

# Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

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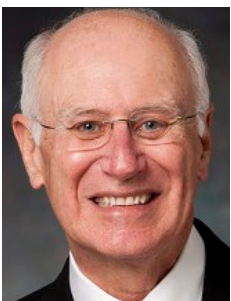






# Our Time Has Come to **PASS THE BATON**

Our God is multigenerational. Will we be faithful to train disciples who will carry His message into the future?



BY DOUG  
BEACHAM

DOUG BEACHAM is the presiding bishop of the IPHC. He has served in various roles in the church including Georgia Conference Superintendent, executive director of Church Education Ministries, and executive director of World Missions Ministries. You can follow Bishop Beacham on [Facebook](#) or Twitter [@DougBeacham](#).

**T**he fifth IPHC Core Value is, “We Prayerfully Value All Generations.” Drawing upon Psalm 100:5, over the course of this year we will discover what the Word of God says to us about our relationships across generations. IPHC Discipleship Ministries, led by Bishop Tommy McGhee, will be leading us in this life journey.

As of 2018, the generation that Tom Brokaw called “the greatest generation,” is quickly moving into the sunset of history. This is the generation that survived the Great Depression and fought in World War II and the Korean War.

The Baby Boomer generation, born between 1946–1964, is reaching retirement age at the pace of ten thousand a day. The strains this is putting on health care and Social Security will have profound budgetary consequences over the coming decades. Younger generations, their numbers in the USA decimated by at least 60 million through abortion on demand, besides wars and natural deaths, will face higher taxes to take care of our aging population.

If not for immigration, the population crisis in the United States would be even more severe. Twenty years from now when younger generations control state and national political institutions, they may decide their elders are not worth the costs.

Today one can hardly examine a magazine, blog or podcast without hearing of millennials and Generation Z. We feverishly try to find ways to understand one another across multiple dividing lines of generation, race, culture, music, language and even gender.

This year is an opportunity for the church to speak truth, grace and love to our society about generations. God is always at work in every generation. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 28:13; 31:24; 35:12).

Recently I was in Barranquilla, Colombia, for the thirty-fifth anniversary of Way, Truth, and Life Church. It was the thirtieth anniversary of the church becoming part of the IPHC.

The founding pastor, Alvaro Castro, died in July 2017. His son, Emmanuel College graduate Sergio Castro, has assumed the leadership of the local church and currently leads the eleven congregations that make up the IPHC in northeast Colombia.

At the celebration anniversary dinner attended by over two hundred people, I observed the young and old worshipping, eating and fellowshiping together. I asked Sergio about the generational diversity and he replied, “We are intentional about being different. We are a multi-generational church; it’s what we do.” He was right, and you could see it in the crowd.

The passing of his father, and Sergio’s appointment as pastor of the local congregation as well as leader of the movement, reflected something I recently heard at a meeting of evangelical and Pentecostal denominational

leaders in Chicago: “The old model is that ministry is a marathon. You run until you drop. The new model is that ministry is a relay race. You run as fast as you can and then hand off the baton to the next person who is also running as fast as they can.”

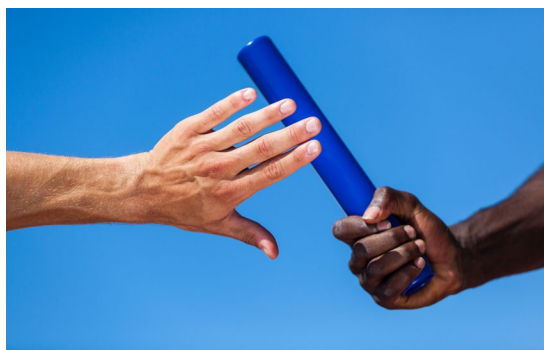
At the same meeting, another leader remarked that when Joshua died at age 110, he left the sad legacy stated in Judges 2:10: “When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.”

That stands in stark contrast to Moses’ death in Deuteronomy 34. Moses had carefully passed the baton to Joshua and his generation. The Promised Land lay before them. Moses saw it, he had the vision for it, but he could not take them there. Yet he successfully handed off the baton to the next generation for the divine assignment of their time.

What adds to the impact of these two deaths is Moses’ age. He was 120 years old when he died. The IPHC will remember that we are 120 years old this year, the year 2018.

We were birthed in the holiness revivals of the late nineteenth century that led to the formation in 1898 of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church and the Pentecostal Holiness Church of North Carolina. The two groups merged in 1911 to form the IPHC as we now know it. But it was 120 years ago that our spiritual DNA took its primary form through those two movements.

So, here we are 120 years old, talking about generations, about passing the baton from one generation to the next, about faithfulness, about vision, about honor and about preparation. But I can’t help but be mindful of Joshua at 110 and the failure to pass the baton,



“I pray that in this new year we will discover the fresh wind of the Spirit enabling us to be a multi-generational church.”

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**A place of hope. A people of promise.**

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## Editor in Chief

Dr. A.D. Beacham, Jr.

## Publisher

International Pentecostal Holiness Church

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the loss of memory of what God had done, the loss of obedience to the divine call.

Somehow the dynamic faith of one generation failed to be passed to the next. It’s a sad commentary whose cycle repeats itself in ways far worse than the agonizing movie *Groundhog Day*.

Which year will mark us as the IPHC? Will we be on the rejoicing side of 120—passing the baton like Moses did? Or will we be on the downward side of 110—failing the next generation?

I know which is my heart’s desire. I pray that in this new year we will discover the fresh wind of the Spirit enabling us to be a multi-generational church that enables our children and grandchildren to inherit the good, merciful, and truthful promises of God expressed in Psalm 100:5: “For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.” □



# Will We Pass Our Values to a Younger Generation?

As a younger leader in the IPHC, I want us to live up to our values—which are found in our church's name.



BY SUMMER SNEED

SUMMER SNEED serves along with her husband, Kevin and two children, Abby and Nate, as an IPHC missionary in Eldoret, Kenya. She is a teacher at East Africa Bible College and the director of Kenya IPHC Girls Ministries. Summer is also a 2007 graduate of Emmanuel College.

January is a time when one usually makes New Year's resolutions. For some, it is a month that brings hopeful expectation for the future year ahead, and for others it brings regret for the past.

This year, the IPHC focus or resolution is, "We Prayerfully Value All Generations." One aspect of this core value involves reaching the next generation. Countless articles and thinktanks have developed suggestions and strategies on how this can be accomplished. Many churches have even hired consultants to help establish new programs to reach the ever-elusive millennial.

Despite all of this, research continues to show that younger people are leaving churches. In a 2011 study, Barna Group president David Kinnaman found that three out of five young people disconnect from the church permanently or for an extended period of time after the age of 15. How can we as the IPHC defy these statistics?

At the risk of sounding over simplistic, I encourage us to resolve in 2018 to truly live out the meaning of our name: International Pentecostal Holiness Church. It is certainly a mouthful, but it communicates a depth of theology that I believe the next generation is seeking and needs to hear.

The term *international* cannot be used to describe a homogenous group of people. This past summer at the twenty-eighth General Conference in Orlando, Florida, I was encouraged by Bishop Doug Beacham's vision and visual of the soil from the nations of the world where IPHC is represented. It was a lovely picture of the diversity within our global church.

However, there is still much work to be done. Too many of our churches are still racially segregated, with no plan to change. We shed tears during a flag parade of nations but then close our hearts to people from our communities who look different from us.

We often give to missions, but we are hesitant to reach out to people from certain neighborhoods in our hometowns. Perhaps we say our physical church doors are open to anyone, but are we projecting attitudes that causes minority or marginalized groups to feel unwelcome?

We should not forget that a branch of our church began with Rev. G.B. Cashwell, who traveled to Azusa Street and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Rev. William Seymour, a black man. Cashwell nearly left when he entered the room and realized that the leadership and congregation was mostly African-American. However, the Holy Spirit convicted his heart about his prejudice and he stayed.

If Cashwell had allowed prejudice to influence his choice, how differently would our heritage be today? Perhaps the word *international* would not be included in our name or identity. Thankfully, Cashwell allowed the unifying and undiscriminating Spirit of God to influence his choice. May the same be said of us.

The description *Pentecostal* sadly carries many negative connotations. Some of these are unfair, but not all.

In recent decades there has been great emphasis among Pentecostal circles on the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit and great neglect on the importance of bearing the fruit of the Spirit. As *People of Promise*, we believe that the promise of Holy Spirit power is ours for today. We should seek gifts and manifestations of the Spirit, but with no less energy should we seek to bear fruit.

Bearing fruit takes time. The results are not instant and usually involves reoccurring and painful pruning. However, if we claim to be truly Pentecostal, we will not only ask the Holy Spirit to give us power but we will also allow Him to take us through the pruning process.

We gather in prayer meetings and cry out for the oil of the Spirit to anoint our churches and ministries, but we forget the process for how oil is made. The oil of finest quality is only produced through much pressing. As a Pentecostal movement, we should be known for the power and manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our churches and individual lives, but we should also be known for the lasting fruit that we bear for the Kingdom of God.

We cannot receive the authentic fire of the Holy Spirit without being willing to bear the fruit of that

same Spirit. The next generation is observing how we show kindness, love and compassion in our interactions with others on the street and on social media more than they are concerned about how often we speak in tongues or proclaim words of knowledge or prophecy.

The final descriptor of our church is of paramount importance. However, it is a term that typically creates some level of discomfort.

*Holiness* is not a very trendy word, and some may believe in order to reach the next generation we should consider avoiding the usage of the word in our identity. Regardless of our opinion on its place in our church names, we cannot and must not neglect to preach, proclaim and live out true holiness.

God's holiness should never be communicated as earned grace that buries us in condemnation and shame. This is a complete distortion. However, we cannot lean too far in the other direction.

God is extravagant in His mercy, grace, kindness, and love. Many Christians like to develop theologies that only focus on these characteristics of His nature. However, God is unwavering and unchanging in His holiness, and it is that very attribute that is being declared and worshipped in heaven.

We cannot fail to teach the next generation about this loving, merciful and holy God. The IPHC is a *Place of Hope* because we believe that our sinful human condition can be forgiven, healed and ultimately transformed by His Spirit to reflect God's holy character. This is not legalism. It is our divine purpose to be "a chosen people, a royal priesthood,

a holy nation..." (1 Peter 2:9) and we need to hold each other accountable to this calling.

We cannot overlook or minimize any sin found among us under the guise of demonstrating love. We cannot rush through the discipline and restoration process without testing the fruits of true repentance and call it grace.

We cannot emphasize and eagerly expose certain sins of those outside the walls of our church but turn a blind eye or downplay repetitive

and blatant sinful behavior within our own house or public figures that we align ourselves to.

If we do this, we cannot expect to reach the next generation. Instead, we make ourselves targets of justifiable criticism while subjecting the name of Christ to unjust contempt.

As a holiness movement, may we in the IPHC be known for our sacred regard of God's holy nature and our uncompromising commitment to humbly reflect that character in our lives, so that when we do make a bold stand for righteousness in our society, we have the credibility to do so because our

words mirror our lives.

As the IPHC makes a renewed resolution this year to value and reach the next generation, let us consider our name as the starting point. May we embrace our name, not as a corporate title, but as a description of who God has called us to be. Let us recognize the areas where we do not live up to our identity and resolve to be who we say we are before we invite others to take our name as their own. □

"We often give to missions, but we are hesitant to reach out to people from certain neighborhoods in our hometowns."





# Opening the **WELLS** of Generational Blessing

We see a divine pattern in the relationship between Paul and Timothy. We must reclaim it!



BY  
**BARBARA  
JAMES**

BARBARA JAMES served for many years as director of WIN, the IPHC's World Intercession Network. A graduate of Emmanuel College, she is an author, conference speaker, and prayer mobilizer. She and her husband, Bane, lead JoySprings Foundation, a ministry that hosts retreats for pastors and leaders. They live in Franklin Springs, Georgia.

Every generation impacts the following generation either positively or negatively through decisions that result in an outcome of influence. This pattern of generational transfer is verified over and over in God's Word. One very positive example of such influence is seen in the book of 2 Timothy.

In 2 Timothy 1:1–2, Paul, “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,” is writing to young Timothy, whom Paul describes as “my dear son.” The reference is not to Timothy as a natural-born son, but as a spiritual son. Paul had influence over Timothy's life as a spiritual father or mentor.

The very fact that Paul, imprisoned for his faith, is making this very specific effort concerning generational spiritual transfer shortly before his martyrdom (see 2 Timothy 4:6–8), underscores the significance of responsibility one generation has to another!

From the scriptures we know that Paul references the scope of this vital spiritual transfer in several ways:

## 1. THE IMPACT OF PAST GENERATIONS.

2 Timothy 1:3a reinforces this truth: Paul said: “I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did with a clear conscience.” We see that Paul was remarkably influenced by spiritual forefathers, even though we know he resisted vigorously for a season. Surely too, the prayer of Stephen, who was stoned to death in his presence, still rang in Paul’s ears (Acts 6:8–15). And Paul’s encounter with God on the Damascus road was undeniably personal and true.

## 2. FERVENT AND CONTINUAL PRAYER.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:3b (NIV): “Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.” Paul recognized the necessity of interceding for young Timothy. Paul did not just talk to his spiritual son about God; He talked to God about his spiritual son! Prayer was a secret of Timothy’s spiritual formation.

## 3. THE FAITH OF EXEMPLARY FAMILY MEMBERS.

Paul reminded Timothy of the significant value of his spiritual heritage from both his mother and grandmother. 2 Timothy 1:5 says: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”

## 4. PRAYERS OF DEDICATION.

Paul obviously prayed anointed prophetic and dedicatory prayers over Timothy’s life.

2 Timothy 1:6 says: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”

## 5. EMPHATIC WITNESS AND PRECISE POINTS OF ENCOURAGEMENT.

Paul constantly challenged his spiritual son to be faithful to his preaching assignment. He knew the challenge would require great boldness. 2 Timothy 1:7–9a (NIV) says: “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-

discipline. So, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me His prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace.”

“Paul was God’s willing instrument to propel Timothy into a place of divine function and lasting impact. Are you available to be God’s willing instrument?”

## 6. SINCERE ADMONITIONS.

Paul constantly urged Timothy to stay on course. He trained him like a coach, reminding him of the obstacles and distractions he would face. He told him in 2 Timothy 1:12b: “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day.”

Because of the steadfast relationship and deep personal knowledge of God which Paul experienced, he could write: “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you” (1 Timothy 6:20–21).

## 7. REPEATED WARNINGS.

Paul called Timothy to accept the on-going challenges of endurance. Of himself Paul wrote: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended

from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too many obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory” (2 Timothy 2:8–10).

Paul was not telling Timothy do something that he himself had not done. Paul had every right to commend Timothy to “endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3). He challenged Timothy to stay focused on the personal mission of his life, to obey God’s word, to fulfill his God-appointed mission in life, and to remain diligent according to godly standards and biblical instructions.

It can be summarized in Paul’s words: “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Timothy 1:13–14). And again, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1).

Today there is too often a vacuum in leadership. We have not had Pauls, therefore we have few Timothys. We have a desperate need for the broad level of spiritual leadership required for effectively discipling the coming generation. The vacuum must be filled by trustworthy mentors and apostolic leadership, by fervent intercession and committed example.

Positive generational transfer of spiritual truths for dynamic living are at a high premium. It takes vision, love, time and faithfulness in spite of our own often overwhelming schedules and circumstances. Paul was God’s willing instrument to propel Timothy into a place of divine function and lasting impact. Are you available to be God’s willing instrument?

I encourage you to pray about what this would mean. Then go forward, committed to filling the vacuum in the faith that works by love.

Grasp a fresh reality of how your life could be filled with a much more significant kingdom impact now. It is possible! God loves “willing instruments” who commit to patterns of generational spiritual transfer for His glory! □



# You Can Be a Healthy Mentor for the Next Generation

Follow me  
as I follow  
Christ.



Younger Christians today need role models. But you can't be an effective mentor if you've never been mentored.



BY J. LEE GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an ordained IPHC minister who directs The Mordecai Project, an international outreach focused on confronting gender-based violence. For 18 years he served as an editor with Charisma magazine, and he is the author of several books including the newly released *Set My Heart on Fire*, a Bible study on the Holy Spirit. He and his wife, Deborah, live in LaGrange, Georgia.

Throughout my Christian journey, God sent special people to be my role models and mentors. One of those, a youth pastor named Barry, invited me to his home for a weekly Bible study when I was just 15. He taught me how to have a private prayer time with God—and now, many decades later, he's still a close mentor and an example of how to be a man of God.

Yet I meet many Christians today who never had a mentor—or they had a bad experience with someone who tried to disciple them the wrong way. If you want to begin a relationship like this, you can find God's pattern for discipleship in the Bible.

And once you have a mentor, you can become one! Young Christians today are starving for role models. Here are 10 qualities of a healthy mentor:

**1. HEALTHY MENTORS HAVE MENTORS.** The greatest leaders I know talk often about the people who helped them grow as Christians. No mature leader is “self-made.” Even the apostle Paul had Ananias and Barnabas to disciple him when he first came to faith. If a mentor claims he or she “learned everything directly from God,” you can be sure they have a spirit of pride. Never trust a loner.



## 2. HEALTHY MENTORS ARE ACCESSIBLE.

Some mentors keep an arms-length distance from people, and they make you wait until the planets align to schedule an appointment. That is not the Jesus way.

The apostle Paul told the Romans: “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift” (Rom. 1:11a). Don’t be aloof or play hard-to-get. Don’t stay so shielded by your staff that people have to jump through hoops to reach you. If you are called to help other disciples grow, give them your phone number, answer their texts and open your heart as well as your office door.

## 3. HEALTHY MENTORS DON’T JUST TALK—THEY LISTEN.

Jesus is the source of all wisdom, yet when He was with His disciples, He didn’t just lecture them. He often asked them questions (see Mark 8:27-30) and listened to their answers. God gave you just one mouth, but He gave you two ears—so we should listen twice as much as we talk. Good mentors know how to use their ears to comfort and care.

## 4. HEALTHY MENTORS ARE PATIENT AND UNDERSTANDING.

If you are called to be a mentor, you must realize that people don’t always take your advice the first time you offer it. Young Christians will make huge mistakes, ignore your counsel and frustrate you so much that you’ll be tempted to get angry, pull out your hair (or theirs) and give up on them! Be there for them when they stumble. Cry with them when necessary.

Always remember how gracious Jesus was to Peter. Even though Peter was impulsive, inconsistent and unstable, Jesus kept loving him—even after Peter denied His master. Ultimately, the grace Jesus extended to Peter restored him and gave him the boldness to preach the gospel on the day of Pentecost.

## 5. HEALTHY MENTORS HAVE THE COURAGE TO CONFRONT.

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians that he cared for them “like a nurse caring for her own children” (1 Thess. 2:7b). But he also sternly warned his followers to avoid sin. He didn’t baby them. Don’t compromise biblical standards to show compassion. Love is kind, but it is never soft. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is rebuke a person who is acting foolishly.

## 6. HEALTHY MENTORS ARE COMMITTED TO CONFIDENTIALITY.

When your disciple bares his soul to you, cover his sins with the blood of Jesus and never tell others what he said. 1 Peter 4:8b says: “Love covers a multitude of sins.” You are betraying your disciple if you tell others about his private confession. And never use people’s private details in a sermon without their permission!

Unless he confesses to child sexual abuse or murder (which you are required by law to report to the police) his confession is between you and him. Give your disciple a “safe place” to heal.

## 7. HEALTHY MENTORS LIVE WHAT THEY PREACH.

Anybody can post their sermons on YouTube and attract a huge audience. But sermons alone don’t make a man or woman of God. Don’t be duped into following people just because of pulpit charm or online popularity. What you need in a mentor is tested character, not the wow factor. And true character is not formed in the spotlight but in the darkness of life’s trials.

## 8. HEALTHY MENTORS FOCUS ON A FEW.

We are all tempted to measure success by numbers. But Jesus turned this mentality upside down. He focused His time on a small, unimpressive group of followers. He taught us that quality comes before quantity.

Good mentors, even if they preach to huge crowds, invest most of their time in

helping a small number of disciples reach maturity.

If you are a pastor, you have responsibility for your flock. But you cannot possibly mentor everyone in your church. Pray and ask which people you are called to personally disciple, and invest in them.

## 9. HEALTHY MENTORS ARE ALWAYS GROWING SPIRITUALLY.

Jesus said a good steward in His kingdom “brings out of his treasure new and old things” (Matt. 13:52). Good mentors aren’t effective if they only teach what they learned 40 years ago. They must stay current. Good mentors are always reading books, learning new things and applying old truths to new challenges so they can train a new generation.

## 10. HEALTHY MENTORS KNOW THEIR LIMITS.

Jesus was the Son of God, but He got tired because He was also fully human. When the crowds drained His energy, He would often slip away to the wilderness to pray (see Luke 5:16). Good mentors know when their tanks are empty—and they withdraw from people to get refilled. Don’t make the mistake of seeing yourself as a Messiah. You can only give people what God gives you.

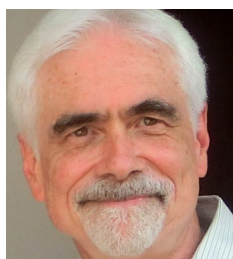
If you need a mentor, look for a healthy one. And if you are a mature leader, make it your goal to impart what you’ve learned from Jesus to a whole new generation of Christians who need healthy role models. □

“Good mentors, even if they preach to huge crowds, invest most of their time in helping a small number of disciples reach maturity.”

# KEEP BELIEVING, Even When the Promise Is Delayed



Like Abraham, we've been given a promise. Will you wait faithfully for it?



BY RUSSELL  
BOARD

RUSSELL BOARD and his wife, Sandra, have served with IPHC World Missions for more than 30 years. Since 2002, Russell has served as Continental Director of World Missions for the Asia/Pacific region, overseeing IPHC work in 19 countries. He authored Sunday school curriculum for LifeSprings for 15 years, and his books *First Things First* and *Grow* are used by many IPHC churches in the United States and abroad. Russell and Sandra reside in Saitama, Japan.

**I**n Hebrews 11:8 we read, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

This act of obedience required a giant step of faith on Abraham's part. He was called to leave behind all that was familiar and all that was comfortable to trust God to lead him into an unknown future.

My wife and I can relate. Thirty-five years ago God spoke to us about leaving the United States and following His call into foreign missions. At the time we were living with our three little girls in a mobile home, scraping by on two part-time jobs during my five years in graduate school.

I had never been outside the country. I'd never even been on an airplane. Foreign missions had never entered my mind as a possible career path.

I don't know if Abraham hesitated before answering God's call, but we sure did! We wanted to make sure that it was really God speaking to us, and that He really understood who it was He was speaking to!

At that time, we looked to Abraham as our example, as all missionaries surely do. But this example isn't just for missionaries. Anyone who answers the call to ministry will follow a similar path. Saying “yes” to God means saying “no” to other career choices, stepping out by faith onto an uncomfortable and unfamiliar course and trusting God to guide and provide.

What is it that would lead Abraham, or any of us, to take such a radical step? Certainly nothing that we can see with our eyes. As the Apostle Paul declares, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).



All around us are signposts erected by the world, in flashing neon colors: *This Way to Wealth and Prosperity; This Way to Power and Influence; This Way to Fame and Success.* But we don't look to these for direction. We step out because we are not guided by what we see, but by what God says.

What is it that draws us out of the familiar and into the unknown? Nothing less than the promises of God. Consider God's promises to Abraham: "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you... so that you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2).

I believe that God makes these promises, in one form or another, to all who answer the call to enter His service.

## I will bless you.

God has called us to bless us. His intention is not to steal our pleasures, load us with burdens, and make our lives miserable. To be sure, there are sacrifices involved in serving the Lord. But the blessings far outweigh any sacrifice.

## You will be a blessing.

Through our obedience and service, God intends to bless the people in our family, our congregation, and our community. Indeed, the greatest blessing we receive will come from blessing others.

## I will make of you a great nation.

God's promise to Abraham included an inheritance and a progeny. So does His promise to us. We are called to occupy a tract of enemy territory, and to liberate it on behalf of the kingdom of God. And we are called to bear fruit for His glory, fruit that will remain. This is the purpose of God's calling for us.

Abraham stepped out by faith, and left his homeland in pursuit of the promises of God. But as we all learn, the call to "walk by faith" involves much more than a single step, no matter how admirable and heroic. Faith is not a fixed and static quality. It must be stretched, refined, purified.

Once in the land of Canaan, Abraham's faith is tested by changing circumstances, and by delay in the fulfillment of God's promises. After ten years, God's promise of descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky has not resulted in a single child. Meanwhile, Abraham's biological clock is ticking away, and his wife's as well.

His patience and faith waning, Abraham yields to the pressure to find a way to fulfill God's promise using his own strength and ingenuity. The result is conflict within the family, conflict that will last for generations to come.

But after this futile attempt, Abraham stops looking at the weakness of his own body and the barrenness of his wife, and simply decides to believe the promise of God. (See Romans 4:19-21.) He doesn't know how the promise will be fulfilled, but he doesn't need to know. He chooses again to walk by faith, not by sight.

In doing so, Abraham becomes the father of the Jewish nation, and the ancestor of Christ. He also becomes the spiritual father of all who follow in his footsteps, who choose to walk by faith, in pursuit of the promises of God.

The writer to the Hebrews points out what Abraham learned, and what the rest of us need to know: "And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:11, 12).

Here is a key lesson we all need to learn: It requires faith *and* patience to inherit God's promise.

Here is a key battle we all eventually face: What will we do when the promise seems slow in coming? Will we yield to the same temptation as Abraham, and turn to human strength and ingenuity to bring about fulfillment of the promise?

We are easily tempted to trade the unpopular values of the kingdom for the popular values of the world. We are tempted to adulterate the message of the gospel, offer a cheap grace that requires no repentance and preach that "godliness is a means to gain."

We are tempted to resort to marketing the gospel by packaging and promoting a Jesus that fits the tastes of consumers. We are tempted to depend on technology or psychology to attract or manipulate a crowd.

Such strategies may bring "success" of a sort, but may also sidetrack us from the true and lasting fruit of God's promise.

As a missionary, I am tasked with contextualizing the gospel, finding ways to communicate so as to be understood in the local language and culture. But in my attempt to make the gospel relevant and understandable, I must always be wary of syncretism, of distorting the gospel by combining it with elements of local religion and culture that are incompatible with biblical truth.

May God help pastors and ministers in the United States to find ways to communicate effectively within the 21st century American context, without allowing that context to alter the gospel in ways that deny or subvert the truth.

Abundant blessing and enduring fruit await those who believe in the sufficiency of the gospel as "the power of God unto salvation," and who pursue the promises of God with faith and patience. ■



"Here is a key battle we all eventually face: What will we do when the promise seems slow in coming?"