



Summer 2018

The College of Bible and Ministry of Harding University seeks to lead all students to know, live and share God's Word and to understand, love and serve God's world through and beyond their chosen vocation.

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HEALTHY LEADERS, HEALTHY CHURCHES

A student dropped by my office to talk about his dad. His father had been the preacher for a congregation located in a state far from here, but was now leaving the church. When I asked the young man why, he answered, "Dr. Williams, dad was their preacher for over 15 years, and in all that time they never once sent him off to a lectureship, seminar, or any other place where he could get his cup filled. He's been giving and giving, but now he's just drained."

That sad conversation reminded me of the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19. In the previous chapter, Elijah experienced one of the greatest spiritual "highs" in all the Bible, with an astounding victory over the 450 prophets of Baal. That "high" was promptly followed by one of the deepest "lows" in Scripture, as Elijah becomes drained, despondent, and even depressed.

In response the Lord sends an angel to strengthen Elijah. The angel touches the discouraged prophet and then says, "*Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you*" (1 Kings 19:7).

Can you relate to Elijah's condition? Have there been occasions in your ministry when the journey was too much for you? From time to time could you have benefited from the strengthening touch of an angel?

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New Birth and New Names

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

Editor's Note: Here at Harding University our Bible faculty are involved with many different aspects of kingdom work outside the classroom. In the following article Dr. Randy Willingham, Director of the Center for Spiritual Leadership and Executive Director of Pure Heart Vision Ministry, reflects on his experience working with the John 3:17 Ministry in Remmel, Arkansas.

Have you ever seen the birth of a child? People disagreeing about the existence of miracles often agree that the birth of a person is nearly, if not fully, miraculous.

One of our first responses to new life is to name the baby. The baby's name always involves a story - if we have ears to hear. The stories are meaningful, and they set a trajectory for these new lives.



Sometimes we need to be renamed by one greater than ourselves, by something that alters our life trajectory. The price tag for our new name is to let the old self die.

The John 3:17 Ministry, conservatively, sees 90% of the women participating in that ministry born again of water and Spirit. In 2017 over 40 women embraced death to their old self. Addiction is in the way of God's salvation. As a result, addiction must go ... and it does!

We all know that every child born does not live to his or her full potential or even expected life span. But, love leads God's people to embrace the pain that accompanies the giving of life. The greater our hope the more pain when that hope disappoints. Few hopes are as great as the hope that our children will live their lives fully in the blessings of God. Therefore, very little pain is greater than seeing that potential unrealized.

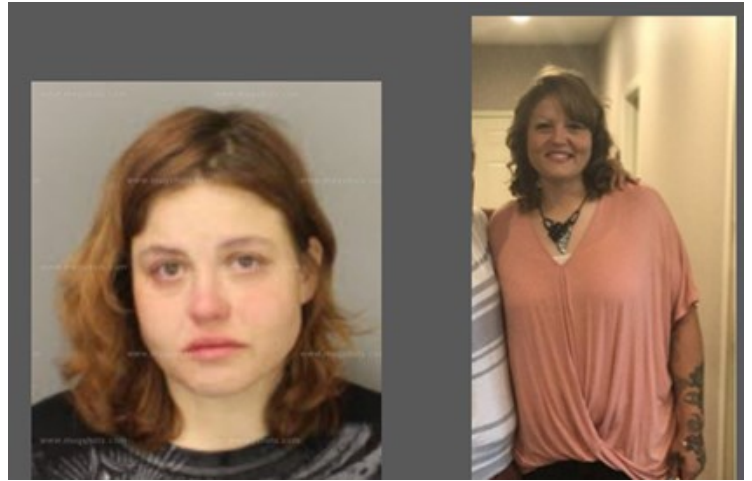
We do not know and cannot control the choices of others, but we do know that the pain of seeking to give godly influence is worth it. Our hope is so important that we pursue it regardless of success or disappointment. Although we feel pain when one person is lost we also rejoice that just over 80% of those completing the ministry remain free from addiction. They are truly "raised from the dead to walk in newness of life."

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Nicodemus joined many others in struggling with the idea of being “born again.” What does that mean? To whom does it apply? How can we tell it has happened? What are the implications for the experts or the “teachers of Israel”? No wonder Nicodemus asked, “can a man ‘enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’”

God’s salvation being relevant to bondage to addiction makes no sense for people blind to the life and death nature of the Gospel. For others these stories are no surprise. Rather, they are expectations. Sober expectations!



As expected with a new birth, these women receive a new name, a new story, and a new trajectory. We cannot change the past, but we can turn the past into a springboard into the future of God’s will for our lives. The women lose old names whereby they were called “addict,” “thug,” “trouble,” and other names I won’t dignify by mentioning. God’s people in Remmel, Arkansas can rightfully call them “God’s angels.” Or, perhaps, the “Queens of the Church.” We may not legally alter their name, but their identity is **beyond repaired**. Their identity is as different as life is from death.

Nicodemus had a point. The birth of which the Bible speaks is not a physical birth entering again into our mother’s womb. The turning point Paul described in Romans 6 is not physical death (although it impacts that death as well). The newness of life or new birth is **not evidenced** by what we call these women as much as it is by what comes from their own mouths.

The women have a name for David Bowman, an elder at the Remmel church who does most baptisms. They call him “Poppy.” It is just like God to use people receiving care to rename the people providing care! These women are like adopted children who end up adopting the family that adopted them. When the adopted children adopt the adopting family something super-natural happens. The meaning of family beyond biology emerges. In other words, the real meaning of family comes to life.

We see Jesus’ truth about family (Matthew 12:48). We see that family is more than biology just as addiction and salvation are about more than brain functioning. We may even discover our own souls as we experience our soul’s true home. John 3:17 women tell me over and over that they would have never come to sustained sobriety were it not for God alive in the church where they experienced soul-healing love.

These children of God see God and it shows. They focus God rather than themselves. As a result, they don’t tend to see that God is also using them to heal the church. God tends to work that way! God designed life so that what we give to others often comes back to us multiplied. I’m told by Suzanne Rudd, assistant director, that we turn down close to 50 women per year due to lack of space. We are taking steps to never turn down even one as long as they are open to God. God has multiplied, and will multiply, this ministry and WE will become more sober as a result.

As the church dies to give life to others we re-experience God’s resurrection life in a dying world. We will also learn that the women of John 3:17 are not our children, but they are God’s children. And, these women are our sisters. In fact, we are twins.

Dr. Randy Willingham, Director
Center for Spiritual Leadership
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That is the role of our Office of Church Relations. Don't get me wrong: I cannot claim any supernatural powers! But it is my personal privilege to direct one of the largest gatherings in our brotherhood, and our purpose in the annual Harding Bible Lectureship is to provide resources, renewal, and refreshment to the many dedicated Christians – elders, deacons, ministers, members – who are on the front lines of the kingdom of God.

Ministers, I invite you to join us for Lectureship on September 30 – October 3. Elders, give your ministers time off to attend – include funds in your budget to make it possible for them to come – and consider coming with them yourself to participate in this year's special "Shepherding Seminar" (see below). It will be a direct investment in your own spiritual and emotional health, and can thus pay big dividends in the health of your congregation.

-Dan Williams, Ph.D.

Church Leaders Seminar

Elders, do you want to sharpen your shepherding skills? This fall's Harding Bible Lectureship will include a special track for elders. Here are the speakers and the topics:

Tom Alexander (Elder, College church, Searcy) will teach two classes on *"A Profile of Godly Leadership – An In-Depth Look at the Qualifications of Elders."*

Ross Cochran (Elder, Downtown, Searcy) will teach two classes on *"Developing the Heart of a Shepherd."*

Willie Nettle (Preacher, Bypass church, Vicksburg, MS) will teach on *"Effective Leadership In A Multicultural Congregation."*

Scott Sager (Preaching Minister, Granny White church, Nashville, TN) will teach the following three shepherding classes:

Elder-Member relationships: *"Eight Keys to Shepherding the Next Generation"*

Elder-Minister relationships: *"Remove the Perspiring from Hiring and Review"*

Elder-Elder relationships: *"3 Keys to Follow the Leader"*

Steve Teel (President, Baxter Institute) will teach on *"Jesus' Leadership Training Manual."*

Noel Whitlock (Preaching Minister, College church, Searcy) will teach on *"What Ministers Want and Need Most From Their Elders."*

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