

## **EXTRAVAGANT: LIVING OUT YOUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S OUTRAGEOUS LOVE**

*Bryan Jarrett*

In the unfolding story of Scripture, the covenants describe a bond between God and humanity. The bond includes both love and law, and it forms a powerful synthesis at the heart of genuine devotion. Each epoch of covenantal history reveals the cycle of reciprocity, a mutual influence or exchange of privileges. God initiates with humanity by offering relationship, blessing, and challenge. The offer of a relationship is explicit or implied: "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Exod. 6:7). If people share God's name, they will want to bear His nature by loving as He loves, forgiving as He forgives, accepting others as He accepts them, being brokenhearted about the things that break His heart, and being thrilled with the issues that bring Him joy. When people's reciprocity mirrors God's love for them, He showers even more blessings on his faith-filled children, and the cycle continues.

Particular Christian circles misuse the concept of reciprocity. Some leaders use it mechanically, insisting on human initiation, and with the expectation that faith guarantees God's outpouring of blessing. Extravagant devotion, however, is not a human-centered, compulsive desire to prove oneself to God or others. According to Paul, genuine affection and joyful obedience to God—in overflowing and sometimes shocking measure—proves the only reasonable response to God's grace (Rom. 12:1-2). Transformed by His love, people no longer try to prove themselves or please others to win their coveted approval. They can move beyond the limited circle of self-absorption to give themselves wholly and joyfully to God and to others. The only way to experience true life in Christ comes through a surrendered self-giving devotion.

## **GOD DWELLING WITH HIS CHILDREN IN PARADISE: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY LAND**

*Samuel L. Brelo*

The subject of the Holy Land and its years of conflict involves many areas of investigation. There are historical, geo-political, psychological, and theological concerns. Specifically, one's understanding of the Holy Land and the relationship of Jews to it will affect ideas about recent history, rights to the Holy Land, and feelings toward Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

For many years, as an Assemblies of God foreign missionary to the Middle East, I observed that an overwhelming number of Assemblies of God pastors are Christian Zionists. Many times this view has created a context for these pastors to "take sides" on the Arab-Israeli conflict and develop negative emotions about Palestinian Arabs. This, in turn, has negatively affected the development of vision strategies to evangelize both Jews and Arabs in the region.

The project, through a six-hour seminar, provided the development of a biblical theology of the Holy Land from Genesis through Revelation. The seminar was given to almost thirty Assemblies of God pastors (and a few from non-Assemblies of God denominations) in Pennsylvania in April, 2011. Specifically, the seminar demonstrated that the overarching desire of God is to dwell with humankind in Holy Space. This idea is seen from Adam and Eve through the New Heaven and New Earth. Through Jesus the Messiah, God restores humankind and invites all His children to receive eternal inheritance and live with Him forever.

The seminar enabled participating pastors to develop a deeper biblical theology of the Holy Land. They developed a theology that demonstrated how the Old Testament Holy Land fits into the overall progress of salvation. Such a theology of the Holy Land moves pastors away from an unconditional and uncritical Christian Zionism and can help them to evaluate the situation and challenges in the Middle East through a different lens.

**PASTORS' KIDS IN LATIN AMERICA: AN INVESTIGATION INTO  
THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES  
OF THE PK EXPERIENCE**

*Jon Mark Dahlager*

National church leaders across Latin America are endeavoring to establish ministries to pastors' kids (PKs), some of the most visible and vulnerable young people in the church, but ministry efforts have been hampered by a dearth of resources and trained personnel.

This investigative study of PKs in Latin America offers a conceptual foundation for leaders wanting to minister to PKs. It surveys 607 adolescent PKs at retreats in Costa Rica, Cuba, Panama, Argentina, and El Salvador. Each PK subjectively named advantages and disadvantages of PK life and responded to objective statements.

The data suggests five distinctive clusters of advantages and corresponding disadvantages that define the PK experience. (1) PKs grow up with preacher-parents and receive a rich spiritual heritage, but the church often dominates family life. (2) PKs live in the church spotlight, enjoying special recognition but feeling on display in the pastoral fishbowl. (3) PKs have access to the best of the Church world, but people expect them to be perfect "little pastors." (4) PKs are privy to insider information about the ministry and the church, but too much information breeds cynicism and isolation. (5) PKs are on the fast track to leadership, but premature ministry may bring disillusionment or ethical failure.

Those who minister to pastors' kids can help PKs maximize their advantages and build relational PK ministry structures to counteract the disadvantages. Further research among PKs in other cultural groups may uncover variables not present in this study.

# **UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL PRODIGALS: PRACTICAL LIFE LESSONS FOR PARENTS**

*Lon Flippo*

Prodigalism is no respecter of parents. From pastors, missionaries, and Christian leaders to average church-attending, Bible-believing parents, none are exempt from the possibility of children turning prodigal. This project addresses the growing problem of prodigalism among Christian families by researching contemporary cultural trends and biblical theology and performing a survey of parents in two churches. To do this, I created a parenting seminar and Web site from this research, named iParentnow.

iParentnow provides a venue for parents to network with others in similar situations, biblical insight for parents to prevent prodigalism, and effective parenting principles when a child abandons the faith and values of the family. The project is exploratory and assumes that parents can acquire practical, usable parenting solutions from other parents.

The seminar and Web site consists of three parts: (1) The *Information* portion summarizes the implications of cultural influences on parents and children. (2) The *Insight* section includes articles by parents in the trenches and experts in the field. (3) The *Inspiration* section articulates parenting principals gleaned from biblical research.

The evaluation process revealed that many parents struggle with spiritual and moral education during their child's teenage years but worry very little about this during early childhood. This suggests that more education is needed on spiritual training in the early years. Parents cited the interactive nature of the seminar as one of its most valuable features. The project provides a valuable resource for churches to use in helping parents to network and mentor one another.

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY SERVICE IN CHURCH OF  
GOD IN CHRIST (COGIC) CONGREGATIONS IN THE  
GREATER HOUSTON AREA**

*Charles Hill*

This project assesses the extent of local Church of God in Christ (COGIC) congregational involvement in community programs based on a survey of at least fifty congregations in the Greater Houston, Texas area. The survey instrument reflected the project writer's research and understanding of the most common types of programs offered by local congregations. Although the scope of the project was restricted to COGIC congregations, a review of local social services, including those of local black megachurches and their programs, served as examples of effective programs.

The biblical-theological literature review examined Old Testament teachings on helping the poor and needy in society and extended to New Testament teachings on love and concern for the well-being of other people. The general literature review supports the ongoing impact of the Church in the African American community as it addresses the social problems and effects of injustice experienced by black people.

The culmination of the project was a six-hour training session presented to COGIC leaders in the Greater Houston area, focusing on the results of the survey and the local resources available to help nonprofit organizations and needy people. Nine participants from six local congregations attended the training session. Participants completed pretest/posttest and evaluation forms to measure the effectiveness of the seminar. The project successfully completed its goal to strengthen local COGIC congregations in the Greater Houston area in community service ministry.

# **TOWARD A MISSIONAL TRANSFORMATION: A HANDBOOK FOR OHIO CHURCHES IN PURSUIT OF *MISSIO DEI***

*Robert Vernon Huckleberry*

Attendance at Dayspring Church in Bowling Green, Ohio, has declined or stagnated over the past four years even with a change in pastoral leadership implementing approaches like EPIC (Experiential, Participatory, Image-rich, and Connected) worship. Total adherents in the Ohio Ministry Network (OMN) have also declined while implementing Strategic Coaching and Church Health programs. However, these efforts will not help if current paradigms in the church persist. This problem extends beyond the local and regional district; the Western Church in America has lost its place of prominence and predominantly caters to a Christian subculture with little impact to its community. The current ecclesia-centric culture offers little hope in evangelizing a pluralistic society bent on secularism and individualism.

This project attempts to raise missional awareness from centuries of church-centric frameworks to a *missio Dei* perspective. A study of *missio Dei* revealed a transformation in missiology from a Western colonial solution to a local approach where culture determines praxis. *Missio ecclesia* needs the same transformation. A thorough review of missional literature led to a basic survey tool measuring one's missionality. Additionally, a missional handbook on Bowling Green's local culture was developed as a template for others to use in their own missional transformation. Eighty-nine responses, along with Dayspring's essay survey, revealed that few understand the thirty-year-old missional concept where missiology ought to determine the church's cultural DNA instead of an ecclesiology led by a sedentary pastoral leadership model.

## **EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN A POST-LITERARY AGE: A NARRATIVE APOLOGETIC FOR YOUNG DOUBTERS**

*Andrew Lovins*

Community of Faith Church is a classical Pentecostal Church that has lost its identity and experienced rapid decline over the past decade. The decline is related not only to leadership challenges, but to a lack of biblical and theological sophistication. The church has failed to navigate the drift toward postmodernity in the digital age. Her greatest need is to reclaim the narrative of her Pentecostal roots, a narrative indigenous to her Charismatic/Pentecostal tradition.

While one may envision a transformation through the usual methods of consumerist marketing techniques borrowed from Main Street, the power of the biblical story is able to change lives when told in a provocative style true to the narrative genre of Scripture. In other words, the secret to revitalization will not be found in a new method, but an old one—the method Jesus used when He expounded the truth through parable, riddle, and metaphor.

A fellowship of mystic storytellers must be formed who, persuaded by the gospel, boldly tell the story to people adrift on the sea of relativism. One must squarely face the nihilism of the current era with the certain hope that doubt can turn into faith when gently confronted by the narrative apologetic of the gospel.

In the course of four weeks a sermon series, utilizing a narrative apologetic, was presented to Community of Faith Assembly of God. A month long seminar was taught during the same month at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center on the same themes. All four lessons were based on texts taken from the Gospel of John and were presented with the intent of helping doubters come to greater confidence in the Jesus narrative. At the completion of the series, data was collected which demonstrated that narrative exposition remains a catalyst for spiritual growth, often becoming the impetus for renewed commitments to Christ and first time professions of faith.

**IMPLEMENTING PREVENTION AND WELLNESS WORKSHOPS FOR  
INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH:  
A PILOT PROJECT FOR WAY OF FAITH ASSEMBLY  
OF GOD CHURCH, FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA**

*Clishia Taylor*

Many Christians adhere to fragmented concepts regarding health and the human body, which seriously hinders the promotion and practice of holistic health. In order to address this imbalance, this project created a seven-week Prevention and Wellness Workshop at Way of Faith (WOF) Assembly of God in Fairfax, Virginia. The Workshop focused on assisting fifteen participants address problems of obesity, high blood pressure, and high blood sugar, the three primary indicators of disease. Individuals learned to take personal responsibility for their health and were empowered to manage their health as medical experts taught principles regarding disease prevention and wellness.

The biblical foundation of the project established the nature of holistic salvation while current literature related to prevention and wellness provided the groundwork for the Workshop curriculum. While meeting a felt need, the primary goal of the Workshop was to provide a means by which people in the church could reach out to unsaved friends, neighbors, and co-workers through a non-threatening health and wellness program.

Data indicates that individuals incorporated healthful lifestyle changes as a result of participating in the Workshop and early detection averted a life-threatening medical condition for one individual. This project produced a ministry model that will contribute to the effectiveness of WOF efforts by educating members with a biblical perspective regarding the body and creating an evangelistic outreach to the community that will move people from unhealthy living to full life, both spiritually and physically (John 10:10).

**FULFILLING THE MANDATE TO CARE FOR THE POOR AND  
FATHERLESS: A CALL TO ACTION FOR THE  
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD OF TEXAS**

*Harry B. Thomassen*

The Assemblies of God has traditionally struggled with a tension between issues of social justice and/or evangelism. The original reason this project was initiated is because multiple pastors had expressed that the role of the church in America was to save the lost and that caring for the poor and orphans was the responsibility of the state.

In a quantitative research study of 243 pastors from three Texas Assembly of God districts, subjects were polled on their opinions on this tension. Results indicated that that over 80 percent of the Texas pastors in the Assemblies of God believe it is the church's responsibility to be involved in caring for the poor and fatherless. A surprisingly high 20 percent of pastors disagree or were not sure and feel that evangelism should be the principal focus of the church. A review of the literature suggests that many of the churches in America have largely relinquished the biblically mandated task of caring for the poor and fatherless to the government. Implications for the pastors' responses are explored relative to their support of Pleasant Hills Children's Home in Texas.

The outcome of this research was shared at a presentation to a sectional Assembly of God meeting in Texas. The results of the research promoted the recommendations that Texas Assemblies of God pastors should focus on when they consider what their ministry should be to the poor and fatherless today.

## **ADVANCING EVANGELISTIC MINISTRY: A MODEL FOR THE TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF PENTECOSTAL EVANGELISTS**

*Marshall Moore Windsor*

The Assemblies of God (AG) has experienced a growing problem over the last twenty-eight years in the steep decline of its itinerant ministers. If this trend continues, the AG will no longer have any evangelists in another twenty-one years. Sixty-one percent of current AG evangelists are age fifty and older, while only five percent claim an age of twenty to twenty-nine. This project verified the problem through statistical data and provided viable options for the AG Executive Leadership Team (ELT) with scriptural support, strategic plans and survey feedback from AG evangelists and students.

The project found that culture, immigration, and generational trends were affecting ministry methods—and adversely affecting evangelists who were unable to adapt. Fewer weekly services, holistic ministry, and relevance to life issues mark current ministry styles. The project confirmed the need for AG evangelists training and also revealed the need for reimagining new roles for evangelists: teacher and discipler, story-teller and apologist, counselor and healer, staff evangelist and missional evangelist.

This project confirmed the need for missional evangelists who are supported and trained to effectively help smaller churches. They understand the value of demographics and realize the impact of culture and immigration upon the church. These evangelists are trained in oratory and teaching skills—equipping leaders and laity for evangelism. Fiscal support will alleviate financial hindrances for both smaller churches needing evangelistic ministry and missional evangelists—allowing exponential propagation of the gospel.

# **MULTIPLYING DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION**

*Darryl E. Wootton*

The goal of Bartlesville First Assembly of God is to disciple Christians into being fully devoted followers of Christ. Many church members hear the Word of God through preaching and teaching, however, they remain in spiritual stagnation due to the neglect of the Word in their daily lives. Scripture memorization is an effective tool in the spiritual formation of all believers. The Bible is full of mandates to learn God's Word, meditate upon God's Word, and to hide God's Word in our hearts. Scripture memorization provides an opportunity to multiply discipleship in the personal life of each believer and in the corporate life of Bartlesville First Assembly of God.

This project developed a strategy for Scripture memorization within the local church. A biblical-theological foundation was presented to the congregation in the form of a sermon series. Leaders from across the country provided inspiration by submitting testimonies exclusively for this project. Following a motivational memorization demonstration, a training seminar provided practical techniques of memorization with application to Scripture.

Based upon the posttest results, the project was successful and multiplied the discipleship ministry of Bartlesville First Assembly of God. Spiritual formation occurred through this project and is evident in the many testimonies that were provided by those who participated in the memorization process. The continuation and further development of the focus of abiding in God's Word should continue in order to reap the same benefits.