

Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

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Forget What God
Did In the Past

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The Church in
China

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You are Digging
For Gold—and Your
Breakthrough is Near!

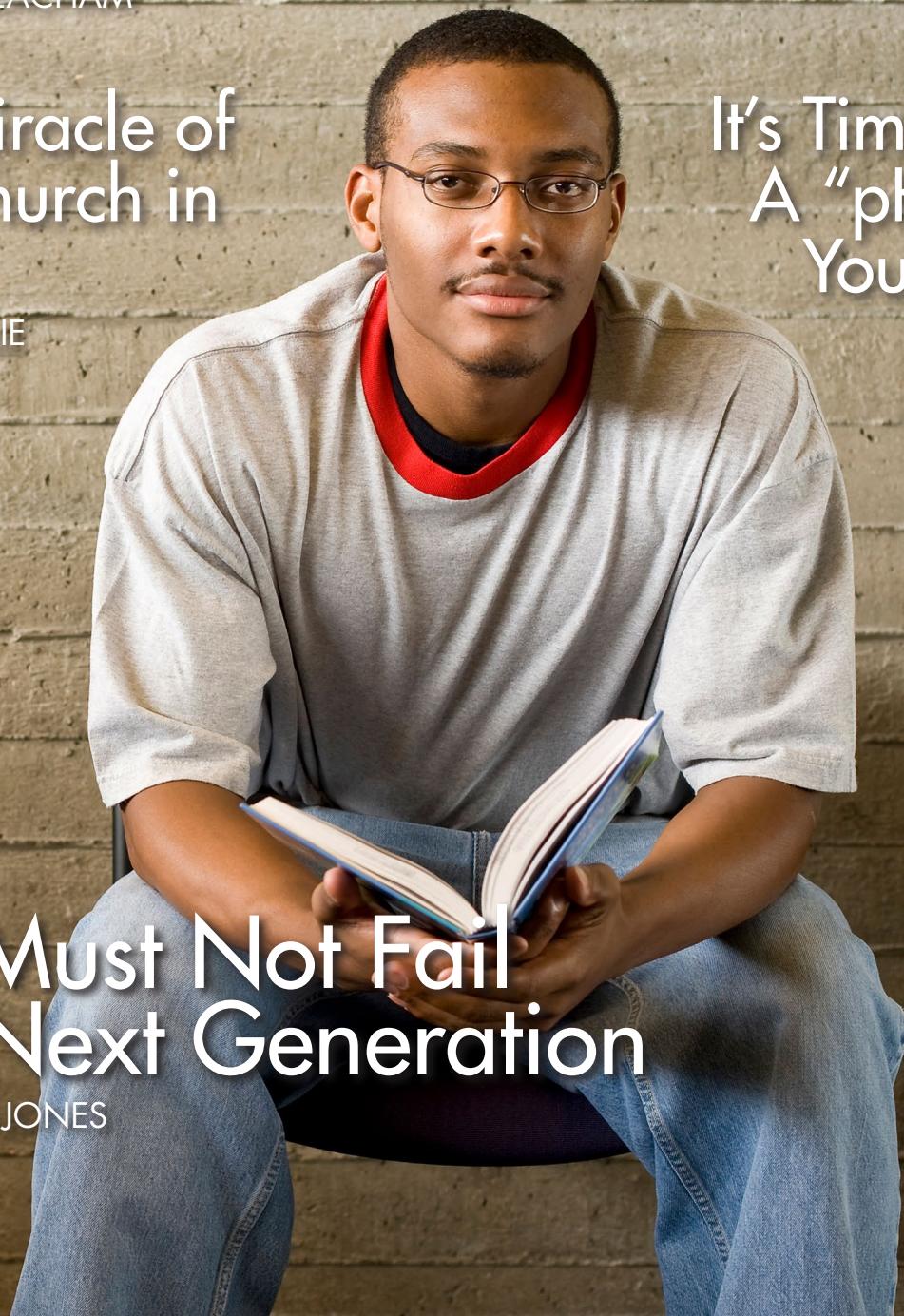
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How Quickly We Forget What God Did in the Past



God has done great things in our past.
But those who follow us must be reminded.



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](#).

In August 1996 the late General Superintendent, B.E. Underwood, called for a Solemn Assembly to confess to the Lord seven systemic sins that were part of our past and present: spiritual pride, judgmentalism, a controlling spirit, racism, male domination, greed and the elder brother syndrome.

Several hundred IPHC leaders convened in the sanctuary of Northwood Temple IPHC in Fayetteville, North Carolina. For twenty-four hours we confessed, prayed, wept, and sought God's face for ourselves personally, our movement corporately, and for our nation and world.

I recently found myself thinking of that event for two primary reasons. First, the #MeToo movement has brought to the surface the reality of the continued impact of male domination. From Hollywood, the media, sports and religion, a profound awareness has put the spotlight on the ubiquitous reality of the continuing abuse of women.

One writer, Beth Moore, who spoke at the opening night of our IPHC General Conference last summer, confronted her Southern Baptist brothers on May 3, 2018, with "[A Letter to My Brothers](#)" (<https://blog.lproof.org/2018/05/a-letter-to-my-brothers.html>).

You should read her letter. It is relevant for the Christian family around the globe. When I read her letter, I could not help but think of the sin our own church confessed twenty-two years ago.

Second, on a recent flight I watched the 2015 movie *Spotlight*. Based on a true story, it portrays how *The Boston Globe*, in January 2002, exposed the decades long sex-abuse of children by priests and the accompanying ecclesiastical cover-up in the Catholic archdiocese of Boston. It led to the removal of the late Cardinal Bernard Law and revealed how the *Globe* itself had slighted the story a decade earlier.

The dark power of controlling spirits by the abusing priests, by the church hierarchy, and even by the *Globe* reveal how deeply the tentacles of sin weave their destructive path of lies and cover-ups.

Lest we be unaware of how spiritual pride and judgmentalism can blind us, these sins have occurred within evangelical and Pentecostal movements, including our own. Within the IPHC, it was a generation ago that acknowledged these sins. But one event does not mark us forever.

A new generation arises that has little to no personal or historical reference to that day in Fayetteville. Even those of us who were there are keenly aware of how easily we slip back into the subtle ways culture entices us with power and prestige. How easily we justify and excuse our

own attitudes and actions. How easily we become the Pharisee in the temple who prayed, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men" (Luke 18:11, NKJV).

I decided to write about these things now for several reasons. First, our Core Value emphasis for 2018 and 2019 have correlation: "All Generations" is our theme for 2018, and "Justice" will be our focus in 2019. While we have

highlighted this year the good that God does through and in each generation, and we have highlighted how much we need one another, we also need to note how easily generational memory loss occurs.

Since "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph," nearly 3,500 years ago (see

Exodus 1:8), does it surprise us that an April 12, 2018, headline in *The Washington Post* reads: "Holocaust study: Two-thirds of millennials don't know what Auschwitz is"?

While I've not done a survey, I suspect the vast majority of our younger church members have no idea that IPHC leaders gathered in Fayetteville in 1996 to confess our corporate sins. I would be surprised if the millennial survey among our own young adults was any different about Auschwitz.

This leads me to the second reason for this column. Each year several thousand USA IPHC teens and young adults gather for the Accelerant conference in January and for Youth Quest in July. We need to watch these young

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A place of hope. A people of promise.

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people: They have the latest smart phones, the coolest games, and the most popular apps. Whether they use Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram or WhatsApp, they can communicate around the world or down the aisle before the speaker can get to her next sentence! We are also told they care about justice issues (Just read this article: <https://theunstuckgroup.com/2015/06/millennials-and-social-justice-insights/>).

I think it's important that we find ways to tell them that our generation has not forgotten what we confessed before they were born. We need to show the next generation of men how to treat women as Christ treated women. We need to show them that sexual manipulation and abuse is not what godly men and women do. We need to show them that Christ's love rejects racial and ethnic hatred.

We need to show them, and remind ourselves, that we are citizens of the kingdom of God. □



We Must Not Fail the Next Generation

Old Testament parenting failures tragically prove why we must stay closely connected to our spiritual sons and daughters.

BY STEPHEN
JONES



REV. STEPHEN JONES is the Student Ministries team leader and pastor of Student Ministries at Whitnel PH Church in Lenoir, North Carolina. In 2002, he earned a B.A. in Christian Ministries from Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia. In 2008, he completed an M. Div. from Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. Since 2002, Stephen's full-time ministry to teenagers has spanned two IPHC Conferences, three IPHC churches, and numerous IPHC summer camps.

It wasn't until I began to teach and preach through 1 and 2 Samuel that I noticed the successive string of epic parenting fails. Before you start considering your own failures as a parent—keep in mind—these examples were *really* bad, major-league, professional-grade failures. They were described right before my eyes, yet they were totally lost on me for years. How did I miss them?

In my defense, when reading those stories I focused on the innocent obedience of Samuel, or the awful arrogance of Saul, or the battlefield exploits of a ruddy young teenager named David. Sure, I noticed the sins of Samuel's sons, Hophni and Phineas (see 1 Samuel 2:12–17) and heard the people of Israel openly reject those men as his successors (see 1 Samuel 8:1–5).

I picked up the obvious personal differences between Jonathan and his father, Saul (see 1 Samuel 14:24–46; 20:30–34). I shuddered

to watch David abdicate his responsibility as a father after he learned that his son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar (see 2 Samuel 13:19–39).

Recently, I stepped back and noticed how all of those national leaders achieved at least a measure of success in shepherding the people of Israel but found their family lives in ruins. The revelation was even more pronounced when I observed it happening successively. God installed and anointed those leaders to lead His people. Yet, they could not lead their own families.

While we're observing the text, you might notice another undetected, repeated cultural phenomenon: The Israeli habit of identifying oneself within a tribal, clan, and familial unit (see 1 Samuel 2:28; 9:21; 10:19–21; 15:17; 16:1; 17:12–13). It's especially notable when Samuel first confronts Saul with his destiny and Saul's insecurity (despite his great size) obstructed his view of who God was calling him to be.

In 1 Samuel 9:21, Saul responded to Samuel's prophetic word, saying, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak to me in this way?" That same genealogical description happened later in 10:20–22 when Saul was to be chosen by lots in front of his countrymen—from the tribe of Benjamin, to the Matrite family, to the household of Kish, to the son named Saul.

This kind of selection by lots has happened before. For example, consider Achan's sin at Jericho and his subsequent unmasking in Joshua 7:1. It happened with David's selection from among his brothers in 1 Samuel 17:12. It appears to be common in the Old Testament to be identified within the larger context of one's family structure.

One scholar, C. Umhau Wolf, in his book *Terminology of Israel's Tribal Organization*, observed and outlined "the fullest description of Israel's early tribal organization" from Joshua 7:16–18, the four decreasing subdivisions of the nation were Tribe, Clan, Household, and Family. You might envision them as concentric circles of relationships.

You might find yourself asking, "Umm, is there a connection between these two ideas? These epic, successive parenting fails and identifying within family units?" I'd say there's less of a logical connection, and more of an illustration.

Allow me, then, to draw some parallels. I may never have noticed that string of bad parenting practices apart from having a child of my own and observing my own mistakes. I may never have spotted those leaders becoming successful

in their careers and yet losing their families until I found myself attempting to balance ministry and family.

I may never have cared about the tribes, clans, households, and families of those men until I saw the value of multiple, older generations investing in this younger, millennial generation.

And there the burden becomes clearer.

In a time when we are most connected by social media and simultaneously fragmented in our relationships, the idea of identifying myself within a larger family unit, a greater community, is a tremendous safety net. Not only does a grander community provide me with protection and support, but it also nurtures responsibility and offers

accountability. Locating ourselves within family units decentralizes our sense of self and contextualizes our lives within a larger story and a bigger narrative.

What better larger-story can we connect to as believers than the church? I like the idea of introducing and identifying myself as part of a larger movement, a greater community and a grander family. It gives me a realistic picture of my own life. It's difficult to overestimate (or underestimate) my own sense of worth when I'm a vibrant and contributing member of a community.

What an expansive sense of purpose and meaning comes when my life is situated within a bigger story? What a great encouragement comes from living in community with the saints!

If we live our lives as individuals, adhering to our own sense of direction and morality, absent of any kind of tether to the previous or succeeding generation, then we are locating ourselves within a very small narrative and dooming our existence to the limits of our own smallness.

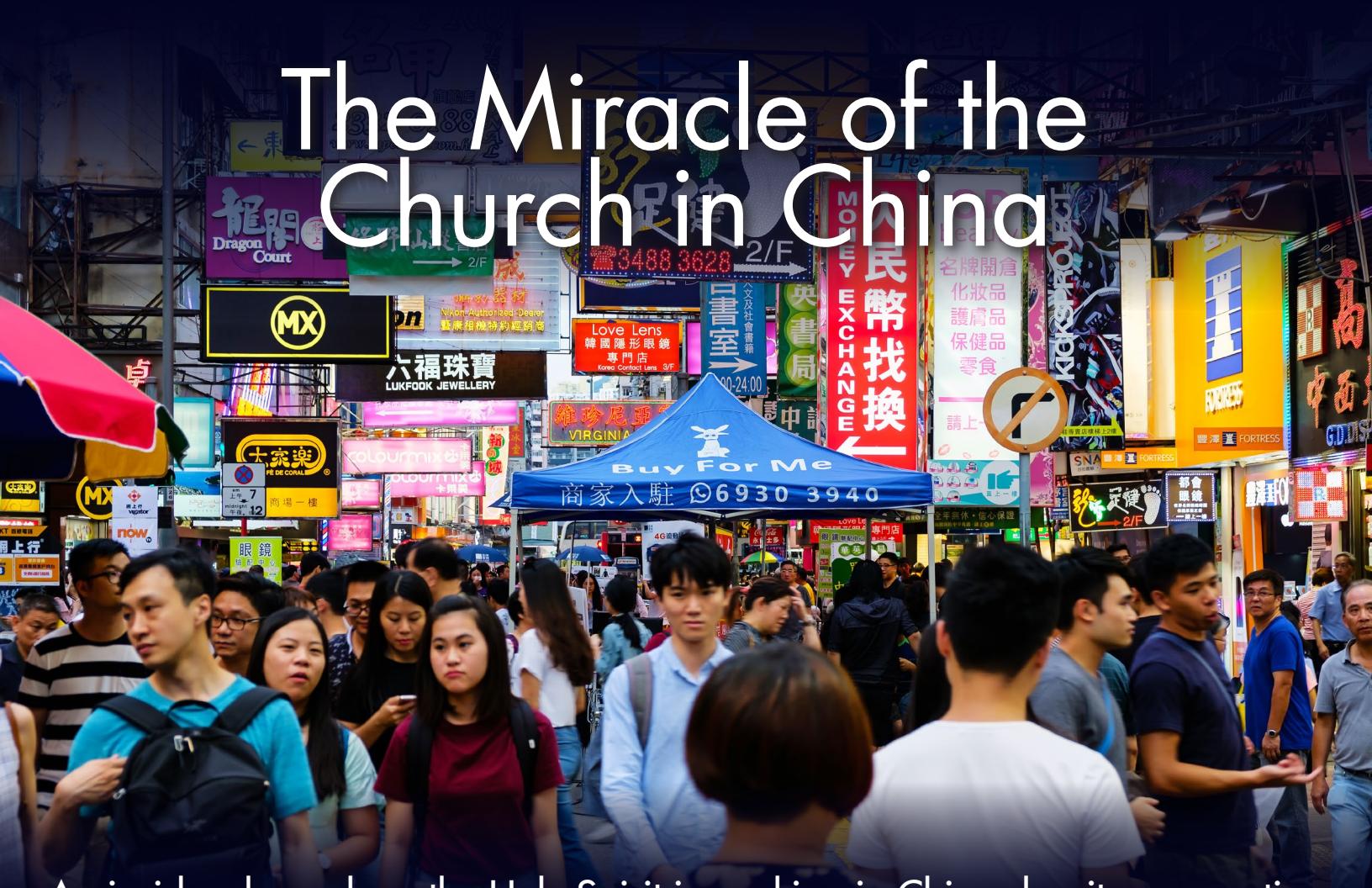
If, however, we live our lives within the context of a previous generation on whose shoulders we stand, and a succeeding generation whose hands are in our own, then we position ourselves in history as vital links in a remarkable story. We are not the main character, and we are not disposable.

None of the stories from 1 and 2 Samuel give much detail about the previous generation mentoring and investing in those younger men as leaders. More intentional mentoring from Eli, Samuel, Saul, and David would have saved their children from judgment. Yet, we can learn from their experiences.

It's time we began to value every generation. We must see the contributions of our forbearers for what they are, and that we make room for the potential contributions of those coming. □

"If we live our lives within the context of a previous generation on whose shoulders we stand, ... then we position ourselves in history as vital links in a remarkable story."

The Miracle of the Church in China



An insider shares how the Holy Spirit is working in China despite persecution.



AN INTERVIEW
WITH ZHANG
JIE

ZHANG JIE (not his real name) works with the underground church in China as a missionary and church planter. We did not use his real name or location for security reasons. You can help the work in China by donating to [Northwest China Mission Support](#).

Encourage: We often hear that the greatest response to the gospel anywhere on earth is in China. How do you explain this openness to the gospel there?

Zhang: There are two ways to look at this. First, one doesn't get the feeling when living and traveling around China that there are multitudes of converts. Outward signs of Christianity (steeple, signs or crosses, for example) are very rarely allowed. As you watch the masses of humanity pass by each day, you just kind of have to keep reminding yourself that there are indeed thousands of Christians among the throng.

However, even knowing that China is 5 to 10 percent Christian, and that there are millions of believers there, I am astounded by how many Chinese people have yet to hear or believe the gospel.

If 10 percent of China is Christian, that means there are 140 million Christians! But what about the other 90 percent? That is more than 1.2 billion people without Christ! So some of the hype about the great response is misleading. China is still is overwhelmingly non-Christian.

A second point to be made is that where the gospel has been preached and where the church has become firmly established in China, it has grown rapidly. One primary reason for this openness is the fact that Communism severely weakened all man-made religions.

Traditional Buddhist and spiritist beliefs were severely marginalized. Christianity provided the truth that people craved. Communism left many Chinese people empty, hurting and confused, and Christianity came in truth and power and caught fire in many regions.

Encourage: Obviously there is also persecution of the church. Is this increasing today or decreasing?

Zhang: The Chinese church is currently going through a time of testing and persecution unlike anything that has happened at least since the turn of the century. The government has decided to systematically shut down many churches that were operating in "gray areas" of the law. They have targeted everyone from village house churches to some of the largest "officially sanctioned" churches in the country, even tearing down huge sanctuaries in a show of force.

One major difference, however, in modern-day persecution in China is some of the methods of punishment used. In the past, brute force was fairly common, with pastors being beaten or thrown into jail. The most common threats nowadays are financial and social in nature.

The police will threaten to force your employer to fire you, or threaten to cut off your pension if you are retired. They will place exorbitant fines on landlords who are caught renting to Christians or churches, making it hard for believers to even find places to meet.

Encourage: Where would you say the greatest church growth is happening in China today? In cities, rural areas, among intellectuals, among students, or in all these sectors?

Zhang: The greatest growth today is in China's huge urban areas. The educated, students, and even the working class are coming into contact with Christians more often after moving to the cities. China is becoming more and more urbanized, with much of the countryside emptying out, so it makes sense that most of the churches being planted are also in the cities and are catering to more educated people.

Most of my experience in China is working in rural, unevangelized areas. I know that in some parts of central and eastern China, many of the greatest revivals have broken out in the rural areas. However, in our region the rural churches are small and isolated. They

"Communism left many Chinese people empty, hurting and confused, and Christianity came in truth and power and caught fire in many regions."

are also intimidated by other religions (Chinese Islam, Daoism and Tibetan Buddhism) that seem to be carry more respect among neighbors.

This could be connected to the fact that Communism never truly rooted out the old Chinese beliefs from these border regions, as it did more successfully to the east. So in spite of what we know of the past, in my personal experience, gospel work in rural areas has been very tough.

Encourage: How have the economic changes in China affected the churches?

Zhang: China has changed so much just in the past 15 or so years since I first arrived here. The urban middle class has mushroomed, and the focus of many people is the pursuit of wealth. They want houses, cars, expensive gadgets and jewelry. This has undoubtedly affected some urban churches, as members have been lulled to sleep by the love of money.

Many of China's Christians, however, are from the rural regions, which have not been nearly as affected by the growing economy. However, they have seen their young people migrate to the cities to search for jobs or business opportunities. On the other hand, generous Christians have helped many Chinese churches become truly self-supporting and even mission-sending churches!

Encourage: There was a time when Bibles were scarce in China. Is there still a need for Bibles?

Zhang: There is a need for more Bibles. Thankfully, with the advent of the smartphone, many people can find a Bible download even if they cannot find their own hard copy of God's Word. But I think a scarcity of Bibles has always been a direct result of many new people becoming Christians!

I know a man who runs a ministry that prints Bibles secretly. These are distributed to the house churches throughout the country. And he says that the need for more Bibles in many areas is still phenomenal!

The number of Bibles per capita is extremely small in China. Chinese bookstores do not carry them. For a few years, they were available for purchase in online bookstores, but even those have recently come down.

We have distributed hundreds of thousands of Bible portions across wide swaths of Chinese cities, towns and countryside villages. We are exposing people to God's Word for the very first time. Pray for God's Word to continue to go forth unhindered!

Encourage: What would you say is the Chinese church's greatest need today?

Zhang: Chinese churches need more depth in the understanding of God's Word; they also need better-trained leaders. However, I also think this current season of mild persecution is just what the church needs. It's like a wake up call, after so many years of relative freedom.

Many Christians have become complacent, taking their good fortune for granted. For the Chinese church to stay healthy, she does not need more comfort and prosperity but enough opposition to help her understand that the spiritual conflict still rages on. There is still a spiritual battle to be fought. □

耶穌愛你

You Are Digging for Gold—and a Breakthrough Is Near!

We all face struggle in ministry.
But if you will remain faithful,
God will reward you. *Don't quit!*



BY CHRIS
FRIEND

CHRIS FRIEND is the national leader of the IPHC in Australia and the senior pastor of Collective Hope, a cluster of congregations in Perth. He has a Master of Arts in Theology and is an adjunct lecturer at Harvest Bible College. He and his wife, Natalee, have two children. Chris is passionate about Jesus, the Bible, leadership, people, architecture, kayaking and fast cars (not necessarily in that order.)

Ministry is hard work. Anyone who thinks it's easy has a vision that is too small. Since we are called to reach the ends of the earth, consider that there are over 4,000 unreached people groups remaining in the world! That ought to provide enough vision for effective ministry for our lifetime.

Yep, it sounds like hard work, but we must be careful that we don't get overwhelmed, discouraged or burnt out in the process. We need to persevere. We must go the distance!

One of the passages of Scripture that encourages me is found in Galatians 6:9: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (NIV). These are the words of the Apostle Paul, who had more reasons to give up than we do! His short summary in 2 Timothy 3 is remarkably vague. He just says, "persecutions and sufferings" (v.11). He doesn't mention specifics like being imprisoned; he just tells us we must persevere!

Tragically, too many pastors and leaders walk away from all that God has for them. Some statistics suggest that as many as ninety percent of pastors will walk away from their callings before they reach the finish line.

Anything less than one hundred percent perseverance should bother us as Spirit-filled people. We want the church of Jesus Christ to press *into* Christ, press *on for* Christ and press *on for the cause of* Christ! How can we reach the world if we aren't willing to persevere like Paul?

Let me share a prophetic vision that I hope will encourage you to persevere. I saw a gold digger who had experienced occasional success in finding gold. He had found enough gold to know that he was in a particular area that could be rich and bountiful, but he was yet to find the breakthrough that his heart and head could sense.

And so, with much blood, sweat and tears, he put everything into that field, that place, that dream. He bought the field. He kept the field. And he worked the field.



In interpreting that vision, I heard the Lord saying that there are veins of gold in the “field” of the IPHC. The devil’s lie is that our communities will never come to Christ, or that the unreached peoples of the world are too far away. We need to believe that we have far more going for us than what we lack.

Wherever you are right now, no matter how small the church, no matter how poor the community, no matter how great the problems—Jesus is saying that there is gold right there!

And so, I would like to encourage us in three key areas:

1. God is calling us to be faithfully patient.

In an age of instant coffee, take-out food and drive-thru conveniences, we aren’t used to waiting. But one of the key thoughts found in Galatians 6:9 is the idea of patiently waiting for the appointed time. There is something wonderfully prophetic about that idea, and terribly annoying as well. We all want to see things happen right now, but that’s not the way of the kingdom.

If we truly believe in the prophetic work of the Spirit of God, we will be willing to listen to the One who has always chosen to reveal things in the spiritual realm before they are seen in the natural realm. God saw creation before He spoke it into being. Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world. You get the idea.

We have to be patient while doing. We have to believe that God is at work. And if I’m to be honest with you, this is something that I have struggled with. I’m coming to realize that God is way more patient than I am. But an essential part of ministry is the willingness to become more like Him while we are working with Him. We must be patient!

2. He is calling us to be faithfully diligent.

When I first went into full-time ministry, I knew it would be hard work. But I didn’t realize that it would be so hard. I underestimated that people who are dead in trespasses and sins (see Ephesians 2:1), are hard to raise to new life (see Colossians 3:1).

I underestimated that a world that was constantly trying to make us conform to its ways (see Romans 12:2) would have such an effect on ministry in a post-modern, post-Christian world like Australia. I really had no idea how hard it was going to be, because I couldn’t see the reality around me. But God sees!

And so I came to realize that there is a correlation between what God is doing, and what I need to do. That just as He is faithful to begin something in us and will carry it through to completion (see Philippians 1:6), so we are called to do the same (see Philippians 2:12).

Just as He is working, we must keep on working. Not just within the four walls of the church building, but out there in the community that is our responsibility. We must work hard in the mission field that we may never get to visit. We must work hard in places with names that we can’t pronounce as we send resources and pray for God to move. We must be willing to keep on working hard and trusting God to bring the breakthrough!

3. He is calling us to be faithful in faith.

This sounds redundant. But we are called to be faithful in our commitment to believe in those things that we cannot even see yet (see Hebrews 11:1). And this is where things get rough. If we are more discouraged by what we see in the natural than we are encouraged by what

remains unseen, then we aren’t walking in faith.

I’ve realized this as we have had to push through church plant after church plant. The work has been hard, and even as we celebrate our eleventh plant, and work on our twelfth plant—it seems so small. How can we reach a nation for Christ when we only have this tiny number of churches? How can the IPHC reach the world when we don’t have a presence in half the nations of the world?

But our call isn’t to see what is already seen. Our call is to see what remains unseen as the Spirit of the living God reveals to us what He has planned for us.

May you be encouraged right where you are. May you be faithful in not only seeing the gold that God has beneath your feet, but may you be faithful in digging until you find it. Then you can give Him the glory when it is found! May He give you the grace today to be patient, diligent and faithful. □

“Some statistics suggest that as many as ninety percent of pastors will walk away from their callings before they reach the finish line.”





It's Time to Take a “pH Test” in Your Church

The spirit of religion kills.
Don't allow these eight attitudes to stifle growth in your congregation.



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.

Several years ago I was visiting friends who pastor an IPHC congregation in the Southeast. I was preaching twice there—on a Sunday morning and an evening—and I was becoming increasingly concerned as I heard horror stories about the history of the church.

I learned there had been a long pattern of bickering, complaining and conflict among church members and its leadership. There was also a history of unhealthy control. As a result, the church struggled to grow—even though the community needed a vibrant expression of Jesus' love and grace.

As I was preparing for the evening service the Lord gave me an unusual directive. He told me to stop at a store on the way to the church and buy a carton of salt. Then He led me to 2 Kings 2:19-22, the story of how Elisha healed the land by pouring a bowl of salt in the poisonous waters near Jericho.

The Lord showed me that there was a religious spirit that was influencing this church, and that it needed to be neutralized through prayer. So after the service I went outside with the young pastor and his wife and poured salt on the foundations of the new sanctuary they were building.

There is nothing magic about salt. Pouring the salt was simply a prophetic act that we did in obedience. But I know God heard me and my friends as we prayed and asked the Lord to wash away the unhealthy religiosity of the past so that the life of the Holy Spirit could spring up in that place!

I'm sure you have read about Elisha's unusual miracle. After Elijah ascended into heaven, the prophet went to Jericho and learned that the city faced an environmental crisis: Their water was toxic, most likely because of the sulfur and other chemicals that had rained down upon nearby Sodom and Gomorrah years earlier.

This poison had made the land barren, and it was affecting people and animals as well as plant life. Nothing grows in a toxic place. So Elisha threw salt in the water and proclaimed: “Thus says the Lord, ‘I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer’” (v. 21, NASB). His proclamation brought immediate cleansing.

This story offers us a picture of the gospel's power. The message of Jesus Christ heals us. The Holy Spirit brings life where death has reigned. He neutralizes the poisons that cause spiritual barrenness. He balances the "pH level" in our hearts and our churches so that spiritual growth and vitality is possible. All of us would like to enjoy a healthy spiritual life, and we would love to see our churches thrive and grow. But the sad truth is that many of our churches are barren because of hazardous additives. We have embraced a gospel laced with legalism, performance-based religion and salvation by works—when Christ alone is our only source of life.

The spirit of religion is the opposite of life! Jesus Himself referred to these toxins as "the leaven of the Pharisees" (Luke 12:1b). He told us that the Pharisees' brand of religion, which looked good on the outside, was deadly—and contagious. And He warned His disciples to be careful whenever Pharisaical religion lurks near.

Have you been infected? Has your church been contaminated by a religious spirit? You can take your own "pH test" by examining these eight characteristics of a religious spirit.

1. A religious spirit views God as a cold, harsh, distant taskmaster rather than an approachable, loving Father. When we base our relationship with God on our ability to perform spiritual duties, we deny the power of grace. God does not love us because we pray, read our Bibles, attend church or witness, yet millions of Christians think God is mad if they don't perform these and other duties perfectly. As a result, they struggle to find true intimacy with Jesus.

2. A religious spirit places emphasis on doing outward things to show others that God accepts him. We deceive ourselves into believing that we can win God's approval through a religious dress code, certain spiritual disciplines, particular music styles or even doctrinal positions.

3. A religious spirit develops traditions and formulas to accomplish spiritual goals. We trust in our liturgies, denominational policies

or man-made programs to obtain results that only God alone can give.

4. A religious spirit becomes joyless, hypercritical and hateful. This can turn a home or a church completely sour. Then, whenever genuine joy and love are expressed, this becomes a threat to those who have lost the simplicity of true faith. Real Christianity is joyful Christianity; meanwhile, religious people look like they've been sucking lemons! And if a church is controlled by religiosity, there is no love. Church members bite and devour one another until all life is gone.

**"The Holy
Spirit brings life
where death
has reigned.
He neutralizes
the poisons that
cause spiritual
barrenness."**

5. A religious spirit becomes prideful and isolated, thinking that his righteousness is special and that he cannot associate with other believers who have different standards. Churches that allow these attitudes become elitist and dangerously vulnerable to deception or cult-like practices.

6. A religious spirit develops a harsh, judgmental attitude toward sinners, yet those who ingest this poison typically struggle with sinful habits that they cannot admit to anyone else. Religious people rarely interact with nonbelievers because they don't want their own superior morals to be tainted by them.

7. A religious spirit rejects progressive revelation and refuses to embrace change. This is why many churches become irrelevant to society.

They become so focused on what God did 50 years ago that they become stuck in a time warp and cannot move forward when the Holy Spirit begins to open new understanding. When religious groups refuse to shift with God's new directives, they become "old wineskins," and God must find more flexible vessels that are willing to implement change.

8. A religious spirit persecutes those who disagree with his self-righteous views and becomes angry whenever the message of grace threatens to undermine his religiosity.

An angry religious person will use gossip and slander to assassinate other peoples' character and may even use violence to prove his point. Jesus, in fact, warned His disciples: "There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he's doing God a favor" (John 16:2b, MSG).

I have on more than one occasion jokingly asked IPHC pastors: "Do you know the pH level of the PH church?" It sounds like a silly play on words, but I am serious. The apostle Paul wrote an entire epistle, Galatians, to warn Christians about the toxicity of legalism. He told them that if they resorted to legalism they would be "severed from Christ" and "fallen from grace" (see Gal. 5:4).

If the poison of legalistic religion has contaminated your church—or your own heart—ask the Lord to pour a fresh understanding of His grace into your barren spirit. Then expect His new life to flow through you. When the fresh revelation of His mercy and grace is poured out, your church will grow! □

