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## OUR MISSION



**Nashville Christian Family**® exists to provide Christians and the community at large with ways to strengthen and grow as a part of the Middle Tennessee Christian Family. This local monthly publication is designed to promote positive living by sharing with readers of all ages relevant and timely news and information related to health, faith, parenting, youth, finances, Christian entertainment, missions, church leaders, and much more GOOD NEWS!

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

### Happy New Year!

As we move past the Christmas season, we step into a new year filled with fresh opportunity and hope.

It's natural for us to mark time in days, weeks, months, and seasons. And as many of us have noticed, the years seem to pass more quickly the older we get.

As we reflect on the year now behind us—whether it brought joy, challenge, or both—we all arrive at 2026 together. We do so with hope, renewed expectations, and a desire for blessings not only for ourselves, but also for our families, friends, and loved ones.

Scripture offers timeless guidance for both our daily lives and our eternal walk. Philippians 3 provides a meaningful perspective for the start of a new year. In verses 13 and 14, the Apostle Paul writes:

*“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

As we begin this new year, may we take these words to heart—letting go of the past, focusing on what lies ahead, and continuing to grow in faith as we walk daily with the Lord.

May God's blessings be with you throughout 2026.



Robert Stringfellow, Publisher, 615-815-8765  
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## ON THE COVER 20

**As a former member of the Tennessee House of Representatives and current Senior Advisor to Governor Bill Lee, John DeBerry, has a strong conviction to use his Christian faith and a heart for public service. See page 20 for more.**

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## *Historic New York City, 911 Memorial & St. Paul's Chapel*

*On April 30, 2026, the 917 Society will follow in the footsteps of George Washington from Federal Hall, where he was inaugurated, to St. Paul's Chapel in New York City where he prayed to dedicate America to God. On the 228th anniversary of that prayer, we will offer a prayer of rededication for our country in that very same miraculously preserved and sacred place.*

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What is it in our Constitution that Makes Us Who We Are as a Nation?

The late Justice Scalia delivered an opening statement on American exceptionalism to a Senate Judiciary Committee on October 5, 2011. Here is an excerpt from his answer to this question.



"What do you think is the reason that America is such a free country?" "What is it in our Constitution that makes us what we are?"

"If you think that a bill of rights is what sets us apart, you're crazy. Every banana republic in the world has a bill of rights." Every President for life has a bill of rights. The bill of rights of the former "Evil Empire," the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, was much better than ours. I mean it, literally. It was much better. We guarantee freedom of speech and of the press -- big deal. They guaranteed freedom of speech, of the press, of street demonstrations and protests; and anyone who is caught trying to suppress criticism of the government will be called to account. Whoa, that is wonderful stuff!"

"The Bill of Rights is just what our Framers would call a parchment guarantee. The real key to the distinctiveness of America is the structure of our government."

"The Europeans look at our system and they say, well, it passes one House and it doesn't pass the other House; sometimes the other House is in the control of a different party; it passes both, and then this President, who has a veto power, vetoes it. And they look at this and they say, "Ah, it is gridlock".

"I hear Americans saying this nowadays, and there's a lot of it going around. They talk about a "dysfunctional government" because there's disagreement. And the Framers would have said, "Yes, that's exactly the way we set it up. We wanted this to be power contradicting power -- because the main ill that beset us".

"So, unless Americans can appreciate that and learn to love the separation of powers, which means learning to love the gridlock, which the Framers believed would be the main protection of minorities -- the main protection."

— Larry L. Crain, Crain Law Group, PLLC  
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Five Financial Insights to Start the Year with Confidence

A new year has begun, full of potential and opportunity. As we pause at the start of 2026, one question remains: What lies ahead? For many, that reflection turns to finances—how to feel more confident and in control. Surveys show financial wellness remains a top priority, with goals like reducing debt, saving, and budgeting reflecting a desire for stability and peace of mind. Here are five key insights to help turn intentions into lasting progress.

1. Financial control is a top priority for many people right now

A majority of individuals setting resolutions place money and financial wellness at the center of their plans. Goals like reducing debt, saving for emergencies, and managing spending are not about restriction—they are about creating freedom. When finances feel organized and intentional, people gain confidence and reduce stress, allowing them to focus on what matters most in their lives.

2. Most financial stress comes down to one root issue: cash flow

Debt, limited savings, and broken budgets are rarely isolated problems. More often, they stem from a mismatch between what comes in and what goes out. Cash flow—defined simply as income minus expenses—is the foundation of every financial decision. Without a clear understanding of this balance, even small shortfalls can quietly undermine progress over time.

3. Both income and spending deserve equal scrutiny

Improving financial health isn't only about cutting expenses. While managing costs is important, increasing income through career growth, side work, or temporary opportunities can be just as impactful. On the expense side, many people overlook "invisible" costs such as taxes, insurance premiums, vehicle expenses, and subscriptions. Bringing visibility to every dollar is essential to making informed decisions.

4. People consistently underestimate how much they spend

Even disciplined, financially savvy individuals are often surprised when they take a closer look at their spending. In many cases, actual expenses turn out to be 20–40% higher than expected. This gap is not due to poor judgment, but to limited visibility. Clear tracking replaces assumptions with facts, creating the clarity needed to take control.

5. Lasting financial change requires tools, accountability, and a plan

Motivation alone is rarely enough to create sustainable habits. Real progress comes from combining the right tools with ongoing accountability and a strategy tailored to your life. Budgeting and cash flow management are more complex than they appear, but with structure and guidance, balance is achievable and sustainable.

Financial confidence is built through awareness, intention, and consistent action. Understanding cash flow, examining both income and expenses, and using the right tools can transform financial stress into clarity and control. If you would like to learn how these principles apply to your own situation, we invite you to contact our office. Our team is here to help you build a clear plan and take meaningful steps toward long-term financial confidence.

— Michael Wallin, Certified Financial Planner™. For more information, please see [www.panthrex.com](http://www.panthrex.com) or call 615-236-2220.







## Diets & Making Peace with Your Body: A Journey Toward Freedom

Happy New Year. Whether we call it a New Year's Resolution or a goal, most of us have something we would like to achieve during the

New Year. I wasn't surprised at all to learn that losing weight was at the top of the list for many women, the struggle with body image begins quietly and early. A comment overheard, a comparison made, a standard absorbed without question. Over time, those moments can grow into a lifelong pursuit of acceptance—often measured by mirrors, scales, or clothing sizes. In a recent episode of Hope for the Journey, Monica Schmelter and Heather Creekmore invite listeners into an honest and hope-filled conversation about making peace with our bodies and finding freedom through faith. Heather shares her personal journey of wrestling with body image, a battle that persisted even as she walked closely with God. What surprised her most was the realization that her obsession with appearance was not merely a confidence issue, but a spiritual one. When our thoughts, energy, and joy revolve around our bodies, body image can quietly become a form of idolatry—something we look to for worth, control, or identity instead of Christ.

but it is also deeply freeing. Recognizing body image struggles as a sin issue is not meant to bring shame; rather, it opens the door to healing. Sin thrives in secrecy, but when brought into the light, it loses its power. As Heather explains, "Healthy is not a number on a scale." True health includes spiritual well-being, emotional wholeness, and right relationships—not just diet plans or exercise routines.

The conversation also highlights how exhausting body obsession can be. Constant self-monitoring robs women of mental space, joy, and presence with their families. Instead of engaging fully in relationships and God-given purpose, many stay stuck waiting—waiting to feel confident enough, thin enough, or "fixed" enough to truly live. But the encouragement is clear: we don't have to wait anymore. Freedom begins with loosening the grip body image has on our hearts. This doesn't mean ignoring health or self-care but reframing them. Pursuing health should never come at the expense of spiritual growth. When wellness becomes another rulebook or source of pressure, it has missed its purpose. Healthy living is about stewardship, not self-salvation.

tion fuels comparison, while relationships remind us of who we are beyond appearance. God often uses trusted friends, mentors, and faith communities to gently redirect our focus from ourselves back to Him.

### It is Not an instant Fix

Making peace with your body is not an instant fix—it is a process. But each step taken toward surrender brings relief. As women learn to focus on God's purpose for their lives rather than society's expectations, they discover something powerful: freedom. A life no longer dominated by mirrors or measurements becomes one filled with deeper joy, stronger relationships, and renewed hope. Today's Secret from the Studio: When we loosen the grip of body image, we make room for something far better—the abundant life God has been offering all along.

— Monica Schmelter hosts the weekly Bridges shows on Christian Television. Bridges airs in over 50 million homes and is al on ROKU and other streaming platforms. Monica and her husband have one adult son and recently welcome a daughter in-love into their family.



### Healthy is not a Number on a Scale

This perspective may feel uncomfortable at first,

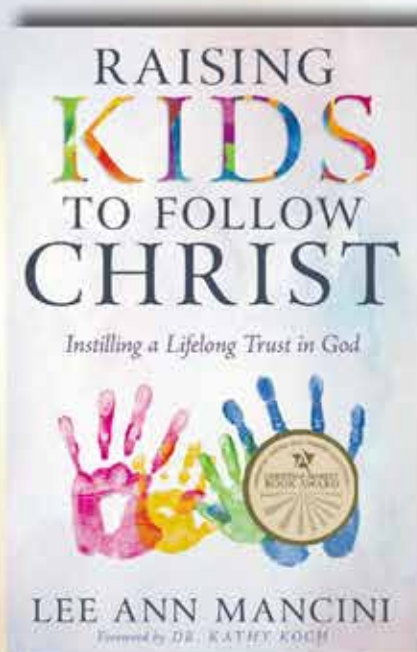
### God Often Uses Trusted Friends

Community plays a vital role in this journey. Isola-

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## From Intentions to Action: How to Gain Control of Your Money

A new year has dawned, brimming with potential and fresh opportunities. As we stand at this annual crossroads, one question quietly persists: What story will we write for ourselves in the months ahead? Recent surveys reveal that for many, the answer centers around one powerful theme—taking charge of our finances. In one study, 61% of people setting resolutions placed money and financial wellness at the top of their list. Another survey showed that nearly half of respondents are determined to tackle financial goals, with paying down debt (43%), building an emergency fund (14%), and reigning in spending or sticking to a budget (9%) leading the way. These aren't just numbers—they represent a collective desire for stability, freedom, and a sense of control over our lives.

This month, we're offering more than advice—we're sharing a step-by-step blueprint to help you transform good intentions into lasting results. If you're ready to break the cycle and finally make your resolutions stick, read on. The first step on your journey to financial transformation is understanding your personal cash flow habits—perhaps the most powerful tool you have. Simply put, cash flow is what you earn, minus what you spend each

month. (And no, your credit limit doesn't count as income.) The challenges highlighted in those surveys—debt, insufficient savings, busted budgets—are all symptoms of one root cause: spending more than you make. Recognizing this is the first step toward change.

There are two sides to every financial story: what comes in, and what goes out. On the income side, ask yourself—does your current job cover the lifestyle you want, or is it time to explore new opportunities, a side gig, or a temporary boost in earnings? On the spending side, beware the hidden drains: it's not just shopping sprees or dinner out, but also less-visible expenses like payroll taxes, insurance premiums, property taxes, and car costs. The key is to shine a light on every dollar—where it's coming from and where it's going. Building great financial habits isn't about luck—it's about intentional action, day after day. This is where the right tools can make all the difference. A comprehensive budgeting platform, like LifeArcPlan™, can reveal surprising truths about your spending. In fact, about 80% of our clients initially overestimate their budgeting skills. Once we dig into the details together, most discover their actual

spending is 20-40% higher than they believed. The lesson? Clarity is the first step to control. If you're truly committed to making this the year you take back control of your finances, you'll need more than good intentions. You need the right tools, ongoing accountability, and a plan tailored to your life. Budgeting is more complex than most people realize, but with awareness, commitment, and a clear strategy, you can bring your money habits back into balance—and finally achieve the peace of mind you deserve.

We're here to guide you every step of the way. For over 20 years, we've empowered people just like you to regain balance and confidence in their financial lives. Let us help you turn your resolution into reality in 2026—and make this the year you finally achieve true financial freedom. As a free gift, we are offering our followers a subscription to LifeArcPlan™ to get you started.

— *Michael Wallin, Certified Financial Planner™*. For more information, please see [www.panthrex.com](http://www.panthrex.com) or call 615-236-2220.



## CITY SCENE

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### CFRC Rodeo – Benefitting Nonprofits in Rutherford and Cannon Counties

SADDLE UP, COWBOYS and COWGIRLS! This year marks our 4th Annual CFRC Rodeo, bringing Middle Tennessee together for a weekend packed with excitement, family fun, and community pride. Hosted by Community Foundation of Rutherford County, the event has quickly become one of the region's most anticipated gatherings, drawing people from counties all across Middle Tennessee. The rodeo action is thrilling, but the mission behind the event is what truly makes it special.



**The Swanson Family**

and explore. From handmade crafts to kids' activities, there's something for everyone. Each year, familiar favorites return alongside new attractions, creating a lively festival-like atmosphere families look forward to every time.

Key sponsors play a huge role in making the CFRC Rodeo possible. Swanson Companies, National Healthcare Corporation, Rollins Excavating, and Middle Tennessee State University all help keep the event accessible, fun, and high-quality. Their support reflects a shared commitment to strengthening Rutherford and Cannon Counties while supporting local charitable efforts. The CFRC Rodeo is about more than just entertainment, it's about giving back. Proceeds support Community Foundation of Rutherford County's mission to make Rutherford and Cannon Counties stronger and provide a way to create lasting gifts for local nonprofits. The foundation's purpose is simple: to promote philanthropy by identifying and addressing current and future community needs, ensuring a brighter, more resilient Middle Tennessee for years to come. Behind the scenes, our Board of Directors, along

with our Guild members, volunteer their time and talents to bring the rodeo to life. They help with everything from planning and organization to ticketing and hospitality, making sure everyone has a smooth, enjoyable experience. Their dedication reflects the heart of the foundation: neighbors helping neighbors and coming together for a shared vision of a thriving community.

#### Event Details:

- Dates: Friday, March 6 and Saturday, March 7, 2026
- Venue: MTSU Tennessee Miller Coliseum, 304 W. Thompson Lane, Murfreesboro
- Tickets: On sale through our website starting February 5, 2026
- Corporate Sponsorships: Available—please visit [cfrcrodeo.com](http://cfrcrodeo.com)

The CFRC Rodeo continues to grow each year, creating memories, exciting first-time rodeo experiences, and meaningful support for local nonprofits. It's a weekend full of fun, fellowship, and purpose.

— *Kelly G Rollins, Chair & President Community Foundation of Rutherford County, Murfreesboro, TN 37129*

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# 2026

# NEW YEAR

*“Set your minds on things  
that are above, not on  
things that are on earth.”  
— Colossians 3:2*



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## Celebration of a Two Hundred and Fifty-Year Long Experiment In Liberty

As Benjamin Franklin was leaving on the final day of the contentious summer-long constitutional convention in Philadelphia on September 18, 1787, a lady named Elizabeth Powell asked him: “Well, Dr. Franklin, do we have a monarchy or a republic?” Franklin replied: “A republic. If you can keep it!” This year will mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and Franklin’s admonition is just as compelling today as when first spoken. It is a formidable warning that a self-governing republic is not guaranteed but depends on the ongoing vigilance, participation, and civic virtue of its citizens to remain free from tyranny. Our founding fathers understood that self-government is hard business. It requires citizens who know how their government works and who have the courage to hold their leaders accountable. We may not always agree about the right policies for the day, but we have the freedom – the obligation – to robustly debate competing ideas and values.

A government of and by the people presupposes that we the people should and can govern ourselves – and do so in peace and with mutual respect. Today, as perhaps never before in our nation’s history, open debate is threatened by a

growing intolerance of opposing worldviews, especially Christian views, to the point of violence. The assassination of Charlie Kirk is perhaps the most poignant example. As Lincoln put it, speaking to a war-torn republic: “We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.”

Throughout much of my career as a constitutional lawyer, I have represented individuals who courageously stood in the public square, proclaimed their allegiance to Christ and were arrested or persecuted by those who condemned them for their ideals and hated them for their audacity to share them publicly. Currently, I represent a young man who was arrested and handcuffed in a public park when he refused to stop sharing the gospel with those who celebrated with “pride” their opposing views. Ironically, those who pressed the police for his arrest did so under banners that proclaimed a need for universal tolerance.

My friend and ardent champion of constitutional liberty, Dr. Carol Swain writes in her book *Be The People*: “Americans’ acceptance of cultural relativism has opened the flood-gates for many changes. Cultural relativism rejects absolute right or wrong,

teaching that truth is valid only for a particular society at a given time. Acceptance of this worldview creates an environment in which tolerance is elevated as the highest virtue.”

There is room in the public square for freedom of expression for all competing ideals and worldviews. Indeed, acceptance of this foundational premise is vital to the preservation of our republic.

The challenges our nation faced in its infancy remain today. But we now have a long history in which contentious disagreement and factionalism has tested time and again our ability to survive these divisive winds. As we celebrate this momentous milestone, let us not only look to our past accomplishments, but to the future of a commitment to the preservation of our unique experiment in self-government founded on the consent of the people and a shared commitment to liberty for all.

— Larry L. Crain, Crain Law Group, PLLC  
[www.crainlaw.legal](http://www.crainlaw.legal)







## George Washington, The Miracle of St. Paul's Chapel and America's Return to God

In the midst of Manhattan's concrete towers and bustling streets, a quiet chapel tells a story of divine preservation — a miracle tucked into the heart of our nation's most iconic city. St. Paul's Chapel, built in 1766, is more than a landmark. It is a living reminder that God's hand has been on America since its very beginning.

On April 30, 1789, after swearing the first presidential oath on the balcony of Federal Hall, George Washington walked reverently to St. Paul's Chapel. He wasn't heading to a banquet or a parade — he was going to pray. Joined by members of Congress, he dedicated the United States of America to Almighty God, recognizing that our freedoms could only be sustained by virtue and divine providence.

Remarkably, over 200 years later, St. Paul's stood untouched when the Twin Towers collapsed on September 11, 2001. Not a single pane of glass was broken. In the chaos and sorrow, the chapel became a beacon of hope — a shelter for first responders, a sanctuary of healing, and a powerful reminder that God's protection is still real, still present, and still vital.

Today, The 917 Society is calling America back to that sacred moment. As we approach the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding, we are inviting patriots, pastors, students, and families to walk again in Washington's footsteps — literally and spiritually — on April 30, 2026, at noon in New York City. We will gather at Federal Hall and walk to St. Paul's Chapel, just as our first President did, to rededicate this nation to God in prayer and humility. But this is not just a ceremony. It's a national mission.

### The 917 Society's 250th Mission

To honor our Semiquincentennial, The 917 Society is undertaking a bold initiative: to distribute 2.5 million pocket Constitutions to every 8th grader across America — a generation that desperately needs to understand our God-given rights, our founding values, and the truth about the nation they are inheriting. We believe that an informed citizen is a free citizen, and there is no better tool to preserve liberty than the United States Constitution — the very document born out of a belief in natural rights and moral order.



For this historic occasion, The 917 Society is printing a special commemorative edition of the Constitution that will be distributed during 2026 — a keepsake and educational resource that will remind students not only of their rights, but of their responsibilities as American citizens. We are encouraging every man, woman, and child in this nation to carry their own copy of the Constitution, just as the Founders carried Scripture — not as a symbol of pride, but as a guidepost of truth.

### A Call to President Trump and All Who Love This Country

In this spirit, we are calling on President Donald J. Trump — as a leader who has stood unapologetically for American values — to join us in New York City on April 30, 2026, at noon, to walk with us and to kneel again, as Washington did, in prayer. This is not a political event — it is a sacred moment to seek God's blessing, guidance, and protection as we turn the nation back to Him. Now is the time for revival — not just in churches, but in the very soul of our

Republic. Let this walk, this act of rededication, be the spark that ignites hearts and reawakens our identity as "one nation under God."

Let us remember that our Constitution, our freedoms, and our very future depend not merely on elections, but on whether we will honor the God who gave us this land.

**Will you join us on April 30, 2026?**

**Federal Hall to St. Paul's Chapel**

**Rededicate America to God at noon**

**Carry your Constitution. Teach it. Live it.**

**Support the 2.5 Million Student Mission**

For more information or to get involved, visit:  
[www.917society.org/washington-walk](http://www.917society.org/washington-walk)

—Joni Bryan, Founder and Executive Director, 917 Society  
[www.917society.org](http://www.917society.org)



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## ENCOURAGING WORD

### The Six Questions of Discovery and The One Choice

The questions starting with Who, What, and Why always prompt us to ask When, Where, and How. Only after they generate multiple options, do we ask the final question, Which.

Questions are the key components to learning. Any parent can tell you, that as soon as a child begins to comprehend their environment, the questions start to flow. It is how every human creates their cache of knowledge. Without questions, our only source of knowledge would come from our limited life experiences and instinct. Trial-and-error would be the method of choice delivered through the School of Hard Knocks.

But the six questions of discovery are much more than the mental calisthenics for all knowledge; they are the keys we use to unlock the truth needed to live by. They are, by Divine design, tied to the natural order of our existence through the Power of the Wisdom of Three; the natural laws of science having only three components. No, they are not six stand-alone questions; they are really two pairs of three questions, each pair intended to enrich the knowledge that makes us uniquely human.

Who, What and Why answer the questions about our human trinity of personas; our Personal, Professional / Vocational, and Spiritual selves. In essence, they reveal our purpose. Who we are, as a person? What we are, as a student, worker, or a retiree? Why we are, spiritually? The answers to these three questions form our self-image and it is our self-image that projects the three characters we portray; who we see our self to be, who others see us to be, and who we perceive others believe us to be. All these answers combined, should lead us to one unified individual; not three different and separate personalities. Who, what, and why we are, regardless of when, where, and how we are! When, Where, and How make up the questions that direct us toward our future accomplishments. They should clarify our actions while supporting our human personas through our three conscience human abilities; our Thoughts, Words, and Deeds. These questions allow us to seek out the truth from other



sources. It is our thoughts that conceive the questions, bringing them to written or oral words so we can learn and teach them for and to others, and our actions or lack of action make up our deeds which are created by applying their answers appropriately or, in the case of poor decisions, inappropriately, to our personal, professional, and spiritual lives.

It is the choice question, Which, that makes the difference between wise or unwise decisions. Our freewill, not our intelligence, controls the answer to that question, as well as the final outcome.

Asking the discovery questions to everyone will only confuse you; look around, there are many inquisitive fools. We must learn how to weed out those persons who do not know the truth and those who benefit from ignoring or withholding the truth. Those people, though loved, should never be trusted to provide true guidance or allowed to enflame our emotions. They know that many can be manipulated to use emotions, as the determining factor, when answering the Choice question.

In addition, we must use of these questions appropriately to be effective. Start by using the other laws of nature in unison with these. One such law is The Law of Determining the Truth. It provides a simple to remember, yet difficult formula to master, for uncovering the true facts of life by asking the right questions, to the right people, at the right time. Then, once the truth is obtained and the right choice is made, we should follow the Law of Applied Truth; we are each born to learn, then teach, and finally, to live the truths of human life.

If this is my last post, I want all to know there was only one purpose for all that I have written; to have made a positive difference in the lives of others.

— Anthony “Tony” Boquet, Certified Professional Business Coach, Solutionary, and the author of “The Bloodline of Wisdom, The Awakening of a Modern Solutionary” and “The Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, A Devotional Timeline”

## FAITH @ WORK

### Who Do We Give Our Attention To?

We have all been created with a tugging on our soul! The desire to give our hearts fully to something greater than ourselves. God has created us with an innate need to give devotion and affection to something more than ourselves. The question is, what are we giving our attention to?

When God doesn't have our affection, we use other things to fill the space, i.e., money, success, relationships, control, addictions, and on and on. There will always be a myriad of distractions. Paul explains that humanity doesn't stop worshiping, we simply redirect it. If we are not giving it to God, it doesn't go away, it simply attaches itself to something else “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator”. (Romans 1:25)

We must trust that the One who has formed us and made us, also knows what will fulfill us. God is calling us back to true worship. “Yet a time is coming and



has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father, in the Spirit and in truth. (John 4:23)

Worship is not just something we do on an occasion; it is who we are. It is not about music or posture but an alignment of bringing our hearts back to the One we were made for.

We are most alive, most free, and most whole when we worship our Heavenly Father. When our worship returns Him, our soul will find rest. As we step into the new year, let us enter into true worship – placing God at the center – and watch Him shape 2026, into a year marked by purpose, peace, and His presence. “Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory” (Isaiah 43:7)

— Rhonda L. Smart, rhondalsmart@gmail.com



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## DEK of Hearts:

### How a Trevecca Trio Earned Their Way to a Four-Chair Turn on “The Voice”

The roar of the crowd could be heard from backstage. Music icons were waiting to hear them sing, along with the rest of America. As the seconds ticked down to the biggest performance in any of their young careers, the trio bowed their heads in prayer. “It was a make or break moment,” said Emily Clapp, one-third of the Trevecca-made band DEK of Hearts. “We were taking a risk jumping right into three-part harmony.” As Emily walked onto “The Voice” stage with her bandmates Dylan John and Kollin Bailey, they hummed their starting note to prepare to hit their harmonies. A single chair turn could drastically change their lives. A deep breath, a count-in, and they began to sing. Almost immediately, a chair turned to face them. Then another. And another. And another. In just a verse or so, the trio found themselves singing directly to music superstars Reba McEntire, Michael Buble, Snoop Dogg and Niall Horan. “I think I blacked out,” Emily said. “We genuinely were just praying for a one chair turn. I don’t have a clear memory of the performance or anything the coaches said.” But before Season 28 of “The Voice,” before Team Niall and before the national spotlight, there were just three singing friends on Trevecca Nazarene University’s campus.



member falling to the floor in complete disbelief,” Emily said.

#### Breaking out

After the successful blind audition show, recorded in July, the group was forced to keep it a secret until the episode aired a few months later. “It was tough,” Emily said. “There were a lot of people in our lives that had no idea what we were doing.”

Finally, after months of waiting, a September 4 commercial before the opening kickoff of the 2025 NFL season broke the news. Of all the auditions that could’ve been previewed, “The Voice” chose DEK of Hearts. “Our phones were blowing up,” Kollin said. “That’s when it felt real.”

Their first big dose of hype continued into the band’s October Whiskey Jam debut in Nashville. “People had driven across state lines,” Kollin said. People came from Georgia, Minnesota, Utah, even Canada asking for photos and autographs—a first for all three of them. Emily admitted: “I had to quickly practice my signature.”

#### Connecting on the Hill

Kollin Bailey still remembers touring Trevecca’s campus and meeting two students in Trevecca’s Nineteen|01 coffee shop—Emily and her future husband, Chris. “I remember thinking, wow, if everybody that goes to school here is like them, then I want to go to school here,” Kollin said.

On campus, their circles overlapped through Trevecca’s public relations (PR) ministry teams: Emily and Kollin traveled with Refuge; Dylan John traveled with Awaken alongside Chris. Friendship came first, music second “The first time I saw Dylan was on the steps of McClurkan,” Kollin recalled. “He sang an Ed Sheeran song. I was like, gosh, this guy is so good.” Their first trio moment came almost by accident. At a senior recital, Kollin asked Dylan and Emily to sing Lady A’s “What If I Never Get Over You.” “It felt so right,” Emily said. And people noticed. But the three wouldn’t become a band until nearly a year later.

#### The three become close

After graduation in May 2023, the trio stayed connected—sharing meals, pickleball games and occasional harmony cameos at each other’s individual gigs. “We were best friends before the band started, and I didn’t want to mess that up,” Kollin said. “I’d heard horror stories of friends starting bands and not being able to even be in the same room later.”

In April 2024 they opened for Rhonda Vincent, a connection formed from an internship Kollin had previously done with the Grammy-winning artist. “Even at that show we were like, are we doing this? Do we even have a name?” Emily laughed. “It felt like if we walk on this stage as a trio, we’re introducing ourselves to the world—and it’s going to be really awkward if we go back on it. So are we good? All hearts clear?”

All hearts were indeed clear, and soon after, as one band, they leaned into four-hour bar sets three to four nights a week, all while holding full-time jobs. That grind, they say, became their boot camp. An Instagram ad for “The Voice,” on the last day to submit, nudged the next step. “We kind of went out on a limb,” Dylan said. They recorded a quick cover of “Heads Carolina, Tails California,” navigated callbacks, then waited. And waited... and waited some more. And then came February 10. The call came telling the trio to pack their bags and head for California. Ironical, considering their audition song. “I re-

#### The Trevecca influence

All three band members credit Trevecca with shaping their craft and their calling. Dylan, a commercial music major with an emphasis in voice, learned the Nashville number system on PR and through songwriting with professor Kim McLean. “I hadn’t had a formal music education. Trevecca was the first time I learned how to communicate with a band,” Emily, a worship arts major and social work minor, discerned her call to ministry in a new context. “Now I’m doing ministry in the country world. We try to spread the gospel at all of our shows.” For Kollin, a music business major, Trevecca was a place where he found reps—and resolve. “Trevécca gave us a space to goof around and be creative. PR prepared us to be in a band. It made what we do now easier.”

#### What’s next

Outside of “The Voice,” DEK of Hearts is working toward releasing an EP. And the dream? “To play the Grand Ole Opry,” Emily said. On “The Voice,” DEK of Hearts advances next to the knockout rounds, which air throughout November. With luck, that could be followed by playoffs and then live performances. Fans can follow their journey on “The Voice” app and @dekofhearts across social platforms.

For Dylan, Emily and Kollin, this moment is bigger than music or TV—it’s about calling, friendship and faith. And they pledge to keep their outlook the same: friends first, ministry always. “It’s our dream to do it for a really long time,” Emily said.

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— Teron Fairchild  
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## Century 21 Capital Properties: A Team Redefining Real Estate in Middle Tennessee

Middle Tennessee is growing faster than ever, and with that growth comes opportunity. Families are buying their first homes, investors are discovering Nashville's potential, and the luxury market is putting our city on the national map. At the center of it all is Century 21 Capital Properties—a brokerage built on teamwork, trust, and a genuine passion for helping people find their place in this community.

Broker/Owner Eva Angelina Romero knows that real estate is about more than houses. It's about people, families, and the stories that unfold once they walk through the front door. That belief has shaped the way her brokerage operates. With a strong team of dedicated agents, Century 21 Capital Properties is committed to serving clients across every stage of life—whether it's buying that very first home, finding a second place in the city, or moving into the luxury lifestyle that Nashville is now known for.

“Our team is really the heartbeat of this brokerage,” Eva says. “They’re the ones walking side by side with clients, celebrating their wins, and navigating the challenges that come with one of life’s biggest decisions. I couldn’t be more proud of the people I get to lead every day.”

### Helping Families Plant Roots

For so many in Middle Tennessee, homeownership is still the dream. The process can feel overwhelming at first—mortgages, inspections, contracts—but Eva's agents excel at making it simple and approachable. They take time to explain, to listen, and to walk clients through every step with patience and care.

“Buying a first home is more than a financial milestone,” Eva explains. “It’s where life happens—where families gather, kids grow up, and memories are made. Our agents understand that, and they pour themselves into making the journey as smooth as possible.”

That personal approach has earned the brokerage a reputation for trust. Time and again, clients return to Century 21 Capital Properties not just for results, but because of the way they were treated along the way.

### Second Homes and Luxury Living

Nashville isn't just a place to live anymore—it's a destination. More and more people are purchasing second homes here, whether it's a downtown condo for convenience or a retreat in one of the city's high-end neighborhoods. The agents at Century 21



Capital Properties understand this shift and have become go-to guides for second-home buyers and luxury clients.

“Luxury isn’t only about price—it’s about lifestyle,” Eva says. “Our team has the experience and market knowledge to match clients with homes that reflect their dreams, whether that’s modern city living or a property with space to breathe.”

### Sharing Nashville with the World

This year brought a new chapter for Eva and the brokerage. Out of hundreds of agents across Tennessee, Eva was chosen to represent Nashville as a host of *The American Dream: Selling Nashville*, a nationally broadcast lifestyle and real estate show streaming on Roku, Amazon Fire, Apple TV, and social media.

The program highlights homes, neighborhoods, and local businesses while celebrating the people who make Nashville so special. For Eva, it's an honor or not just personally, but for her team and the city she loves.

“I’m honored to share Nashville on a national stage,” she says. “But for me, the real joy is in telling the stories—about our neighborhoods, our community heroes, and the businesses that keep this city thriving. It’s also a chance to show the world what an incredible team I have at Century 21 Capital Properties.” Eva encourages the community to join her in that storytelling. “Know a home with a story? A community hero? A local gem?” she asks. “We’d love to share it.”

### More Than Transactions

What sets Century 21 Capital Properties apart is the culture. This isn’t a brokerage where numbers are the only measure of success. It’s about relation-

ships. It’s about making sure that every client feels cared for, understood, and respected.

“We’re stronger together,” Eva says. “Our agents bring a wide range of strengths, but the common thread is their heart for service. That’s what makes our brokerage different—it’s not just business, it’s personal.” The same culture of care extends to the team itself. Agents are encouraged to grow, to learn, and to lead with integrity. That environment not only makes the brokerage stronger, it ensures that every client benefits from a team that’s invested in them from start to finish.

### Looking Ahead

As Nashville continues to grow, Century 21 Capital Properties is ready to grow with it. The team is expanding its footprint in the luxury and second-home markets while continuing to champion families who are buying their very first homes.

Eva’s role as both broker and national TV host underscores the brokerage’s unique place in the industry. But she insists the spotlight belongs to her team. “Being chosen as a host is an incredible honor,” she says. “But my greatest honor is leading this team of agents. They’re the reason people trust us. They’re the reason we’re able to make such an impact in this city.”

### Gratitude and Invitation

At the heart of it all is gratitude—gratitude for clients who trust them, for the community that surrounds them, and for the opportunity to represent Nashville both locally and nationally.

As the brokerage looks to the future, one thing is certain: Century 21 Capital Properties will continue helping families achieve their dreams, guiding investors in second-home opportunities, and elevating Nashville’s presence on the national stage.

For those ready to buy, sell, or invest—or to nominate a story for *The American Dream: Selling Nashville*—the agents at Century 21 Capital Properties are ready to serve. Because in Nashville, every home has a story. And this team is here to help write the next chapter.

— Eva Angelina Romero, Broker/Owner  
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# John DeBerry: Faith, Family, and a Life of Service

**John DeBerry proudly calls himself a bridge builder.** A former member of the Tennessee House of Representatives and the current Senior Adviser to and member of Governor Bill Lee's cabinet, John DeBerry has a strong conviction to use his Christian faith and heart for public service to do what's right for his constituents. Because of that, he wants to be a bridge builder who serves everyone despite political parties, religious faith, or anything else that might divide the people of Nashville and Tennesseans in general. "What I see now is that we too often maximize our differences and minimize the similarities. There are people who love to create division and chaos," DeBerry said. "But if I have a seat at the table, I have a responsibility to build consensus and listen to everyone from across the state."

## A Faith Background

DeBerry was raised in a Christian home and was surrounded by Christian pastors and leaders. His father preached for more than 60 years and today DeBerry himself is pastor at Coleman Avenue Church of Christ in Memphis

DeBerry felt the call to ministry when he was young and has been in the pulpit since he was 17 years old. "I dreamed about being a preacher from an early age, and I studied under my dad's feet," he said. "Today I always go home every week and preach."

DeBerry's father, grandfather, and great grandfather preached; both of his brothers are preachers, one brother-in-law is a preacher, and a son is a deacon as are nephews.

While his professional background is in business and marketing (and now he works in politics), DeBerry has worked as a bi-vocational pastor for his entire adult life. It's an example he saw from his father—and one that still inspires him as he works in both ministry and public service.

"I've always been a working preacher, and my dad was that way too," he explained. "He was a veteran who worked at the post office and also preached. My background is in radio and television and I established a marketing firm in the 1990s that's still operating." According to DeBerry, that multifaceted life and career makes him more effective in all corners of his life.



"It keeps me grounded and makes me a better minister," he said. "Straying involved in politics, public policy, and business keeps me better connected to people. Everyone has a lot going on and I can understand their lives better because I see it from different viewpoints."

A word he uses often in describing his ministerial and political work is "blessed." "Faith is the foundation of everything, and I'm very blessed," he said. "It all goes back to my great grandparents, grandparents, and parents. They led the way for me and my family."

DeBerry said that his faith and worth are inseparable. He truly can't do one without the other. "If you don't have a Christian or spiritual basis...if you don't believe in something bigger than yourself and trust a wisdom greater than your own, then I don't see how you can be an effective public servant," DeBerry said, noting

that the constitution of Tennessee recognizes God and faith. "The word of God," he said "is the basis for it."

In his past political work as a state representative, as well as his current work on the governor's cabinet, DeBerry said that he recognizes that his constituents are primarily Bible-believing people who have conservative and moderate values. They've always understood his values and he's fought for them even when he's felt pushback for it.

That, he said, is key in political power—to recognize what those whom you serve expect from you and to respect their needs and wants from their representatives. As a Christian serving other Christians, his faith is key in that work.



## Political Work in Tennessee

DeBerry was first elected in 1995 and went on to serve for 26 years as a member of the state house of representatives as a Democratic lawmaker. During his career, he chaired committees on children and family and served on health and finance committees.

After coming out in favor of the state's "heartbeat bill" and against abortion, DeBerry was decertified by Democratic leadership and invited by Lee to serve in his cabinet. DeBerry said he has no animosity about his decertification,



instead insisting that his constituents understood his conservative beliefs on certain issues and looking to the positives from the move.

“The people who elected me knew I believed in a creator, in life, and in parental responsibilities and authority,” he said. “I campaigned on these issues, so it wasn’t my district that disagreed with me. They understood my heart and where I stood.”

When Lee invited him to serve on his staff, DeBerry saw it as an opportunity to bring people together. “He offered me this position in his cabinet specifically to utilize my experience with members of the house of representatives and my ability to build bridges across the aisle,” he said. “My goal always is to get public input and work for what’s best for our people.”

DeBerry said he recognized the governor as a fellow Christian and family man who had similar experiences as himself. They both had lost wives and raised children for years on their own.

He prayed about the job invitation from Lee and decided to take the step and accept the position. It’s one that has vastly enriched his life and faith—especially as he meets the people of Tennessee and learns about their lives and struggles.

DeBerry is the first African American in the history of the state to have an office on the first floor of the state building, and he treasures the opportunity to meet with and serve the other diverse members of the state and local communities.

“The governor uses me as an ambassador, and I talk with different group, different ethnic groups, people from different background, even different political groups and individuals,” he said. “I’ve been very blessed to work with Native Americans, African Americans, African, Latinos, and others. It’s a privilege to sit in this office, represent the governor, and serve all of our people.”

### Love of Family

DeBerry’s pride in and love for his family is evident, and it guides both his ministerial and political work. He met his wife in college at Freed-Hardeman University in 1972 and were married for almost 45 years. He lost her in 2015 after she suffered a stroke. He and his wife had two daughters, Chevida (who is an attorney and married to a doctor in Memphis) and Victoria (who also lives in the Memphis area). His extended family includes two brothers and numerous nieces and nephews.



**DeBerry was the Guest of Honor at the Tennessee Native American Association Pow Wow 2025. He is seen here with Chief Ray Emanuel (right).**

“My daughters are wonderful children and I have very good grandkids. I’m very proud of them,” DeBerry said. “My daughters both look like my wife, and I see her strength in them.”

DeBerry was raised in a strong Christian family and had what he considered three sets of parents—his parents, grandparents, and great grandparents—who lived in houses side by side. “I had three different generations who were strong, resilient, and took no excuses even in the days of segregation,” he said.

His dad worked with Martin Luther King Jr and was with him at Pettus Bridge and at his last speech in Memphis. His mother campaigned against abortion, and both parents instilled in DeBerry the passion for public service and standing up for the underserved without a need for recognition.



“My Dad was one of the many unnamed faces in the crowd during the civil rights movement, and he was there for the work, not the recognition,” he said. “He taught me that it’s not about myself, it’s about the job. It’s about making the world better.”

Before his father died, he reminded DeBerry that they shared a name (“He told me all the time, ‘Don’t mess up my name’”) and he reminded him that there was a better place waiting for Christians. “I kept those words close to my heart,” he said.

### A Call to Unity

DeBerry’s message to Tennesseans is that “we are more similar than we are different.” In his work at the governor’s office in Nashville, and from his pulpit in Memphis, DeBerry stresses that working together is key to a better future.

He bemoans the fact that people on different sides of the political and religious spectrums are unable to be friendly with one another. In the past, he said, people could disagree and still be friends. “Sometimes you won, sometimes you lost, but it wasn’t personal. Now things are so personal, divisive, and toxic,” he said. “When we lose sight of what God wants us to be, that’s when we create division.”

— Cheryl Wray  
Author, Freelance Writer, Speaker





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Why Volunteering with VITA Matters: Bob’s Journey of Impact and Community

Every tax season, thousands of families rely on the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program to file their taxes accurately and for free. Behind this effort are dedicated volunteers who give their time and expertise to make a real difference. Bob, a long-time VITA volunteer and Site Coordinator, shares his journey and why you should consider joining the mission.



**Making a Real Difference**  
Bob recalls helping a woman who had been denied refunds for years because of an incorrect return. By correcting and resubmitting her past filings, she finally received thousands of dollars she desperately needed. Stories like this remind Bob why VITA matters: it’s not just about numbers, it’s about lifting burdens and restoring peace of mind.

**More Than Numbers—It’s About Connection**  
Volunteering with VITA has enriched Bob’s life in unexpected ways. He’s built friendships with fellow volunteers and clients and even joined other charitable activities through those connections. For him, VITA is more than a program—it’s a community.

**Why You Should Join**  
You don’t need to be a tax expert to start. VITA offers excellent training and plenty of support. Volunteers can begin as greeters and progress to more advanced roles at their own pace. Even a few hours a week can make a huge difference for families in need.

**The Bigger Picture**  
“The VITA program helps families comply with tax laws, saves them hundreds of dollars in fees, and ensures they receive refunds and credits they deserve. That money goes right back into the local economy. As a Site Coordinator, I help recruit and train volunteers so the program can serve as many people as possible,” Bob explains.

**Get Involved**  
Bob’s story proves that volunteering isn’t just about giving time—it’s about changing lives and strengthening communities. Ready to make an impact? Join VITA today and help us build a future where everyone has access to the support they need. Scan this QR code to sign up!



— Kris Wiese, Director, Marketing and Communications, United Way of Greater Nashville  
[www.unitedwaygreaternashville.org](http://www.unitedwaygreaternashville.org)

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& Celebrating America

It feels like every year flies by faster than the last. Can you believe it's already 2026? Where are the flying cars we were promised? According to Marty McFly in Back to the Future Part II, they should have been here 11 years ago! This September will mark 25 years since the tragic events of 9/11—a moment that changed the world forever. And in just three short years, we'll reach the centennial of the Great Depression. Time has a way of reminding us how quickly history moves and how much the world changes along the way, but one thing hasn't changed, Jesus. Hebrews 13:8 tells us that, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (ESV). Isn't that magnificent?



Here at Swanson Christian Products we believe that God should be in everything we do. Clifford E. Swanson, my great grandfather, was inspired by God to write His Word on wall plaques and crosses 91 years ago. That inspiration, desire, that dream, is still alive today in the Swanson Family and we wouldn't be successful without the love and support from our customers. We have been blessed to expand Cliffords dream to additional products. Including: pens, vinyl decals, shawls, bracelets, tissues, apparel, and so on. Deuteronomy 6:4-8 states, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (NIV). In the world we live in today, in the country we live in, we have the opportunity to place plaques in our homes with scriptures as a reminder of Christ, to wear jewelry, hats, and ties to share the Gospel, and to gift Christian items to friends and family. We are blessed. Let us not forget the power of the living Word of God.

Speaking of our great nation—the United States of America—she's turning 250 this year! To mark this historic milestone, our talented graphic designer, Allie, has created some amazing commemorative products. If you're proud to call this country home and want to celebrate with us, we've got lapel pins, a license plate, gift pens, and a vinyl decal and more—all designed to honor America's 250th birthday.

The Swanson Family would like to wish you a Happy New Year. May God Bless America.

— Katherine Stewart, Custom Representative,  
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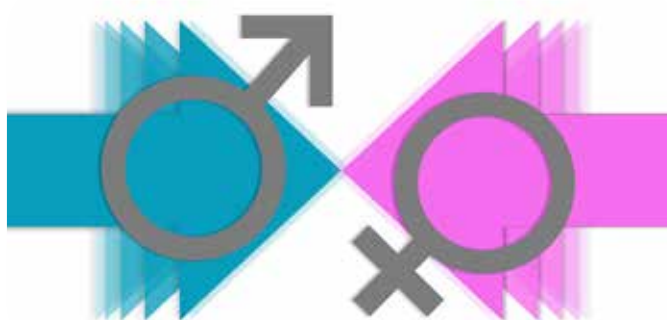
## Body & Soul

### Biblical Look at Modern Gender Dynamics

In today's culture, conversations about respect between men and women often turn combative. Many people argue that men are solely responsible for how they treat women, regardless of circumstances. While men are absolutely accountable for their actions, the Bible also teaches that behavior, character, and self-respect matter for everyone. Ignoring this has contributed to a culture where mutual respect is breaking down.

Scripture consistently emphasizes modesty, wisdom, and self-control as foundations for healthy relationships. In 1 Timothy 2:9–10 (NIV), Paul writes, “Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control... with what is proper for women who profess godliness.” This verse is not about shaming women or policing their bodies; rather, it highlights the idea that how someone presents themselves communicates values. When modesty and dignity are dismissed as outdated or oppressive, it becomes easier for others to respond without seriousness or respect.

Modern culture often encourages women to seek validation through sexualization, social media attention, and outward rebellion against traditional values. While this may feel empowering in the short term, the Bible warns that chasing approval in this way can lead to harm. Proverbs 11:22 (NIV) states, “Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.” The verse is blunt, but the message is clear: beauty without wisdom or self-respect loses its value. When discretion is absent, people begin to treat others as disposable rather than honorable.



This does not excuse men who act disrespectfully. The Bible is clear that men are commanded to act with honor. Ephesians 5:25 calls men to love sacrificially, and 1 Peter 3:7 instructs them to treat women with understanding and respect. However, Scripture also teaches personal responsibility. Galatians 6:7 (NIV) says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” Actions, attitudes, and choices shape how others respond, even when that response is not morally justified.

Respect thrives when both men and women uphold standards of character. Titus 2 encourages women to be “self-controlled, pure, and kind,” not as a limitation but as a strength. When women model confidence rooted in integrity rather than attention-seeking behavior, they set expectations for how they should be treated.

Ultimately, the Bible calls everyone to rise above cultural chaos. Respect is not demanded through entitlement; it is cultivated through conduct. Reclaiming biblical principles does not mean returning to oppression, but restoring dignity, accountability, and mutual honor in a culture that desperately needs all three.

— Karys Demos is a recent Auburn graduate. She writes about faith, character, and what it means to navigate today's culture as a young Christian.



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PARENTING POINTS

Teaching Generous Giving Throughout the Year

I know you have been generous with Christmas gifts, food, support for ministries, help for the homeless, nonprofits, and more. And God sees all of that. But how can we as parents teach our kids to hold things loosely and keep giving throughout the year?

Our actions and words model generosity. If you say you are generous, but they never see you give, what does that imply? Share with older kids whom you give to monthly. If you feel comfortable, show them how much you give, and ask them to keep this information confidential.

Start small. For younger kids, help them choose one toy to donate and suggest cleaning or sanitizing it first. (Make repairs if needed.) Take them with you to the donation site. If your child received a duplicate gift, recommend giving it away or getting a refund. What if they used that money to buy canned goods for a food pantry? Help them see that people are still hungry in January.



Clear out your closets and drawers. I bet there are plenty of outgrown or unused clothes that someone else could use. Do you know a struggling family? A single mom?

Does your child receive an allowance? Teach them to set aside a portion of the money in a savings jar or envelope. Let them choose how and to whom they will give the money.

Think of sharing time and talents. Impress on your children that giving isn't solely about money. Does your child have a talent or time to share? Maybe your teenager could babysit for free or spend time with an elderly neighbor. Does your child play an instrument to perform for a nursing home or a home-bound individual?

Help your child discover the joy in giving. After they have given away one or more items, talk about the experience. How did it feel when you first approached them about giving? How did you feel after leaving the item with someone else?



Most importantly, pray that God would transform your child's heart into a generous one.

— Sally Cressman is the author of “The Dance of Easter.” Sign up for her email list to receive “Prayer Sheets for the Family” or connect on Instagram.



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About the Host, Dr. Ming Wang, MD, PhD

The Angel Studios' film "Sight" (FREE LINK: [sight.drmingwang.com](http://sight.drmingwang.com)), starring Greg Kinnear, is based on the autobiography "From Darkness to Sight" of Dr. Ming Wang, Harvard & MIT (MD, magna cum laude); PhD (laser physics).

As a teenager, Ming played the Chinese violin erhu to escape labor camp and came to America with only \$50. He became a world-class surgeon and has performed over 55,000 laser vision surgeries (including on over 4,000 doctors). Dr. Wang invented the Amniotic membrane contact lens which has helped millions.

Wang Foundation for Sight Restoration has helped patients from over 40 states in the U.S. and 55 countries, with all sight restoration surgeries performed free-of-charge. Dr. Wang was named the Kiwanis Nashvillian of the Year for his lifelong dedication to help blind orphan children around the world.

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## PARENT WITH PURPOSE

### Beyond the Wrapping Paper: Using Christmas Toys to Teach God's Word

This is the key to raising strong disciples! Deuteronomy 6:6-7: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

So, how do we bring God's Word alive for our little ones? The answer is beautifully simple: children absorb truth best through their favorite activity—play! As we integrate Scripture into the toys and games that already make their faces light up, we're not simply instructing them. We're crafting powerful memories that will anchor their faith for generations. Einstein understood this when he said play is the highest form of research. Here are practical ideas to transform playtime into faith-building moments.

#### When Your Child Builds with Blocks

I've watched my own children's faces light up as they stack towers high, and I've learned these are perfect moments to share how Nehemiah rallied God's people to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. As their little hands work, ask them, "Why do you think God wanted everyone to work together?" Let them act it out, making those ancient walls real in your living room. Abstract faith becomes something they can touch and understand. Also, you can purchase biblical Legos!

#### Transforming Toys into Teaching Tools

Your child's stuffed animals can become the creatures marching onto Noah's ark, two by two. Those action figures? They're suddenly David, standing courageously before a giant. I've discovered that when my children physically reenact these stories, something profound happens—they don't just hear about faith, they live it. What their hands do, their hearts remember.

#### Creating Art with the Creator

While your little one colors or paints, talk about how God filled creation with breathtaking colors. Share the story of Joseph's special coat or Noah's rainbow of promise. Ask wonder-filled questions: "What colors do you think God painted in the Garden of Eden?" Every crayon stroke becomes a celebration of God as the ultimate Artist.

#### Playing Kitchen, Learning Faith

During pretend cooking time, tell about God's miraculous meals, and how manna appeared each morning in the wilderness, Jesus multiplying bread and fish, or the widow whose oil jar never emptied. Wonder aloud together: "How do you think that little boy felt when Jesus used his lunch to feed so many people?"

#### The Joy of This Approach

When we integrate Bible stories and prayer into play, something beautiful unfolds. Our children naturally absorb God's character. Their curious questions—"Why did God do that?" or "Was she scared?"—show us their hearts are truly engaging with Scripture, not just memorizing facts. Building faith in young hearts requires patience, consistency, and abundant grace. Start small, stay steady, and trust that these faithful moments are planting seeds that will bloom for generations.

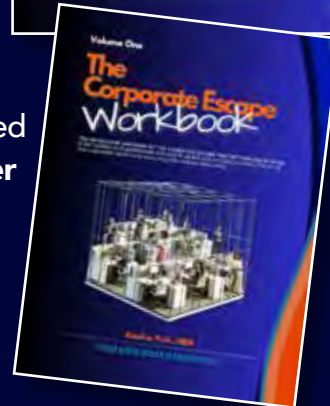
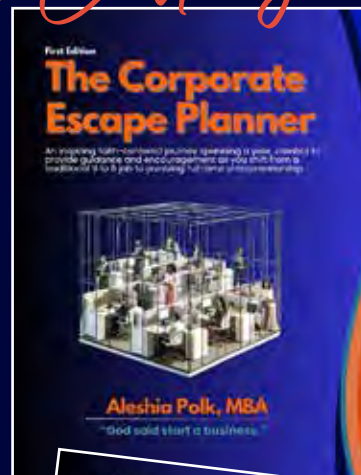
— Lee Ann Mancini is the author of *Raising Kids to Follow Christ: Instilling a Lifelong Trust in God*, founder of *Raising Christian Kids*, adjunct professor at *South Florida Bible College & Theological Seminary*, and executive producer of the animated series *Sea Kids on Right Now Media*, *Pure Flix*, *Answers.tv*, *Minno*, and *Yippee*. Lee Ann is the mother of two adult children and lives with her husband in South Florida, where she passionately pursues her calling to help parents raise lifelong Christ-followers.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Aleshia Polk, MBA, is the founder of Hustle On Sunday®, a boutique faith-based entrepreneurship consultancy focused on guiding purpose-driven individuals into impactful business ownership.





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## Churches and the Crises They Face

The reputations of churches today are just one crisis away from being destroyed. Yet, an overwhelming majority of churches are unprepared to manage even the slightest level of hostility that is becoming more prevalent in American culture.

Harsh statement? Maybe, but hopefully a wake-up call also. After more than 20 years in crisis communications and media relations, I can confidently say there are two types of organizations: those that have faced a crisis and those whose crisis hasn't happened yet.

When things go wrong, organizations without a plan often suffer significant reputational damage — sometimes irreparable — in a matter of minutes. Why are so many churches unprepared? Often, it's because no one anticipates a crisis. Some adopt a "we'll deal with it if it happens" mentality. Others recognize the need for a plan but don't know where to start or lack the staff and resources to create one. Whatever the reason, preparation must become a priority.

I've helped church pastors, and leadership teams navigate crises involving sexual abuse allegations, financial scandals, moral failures, social media attacks, false accusations, church fires, and more. While the number of churches in crisis at any given time is statistically small compared to the total number of churches affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention, the question remains: What if the church in crisis is your church?

Every crisis presents an opportunity for a positive outcome. Preparation and execution often determine the result, and it all starts with being ready. So, are you prepared? Here are five basic steps to help your church absorb the initial blow of a crisis and build a foundation for survival.

### Step 1: Embrace reality

Crises can arise from anything — a sidewalk trip-and-fall, a youth bus accident, or even a church shooting. Start by identifying potential crises your church could face. Too often, leaders dismiss crises as minor inconveniences that will resolve themselves. Reality check: The organizational landscape is littered with leaders who lost their positions because they failed to take crises seriously. Manage the crisis, or it will manage you.

### Step 2: Define roles and responsibilities

When a crisis hits, who needs to respond, and what will they do? One person



cannot manage a crisis alone. Proverbs 11:14 reminds us there is safety and wisdom in a multitude of advisors. Assign specific roles: Who will serve as the spokesperson? Who will monitor social media? Who will gather the latest information? Who will contact families if someone is injured? Who will handle logistics, like meals, if the crisis requires extended engagement? Confusion escalates quickly when roles and responsibilities are unclear and people are under the pressure of a crisis.

### Step 3: Practice preparedness

Once you've identified a crisis response team and assigned roles, practice. Walk through "what if" scenarios based on the potential crises you identified in Step 1. For example, "What if someone falls?" or "What if there's a camp accident?" "What if there is a social media attack?" Preparation through practice reduces confusion and ensures everyone knows their roles.

### Step 4: Craft your message

Every crisis is unique, but your church's mission and values should guide your communication. Develop foundational talking points that reflect your church's ministry and can be adapted to different scenarios. These points will serve as the bedrock for your messaging during a crisis.

### Step 5: Don't overlook the front desk

The receptionist answering the phone or greeting visitors is often the most uninformed person during a crisis. Yet, they are among the most critical. They are often the first point of contact for anyone reaching out to the church. Assign someone to keep the receptionist updated with the latest information and equip them with clear instructions on how to respond to inquiries.

There's much more to crisis management than these five steps. However, without these fundamentals, the rest won't matter.

A crisis can torpedo a church and its leadership in minutes — or it can be an opportunity to solidify your place in the community. The outcome depends on how well you manage the crisis.

— Chris Turner, Editor, Baptist and Reflector  
[www.baptistandreflector.org](http://www.baptistandreflector.org)

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Cleaning Schedule For Working Moms and Dads

Raising a family and working a full-time job may leave you very little time to keep your home as clean as you'd like. Looking at dusty furniture and dirty floors each day can be frustrating. Is getting used to a messy home the only option? Not according to the cleaning pros at Molly Maid. Here are some tips and useful advice that can help keep your home tidy and clean, even if you don't have a lot of time.

9 Cleaning Tips for Busy Moms and Dads

Instead of being irritated by the clutter in the living room, the food stuck on the counters, and the laundry piling up, it's time to take action! Here are some great ways to keep up with the mess before it takes over your life.

1. Create a Routine

Because everyone's schedule and family routine may be a little different, cleaning schedules for working moms and dads should be based on your family routine, work hours, and fun time. Here is an example of an effective work schedule that requires 90 minutes of cleaning and organizing a day:

Before School/Work - 30 minutes total

- Make your bed and help children (under 10 years old) make theirs.
- Clean all breakfast dishes and wipe down the counters.
- Vacuum a few high-traffic areas.

After Work - 30 minutes total

- Start a load of laundry.
- Organize homework papers and mail
- Clean up dinner dishes (load dishwasher) and wipe all counters

Before Bed - 30 minutes total

- Declutter living areas and lightly dust furniture.
- Fold and sort laundry.

2. Stock Up On Supplies in Advance

It is frustrating to get hyped up to clean your house only to discover that you are out of bathroom cleaner. Do a monthly supply inventory check of which cleaners you have and which you need to buy so when you are ready to clean, nothing will stand in your way.

3. Wash Toys With Ease

If you have young children, there are two easy ways to wash those germ-ridden toys they love. You can put all the toys in the dishwasher and wash them through a cycle. Or, wash them on a delicate cycle in the washing machine. Washing your children's toys once a week will reduce the amount of germs they accumulate and hopefully keep them from getting sick.

4. Toss Everything in a Basket

Decluttering a household is one of the biggest challenges for a busy family. If you're constantly in a rush and don't have time during the day to put things in their proper place, start a mess bin. A mess bin can be used for things like shoes, socks, toys, makeup, and other things that you don't have time to put away during the day. When things settle down, and you have more time, choose a family member to put these items into their proper place (kind of like restocking shelves). Take turns and choose a different family member for this task each time, and don't forget to reward a job well done.

5. Put Cleaning Supplies Where You Use Them

Keep cleaning supplies where they're needed, so you never have to cart them from room to room. For example, if you have four bathrooms in your house, you should have four bathroom cleaners, four toilet bowl cleaners, and four toilet bowl brushes. Just be sure to stow any cleaning products in child-proof



cabinets. This will save you multiple trips around the house looking for the cleaner supplies you need for each room.

6. Keep a Donation Box Accessible

Most of us accumulate a lot of stuff. Kids are constantly growing out of clothes and shoes. Parents need to get

rid of wardrobe items they don't wear anymore. Instead of letting these items pile up in closets or corners of bedrooms, designate a donation box when you're ready to purge. Once the box is full, bring it to a donation center in your community.

7. Pick Up a Few Times a Day

Here is another good cleaning tip for busy moms and dads: divide your home into three working zones and spend 10 to 15 minutes a day picking up and decluttering each zone. This creates a slow and steady decluttering process rather than a major cleanup at the end of each day that will leave you exhausted.

8. Touch Something Once

The rule is a simple one: put away what you take out. Teach your children the "one touch" rule, which is the philosophy of only touching something once before putting it away. For example, if you take crackers out of the pantry to eat, put them away as soon as you're finished. This simple exercise avoids messes piling up in your home throughout the day.

9. Do Laundry Every Day

Keep up with the laundry by completing one load a day during the week and save your weekend time off for fun. After each load is clean and dry, don't wait, fold it and put it away the same day. This will keep it from piling up at the end of the week.

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— Daron and Maricela Farrar



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Evangelism with Confidence: Calvin’s Call to Proclaim—and Ours

Where I Stand

In a world full of theological tension, I find myself somewhere between Calvinism and Arminianism. I believe God knows our choices before we’re born—but knowing isn’t forcing. We still choose. And that choice matters. I’ve known people who wrestled with faith. Some said, “I’ve got time—I’ll sow my oats first.” Others denied Christ outright. I’ve seen deathbed conversions that shook me to the core. And I’ve asked: What if no one had shared the Word with them? What if we stayed silent?

The Call to Proclaim

Scripture is clear—and urgent:  
“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”  
— Matthew 28:19–20  
“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”  
— Romans 10:14–15

John Calvin believed that evangelism was essential. Though he taught that salvation is by God’s sovereign election, he also insisted that preaching the gospel is the ordained means by which God calls His elect. Calvin didn’t know who the elect

were—so he preached to all. He trained missionaries, sent pastors into hostile regions, and preached regularly in Geneva. His theology didn’t hinder outreach—it fueled it. That’s not contradiction. That’s confidence.

The Weight of Silence

If we don’t share the gospel, are we responsible for those who never hear?

- For those near us—yes, we bear a burden. We are called to be salt and light.
- For hidden communities—we may not be personally responsible, but the Church collectively is. Missions matter. Outreach matters.
- For those taken suddenly—accidents, violence, illness—these remind us that time is not guaranteed. Evangelism must be urgent, not casual.

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise... but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”  
— 2 Peter 3:9  
“You will be My witnesses... to the ends of the earth.”  
— Acts 1:8  
“If you do not warn the wicked... his blood I will require at your hand.”  
— Ezekiel 3:18

Evangelism Beyond the Pulpit

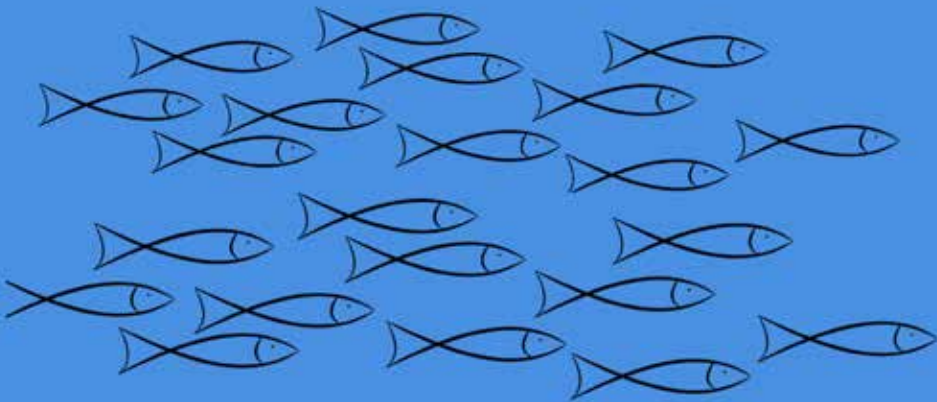
I’ve seen pastors who preach well but avoid outreach. I’ve seen churches that forsake discipleship for doctrine. But evangelism isn’t just preaching—it’s presence. It’s mailing a package of encouragement. It’s grilling bratwurst for a weary captain. It’s living in such a way that others ask, “What must I do to be saved?” *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”* — John 3:16

A Legacy of Invitation

God didn’t create people for eternal separation. He created them for relationship. And while He knows who will choose Him, He calls us to invite, proclaim, and steward that message. Evangelism with confidence means trusting God’s sovereignty while embracing our responsibility. It means proclaiming truth, living visibly, and loving boldly. Because someone’s eternity may hinge on our willingness to speak.

— Durward Blanks is a Christian Life & Relationship Coach, legacy-minded travel consultant, and professional Santa Claus. With over 40 years of ministry through storytelling, seasonal service, and spiritual encouragement, he blends lived experience with biblical insight to inspire others.

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## PARENTING POINTS

### How to Talk with Your Child about a Book You've Never Read (and Why You Should Try It!)

Years ago, I bribed my then-teen-age son with Cardinals tickets to read my favorite novel. As we began the drive to St. Louis, I looked forward to hearing all these insights bubbling out of him. But the book that began unfolding from his mind was like a house with no furniture. He was looking forward to the trip and the game, but the book held no joy for him! He had dutifully kept his end of the bargain. But the proud parent in me had forgotten what the teacher had learned long ago. Regardless of intelligence, reflection is not automatic. Some assembly is required along the way!



When kids are very young, we're often reading with them. As kids get older and more independent, asking about their reading gives them a chance to pull their own thoughts and feelings together as they make deeper sense of what they've read. Here are four conversation starters you can use, even if you've never read the book!

**What in this story is grabbing your attention?** This is a great entry point because it tells you as much about your child as about the book! As she speaks, listen for emotions: Did this part make her feel sad, angry, excited, or maybe surprised? If you ask this question frequently, you'll get a feel over time for how your child reads.

**What in this story is reminding you of something in your life?** Most kids like to picture things in their minds as they read. To them, a barn in the story might look like the barn down your road.

**What character in this story you would want to be... or NOT want to be?** Characters are people, and we all know people! Kids who struggle with many things about reading often find traction here.

**What in this story do you wish you could change?** This question engages the imagination and reasoning together. Could this story happen in a different time or place and still be the same story? Listen especially for complaints about "boring" parts or disappointing endings. When something in a story seems pointless to us, that's often where we're missing pieces we need to understand and enjoy it more fully.

When kids read, they're often looking for things they can connect to personally. For example, a boy who's reading for action may pass right over a character's thoughts and feelings... and miss how those are about to shape the action that happens next! Often reading improves as we begin to ask ourselves new questions, especially questions like "Why do you think this person did this thing?". When we engage with kids about what they're reading, we're not only showing them that their reading matters but also modeling the curiosity that helps make reading better.

— George Rietz encourages teachers, teaches homeschoolers, and invents new tools to reshape education. Contact him through [www.ExploreMyWriting.com](http://www.ExploreMyWriting.com).

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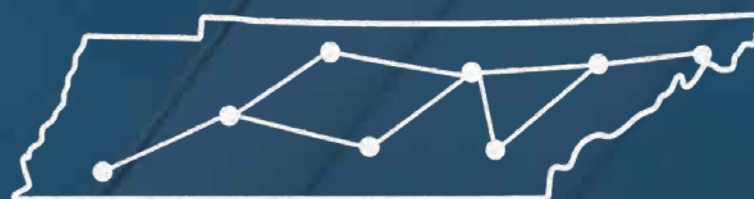
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### Charlie Kirk Part II: The Call to New Evangelization

Last month, I offered a comprehensive review of Charlie Kirk, an extraordinary individual whose writings and inspirational podcasts have made a significant impact on many of us. Kirk stands out for his brightness, articulation, genuineness, and spirituality, challenging us to renew our understanding of the charge: “Go forth throughout our world and preach (words, actions, kindness, etc.) the good news of the kingdom of God.” His influence has touched many in our audience, encouraging a deeper reflection on faith and purpose and meaning.

#### The Role of Cognitive Behavioral Thinking (CBT)

In Part I, I discussed the importance of Cognitive Behavioral Thinking (CBT) as a foundational change in how we think, believe, and behave. CBT involves shifting from irrational and untruthful thought patterns to a refreshed, rational way of thinking. This transformation leads to clarity, untainted by bias or prejudice, freeing us from narcissism and disengagement from learning, toward a passionate lifelong quest to learn! Such clarity also helps us resist superficial media narratives that promote materialistic values, such as “he/she who wins at life is the one with the most toys at the end of the game.”

#### The Journey of Man: Our Shared Humanity

The second major change which also must happen, is our understanding of humanity’s interconnectedness. Referencing the latest scientific research, particularly the work of Dr. Spenser Wells, it has been established that over 99% of human DNA is identical across all people. Wells, a passionate epidemiologist and anthropologist, traveled globally with his team to collect and analyze blood samples, confirming that our differences lie in personality, background, experience, and culture—not in our genetic makeup. His book, *The Journey of Man*, demonstrates that we all come from the same ancestors. Recognizing this truth leads to the realization that we are all brothers and sisters, making it unthinkable to harm one another family member. For further details, I recommend reading my article published in NCM in January 2025.

#### The True Mission of Christianity

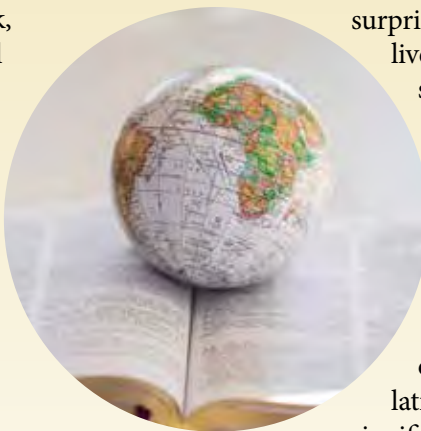
Unlike the times of the Bible, many Christians today find “a comfort zone,” within their religious communities, often missing a crucial aspect of their faith: genuine service to others and the active sharing their faith to all they encounter.... Usually with their genuine Christlike behavior and the mantra, “use words only when necessary”. Some believe salvation is a one-time achievement, allowing them to rest easy, yet Jesus’s command was clear—evangelize the entire world. This directive is not a passive noun but an active verb, calling for motivation and action: “Go everywhere in the world, and tell the Good News to everyone”! (Mark 16:15)

#### Understanding Our World: Dr. Matthew Kelly’s Metaphor

Dr. Matthew Kelly once shared a metaphor to help grasp the vastness and diversity of our world. By envisioning the planet now arriving at 8 billion people, reframe it to a small town of 100 people. This then breakdowns down to: 57 people are from Asia, 21 are from Europe, nine are from Africa, eight are from North America, and five are from South America. Of the 100, 51 would be women and 49 men. Six people would control more than half of the world’s wealth—a finding echoed by my friend Og Mandino in his book, *The University of Success*.

#### Global Realities and Challenges

Further analysis of this world-town reveals stark realities: one person is about to be born, one is about to die, and only seven have attended college. A major



surprise for most of us, only 33 are Christian while 67 are not; 80 live in substandard housing, and astonishingly, 92% have never sat on a commode. Thirty-one cannot read or write, 24 do not have electricity, 71 do not have internet access, and 39 survive on less than two dollars a day.

1/3 of the world is dying from lack of bread, another 1/3 of the world is dying from injustice, and the final third of the world is dying from overeating. This snapshot illustrates the immense challenge facing us as we strive to fulfill our charge to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all corners of the earth. Currently, only one-third of the world’s population knows this message, leaving two-thirds unaware of its significance. The focus is not on denominational differences but on uniting as followers of the one Risen Jesus Christ.

#### The Call to New Evangelization

It is time for each of us to embrace the responsibility with enthusiasm (this word has Greek roots meaning “God within”). The mandate is clear: we must rise to the occasion and actively share the good news with everyone. This movement is now recognized as the New Evangelization—a call to action for all believers to spread faith, hope, and love throughout our world. “Jesus said to his followers, go everywhere in the world, and tell the good news to everyone”! (Mark 16:15)

— Dr. Tim Lynch, PhD, [tdlynch@bellsouth.net](mailto:tdlynch@bellsouth.net) If you want to know more about Dr. Tim Lynch check out *Psychology Today Practice Directory*, or visit [www.thelynchgroup.net](http://www.thelynchgroup.net).

**If something in this month’s issue of**

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## Spiritual Goal for January

### RECRUIT...for the future.

Do we really, really want everyone to know the Lord Jesus, receive salvation and go to Heaven? Someone said, "I really would not want that person to be in Heaven with me?" Think about that statement. Who has the right to be someone's moral agent? God's ways are not our ways. The Lord is the Absolute Authority. He died to save us from damnation. How does that fact affect our way of thinking?

Someone provided a great recruitment method while looking to the future. It's called CONVERSATION EVANGELISM. Be mindful of the future for others by finding a way to introduce God into a conversation. For example. A person may say, "I like this beautiful day." Our response should be, "You're right because God made it for us. He created everything, including the sun that sustains life on earth. WOW."

#### Prayer

*Lord Jesus, what would You have us to say...and do TODAY to represent Your Kingdom? Our efforts would be futile UNLESS You give a touch of Your Divine Power and Spirit. We are willing... but...need You in everything we think...say...and do.*

*Lord, we want to encourage and be a recruiter for You. According to Your will, let it be so. Let fit be so Lord Jesus. Amen.*

— Ralph E. Vaughn

## PLAN OF SALVATION

*Has something in the magazine or something you have discussed with someone or some thoughts that you have had or something that you have heard, brought you to a point of realizing that you want and need to know Christ in the truest and personal sense?*

*If so, below is a simple outline for someone of any age who is not a Believer to act on their desire to accept Jesus Christ into their heart as their Savior.*

#### God's Plan of Salvation

##### God created us to honor and serve Him

Revelation 4:11: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist[b] and were created

##### Each of us has sinned against God

Romans 3:10: As it is written, "There is none righteous, no, not one"  
Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

##### The penalty for sin is eternal separation from God and Heaven

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

##### Good works cannot ever earn God's forgiveness and Salvation

Titus 3:5: not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.

##### God loves each of us

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

#### Jesus Christ died on the cross in our place, paying the penalty for our sin

Romans 5:8: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

#### We each must accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior

Romans 10:9: that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:13: For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

#### To accept Christ into your heart and life, pray a simple prayer along these lines -

*"Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and I am sorry for my sins. I know that Jesus died for my sins and the sins of the world. Right now, I ask Jesus into my heart and receive Him as my personal Savior. Forgive me of my sins, thank you for saving me through the blood of Jesus. Please Lord, help me live for you. In Jesus name, amen."*

*All scriptures are taken from The New King James Version of the Holy Bible.*

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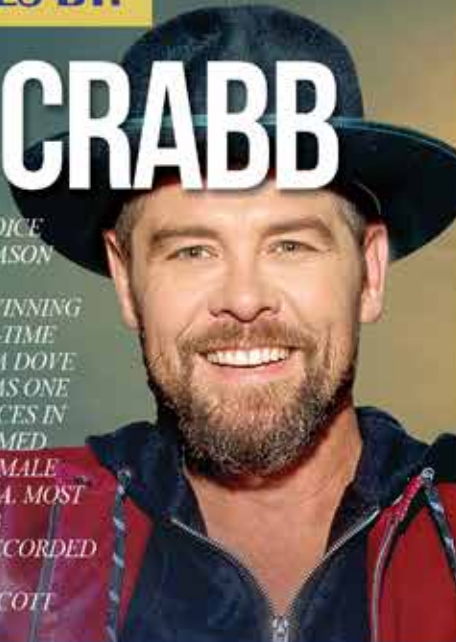
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