

# Encourage

Inspiration for IPHC Leaders

## As We Leave 2020 Behind, **We Look Forward With Hope**

BY DOUG BEACHAM

Rebuilding Your Church  
After the 2020 Crisis

BY KEVIN ROBINSON

We Can't Stay Disconnected  
When The Pandemic Is Over

BY J. LEE GRADY

In Times of Shaking,  
You Need a  
Building  
Inspection

BY GARRY BRYANT

At Southwestern  
Christian University,  
We Are Making  
Disciples

BY BRAD DAVIS







# As We Leave 2020 Behind, We Look Forward With Hope

This has not been an easy year for any of us.  
But we have so much to be thankful for.



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.

This issue of *Encourage* covers both November and December. I'll have to admit I'm ready for 2020 to end. I suspect that the typical end-of-year cartoon of an old, bearded man and a baby will be different this year; they both will be wearing masks!

But as we close this year's comments in this column, I offer a few thoughts for now and our future.

First, I write this before the United States elections on November 3. I do not have a clue who will win the race, or even if we will know who won the presidential vote by the time you read this (as in the year 2000, after the tumultuous Bush/Gore election).

But this I know: "... that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," that Christ "rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," and Jesus' words, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Titus 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:4; Philippians 2:10, 11; Matthew 16:18). These remain true regardless the election results.

Second, as we approach this unusual Thanksgiving season, I am thankful for the ways that IPHC ministers and congregations have

remained faithful to share the gospel with others. I'm thankful for your faithfulness to support your local congregations, conferences and the ministries of the IPHC.

For many of you it has been a significant sacrifice to stay connected to your congregations and to invest in people virtually. Yet God has proven Himself faithful. I am thankful for God's grace for all of you who have suffered illness and death from the coronavirus, as well as a host of other diseases, distresses and disappointments.

I am thankful for the bishops of the IPHC and their wisdom, their love for Christ's church and their discernment. I am also thankful that my booklet on the 2011 IPHC Centennial Covenant is available for you as a free download [here](#).

Third, I look forward to the Christmas season and the blessings of Advent, and the Twelve Days that follow Christmas Day. Though written a few years ago, I mention this e-book written by IPHC missionary Russell Board and me titled *Christmas Before and After*. It's available [here](#).

In light of the approaching Advent Season, which begins this year on Sunday, November 29, my thoughts are turned to the Servant Songs found in Isaiah. Later this month and into December I will be sharing more about each of these four prophetic poetic hymns in four Advent videos and mediations.

These four passages in Isaiah reflect the Babylonian captivity of Judea and the Holy Spirit's

prophetic voice of hope and promise to a people experiencing that marvelous mix of divine judgment and divine mercy. Commentators see in the "Servant" God's redeeming plan for and through Israel, as well as the fulfillment of that plan in the Messiah, Jesus, the Servant of the Lord. Let me offer a preview of these amazing revelations:

**Servant Hymn One - Isaiah 42:1-9.** The Holy Spirit's work in the Servant is for the nations of the earth. His role will be one of divine justice and the reign of God's kingdom. As the fulfillment of God's promises through Abraham, the Servant will be "a light to the Gentiles" (42:6). Furthermore, the Servant's mission is described in 42:7 with words similar to the Messianic promise of Isaiah 61:1-3.

**Servant Hymn Two - Isaiah 49:1-7.** This hymn is like a second verse of hope to a lost world as the Servant again is "a light to the Gentiles" (49:6). This hymn concludes with the promise that the rulers of the earth will bow before the Servant (49:7).

**Servant Hymn Three - Isaiah 50:4-9.** While the first two hymns centered on the global mission of the Servant, this hymn centers on the character of the Servant. He is teachable and has an ear to hear what the Father calls Him to be and do.

**Servant Hymn Four - Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12.** The fourth hymn, the Sunday prior to Christmas Day, reminds us of the

## Encourage

A place of hope. A people of promise.

November/December 2020

Vol. 7 No. 10

Editor in Chief

Dr. A.D. Beacham, Jr.

Publisher

International Pentecostal Holiness Church

Executive Editor

J. Lee Grady

Communications Director /

Associate Editor

Jamie Cain

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 unless otherwise noted.

ultimate mission of the Servant. He is the One who will be "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities" (53:5). It is a powerful reminder that the meaning of Christmas, the meaning of the Incarnation, is that God Himself will take away our sins and bring salvation.

As we enter this American Thanksgiving and global Christmas season, I remind you that we, the IPHC, are called to be a Place of Hope and a People of Promise. It is from that hope and promise that our mission is set clearly before us: Arise 2033—we anticipate a day when the church will advance to all the nations of the earth.

2020 will long be remembered as a year of great struggle. But the years ahead of us are even more important as we take the gospel across the United States and around the world. May Jesus Christ be praised! ☑

“2020 will long be remembered as a year of great struggle. But the years ahead of us are even more important...”





# As We Leave 2020 Behind, We Look Forward With Hope

This has not been an easy year for any of us.  
But we have so much to be thankful for.



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.

This issue of *Encourage* covers both November and December. I'll have to admit I'm ready for 2020 to end. I suspect that the typical end-of-year cartoon of an old, bearded man and a baby will be different this year; they both will be wearing masks!

But as we close this year's comments in this column, I offer a few thoughts for now and our future.

First, I write this before the United States elections on November 3. I do not have a clue who will win the race, or even if we will know who won the presidential vote by the time you read this (as in the year 2000, after the tumultuous Bush/Gore election).

But this I know: "... that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," that Christ "rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," and Jesus' words, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Titus 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:4; Philippians 2:10, 11; Matthew 16:18). These remain true regardless the election results.

Second, as we approach this unusual Thanksgiving season, I am thankful for the ways that IPHC ministers and congregations have

remained faithful to share the gospel with others. I'm thankful for your faithfulness to support your local congregations, conferences and the ministries of the IPHC.

For many of you it has been a significant sacrifice to stay connected to your congregations and to invest in people virtually. Yet God has proven Himself faithful. I am thankful for God's grace for all of you who have suffered illness and death from the coronavirus, as well as a host of other diseases, distresses and disappointments.

I am thankful for the bishops of the IPHC and their wisdom, their love for Christ's church and their discernment. I am also thankful that my booklet on the 2011 IPHC Centennial Covenant is available for you as a free download [here](#).

Third, I look forward to the Christmas season and the blessings of Advent, and the Twelve Days that follow Christmas Day. Though written a few years ago, I mention this e-book written by IPHC missionary Russell Board and me titled *Christmas Before and After*. It's available [here](#).

In light of the approaching Advent Season, which begins this year on Sunday, November 29, my thoughts are turned to the Servant Songs found in Isaiah. Later this month and into December I will be sharing more about each of these four prophetic poetic hymns in four Advent videos and mediations.

These four passages in Isaiah reflect the Babylonian captivity of Judea and the Holy Spirit's

prophetic voice of hope and promise to a people experiencing that marvelous mix of divine judgment and divine mercy. Commentators see in the "Servant" God's redeeming plan for and through Israel, as well as the fulfillment of that plan in the Messiah, Jesus, the Servant of the Lord. Let me offer a preview of these amazing revelations:

**Servant Hymn One - Isaiah 42:1-9.** The Holy Spirit's work in the Servant is for the nations of the earth. His role will be one of divine justice and the reign of God's kingdom. As the fulfillment of God's promises through Abraham, the Servant will be "a light to the Gentiles" (42:6). Furthermore, the Servant's mission is described in 42:7 with words similar to the Messianic promise of Isaiah 61:1-3.

**Servant Hymn Two - Isaiah 49:1-7.** This hymn is like a second verse of hope to a lost world as the Servant again is "a light to the Gentiles" (49:6). This hymn concludes with the promise that the rulers of the earth will bow before the Servant (49:7).

**Servant Hymn Three - Isaiah 50:4-9.** While the first two hymns centered on the global mission of the Servant, this hymn centers on the character of the Servant. He is teachable and has an ear to hear what the Father calls Him to be and do.

**Servant Hymn Four - Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12.** The fourth hymn, the Sunday prior to Christmas Day, reminds us of the

## Encourage

A place of hope. A people of promise.

November/December 2020

Vol. 7 No. 10

Editor in Chief

Dr. A.D. Beacham, Jr.

Publisher

International Pentecostal Holiness Church

Executive Editor

J. Lee Grady

Communications Director /

Associate Editor

Jamie Cain

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.

ultimate mission of the Servant. He is the One who will be "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities" (53:5). It is a powerful reminder that the meaning of Christmas, the meaning of the Incarnation, is that God Himself will take away our sins and bring salvation.

As we enter this American Thanksgiving and global Christmas season, I remind you that we, the IPHC, are called to be a Place of Hope and a People of Promise. It is from that hope and promise that our mission is set clearly before us: Arise 2033—we anticipate a day when the church will advance to all the nations of the earth.

2020 will long be remembered as a year of great struggle. But the years ahead of us are even more important as we take the gospel across the United States and around the world. May Jesus Christ be praised! ☑

“2020 will long be remembered as a year of great struggle. But the years ahead of us are even more important...”





# REBUILDING Your Church After the 2020 Crisis

God is using this crisis to change us.  
Embrace the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.



BY KEVIN D.  
ROBINSON

DR. KEVIN DREW ROBINSON was a Jehovah's Witness before he found Jesus Christ. He and his wife, Sheila, founded Divine Empowerment International Church in Fayetteville N.C., in 2006. Robinson joined the IPHC's North Carolina Conference in 2009, and he was ordained in that conference in 2010. He serves on the Executive Conference Council and the Evangelism Council, and he is the Multi-Cultural Ministries Director. He is a graduate of the Greater Mt. Zion Bible Institute and Seminary, with a Ph.D. in Religious Education and an honorary Ph.D. in Divinity. He is also a certified team member of the John Maxwell Group, and serves nationally as a public speaker, consultant and life coach.

I've meditated on the conversations many of us had at the end of 2019. Most were trending towards the cliché of "2020 vision" as we looked forward to the next year. We had no idea what was coming in 2020!

The unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 stopped our normal ministry activities. The world's industries closed their doors, and the opportunities for churches to worship publicly were challenged. People across the globe experienced a universal culture shock.

What did you lose during this pandemic season? I'm certain we have all experienced some level of chaos and trauma. We've all been impacted. Many lost loved ones to this horrible pandemic. Many families are emotionally scarred because they weren't permitted to visit loved ones in hospitals or to have traditional funerals.

Many people lost jobs; some are still unemployed. Some people lost their homes. Our activities were restricted. Suddenly life wasn't normal anymore.

These unexpected interruptions forced us into a "new normal" for life and ministry. For many years we've declared that the church must be "on the cutting edge." But now a global crisis has forced us into uncomfortable change.

The "cutting edge" is not a comfortable place! But whether we like it or not, we must reposition ourselves on the forefront of Christ's mission. We must dedicate our lives to serve as His ambassadors to reconcile the world back to God.

This will require much work and dedication. We must rebuild and repair generational disconnections and reestablish Christ's church as the center of family and community. But we can't do that without a vision that is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

How can you as a leader rebuild after this crisis? I offer these important steps:

## 1. REASSESS YOUR VISION.

The first step you must take is to revisit your overall vision and ministry mission. Identify areas that don't coexist well with your overall vision. If a conflict of interest has caused a schism, or inconsistency in the flow of the vision, it may be a sign that your ministry needs a reassessment.

A demolition may be required prior to rebuilding or relaunching your ministry. Two scriptures come to mind that support this thought:

- Isaiah 9:10 says: "They said, 'We will replace the broken bricks of our ruins with finished stone and replant the felled sycamore-fig trees with cedars.'"
- Isaiah 61:4 says: "They will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago. They will revive them, though they have been deserted for many generations."

Like Nehemiah, you must rebuild what is ruined. Unprecedented times demand unprecedented ideas and plans of action. Therefore, all who feel compelled to advance the kingdom of God in the earth under Christ's authority must engage in the process of spiritual renewal. To change the land we must eliminate counterproductive thinking.

This means you, as a leader, must allow the Holy Spirit to renew your mind, so that you are not stuck in old patterns of thinking. Romans 2:2 says: "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

You cannot know God's perfect will until you allow Him to change your mind! Our spiritual renovation will stretch our Christological worldview and strengthen our spiritual gifts. As

a result, the power of the Christ will be made alive in us and significantly influential around us.

If we desire to reach the world with the gospel, we must see humanity through the face of Jesus Christ as opposed to our personal convictions and traditions. Once our visionary scales have been lifted, our behavior will reflect Christlikeness to the world. It is inevitable that the spiritual gifts of administration, ministries of helps, intercessions, faith and healing will be used mightily in this hour.

## 2. BATHE THE REBUILDING PROCESS IN PRAYER.

This season has postured us to spend much needed time in communion with the Holy Spirit. The business of ministry can bring interruptions in our alone time with God. I want to encourage you to reestablish that time of prayer and meditation.

Many of us who preach from pulpits love to prepare sermons for the crowd, yet we struggle to hear from God concerning our personal lives and vision. Jesus made certain to have His hour in the garden of Gethsemane. In that hour of prayer, He was able to be honest with God concerning his feelings, and yet willing to surrender His will to maintain His obedience and complete His assignment.

## 3. PLAN STRATEGICALLY AND EFFICIENTLY.

This next step is critical to the mission of Christ. We must identify blind spots with a trained eye so we can expand our vision without destroying its foundations.

Don't be afraid to allow someone who has administrative experience to study your habits. God is the one who sends the gift of administration. Too often we are trapped inside our "we've always done it this way" boxes. A gifted administrator can help you think in new ways.

Look for new and more efficient ways to get things done in this new season. God has placed people in our inner circles who have this administrative gift. They have the knowledge of the age, and high levels of influence.

These gifted people are much like the children of Issachar mentioned in 1 Chronicles 12:32. They can assist us in identifying areas of ministry that need to be pruned back for the purpose of eliminating wastefulness so we can increase our operating capital.

Don't get stuck in old ruts. God is using this pandemic crisis to prune us and to cut away the dead branches. Invite gifted people to help you make needed changes.

This pandemic has helped us to think outside of the church box. As we have done online ministry, we realized that many people listen to our services—even those from different

cities and regions. You are called not just to minister to those in your building, but also those who are called to serve the marketplace's mission field.

Their schedules may not allow them to attend church in person, but it won't stop them from worshipping or soul-winning. We must diversify our inner circle for the purpose of diversifying our service mix. These are opportunities to step

outside the box and touch many more unchurched people.

If we stand on our firm foundation of Christ and remain intentional about reaching the world, God's favor will rest upon us. Embrace all the changes that the Holy Spirit wants to make in your ministry so you can be fruitful in the next season. ☐

“Like Nehemiah, you must rebuild what is ruined. Unprecedented times demand unprecedented ideas and plans of action.”







# In Times of Shaking, You Need a Building Inspection

In these turbulent times, make sure the foundation of your life and ministry is secure.



BY GARRY BRYANT

GARRY BRYANT is a native Virginian and the son of a Pentecostal Holiness minister. He has served as a senior pastor, Christian Education director for his conference, Conference Superintendent for Redemption Ministries, and National Field Director for Acts2Day Ministries. He currently serves as Executive Director of Evangelism USA Ministries. Garry and his wife, LaDawn, live in Oklahoma City, and they have two adult children, Dreama and Garryt.

There is a stern and stirring prophetic promise given in Hebrews 12:26-28. God says: "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words 'once more' indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe ..."

The wonder and warning of this passage can produce several responses and emotions:

- *Fear:* A shaking is coming.
- *Concern:* Am I safe? Are the people I love ready for this shaking?
- *Excitement:* We can rejoice in knowing that we are a part of a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Many prophetic voices and Bible scholars have warned us that there is an obvious and increased shaking coming to this earth. All of us would have to acknowledge that the year 2020 seemingly fits into the description of a great shaking.

The global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, world-wide economic instability and widespread political unrest in 2020 has had unbelievable impact on our personal lives, families, churches and ministries. Life is not what we knew it to be when we entered this year!

The passage from Hebrews prompts a serious question. Are we properly prepared to withstand this shaking? I call us to consider the duty of inspecting our foundations as an appropriate obligation in this season of instability.

In Matthew 7: 24-27, Jesus described two men. One built his house on a rock, and another built his house on shifting sand. The man who foolishly built on a shaky foundation watched as his dwelling "fell with a great crash" (v. 27), while the man who built on stable ground stayed safe.

This is the most informative scripture we have as it relates to enduring and surviving a shaking. Jesus, in His masterful way of exposing eternal truth through

natural illustrations, provides for us some of the most practical insights in all of His teachings. The main emphasis is the value of a right foundation.

Proper preparedness for all matters we face hinges on the condition of our foundations. It is a known fact that the foundation of any structure is the primary contributor to stability, performance and survivability.

In Jesus' story, there were two builders, two houses and two foundations. Both experienced the same storm, but with totally different outcomes. The house built on the rock did not collapse. The house built on sand fell with a great crash.

The key element of distinction is defined by those who hear Christ's teachings and obey, versus those who hear Christ's teachings and do not obey. This sets us up with an opportunity to inspect the condition of our foundations. Are we ready for the storms of life, the increased shakings and the adverse circumstances?

We must evaluate from the perspective of our obedience to the Word of God. That means you must engage in a personal inspection of your foundations!

The foundation of our homes, church buildings and ministries are so important yet so overlooked. We typically do not give foundations much attention. We can't see what is underneath a structure. However, everything above ground is totally dependent upon what is below ground!

Unfortunately, we tend to give much more attention to what is easily visible. We care about what people see. We want their praise and their compliments. But if we care about what God thinks, we must look at the unseen foundation.

Paul says in I Corinthians 3:10-11 that he was a wise builder: "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

In the construction world, we learn that a foundation must be able to bear three distinct types of weight and pressure. These are:

- *Dead load* – the actual weight of the building itself.
- *Live load* – additional weight added to the structure; for

example, furniture, people and belongings.

- *Surprise load* – storms, wind, external impacts and other factors.

I believe we can translate these types of demands on a physical foundation to our lives as followers of Christ. A weak foundation produces cracking, settling, sinking, upheaval, gaps, unevenness and separation.



**"The Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the world's tallest building—with 163 floors—has a foundation that is 164 feet deep! This shows that if we want to soar high, we must dig a deep foundation."**

Are you experiencing any of these issues in your faith? Has this season of uncertainty exposed weaknesses in your life? Do you deal with anger, unforgiveness, broken relationships, doubt, prayerlessness, greed, fruitlessness, pride, arrogance, self-pity, isolation, hatred or lust?

There are so many potential issues that can produce defects in our foundation. That is why Jesus gave us truth to apply. The Word of God is a sure foundation. It corrects our faults and foundational weaknesses.

The foundation of the Empire State Building in New York City is 55 feet deep. The Sears Tower in Chicago, now known as the Willis Tower, has a foundation that is 100 feet deep. The Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the world's tallest building—with 163 floors—has a foundation that is 164 feet deep! This shows that if we want to soar high, we must dig a deep foundation.

The apostle James exhorts us to not only be hearers of the Word, but doers. Jesus declared that this determines the strength and service of a sure and solid foundation!

I challenge you to do an inspection of your foundation during this shaky time of global pandemic. Take a cautious and patient journey through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7) and inspect the present level of your obedience. You will be able to determine the condition of your foundation.

You and I have an incredible opportunity to have our homes, families and ministries established on that which is unshakeable. This means we can have guaranteed stability, safety, security and shelter!

We will endure increased shaking and storms. Expected and unexpected loads and weights will add pressure to our lives. But in Christ, by His Word, we can be safe and secure!

Psalms 62:5-8 says: "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."

He is our secure foundation! Hymnwriter Edward Mote reminded us of this truth with these memorable words: "On Christ the solid rock I stand / All other ground is sinking sand / All other ground is sinking sand."

Are you properly founded? What is the result of your foundation inspection? I pray we will look to the rock that cannot be shaken, even in these stormy times. ☐





# We Can't Stay Disconnected When the Pandemic Is Over

Are your church members staying home?  
Here are six reasons why Christians can't live in perpetual isolation.



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).

**T**his crazy season has been overwhelmingly stressful for churches. Some congregations are experiencing a financial crunch because members are out of work. We can't visit our sick members in the hospital or go inside nursing homes. COVID-19 forced us to go online, and the pandemic has turned most pastors into awkward television evangelists who preach to empty auditoriums using smartphones.

And we are all "Zoomed out" because we are weary of the online church experience!

Now, eight months after the shutdown, some congregations are reopening—with masks, social distancing and temperature checks. Instead of hearing a worship leader say, "Turn to the person next to you and give them a hug!" we have learned to bump elbows. We also have noticed that a large percentage of church members haven't returned.

In August, church growth coach Thom Rainer predicted that between 20 to 30 percent of people who attended church before the pandemic will never come back, including 1) the non-committed, 2) those who never joined small groups 3) the "church critics," 4) cultural Christians and 5) those who already went to church infrequently before the quarantine began.

I was a bit perturbed when I first read Rainer's article. Why wouldn't anybody be excited about going back to church after this painful season of isolation? The truth is many Christians don't see church as essential. COVID-19 has become an easy excuse to stay home.

I'm not advocating that people return to church if their health is at risk or they don't feel comfortable being around crowds yet. We need to protect each other from the virus, especially those in our congregations who are the most vulnerable.

But if people in your congregation are feeling tempted to never return to church, I offer these six reasons why we need to be connected to God's people instead of living in perpetual isolation.

**1. The church is still God's Plan A.** Heaven does not have a Plan B. Jesus is the head of His church (see Col. 1:18) and we are His hands and feet. Jesus announced before He went to the cross: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

Jesus intends to use the church—even in its weakness—as His primary tool to reach the world with the gospel. To reject the church is to reject God's ultimate strategy to bring heaven's kingdom on earth.

**2. The Holy Spirit has called us to be together.**

When we were born again and baptized, the Bible says we were mystically unified with all other born-again believers and connected to each other by the Holy Spirit. The Lord also connects people in local congregations. This connection is holy, and we should never make light of our bond of fellowship, or damage it.

Paul told the Ephesians to "be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" by being in close fellowship with each other (Eph. 4:3). To reject this union of believers is to dishonor the work of the Spirit.

**3. God accomplishes more through His corporate people than through isolated individuals.**

The Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian believer, and the corporate church makes a much bigger impact than one person does. This is why Jesus told His disciples after He went to the cross that we would do "greater works" than He did on earth (see John 14:12).

Because healthy churches can pool

resources, organize volunteers and train leaders, we can offer ministry to children, youth, families, singles, the needy and the lost overseas—in a way one person could never alone.

**4. God's authority flows through His church, not through "Lone Ranger" Christians.**

Some people I know who've been hurt by church leaders say they can never submit to another pastor again. Yet God has delegated to certain people the task of building up the church (see Eph. 4:11-12).

It's totally acceptable for someone to leave an unhealthy church that has poor leadership, but they should quickly find a new church where they can be equipped to fulfill their ministry. Christians can't grow in their faith if they have a "my way or the highway" attitude.

**5. It is by living in Christian community that we learn to love and serve.**

Paul told the Hebrews: "Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another, especially as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). People who live in isolation find it difficult to develop character, and they often get discouraged; those who walk together in close fellowship inspire each other, and they improve each other just as iron sharpens iron.

I don't know about you, but being quarantined at home for months has made me miss my spiritual family more than ever. I miss corporate worship, the conversations after church and the hugs. I need at least seven hugs a day! God created us with this need for connection—and we won't remain healthy for long if we stay apart.

**6. If people leave the church because of hurt or resentment, they will find it difficult or impossible to find healing and reconciliation.**

We are living in a divisive time. I've never known a season in my entire life when Americans were so outraged over politics. Even something so minor as a mask has divided us!

One pastor in Alabama told me that one of his most loyal members left his church when he announced

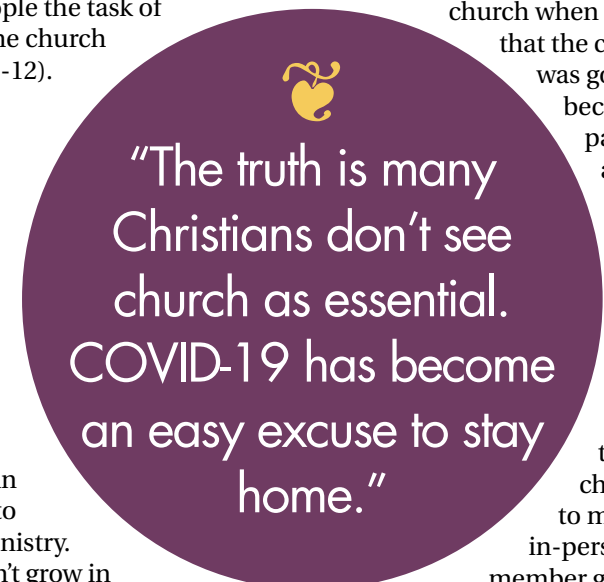
that the congregation was going online because of the pandemic. The angry member felt that the church should continue to meet because, in his words, "The virus is a hoax!" But then, when the church began to meet again in-person, another member got upset

because, in her words, "We are not taking this virus seriously!"

It has been impossible for pastors to please everybody during this tense time. So many people are finding it easy to get offended. And offense has caused some church members to quit church altogether.

If you are dealing with offended members, you must preach about the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. I always say: "People may have hurt you, but God will use people to heal you." Don't let the hurts of the past paint you into a lonely corner. Choose to forgive. Take a risk and keep on loving.

We must remind our church members that we don't have permission to check out of church or give up on God's flawed saints. Even if people stay home until this pandemic is completely over, we must make a decision now to return to church when the threat has passed. God wants us to find our place in His eternal family. □

  
"The truth is many Christians don't see church as essential. COVID-19 has become an easy excuse to stay home."





A place of preparation: Students at SCU pray for each other.

# At Southwestern Christian University, We Are Making Disciples

God prepared me for ministry at SCU. Now I am shaping young leaders there.



BY BRAD DAVIS

BRAD DAVIS is a native of Louisiana and he has served as a senior pastor in South Carolina and in Oklahoma. He is married to Whitney Spires Davis and is the father of four daughters and a son. Brad currently serves as Vice President of Student Services at Southwestern Christian University in Bethany, Oklahoma, where he oversees housing, student life, spiritual life and enrollment services. He will soon complete his doctorate of education at Oral Roberts University.

In the spring of 1992 I made a trip with the youth of our church. We drove from Lafayette, Louisiana, to Bethany, Oklahoma, to take part in the regional Teen Talent competition. The event was held at the IPHC's Southwestern Christian University.

While on the campus, I sensed that the Lord was speaking to me about this school. I didn't know much about the place, but somehow I knew I was supposed to be here.

I transferred from a college in Louisiana and made my way to Oklahoma in the fall of 1992. My parents were living overseas in Malaysia, so I had to pack up my car and make the trip to Oklahoma by myself. Back then I had no GPS or access to Google Maps. All I had was a paper road map! I drove 10 hours and found myself in the heartland of the country.

Once on campus, I knew I had found a home. I noticed from day one that the central focus of the college was Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Under the leadership of Dr. Ron Moore, SCU had been established with the goal of developing leaders for Christian ministry. Dr. Moore's passion was to train ministers within the IPHC.

There was no doubt in my mind that I was called in ministry. The Lord had spoken to me throughout my life at youth camps, in church services and even in my accounting class at a local public university. I knew I was called to be in full-time ministry. And once I was at SCU I knew I was in the right place for my training and preparation.

One of SCU's former presidents would say this about the university: "SCU is not a perfect university, but it may be the perfect university for you." That certainly applied to me.

In my three years at the school I developed friendships and connections that have shaped my life. Amazing faculty members poured into my life. Incredible professors including Dr. Frank Tunstall, Dr. Garnet Pike, Dr. Spencer Ledbetter and Dr. Chuck Chitwood challenged me.

I never felt like a number at this institution. I was mentored and disciplined. The professors allowed students to ask questions and build relationships with them. I still communicate with most of these professors today.

It was not just the classroom that challenged me to grow; I got many opportunities to serve at the school. Our motto is "Scholarship, Spirit, and Service." I served on the college's chapel band and led worship in some of our chapel services throughout the year.

I acquired an understanding about worship and worship leading from Greg Erway. When I served as president of the Student Senate, I developed leadership skills under great men like Laban West and Otis Garrison.

Finally, I learned how to develop a team and create a culture of teamwork from Coach Mark Arthur when I joined the men's basketball team. Playing collegiate basketball with some of the best men at SCU will always be a highlight of my time at the university.

I believe in Christian education. I've seen the difference between a public and private college, a secular and Christian institution and a large and small school. Within a Christian institution and its environment, especially at SCU, I not only received a great biblical foundation but also a biblical worldview.

My time at SCU prepared me for ministry. When I graduated from Southwestern in 1995, I went to Columbia, South Carolina, where I devoted more than six years as the youth pastor of the West Columbia PH Church under the leadership of Pastor Derrick Gardner. Then I spent 12 additional years as the Senior Pastor of the same church.



The SCU campus is located in Bethany, Oklahoma, a suburb of Oklahoma City.

In the summer of 2013, SCU came knocking on my door. Coach Mark Arthur and Mr. Wallace Hamilton asked if I would be interested in applying for a position at SCU. It was in my heart to work at SCU; however, it never occurred to me that it would be possible. That call changed my life.

My wife, Whitney, and I stepped down from our church and said goodbye to some of the most amazing people. We resigned on one Sunday and arrived in Oklahoma two Sundays later. God was in this transition as He opened a new season of ministry for us.

"I love this school. I love what we are doing to prepare students to impact the world for Jesus Christ."

Over the past eight years I have had the honor of serving as the Vice President of Student Services at SCU. This role is a combination of being a student advocate, a campus pastor, a student activities coordinator, a disciplinarian, a mentor and a disciple maker. I had no idea how the Lord would use me to invest in the lives of so many young men and women.

SCU, with a student population of less than 500, has had students from 30 different countries over the last several years. Each day I have the privilege to learn and grow with so many student leaders. I'm investing in them, just like my teachers and mentors invested in me when I was a student there.

Spiritual formation is important to our institution, and I have seen students transformed at SCU. One student, Kyle Mickleburgh, came to SCU from Wales to play soccer. When I met him, I could see that the Lord had something great for him. Within two years, Kyle was elected Student Government President and began to make a tremendous impact on campus.



A place of opportunity: SCU offers many extra-curricular activities.

Although he knew of religion, Kyle did not know Christ when he first arrived on campus. During our time together, God allowed me to be an example to him of the love of Christ. Kyle would travel with me to youth camps and he experienced the power of God. He turned his life over to Christ and is serving God today in Dallas, Texas.

Another student, Ethan Sellars, came to SCU to play baseball. While at SCU he sensed that God was calling him to ministry. He changed majors and started working with me as the Student Director of Campus Ministry.

Ethan and I spent countless hours working together to enhance the spiritual life program and ministry opportunities on our campus. He impacted so many students while he was at SCU. Currently he is the associate pastor of an IPHC church in Purcell, Oklahoma.

There are so many more stories of students that I had the pleasure to invest in—such as Josiah Olsson, who is now serving in Mississippi with an IPHC church plant. Also, McKenzie Janz and Kylee Vestal served as student leaders with me; now they are teaching at public schools in Oklahoma.

SCU is a place to be disciplined and to make disciples. I love this school. I love what we are doing to prepare students to impact the world for Jesus Christ. I love that God has placed this institution in the IPHC.

The IPHC's schools depend on the generosity of Christians. I encourage you to support SCU in prayer, send students from your church there, and invest your money to meet the school's budget. You can give online at [swcu.edu/giving](http://swcu.edu/giving). □