

Good Friday afternoon, New South Family. Welcome to the 32<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending February 7, 2020.

-----**The Critical**-----

## Announcements

- 1) Change of Venue for Annual Conference** Due to several factors, primarily the fact that your Interim Superintendent doesn't yet really know what he's doing, we are choosing to have Annual Conference at Wilmore instead of at Oakdale Christian Academy. Sorry for this late notice, and thank you to Dan Fisher and the OCA staff for your accommodation and graciousness.
- 2) A Complete FM Course Schedule...**is attached below These are courses currently being offered through the Credentialing office. If you would like to see syllabi for any of these courses, [email Donna Miller](#) at FM Credentialing and she will be happy to send them. Online courses are exactly 7 weeks long. Correspondence courses may move as quickly as the candidate needs up to 8 months.
- 3) Denominational Church Report Forms** should have been sent to every church / pastor from the World Ministry Center. If you are a pastor and did not receive two e-mails from Theresa Portwood involving our annual report to the FM Ministry Center, please let me know ASAP.
- 4) A New Conference Mileage / Expense Report** is attached to this e-mail, and also appears on the NSC Website. Please use this for expense reimbursements from now on due to an IRS rate change.
- 5) We'll Be Saying Goodbye** to Stan and Gloria Welton, who has accepted a position at Light and Life Camp in Florida.

**Church of the Week:** We have a facility in Johnson City, TN sitting empty. Would you pray that the Lord might provide a person / team to plant a new church in that place?

## Conference / Superintendent's Calendar (all times eastern)

February 13:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
February 25:	MEG Zoom, 7:00p
March 12:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
March 20:	District Leaders – Wilmore, 2:00 – 5:00 p
March 20:	BOA – Wilmore, 6:00 – 10:00 p
March 21:	MEG/MAC – Wilmore, 8:00 a - noon
March 31-April 2:	Global Overseers Team (GOT) - Indianapolis
April 9:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
April 26-28:	ABS - Tampa
May 14:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
May 29-30:	New South Annual Conference, <a href="#">Wilmore FMC</a>
June 7-9:	ABS - Indianapolis
June 15-20:	NSC Teen Camp
June 11-14:	NSC Family Camp
June 22-26:	NSC Kids' Camp
August 9-11:	ABS – Baltimore
August 25-28:	Starting Strong for new pastors - Indianapolis
September 23-25:	New Room Conference, Nashville, TN

And now...

## -----The Important-----

### Resources, Articles and Attachments

- 1) **A Very Helpful (and Sad, Actually) Article** – from the Wall Street Journal is appended to the WW today, entitled, “The Lonely Burden of Today’s Teenage Girls.” Read this, if you want to understand a bit about what the teen girls in your life and church are dealing with.
- 2) **Ten Church Predictions** is also attached – an article passed on to me by Bishop Cowart
- 3) **February Global Praise and Prayer** chart is also attached.
- 4) **The Faith of Troy Polamalu** OK, I’m admitting my love for the Pittsburgh Steelers in this one, but this is an inspiring snapshot of one of the greatest players of the Steelers, if not the NFL.

### Job Openings

At this point, we have a pastor or interim pastor in every NSC church, although those interim situations are, well, interim.

However, [if you click here](#), you will find job opening listings at the FMC Human Resources web site.

### February Birthdays (\*that we know of)

Reed Wilbanks – 8 – Elder, Lead Pastor, Church 180, Rock Hill, SC

Bobby Wheeler – 10 – Elder, Retired, but Interim at Bratcher’s Crossroads, McMinnville, TN

Dean Cook – 24 – Elder, Retired, Wilmore, KY

Annette Diddle – 29 (my wife ☺ )

\*I would love to know the birthdays of all those related to the NSC who receive this communique – pastors, elders, delegates, special friends, etc. Please send month and day to Timothy at [newsouthconference@gmail.com](mailto:newsouthconference@gmail.com)

### This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke

**Passage:** I will be working out of 1 John 4:7-21, talking again this Sunday about God’s kind of love.

**Quote:** *“I look on all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.”* John Wesley, Journal, June 11, 1739.

**Joke:** A monastery in the English countryside had fallen on hard times, and decided to establish a business to defray their expenses. Other monasteries, they knew, had opened bakeries or wineries. Being English, however, they decided to open a fish-and-chips restaurant. The establishment soon became very popular, attracting people from all over.

One city fellow, thinking himself clever, asked one of the brothers standing nearby, “I suppose you’re the ‘fish friar’?”

“No,” answered the brother levelly, “I’m the ‘chip monk’.”

Blessings on your weekend and day of worship.

D-

**January 2020 Current Courses offered through the Credentialing Office.**  
**Online Courses – 7 weeks**  
**Correspondence Courses – At the candidate's pace, up to 8 months**

**BIBLE**

**50 Inductive Bible Study Online Dr. Robert Vaughan**

**Texts**

*Creative Bible Teaching*, Richards, L. O. & Bredfeldt, G. J., Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1998

*The New Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*, Wald, Oletta, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2002.

**50 Inductive Bible Study Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter**

**Texts**

*Grasping God's Word*, DuVall, J. Scott, Hays, J. Daniel, Zondervan press 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2012. ISBN 978-0310492573 (ORDER FROM Amazon.com)

*Malachi. Revering the Lord, Standing in Awe of His name*, Precept Ministries International, 2015. ISBN 978-1-62119-470-5 (ORDER FROM <https://shop.precept.org/products/malachi-in-out-workbook-nasb>)

*Hosea, A Love That will Not Let Me Go*. A study of Hosea, Precept Ministries International. 2017. ISBN 978-1-62119-635-8 (ORDER FROM <https://shop.precept.org/products/a-love-that-will-not-let-me-go-hosea-precept-workbook-esv>)

**51 History and Polity Online Dr. Robert Vaughan**

**Texts**

*2015 Book of Discipline*, Free Methodist Church, 2008 Light and Life Communications

Readings: *From Age to Age A Living Witness*, Leslie Ray Marston, Light and Life Communications, 1997

*Belonging: Adventures in Church Membership*, Don Bastian, Light and Life Communication, 2007

*Pastors and Church Leaders Manual* - Light and Life Communications, 2006

**51 Free Methodist History and Polity Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter**

**Texts**

*2015 Book of Discipline*, Free Methodist Church, 2012 Light and Life Communications  
freemethodistbooks.com

*From Age to Age A Living Witness*, Leslie Ray Marston Light and Light Communications  
freemethodistbooks.com

*Belonging: Adventures in Church Membership*, Don Bastian Light and Life Communication,  
1996 freemethodistbooks.com

*Pastors and Church Leaders Manual: Resources for Leading Local Churches* Light and Life  
Communications, 2013 freemethodistbooks.com

*Fire Among the Stubble: Church Renewal in the Wesleyan Tradition*: William Kirchofer  
dissertation thesis 5/2009. Available at [lulu.com](http://lulu.com).

<http://vimeo.com/12906976>- video about BT Roberts.

Power point on BT Roberts and other films concerning FM History available at

[Http://fmcusa.org/historical/denominationsl-hisotry-films/](http://fmcusa.org/historical/denominationsl-hisotry-films/)

### **59 Old Testament Survey Online Dr. Robert Vaughan**

**Text**

*God With Us: An Introduction to the Old Testament* 92<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) Marion, Indiana: Triangle Publishing, 2009.

### **59 Old Testament Survey Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter**

**Text**

*Old Testament Today*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, John Walton and Andrew Hill, Zondervan

### **60 New Testament Book Study Correspondence Hebrews Dr. Darin Land**

**Text**

*Aldersgate Biblical Series course on Hebrews*

*Commentary on Hebrews*, William Barclay

*Hebrews: A Call to Commitment*, William Lane

### **61 New Testament Survey Online Dr. Robert Vaughan**

**Text**

*A Survey of the New Testament*, Robert H. Gundry, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., Zondervan Publishing, 2012

### **61 New Testament Survey Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter**

**Text**

*A Survey of the New Testament*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003, ISBN 9780310494744

### **62 Old Testament Book Study Malachi Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter**

**Texts**

*Grasping God's Word*, DuVall, J. Scott, Hays, J. Daniel, Zondervan press 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2012. ISBN 978-0310492573 (ORDER FROM [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com))

*Malachi. Revering the Lord, Standing in Awe of His name*, Precept Ministries International, 2015. ISBN 978-1-62119-470-5 (ORDER FROM <https://shop.precept.org/products/malachi-in-out-workbook-nasb>)

Hosea, A Love That will Not Let Me Go. A study of Hosea, Precept Ministries International. 2017. ISBN 978-1-62119-635-8 (ORDER FROM <https://shop.precept.org/products/a-love-that-will-not-let-me-go-hosea-precept-workbook-esv>)

## THEOLOGY AND DOCTRINE

### 52 Introduction to Christian Doctrine Online Dr. Robert Vaughan

#### Texts

Exploring Our Christian Faith, Purkiser, Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1978, ISBN: 9780834105522

Basic Beliefs, Demaray, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992, ISBN: 0-89367-178-9

2015 Book of Discipline of the Free Methodist Church, Light & Life Communications, 2008

### 52 Introduction to Christian Doctrine Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter

#### Text

Essential Beliefs A Wesleyan Primer, Mark Maddix and Diane Leclerc

### 74 Wesleyan Theology Online Dr. Robert Vaughan

#### Text:

God's Great Salvation by Wesley Duewel

### 74 Wesleyan Theology Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter

#### Texts

Foundations of Wesleyan Arminian Theology, Midred Bangs Wynkoop, 128 pages

The Scripture Way of Salvation, Kenneth Collins, Chapter 6, Sanctification by Grace Through Faith, Pg 153-190

John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology, Edited by Outler and Heitzenrater, Nashville: Abingdom, 1991

A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, John Wesley, 116 pgs

### 75 Church History Correspondence Dr. Greg Herke

#### Texts

Introduction to the History of Christianity, Fortress Press

Documents of the Christian Church, Bettenson

### 76 Systematic Theology Correspondence Dr. Samuel Tinsley

#### Text

Christian Theology, H. Orton Wiley, VOL 1, 2, 3, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press

### **78 Issues in Contemporary Theology Correspondence Dr. Samuel Tinley**

**Text**

A Handbook of Contemporary Theology, Wheaton, IL, Victor Books

## **PRACTICAL PASTORAL THEOLOGY**

### **80 Homiletics Online Dr. Robert Vaughan**

**Text**

Biblical Preaching, Haddon W. Robinson. Edition: 3, 2014

### **82 Church Administration Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter**

**Texts**

Essentials for Christian Ministries, Michael Anthony and James Estep, Jr., B&H Publishing, 2005

Dance of the Bees, Allen Wachter, 5 Fold Media

Who Moved My Cheese?, Spencer Johnson, 1998

### **85 Church Growth Correspondence Dr. Allen Wachter**

The Book of Church Growth, Thom Rainer

Church Growth Flywheel Paradigm, Bob Franquz, 2018 **OR** The Volunteer Church Mobilizing Your Congregation for Growth and Effectiveness, Leith Anderson and Jillian Fox, Zondervan 2015

### **88 Spiritual Formation Online Dr. Robert Vaughan**

**Text**

Devotional Classics, Foster and Smith, Harper Collins, 2005

The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard, Harper Collins, 1991

### **88 Spiritual Formation Correspondence Dr. Mike Conkle**

**Texts**

Devotional Classics, Foster and Smith, Harper Collins, 2005

The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard, Harper Collins, 1991



This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-lonely-burden-of-todays-teenage-girls-11565883328>

## ESSAY

# The Lonely Burden of Today's Teenage Girls

Amid our huge, unplanned experiment with social media, new research suggests that many American adolescents are becoming more anxious, depressed and solitary

By *Mary Pipher and Sara Pipher Gilliam*

Aug. 15, 2019 11:35 am ET

“I have friends with debilitating problems like cutting and OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder],” a girl named Jordan recently told us. “It’s frustrating because I can’t help them. I mean, I’m only 14 myself.”

Young Americans have become unwitting guinea pigs in today’s huge, unplanned experiment with social media, and teenage girls like Jordan are bearing much of the brunt. In conversation after conversation, adolescent girls describe themselves as particularly vulnerable to the banes of our increasingly digital culture, with many of them struggling to manage the constant connectedness of social media, their rising levels of anxiety and the intense emotions that have always been central to adolescence.

Girls in 2019 tend to be risk-averse, focused on their studies and fond of their families. They are also experiencing high levels of depression and loneliness. A 2019 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 36% of girls report being extremely anxious every day. They are particularly worried about school shootings, melting polar ice and their ability to afford college.

**Girls in 2019 tend to be risk-averse, focused on their studies and fond of their families.**

Over the past 18 months, we have

conducted interviews and focus groups with around 100 American girls aged 12 to 19 and their mothers, most of them Midwestern and middle class. (We agreed to withhold their last names.) We have also interviewed many more teachers and therapists around the country. That sample isn’t comprehensive, of course, but the results are highly suggestive and strikingly consistent—with much to cheer but also much to worry about.

Many girls report that their mothers are their best friends. The close-knit family unit has, for the most part, rebounded as divorce rates have dropped to a 40-year low.

But girls today aren’t as self-sufficient as their counterparts in earlier decades: They are less

---

 SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS
 

---

*As a young person (or a parent to one), how do you handle the challenges of social media and other pressures? Share your stories with us.*

---

likely to possess driver's licenses, work outside the home or date.

They are also more solitary. Research from the University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future project shows that, since 2007—the dawn of the smartphone era—girls have dramatically decreased the amount of time they spend shopping, seeing friends or going to movies. We found that many girls spend their Saturday nights home alone, watching Netflix and surfing social media.

The glow of screens is unavoidable. Last year, the Pew Research Center reported that 95% of American teenagers have access to a smartphone. The nonprofit group Common Sense Media has found that contemporary teens spend six to nine hours a day online—and that 72% of teens felt manipulated by tech companies into remaining constantly connected.

Because of the omnipresent smartphone, girls can call or text their parents to ask what's for dinner or request a ride home. Many girls are rarely out in the world alone, solving problems by themselves.

When girls do eventually leave home, they often find themselves ill-prepared to navigate “real life.” In 2011, the American College Health Association reported that 31% of female freshmen said they had experienced overwhelming anxiety or panic attacks; by 2016, that had shot up to 62%.

**‘When my friends are depressed, I’m the person they call. It’s terrifying.’**

—Olivia, age 14

“When my friends are depressed, I’m the person they call,” said Olivia, 14. “It’s

terrifying. I’ve put suicide-prevention apps on so many peoples’ phones.” We are grateful for girls like Olivia who help their friends, but teenagers aren’t ready to handle this level of emotional responsibility.

How did we get here? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 1993, girls scored the highest levels of suicide ever recorded. From 1994 onward, rates of suicide steadily declined until 2007, when they started to skyrocket.

The American Association of Pediatrics now warns that too much social-media use can lead to depression and anxiety. Social media works against basic developmental goals—physical, cognitive, relational, sexual and maturational. Girls sleep with their phones and react to every notification. As they create more interesting, supposedly happier virtual personas for themselves, their real selves diminish. Girls collect “likes” instead of making friends. They can be devastated by a cruel text or a tepid reaction to a selfie. Long before they hold hands with a date, they are exposed to online pornography and misogynistic messages.

In a sense, modern girls are never truly alone and never truly with others. In a 2018 national health survey by Cigna, girls reported the highest levels of loneliness on record.

“Honestly, sometimes I wish we were living in the ‘olden’ days, when kids hung out with friends and went on dates,” Genevieve, 16, told us. “But that just isn’t what my friends and I do.”

Many of the girls we interviewed articulated many of social media’s drawbacks even as they declared that they can’t live without it. “After an evening online, I go to bed feeling unhappy,” Izzie, 13, told us. “I wonder, ‘What did I do all day long?’ Then I wake up and do the same things the next day.”

---

#### MORE ESSAYS

---

- • What Past Crises Tell Us About the Coronavirus January 31, 2020
  - • The iPhone Isn’t Made in China—It’s Made Everywhere January 31, 2020
  - • A Survivor’s Diary Emerges From Auschwitz January 24, 2020
  - • Ignore the Fake Climate Debate January 23, 2020
- 

Fortunately, parents have many ways to ameliorate the effects of social media. To combat the creation of hollow online selves, parents should encourage identity-building activities such as team sports, meditation or volunteerism. Beginning in middle school, parents can nudge girls toward navigating the world

on their own: Part-time jobs can teach patience, persistence and people skills, and girls can schedule their own medical appointments or plan family events.

Girls can also develop their true selves through writing, music, drama and the visual arts. Journaling helps girls process complex feelings. So does meditation and time spent in nature.

We also suggest that girls make pacts with their friends that help them spend more time in the real world—for example, a commitment to put down their devices after 9 p.m. or remove social-media apps from their phones during the school week. These agreements let them all be offline at the same time—hence, none of the dreaded FOMO (fear of missing out).

**Times have changed, but girls’ needs haven’t.**

Times have changed, but girls’ needs haven’t.  
They need to be loved and loving—to be safe,

useful and free to grow into all they can be. The role of thoughtful parents hasn't changed either: Mothers and fathers need to protect their daughters (and sons) from the culture's noxious elements and connect them to life's goodness and beauty. In an increasingly complicated world, much of the answer is simple: Unplug and do the things families have done since the beginning of time—tell stories, laugh, work together and talk through life's big questions.

This generation of girls, we found, is particularly eager to make its opinions heard and defend its rights. "I stand up for myself and others," Greer, 16, told us. "It gives me hope, because when other girls accept themselves like I do, we can take all that energy and launch the Industrial Revolution of girl power."

*—Dr. Pipher is a therapist and clinical psychologist. Her books include "Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls," which was recently republished by Riverhead in a 25th-anniversary edition coauthored with her daughter, Sara Pipher Gilliam, the editor in chief of Exchange, an international magazine for early childhood professionals.*

Copyright © 2020 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS



pg 3	About the Contributors
pg 4	Brief Introduction
pg 6	Prediction #1: Bye, Bye Evangelical
pg 8	Prediction #2: Morality Matters
pg 10	Prediction #3: Buildings Go Bust
pg 13	Prediction #4: Disciple-Making Movement
pg 15	Prediction #5: Digital Dynamite
pg 18	Prediction #6: Race & Misogyny
pg 20	Prediction #7: Mergers & Acquisitions
pg 22	Prediction #8: Evangelistic Explosion
pg 24	Prediction #9: Human Sexuality
pg 26	Prediction #10: Innovation goes BOOM
pg 28	Next Steps

For more free downloads, webinars, workshops, training and transformational content, please visit:

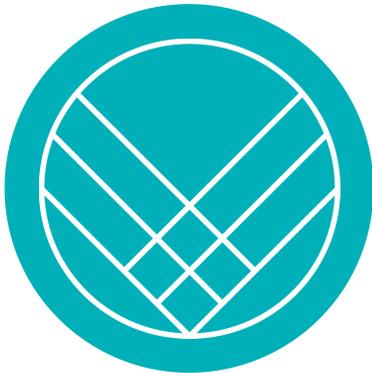
**DOUGPAUL.ORG**

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



**Doug Paul**  
**Author & Editor**

Doug is a full time Innovation Strategist while continuing to serve as a pastor and elder at a church in the inner city of Richmond, VA. Each day, he works with pastors, churches, denominations and networks who are looking to find the future of the church through the process he's designed for innovation. He's the former Global Director of Content for 3DM, has planted a multiplying missional church, transitioned a mega-church, and was a Teaching Pastor and Multi-Site Director at a multi-site mega church. He catalyzed a wave of discipleship that saw 7+ generations of disciple-makers, and has led, multiplied, coached or kick-started more than 5,000 Missional Communities. He's married to Elizabeth, an advertising & brand executive; they have 3 precocious and joy-filled kids: Avery, Jude and Sam. You can friend Doug on Facebook or follow him on [Instagram here](#).



**Other Contributors**

This ebook has been a labor of love as a small team has worked together to harvest the research, ideas, predictions and discussion. Most notably, it's worth saying that my wife and I are both strategists. My wife is a cultural anthropologist by trade and is the Chief Strategy Officer of one of the largest ad agencies in the world. As such, the everyday conversation of our household often revolves around the trends we're studying and how that applies to business, church, non-profits, etc. Truthfully, this idea began as a fun thought experiment we had one night and as you can imagine, this has been an ongoing conversation between the two of us.

A special thanks to Todd Milby, Rich Robinson and Andy Graham, who gave input into this through various conversations, emails and my endless hypotheses. I was privileged to have numerous conversations over the 6 month period of this project with more people than I can count, but a hearty thank you to Alan and Deb Hirsch, Gabe Lyons, Jon Tyson, Andy Crouch, Erin Rose, David Bailey and JR Rozko. Finally, while I've not had conversations with them about this specific project, the ongoing work of David Kinnaman, Mark Sayers, John Mark Comer, Will Mancini, Dave Rhodes and Ed Stetzer all gave helpful insights along the way.

# BRIEF INTRODUCTION

In a few short weeks, the millennium will turn 20 — and historically, the 20s have been freewheeling and fascinating times. The 1720s saw maritime travel that led to the formation of the first corporations (think the *East India Company*). The 1820s saw industrialization that changed the way people lived and worked. The 1920s (referred to as “the roaring twenties”) witnessed the birth of popular culture — as ‘mass’ forms of music, film and dance sprung into the world. So what will the 2020s have in store?

Sociologists’ theory is that the turn of each century sees breakthroughs in technology and invention. Typically, it takes 20 years to commercialize those inventions — so in the 20s we begin to see a shift in the way that mass culture moves and thinks and operates.

Stepping into a new decade provides a unique opportunity that can only happen once every ten years. Behavioral economics observe that human beings are most likely to make a big life change the last year of every decade; which can be positive or negative. For leaders, the same is true. We are more likely to take bold steps for a different future now than we will virtually any other time in the next ten years. So what we have done is spend this year looking at macro trends within wider culture and within the North American church so that we could land on ten church predictions for the next ten years. Our hope is to sketch out some of the terrain for what we believe is coming (and some of which has already started to happen).

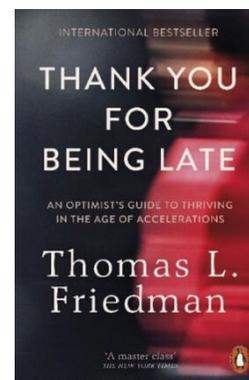
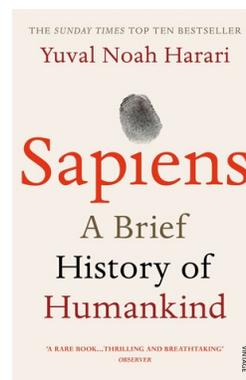
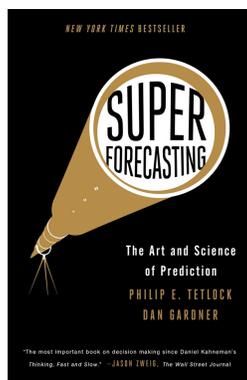
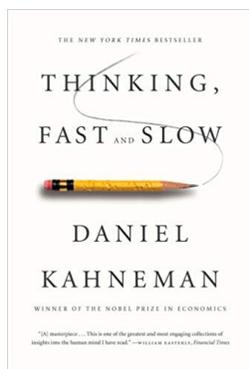
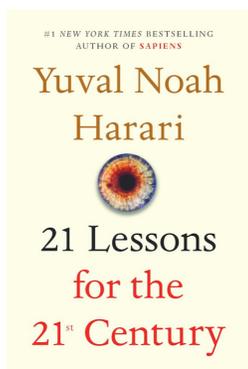
All told, we ended with a list of 31 predictions that we felt fairly confident in making. We then tried to group them where we could (largely unsuccessfully) and then used the following filter for deciding which ones made the cut and which didn’t (You can also see a short list of additional predictions at the end):

- How confident are we in the prediction?
- How significant is the prediction to the majority of local churches?
- How practically useful is the prediction?
- How interesting is the prediction?



Now there is an art and a science to making long-range predictions. While we are considered experts in our respective fields, that doesn't necessarily make us experts in the field of prediction. Put another way, just because you're good at football doesn't mean you'll be good at ruby. They are similar, but it is, after all, a different sport.

To aid us in these forecasts, we've enlisted help from people who are experts in that field, to borrow their glasses and see what they see. The following are a few of the books that have helped us think well around long-term trends, as well as the field of forecasting as a discipline:



Just as one final word...

We believe the future of the people of God is coming into shape and, as you'll see in the coming pages, its DNA will be saturated with innovation — the introduction of new methods or ideas to an established order. With each passing year, more and more people are working together, learning together, sharing together, ideating together, growing together and innovating together in ways that seem unfamiliar to the existing church.

It is an exciting time to be alive, and it's into this time we want to humbly submit some of what we've been learning. What you'll really see, over and over again, is there a significant opportunity for Gospel innovation. Chances are that you've experienced, maybe even initiated, some kind of innovation in the past. Maybe it happened by happy accident, or maybe you knew exactly what you were going after. But we think you know the feeling we're talking about: That wholly unique feeling of seeing something new happen, something you've only dreamed about, but it's right there unfolding in front of you like it's in slow motion, a taste of heaven bursting forth into the present.

The days ahead could very well be difficult in some ways. *But Jesus is on the move.*



# PREDICTION #1

## THE WORD 'EVANGELICAL' WILL GO THE WAY OF THE DODO.

In some ways it is important to remember that there has never been a universally accepted definition for what we mean by “evangelical.” Where we (the writers) have used it in the past, we use Historian David Bebbington’s framework for thinking about it, as [shown in this article](#) by the National Association of Evangelicals. He says that historically, evangelicals are a group of Christians with four primary identifiers:

The total percentage of the U.S. population who are evangelical protestants according to Pew Research.

25.4%

- *Conversionism*: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a life long process of following Jesus
- *Activism*: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts
- *Biblicism*: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority
- *Crucicentrism*: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity

The problem, of course, is that evangelical has become synonymous in both American Christian culture and the wider culture as something else: A politically conservative voting block. In their landmark book *UnChristian*, Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman were able to measure the early traces of the effect this was having on the wider perspective of evangelicals. This research came out more than twelve years ago and it’s gotten far worse. The topline? Almost all of the comments about evangelicals were negative. Respondents saw their primary associations as: Hypocritical (saying one thing and doing another), too focused on getting converts (viewing people as targets), antihomosexual (bigoted), sheltered (old fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality), too political (motivated by conservative political agenda), judgmental (quick to judge others). It takes a while before you get to *anything positive* in the wider cultural consciousness about evangelicals. And this was 12 years ago.



On the other side of the Trump presidency however, whether you voted for him or not, most pastors acknowledge there has been a kind of collusion, confusion or collapse of evangelical within the political structures. Whether you view it as a good thing or not, the word “evangelical” is now completely synonymous with politics. There are many people who identify as evangelical who wouldn’t come close to looking like David Bebbington’s four identifiers. Meanwhile, there are many people who look like historical evangelicals who will never, under any circumstances, allow themselves to be painted with that brush.

The word evangelical is either going to be radically reclaimed or it’s going to be let go and the historical meaning will become something else. But the movements risks a bigger thing: Losing people who want to live it out, but simply can’t abide being called that. So you already see a move towards leaving the name behind with the political voting block.

***Our prediction is a new word is going to emerge that will gather momentum and mean something far different than it currently does now.***

In some ways, this is very normal in the way that human anthropology works. Christians, and subsets of Christians, have been called numerous things over the years. We used to be called *The Way* in the book of Acts and that’s no longer a thing. In the book *Freakanomics*, the writers describe how names work through culture. What you usually see happen is the cultural elite 1% have a number of names they are choosing among, and over time those same “top 10 baby names” work through the diffusion of ideas curve and eventually they stop being popular. While etymology is different, there are strong parallels.

In a kind of way, the same is happening here. This term has outlived its usefulness and many see that and say that.

But on a deeper level, a group of Christians authentically committed to the mission of Jesus in this world are not going to let one descriptive word be the reason they don't share the Gospel. Already we're seeing [college groups abandon the term evangelical](#) so that they can be more effective in sharing the Gospel. The word was a barrier to sharing the Gospel so they dropped the word. That's only going to increase.

Rather than trying to resurrect it from the ashes, the term “evangelical” itself, when used by the people embody the historical term, is going to go the way of the dodo: *Extinct*.

- [Colin Kaepernick vs. Tim Tebow: A tale of two Christians on their Knees](#) by Michael Frost
- [UnChristian](#) by Gabe Lyons & Dave Kinnaman
- [The Next Christians](#) by Gabe Lyons & Dave Kinnaman

Resources



# PREDICTION #2

## PUBLIC MORAL FAILURES AMONG PASTORS WILL BE MORE PERSONAL AND FAR MORE COMMONPLACE.

The last five years, we've seen a wave of celebrity pastors either removed from leadership due to moral failures. In my work with churches, one of the most common things I (Doug) hear is that the people leading churches have never personally been disciplined. Many have been to seminary, they grew up in church and they've read books on discipleship, but their own personal experience of it is very limited.

According to Barna, 57% of pastors admit to struggling with pornography, either currently or in the past.

57%

*Perhaps you can see where this is going.*

We'd make the anecdotal observation that there is a large percentage of people leading churches right now who do not have the spiritual maturity to stand up beneath the weight of that spiritual responsibility. It is never God's desire to something through us that he does not first do in us, and because he is ultimately more committed to our own spiritual health and the health of his Bride, these things come to light.

It is possible that this has always been true. It's hard to know. **But what is true now is there are more shadowy corners to hide in but way more spotlight when it hits.** Whether it's the paper trail of text messages or email, viewing history and website logins, screenshots or the ability to capture something on video and immediately send it out, *it is far easier to get caught.*

Furthermore, one of the effects of social media is the rise of truth-telling or whistleblowing on whatever platform people have. A large number of famous pastors in the last few years ultimately lost their jobs because of this. Not only in today's day and age but in the next ten years, people will only become more courageous in sharing their story, and they will be more adept at utilizing the platforms at their disposal.



## Spiritual Opportunity:

Thirty years ago, if a pastor had a moral failing and was able to cover it up, leave their church and went to another state, it probably would have been buried in the past. But as technology and connectedness has progressed, we're seeing that's far more difficult to do. It also means there's going to be opportunities for the spiritual work of investing in pastors who have suffered these moral failures, such as the work that [Alex Johnson](#) is doing. Rather than jettisoning them away for good, how can we partner with the work the Holy Spirit wants to do in them, and in some cases, even restore them? We've already seen [success stories](#) of this going well, and we've had the privilege to witness a number of these restorations.

Ultimately, while this is a sobering reality, it is also a good thing. Jesus Christ cares about the purity of his Bride and the Bible speaks to the qualifications of leading the church. If there needs to be a period of pruning among leaders so the church can more faithfully engage Jesus' mission in the world he so loves, the church should be all for it.





# PREDICTION #3

## THERE WILL BE A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF CHURCH BUILDING FORECLOSURES.

One of the most prevalent models of church growth in the past generation was, “If you build it, they will come.” As such, churches all across the United States embarked on building campaigns to attract more people to what was happening on Sunday mornings. This isn’t to say that building campaigns are built on this idea alone. Many building projects came as a result of attendance growth and the need to have larger seating capacity for something that was already growing.

The number of jobs globally that will be lost to automation in the next 10 years according to the McKinsey Global Institute.

800 MILLION

But most of these mortgages are not close to being paid off and there are 5 waves coming that could drive many churches into foreclosure:

### Wave #1: Pastoral Succession

A large number of buildings were built by pastors who are now already close to retirement. [Barna reported](#) in 2017 that in the 1960’s, most pastors were under the age of 45. Today, most are older than 60. When a leadership transition happens, it is normal to see a small-to-sizeable exodus of people, particularly when it’s a beloved leader who has been there for a long time. A number of the people who leave are the most financially committed.

### Wave #2: Global Recession

Economists predict that within the next ten years, [around 800 million jobs will be lost to automation](#). In the past, moving to automation meant largely blue collar workers losing their jobs. But in this new iteration of automation, far more white collar workers will find themselves out of work. Many of the places where these buildings were built were funded by people making white collar / solidly middle class salaries. And many of those jobs are going away.



### Wave #3: Over Leveraging

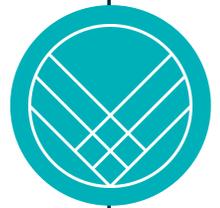
Many churches who built buildings did not see the attendance growth they anticipated. In other words, they built a size of building that didn't match the attendance numbers (and thus dollars) they anticipated, and so there's already strain on what the group size can sustain financially. It's already a financial struggle for many churches and the silver bullet of growth they were planning on never came. ([Here is an excellent article](#) from *BCLC Church Lending* when thinking about some of these realities.)

### Wave #4: Lower Income

As [Pew Social Trends reports in this study](#), for the first time since World War 2, the emerging Millennial generation are tracking to make less than their parents. Between the weight of student loans, Boomers retiring later, or wages failing to keep up with inflation — Millennials have less disposable income than previous generations.

#### **Mark Deymaz, author of *The Coming Revolution of Church Economics***

"To finance ministry in a rapidly changing world, pastors will soon need to do more than host Financial Peace University, preach yet another sermon on generosity, and chase numeric growth — which, by the way, will no longer guarantee larger offerings as it has in the past. Indeed, there is a coming revolution in church economics ... and the sooner you lean in to it, the better positioned your church will be not only to survive but to thrive in future winds of disruptive social and financial change."



### Wave #5: Generational Shifts

One of the untold stories of the modern church is how much the Builder and Boomer generations have underwritten the financial cost of these construction projects. For the Builder generations, while science has elongated their lives, they are now passing away to be with Jesus. For Boomers, a large percentage of them are retiring and within ten years, almost all of them will have retired. That means their tithes and offerings will no longer come from salaries, but from retirement savings and social security, which will be based on a much smaller fixed income. Finally, while the Gen X'ers and Millennials are generous like their predecessors, they are far more likely to split their charitable giving between organizations. Rather than giving it all to their local church, many give some to a certain percentage to their local church and the rest to a few other charities they believe in. (This is particularly true of Millennials.) Taken together, these converging trends will meet ballooning mortgage payments, and there will be foreclosure signs on many church buildings across America.



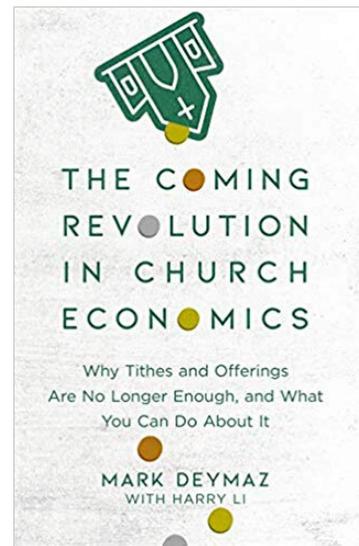
## Spiritual Opportunity:

We find ourselves in a place where a lot of the “maps” that used to work for “doing church” no longer work the way they used to. The good news is this is certainly not the first time this has happened in the history of the Church! In innovation theory, there is something called *The Principle of the Beautiful Constraint*. It means that rarely does innovation happen because we had a blank sheet of paper and clear blue skies. Rather, a group of people were constrained and hemmed in and they needed a brand new way of thinking about the situation within the constraints given to them.

For instance, no one thought the Chinese church would thrive when the communist curtain dropped and it was illegal to have public worship services. That was their practical constraint. But as we know, fifty years later the Chinese church not only survived, but had learned to multiply in incredibly adverse situations. Believers met home to home, and a revival happened that was among the most significant of the 20th Century.

We could receive this current prediction of buildings going bust as a threat, or it could also be an opportunity for the Gospel to break out and thrive in news ways that we never thought imaginable.

### Resource





# PREDICTION #4

## A DISCIPLE-MAKING MOVEMENT WILL HIT AND SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE.

Every generation or so, there seems to be a movement of discipleship that God creates and it catches. It's like it takes on a life of its own. In the late 1980's and early 1990's we think about the *Experiencing God* phenomenon. After that, many churches used the *Alpha* course as a way of discipling people in the basics of Christianity. Both of these started quite small with no real aspirations for getting as large as they did.

This prediction is more about art and observation than about data prediction, but sometimes that's what it looks like to be a futurist. Every once in a while, it can feel more intuitive than anything else. As we look towards the next ten years there is a unique confluence of events coming together that make us think a giant wave of disciple-making will hit:

### The rise of Therapy as Religion

People are far more open to counseling than they've ever been before. It's OK to say you have wounds, to openly show those crack and to seek healing. People are already predisposed to seeking breakthrough.

### Missional Movement Maturation

While the "missional conversation" probably peaked a little while ago ([see this article](#)), the movement itself is gaining steam. At the heart of missional was a beating heart for disciple-making and the belief that the best way to grow a church is so to spiritually grow and mobilize disciples into every crack and crevice of society.

Percentage of who pastors believe that their most important next step for discipleship in their church is for them to receive training.



[\(Download infographic here.\)](#)



## People are Spiritually Stuck

Whether you're looking at the New York Times best seller list or the best selling books of Christian authors to people in the pews, the kinds of books that Christians are buying speak to wanting spiritual breakthrough they haven't experienced in a while (or have never experienced).

## Reproduction at Every Level

A frequent conversation in pastoral leadership circles as of today is what it looks like to multiply at every level of church life: disciples, leaders, groups, services, campuses and churches. Baking reproduction into a disciple-making model gives it a much higher ceiling of potential.

## Bringing it All Together

When we look at these four things, this is what we see: People are really open to spiritual investment and what they want in their bones is what the Gospel promises through discipleship. That's what the Holy Spirit does through the process of sanctification. In addition, there is a group of people who have already been tinkering with new methods and forms and some of them are really starting to catch. Finally, add in the yeast to the dough of multiplication, and you have something pitch perfect ready to catch fire and go.

### Practical Next Steps for Churches:

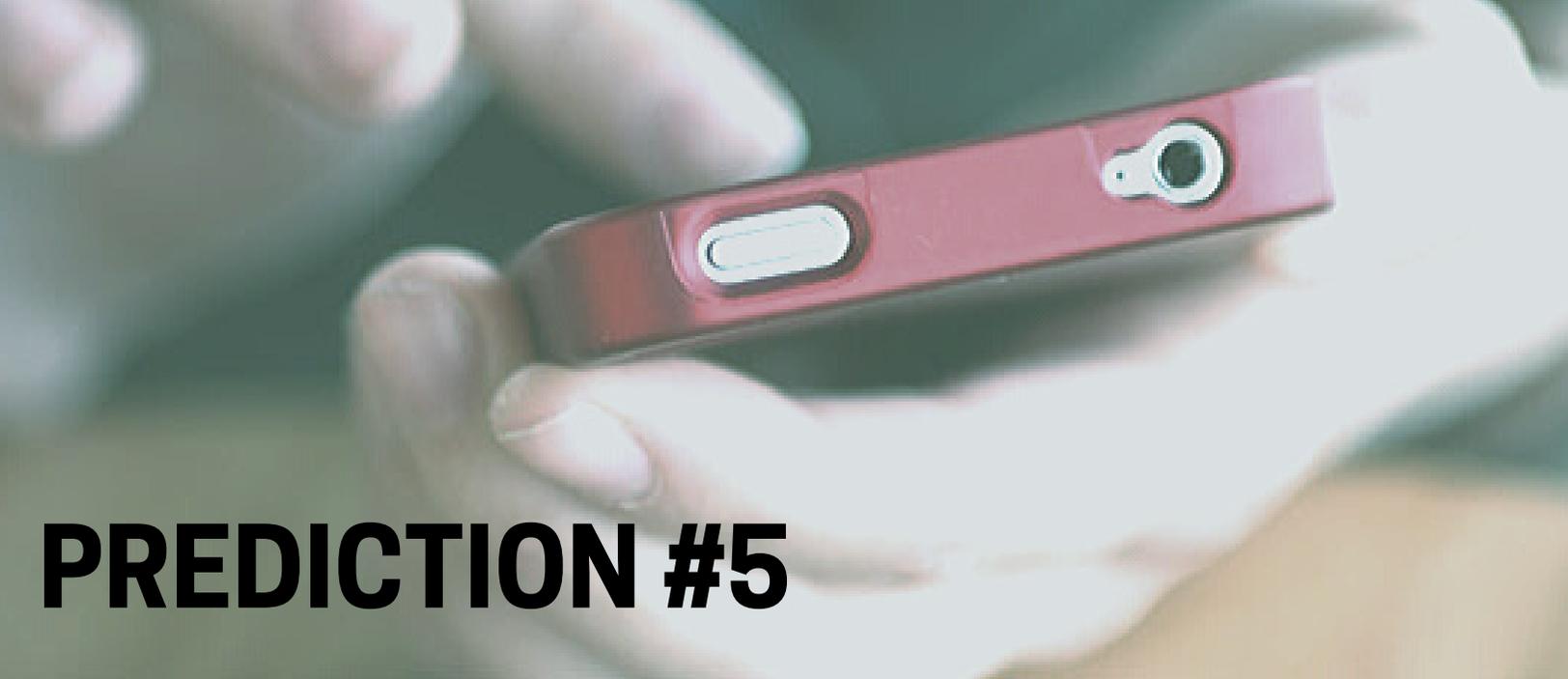
#### Models that are already working:

- [Kickstart Disciple-Making](#) at East End Fellowship
- [Disciples Made](#) at KC Underground

#### Build Your Own

One of the things that Doug does is lead the Disciple-Making Innovation Lab. Churches walk away with a custom-built discipleship model that's completely tailored to all their unique theology, vision, mission, leadership and strategy. [You can get more info here.](#)





# PREDICTION #5

**WHILE SOME CHURCHES WILL BE DEFINED BY THEIR POSTURE TOWARDS DIGITAL MEDIA, MOST WILL BE DISTRACTED BY IT.**

Today, sociologists refer to the invention of the internet as a species defining event. There was human civilization before the internet and human civilization after it. But in some ways, the real dividing line is when the internet went mobile. The endless ability to access unlimited content and connect with almost anyone on the globe, at almost any given time, simply didn't exist before 2008. As of today, according to [Pew Research](#), 81% of Americans own a smart phone. According to [ZDNet's research](#), the average American spends 5.4 hours a day on their phone, with very little time difference between Millennials and Boomers.

The current number of hours each week the average American spends in front on a smart phone.

**37.8**

The intersection point here for the church is interesting because it presents a conundrum between opportunity and danger. **The opportunity is the number of potential people who can be reached with the Gospel through online engagement. The danger, as we'll discuss later, is the addictive properties of technology itself.**

We predict how local churches engage this conundrum will ultimately be an inflection point for each church. We don't believe there is a universal "right" answer here for local churches, but certainly there are wrong ones. If we were to boil it down, there are four ways to respond; two are a faithful response coming from a place of conviction, while the other two are a reactive posture that will have serious and detrimental effects on local churches.

However churches choose to respond, their choice will be a line of demarcation in the long-term life of their local church.



**Response A: Go all-in on digital engagement, choosing to act as missionaries with people and with content.**

There are [already examples](#) of how this is working well as churches are sending missionaries into the gamer community on platforms like Twitch. Other [churches are innovating in how they can develop](#) and mobilize content to find people who are open to Jesus with creative content that's far more innovative than a repackaged sermon. Still other churches are equipping their congregations to use the social platforms they have to evangelistically engage people in ways that are natural and organic and true to where people might find themselves. What these churches will do is see the missional opportunity and engage it as creative pioneer missionaries. It'll become far more common to see someone on a church staff who is "Pastor of Digital Engagement." But the churches who stay in this posture in a sustainable way and continue to bear Kingdom fruit will be the ones coming from a place of Biblical conviction to be true missionaries in the digital space. They are not chasing a fad to keep up with what's new and what's next. Furthermore, they will still think about how the digital experience is forming people in ways that come against the way of Jesus and how they need to bring challenge to those places. They aren't going to let people swallow it wholesale without bringing challenge where necessary. Many churches will want to be this kind of church, but very few will actually become it.

**Response B: Abstain from "typical" digital engagement and offer a countercultural witness.**

In the same way that long ago people within Mennonite, Amish or Quaker communities made decisions to abstain from the excesses of modern culture and technology, there will be a number of faithful churches who choose to do the same. In the Mennonite community, there is a wide spectrum for what the abstinence from technology looks like, spanning from your "horse and buggy" communities all the way to "black bumper" communities who provide a hybrid approach to cultural engagement. We believe there will be a large number of "black bumper" churches that are very wary of technology. The people who are part of these spiritual communities will not abstain from it altogether, but will choose to be very "tech limited". Like the previous group, this will come from a place of Biblical conviction, embracing their particular calling of mission within the world. They will look distinct from many of their friends, families and wider culture, but there will be a peace to their life that contrasts the freneticism of others, providing an opportunity for the Gospel to shine out.

**Response C: Churches that do next to nothing.**

There will be a whole host of churches that do next to nothing. Now the bar for "nothing" has shifted. When we say "next to nothing," we still mean most of these churches will have a website, have a church app, use social media and they will livestream or podcast their worship service. The ability to do these things is so affordable and easy already that "next to nothing" includes doing those things for most churches. But outside of that? They will do very little else. They are neither hot nor cold. They won't train their congregation to use their online presence with missional purpose, nor will they disciple their people in how to engage technology in a faithful way. It means the vast majority of their congregations will be addicted to their smart phone and are given an implicit "we're OK with the way you're relating to technology."



## **Response D: Using digital to paper mache over the real problems.**

In the first decade of the 2000's, many churches saw what was happening with the internet and how websites could become the front door for a church. There were untold numbers of churches who spent \$100,000 on a website that, in the end, did very little for them, but it made them feel better about what they were doing. The reason they made this investment is they were hoping the new thing would solve the problems they were already experiencing with discipleship, mission and leadership. But transitions like we're experiencing in culture don't really bring new problems; what they do is amplify the ones that already exist.

There are many churches who have plateaued attendance numbers or feel lost when it comes to making disciples who make disciples. Because the current measurements that many churches use for "success" are about Attendance, Buildings and Cash, they will see the mobile digital revolution as the shiny new object that could solve all of their perceived problems as a church. But it won't. Whether it's developing a new app, creating streamable content, a viral video strategy or live broadcast, they'll flush a load of money and time down the toilet for very little return. It may not close the doors of the church, but the diversion of energy, leadership capital and time will be the most costly aspect of this decision.

***We predict this is where the vast majority of churches will end up.** In an age of church decline, leaders are desperate to get people to engage. If the past thirty years tells us anything, it's that we will often paper mache over the real problems in hope of the quick fix.*

## **Opportunity & Next Steps for churches today:**

Have conversations in your leadership team around how you're thinking about technology as it relates to discipleship and mission. How will you disciple people (and perhaps yourself) as it relates to technology and how does that intersect with the mission of Jesus in this world? One of the things that we do in helping churches create a custom disciple-making model is facilitate these kinds of conversations and work the outcomes into the model itself. It's not enough to have philosophy on how digital, discipleship and mission intersect. This philosophy needs to be activated in ways that work and bear fruit.

### **Resources**

- [The Tech Wise Family](#) by Andy Crouch
- [WeStartNow.org](#)
- [Faith for Exiles](#) by David Kinnaman





# PREDICTION #6

## ISSUES AROUND RACE AND MISOGYNY INSIDE THE CHURCH ARE GOING TO GET UGLIER. MUCH UGLIER.

After the shooting of Trayvon Martin in February, 2012, the level of public discourse around race shifted dramatically in the United States. Because of the way digital technology allows information and conversation to go viral, a conversation that might otherwise have been happening in a few living rooms in select homes across the United States exploded into the light of everyone's social media feeds. Since then, as various racialized events continue to pop up on people's newsfeeds with interminable regularity, the conversation shifted into hyperdrive.

The percentage of white Christians who feel the wealth gap is due to racial discrimination vs the percentage of black Christians.

27%  
VS  
72%

The crux of the race conversation in the church, largely between African American citizens and white citizens, revolves around this: You have two groups of people who are brothers and sisters in Christ. When an event happens, you get two wildly different responses. For example, one congregation might be experiencing grief and lament while a police officer is released without any charges, while another congregation cheers and thanks God for "justice" being done.

**This has already been detrimental to the church, but it is only going to get worse.**

More than fifty years ago, Dr. King remarked that Sunday mornings are the most segregated hour in America. Today, it only seems more divided. In Richmond, VA (where we live), [public schools are more segregated](#) today than they were after the implementation of *Brown v. the Board of Education*. It seems that in many ways, whether we are talking about church life or the rest of life, we still continue to live very separate lives.



When a police shooting happens, discussing things like mass incarceration, racial dog whistles in public discourse or the disenfranchisement of black voters, many white Christians draw blank (or worse, double-down). When Christians don't have many close relationships with people across racial lines, it's hard to have these most difficult conversations. And quite frankly, many of our black brothers and sisters are tired of having to explain it over and over again. They say that the best way to predict the future is to look at the past. If the last few years have taught us anything, it's not that we are going to have less racialized events; rather, those events are going to keep happening and we are going to keep having painful conversations in unhelpful ways.

Likewise, the church is in for a rude awakening with it comes to misogyny within the church. We are of the opinion that someone can be a complementarian or an egalitarian and not be misogynistic. So we aren't making a theological argument here. Rather, the thing about unconscious bias is you don't see the plank in your eye. And if the church can't see the way that misogyny, in all its' hard forms and soft forms, is at work within so much of the North American church as of today, the church of 2030 is in for a rude awakening.

Women have so many more options now than they've ever had in the workforce and in every area of life. Whether it's the #metoo movement or because of the way we've seen toxic masculinity manifest out loud and in person in wider culture, the conversation around this topic outside the church is creating unprecedented space for women to speak, grow, advance and lead. Again, this isn't us making a theological statement. There are ways to lead with a variety of theological positions and not have a misogynistic culture.

### **Ed Stetzer, Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College**

"While avoidance and inaction have characterized the responses of many watching [#churchtoo], something's got to change and soon. The world is watching, people are being hurt, and the church's witness is at stake not just today, but for future generations."



Outside of the church, there is a reckoning happening with how institutions have treated women. One that the church should be leading. All you have to do is look at scripture to see the way that Biblical leaders led on this issue. Whether it was Levitical law protecting women of a conquered people or Jesus first including women in his inner circle and later revealing the resurrection to women first — there is a Biblical precedent for leading on this issue. But inside of the church, there is largely a refusal to acknowledge the way that the church has mistreated, under-appreciated, undervalued, and in some ways, violated women. Wider culture is having a repentance moment and currently, the church is largely choosing to abstain.

We often forget that historically, it's women who have kept the church alive. **If women get more respect, kindness and compassion outside the church than within it, what happens next?**

Much is being made of the importance and moral imperative of "allies" to speak up and use their power on behalf of the marginalized. If this isn't Kingdom language, in plain clothes, we don't know what is. And when the culture lives into this Kingdom reality more than the church does, we are in big big trouble.





# PREDICTION #7

## CHURCH “MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS” WILL BECOME THE NORM.

There is a general trend in our wider culture where things are either getting bigger and broader, or they are getting smaller and more targeted. While some businesses are “bundling” their services, others are “unbundling” a number of things they do so each smaller thing can specialize on what they do best. The same thing has already started to happen with churches and it will only increase.

46% of people attend a church that’s 100 people or less, while 10% attend a megachurch (which is 10% of the attending population attending .8% of churches).



In megachurches alone, you see the trend happening both ways. Some megas are “unbundling” their sites and each site of the multi-site church are each becoming their own independent church. The Village Church, Redeemer Presbyterian Church and Trinity Grace Church quickly come to mind. On the other hand, many mega churches are not only planting more campuses, but are increasingly adopting churches that want to be part of the larger expression of what that church is doing.

It’s not just smaller churches who are “asking” to be adopted. Recently, three of the megachurches I (Doug) happened to be working with were approached by very large churches looking to join them; one of those churches was a 7,000 person church looking to join a bigger one. As such, some of these now “gigachurches” are adding a kind of “Mergers and Acquisitions” team to their staff. One church we spoke with is looking to have a site within 15 minutes of every person living in the United States. And having seen their strategy, there is a good chance it could happen.

On the other hand, there is a significant move in wider culture and also within the church to go smaller, specialized and local. In the church leadership space, there is movement towards neighborhood mission, incarnational approaches and church planting through reproducing churches at a much smaller size.



Whether that's things like missional communities, microchurches or deeply rooted neighborhood churches committed to a people in a specific geography, this the other side of the pendulum. These churches will be committed to multiplication, but it'll be at a much smaller size and with different values at work.

In the innovation world where we both work and play, there is a common phrase: "the bug is the feature." It means that sometimes the best innovation doesn't come from something being perfect, but because there's something wrong with the product (the bug), it actually becomes what is right about it. In other words, what some people point to as the problem is what many people will see as the reason it works.

Sociologically speaking, different people want different things from "church." There is a large group of people who will choose an ever-growing megachurch or gigachurch because what other people see as the thing wrong with it, they see as the feature. Likewise, what many people would find frustrating or missing from a smaller and localized expression of the church is exactly what another large group of people is looking for.

But again, what's important to see is the way in which this is not just happening in the church world, but in everything in wider culture. As a society, everything is moving to polar extremes.

## **Opportunity & Next Steps for Churches Today:**

Church leaders need to be having very honest and frank conversations about the mission, vision, values, strategy and measurements of their church ([Auxano](#) is an organization I do some work with who is excellent at helping churches mine this out). Often times, we are looking for the next "model" or the next trendline to tell us the future of the church. We'd like to suggest that the only way to find the future of your church is to get a holy sense of what God wants to do in and through your individual body. We want to be people who away from leading out of a place of reaction, to leading from a place of conviction. Whether it's big or small is slightly beside the point. Are you and the church you serve being faithful to the mission God has called you to?

### **Will Mancini, author of *Church Unique* and *God Dreams***

"Think about it: God's doesn't stand in heaven with a photocopy machine every time a local church is started. Your church was born an original; don't let it become a carbon copy on your watch."



# PREDICTION #8

## THERE IS GOING TO BE AN EVANGELISTIC EXPLOSION FROM TWO UNLIKELY PLACES.

In the last few hundred years of church history, you often see waves of evangelism happen in two distinct ways.

First, there is a group of people already actively seeking something Christianity readily offers. Second, there is a substantial problem that many individuals find themselves up against and the Gospel offers a decidedly remarkable solution. The same will be true in the next 10 years.

57% of adults are currently addicted to technology, while there's been a 50% increase in the number of Americans who identify as “spiritual” but not “religious”.

57%  
and  
50%

**The first evangelistic wave focuses on people already seeking something will come from the modern movement of hyper-spirituality.** Whether it's people who see [therapy as religion](#), get their spiritual fill from [pseudo-spirituality](#) in their instagram feed or the quest for self through the wasteland of personal brokenness like the [Enneagram](#), people are looking for something beyond what only science can provide. This is the next natural step beyond the Age of Reason towards the Post Enlightenment era.

Celebrities like [Russell Brand](#) and [Dax Shepard](#) have millions of devoted podcast listeners hanging onto their every word, waiting for the next insight or revelation about how broken things get put back together. And through all of this, there is a foundational belief around experiencing something that is deeply mysterious bordering on mystical. In the same way that in the late 1960's and the 1970's hippies and people with flower power were finding Jesus in droves in what became known as the Jesus Movement, there is a cresting wave of people looking for an authentic experience with something that will bring them healing and hope.



**The second evangelistic wave which seeks to solve a great individual problem will come from people suffering from addiction to technology.** We are not that far removed from the release of the first smart phones and the internet being put into the hands of everyone wherever they go. Normally, it takes about ten years for substantive research to come back that begins to give a picture of what long term engagement to a new habit does. It would be an understatement to see that the results aren't positive (you can watch a [short video here](#) of Simon Sinek talking about the effects of technology addiction).

Today, more than 59% of adults [self diagnose a technology addiction](#). To put it a different way, the average adult will scroll through the height of Mt. Everest on their phone over the course of a given year. But what's coming? It gets worse. Gen Z represents the first generation of "digital natives;" people who grew up with smart technology and know nothing different. What we are seeing already, and will only increase over time, is a whole culture of people who are *longing to look up*.

We want real human connection, but technology addiction isolates us like never before and loneliness is reaching epidemic proportions. More than 30% of Millennials have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and suicide rates among teens is skyrocketing.

In the 1930's, the debilitating effects of alcohol addiction were rampant in wider society and it's why the pioneering and multiplication of *Alcoholics Anonymous* was one of the great achievements of human civilization. It provided hope for the struggle and freedom when it felt non-existent before. But a part of that story is the tens of millions of people who became Christians as a result. Similarly, in the 1980's and 1990's, there were large groups of people in Western society who were having an existential crisis around their purpose and *Alpha* has seen more than 23 million people engage the course and an untold number of people come to faith in Jesus Christ as a result.

There is already a great need for this and we believe it will only hit an exponential curve with more time. We predict that out of this moment, for such a time as this, there will be a program or a group of churches who pioneer new avenues to not only help people break free of their addiction, but offer the Gospel as a meaningful way of living into a flourishing and meaningful life of connection with themselves, with others, and ultimately with God. This will be one of the great "Felt Needs" of our time and we believe the church will respond.





# PREDICTION #9

## THE DIZZYING EFFECTS OF THE QUESTIONS AROUND HUMAN SEXUALITY WILL KILL ANY CHANCE OF A “THIRD WAY”.

### As a disclaimer up front:

We are writing this resource in a way that a futurist would write it, which is described as “value neutral.” That means we aren’t writing predictions as if they are good or bad. We are only making predictions and leave it up to the reader to discern what faithful Christian leadership looks like in their context.

34% of Gen Z (born between 1995 and 2015) identifies as something other than straight.

34%

When we talk about human sexuality, what we’re really talking about is a broad term for intersectional issues that range from gender identity and expression, sexual moores and proclivities, sexual orientation and a host of other conversations.

While there’s nothing new under the sun, it does feel like we’re in a new era of “to each their own.” It makes the sexual revolution of the 1960’s feel analogue and this thing is straight up digital. Towards the end of the first season of Netflix’s new hit show, *The Politician*, we are introduced to a major character who’s in a “throuple.” Most people over the age of 25 have no idea what they’re talking about. There are times when it feels like the genie is out of the bottle and things are going faster than many can keep up with. Every couple of weeks, there’s a new term, with new sociological and anthropological underpinnings. Every year things feel more and more “different” than it did the year before.

The first openly-gay major-party presidential candidate regularly, overtly and persuasively talks about his Christian faith, even talking about theology and using the word ‘eschatology’ on the debate stage. As of the writing of this resource, he is leading in an early presidential primary state. As you can imagine, if he becomes President or Vice President, this will profoundly shape the landscape of faith and sexuality. He will not be the last to check these boxes.



Gender fluidity (someone whose gender identity fluctuates between more than one gender) is far more mainstream than most even realize. For those under the age of 18, the majority do not identify with one gender or another. There are regularly family shows popularizing language like “masculine of center,” and Ze/Zem with a whole generation growing up understanding exactly what that means.

In many publicly traded companies, employees are encouraged to write their preferred pronouns in their email signatures even if they are cis-gender. Why? Because it normalizes the discussion of preferred pronouns and gender identity. Some consider it a microaggression and an act of ‘verbal violence’ to misgender someone. So how do you lead someone to faith in Christ or have a shot at discipling them when you might be committing verbal violence against them left and right and not even know it? The last decade has been very “live your life out loud” on social media, but we might see a return to “don’t discuss religion or politics” online for fear of real professional implications. But more largely: For so long the church has only really been having conversations around orientation, but what does it mean when the very notion of gender is in question?

*This is not going to slow down. It’s going to speed up.* Just like reading these last few paragraphs can feel dizzying, we believe the next decade is going to be so dizzying for church leaders that they will either wholesale adopt where culture has gone (and will go)...or they will move to the other extreme and largely not participate in conversations outside heteronorms.

### **Alice Dreger, writer of *The Social Construction of Sex***

*"I keep running into smart people who seem to think I believe that sex "isn't real" because it is all "socially constructed." Allow me to correct this erroneous social construction of me."*

Alice Dreger is an American bioethicist and professor of clinical medical humanities and bioethics at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. [Her article](#) is a good summation of where the conversation currently stands around human sexuality.



For some time now, there has been much discussion in the North American church around the possibilities of a Third Way; a way of engaging these questions around human sexuality that remains faithful to the historic and orthodox sexual ethics while living in the gray space of our current world and the frailty therein. But already [within the last few years](#), that window has been coming to a close.

**We predict that the pressure created from the pace of change and the everyday practicalities of living in that world will ultimately collapse the experiments around a Third Way for the church to exist.** That means that in ten years, there will likely be a good number of churches across the United States, largely made up of people younger than 35 years old, who will look like thriving evangelical churches in all regards except for one thing: They will be affirming. That is a very different church landscape than we've seen before. On the other side of the pendulum will be a large group of churches who increasingly pull away from healthy and faithful cultural engagement on these issues because they simply don't know how as they feel completely overwhelmed with the speed of the changing sexual terrain.



# PREDICTION #10

**A WAVE OF INNOVATION IN THE CHURCH WILL HIT IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS.**

What you've seen in the preceding pages are predictions of a church at a crossroads. Church engagement is in precipitous decline with each successive generation. What worked in the past is no longer working today. We do not have good standing within the wider culture and much of that is self-inflicted. For many, the money is drying up. The original sin of our nation (racism / slavery) is coming home to roost and the patriarchy that's existed for the whole of human civilization is sputtering out here in the West. The maps that we've used in the past for navigating faithful leadership don't work, and many are questioning those maps to begin with.

In 2004, after two years of studying the fruit from some very long running Gospel experiments, the Church of England released "Mission Shaped Church." For centuries, this "parish model" was an effective way of living on mission. But since World War I, as seismic changes happened within culture and one cataclysmic event after another occurred, the institution has been in a steady decline, but looked relatively the same. According to the esteemed Peter Brierly, in 1980, 11.1% of the UK population were church attenders. In 2015, that number had plummeted to 4.7%.

Rather than scrap the whole system, they created space for innovation to happen in a way that wouldn't upset the whole apple cart. The "Mission Shaped Church" report sheds light on what they learned after eight years of experimentation in ways that didn't look like "traditional" church for their tribe and context.

In the Forward to the report, the Archbishop of Canterbury writes, "The challenge is not to force everything into the familiar mould; but neither is it to tear up the rulebook and start from scratch (as if that were ever possible or realistic).



What makes the situation interesting is that we are going to have to live with variety; the challenge is how to work with that variety so that everyone grows together in faith and in eagerness to learn about and spread the Good News.” Bishop Graham Cray, the Chair of the work team overseeing the study wrote in the report, “It is clear to us that the parochial system remains an essential and central part of the national Church’s strategy to deliver incarnational mission. But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose.”

In other words, they were desperate and they were going to throw gasoline onto the fire of trying new things.

In the past, anything that wasn’t part of the parish church was considered a threat, and perhaps more often than not, the fire of imagination was put out. But now, almost anything outside of the box of “parish life” was celebrated and called a “Fresh Expression” of the church. It could be as simple as a missional book study, Alpha Course in your home or soup kitchen; or as complex as a multi-site church plant or starting a new faith-based charity. It was all a Fresh Expression because it wasn’t in the mold of the parish church system.

Now to be candid, church attendance has continued to decline. In 2015, Brierly reported attendance at 4.7% with continued projections of bleeding through 2022. However, for “Fresh Expressions,” there was as 273% increase.

Here is our last prediction: We predict a wave of innovation in the North American church is coming in the next ten years.

**They say that necessity is the mother of invention.** When people become desperate enough, they start to try new things, as we just saw evidenced in the Church of England, of all places. The idea that when people get desperate enough they will try new things is one of the most predictable patterns of human behavior. And if enough people start to try new things, by the law of averages, something will work. And if enough people try enough things, with the Spirit working in and through them, there’s going to be a wave innovation on its’ way. We are not predicting explosive growth in the same way that the Church of England hasn’t seen explosive growth yet.

We are not saying these innovations will be all we want them to be. We are simply predicting that new models for discipleship, leadership, mission, reconciliation and new forms of “being the church” are on their way. We can’t speak to whether that will be missional communities, microchurches or a movement of neighborhood churches. It will almost certainly include these things, but will include a whole host of new ideas and models that no one has even dreamed up yet. But this shift towards innovation will provide a tension point with the American church because the measurements of innovation are different than the measurements of the establishment. As the old adage goes, “We measure what we value.” Simply put, the established order and this coming wave of innovation will value different things.

It will be these things that the future of the church is built on.



# SOME HELPFUL NEXT STEPS COMING OUT OF THIS EBOOK



## ADDITIONAL PREDICTIONS & CONTACT INFO

We started with a list of 31 predictions and honed it down to 10. If you'd like to read a short article with 6 more predictions, [you can read it here.](#)

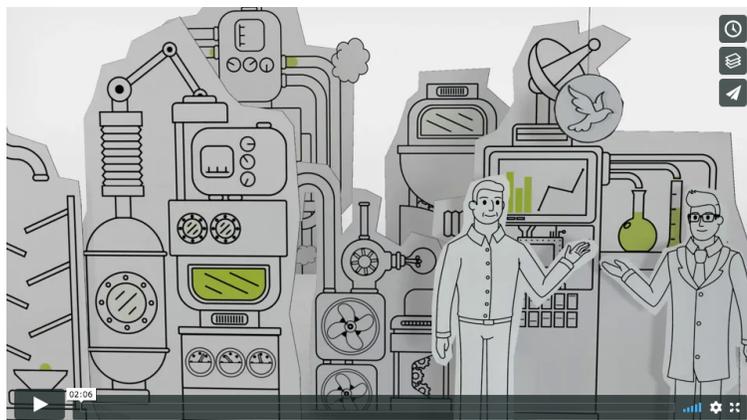
To hear about more ways we can come alongside of you to help find the future of the church, email [Doug@eastendfellowship.org](mailto:Doug@eastendfellowship.org)



## BRAVE COACHING COHORT

A new world is unfolding and it requires brave new leadership skills that you won't find almost anywhere else. In our BRAVE Coaching Cohort, we train pastors, planters and socialpreneurs in the three indispensable leadership skills for this new world.

[Visit the webpage and download the informational PDF here.](#)



## INNOVATION LAB

Creating a custom disciple-making model that is tailored to your mission, vision, theology, context and leadership that grows your church through growing your people.

[Watch the video here.](#)

## February 2020 Global Prayer & Praise Guide



*Saturday, February 1* - Dosseh Takpale serves as the national country leader in **Togo**, West Africa. Mike Reynen (right) is the African area director who with his wife Vickie decided to move from Kenya to West Africa two years ago where the Lord was opening new doors of ministry. The Wesley Missionary Institute just outside of Togo's capital is under construction designed to train national missionaries to reach the multiple cultures in West Africa. Vickie also oversees the ICCM work in Togo, Nigeria and Liberia.



*Sunday, February 2* - Phyllis Sortor continues her service in **Nigeria** where God has given her much favor and fruit among the Fulani, an estimated 25 million nomadic people group of disenfranchised herdsmen. Owning no land, they have not had access to what landowners have such as schools for their children. Besides being instrumental in starting numerous schools for them, Phyllis has worked to provide health care

and a system of rotational grazing (including wells and dams) for multiple tribes. Currently, a filming project is underway to document the story of her kidnapping. Though in her 70's, she says she feels good so why should she retire particularly since the Fulani are coming to Jesus.



*Monday, February 3* - A modular class schedule continues at Evert Bible College in **Tanzania**, opened in January of 2019. Thom and Sherry Cahill plan to travel to Togo for the Africa Team Missionary Meeting the end of April, and then go on to Tanzania to teach in Evert's May session, where they will stay if their funding requirements have been met. They say, "We are anxious to get boots on the ground in Tanzania."



*Tuesday, February 4* - Moises and Jacione Sousa are missionaries to **Sao Tomé**, a small Portuguese-speaking island off the west coast of central Africa. European Area Director Josh Fajardo visited last month to celebrate their one year anniversary as a church plant. Sent by the FMC in Portugal, the Sousas return there this summer to be ordained. Their daughter Giovanna was baptized last summer by Eduardo Angelo when a missions team from Portugal came to Sao Tomé.



*Wednesday, February 5* - Julie Yerger has worked for a number of years at Kibogora hospital in **Rwanda**, but last year the mission board decided that without another missionary on site, it was best for her to go to a different area. Julie loves working with babies and teaching nurses, but says she doesn't have a broad base of experience. She believes God is leading her to get more training by working a few years in US hospital neonatal units to learn all the things she wasn't able to do at Kibogora saying, "I'm pondering the idea of traveling to various hospitals. . .four each year. . . not sure if that's God's plan for my future, but it's the seed of an exciting idea."



*Thursday, February 6* - Started in 2012, Tumaini Women **Kenya** now has 32 groups serving over 500 members. “Tumaini” means hope, and the organization provides opportunity for each member to invest in and grow businesses through a unique savings and loan program. Bible study and fellowship help women believe in their true worth which comes from being made in God’s image. The extra resources TWK provides allow their families a leg up in a society where they have previously been marginalized.

*Friday, February 7* - Many missionaries, pastors and Christians in **Asia** cannot be pictured here or even listed by name. May God help us to pray according to Romans 8:26 - “For we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” We do know that many are hearing the Good News, salvation is coming to those who hear, and more and more people are accepting the call to the ministry.



*Saturday, February 8* - Becca, who teaches at Holy Light Seminary in **Taiwan**, and if all goes according to plan, will have just returned from leading a student team to **Myanmar** ministering mostly to the Chinese church there through teaching, arts and crafts, pantomime, worship, preaching, ice breakers, and cultural exchange. The Taiwan church also oversees leadership development in creative access countries, which sometimes includes Becca; so we do not picture her or share her full name.



*Sunday, February 9* - Pa Kep is the national leader in **Myanmar**. He shares his excitement that this new church was born during Christmas. Also they have been able to share the love of Christ to the Rohingya, a Muslim group in Rakhine State, and are ministering to Buddhists who have accepted Jesus.



*Monday, February 10* - The Myanmar FMC has sent a missionary to creative access country L. Six people were baptized, and six young people are taking discipleship training to become future leaders in this country. Pictured here are students at Light & Life Bible College in Yangon, **Myanmar**.



*Tuesday, February 11* - Sitting room only at **Myanmar**’s youth camp as 200 came from four FM churches for a week of Bible study.



*Wednesday, February 12* - Tim and Lily Kinkead pastor the Chung Lun FM church plant in **Taiwan**. Here Lily (left) shows her joy at the baptism of Melody, a junior high school teacher; Jackie, a sixth grader; and Mr. Tsai, a sixty year old man. All are in discipleship training, and they request prayer particularly for Mr. Tsai who is still struggling with some bad influences in his life.



*Thursday, February 13* - This from Mike Long, career missionary in **Greece**: “The harvest has matured so much this year. The number of new believers continues to grow. The new believers are maturing, and we are so much more like a spiritual family. Our team is developing with a diverse collection of perspectives from Iran, Korea, Sudan, California, Texas, Ohio, Switzerland and, of course, Greece. Our family is enjoying our one grandchild. The doctoral research is progressing as the deadline approaches. Health and relationships are well. Thanks be to our God for his mercy and grace.”



*Friday, February 14* - Last month the FMC in Győr, **Hungary** received two new pastoral appointments –Chad Anderson as head pastor, and Sylvia (in yellow) as asst. pastor. One of Chad’s first official "pastoral moments," was brining in his wife Sarah as a local ministerial candidate saying, “After serving in ministry with her for over 20 years, I can verify not only her giftedness and dedication for ministry.”



*Saturday, February 15* -Larry Winckles, (seated left) career missionary to **Hungary** writes: “The Budapest Ministry Center is home to the Budapest FMC and also hosts a number of community- related programs and outreach events. This year the church . . . enjoyed a weekend retreat hosted jointly with the Győr, Hungary FMC. The building is in use every day of the week with community programs that include a ladies’ discussion group, a German language discussion group, kindergarten readiness classes, a folk music

class, an English class, reading groups, and a 12-step recovery group.” A couple who has started coming regularly on Sunday mornings recently said they feel they have found the place where they can grow in faith, and now they want to help organize a prayer group.



*Sunday, February 16* - Cindi Angelo, missionary to **Portugal**, has many responsibilities, but generally takes Mondays for solitude to listen to God. Here she looks toward the Atlantic –half of Portugal’s border. During their 20 years of ministry in Portugal, they have started multiple churches, but she and husband Eduardo rejoice that their vision for a church within the city of Lisbon has finally come to pass.



*Monday, February 17* - Rodrigo and Tonya Rosado are still waiting on the Lord's direction since their plans to serve in Athens, Greece, have been turned down by the Greek government. They are still praising God for all the ways He has blessed them: selling their house with enough profit that they were able to pay off their student loans; a good place to call home while their plans were up in the air; sharing Jesus' heart for Europe with 26 churches and 3 annual conferences; listening to multiple stories from people they met about God's work in their lives; Ellia turning two and delighting them with her nightly prayers; and celebrating 11 years of marriage. Now we look forward to God's plan for their lives when and how He reveals it.



*Tuesday, February 18* - Ada Hernandez recently accepted the role of interim pastor at the FMC Iglesia Comunidad Cristiana Luz y Vida in Rivas-Vaciamadrid, **Spain** until the pastoral family of Airam Cabrera and Marta Palmes Perez arrive at the end of June. Josh and Susy Fajardo began the church plant in this suburb of the capital, Madrid, in September 2006.



*Wednesday, February 19* - Haney Selah (right) was at a refugee camp in northern **Iraq** with Pastor Emad who says that God has been shifting his heart and passion to serve among the people here – the suffering and under served –not just preach and teach at the church, but be here on the ground with people who are so needy. There are 25,000



people here –7,000 are children. Sharing the message of hope that God really cares – that there is a great God who really sees suffering is bringing salvation to the previously hopeless.



*Thursday, February 20* - Fiza, married and mother of a little boy, lives in a village in **Egypt** and believes that everyone has a calling to serve God. She began working in the church when she was a freshman in college, and says her calling is to children's ministry. She also enjoys serving with others leading people to grow in their faith. Her passion is to use her gifting and skills to help grow the church, and says it is the joy of her life.



*Friday, February 21* - An Impact Middle East ministry team of 70 volunteers serves approximately 2,500 prisoners in **Egypt**, including some of the country's most violent offenders. The team's ministry focuses on evangelism and discipleship with the inmates themselves as well as providing outreach to the inmates' families and their victims' families.



*Saturday, February 22* - ICCM has partnered with Impact Middle East to support a very special school in a refugee camp in **Kurdistan, Northern Iraq**. The school provides hope and basic educational opportunities for children whose lives have been devastated by war. When they come to school, they have a chance to learn, explore, be loved, and experience life after their trauma. God through the Holy Spirit is the Great Healer!

*Sunday, February 23* - Prayers for funding as the following missionaries seek to go or return to the field: Joy to Bulgaria, Phil and Debra Gilmore to Spain, Morgan as creative access, Mike and Andrea Green back to Uruguay, Mark Barigye to Australia, Thom and Sherry Cahill back to Tanzania, and Rich and Laurie Sheriff to Chile. (Joy and Morgan not pictured for security.)



*Monday, February 24* - Kay Stotts Godoy serves as Latin America regional coordinator for ICCM from her home base in Santiago, **Chile**. Besides supervising national coordinators, she works alongside FM elementary school teachers and church workers sharing the good news of Jesus with children. Married to Leonardo Godoy, who shares her heart for service, they also are responsible for outreach, training and administrative responsibilities at Comunidad Casa Grande FMC in Santiago, a growing church that also is ministering to immigrants from Venezuela. Children are Sophia and Ben.



*Tuesday, February 25* - This group participated in last month's **Latin American** missionary retreat including new missionaries to Columbia, Thad and Nikki Roller, Director

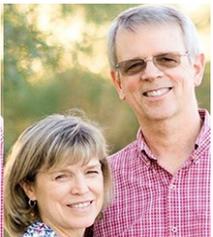
of Global Church Advocacy Gerald Coates and his wife Jan plus a volunteer team from the Wilmore, Ky. FMC who came to minister to the missionary children. Latin America Area Director Ricardo Gomez is standing far right.

*Wednesday, February 26* - **Latin America** Area Director Ricardo Gomez writes, “The past several months have seen unprecedented conflicts and violent protests throughout the entire region including Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua. It seems turmoil is the daily bread in Latin America, and some places, the only bread. Perhaps the bright spots amid the turmoil are the new opportunities to present the gospel of Christ. Families are crossing national borders at extraordinary rates. They are in search of safety, employment, and new opportunities. Many are open to receiving the gospel message. Many Free Methodists have fled Creative Access Country-X and are now planting churches and beginning discipleship ministries throughout the region.” Prayer particularly appreciated for the urgent need of humanitarian aid in Country-X.



*Thursday, February 27* - Dan and Hope Owsley have served in three regions of **Brazil** over the past 31 years starting churches and organizing conferences. Their ministry has included teaching Bible and Christian doctrine to church leaders, mentoring men and women in ministry, sharing the gospel, and discipling new believers. Over the last seven years, Dan and Hope have served in Brasilia, the nation's capital and fourth-largest metropolitan area in Brazil. During this period Hope edited a book of John Wesley writings translating them into Portuguese. Dan engaged in reaching people for Christ through weekly visits to small businesses and home meetings. This month they move to Sao

Paulo to help revitalize the main campus of the FM Bible seminary and encourage a church planting movement throughout the country.



*Friday, February 28* - Guy and Betsy Crawford provide pastoral care and support to FM missionaries in Latin America. This role includes encouragement and spiritual nurture via emails, phone calls and field visits; special care in emergencies or times of crisis; and organization of prayer networks. Guy is a medical doctor and also facilitates medical services for the FM school in Managua, Nicaragua. Betsy provides support assistance for the Latin America Area Director.



*Saturday, February 29* - When workers with SEED travel overseas, they are often asked to take kits with reusable menstrual pads/kits as girls often lose days of school each month during their cycle and women, days of work which obviously impacts them and their families. The reusable menstrual kits are one solution helping girls stay in school and for women to keep their jobs. Another thing SEED is asked to bring is underwear. “Now,” writes Rose Brewer, SEED director shown here with her family, “if you’re uncomfortable reading this, think how uncomfortable girls and women are when they don’t have supplies.”

This is just another reason to support SEED, the organization that is helping people make a living wage by creating livelihood-group ministries in FM churches around the world to do microenterprise appropriate for their churches and/or communities.

*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy Philippians 1:3&4 (ESV)*



Worship service on January 12, 2020

New Hebron FMC on October 29, 2019





# The Faith of Troy Polamalu

February 4, 2020 Gary S. Smith



Troy Polamalu, who played safety for the Pittsburgh Steelers from 2003 to 2014, has been elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility. He will enter the hall with Bill Cowher, who coached the team for his first four seasons, and defensive back Donnie Shell, both selected as part of the hall's special class to celebrate the NFL's 100<sup>th</sup> year.

Polamalu's "combination of speed, anticipation, and toughness" made the eight-time Pro Bowler one of the best at his position in NFL history. Polamalu was named a first-team All-Pro four times and the NFL's MVP in 2010 and won two Super Bowl rings. Many football pundits argue that he revolutionized the safety position. For a dozen years, Polamalu was the public face of the Steelers' franchise because of his stellar performance and his television commercials for Head & Shoulders shampoo.

While playing with the Steelers, Polamalu was also widely known as one of the NFL's most devout Christians. In his book "The Tebow Mystique," Patton Dodd reported that Polamalu was "mentioned by fellow players for his spiritual devotion" more than anyone else. The NFL, David Kamp wrote, abounded with "Bible-study groups and postgame prayer circles. But even in this context, Polamalu stands out." Polamalu, Kamp argued, was different from other Christian stars such as Roger Staubach and Reggie White. He was "a mystic, a man more fourth century than twenty-first, living in constant dialogue with the Deity." "What truly marks Polamalu as a man apart," Kamp concluded, "is his godliness."

The youngest of five children, Polamalu was raised by a single mother on welfare in an impoverished, crime-ridden Los Angeles neighborhood. Polamalu spent more time on the streets than with his mother. By third grade, he was stealing lunch every day from a local grocery store. To escape this environment, he moved to Oregon to live with his uncle Salu Polamalu and his wife where he attended fourth through twelfth grade. In Oregon, Troy attended a Catholic high school and developed a close personal relationship with God. Polamalu reports that in high school, "I was almost constantly in prayer."

After joining the Steelers in 2003, Polamalu undertook a spiritual quest that led him and his wife Theodora to become Orthodox Christians in 2007. For several years, Polamalu read books and talked with priests, pastors, and Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Buddhist monks to develop "a deeper, more consistent experience of God." His study of Scripture and church history reaffirmed his childhood faith in

Christianity and persuaded him that Eastern Orthodoxy was the most biblical and spiritually meaningful form. During his investigation, Polamalu spent four days in a monastery in Greece conversing with Orthodox monks. This experience contributed to Troy's and Theodora's decision to join the Greek Orthodox Church. After studying with a Greek Orthodox priest in Pittsburgh for a year, they were baptized into the faith. Polamalu began to understand the Bible more clearly and fully. Thereafter, the Polamalus attended worship services at several Greek Orthodox parishes in Pittsburgh.

For Polamalu, the essence of faith is surrendering to God. While playing for the Steelers, he declared, "I try to serve God, through football, with passion." "As Mother Teresa said, God calls us not to be successful but to be faithful," Polamalu asserted. He denounced the "idea that the more pious" people were, the more successful they will be, as "very dangerous." "If you look at faith in that way," he added, "you're bound to fail" both "spiritually and in your career." For Polamalu, winning two Super Bowls paled compared to the fulfillment God provided.

Trying to reconcile the Samoan warrior spirit of his ethnic heritage with Greek Orthodox teachings, Polamalu admitted, was challenging. He strove, however, "to be a valiant Christian warrior" who controlled his passions. "Football," Polamalu avowed, has "its demons—prestige, ego, avarice"—that players must battle. Football, Polamalu argued, is "a very spiritual sport" because players must deal with "the fear of failure," pride, and being criticized for making a mistakes. What set Troy apart, Gina Mazza Hillier insisted, was his ability to keep "love at the center of his sport."

In the early 2010s when Tim Tebow's religious rituals on the gridiron and references in interviews to his "Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" were extensively publicized, Amy Frykholm wrote about "The Other Devout Christian on the Field" in "Christian Century." "I wish I could capture Polamalu's very different kind of spirituality amid the football season's endless hype," she declared, but "a rich and complex life of faith is hard to sum up."

During his playing career, many teammates and opponents expressed great admiration and affection for Polamalu. They respected his temperament, character, compassion, and Christian faith. Numerous players testified that Polamalu positively influenced their faith. When Steeler safety Shamarko Thomas asked him how to be great, Polamalu replied that greatness is about "putting God first and just doing the right things in your life."

Off the field, Polamalu made weekly unpublicized visits to cancer patients at Pittsburgh's Children's Hospital and created a foundation to aid the needy. Many hospital staff "marveled at Polamalu's attentiveness." "When he comes in," observed a child-life specialist, "he makes the kids feel like they are the most important person in the room." Polamalu's foundation helps fund the hospital, provided housing for residents of American Samoa who were displaced by a 2009 tsunami, and supports the initiatives of Focus+ Pittsburgh, an Orthodox organization that combats poverty in western Pennsylvania.

Polamalu deserves to be honored not only for his outstanding performance on the gridiron but also for his exemplary Christian witness and charitable deeds.

### [About Gary S. Smith](#)

Dr. Gary Scott Smith is a Professor of History Emeritus at Grove City College and is a fellow for faith and politics with the Institute for Faith and Freedom. He is the author of "A History of Christianity in Pittsburgh" (2019), "Suffer the Children" (2017), "Religion in the Oval Office" (Oxford University Press, 2015), "Faith and the Presidency From George Washington to George W. Bush" (Oxford University Press, 2009), "Religion in the Oval Office" and "Heaven in the American Imagination" (Oxford University Press, 2011).