

# Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

## Don't Let the Children Fall Through the Cracks

BY JOSEPH T. LEGGETT

### We Must Give Hope to the 'Strangers' Among Us

BY DOUG BEACHAM

### If You're Pro-Life, You Should Be Pro-Earth

BY DR. CHERYL BRIDGES JOHNS

### Myths and Realities of the Persecuted Church

BY EUGENE BIRLING

### Every Leader Needs a Jonathan Friend

BY J. LEE GRADY





# We Must **GIVE HOPE** to the 'Strangers' Among Us



Whether they are homeless people, immigrants or refugees, the hopeless need Christ's love.



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](#).

**A**s of June of this year there were 36,300 homeless people living in the streets of Los Angeles. The causes include mental illness and substance abuse. According to an article in the *New York Times*, city officials in Los Angeles say the primary cause of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. That complaint is being heard in more and more major cities throughout the world.

Thankfully, churches are not absent in this crisis. A Google search of "churches helping the homeless in Los Angeles" produced nearly 13,700,000 hits, proving that Christians are stepping in to offer aid in this situation.

Many people find themselves temporarily homeless for short periods of time. They lose their jobs, and then they lose their homes or apartments because they cannot pay the rent or mortgage. They have no family nearby, or family is unable or unwilling to help.

Some homeless people are also overwhelmed by high medical bills. Some are veterans who are unable to function due to post-traumatic stress. Some are fleeing forms of abuse and have nowhere to go. I encourage you to listen to an excellent podcast by IPHC pastor Kent Bell, whose church in Pennsylvania is helping women escape from sexual abuse and sex trafficking. You can listen [here](#).

And yes, there are some homeless people who simply choose to drop out of society and live on the streets. They have little motivation to change their lifestyle. They receive what assistance they can from government or charitable programs.

All of us have seen people on street corners with signs asking for help that say, “God bless you.” I’ll have to admit they often pull at my heart. But I’m also aware that in many instances they are part of a syndicate scam.

While traveling overseas, I’ve seen children begging on street corners. Yet many of them are part of a human trafficking ring. Someone is exploiting them for profit.

As I think of these tragic situations, I think about Acts 16 and the Apostle Paul’s visit to Philippi. When Paul and Silas first entered Philippi, they met Lydia, a woman who was economically successful in her own right. She and her household came to faith in Christ and were baptized, and she opened her home to host the first house church in the city (see Acts 16:12-15).

The apostles then encountered a situation where unscrupulous men were using a “slave girl possessed with the spirit of divination.” We are told that her owners were using her to make “much profit by fortune-telling.”

Today we call this economic slavery or human trafficking. The Apostle Paul rebuked the demonic spirit operating in the girl. She was immediately released from the greedy oppression that had been controlling her life (see Acts 16:16ff).

The account in Acts notes that it was her abuser’s economic loss that led to the imprisonment of Paul and Silas. The rights of these two apostles, as Roman citizens,

had been violated by the mob’s rush to judgment.

The remainder of the story in Acts 16 is well known to most of us. After the midnight earthquake that freed Paul and Silas from their chains, Paul said to the distraught jailer: “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here” (16:28). Another household in Philippi came to faith in Jesus and was baptized, perhaps starting a second house church in the city.

It’s interesting that once Paul and Silas were released from prison, and after the magistrates apologized for violating their rights, the two men went back to Lydia’s house (Acts 16:35-40). They spent time “encouraging” the small band of disciples with exhortation and instruction.

I wonder if the people in the jailer’s house attended church? Perhaps more importantly, I wonder if the formerly possessed servant girl was there. The Bible doesn’t tell us what happened to this unnamed young woman. But it’s hard to fathom that she was forgotten once she was set free.

I hope Lydia searched for her and offered a place of hope—a refuge to start life afresh with the Holy Spirit. I also hope the greedy men who used her ultimately heard that they, too, can be forgiven. I hope they, too, found themselves at home with Lydia and the jailer.

One of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament is hospitality (see Romans 12:13; Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter

“The word for “hospitality,” in the Greek, literally means “love or friendship shown to a stranger.”

# Encourage

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

August 2019

Vol. 6 No. 7

## Editor in Chief

Dr. A.D. Beacham, Jr.

## Publisher

International Pentecostal Holiness Church

## Executive Editor

J. Lee Grady

## Communications Director /

## Associate Editor

Janese Bennett

## Copy Editor

Deborah Delk Grady

## Discipleship Ministries

Thomas H. McGhee

## World Missions Ministries

J. Talmadge Gardner

## Evangelism USA

Garry Bryant

## Clergy Development / World Intercession Network

Lou Shirey

*Encourage* is published monthly except in July and December by the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, P.O. Box 12609, Oklahoma City, OK 73157. Digital subscriptions are available free of charge by subscribing at [iphc.org/connect](http://iphc.org/connect). Images courtesy of [adobestock.com](http://adobestock.com) unless otherwise noted.

4:9). This gift involves so much more than being a gracious host at a meal or in a home. The word for “hospitality,” in the Greek, literally means “love or friendship shown to a stranger.”

This type of hospitality is part of the Christian response to those who are unknown to us, to those who are different from us. We desperately need this gift today.

The “stranger” among us today might be a refugee, a migrant worker, an immigrant or perhaps a homeless person. The “stranger” might also be the well-educated, the elite, the self-sufficient or the so-called “one percent” who have all the luxuries of the world but remain spiritually empty. They have houses, perhaps even mansions, but do not have a true home.

May the Holy Spirit open our eyes to know how to discern the times in which we live. And may He open our hearts to all who are searching for the hope and love of Jesus Christ. □



# Don't Let the **CHILDREN** Fall Through the Cracks



As we ponder the need for God's justice in 2019, let's remember the children who lack a family's love.

One big family: Current residents at Falcon Children's Home.



BY JOSEPH T.  
LEGGETT

**JOSEPH T. LEGGETT** has served as the CEO and superintendent of the IPHC's Falcon Children's Home in Falcon, North Carolina, since 2007. Prior to his current assignment, Leggett served as a probation and parole officer in North Carolina, a social worker, and an administrator of two nursing homes. He attended the IPHC's Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia. He and his wife, Sharon, have three sons. For more information about Falcon Children's Home, go to [falconchildrenshome.com](http://falconchildrenshome.com).

I recently watched a television commercial about the neglect and abuse of dogs in the United States. Pictures of needy dogs flashed across the screen. The pets looked malnourished and had been harmed or abandoned, and a celebrity spokesperson encouraged viewers to donate to local shelters or to adopt the pets.

After watching this, I decided to give my German shepherd, Maverick, a big hug. Then I changed the channel to watch some news. The lead story was about the passing of new legislation making it illegal to perform abortions in certain states.

I was excited to hear that the pro-life legislation had passed, but I watched in disbelief as one celebrity after another criticized the laws. Then I saw footage of protestors who were shouting and carrying offensive signs to protest the new laws.

In the span of just a few moments, I saw a snapshot of our nation's misguided value system. More money is given to protect pets than to save unborn children. How disturbing it must be to God, our Creator, to witness the total disregard for the life He created.

As CEO of Falcon Children's Home and Family Services, I regularly come across cases in which children and teenagers are victims of injustice because our society's value systems have gone awry. From child abuse to child neglect, the ills being afflicted upon our youth today are staggering—and the numbers keep increasing because of the opioid crisis.

The commercial I watched about pet abuse caught my attention because of its irony. Even in the mid- to late-1800s, cruelty to animals was monitored more closely than cruelty to children. The first recorded case of child abuse was reported to Henry Bergh at the Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York City in 1873. Neighbors concerned for the safety of an adopted child first reported their concerns to a city agency.

A worker with this agency, finding no available resources, turned to ASPCA for help. Mr. Bergh, a defender of abused animals, took pity on this child. With the assistance of an attorney, he petitioned for the child to



be removed from the abusive home. Bergh and his attorney, along with a New York philanthropist, formed the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children the next year.

The protection of children has come a long way in 150 years. The Child Abuse and Prevention Act (originally enacted in 1974 and amended numerous times), provides oversight for many services offered to children. A lot has also changed in the ministry of Falcon Children's Home since its inception in 1909. The ministry was formed after a service at the Falcon camp meeting, where a desire to help the orphaned children attending the services was put into action.

About \$850 was collected to begin the process. A farmhouse was purchased and shipped to Falcon in order to receive the first two children, Mary and Thomas Ward, who were from Bethel, North Carolina. The facility grew from those humble beginnings.

Today, 110 years later, Falcon Children's Home occupies a 45-acre campus. The ministry has served more than 15,000 children to date. It now includes an additional facility in Turbeville, South Carolina, a program for adoption, a program for mothers and babies, a private Christian school, and the licensing of foster homes.

At the present time, between all of these ministries, Falcon Children's Home serves more than 150 children. But the definition of an orphan has changed a great deal since that 1909 camp meeting. The majority of children we serve don't fit the description of a true orphan. They usually do have a parent, or parents, who are living. But for various reasons those parents aren't able to return home to care for their kids.

In spite of the best efforts of social workers and counseling agencies, the parents or relatives do not change their ways and the children are left to wander through the foster care system, hoping one day, to find what is referred to as a "forever family." On any given day there are more than 440,000 children in foster care in the United States.

As proud as I am of the work that Falcon Children's Home does, I would be just as happy if every child we currently serve could find a permanent home and family. That is why we started licensing foster homes, and why we maintain our adoption license.

What if every IPHC congregation in America today (more than 1,800 churches) got involved in being a part of the solution for the modern orphan—either through volunteering, giving, fostering or even adopting? This is part of my dream.

We would love for everyone to be actively involved in the ministry of Falcon Children's Home, but that is not realistic due to distance. I encourage you to get involved locally. Fostering and adoption may not be your calling, but there are so many other ways to be involved:

- Youth leaders can become a lifeline to children who have lost hope by developing programs that bring kids to events at church. Or you can send help to them in low-income areas.
- Churches can develop programs that recruit and identify potential foster parent families in your congregation.
- You can also develop outreach programs that send volunteers, tutors, or mentors to local group homes to help as needed.

**"On any given day there are more than 440,000 children in foster care in the United States."**



A perfect blend: Falcon Children's Home recently helped Matt and Angela Morgan and their three biological children adopt two foster care children into their family.

- You can become a visiting resource for children in foster care. This allows the children to visit your home and be a part of your family at holidays or other planned events. One of the most important things you can do is be mindful of the possibility that a child you know is in a situation that is not safe. Watch for signs that may need to be reported.

If enough Christian families got involved, this modern orphan crisis would be eradicated. There would be enough forever families that every child would have a forever permanent home.

This is important for the church because we need Christian families. There are many non-Christian and non-traditional families stepping up today to help. I admire them for being willing to make a difference, but the Lord must be at the center of a household for a child's deepest needs to be met.

At Falcon, we have a painting by artist Linwood Berry that contains this Scripture from Psalm 68:5-6: "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families; He brings those who are bound into prosperity." I am thankful that the IPHC is committed to bringing His justice to the most vulnerable children in our nation.

The next time you view one of those commercials about abused dogs, let it remind you that there are children in our communities who feel alone. They too have scars that you may not visibly see, but their hearts are broken. They long to be part of a true family. □



# If You're **PRO-LIFE**, You Should Be **PRO-EARTH**

Pentecostals who believe in the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit should also care about creation.



BY DR.  
CHERYL  
BRIDGES  
JOHNS

**CHERYL BRIDGES JOHNS** attended the IPHC's Emmanuel College. She also attended Lee College (now Lee University), obtained her M.A. at Wheaton College and was awarded her Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Seminary. Today she is a theologian, author, seminary professor and ecumenist. She is a faculty member at Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee, where she serves in the Robert E. Fisher Chair of Spiritual Renewal. She is married to Jackie David Johns and they have two daughters and five grandchildren. In 2013 Emmanuel College awarded her the G. Earl Beatty Servant Leadership Award. A version of this article appeared in *The Evangel*, a publication of the Church of God. It is used with the author's permission.

I remember the day I became pro-life. Until then I was opposed to abortion but paid little attention to the inherent quality of life that is in creation. It took the death of a premature guinea hen to enlarge my understanding.

My husband, Jackie, and I keep a small farm. Over the years, we have raised poultry, and for a few years we raised guineas. These grey birds, which were once-standard features on Southern farms, are good at controlling insects. They are also wonderful guardians. When someone drives up or disturbs their habitat, they burst out in loud, hysterical screams.

Our guineas were not wise at building their nests, often laying their eggs where predators could easily destroy them. So we decided to incubate a batch of eggs.

The weeks passed, and our incubated eggs burst open; and much to our dismay, tiny baby guineas flayed about the ground. Horrified at what we had done, we rushed to grab up the guineas and placed them in the incubator. Injured and premature, they began to die, one by one, until one frail guinea remained.

This guinea had an extra will to live. Every few minutes I would raise the lid of the incubator thinking the baby was dead. It looked lifeless, but if I called out to it and stroked its head, the frail hatchling would struggle to move.

During the course of the day, I kept deathwatch over the little guinea. Filled with guilt and shame that I was the cause of its suffering, I prayed for the baby guinea and sang to it as I stroked its tiny head. Toward the end of the day, the baby guinea could fight no longer; and upon its death, I cried tears of grief and penitence.

I, its executioner, had witnessed its struggles to live in the face of death. It was a death that left me with a great deal of questions. How could such a tiny creature have such a strong will to live? What drove this baby guinea to fight against death?



## THE COMMISSION TO PROTECT THE EARTH

It has been several years now since that day, labeled by my husband and me as “the slaughter of the innocents,” but its effect is still very much with me. I believe God used the tiny guinea to teach me about the sanctity of life. The God who records the death of every tiny sparrow is the same God who gave humankind stewardship over His created world.

It is a stewardship we have abused. We have taken the directive in Genesis 1:28, giving us “dominion” over the earth, as a license to treat the earth and its creatures as if they belonged to us and not God. We have forgotten the admonition of Genesis 2:15, namely, to tend and guard and protect the earth.

Some time during late modernity, the earth ceased to be a mystery and a means of revelation of God’s power and glory. It ceased to be the Lord’s world and became instead mankind’s world. It became a source of unending natural resources for our vision of progress.

The world’s minerals, plants and animals became something to harness, to conquer and to own. We exploited the world for our own good as if there was no tomorrow ... and no God. Simple things, such as animal husbandry, fell to the wayside in favor of mechanized and industrialized breeding of animals.

As a result of this recklessness, the beginning of the 21st century reveals a world in deep ecological crisis. I believe that God’s Holy Spirit, who brooded over God’s creation at the dawn of time, now grieves over its destruction. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life, bringing light to darkness, order to chaos, and beauty to wastelands.

The great festival of Pentecost is actually a celebration of harvest and life. It celebrates the power of God to make the land fruitful and to make wastelands into beautiful places. We who carry the name “Pentecostal” should, of all people, respect the earth. After all, God respects our earthliness by pouring out His Holy Spirit into our “earthen vessels.” Spirit-filled Christians are visible signs of what is to come, namely, the filling of the whole creation with God’s glory.

## THE COMMAND IN PRACTICE

God used the guinea to open my eyes and my heart to His creation. Since that time, He has opened doors for witness of the lessons taught. I have been part of two evangelical creation care initiatives: The “Sandy Cove Covenant” and the “Call to Action by Scientists and Evangelicals to Care for Creation.”

The first initiative brought together evangelical leaders for a two-day retreat in Sandy Cove, Maryland. At that meeting there was a strong sense of conviction over the lack of evangelical care for creation.

Those who attended the meeting refer to it as “the Sandy Cove miracle.” It was a miracle that we who were so different theologically and politically felt a strong sense of common mission to call our traditions to care for, protect, and serve the earth. That sense of calling led us to draw up a covenant pledging to care for God’s creation.

The second meeting—between scientists and evangelicals—was a most surprising miracle of grace. The differences between evangelicals present at Sandy Cove

were also present at this meeting.

In addition, we were meeting with secular scientists, some of whom had no belief in a personal God. I feared that our gathering would become an occasion for a “creation vs. evolution” debate, but nothing of the sort occurred. It quickly became evident to all of us that there is no such thing as a Republican or Democratic, liberal or conservative, religious or secular environment. We all breathe the same air and drink the same water.

At this meeting there was a strong sense of conviction, rivaling that experienced at Sandy Cove. God’s Spirit was at work, compelling us to love His earth. The scientists too felt this drawing, and not knowing what to call it, spoke in terms of “transcendence.”

One scientist stopped me during an afternoon walk and, with tears in his eyes, observed that the meeting had “transformed his life.” He noted that until this meeting he had separated spirituality from the environment. “Now,” he said, “I can no longer do that.”

Consider the following statements written at our joint meeting: “We agree that our home, the Earth, which comes to us as that inexpressibly beautiful and mysterious gift that sustains our very lives, is seriously imperiled by human behavior ... We believe that the protection of life on Earth is a profound moral imperative ... It requires a new moral awakening to a compelling demand, clearly articulated in Scripture and supported by science, that we must steward the natural world in order to preserve ourselves and future generations a beautiful, rich and healthful environment.

Let us build our beliefs and develop lifestyles that reflect stewardship rather than conspicuous consumption. We can start with simple things like recycling. We can avoid purchasing large, inefficient vehicles in favor of hybrid or more fuel-efficient cars. Bit by bit, we can allow God’s grace to sanctify our lives away from greed toward preservation and care.

The earth is the Lord’s. May our lives reflect awareness of God’s ownership of our most beautiful world. □



“The great festival of Pentecost is actually a celebration of harvest and life. We who carry the name “Pentecostal” should, of all people, respect the earth.”





# MYTHS and REALITIES of the Persecuted Church

A minister living inside China shares how the global church can help believers who are suffering for the gospel.



BY EUGENE  
BIRLING

EUGENE BIRLING is a missionary who has spent nearly 20 years in China since 2002. We are shielding his identity to protect him, but you can email him at [china@eugene.cotse.net](mailto:china@eugene.cotse.net) for more information about how you can serve the persecuted church worldwide.

**W**e have all read terrifying stories about the persecution of Christians. Recently I've seen articles about attacks on Christians in Nigeria, China and the Middle East. Although most of these stories are based on real events, some have been making the rounds for years. I've seen the same handful of stories about persecution in China more times than I can remember.

There is a risk of "crying wolf" when we share dramatic stories like these. How many articles about beheadings in North Africa or demolished churches in China do we need to see before we don't even click on them anymore? And even if we do open them, we are not serving the persecuted church by simply skimming a viral post and sharing it once again.

I don't want to discourage anyone from learning about the persecution of Christians. We are commanded to intercede for the suffering body of Christ. However, the reality is that our prayers will be much more effective if they are based on the reality of what our persecuted brothers and sisters are facing every day, rather than just on a few sensational stories that go viral on social media.

Here are some realities about the persecution of Christians that we all need to know:

**1. Its not only pastors who suffer.** I am currently reading *Tortured for Christ*, a book by Richard Wurmbrand that was published in 1968 after his release from decades of imprisonment in Romania. I have been blessed tremendously by the testimony of his steadfast refusal to turn over his fellow gospel workers to the Communists.





However, the vast majority of those who suffer for Christ today do so alone, with no publicity or recognition. They are not famous leaders. We never hear of their pain or their deaths. We don't get to see their courageous stands for truth in the face of devilish hatred for God's Word. Yet there are millions of them. They may be unknown to us, but not to God.

So, is not merely a few preachers who suffer for Christ, but Christian moms and dads, working class teachers and shop owners, Sunday School teachers and deacons, underground seminary students and home-schooled toddlers. The vast majority of those who face daily threats and persecution are "normal" Christians like us.

These believers are regularly kicked out of their homes, fired from their jobs, forced to relocate back to their hometowns in the countryside, locked up for weeks or months at a time, separated from families and fellow believers; all for simply continuing to "gather together" as a church and proclaim the gospel. This kind of persecution is happening on a scale that would fill countless volumes of books.

## 2. Intercession is your first step.

Hebrews 13:3 tells us: "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body." We must not despair in the face of such suffering, but pray! And the best way we can pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters is by realizing that they are men and women like us.

We are not praying for mythical Christian heroes. We are all so very much alike! So the first step is to put yourself in their shoes and pray for them as you would want someone to pray for you under similar circumstances.

As we intercede for our persecuted brethren in their suffering and imprisonment, here are three specific ways that you can pray for the church in nations such as China:

■ First, pray for God's Word to "spread rapidly," as Paul states in 2 Thessalonians 3:1. While the godless governments in many parts of the world seek to prohibit God's Word, we must pray that the message of Jesus Christ spread like a wildfire in every nation!

■ Second, pray for God's people to remain faithful and to boldly proclaim the gospel in their difficult circumstances. The Apostle Paul himself, writing as a prisoner in chains in Ephesians 6:19-20, twice asks for the church to pray that words would be given to him to boldly proclaim the gospel.

■ Third, in the same passage in 2 Thessalonians (vs 2-3), Paul asks for prayer that they "may be protected from wicked and evil men". So let us cry out to the Father to protect His children from Satan's minions, as He has already done countless times throughout Scripture and church history.

## 3. Let your prayers turn into a

**passion for action.** Many times during my nearly two decades in China I have been asked by well-meaning Christian guests if it would be possible for them to attend an underground church gathering. Almost always the answer is no. It is just too risky for local Christians to have foreigners around.

This does not mean that western Christians should not visit China at all, but that we should serve strategically when we come! In the current climate of persecution, Communist authorities are trying to intimidate believers into keeping quiet about their faith.

However, Christian visitors and short-term missionaries rarely face these same threats and restrictions, simply because they are seen as tourists along with millions of other foreign guests China receives each year. So it is not an exaggeration to say that there is nothing stopping multitudes of Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, gospel-preaching Christians from every state and city in America (or any other free country) from visiting China and sharing the gospel!

China's millions of students and the burgeoning middle-class are learning to speak English more fluently than ever before. But what about the persecution, you say? China is a strange place. Foreign visitors are treated very differently from locals. While Chinese Christians face life-altering persecution for merely attending church, the worst that happens to a foreigner caught evangelizing is to have their tourist visa cancelled and be sent back home.

"Let's not stand idly by while our brothers and sisters suffer in persecuted nations around the world. Let us intercede for them faithfully."

## 4. Prayer and evangelism as peaceful protest.

Do you want to encourage the persecuted Chinese church in a practical way? Then send a team over to walk the streets, intercede for the nation and boldly share the gospel. Imagine the joy you would feel as a Chinese believer in prison knowing that Christian reinforcements were coming from around the world to share the gospel with your unreached neighbors, classmates, teachers and co-workers.

I am reminded of Early Rain Covenant Church in western China. For years, up until they were forced entirely underground last year, when any of the church members were arrested for the "crime" of evangelism or holding illegal meetings, they would quickly pinpoint the location of the police station where their brothers or sisters were being held and dispatch a team of volunteer church members to attempt to visit them.

If they were not allowed to make contact, then there on the sidewalk, in peaceful defiance of the arrest of their fellow Christians, these small groups would begin to sing hymns of praise outside the police station—loud enough so that their friends inside could hear and join in the fellowship. Imagine the joy their fellow church members must have felt! They were able to join in the chorus, despite being locked up inside!

Let's not stand idly by while our brothers and sisters suffer in persecuted nations around the world. Let us intercede for them faithfully, visit and encourage them as we are able, and take up the mantle to evangelize their people as the Holy Spirit fills us with boldness and the love of Jesus compels us to action! □



# Every Leader Needs a Jonathan Friend

So many pastors today lead in isolation. That's not healthy. ***You need friends.***



BY J. LEE GRADY

J. LEE GRADY is an author, traveling minister and former editor of *Charisma* magazine. Author of several books including *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* and *Set My Heart on Fire*, Lee leads The Mordecai Project—a missionary organization that focuses on bringing the healing of Christ to women who are abused and marginalized. Lee has been ordained in the IPHC since 2000, and he and his wife, Deborah, live in LaGrange, Georgia. You can learn more about his ministry at [leegrady.com](http://leegrady.com).

Back in June I was dreading the upcoming weekend. I didn't want to think about Father's Day—partly because it was the second year since my father had died, and partly because my elderly mother's health is failing. I honestly felt like crawling in a hole. But instead of stuffing my pain, I asked some of my friends to send me an encouraging text or video to cheer me up.

You may think that sounds like a selfish request, but my friends didn't see it that way. The texts began flooding my phone on that Sunday morning, and they came throughout the day. I saved every message, and I've been reading them over and over ever since. Their words literally lifted me out of a pit of discouragement.

I honestly don't think I could survive without my friends. Yet as I travel and meet Christians all over the country, I find that the church today is actually a very lonely place. Many people have experienced total relationship shutdown. Some have walked through painful church splits, others have been betrayed by friends they trusted, and still others have closed their hearts entirely to avoid being hurt.

It's as if we forgot how to have true friends. I've met pastors who've told me they just can't risk building friendships. So they live in isolation. They bear their own burdens. They get no encouragement. Some end up in depression.

One pastor told me he couldn't open up with anyone because his confidential confessions would be shared with other leaders. So he crawled into a shell and never told anyone what he was going through! I have met



other pastors who developed what I call “a theology of isolation.” They believe it is more spiritual to do life alone. Their watchword is: “It’s just me and Jesus.” They actually think it is a sign of weakness to need anyone’s love and support when they are going through a difficult time.

That is sad when you consider depth of fellowship that the New Testament church enjoyed. God created us to live in close community. And the letters of Paul tell us to greet one another, accept one another, forgive one another, be patient with one another, be at peace with one another, confess our sins to one another and encourage one another daily! The Christian life is about relationships, not isolation!

Recently, the Holy Spirit drew me to study the friendship that developed between David and Jonathan during David’s early years. It is clear from the biblical record that God put Jonathan in David’s life at a crucial time in his journey to the throne. And if it were not for Jonathan’s covenant relationship with his friend, David would never have been able to overcome the obstacles he faced during the reign of King Saul.

The same is true for all of us. You’ll never achieve your maximum spiritual potential without the help of the key relationships God places around you. Yet in order to benefit from these friendships, you must open your heart and take the risk of being a friend.

How can you move from being isolated to developing close friendships? Proverbs 18:24a says: “A man who has friends must show himself friendly.” You can’t wait for a friend to reach out to you. Take the first step and be willing to break the stalemate. British preacher Charles Spurgeon put it this way: “Any man can selfishly desire to have a Jonathan; but he is on the right track who desires to find out a David to whom he can be a Jonathan.”

Here are six qualities I see in Jonathan that challenge me to be a better friend:

## 1. JONATHAN NURTURED A SPIRITUAL BOND.

After David killed Goliath and moved to Saul’s palace, the Bible says “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David” (1 Sam. 18:1, NKJV). This is the work of the Holy Spirit. All

Christians should experience a sense of family connection, but there are certain friends you will feel deeply connected to because God is putting you in each other’s lives for a reason. Don’t resist this process. Let God knit you to people.

## 2. JONATHAN SHOWED SACRIFICIAL LOVE.

Jonathan loved David so much that he risked his life to help him fulfill his mission. Jonathan even dodged Saul’s spear in his effort to help his friend.

“You’ll never achieve your maximum spiritual potential without the help of the key relationships God places around you.”

He lived in the spirit of Jesus’ words about friendship: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13, NLT). The world says we should only care about our own success. But the best way to become more like Jesus is to help someone else succeed!

## 3. JONATHAN ALWAYS OFFERED ENCOURAGEMENT.

When David was fleeing from Saul in the wilderness, Jonathan traveled to Horesh to cheer up his friend (1 Sam. 23:16). There were times in David’s life when he had to encourage himself, but in this case, Jonathan was God’s instrument. We need each other! If you allow the Holy Spirit to speak life and hope through you, your words can propel your friends into their destiny.

## 4. JONATHAN OFFERED HIS FRIEND PROTECTION.

When Jonathan realized his father was plotting to kill David, he not only warned him of danger, but he concocted a plan to deliver his friend (1 Sam. 19:1-4). Friends don’t let friends get massacred in spiritual warfare. If you see a friend making a foolish mistake, or if you sense the enemy is targeting him or her, God can use you to avert a disaster. Speak the truth in love.

## 5. JONATHAN KEPT HIS FRIEND’S PAIN CONFIDENTIAL.

David confided in his friend Jonathan, and in some cases, he poured out his heart in frustration. At one point he said to Jonathan, “What have I done? What is my iniquity?” (1 Sam. 20:1a). When I’m going through a difficult trial, I sometimes just need to vent. I have loyal friends who let me process my pain—and they don’t run and tell others about my weakness. This is true friendship.

## 6. JONATHAN HARBORED NO JEALOUSY.

At one point in David’s journey, Jonathan realized his friend would one day be king of Israel. This was actually Jonathan’s inheritance, since he was Saul’s son, but he acknowledged that God had chosen David instead. So he gave David his royal robe, his armor and his weapons (see 1 Sam. 18:3-4).

This is a beautiful picture of how we are to prefer and honor each other. Jealousy destroys friendship. If we have God’s love in our hearts, we will want our friends to surpass us.

This is a huge challenge for leaders. We are conditioned by the world (and by a worldly church culture) to fight to get to the top. We allow competition to ruin godly relationships. We put ourselves first and secretly rejoice when another leader fails.

We need a new perspective on leadership. Open your heart. If you’ve been hurt in previous relationships, break out of your isolation and ask God to heal you. Find your Jonathan. And above all, choose to be a Jonathan to someone else. □