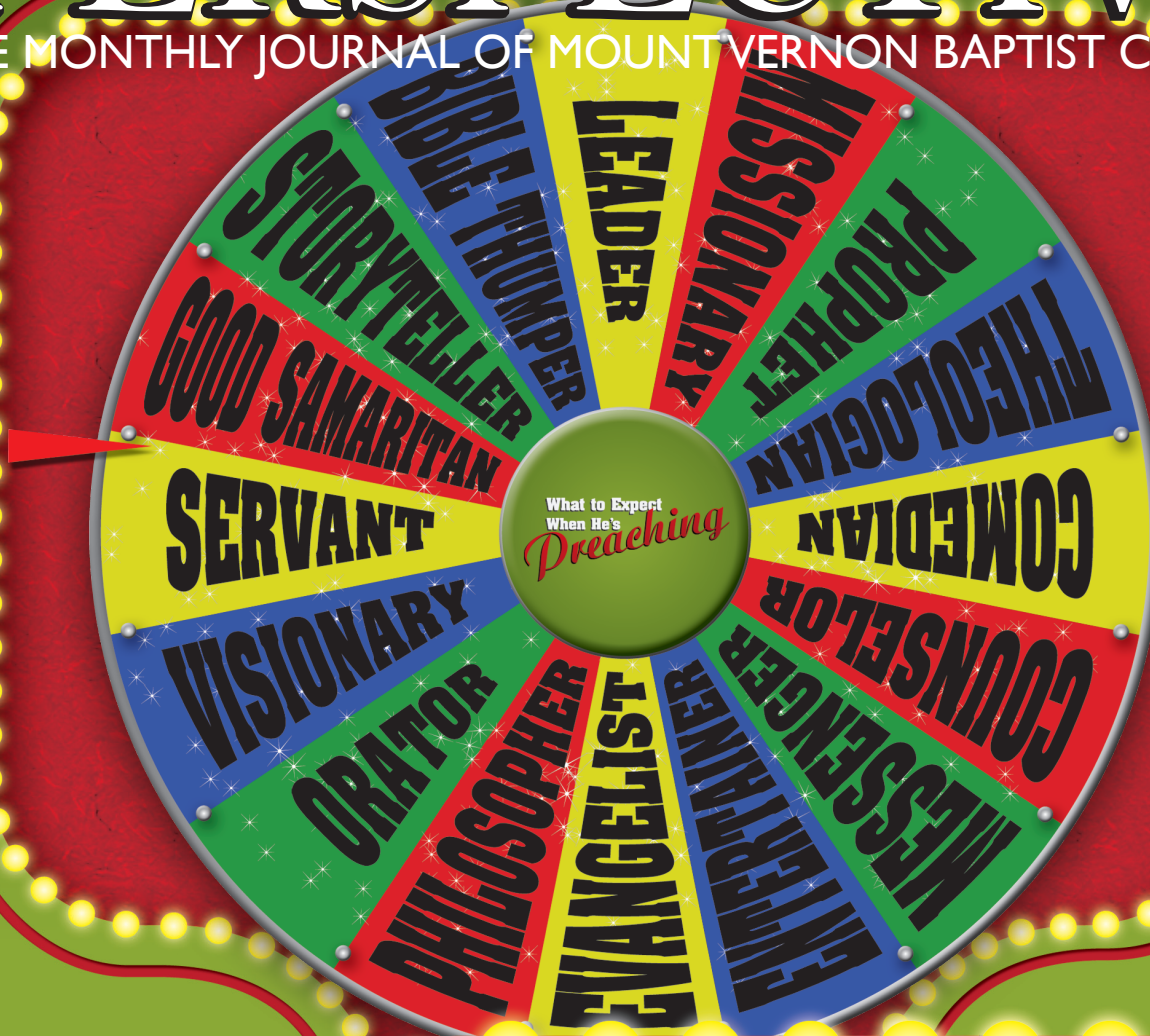


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PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH





850 Mt. Vernon Hwy. NW \ Sandy Springs, GA 30327
Phone: 404.255.3133 \ Fax: 404.255.3166
info@mvbchurch.org \ www.mvbchurch.org



Aaron Menikoff
Senior Pastor
aaronmenikoff@mvbchurch.org



David Carnes
Associate Pastor/Corporate Worship
davidcarnes@mvbchurch.org



Jacob Hall
Pastoral Assistant/Youth
jacobhall@mvbchurch.org



Bert Neal
Administrative Assistant
bertneal@mvbchurch.org



Anne Russo
Financial Assistant
annerusso@mvbchurch.org

Bryan Pillsbury
Associate Pastor/Missions
bryan.pillsbury@mvbchurch.org



Brad Thayer
Assistant Pastor/Administration
bradthayer@mvbchurch.org



Doug Young
Family Ministry Coordinator
dougyoung@mvbchurch.org



Priscilla Barry
Administrative Assistant
priscillabarry@mvbchurch.org



STAFF > SERMON SCHEDULE

- August 5 A Meaningless Life?**
Ecclesiastes 1:1-11
Assistant Pastor: Brad Thayer
- August 12 A Meaningful Life?**
Ecclesiastes 12:1-14
Assistant Pastor: Brad Thayer
- August 19 He Believed in the Devil**
John 8:31-47
- August 26 He Is the Eternal God**
John 8:48-59

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Use the QR reader on your mobile >
device to sign up to receive each
issue of *Perspective* by email.



Ice Cream Social

On Sunday, August 26, we will have our annual homemade ice cream social immediately following the evening service. All are invited to attend.

Sign up sheets are at Connections Corner.

FIGHTER VERSE

August 2012

³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”

³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are
all things To him be glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:34-36

The Bookshelf



CCEF Booklets by Various Authors

Reviewed by Brad Thayer

I HAVE RECENTLY BEEN STUDYING the book of Ecclesiastes. If you're familiar with the book, you'll know that "the Preacher" asks a question that we all do at some point in life—where do we find meaning? Where's the lasting profit in all the toil we spend in life "under the sun" (Eccl. 1:1-3)? In search for an answer, the Preacher explores life's ventures, institutions, pursuits, relationships, and more only to conclude, "All is vanity" (1:2). (I would encourage you to read the book of Ecclesiastes to see how the Preacher comes to this conclusion.)

One of the book's most shocking features is the candor with which the Preacher speaks about life. He is a man who has experienced and attained great things, e.g., wisdom and wealth. Yet, he has come to learn that life isn't as simple as it may seem. He evaluates daily living in pursuit of lasting meaning only to find that it is extremely complex and that God's ways can be inscrutable. In a world that is shot through with sin, the Preacher grapples with the joys and frustrations in life's non-black and white ways.

Isn't that the way we all experience life? So often the struggles we face aren't simple black and white matters. We believe and trust that the Bible is sufficient for all of life's complexities. But knowing how to rightly apply the Scriptures to those complexities isn't as simple as it seems. How do we rightly deal with family feuds, especially when family members are non-

Christians? How do you comfort a middle-aged woman who comes to Christ but still lives with the guilt and regret of having an abortion as a teenager? What do you say to your teenage son who finds relief from life's pain by cutting himself? What do you do when you're burned out on your job after fifteen years, but you know you've got another twenty before you can retire? This is life, as we know it, in its naked exposure. We have issues like these in one hand and the Bible in the other. How do they go together?

Enter the ministry of The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF). They exist to "teach people how to explore the wisdom and depth of the Bible and apply its grace-centered message to the problems of daily living. Simply put [their] mission is to: *Restore Christ to Counseling and Counseling to the Church*" (their emphasis, www.ccef.org/mission-and-ministry). In other words, they exist to help us put the Bible and life's complexities together in a way that is faithful to Scripture and brings transformational change in a person's life.

If you're familiar with Christian counseling, you'll know that CCEF is committed to "biblical counseling." In CCEF's language that means they want to know, "How do the riches of the Gospel impact my life and my efforts to help others? Everything they do flows from our desire to equip Christians to live and love in a Christ-centered way." In addition, they

believe that the “primary context for change” is the body of Christ, the community God uses to transform people. “CCEF’s mission is to equip the church to be this kind of transforming community.” Their ministry is simply an “extension of the local church.” The means by which they seek to accomplish their mission is by providing a robust counseling ministry in their home office in Pennsylvania, offering accredited counseling programs affiliated with many evangelical seminaries, conferences and speaking, and publications. (For more information, visit www.ccef.org.)

I bring CCEF to your attention because you may have noticed that some of their resources have been added to the bookstore. They are “mini-books” published by New Growth Press as part of the publication ministry of CCEF. These booklets were written to equip people with the knowledge of Scripture on a variety of topics. There are over 75 mini-book titles in print. We have 25 available at the bookstore. Some of the topics available deal with angry children, authority issues, conflict resolution, depression, divorce recovery, grief, how to speak the truth in love to a homosexual, pornography, renewing marital intimacy, single parenting, and more.

These mini-books are very inexpensive—only \$3 each. But they are worth much more for personal instruction and ministry. I encourage you to take the time to look at the titles available on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening. As you do so, keep these questions in mind, as they may be of help in your life and relationships.

1. *Is this applicable to me?*

Admittedly, some of the titles could be publicly embarrassing if people knew you struggled with a certain topic. Furthermore, some issues should be kept private or shared only with another brother or sister in the Lord that you know and trust. So the person selling books that day won’t say, “Hey! Is that for you or a friend?” There will be no whispering, “Did you see what John Doe bought? I always thought he walked around a little depressed.” No! This isn’t a resource intended to help you publicly disclose some of your deepest and most personal struggles.

However, I would encourage you to browse these titles with a spirit of humility that is willing to ask, “Is this me?” Some things may be an obvious “No.” But others may not be. Do you struggle losing your temper with your kids? Is it your marriage that needs to renew intimacy? We all live in a fallen world, and we all struggle with the complexities of daily living. Thus, the probability of there being at least one title relevant to you personally is pretty high. Browse with yourself in mind.

2. *Is this applicable to someone I know?*

My wife and I have a friend who is newly divorced and newly a single mom. She’s a Christian who is seeking to be faithful in her walk with the Lord but is deeply struggling in these areas. As soon as these mini-books were available, we bought and mailed her copies of *Divorce Recovery: Growing*

and Healing God’s Way and *Single Parents: Daily Grace for the Hardest Job*. These are great resources to help her orient her thinking about the challenges she is facing.

These mini-books are not the “end-all be-all” for people facing these types of challenges. They are simply a tool for ministry. As you consider browsing with others in mind, also consider how you can *personally* encourage them. Read the booklet before you give it to them. Offer to read and discuss it together. Send a handwritten letter or card with it. Be the member of the body of Christ that is here to help and not simply direct.

3. *Is this a topic I need to be knowledgeable of?*

A quick glance of the titles shows that they are a reflection of our culture. The number of mini-books related to sexuality is an obvious example. Part of our responsibility as Christians is to “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). That is becoming increasingly difficult with changing cultural norms and the growing hostility to biblical truth. Some of these mini-books reflect that challenge.

Are there issues that you should give some attention to? What is a biblical response to eating disorders? How do you biblically care for a child diagnosed with ADHD or Asperger syndrome? What is the problem at the core of sexual addiction? What is the loving and biblical response when your child says, “I’m gay.” You may not know someone who personally deals with these issues. Nevertheless, part of developing a Christian worldview is knowing how to think and respond biblically to such issues. So use these mini-books as a personal equipping ministry. The culture has an answer and diagnosis. Do you as a Christian?

At the end of the day, all of us have “issues.” We are sinners in need of the transforming power of God’s grace wrought by the Holy Spirit. We could have biblical encyclopedias full of diagnoses memorized. But at the end of the day, we can’t change people. No mini-book sold on a rolling bookstore will change people. Only God changes and transforms us. Only God gives us hope to deal with life’s complexities. ■





**What to Expect
When He's
*Preaching***

**What Kind of Man
Should a Preacher Be?**

ON MARCH 28 OF 2010, many preachers like myself took note when John Piper announced he'd be taking an eight-month sabbatical. Piper, the pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the head of Desiring God Ministries, continues to influence a generation of ministers who appreciate his gifts. So when Piper explained his need for rest, pastors listened. He described a soul that needed care:

I see several species of pride in my soul that, while they may not rise to the level of disqualifying me for ministry, grieve me, and have taken a toll on my relationship with Noel and others who are dear to me. How do I apologize to you, not for a specific deed, but for ongoing character flaws, and their effects on everybody? I'll say it now, and no doubt will say it again, I'm sorry. Since I don't have just one deed to point to, I simply ask for a spirit of forgiveness; and I give you as much assurance as I can that I am not making peace, but war, with my own sins.¹

Piper was appropriately vague when it came to the specifics of his sin, though he made it clear there was no unfaithfulness on the part of he or his wife. He simply asserted, "the precious garden of my home needs tending."

Don't you want an elder like this? A man who sees his sin, is willing to confess it, and then fight for the holiness he needs to protect the family and the church that God has given him? Don't you want to make sure that the men ministering the Word to you are careful about their souls?

Piper simply made public the reality that pastors struggle. In principle this should come as no surprise. The Bible is full of godly men who genuinely struggled. Job, David, Peter, and Paul—to name just a select few. The practical danger that every elder faces is that of being double-minded. It is possible to have a genuine concern for the welfare of a congregation while taking pride in the growth of the congregation. Perhaps this is why pride and double-mindedness are so closely linked (James 4:6-8). You need to be aware, as best you can be, of your elder's heart so that you will know how to pray for him and how to encourage him.

In many vocations, success can be quantified. A lawyer knows if he has won the case. A doctor knows if he has saved the patient. A plumber knows if he has fixed the leak. An athlete knows if he has set a record. The success of an elder or a preacher is not so obvious.

In John 6 Jesus delivered a great sermon. He described himself as the bread of life and promised that those who came to him would never hunger or thirst. But his disciples found the teaching hard (John 6:60). Instead of praising Jesus they began to grumble. And by the time the Savior was done preaching, "many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him" (John 6:66).

Jesus preached a sermon that many of his disciples rejected. His words were good and true and wise, but when he was done

the number who followed him had shrunk. So we shouldn't be surprised to find out that it is difficult to quantify spiritual success.

A pastor cannot control his success, but he can tend to his heart. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in doing this, for by so doing you will save both yourselves and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16). It's not that the pastor saves anyone—only God can do that. But God uses the words of a pastor to bring life. A pastor's life is connected to the salvation of those who hear him.

You don't want to sit under the preaching of a man who appears to check in for the service only to check out afterward. Spurgeon called such men "clockwork ministers." They only live for God when they are on the clock, preaching and teaching. I hope this article will help you know better how to pray for the elders and preachers. If you happen to be looking for a church, I hope you learn what to expect not just in a preacher's style but a preacher's heart.

I've written this article with the preacher in mind. But the truth is, most everything I am going to communicate applies to every elder in a church. If you aren't an elder or a preacher, then I hope these words encourage you to know better how to pray for them. I want to ask, "What kind of man should a preacher be?" I'll give three answers. But as you read, don't just think about your preacher or elder. The truth is, each and every one of us should love the church, the cross, and Christ.

A Man Whose Heart is for the Church

The apostle Paul gave his life to preaching the gospel, planting churches, and raising leaders. This is what he did in Ephesus. In Acts 20 we find his final words to the elders of that local church. He gathered these elders together so that he could instruct them, one last time, regarding the magnificence and weight of their calling:

And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you

**Before he ever steps
into the pulpit,
he ought to have
a love for the church—
and not the church in general,
but a specific, local church.**

¹ John Piper, "John Piper's Upcoming Leave." Found at <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/john-pipers-upcoming-leave>.

the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (Acts 20:25-28)

Clearly pastors are men who “oversee” and who “shepherd” the flock. The English word, pastor, literally means, “shepherd.” Verse 28, then, is a mini job description for the man who would preach and lead God’s people.

Notice that this man is to pay attention to himself. Much like a waiter is constantly attending to the table he’s serving, a preacher must attend to his personal life. He cannot neglect his own soul or he will be of no good to the church he has been called to lead.

Far too many pastors are cranking out decent messages every Sunday all the while living deplorable lives. It is why Paul urged Timothy to watch himself and his teaching—his person and his preaching. The two go hand in hand (1 Tim. 4:16). Sure, God can use a preacher whose motives are suspect (Phil. 1:15-18). But God will most surely use a preacher whose heart is pure. Faithlessness makes a man think, “It doesn’t matter how I live.” God’s word and human experience prove otherwise.

But most importantly, Paul taught these elders to “care for the church of God.” He urged them to have a heart for the church they taught and served. The church is precious to the Lord. He bought it with his own blood—the blood of his precious son, Jesus Christ. Preachers should have a sense of the value of the body of Christ and care for her accordingly. Preachers of the church have been entrusted with something very special. Therefore, they must have a heart for the church.

Think of that day new parents bring a baby home from the hospital: the nurses are gone, the parents are alone, and the baby is hungry. They are the ones responsible for that child. Mom and Dad now feel the weight of this amazing responsibility. They have been entrusted with the life of a child they love. The love of a parent for a child is nothing compared to the love of God for his people. So here is Paul, speaking to a group of elders, telling them that they have been entrusted with God’s treasured possession. Christ died for the church. Would they have a heart for the church, too?

It should be no surprise that when Paul wrote Timothy he announced, “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). The task is noble because the people are precious. Similarly, in 1 Tim. 5:17, the elders are worthy of double honor, not because of *their* quality, but because of the quality of the *church* which has been entrusted to them.

Every elder should feel the weight of the ministry to which God has called him. Before he ever steps into the pulpit, he ought to have a love for the church—and not the church in general, but a specific, local church.

I still remember the first Sunday I preached at Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Atlanta. As I looked over the crowd, all I could think of was the faces I’d left behind at my church in Kentucky. I wasn’t even the pastor of the church in Kentucky, but those were the brothers and sisters with whom I had served for years. They were my family. I loved them. And, by God’s grace, they loved me, too. My love for my new church was like wet concrete—it had yet to harden. As time has gone on, as

I’ve performed weddings and funerals, as I’ve met the needs of brothers and sisters and seen them meet the needs of my family, my love for the church has grown. I think that as this has happened, my preaching has even improved—at least I hope so!

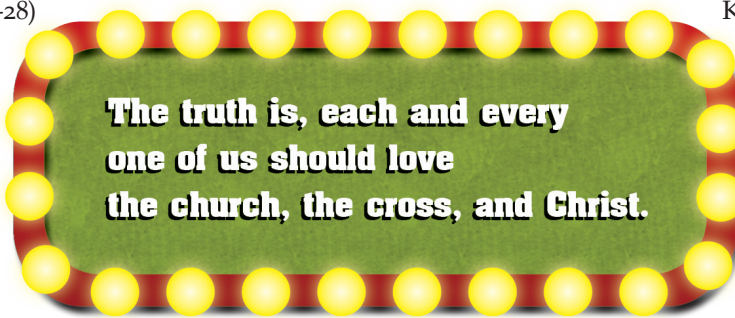
A Man Whose Heart is for the Cross

We have no hope of living for Christ or preaching Christ unless we love the cross of Christ. It is his death that changed us. 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” The ugliest thing in the world is an arrogant elder. He has nothing commendable to set him apart for the office of pastor except a message that he did not write. Paul understood this and rightly explained that it was the message of the cross, and not his delivery, that was valuable:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

In other words, when God wants to use a pastor, he finds a man who has been humbled by the cross. You should want a pastor who is clear about the cross, who is not embarrassed to preach it, and who has been affected by it.

I was saddened one day when an assistant pastor at another church told me that his boss, the senior pastor, had just rebuked him. What had the assistant done? Had he taken money from the offering plate? No. Had he forgotten to visit a shut-in? No. Had he come to the office in cutoff jeans? No. So what had he done? He had urged the senior pastor to share the gospel during the Christmas Eve service, and pressed him about it when the pastor declined. The pastor made it very clear that he was not about to scare away first time visitors with the message of the cross. Little does that pastor know that one day his ministry will be weighed, and if there is little gospel, his work will be found far too light to warrant God’s praise. The only men who should preach are men with a heart for the cross.



A Man Whose Heart is for Christ

Discouragement relentlessly pursues most of us. A couple of years into my ministry I felt it keenly. The church was not growing as fast as I thought it would, my preaching was not improving as fast as I thought it should, and I entertained the notion that, perhaps, I was doing the wrong thing.

I shared my burden with a friend who pointed me to Matthew 13:44, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." What a passage! In the midst of discouragement, the most important thing any of us can do is nurture our heart for Christ. Can we stand before the Lord and say, "You are my hope, the source of my encouragement, the reason for my confidence"?

The verse is easy to understand. There was a man walking in a field who found something very valuable. We aren't told what the treasure is, just that he prized it greatly. The moment he found it, he began to strategize how to keep it. He hid it in the ground for fear it would be either lost or stolen. To secure this valuable object he bought the entire field. Now the treasure belonged to him. If you hear this story and think to yourself, "That man was really greedy!" you are missing Jesus' point. When you find something you really want, you will give up everything to get it.

Have you given years of your life and thousands of your dollars (or your parent's dollars!) to get a valuable education? Do you give the best hours of your day so that your children will have the things you never had? Do you risk your life to serve your country? Do you sacrifice for your husband? For your wife? We all have some idea of what it means to give up what we want so that we can have something even greater.

But the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that a man valued more than anything. This kingdom is the reign and rule of Christ, the King. To value the kingdom of heaven is to value Christ. Jesus is effectively teaching that when you found him, you will do anything for him. You will give up everything for him. It is impossible to overestimate the significance of this challenge. To be a Christian, you have to love Jesus most of all. You have to love him more than your friends, more than your stuff, more than your plan, more than anything. At the heart of Christianity is seeing Christ as our treasure.

Not too long ago, a woman resigned from a church. Her husband, a hardened skeptic, had grown tired of her biblical conviction that the Bible is God's Word, that hell is real, that Jesus died on a cross for sinners, that repentance and faith are necessary...you get the point. She sat in her pastor's office with tears in her eyes while her husband explained he wanted her to go to a church that emphasized food for the hungry, not salvation from sin. This man had come to the conclusion that most Christian churches try to get people into heaven by scaring them about hell. He didn't want his wife anywhere near that theology.

Let's be real clear: hell is scary, and it is appropriate for one to look seriously at the gospel because he is frightened at the

thought of going to hell. And yet, Jesus did not say that the kingdom of God is like a man who escaped a death sentence. He said it was like a man who found a treasure! It is the value and glory and beauty and majesty and excellency of the King that should lead us to worship him. Yes, the church needs pastors who are able to speak unapologetically about the terror of hell. But the church also needs pastors who can present a King so grand that everything and everyone pales in comparison.

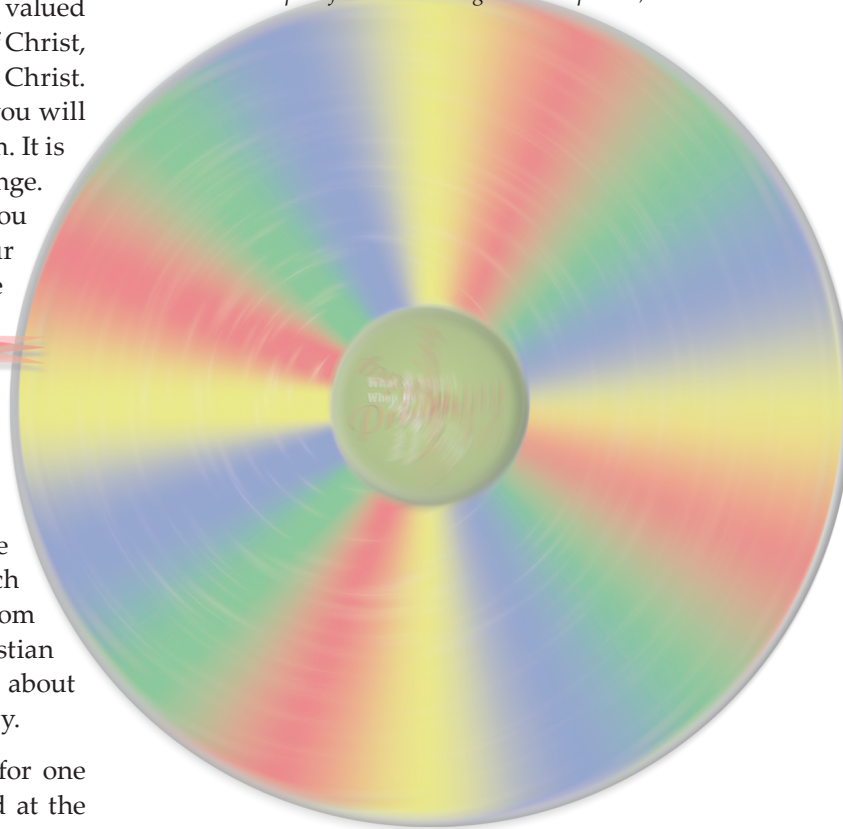
We know that there are no perfect preachers. Sin takes care of that. But surely we can expect more from a pastor than a well-crafted sermon that is chock-full of doctrinal meat and piercing application. We need all that. We need our pastors to do all the right things, but we also need them to want the right things. His heart matters. Does he have a heart for the church? Does he have a heart for the cross? Does he have a heart for Christ? Our churches don't merely need pastors who can preach. They need pastors whose hearts are tender. This was the message of the Methodist preacher E. M. Bounds. His words are true today:

The preacher's sharpest and strongest preaching should be to himself. His most difficult, delicate, laborious, and thorough work must be with himself. . . . It is not great talents or great learning or great preachers that God needs, but men great in holiness, great in faith, great in love, great in fidelity, great for God—men always preaching by holy sermons in the pulpit, by holy lives out of it. These can mold a generation for God.

We can't all know our pastors well, but we can all pray for them. Pray that your elders would do the hard work of tending to their souls, spending time in the Word, and enjoying the gospel. ■

~ Aaron Menikoff

This article is adapted from a sermon given on April 11, 2010.



August 2012

5 ▶ 10:30 am Lord's Supper	6	7	8 ▶ 7:45 pm Wee Worship Workers' Meeting	9	10	11 ▶ 9:00 am Children's Teachers' Training	4
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
19 ▶ 12:30 pm Elementary Family Picnic	20	21	22	23	24	25	
26 ▶ 7:00 pm Ice Cream Social	27	28	29 ▶ 7:45 pm Equipping Matters Teachers' Training	30	31		

EVENTS ◀ ▶ BIRTHDAYS

Churchwide ▼

August 5 10:30 am Lord's Supper

We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationships with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

August 29 7:45 pm Equipping Matters Teachers' Training

All those who will be teaching Equipping Matters classes in the Fall are encourage to come to this training session.

Children ▼

August 8 7:45 pm Wee Worship Teachers' Training

If you currently serve or plan on serving in Wee Worship, please attend this hour-long orientation session. We will spend time discussing our vision for Wee Worship, practical details, and "how-tos" of children's ministry.

August 11 9:00 am Children's Teachers' Training

If you are a teacher of Preschool or Elementary students, please attend our Teacher Orientation. We will spend time together focusing on our mission as teachers and how we can teach well. This will be a formative time together as we seek to be equipped for another year of ministry.

August 19 12:30 pm Children's Family Picnic

Families of preschool and elementary will gather for food and fellowship at Morgan Falls Overlook Park in Sandy Springs. Parents are encouraged to bring a side or a dessert. Hot dogs and hamburgers will be provided. Please join us!

3 Carolyn Versele	17 Paul Holtzclaw
4 Minnie Reddick	Carolyn Nygaard
Jo Anne Padgett	Janet Olver
Nancy Wilkinson	18 Nancy Garner
Wayne Tucker	19 Linda Baugh
Gary Reid	Candy Houser
Mark McCallum	20 Pat Terry
5 Suzi Voyles	Bill Mitchell
David Dorsett	22 Dot George-Phillips
Adam Parker	Jim Heiskell
7 Michael Reagan	JoEllen Langmack
8 J. Lee Gregory	Ben Brewer
Anna Carron	Ricky Hutchins
Jim Wellman	23 Katherine Marshall
Greg Tatum	Cheri Perkins
Ron Harris	Clint Daniel
9 Ruth Murdock	24 Deana Menikoff
Emily Boynton	25 Charles Harkey
10 Bill Franklin	Thomas Dean
Troy Kubes	26 Bob Wharton
11 Kacy Chamblee	27 Charlotte Dixon
Anne Elizabeth Goodgame	Larry Baugh
12 Peg Windham	28 Karen Ford
15 Elinor Becknell	Darcelle Reid
Lisa Blackburn	31 Ida Wheeler
16 Bo Stillwagon	John Galloway
	Julia Gurley



Knowing MVBC is a four-session course that introduces you to life at Mount Vernon, covering the following topics:

- **Knowing Our Commitments: Church Covenant**
- **Knowing Our Beliefs: Statement of Faith**
- **Knowing Our Structure: Leadership**
- **Knowing How to Be Involved: Discipling & Serving**

Anyone interested in membership or knowing more about life at Mount Vernon is invited to **Knowing MVBC**. All four sessions will be offered Sunday, September 9, during the Sunday School hour (session 1) and from 12:15-2:30 pm (sessions 2-3). Lunch will be provided.

You may sign up on the edge of the bulletin, by contacting the church office at 404-255-3133, or by email at info@mvbchurch.org.



850 Mount Vernon Highway NW
Sandy Springs, GA 30327