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growth in faith and service to God

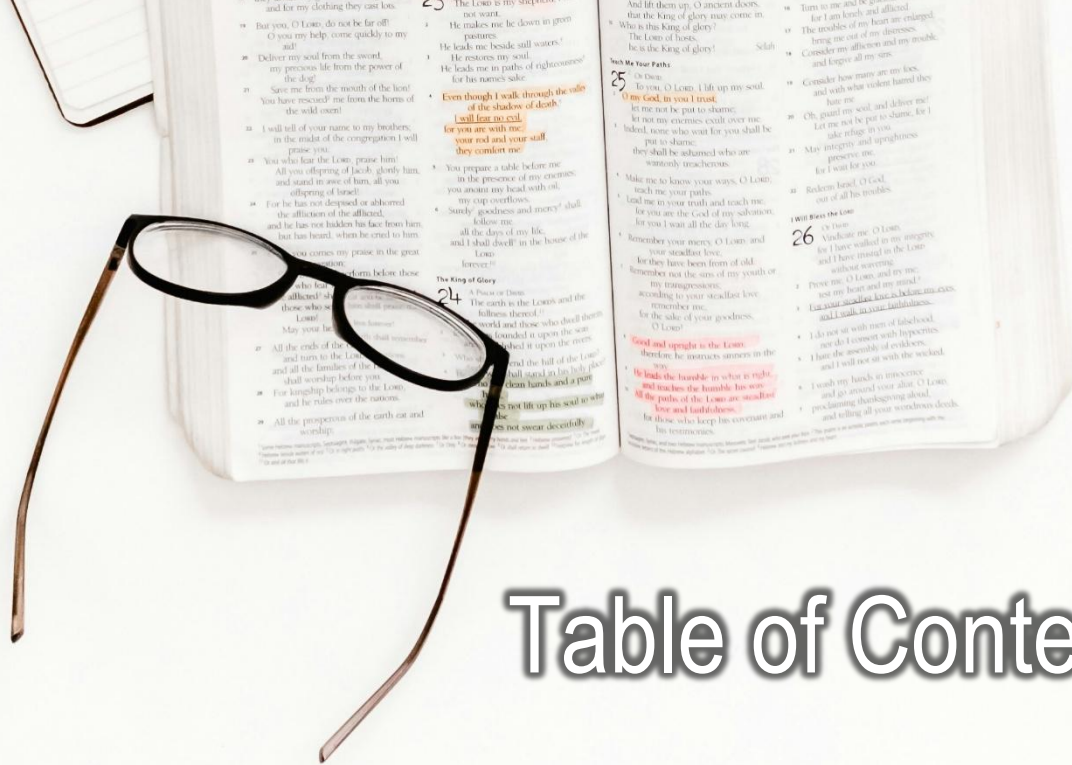


Table of Contents

- 5 | **EXPOSITORY ARTICLE | William Stewart**
[The Death Of A Testator](#)
- 8 | **CHURCH ARTICLE | Keith Sharp**
[A Church Without Elders](#)
- 11 | **WORSHIP ARTICLE | Jeremy Woodman**
[On Psalms, Hymns, And Spiritual Songs](#)
- 14 | **APPLICATION ARTICLE | Sean Cavender**
[Serve The Living God](#)
- 17 | **EVANGELISM ARTICLE | John Hains**
[Using Our Homes For Evangelism](#)
- 20 | **BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE | John Hines**
[Confess Much?](#)

From the Editors...

Happy New Year! We are excited for the year ahead and the prospect of GROWing in our knowledge, understanding and application of God's word. Thank you for being a GROW magazine subscriber. If you believe this e-publication is worthwhile, we'd be delighted for you to share it with others. Forward the email notification to others, post the website or individual articles on your social media accounts, print out any individual article (there is a printer friendly button at the bottom of each page), or forward, print out, or share this PDF copy of GROW magazine.

We appreciate the writers who have contributed to this quarter's magazine. Our aim is to provide

material that will provoke us to think, to dig deeper into God's word. We believe the articles presented herein will encourage such. And of course, if we are truly going to GROW in the faith, we need to put into practice the things we learn from the Scriptures. GROW magazine was started as a publication by Christians for Christians. Most of our writers are gospel preachers by vocation, but not all. They are all diligent Bible students, and for that we are thankful, and because of that, we will benefit.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,

Sean P. Cavender, chief editor

William Stewart, editor & designer



The Death Of A Testator

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

The book of Hebrews is a wonderful treatise on the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. It contrasts the two God-established religions on several different counts: covenant, mediator, priesthood, tabernacle, sacrifices, promises, hope, etc.. Consistently, the writer concludes what is available in Christ is “better” (Hebrews 1:4; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:40; 12:24).

In Hebrews 9, having spoken of the Levitical High Priest’s duty to go beyond the veil on the day of atonement with a sacrifice for himself and the people, the author boldly affirms

...Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He has entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.
(Hebrews 9:11-12)

Jesus is not only the New Testament High Priest, but He is also the New Testament sacrifice. His service as High Priest is greater, for He has not entered an earthly sanctuary one day per year, but has gone into heaven itself perpetually. His sacrifice is far more effectual than the blood of goats, calves and bulls prescribed under the Old Covenant which only made people ceremonially clean (Hebrews 9:13; 10:4, 11); for He is the perfect Lamb of God, the prophesied Messiah, whose blood has power to remove sin (Hebrews 9:14-15; 10:12, 14).

In Hebrews 9:16, we find the source of our title. It reads, *“For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of a testator.”* A handful of English translations use the word “testator,” but the idea is consistently found among translations. For example, the



ESV reads, *“For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.”* This text seems to speak of a concept we are very familiar with – a last will and testament. An individual makes a written record of what he wishes to be done with his possessions after his death. Though it is a legal document until the death of the one who wrote it, it is not a binding document until the death of the one who wrote it. But is that really the thought given in Hebrews 9:16-17, or have we (and perhaps the translators to some degree) approached the text with a western world bias?

Keep in mind, the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians in the first century. Is the idea of a last will and testament even a concept they would be familiar with or accept? I do not want us to get bogged down looking at Jewish laws regarding inheritances, but suffice it to say, there are several Old Testament texts which address such (ie. Numbers 27:5-11; 36:5-9; Deuteronomy 21:15-17; 25:5-10; Ruth 4; 1 Kings 21:3; etc.). Pankauski Hauser PLLC, a Florida law firm, has an article dealing with wills and Jewish law. In it, they state,

Under Jewish law having a will that goes against these principles (the direction of the OT law and the Talmud, wjs) is technically a violation of Jewish law to some observers. Worse the beneficiaries under our law would be considered as stealing from the estate under Jewish law.¹

If such is the case, I doubt the Holy Spirit had the Hebrew writer portray the New Covenant as Jesus' last will and testament, to be executed upon His death. In fact, I am not aware of any other place in the Bible which uses the idea of a last will and testament for the installation of the New Covenant.

I am not a Greek scholar, so please, do your own research, but the wording in the Greek is simply about the inception of a covenant, not the execution of a testator's will. A word for word rendering of the text would say *"where indeed a will death necessary to establish of the having made."*² Without doubt, the wording is awkward. One could read that and think it is a testator dying and his will coming into force, but that is not the only option. The Greek word some translations render as "testator" appears seven times in the New Testament, four of those in the book of Hebrews. The only time it is translated as "testator" is in Hebrews 9:16-17. Elsewhere it is translated as "appoint," "bestow," "made," or "make." A death is appointed in Hebrews 9:16-17, but is it the death of a testator to bring a will in force?

Young's Literal Translation reads, *"for where a covenant is, the death of the covenant-victim to come in is necessary."* The "covenant-victim" Young speaks of is a sacrifice. A covenant is established by the death of a sacrifice. Recall in Genesis 15, when the LORD made a covenant with Abram, he was commanded to bring "a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon" (Genesis 15:9). These creatures were "covenant-victims," their death was specifically associated with the

establishment of the covenant between the LORD and Abram.

Back to Hebrews 9, if we keep reading in the context, it should become evident that the writer is not speaking of the execution of a dead man's will, but the establishment of a covenant. Notice:

Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you.' Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry.
(Hebrews 9:18-21).

This refers to Exodus 24:5-8, where the Old Covenant was established between God and Israel. No man died to bring Moses' law into force – an animal sacrifice was made and the blood of the covenant was sprinkled. While it is true a Man died to bring the gospel into force, please understand it required more than just death. If Jesus had accidentally fallen off a cliff to His death, or if He tragically died as an innocent bystander in a robbery gone wrong, or if He perished with pneumonia, or any number of other ways; it would not have resulted in the New Covenant coming into force. It was not merely His death, but Him dying as a sacrifice that brought about the New Covenant. As Moses' law was established by *"the blood of the covenant"* (Hebrews 9:20; Exodus 24:8), Christ's law would be established by *"the blood of the covenant"* (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:12, 14; 12:24; 13:20).

The contextual comparison with the Law negates the idea of a "last will and testament" and clearly indicates a covenant being instituted. It stands as further evidence of the advantage of Christianity over Judaism. The Law of Moses was installed through the sacrifice of calves and goats, and their blood being sprinkled. The Law

of Christ came into force through the Son of God being sacrificed and His blood being sprinkled.

Again, there is a better Mediator, a better covenant, a better sacrifice, and a better hope. Though the shedding of blood was necessary for purification (Hebrews 9:22), resulting in atonement (Leviticus 17:11), the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4, 11). The animal sacrifices were powerless to provide true forgiveness. But notice what the writer says concerning the Christ,

...this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified (Hebrews 10:12-14)

Okay, it is the establishment of a covenant, not the execution of a last will and testament; it is about the blood of a sacrifice being shed, not just about a death. You might be thinking, “Does it really matter? What difference does it make?” Consider a few things:

- The testament/testator approach ignores the immediate context (compared with Moses establishing the Old Covenant), and the greater context (the “better” argument found throughout the book of Hebrews).

- The testament/testator approach focuses on His death, but inherently takes away the force of Him dying as a sacrifice. Death alone was not enough.
- The testament/testator approach disregards the importance of His blood. Blood is mentioned 15x in chapters 9 and 10. A testator may die without blood being shed; a covenant-victim (or sacrifice) cannot.

Do I think folks who have accepted and believed the testament/testator concept in Hebrews 9:16-17 don't believe in the superiority of Christianity, or discount Jesus' sacrifice or blood? No, not at all. The problem is, the testament/testator approach weakens the text and uses a man-made analogy that misses the mark. Paul told Timothy to “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15). Let us be diligent in our pursuit of truth. May we discover and accept the concepts and analogies the Lord uses to reveal His manifold wisdom to us. A correct contextual understanding of Hebrews 9:16-17 will serve to enrich our appreciation for the great plan of God.

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1. pankauskilawfirm.com
 2. biblehub.com

A Church Without Elders

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The Lord's plan is for each local church to have its own elders (overseers/shepherds) to rule and to shepherd the local flock (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Thus, a congregation that has men qualified to do this work but refuses to appoint them rebels against the Lord. It is just as sinful to refuse to do what the Lord requires as it is to do what He forbids (James 4:17).

But a congregation may not have a plurality of men qualified to serve as overseers. It is also wrong to select and appoint unqualified men (1 Timothy 3:2).

Thus, a congregation may be forced to exist without shepherds. Such a church can still successfully do the work of the Lord. No elders are ever mentioned in the congregation in Antioch, though "prophets and teachers" are mentioned (Acts 13:1), yet that church sent out Barnabas and Saul on Paul's first journey to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3) and received them when they returned (Acts 14:26-27).

Elders of the church have two primary functions in the local congregation of which they are members: (1) ruling the church (1 Timothy 5:17), ie., overseeing (1 Peter 5:1-2), making decisions the members are obligated to follow (Hebrews 13:17), and (2) shepherding the flock (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-2).

In the absence of elders to perform these essential functions, others in the local church must do them. How is this done?

Rule

One Man Pastor

In many Protestant denominations, the "pastor" (singular) rules the local church. Actually, the term translated "pastors" (Ephesians 4:11) means "a shepherd, herdsman" (Mounce. 1249), and is the noun form of the verb translated "to shepherd" (New King James Version) or "feed" (King James Version) in Acts



via Kathy Buscher | Piabay.com

29:28. Of course this is work given to the elders (Acts 20:17), and there must be a plurality of elders if the church is to have elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1).

Evangelistic Oversight

There was formerly a sizable group of brethren who believed an evangelist was to start a congregation then oversee that church until it had elders. Also, there are many untaught brethren who have brought over from their denominational background the one man pastor concept. The Scriptures do not assign any decision-making authority at all in the congregation to the preacher/evangelist. The evangelist is not even an office in the local church (cf. Philippians 1:1), but preachers have fellowship with the church or churches that assist them in their work and with which they work (Philippians 4:15-16). The preacher's role is preaching and teaching the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-5), and his opinions carry no more weight than those of any other man in the congregation.

Leaders

There are those who advocate that in a church that has no men qualified to be elders, more spiritually mature men not qualified to be elders should serve as “leaders” and, as a group, should make decisions for the congregation. The word “leaders” is in the New International Version in Acts 15:22; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; in the English Standard Version in the passages in Hebrews 13, and in Hebrews 13:17, 24 in the New American Standard Bible.

“Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas” were “leaders among the brothers” (Acts 15:22, NIV). But this was in the church in Jerusalem, where there were both apostles and elders (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23). That hardly leaves room for mature men who were unqualified to be elders to make decisions for the church. But Judas and Silas (verse 22), not elders or apostles, were indeed leaders in the church; they were prophets (Acts 15:33). Their leadership role was in proclaiming by inspiration the word of God, not in making decisions for the congregation (ie. Acts 11:27-28).

The overwhelming evidence and the universal conviction of Christians from the very beginning is that the Hebrew letter was written to Jewish Christians in Palestine not very long before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (cf Hebrews 10:24-34). There had been apostles among the Hebrews from the very beginning (Acts 2:41-42) and elders from very early (Acts 11:29-30). Why would the author write the Hebrew disciples as a whole and command them to remember men who were not qualified to be either apostles or elders, to follow their faith, and to obey them? (Hebrews 13:7, 17)

Thus, the evidence is overwhelming that the term “leaders” is a comprehensive term for those who occupied the offices the Lord Jesus Christ gave His church as a gift when He ascended back on high: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). Apostles rule the universal church (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29-30), pastors

and teachers rule the local church (elders; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4), prophets led by their word (Acts 11:27-28), and evangelists lead by preaching the word (2 Timothy 4:1-5). This position harmonizes with the use of the word “leaders” in all four passages in which it is found.

Consensus

Several years ago a brother contended:

the (male) leaders call the multitude together, discuss the problems, propose solutions, ask the multitude to make choices, get congregational consensus, and apply the resolution. That's the pattern (Trefethen. 24)

Of course, this gives women an equal role with men of the congregation in rule, whereas God has given the leadership role in the church to men (1 Timothy 2:11-12). This also nullifies the rule of elders in a church with elders (1 Timothy 5:17).

Proper Rule

Decision-making authority in a congregation without elders is vested in all the men of the congregation (1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). The younger should submit to the older (1 Peter 5:5), but that doesn't imply the more mature as a separate group make the decisions. Women may not rule over (help make decisions for) men (1 Timothy 2:12). No one should seek or be allowed pre-eminence (3 John 9-10). All members of the church, including women, have rights to have their opinions and needs considered, be kept informed, and have their approval sought (Acts 6:1-5). Whether a congregation has elders or not, all should strive for unity and peace (Ephesians 4:1-3), seek to please others in matters of opinion, and determine not to cause others to stumble (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

Shepherd

Every member of the congregation is to do what he/she has the ability and right to do to help edify the congregation (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:14-27). We have the responsibility to watch out and care for each other spiritually (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20). The shepherds of the

flock have a special obligation toward the sheep (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-3), for which we will be judged on the last, great day (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:4). However, every member of the local church has the responsibility to care for every other member (Galatians 6:2).

Conclusion

I had a friend who, due to diabetes, had both legs amputated below the knees. He was handicapped, but he refused to be crippled. He learned to walk with prostheses and even waited on the Lord's table.

If the congregation of which you are a member has no elders, it is handicapped, but not crippled. You can overcome the handicap by following the divine plan for rule in the local church and by each member demonstrating love and concern for all others.

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On Psalms, Hymns And Spiritual Songs

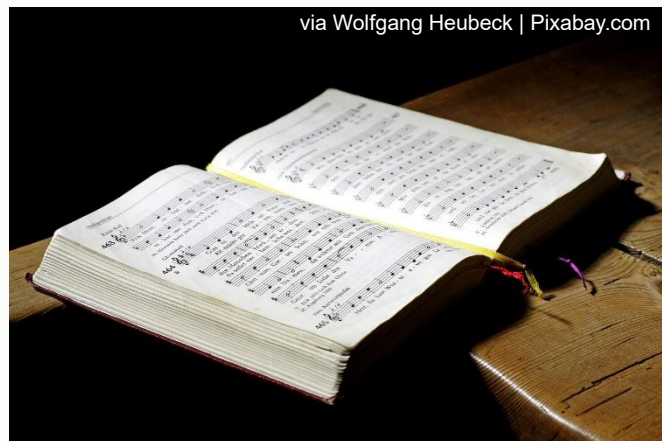
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There are few things in this world as precious as the sound of saints singing together in the assembly. In worship, it occupies a unique place. It is an expression of our emotions without the extreme of emotionalism. Singing is a form of teaching without the use of words alone. It combines elements of emotion and instruction to the praise and glory of God. We encounter the Song of Moses in Exodus, after the Hebrews were released from Egyptian bondage. The book of Revelation is filled with scenes of the heavenly hosts and saints in heaven singing. Emphasis on singing praise to God appears in the Bible from beginning to end, so we ought to carefully consider what God's word has to say on this subject.

Two closely related verses are often referenced when discussing worship in song, *"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:19) and *"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"* (Colossians 3:16). Much could be written about these two verses, but this article will focus specifically on the phrase *"psalms, hymns and spiritual songs."*

If we are to *"worship Him [God] in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24), then we ought to know what we sing and why. If we are to teach, we ought to know what we are teaching. What is a psalm and how does it differ from a hymn and/or a spiritual song? What makes for a good song? How can we get the most out of our singing, as individuals and as a congregation?

The first category, psalms, are the same as the ones we find in the Old Testament, most authored by David, but a fair number by the sons of Korah, Asaph, and a handful of other authors. As such they are inspired by the Holy



Spirit. They were more than just writings though, many were set to music, though sadly we lack the original melodies.

As anyone who has ever had a tune stuck in their head can attest, songs aid memorization. The psalms were an excellent teaching tool for the Israelites and us. This lack of literacy and limited availability of printed material was why it was important that, *"the lips of a priest should keep knowledge"* (Malachi 2:6). The people relied on him to teach and apply the law. It is also why God through Moses commanded the people, *"You shall teach [these words] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up"* (Deuteronomy 6:7). Without constant reinforcement, the people were prone to forget.

A psalm appearing in a modern song book should be either a word-for-word quotation from Scripture or close paraphrase. Paraphrases might be necessary to modernize the language and accommodate the setting of the words to music. For example, there are multiple songs based on Psalm 23, *The Lord's My Shepherd*. Some of these songs are word-for-word

quotations, while others slightly modify the words to fit the tune. When we are singing a psalm, we can be confident that the word we are singing please God since He authored them.

What are hymns and spiritual songs? Both are songs with words that may not all be quotations from Scripture, but are consistent with its teachings and themes. From its usage in the Bible and historical sources, hymns appear to have more of a focus on praise to God.

The great advantage of hymns and spiritual songs is their ability to focus the audience's attention on a singular concept and to create an atmosphere. Consider the song, *Hear O Israel*. It is based on Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ("*you shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart*") and Leviticus 19:18b ("*you shall love your neighbour as thyself*") set to a somber tune with a cadence evocative of a people receiving the law at Sinai. It captures the gravity of the occasion and authority of the two commandments on which Jesus said, "*hang all the law and the prophets*" (Matthew 22:40). Consider another song, *Tis Midnight and on Olive's Brow*. Without quoting Scripture *verbatim*, it references Jesus's time in the garden of Gethsemane. It describes the event with poetry and literary device, the emotional anguish He suffered, how He was abandoned by His disciples, even the ones closest to Him. This makes it an excellent song to focus the mind before partaking of the communion bread and fruit of the vine.

However, we need to be cautious about hymns and spiritual songs. Creating an atmosphere can degenerate into a focus on entertainment. Primarily what makes a good song is how well it conforms to Scripture in word and thought. The melody of the song is of secondary importance and should supplement the singing. A catchy tune does not necessarily a good hymn make.

Hymns and spiritual songs can rely more on poetic licence, where certain liberties with language are permitted. This can be used to great effect or abused. Of the former, consider Isaac Watt's *When I Survey the Wondrous*

Cross. The third stanza starts with, "*See from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down!*" We know of course that sorrow and love are emotions that did not actually flow down while Jesus was on the cross. However, we also understand that the author is reflecting on what motivated Jesus to go to the cross and stay there. Here, poetic licence is used effectively and aids us in teaching one another.

At times, however, poetic licence can cross the line into fantasy, speculation, or downright doctrinal error. Some authors pen words that express concepts that go beyond, or worse contradict, the Scriptures. I am not going to name songs, but there are some songs that I cannot sing in good conscience. Some of these songs can be salvaged by omitting some of the verses. The point is we need to be careful about what we are singing. Generally, I think the compilers and editors of the songbooks the churches use do an outstanding job; however, on occasion a song is selected that should not have been. Do not assume because it is in a song book that it is error-free.

This reinforces the need for us to pay close attention to what we sing. Paul warned the Corinthians about improper conduct and a lack of reflection during the Lord's Supper. They were failing to treat it with the respect it was due. We can do something similar in our singing if we do not pay attention to the words and reflect on their meaning. Our worship can become rote and our minds can wander to mundane things. Some modern songs that repeat a single phrase many times seem more prone to become the type of "*vain repetition*" (Matthew 6:7) Jesus spoke against, but it can happen to any.

How best to avoid this? Song leaders, try to pick a variety of songs and not lead the same ones too often. Pick ones that match the lesson or sermon topic, if known. Try to learn new songs as a group. A newly learned song may resonate with us in ways one we've known for a long time may not.

Last year, I learned *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*. One of its verses begins, “*What language shall I borrow, to thank Thee dearest friend? For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end.*” Certainly, many songs have conveyed the idea of our gratitude to Christ transcending language. However, this turn of phrase stuck in my mind and I found myself thinking about it for days afterward. That is one definition of effective teaching!

Another tactic is to ask oneself the question “how does this apply to me?” A couple years ago a visiting preacher was making a point about how we can lie in song. Lie in song? How? If we are singing *I Want to Be a Worker for the Lord* but we never share our faith and have no

intention of doing so, or if we leave all the work to others, are we not declaring with our mouth something we know to be at odds with our actions and attitude? Are we not lying in song? Yet, if the song gets us to reflect on the quality of our work and where we may improve, then it has proven itself as an effective admonishment.

I leave you with a challenge: improve your singing. Improve your singing, not by focusing on the quality of your voice, but by paying greater attention to the words you are singing so the word of Christ may dwell richly in you. Through singing you may fulfill your obligation to teach and admonish yourself and your fellow Christians.

Serve The Living God

SEAN CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

The book of Hebrews is a book that concentrates on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We learn about the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice, His perfection and sinless life which qualified Him to serve as our great High Priest. By His sacrifice, the new covenant, which we are under today, was established. God grants forgiveness of our sins based upon the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. We are reconciled to the Father through the obedience of the Son of God. While the book of Hebrews concentrates on the superiority of Christ and the blessings of the new covenant, it also reminds us that we are called to serve.

Jesus is the perfect sinless example who sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). His life is the essence of obedience. The author reminds us of His humility and submission in saying, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered," (Hebrews 5:8, NASB). Jesus Christ dedicated Himself to serving God – even at the cost of His own life. He offered His blood to initiate the new covenant which God promised (Hebrews 9:16-18).

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. (Hebrews 9:16-18)

Jesus' sacrifice had been brought near to God by His blood, whereby we are cleansed from sin and called to a life of service!

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your



via Renna Black | Pixabay.com

conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14)

God equips us to do His will and to please Him! The covenant that Christ brought into effect calls us into a life of service to the Lord.

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

We are able to serve God **because our consciences have been cleansed from sin.** We are free from the guilt and burden of sin. The new covenant promises our sins will be remembered no more (Hebrews 8:12). They are no longer held against us! Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), but under the new covenant, because we are forgiven of sin, we are no longer separated from Him. Jesus was perfect, undefiled, and separate from sinners (Hebrews 7:26) – that also describes the Christian who has been forgiven of sins! We have received the atonement through Christ and are therefore one

with God. Sin no longer is a stumbling block between us and God. Now we can serve!

Since we stand in a right condition before God, **we can approach God to serve Him**. God is ready to aid us, granting mercy and grace in times of weakness and temptation (Hebrews 4:15-16). Yet, we are able to approach the throne of Jehovah with confidence. We can come before His presence, waiting for His command. Hebrews 1:14 describes the angels as ministering spirits who minister to those who will inherit eternal salvation. The angels continually stand before God's throne, seeing His face, waiting to minister.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10)

As those who have been cleansed from sin, we have the unique benefit of coming before the throne of God to receive the mercy we need. Yet, that is not the only reason we go before God's throne. Our purpose is two-fold: find the mercy of the King, but also to kneel in service to our King.

The apostle Paul wrote a beautiful prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21. He encouraged the saints to not lose heart, despite the tribulations Paul faced. Why was Paul willing to endure those hardships? He did it to serve the Lord's church. He served God and said, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father" (Ephesians 3:14). Approaching God's throne is an act of confident submission, expressing our attitude of service.

By the atoning death of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the new covenant, our conscience is clean and we are to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). What should our service look like? **First, we should exhort one another** to not lose heart and to continue to believe in God (Hebrews 3:13). Some may start well, confessing their faith in the Son of God, but then turn away, forsaking and despising the blood of the covenant. We have a duty to help and encourage those who are weak. It is not

something to be put off, but should be done "today," day after day – as long as it is called today. Sin can and will creep in. It will harden and destroy the hearts and souls of believers. We must be on the offensive, reminding brethren to keep the faith firm until the end..

We may serve God through stirring up the brethren to love and good works (Hebrews 10:23-24). Some Christians had begun to forsake the Lord and quit assembling with fellow believers. Lackadaisical Christianity is foreign to the Scriptures. The Lord expects us to stimulate each other in the Lord's Church. We should not attack one another, but need to help each other improve. We cannot remain stagnant, or else we will need to start all over again (Hebrews 5:11-14). When Christians begin to distance themselves from the flock and quit assembling with others, it may be too late! Promote love among the brethren, encourage Christians to do more. We should encourage one another to serve. Whether it be visiting orphans and widow (James 1:27), or leading the congregation in worship, praise, and prayer; there is something for you to do in serving the Lord. Allow others to stimulate you and push you beyond your comfort levels, and you, in turn, encourage others to step up and become what they ought to be in service to God.

Thirdly, our service to God cannot get messy and entangled with sin. The Hebrew writer exhorts us to endure and put sin aside, "*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*" (Hebrews 12:1). We must remain vigilant and faithful as we serve the Lord – that requires endurance. The race is not momentary, but throughout our entire life. Our heart, purpose, mind and goal should be wholly dedicated to Christ. We are to learn obedience, just as Christ

did (Hebrews 5:8). Temptation and sin may be in your life – double down and renew yourself. Depend on your brethren to encourage you. One of the biggest lies the devil wants you to believe is that others will not forgive you, but will only judge you. Don't believe him!

One final act of service we must offer to the Lord is the sacrifice of praise: *“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased,”* (Hebrews 13:15-16). We should offer up the sacrifice of our lips by offering prayers of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to God and singing the praises of joy for salvation. We cannot neglect doing good to one another, nor should we neglect the worship of our God in heaven. The Lord is pleased with us when we do such things, worshiping Him in spirit and in truth.

Through the sacrificial death of Jesus and the establishment of the new covenant by His blood, we can serve God. **However, our service is not in vain: we have hope.** Believers are exhorted to remain faithful, because there is a promised rest awaiting us (Hebrews 4:1). The life of a Christian is one of service and work, requiring endurance to remain faithful, culminating in rest in the presence of God (Hebrews 4:9-11). Diligence is required, lest we turn to disobedience and sin.

Christ offered Himself on the cross, was raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven to serve as our High Priest. He is our forerunner. He endured the same race we are in—He has received His reward; the hope of receiving our eternal reward is set before us, if we will endure to the end.

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:19-20)

Christians, we have the blessed hope of receiving a glorious crown once this life is over. We are called to serve God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2). We pour ourselves out; our heart is tested, our mind is pushed, our will is defined. We must be instructed, disciplined, and exercise diligence; but it will be worth it. Christ died in service to the Father, so we, who were dead in sin, might live to serve God. He has entered beyond the veil into the presence of God. May we serve in this hope, that we too will come into the presence of God eternally.

Using Our Homes For Evangelism

JOHN HAINS | SMITHVILLE, ONTARIO

The truth of the gospel of Christ is one of the most precious gifts we will ever receive – but it's not just for us to enjoy and hold onto selfishly – it's for us to share with as many as we can.

It is important we utilize what we have been given from God for doing His work for His glory. Being good stewards is part of being a Christian. First Peter 4:10 encourages us, *“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”* Our homes are huge commodities to be used to God's glory, commodities we invest significant amounts of money into each year – money the Lord has blessed us with. As good stewards of our homes, we can use them in His service. One particular service we can use our homes for is in sharing the gospel with others.

What are some ways we can use our homes for evangelism and spreading God's truth, sharing our hope in the Lord? Here are several ideas:

We can get out our church directories and going through all the names of the families we worship with every week and have them in to sing, read the Bible, and pray for those we would like to see obey the gospel. Imagine all the good that could be done if every home engaged in this kind of an effort. Opening our homes for this kind of activity is a way to honour the Lord with our homes. To think your home could become known as a place where prayer is customarily made would be such a blessing, as mentioned in Acts 16:13, *“And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made...”* Imagine if everyone in the church engaged in this kind of activity with their homes, how the church would grow in strength and number.

Our homes are also a natural choice as a setting for inviting new friends we've met, or old



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acquaintances, for a friendly visit while sharing seeds of the gospel with them. To some people, the comfortable and homey atmosphere may be less threatening than an invitation to attend a worship service. Whatever the case, it is a great first-step. The key is to genuinely care: spend time listening to understand their hearts. Having prayed for wisdom, stick with your conversation plan, so it will not become a visit just about the weather and your favourite sports team. Share passages you have prepared to unfold in a relaxed and gentle way. Some folks will be interested in talking further about the gospel, even committing to studying the Bible. Others will not, but the important thing is to do this often – using your home to keep reaching out with the gospel to more souls. Don't be discouraged or distracted by the busyness of life: keep praying, asking for wisdom and open doors – God is able. With His help, you can make it a practice to do this often.

Years ago, every other Tuesday evening was known as Neighbourhood Bible Study night in our home. We became concerned about sharing the truth with those living around us, so we prayed and planned. We started by hand-delivering

invitations to the neighbours we knew personally, asking them to join us for a Bible study together, hoping they would want to extend that one study to more sessions – and they did!

Those neighbours enjoyed the Bible study and invited other neighbours and friends to join us, until many were involved. We would post a lawn sign up at the edge of the street which read “All Welcome – Neighbourhood Bible Study tonight at 7:00 PM.” Our largest gathering included, I believe, 39 souls!

Over the years we dedicated to holding the Neighbourhood Study, we were blessed to see 6 precious souls obey the gospel through that effort. It was a time of rich blessings from the Lord, as we prayed for open doors, we saw the fruit come, all because of what the Lord is able to do. It was amazing to see passages like Ephesians 3:20-21 at work: *“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* Wow!

Those were good years for our family. The children participated in the classes, filled with non-Christians from around the neighbourhood and beyond. Those studies really were a blessing for the whole family, and the brethren who joined us – as our minds were centered on the Lord’s work – together. In those studies, all kinds of Bible questions were asked, so we had to dig in the Word for ourselves to find the answers. Not only were the children learning from the teaching, they were learning by example. It was an opportunity for them to learn about the power of the gospel; the importance of evangelism; compassion for other souls; standing for one’s faith with courage and gentleness; and sharing what we had through hospitality. (This makes me think of a verse of scripture in Romans 12:12-13: *“...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”* Hospitality offered while sharing the gospel with others is a great application of this text).

You might be thinking, “Well not me, I could never do a thing like a Neighbourhood Bible Study in my home!” My question is, why not? If you don’t feel up to teaching something like that, you can certainly provide the place and the neighbours. Then ask one of the men in your congregation to help with the teaching.

A good place to start in any Bible study is with simple lessons on topics such as “The Bible is the Word of God”; “Respect for the Bible”; “The Life of Christ”; “The Parables”; “The Fruit of the Spirit”; and “How to Establish Bible Authority.”

In your teaching, it’s important to focus on these things:

1. Prayerfully convey the truth, asking the Lord for wisdom.
2. Look for areas of common ground.
3. Remember to start with the “milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2).
4. Be as “gentle as doves,” as Jesus taught His apostles (Matthew 10:16).
5. Be assured your words, and your attitudes, in teaching have an immense impact on the hearer, and on whether they will open their hearts to the truth.
6. Argumentation and heated discussion just squelch an atmosphere of trust and safety for studying the word of truth, and mar the message! The gospel is powerful enough to stand on its own merit – it doesn’t need the “help” of human pride, ego or temper!
7. After establishing some “common ground,” teaching foundational truths, and creating a trusting friendship, then hearts will be more receptive to topics such as: “How People Became Christians in the First Century.”
8. Do not force the seed! The word of God is far more powerful than we realize (Romans 1:16).
9. Continue earnestly in prayer (Colossians 4:2)

You want to talk about restoring New Testament Christianity? How about restoring things like boldness, joy and excitement over the truth (Acts 4:12-13). We can do this by God's grace!

In Ezekiel 3:15, when the Lord prepared Ezekiel to do his work as a prophet, God told him to go and sit where the people sat, so he did: *"Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days."* You and I need to learn to see life through the eyes of the people we hope to teach. We need to teach them what they need to know with great humility and compassion, just as God taught Ezekiel to do. Then, go teach.

Another aspect of this kind of teaching is trying to learn to love the people as God loves. You remember when the Lord prepared Hosea to do his work as a prophet, God told him, *"Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry"* (Hosea 1:2). As he did just that, Hosea's heart was crushed and broken when his wife became unfaithful to him. As you continue to study through the book of Hosea, you learn God expressed to Hosea: now

you know how I feel when my people sin, now go do your work. We need to glimpse into the heart of God and have a heart like His for the lost. Eventually, Hosea's wife was used by so many men no one would have her. But Hosea took her back, just as God did with unfaithful Israel. God's love is absolutely tremendous! When He loves people so much, how can we not attempt to love as He would want us to love? That love includes gently and carefully teaching His truth to others.

*"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**"*
(Romans 5:6-8)

May the Lord bless our efforts to spread His precious Word as we use our homes to His glory!

Confess Much?

JOHN HINES | HAYNESVILLE, LOUISIANA

There is an old saying, “Confession is good for the soul.” I would suggest it is not only good for the soul, it is necessary if we are going to be saved. It plays a role in our conversion, but it certainly does not stop there. Consider a few of the confessions we are called to make as Christians.

The Good Confession

This should be the most obvious one. Paul told Timothy, *“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot...”* (1 Timothy 6:12-14). These verses are not speaking of what Jesus saw, but rather what He testified as witness, *“Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’”* (John 18:37). Our confessional journey begins here, as we proclaim our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. It is a recognition of His identity, supremacy, and authority.

Paul was encouraging Timothy, who was already a Christian, to hold fast to when he first obeyed the Lord’s calling. He reminded him of the “many witnesses” to his confession. These witnesses were brothers and sisters in Christ who could testify of Timothy’s obedience. Paul was reminding the young preacher and holding him accountable, before the Father, before the Son, before the brethren, and before Paul himself. *“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust...”* (1 Timothy 6:20). Let us all hold fast to our own good confession; it is a manifestation of our believing hearts



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(Romans 10:10).

The Confession of Sin to the Lord

Another confession we must make is the one spoken about in 1 John 1. *“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth ... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:5-6, 9). Repentance is not merely ceasing from sin, yet that is what many people practice. They say, “I won’t do it again. I’ll do better. I promise.” That is well and good, but should we not also express, *“God, be merciful to me a sinner”* (Luke 18:13)? There is no forgiveness without the confession of sin.

We also see the power of the Lord in 1 John. Many Christians say we are weak and sinful creatures, both before and after our forgiveness. Our verse makes it clear – the Lord cleanses us “from **all** unrighteousness.” So, what sin is left? None. That is the power of the grace of God; that is the power of the Lord’s sacrifice and it is not automatic. We must confess our sins. Do you

think the father in the parable of the prodigal son would have been well pleased with his son if the child would have come home without the “Father, I have sinned...”? Probably not. Confessing our sin to God is one of the most important confessions we are all called to make.

The Confession of Sin to One Another

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16, KJV). Remember, the prodigal did not just confess his sin against God. He also had sinned in his father’s eyes (Luke 15:21). There is a reason we must confess our wrongdoings to each other. If I keep my confession private, but you know I have sinned, what will your mindset be? You will assume I still need to repent unto God. You would rebuke me when the time of rebuke has passed. After seeking forgiveness, it is time for confession and prayer.

“Pray for one another, that ye may be healed” (KJV). Two things about this verse:

- 1) When we go to our brother in confession, or when they come to us, we need to pray together. Simply saying, “Oh, that’s OK. Don’t worry about it...” is not going to cut it. We are restoring fellowship which is in the Lord. Don’t cheapen it and do not skirt around it.
- 2) “Ye” is plural. Consider your earthly body for a moment. When a limb is severed, there are two sides to the wound. When there is a sin between brethren, yes, there is a guilty party and an innocent party, but both parties are hurting. Both parties are wounded and both parties need to be healed. The Great Physician does not want us broken and hurt. He wants us well. Our confession and prayer are crucial in that process. Both the offender, and the offended, need to heal. So, there is great importance in confessing and praying together.

Confession in Evangelism

“Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetop ... whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven...” (Matthew 10:27, 32). This is neither the good confession that we began with or the confession of sin. It is proclaiming Jesus and it is just as essential to our salvation as any other confession.

It is no coincidence in the next verse Jesus said, *“...a man’s enemies will be those of his own household?”* He speaks of setting a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and those who love family more than the Lord not being worthy of Him (verses 34-38). Where does our confession often go silent? It is within the walls of our home. When that happens, make no mistake, it is exactly what the Lord is speaking about when He says, *“Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven”* (verse 33). Let us confess the Lord and let the power of the gospel work. Our sphere of influence is only so big, but it has the biggest impact at home. Our children, our parents, and our in-laws – all are in need of our confession.

Confession Involves Doctrine

Confession in evangelism is more than just, “You need to believe in Jesus!” Consider Paul as he stood before the Sanhedrin in Acts 23. When Paul identified himself as a Pharisee, it split the assembly, pitting the Pharisees against the Sadducees, with Scripture giving the reason; “For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection – and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both” (verse 8). The Pharisees may have been wrong about a lot of things, but here are two things they were right about, and they freely confessed them.

Some folks will confess Jesus as the Son of God, but it is far fewer who will confess His

doctrine. To most in the religious world, doctrine is a 4-letter-word, as they consider it synonymous with legalism. From the beginning of the church, we see the truth. *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship...”* (Acts 2:42). Doctrinal issues are important. Jesus astounded people because of His doctrine (John 7:16). If our confession does not involve His doctrine, then our confession has come short. Let us speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11).

The Pilgrim’s Confession

As Hebrews 11 looks at the faith of Abel, Enoch, and especially Abraham, we are reminded of the confession made by those who walk by faith. *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland ... Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them”* (verses 13-16). This world is not our home, but do you believe that? Pertaining to our study, do you confess it?

It is easy to become too comfortable here. We forget our dwellings, whether they be wood, brick, or concrete, are just as movable as Abraham’s tent. One of these days, God will remove them. After being told to leave his home, Abraham did not look back. If he had wanted to, he could have returned to the country from which he had come (verse 15). The faithful are unattached. They are unattached from this land so they may be attached to the next. *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go*

and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2-3, ESV). There is a reason many are so troubled by the affairs of this world. It is because they are too attached to this world. Let us follow Abraham and the others, confessing freely we are pilgrims and strangers. We will be happier, now and forever.

Conclusion

So, we see the confessions we are called to make touch every facet of our walk with the Lord. Thayer’s definition for the word “confession” reads this way: 1) “To say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent.” Amen. Let us always be walking in the Lord’s footsteps, imitating Him. The definition goes on: 2) “To concede... to admit or declare one’s self guilty of what one is accused of.” Amen The Lord came to call sinners to repent. We are thankful for His grace, patience, and sacrifice. Let us never spurn our call to confession. There is also an element of the word “confession” pertaining to thanksgiving. *“Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name”* (Hebrews 13:15). The word for “giving thanks” is the word for confession. Worship and thanksgiving are incorporated into the life of our confession. While confession certainly is a part of our conversion, let us look beyond, building upon it, and what a glorious idea it is: “continually,” which describes our confession. Does it describe yours? We hope so. If not, it is time to confess once again. It is good for the soul, and our heart, mind, and body too.

** All passages quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.*

APRIL 2018 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Scott Long uses Galatians 3:6-18 to consider the father of the faithful, Abraham.

CHURCH ARTICLE

William Stewart discusses what Bible says about membership in the Lord's church.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Sean Cavender focuses our minds on prayers using the Psalms.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

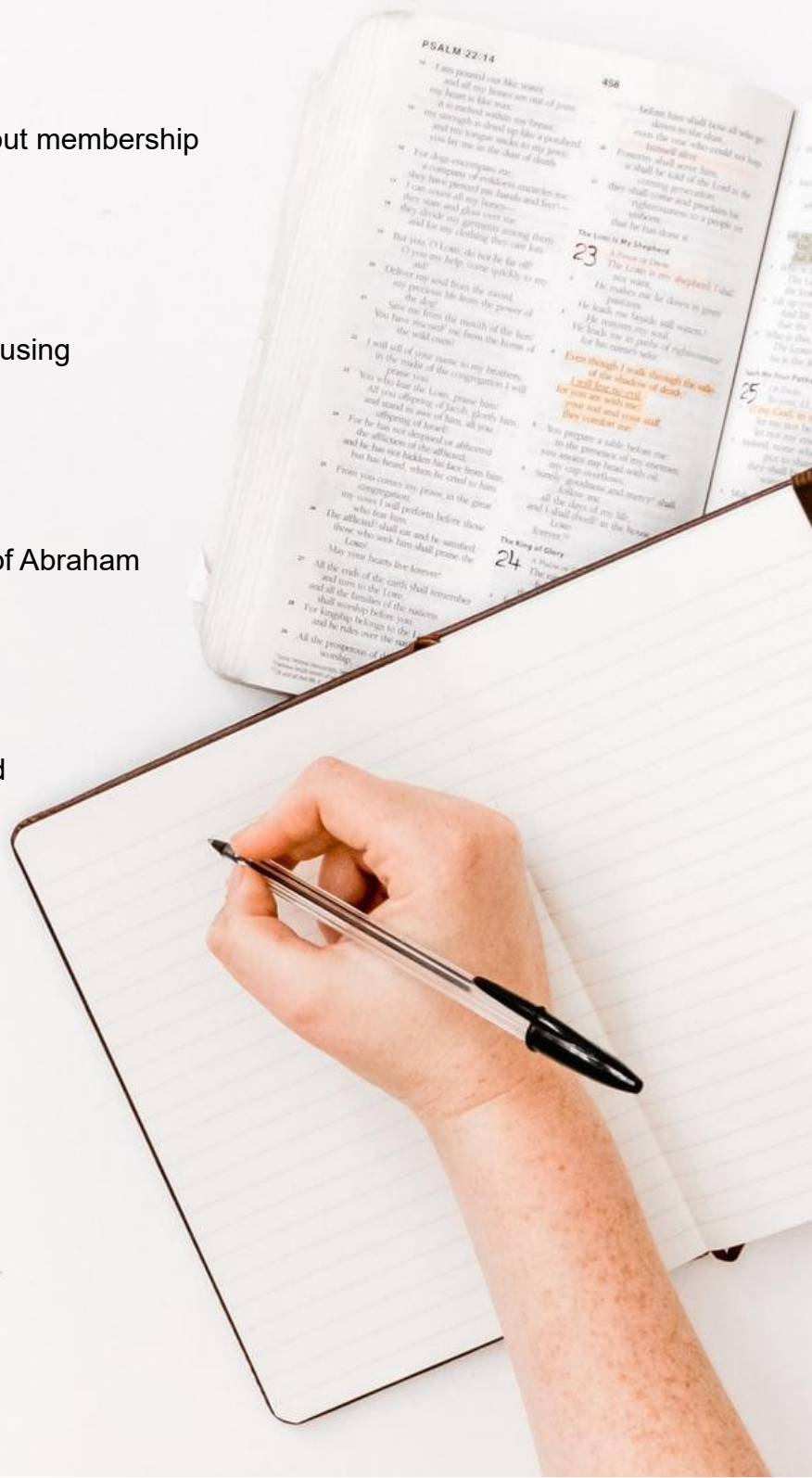
Regan McClenny urges us to imitate the faith of Abraham (via Galatians 3).

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Colton McDaniel encourages us to be engaged in the work of evangelism.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

William Stewart discusses the need for discernment regarding secular activities and entertainment.



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