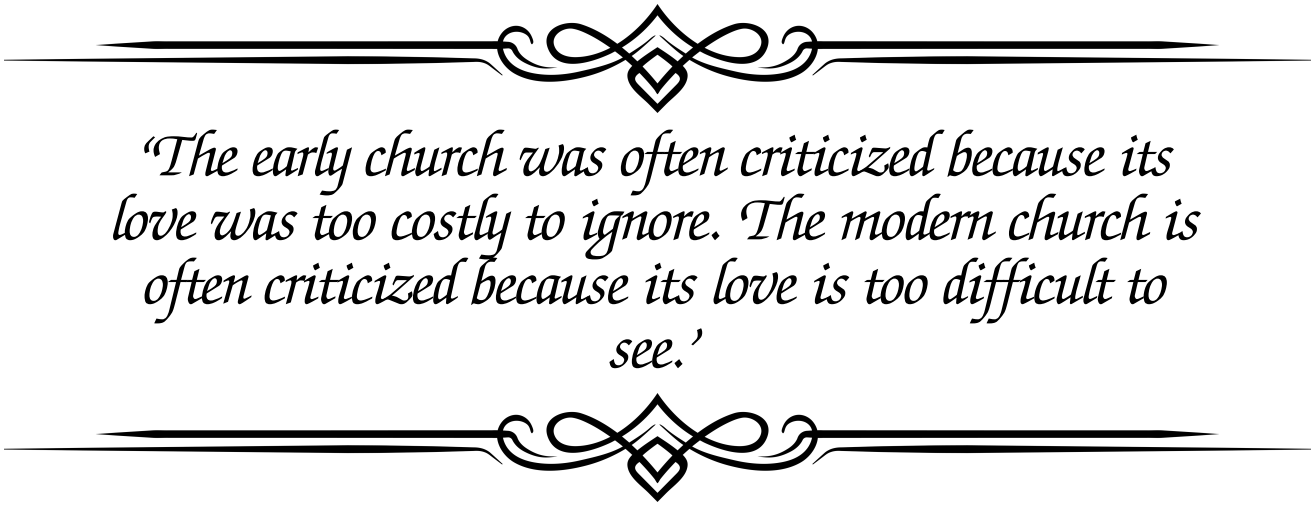
Jesus gave His disciples a mark by which the world would recognize them: ***"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"*** **(John 13:35**).

He did not say the world would know them first by their buildings, slogans, platforms, political influence, institutional strength, or public arguments. He said they would be known by love.

That love was not invented by the church. It was received from Christ. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Christian love begins as a response before it becomes a witness. It is not generated by human niceness or religious politeness. It is born from the astonishing truth that God loved sinners before sinners loved God. The early believers understood, however imperfectly, that the cross had not merely changed their religious opinions. It had changed its ownership. They no longer belonged to themselves. They had been bought at a price. Their lives were now to become “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1).

That is one of the great differences between the early church and much of the modern church.

The early church often had to prove its faith through endurance. The modern church often tries to prove its relevance through explanation. The early church was known by the way believers lived together under pressure. The modern church is often known by its statements, programs, controversies, personalities, and public debates. The early Christians had little worldly power, yet their love carried moral force. Many modern Christians have platforms, buildings, microphones, media channels, and influence, yet the watching world often wonders where the love has gone.



This does not mean the criticism of Christianity is always fair. Often, it is not. The world has always misunderstood the people of God. Jesus Himself warned His disciples, ***“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you”*** **(John 15:18).** He also told them, “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” **(John 15:20)**.

The apostles did not prepare the church for cultural applause. They prepared believers for opposition, slander, imprisonment, suffering, and endurance. Peter told suffering Christians not to be surprised by the *“fiery trial”* when it came upon them **(1 Peter 4:12)**. Paul reminded Timothy that *“all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* **(2 Timothy 3:12)**.

From the beginning, Christian love did not protect believers from persecution.
Often, it exposed them to it.

That reality has returned with awful clarity in our own time. Around the world, Christians are being harassed, imprisoned, displaced, attacked, abducted, and killed because they follow Jesus. In some nations, believers cannot gather openly. In others, conversion to Christ brings family rejection, social punishment, legal danger, or violent retaliation. Churches are burned. Pastors are threatened. Families are driven from their homes.

The persecuted church is not a historical memory.
It is a present reality.

Recent religious-freedom and persecution reports continue to document severe pressure against Christians around the world. Open Doors' 2026 World Watch List reports that more than 388 million Christians face high levels of persecution and discrimination globally. USCIRF's 2026 reporting continues to identify countries and conditions where religious freedom is violated through unjust laws, discrimination, harassment, violence, and state or non-state repression.

Even in the United States, where Christians still enjoy freedoms unknown in many parts of the world, hostility toward churches and believers has become more visible. Vandalism, threats, disrupted services, arson, and targeted attacks against churches should not be dismissed as ordinary disagreement.

America is not the same as nations where believers are routinely imprisoned or killed for naming Christ, and we should not pretend the situations are equal. But neither should we ignore the signs of contempt, intimidation, and spiritual coldness when they appear close to home.

The question before the church is not merely, ***"How bad is persecution becoming?"***
The deeper question is, ***"What kind of people will we become under pressure?"***

The early church teaches us that persecution does not automatically produce holiness. Suffering can purify, but it can also harden. Opposition can make the church courageous, but it can also make the church bitter. Being misunderstood can drive believers deeper into Christ, or it can tempt them into anger, fear, self-pity, and retaliation.

The test of the church is not only whether it survives hostility.

The test is whether it remains faithful to Jesus while enduring it.
Jesus did not tell His disciples to love only when love was easy. He said, ***"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"*** **(Matthew 5:44).** He did not say to bless only those who agree with you. He said to bless those who curse you **(Luke 6:28).** He did not say to overcome evil by matching its spirit. Scripture says, *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* **(Romans 12:21).**



This is not natural human behavior.
It is kingdom behavior.

That is why the solution is not for the modern church to talk more loudly about love. We already have enough words. Paul warned that even the most impressive religious speech becomes noise without love: *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal"* **(1 Corinthians 13:1).**

A loveless church may still sound religious. It may still argue doctrine. It may still host events. It may still publish statements. It may still defend itself. But without love, the sound becomes hollow.

The solution is for the church to become a people whose love can be seen, tested, and trusted.

The church must recover embodied love.

Embodied love means churches do not merely preach compassion; they practice it. They know the lonely by name. They feed the hungry. They visit prisoners. They support widows. They defend children. They strengthen families. They care for wounded pastors. They carry the exhausted. They make room for the poor without turning them into projects. They welcome the repentant without lowering the holiness of God. They speak truth without cruelty and show mercy without cowardice.

James gives the church no room for empty compassion. If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking daily food, and someone says, *"Go in peace, be warmed and filled,"* but does not help with the body's needs, what good is that? Faith without works is dead **(James 2:15–17).**

In the same way, love without embodiment becomes a religious slogan. It may sound noble, but it does not resemble Jesus.

Embodied love also means the church remembers the persecuted. Hebrews commands believers to *"remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them"* **(Hebrews 13:3)**. That is more than sympathy. It is spiritual identification.

A congregation that never prays for suffering believers has forgotten part of its own body. If one member suffers, all suffer together **(1 Corinthians 12:26).** The persecuted church should not be a once-a-year missions' emphasis. It should be part of the church's living consciousness. We should pray for them, support them, learn from them, and allow their courage to correct our comfort.

Embodied love means Christians refuse to let outrage become their primary public witness.

There is a place for warning, correction, apologetics, moral clarity, and courageous resistance. The prophets were not silent. The apostles were not timid. Jesus Himself confronted hypocrisy and evil. But biblical truth must be carried in the spirit of Christ, not the spirit of the mob.

"Speaking the truth in love" is not a decorative phrase; it is a command for Christian maturity **(Ephesians 4:15).**

If the world knows us only by what we oppose, and not by whom we love, something has gone wrong. Biblical love does not require silence in the face of evil. But it does require that our courage be cruciform. It must look like Jesus: truthful, holy, merciful, patient, and willing to suffer without hatred.

'Persecution does not automatically make the church holy. The real test is whether pressure makes us more like Jesus or merely more angry at the world.'

The early church did not conquer Rome by becoming Rome. It bore witness to another kingdom. It showed a different way to be human. It taught that the child, the slave, the widow, the poor, the foreigner, the prisoner, and the enemy all mattered before God. Its love was not an accessory to doctrine. It was doctrine made visible.

The modern church must hear that lesson again.

We do not need a thinner gospel. We need deeper obedience. We do not need love emptied of truth. We need truth clothed in love. We do not need churches that merely advertise compassion. We need churches that become communities of compassion. We do not need Christians who speak of persecution only to win arguments. We need Christians who respond to persecution with courage, prayer, practical support, holiness, and Christlike mercy.

Peter wrote to suffering believers and told them, *"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly"* **(1 Peter 4:8).**

Those words matter: above all.

Not because love replaces truth, but because love reveals whether truth has taken root in us. Not because love makes persecution disappear, but because love shows who we belong to when persecution comes.

The world may not understand such love. It may mock it, mislabel it, resist it, or fear it. The Roman world did. Yet the early Christians kept loving anyway. They loved one another. They cared for the abandoned. They prayed for their enemies. They suffered without surrendering Christ. They bore witness not only with their mouths, but with their lives.

And so, the challenge comes full circle.
The early church lived under suspicion, yet love became its unmistakable mark. The modern church now lives under renewed pressure, and the same mark is needed again.

What Embodied Love Looks Like

Embodied love is not vague kindness. It is visible obedience. Here are practical ways churches can recover love as a living witness:

1. Pray for the persecuted church by name.
Move beyond general prayers. Learn the countries, stories, and needs of suffering believers. Let their courage shape the congregation's prayer life.

2. Care for the wounded inside the church.
Many pastors, ministry workers, widows, single parents, elderly members, and exhausted servants suffer quietly. Love notices who is missing, who is weary, and who needs help.

3. Serve the poor without using them.
Christian compassion should not turn people into ministry trophies. Serve with dignity, patience, and relationship.

4. Speak truth without cruelty.
The church must not surrender *biblical conviction. But truth carried with arrogance does not reflect the heart of Christ.*

5. Practice enemy-love in public.
Pray for opponents. Refuse mockery. Bless when cursed. Correct falsehood without hatred. Show the world a different spirit.

6. Make mercy part of the church's structure.
Love should not depend only on spontaneous emotion. Build systems of care, benevolence, visitation, discipleship, restoration, and practical support.

7. Teach suffering as part of discipleship.
A church unprepared for opposition will often react with panic or anger. Jesus prepared His disciples to endure hardship with faithfulness.



Not louder outrage.

Not thinner conviction.

Not religious performance.

Not love as a slogan.

Love as obedience. Love as sacrifice. Love as courage. Love as truth made visible.
If persecution has reared its ugly head again, then the church must recover its beautiful witness again.

Let the watching world see what it once saw.

Let them see believers who forgive when others retaliate, serve when others withdraw, give when others hoard, bless when others curse, and stand firm without hatred.

Let them see a church that belongs to Jesus.

Let them see our love again.

"So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

–1 Corinthians 13:13.ESV



When the Church Is Ignored for Telling the Truth

Many churches are being told that if people are not listening, the problem must be poor communication. But sometimes the deeper issue is not unclear messaging. Sometimes people are turning away because the church is faithfully proclaiming a truth they do not want to hear.

There is a common assumption in modern church leadership circles: if people are not listening to your church, your communication must be broken. Your message must be too vague. Your website must be too confusing. Your sermons must not connect with felt needs. Your announcements must sound too church-centered. Your language must not be targeted enough.

There may be truth in some of that.

Churches should communicate clearly. They should avoid unnecessary religious jargon. They should speak with compassion, wisdom, warmth, and understanding. A poorly explained message can become a barrier, and churches should never make the Gospel harder to hear because of lazy communication.

But there is another possibility we must be willing to consider.

Sometimes people are not listening because the church is saying exactly what God has called it to say.

The Gospel is good news, but it is not soft news. It comforts the weary, but it also confronts the proud. It welcomes sinners, but it calls them to repentance. It offers forgiveness, but it does not flatter rebellion. It announces grace, but it also declares the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

'The church must not confuse being ignored with being ineffective. Faithfulness is not always applauded by the age it confronts.'

In a culture trained to prize affirmation over transformation, the church must resist the temptation to measure faithfulness by public response. Crowds do not always prove the truth. Rejection does not always prove failure. Sometimes the silence of the audience says less about the weakness of the message and more about the condition of the heart.

We live in a time when many people want encouragement without conviction, community without commitment, spirituality without surrender, and blessing without obedience. They may welcome a church that speaks to their pain, validates their struggles, and offers practical help. But when that same church speaks of sin, judgment, repentance, holiness, sacrifice, and the authority of Scripture, the applause may fade quickly.

This is why the church must begin in the right place. The first task of the church is not to say the audience's name. It is to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ.

Yes, people need to feel seen. Yes, churches should understand the life stages, wounds, fears, and pressures carried by those they are trying to reach. But recognition is not redemption. Empathy is not salvation. A church may gain attention by saying, "We understand you," but it fulfills its mission when it declares, ***"Behold the Lamb of God."***

The church must also speak truth, not merely pain. Human suffering is real. Loneliness, anxiety, divorce, depression, grief, confusion, and exhaustion are not imaginary burdens. A faithful church should meet those burdens with tenderness and care.

But pain must not become the highest authority in the room.

If every sermon, ministry, and outreach effort begins and ends with felt need, the church may unintentionally train people to believe that God exists mainly to solve their immediate distress. The Gospel does address human pain, but it also addresses human sin. It does not merely soothe the soul; it raises the dead. It does not simply help people cope; it calls them to be made new.

The church must proclaim the Gospel, not merely solutions. There is nothing wrong with ministries that help marriages, strengthen families, comfort the grieving, support recovery, or build community. These are good and necessary works. But programs are not the center. Christ is.

When churches market every ministry as a solution to a personal problem, they can slowly shift from making disciples to attracting consumers. People may begin to ask, *"What can this church do for me?"* rather than, *"How must I follow Christ?"* That is a dangerous exchange.

The church is not a religious service provider. It is the body of Christ. It is a worshiping, witnessing, teaching, discipling, serving, truth-bearing people under the authority of the Word of God.

This also means churches must show the cost, not only the gain. It is right to speak of hope, peace, healing, belonging, and transformation. Testimonies matter. Stories of changed lives can stir faith and open hearts.

But Jesus never presented discipleship as a path of convenience. He called people to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. That message will never be fashionable in a self-centered age.

Pastors must be honest. Following Christ may bring peace, but it may also bring conflict. It may bring belonging, but it may also require separation from sinful patterns. It may bring joy, but it will also require obedience. It may bring purpose, but it may demand the surrender of personal ambition.



'The Gospel offers comfort, but it also commands surrender. A church that hides the cost of discipleship is not doing people a favor.'



If the church only communicates the benefits of Christianity, it may draw people to a version of faith that expects reward without repentance. That is not the faith once delivered to the saints. That is a spiritual sales pitch.

The answer is not careless communication. The answer is courageous communication. Churches should be clear, compassionate, thoughtful, and accessible. But they must never become so audience-focused that they lose their Christ-centered confidence.

Pastors, do not measure your ministry only by who is listening. Measure it by whether you are being faithful to the Word of God. Preach Christ. Speak truth. Love people deeply. Refuse to entertain goats while starving sheep. Do not dilute the Gospel to make it more acceptable to people who are offended by its authority.



The church does not need a quieter message. It needs a clearer trumpet.

The world may not always listen. The culture may not always approve. The crowd may not always gather.

But the call remains the same.

Preach the Word. Lift up Christ. Shepherd the flock. Warn the wandering. Comfort the broken. Call sinners to repentance. Make disciples.

And trust God with the response.


Psalm 150:6
English Standard Version
6 Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!
Everything that has breath!
Not some things. Not humans,
it says EVERYTHING!
Meaning that even though
we don't physically witness it,
all of creation bows before
One God!
That is something and
what a great God we serve!
AMEN!

From Uganda to Denver:

Pastor Robert Kayanja

UNAA Worship Experience

When the Ugandan North American Association gathers in Denver for its 38th Annual UNAA Convention & Trade Expo, the weekend will close with a powerful moment of worship, reflection, and spiritual encouragement.

Pastor Robert Kayanja, Founder and Senior Pastor of Miracle Centre Cathedral, will travel from Uganda to Denver, Colorado, to serve as Minister and Keynote Speaker for the Sunday Interfaith Service and Closing Ceremonies.

According to UNAA President and CEO Lambert Etibot, the service begins at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, September 6, 2026, and is expected to bring together believers, families, friends, and community members for an uplifting experience of worship, fellowship, and inspiration.

Known internationally as an evangelist, preacher, and influential faith leader, Pastor Kayanja's ministry has touched millions through preaching, outreach, and humanitarian service. His presence at UNAA Denver 2026 adds a deeply spiritual dimension to a convention already centered on business, culture, entertainment, networking, and discovery.

The official convention flyer describes the gathering as a "transformational worship experience," featuring an anointed service, powerful teachings, and a dynamic keynote address. With the theme "Achieving Great Achievements," the event invites attendees not only to celebrate Ugandan identity and excellence abroad, but also to reflect on faith, purpose, and the higher calling that strengthens communities across generations.

For many Ugandans in North America, UNAA is more than an annual convention. It is a homecoming, a cultural bridge, and a place where vision is renewed. Pastor Kayanja's journey from Uganda to Denver symbolizes that bridge beautifully, connecting the spiritual heartbeat of Uganda with the aspirations, achievements, and shared hopes of the diaspora.

As the convention concludes, his keynote message is expected to offer more than inspiration. It will be a call to faith, unity, courage, and renewed purpose. In a season when communities everywhere are searching for strength and direction, this worship experience promises to be a memorable closing moment for UNAA Denver 2026.

The 38th Annual UNAA Convention & Trade Expo will be held in Denver, Colorado, with registration available through UNAA's official convention platform.


THE 38TH ANNUAL
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DENVER 2026
UNAA
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The Church Cannot Reach Tomorrow by Surrendering the Truth

by Montgomery Alexander Kaine

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



'A church can become so eager to listen to the age that it slowly loses the courage to speak to that age.'



The church is not called to protect old methods. But neither is it called to baptize cultural pressure and call it renewal.

That distinction may define the next generation of church leadership.

Across the Christian world, leaders are being told that survival requires change. In one sense, that is true.

Churches that refuse to examine their systems, communication habits, decision-making structures,

digital presence, hospitality, outreach, and ministry formats may become increasingly disconnected from the very people they are called to reach.

But there is another danger.

A church can become so eager to listen to the age that it slowly loses the courage to speak to that age.



'The church must know the difference between removing obstacles to the gospel and removing the offense of the gospel. One is mission. The other is surrender.'



The gospel does not need to be softened, modernized, edited, diluted, or redesigned to fit the mood of the moment. The message of Christ is not outdated. It is not fragile. It is not in need of cultural permission.

But many church methods are outdated. Many church systems are fragile. Many church habits are in need of honest review.

The question is not whether the church should change.

The question is what the church has the authority to change.

That is why current conversations surrounding Pope Leo XIV are instructive, even for those outside the Roman Catholic tradition. Recent reports indicate that he is calling Catholic leaders into renewed listening, synodal discernment, pastoral evaluation, and deeper engagement with families, justice, inclusion, sexuality, and modern culture. Supporters see this as humility, compassion, and necessary reform.

Critics fear it may become another step toward theological Modernism, where the pressure of contemporary opinion begins to reshape settled doctrine.



Evangelicals should pay attention.

Not because Rome is our authority, but because the same tension is pressing upon every church, denomination, network, and ministry movement in the West. Every leader is being asked, directly or indirectly, *"Will you adjust your message to survive?"*

The faithful answer must be no.

But that no must be joined to another answer: yes, we will adjust our methods to reach people more faithfully.

This is the line every church leader must learn to see.

When church leaders rethink ministry systems, they may be practicing wisdom. When they rethink communication methods, they may be practicing stewardship.

When they rethink hospitality, digital engagement, small groups, outreach, guest experience, and decision-making, they may be removing obstacles that never belonged in front of the gospel in the first place.

But when leaders begin to rethink sin, holiness, repentance, marriage, human identity, salvation, the authority of Scripture, the uniqueness of Christ, or the necessity of conversion, they are no longer updating methods. They are tampering with the message.

That is not innovation.

That is erosion.

Many churches are not struggling because the gospel has lost power. They are struggling because their methods have lost contact with the people they are called to reach. Yet some churches are not struggling because they are too traditional. They are struggling because they have become embarrassed by truth.

The faithful church must avoid both errors.

It must not become a museum of yesterday's preferences. It must not become a mirror of today's culture. It must become what Christ called it to be: a living witness, rooted in eternal truth, sent into a changing world, courageous enough to adapt its methods and courageous enough to refuse compromise.



This is the leadership moment before us.

Church leaders must become more courageous, agile, outward-looking, and innovative. But courage does not mean bending doctrine until it fits the culture. Agility does not mean abandoning conviction. Outward-looking ministry does not mean allowing outsiders to redefine the gospel before they have even encountered its power. Innovation does not mean improving the church by removing the offense of the cross.

The church must listen to people.

But it must listen to God first.

The church must understand the culture.

But it must not be catechized by the culture.

The church must welcome the wounded, the confused, the skeptical, the searching, the lonely, the rejected, and the morally broken. But welcome is not the same as affirmation. Compassion is not the same as surrender. Hospitality is not the same as doctrinal silence.

Jesus welcomed sinners without pretending sin was harmless. He ate with the broken without becoming unclear about righteousness. He touched the unclean without making uncleanness the new standard.

He was full of grace and truth, not grace at the expense of truth or truth without the fragrance of grace.

That is the model.

The future-impacting church will not be the church that changes the gospel to keep people from leaving. It will be the church that removes every unnecessary obstacle so people can clearly hear the gospel that calls them home.

There is a world of difference between changing the container and changing the contents.

A church may change its musical style, service schedule, technology, building strategy, small-group structure, outreach method, leadership process, digital presence, and guest pathway without compromising the gospel. But once the church changes what it means by sin, grace, repentance, salvation, holiness, marriage, Scripture, or Christ Himself, it has not modernized the mission. It has replaced it.

Pastors, this is the hour for holy courage.

Do not let fear make you rigid. Do not let relevance make you reckless. Do not confuse tradition with truth, and do not confuse cultural approval with gospel fruitfulness.

Change what should be changed. Simplify what has become cumbersome. Strengthen what has grown weak. Rethink what no longer serves the mission. Reach people where they are.

But do not surrender what God has spoken.

The church does not need a new gospel. It needs renewed courage, cleaner systems, faster obedience, deeper compassion, and leaders willing to say, *"We are not changing the message. We are removing anything that keeps the message from reaching the people Jesus loves."*

That is not compromise.

That is mission.

But changing the message itself is not mission.

That is another gospel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mongromery Alexander Kaine (MAK), is a reclusive and camera-shy author whose writing spans marketing, leadership, wellness, spirituality, and political activism. Though he rarely steps into public view, he occasionally lends his insight to selected works.

SAFE PEOPLE
20 Traits of Unsafe People

(from Dr. Henry Cloud's book ***Safe People***)

Part 3 of a 4 Part Series

Welcome back to the next section of the manuscript. (link to part two's issue, where the first part is within)

If you may recall, the introduction and part one spoke at length about how spiritually and emotionally healthy relationships require discernment, humility, boundaries, and character awareness. Part two's message was that many (if not everyone need to learn how to discern "Safe People."

The central message is that choosing safe relationships is not judgmental but wise and biblical.



'...many (if not everyone need to learn how to discern "Safe People."

PART 3

Now the big question remains—where do you find safe people?

A client lamented with me about how she had tried the *"safe relationship"* stuff, sharing her heart, being honest, etc., and concluded that it just didn't work. She felt judged and condemned. It seemed that those she opened her soul to were simply not safe people.

She assumed that since they were people in her church, they would automatically be safe. She had discovered a sad but real truth: the church is not a perfectly safe place. How can this be? If any place should be safe, the church should be.

As much as we would like for it to be true, the church does not consist of only safe people. If we are going to have a biblical view of relationships and people, we must see the church as God describes it. Our faith must be able to square with the reality of life as we find it and with the reality the Bible describes to us. Let's look at those two realities.

Reality as People Find It

Even in the body of Christ, we find some harsh realities: judgment, pride, self-centeredness, manipulation, abandonment, abuse, control, perfectionism, domination, and every kind of relational sin known to humankind. The walls of the church do not make it safe from sin. In fact, the church, by definition, is composed of sinners.

To further complicate matters, the church, by its very nature as a family of God, activates our most primitive and dependent longings because we want a perfect family. God designed the church to be our second family, and we often take into the church our longing for security and love that we take into our families of origin.

And for some, as in their original family, the wish is not only disappointed—it can be crushed altogether. What are we to do with that reality?

The one difference is that, as adults entering into the family of God, we have choices about whom we are going to trust and get close to. David said in **Psalm 101:6 t**hat we can pick the *"ones who will minister to [us]."*

But we are not by nature so discerning. We come into the church feeling and wishing, "Take care of me. I need you. I shouldn't have to first figure out who is safe and who is not. You should be good and trustworthy." We want things to be right, and often they are not.

On the other hand, many of us have felt that the body of Christ has nurtured, loved, and taught us in ways that have radically healed us. Through the acceptance and love of other believers, our character has changed, and we have slowly let go of the things that shackle us.

The church can be a healing place where lives are transformed and where powerful love and healing can take place. The body of Christ is still God's instrument for our healing and restoration **(1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:16**).

So, the question rings in our needy hearts: Is the church safe, or is it dangerous? The answer is, *"It is both."* Sometimes we are fortunate to find good relationships, and other times we run into disaster.



Reality as the Bible Describes It

The sad thing is that our ideals for the church do not reflect biblical reality, either. We think that the Bible promises a church where we find only safe people.

But the Bible says that the church is full of wolves as well as sheep. In the church, we will find both healing and hurt. If we are going to find healing and minimize hurt, we need to make sure that we see the church as God describes it to us. We need to operate according to biblical reality instead of our fantasized wishes.

In describing reality of the kingdom of God, Jesus told a story:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. But that night, as everyone slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat. When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. The farmer's servants came and told him, `Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds!'

"`An enemy has done it!'*** the farmer exclaimed. ***`Shall we pull out the weeds?' they asked. ***"He replied, `No, you'll hurt the wheat if you do. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds and burn them and to put the wheat in the barn.'"*** **(Matthew 13:14-30, italics mine)**

As this story shows, God allows unsafe people to be in the church. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, and they are dangerous. While they may seem religious, they may not even be true believers. While they do many things in his name, they are not his sheep. **(Matthew 7:22-23**)

Another reality is that even with believers, we get a mixed bag as well. Listen to the parable of the sower:



The seed that fell on the hard path represents those who hear the Good News about the Kingdom and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches the seed away from their hearts.

The rocky soil represents those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots don't go very deep. At first, they get along fine, but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word.

The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the Good News, but all too quickly, the message is crowded out by the cares of this life and the lure of wealth, so no crop is produced.

"*The good soil represents the hearts of those who truly accept God's message and produce a huge harvest–thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted."* **(Matthew 13:19-23)**. Within the church, some people are never really born again; the kingdom never takes hold in them. Others are joyful in the faith, but they do not have the reality of the life of God within them. Both of these groups can be very destructive.

But it is the third group, where we can get really confused. The seed has taken hold; they are in the faith, but they are so self-centered and caught up in temporal concerns that they are not producing loving fruit in their relationships. This kind of well-intentioned but growth-stagnant person can be very hurtful as well.

Finally, Jesus describes the fruitful person. This person, although not perfect, is involved in the process of growth with God. Love, confession, humility, truth, and grace are present and increasing. This is the kind of person is the one that brings about healing in other people's lives.

Wisdom and Character

Our experience and the Bible affirm the same thing. The church is full of safe people, unsafe people, and hurtful lingerers. There is no perfect family short of heaven. The Bible's message is that we need to be discerning. We need to make informed choices, and we need to be careful. But we also need to avoid becoming pessimistic and learn to recognize the goodness that abounds within the family of God.

The long and the short of it is that we have to work to find safe people, using our wisdom, discernment, and character.



Where to look

Within the body of Christ, God has gifted people to heal each other. We have found these people in a variety of settings and structures, from informal to formal. Here are some of them.

Safe Churches

Look for churches where relationship is preached, and community is formed. While churches have different personalities and cultures, it is possible

to find churches that have the following qualitieschurches that have the following qualities:

- Grace is preached from the pulpit and is the foundation for how people are treated.
- Truth is preached without compromise, but also without a spirit of law and judgment.
- Church leaders are aware of their own weaknesses and need to grow. They are open about their hurt, pain, failings, and humanity. Instead of "having it all together" and being insulated from confrontation and change, they are in a process of healing and opening up to their own safe people for support and accountability.
- The church uses small groups to touch people's lives, and sermons focus on community in the body of Christ as well as doctrine.·The culture is one of forgiven sinners, not self-righteous religious Pharisees.
- The church, instead of being a self-contained unit and thinking it has all the answers, is networked into the community, utilizing input from other sources such as churches, professionals, and organizations.
- The teaching has a relational emphasis as well as a vertical one. Relationship between people is seen as part of spirituality as well as a relationship to God.
- The teaching sees brokenness, struggle, and inability as normal parts of the sanctification process.
- There are opportunities to serve others through a variety of ministries.

Restorative Friendships

We (John and I) value friendship. We believe that friendship is one of the most powerful tools God uses to change and heal character. In relationships with others, we are healed, our character is changed, and sanctification happens.

Friends give us what we need in the areas of acceptance, support, discipline, modeling, and a host of other relational ingredients that produce change. Good friendships are an absolute must for our spiritual growth to happen. In picking good friendships that produce growth, several qualities are important:

- Acceptance and grace.
- Mutual struggles, although they do not have to be the same ones.
- Loving confrontation.
- Both parties need other support systems as well to avoid the same kind of toxic dependency on each other that led to the problems.
- Familiarity with the growth process where both parties have "entered in" and have some knowledge of the process to avoid the blind leading the blind.
- Mutual interest and chemistry, a genuine liking.

- An absence of “one-up and one-down” dynamics.
- Both parties in a relationship with God.
- Honesty and reality instead of “overspiritualizing.”
- An absence of controlling behavior.

Support Groups

Groups are an extremely powerful tool for spiritual and emotional growth. A dynamic occurs in a group that is absent in one-on-one relationships. Members realize the universality of pain and suffering, and they are not as tempted to condemn themselves.

Support groups come in many styles, from therapy groups to twelve-step groups, to prayer groups, to groups that form around a particular issue, such as grief or sexual abuse.

One caution needs to be mentioned, however. Groups are powerful and need leadership by people who know what they are doing. They need to know the issues that will arise and how to deal with them. That is why groups have trained leaders, or leaders who have experience in the growth process. We generally discourage informal groups of hurting people who get together with no trained or experienced leader. These groups can re-create all the problems that someone is there to get help with. Unless you are far along in the process, try to find groups that are structured, have an expressed purpose, and have experienced leadership.

Individual Therapy

Sometimes people are so hurt and have so much to deal with that they need specialized one-on-one attention. Individual therapy is a powerful, proven method of dealing with deep issues and developmental impasses.

In choosing a therapist, remember that you are a consumer and have a right to know that you are getting good care. Check out her credentials first, and make sure that you check around with people who are familiar with her work. Pastors can be a good referral resource.

Be Careful and Go for It

There are many good people out there. To find them, use discernment, wisdom, and information, and trust your experience with people. Keep looking, praying, and seeking until you find safe people-people who will give you all the benefits that God has planned for you.

The 4th and Final Part of “Safe People” will conclude the series in the August Issue of The Next Wave.

Make sure to subscribe so you don’t miss it!

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Balm of Gilead Gospel Ministries International warmly invites you to **Times of Refreshing 2026,** a powerful three-day gathering centered on the theme, ***"Advancing God's Kingdom Through Godly Families,"*** drawn from Joshua 24:15.

Join Bishop Tembi Alfred, Pastor Dr Bertrand Sone, and hosts Pastors D & W Angaama for an inspiring time of anointed teaching, healing, and deliverance ministry, continued prayer, impartation, and the ordination of church leaders.

The event will take place on Friday, 3rd July and Saturday, 4th July 2026, from 18:30 to 21:00, followed by the ordination service on Sunday, 5th July 2026 from 14:00 to 17:00.

91 Victoria Street, Parow, Cape Town, behind DC Meat Market. Come with your family, come with expectation, and experience a refreshing time in God's presence as we gather to strengthen homes, leaders, and the Kingdom of God.

All are welcome.

BALM OF GILEAD
GOSPEL MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

PRESENTS

TIMES OF REFRESHING
2026

MENTOR OF BALM OF GILEAD



Bishop Tembi Alfred

GUEST SPEAKER



Pst Dr Betrand Sone

THEME:

Advancing God's Kingdom through godly families.

JOSHUA 24:15

HOSTS



Pastors D & W Angaama

NEW DATES CONFIRMED!

NEW DATES CONFIRMED!

3RD, 4TH FOLLOWED BY THE ORDINATION ON THE 5TH JULY 2026

FRIDAY
3RD JULY 2026
Anointed Teachings, Healing and Deliverance



TIME: 18:30 – 21:00

SATURDAY
4TH JULY 2026
Continued Teachings, Prayer & Impartation



TIME: 18:30 – 21:00

SUNDAY
5TH JULY 2026
ORDINATION OF CHURCH LEADERS



TIME: 14:00 – 17:00

VENUE: 91 VICTORIA STREET, PAROW, CAPE TOWN,
(behind DC meat market)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

073 390 8242
073 552 1190

074 659 6938
071 057 9607

All Are Welcome!

"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles." – Isaiah 40:31

Apostolic Heritage Conference

October 22nd & 23rd





The Apostolic Heritage Conference is October 22nd & 23rd in Joplin, Missouri. The event will be held at the Apostolic Heritage Center, 2601 Connecticut Ave, Joplin, MO. 64804. The headquarters hotel is Home2 Suites by Hilton, at 3000 S. Rangeline Road, Joplin, MO. The reservation number for the hotel is: (417) 680-0076. Mention that you will be attending the Heritage Conference in October to receive the special rate of $115.00 per night. It's important to get your reservation made as soon as possible to secure your room and the special rate. Heritage Museum will be open throughout the conference, except during events.

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Solid Rock Bible Church Member Turns Side Project into A Ministry

by John Losh II

IN THE SPOTLIGHT





Since Fall of 2019, I have been an active Member and Ministry Volunteer at Solid Rock Bible Church in Kansas City, Missouri, since my previous Church, Open Door Bible Baptist, merged with Avondale Baptist Church, moving into Avondale's decades-long facility and the name being changed to Solid Rock www.srbiblechurch.org .

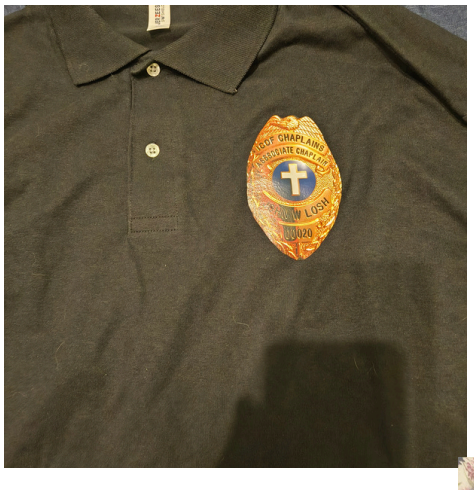
In December of 2025, one of our members, Tracy Smith, a Civilian Employed Accountant for the U.S. Marine Corps KC Office (whom I have had the privilege of serving with in Church drama presentations), began having severe issues with Vertigo that led to several months off work on FMLA.

Not knowing if she would be able to return to work eventually, she turned something that had been just a hobby and a way to make gifts for friends, family and Church family: screen printing on clothing and even the now very popular metal tumbler cups into a business to provide backup income and as a Born Again Sister In Christ, as a Ministry, offering mostly Biblical, Christian life promoting designs.

After a while of consideration and prayer, she got the inspiration for the name **Mama T's Creations**.

This not only has the abbreviation T (for her first name), but obviously, a lot of her designs are placed on T-shirts. She is also interested in doing screen printing on ball caps.

Once I found out she was doing this, I told her God had a plan for me, knowing this as I was looking for someone who could create wearable (and usable) merch with things like the ICOF Chaplain badge, as

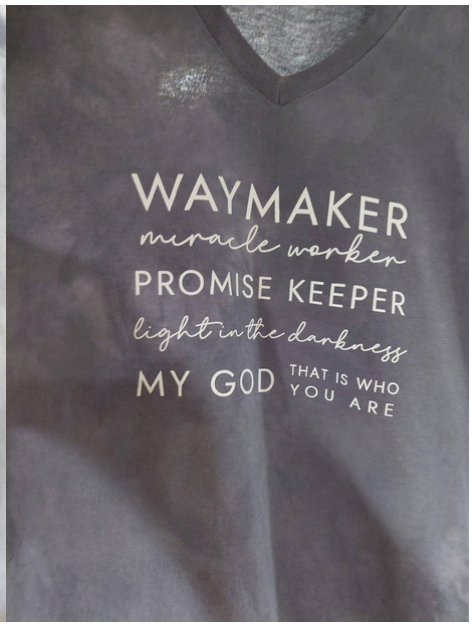


well as the various logos of AAHEA and ICOF, Devotion Coffee, and likely even things representing my personal podcast and YouTube channels.

And for the current price of only $20 for the item and the printing, you can't beat that. She has already made polo shirts with my Chaplain badge on them, and other members of our ministries are also starting to show interest in going through me to order ministry logo merch for them as well.







ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John W. Losh II is a lifelong Kansas City, Missouri, resident, born-again believer, husband, father, author, media host, and ministry servant. With a background in public service, security, broadcasting, writing, and Christian media, John serves as Administrative Assistant and Chief News Correspondent for AAHEA while supporting ICOF, ICOF Chaplains, and Life College & Seminary.

Admin Assistant/Chief News Correspondent
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Secretary/Chief News Correspondent
Birland Global Foundation
Recognized for U.S. Journalism by the
International Human Rights Association News Agency

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Tracy Smith's (MAMA T) can be found at:

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