

Volume VI, Issue 8 • August 2013

PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH

1



PRAYERS FOR GODLY ELDERS



850 Mt. Vernon Hwy. NW • Sandy Springs, GA 30327
 Phone: 404-255-3133 • Fax: 404-255-3166
 info@mvbchurch.org • www.mvbchurch.org

CHURCH STAFF



Aaron Menikoff
 Senior Pastor
 aaronmenikoff@mvbchurch.org



Bryan Pillsbury
 Associate Pastor/Missions
 bryanpillsbury@mvbchurch.org



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



Brad Thayer
 Associate Pastor/Administration
 bradthayer@mvbchurch.org



Doug Young
 Associate Pastor/Family Ministry
 dougyoung@mvbchurch.org



Jacob Hall
 Pastoral Assistant/Youth
 jacobhall@mvbchurch.org



Bert Neal
 Administrative Assistant
 bertneal@mvbchurch.org



Priscilla Barry
 Administrative Assistant
 priscillabarry@mvbchurch.org



Anne Russo
 Financial Assistant
 annerusso@mvbchurch.org

SERMON SCHEDULE

August 4
Rest for Your Souls
 Matthew 11:25–30
 Associate Pastor: Doug Young

August 11
Significant Insignificance
 Philippians 2:1–11
 Associate Pastor: Brad Thayer

August 18
A King Who Bows
 2 Samuel 24:1–25

August 25
Prayers That Matter
 Matthew 6:1–15

FIGHTER VERSE

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

INSIDE THIS EDITION

The Bookshelf:
Keep the Faith by Martin Ayers
 A book review on dealing with doubt.
 by Jim Heiskell

page 2

Cover Article:
10 Prayers for Godly Elders
 An article discussing how to pray intentionally for elders.
 by Aaron Menikoff

page 4



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

Knowing

M V B C

These individuals were voted into membership at the Church in Conference on July 28, 2013. Make a point to get to know and love them.

OUR NEWEST MEMBERS:

The *Knowing MVBC* membership class is a four-session course that introduces you to life at Mount Vernon.

The next class is being offered **Sunday, September 8.**

The first session takes place in room 217 during the Sunday School hour (9:15–10:15 am). The remaining sessions take place in room 232 from 12:00–2:30 pm. Lunch is provided.

Session 1:
Knowing Our Commitments:
Church Covenant

Session 2
Knowing Our Beliefs:
Statement of Faith

Session 3
Knowing Our Structure:
Leadership

Session 4
Knowing How to Be Involved:
Discipling & Serving

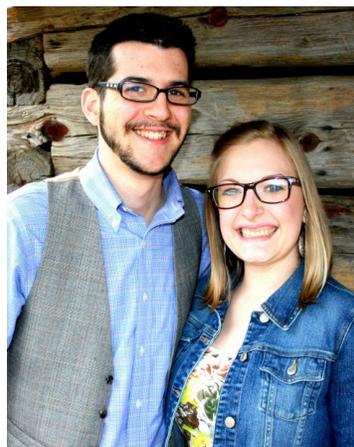
Sign up is available on the edge of the bulletin or by contacting the church office at 404-255-3133 or info@mvbchurch.org.



Kent & Romi Hong
Micah
Marietta, GA



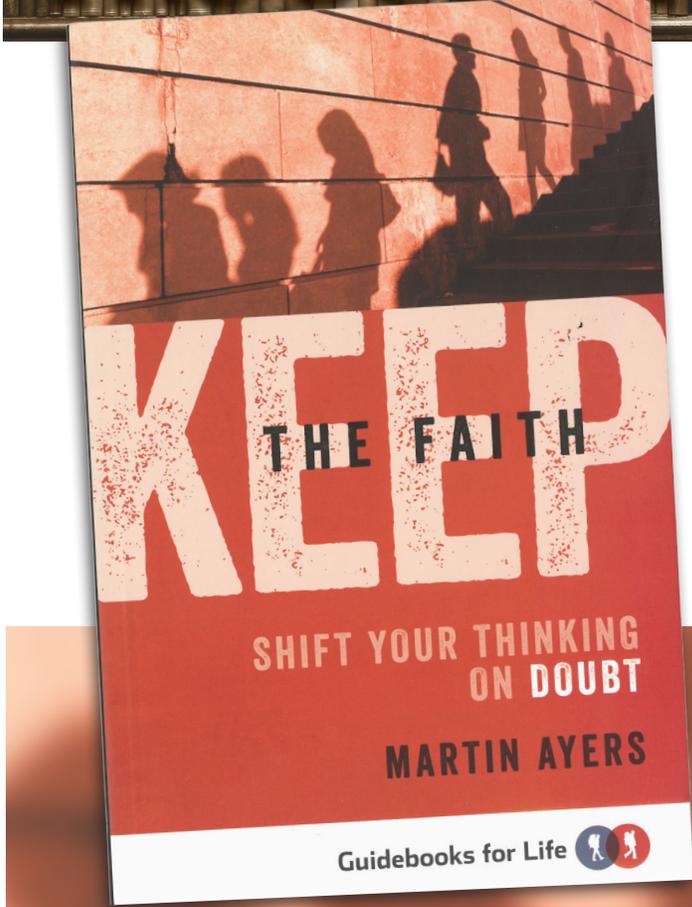
Anthony & Kimberly DiPrima
Kennesaw, GA



Nathan* & Heather Pillsbury
Sandy Springs, GA

* Member prior to Church in Conference

BY THIS ALL WILL
KNOW THAT YOU
ARE MY DISCIPLES,
THAT YOU LOVE
ONE ANOTHER.
—JOHN 13:35



Keep the Faith

by Martin Ayers

Reviewed by Jim Heiskell

In his book *The Effective Executive*, management consultant Peter Drucker observes that when people make a decision *they inevitably start with an opinion and then look for selective facts to fit the conclusion they have already reached.*

In other words, whenever we are faced with a choice, we typically make a decision and then we spend time and effort justifying that choice. We readily focus on those facts that support our original conclusion, but give less weight or even ignore those facts that do not.

We see this all the time in the world of politics. We decide who we are going to vote for and then we view speeches, media communication, and people's opinions as relevant or irrelevant, true or untrue, depending on whether or not the message supports the choice we have already made.

We also see this principle at work when it comes to people's choice about whether or not to accept or reject the gospel message.

In his book *Keep the Faith—Shift Your Thinking on Doubt*, author Martin Ayers writes that when it comes to the truth of the gospel message there is no shortage of evidence for its validity and reliability. But unbelievers ignore the evidence, suppress the truth, and choose not to believe. And if we're not careful, it's possible for those of us who are believers to be caught up with their arguments, lose confidence in what we know to be true, and *begin to doubt our own faith.*

Ayers states that "many believers long for greater confidence in what they believe...in an age when messages contrary to core Christian beliefs inundate us on a daily, even hourly basis. As a result it can be difficult to hold on to gospel truths and live for Christ." Then he states his purpose for writing the book: "I hope this book will deepen your conviction and

encourage you to persevere—to keep the faith—as you consider God's Word and apply it to the issue of intellectual doubts."

How important is it for us to deal with doubts? Ayers writes, "My Christian faith is who I am. My faith in and union with Jesus gives me everything I need. If I lose my faith in Him I would lose everything." But secularism is so rife in our society we might begin to wonder from time to time if we might be wrong and all these other people might be right after all.

The solution, according to Ayers, is that we need to begin to see our doubts as God sees them. That's why he wrote this book. We need to turn to God's Word to grasp what it says about faith and doubt. When we do that we are able to see what's going on in our world in a much different and clearer way.

Ayers suggests a two pronged approach to help us deal with our doubts biblically. He says the first step is to *shift the way we think* by looking in depth at what God has to say about doubt. Then, we need to take the next step and *shift the way we act.*

PART I: SHIFT THE WAY YOU THINK

In the chapter entitled "An Inconvenient Truth," Ayers addresses the issue of those who do not believe. We know that there are always going to be those who reject the gospel outright, but what about those who have examined the evidence with an open mind and simply do not believe? In a reasonable way they say, "I've looked into it but I just don't think it's the truth."

Ayers states that Jesus doesn't leave room for that. In John 3:18–20, Jesus tells Nicodemus that the reason people don't believe is that they prefer to live

in darkness rather than the light. If they believed they would have to change the way they live. They may be intelligent, articulate people but when they argue their reasons for not believing, Jesus hears only one thing—*rebellion*. They are rebels who steadfastly refuse to accept him for who he is and what he's done to bring them into a right relationship with him.

In the next chapter entitled “Turning a Blind Eye,” Ayers focuses on Romans 1:19–20: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Many people look at the world around them and say they do not see evidence of God's existence. They look at creation and say, “There is no creator.” Why? Romans 1:18 tells us that people are suppressing the truth about God in their unrighteousness and as a result, they will experience His wrath. God is angry with them not because they have weighed the evidence and found it wanting, but because they refuse to accept the truth about Him. They have “turned a blind eye” simply because they do not want to be accountable to Him.

As believers we have difficulty understanding why people don't see the evidence of God in creation. We ask, “Why can't they see what is so obvious?” Ayers addresses this question in the next few chapters which I found to be some of the most helpful in the book. In his chapter entitled “Rose-Tinted Spectacles,” he asks why sensible people come up with different conclusions when presented with the same evidence—especially about Jesus. His answer is that none of us look at the world in an unbiased way. None of us are neutral. We look at facts and we interpret them through our own personal set of lenses.

When it comes to evidence about God, unbelievers are not able to remove their glasses to weigh things fairly. As fallen people, they don't want there to be a God who is going to shine His light of truth into their lives, habits, thoughts and actions and expose them. They would rather remain in darkness. As a result they are unable to look at the evidence objectively.

In the next chapter entitled “Finding What You're Looking For,” Ayers explains that some high profile atheists, such as Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens, are not really driven by a zeal for the truth, but a consuming desire to prove there is no God. They hate God and do not want Him to exist, and as a result, their belief has influenced and prejudiced their thinking. Even though they like to present themselves as being objective, they are not. Deep down they simply do not want the gospel to be true.

Ayers then summarizes his thoughts with this statement: “*Belief comes before evidence.*” We have what you might call a “prior commitment.” Once we've made a prior commitment, we see everything through the lens of that commitment.

When unbelievers say you should believe something only if you can prove it by logical thinking or by scientific observation, their argument sounds reasonable on the surface. But their thinking is based on a prior commitment to logic and scientific proof as the only true basis of knowledge. It makes the gospel of Jesus Christ seem highly implausible.

But the Christian faith isn't based on reason and science, it is based upon *revelation*. Jesus reveals to us the God, who we could never know or find on our own. In the opinion of unbelievers, that's against the rules about how people know things and no amount of evidence to the contrary is going to persuade them. But God can and will reveal Himself to those who truly seek Him.

PART II: SHIFT THE WAY YOU ACT

Ayers says that believers who are struggling to keep the faith and deal with their doubts need to *shift the way they act* by remembering three

things: remember the Fall, remember your Redeemer, and remember the stakes.

Remember the Fall

We can't forget that those around us who are ridiculing us for our faith are fallen people — they love the darkness rather than the light. God has told us to expect this and to take courage when our faith is under attack. The victory will ultimately be His.

But what if our doubts persist? Ayers then appropriately asks, what is your alternative position? Why would you believe that alternative over the truth of the Bible? When you weigh all the evidence, you will ultimately come to the conclusion that the gospel message is the only true alternative and there is no reason to go anywhere else. We should not let ourselves be overly influenced by the arguments of those who walk in darkness.

Remember your Redeemer

Things that infatuate us and take the place of God in our lives can become all consuming idols even if they are good things in and of themselves (family and friends, our jobs, church, and schools). When that happens we can easily begin to doubt. To counter this tendency Ayers encourages us to refocus on the person and work of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, and put him back on center stage where he belongs.

Ayers looks at the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1–44) to demonstrate that Jesus is a man of compassion and is worthy of our trust. Instead of pinning our hopes on the false gods of money and power, of sports and entertainment, or whatever takes our mind away from Him, we need to fix our eyes on Jesus who can and will eradicate our doubts.

To help us do this Ayers quotes the words of the late John Stott in his address to the London Men's Convention at the Royal Albert Hall in 2005:

We may speak if we will of Alexander the Great, and Charles the Great, and Napoleon the Great, but not Jesus the Great. He is not “the Great.” *He is Jesus the Only.* There is nobody like Him. He has no peers. He has no rivals. And He has no successors. So our place is on our faces, prostrate before Him in Humble adoration and praise.

Remember the Stakes

Ayers also exhorts us to remember what's at stake. Our decision has eternal consequences. In Hebrews 6, we are warned not to fall away. We need to remember that when we hear God's voice we have a choice. We can choose to respond in faith or in doubt. We can persevere or we can drift. The stakes are life and death.

In his conclusion, Ayers says that what need to do as individuals and as a church body is to keep the faith. We need to keep trusting in Jesus Christ. We need to persist, stand firm in Him, and praise Him continuously.

But we should not try to do this on our own. When we begin to doubt we must not forget the importance of gathering with our local body of believers at Mount Vernon. It is the body of Christ and fellow believers who will help us remember the Fall, remember our Redeemer, and remember the stakes.

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deed, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24–25) ■

1



PRAYERS FOR GODLY ELDERS

More than ever, I'm convinced that what the church needs to today is not better marketing but better leaders. Instead of trying to woo our visitors with the size of our facilities and smoothness of our services, we should be focused upon raising leaders who will teach and model the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ.

Over twenty years ago, in a book that was truly before its time, Douglas Webster asked the question, "What's wrong with marketing the church?"

American Christianity is increasingly tolerant of any and all methods, as long as they bring numerical results...if five thousand people attend church [many think] it must be God's doing. We have virtually eliminated discernment of the will of God—and sadly, that's the equivalent of losing the keys of the kingdom.

Anything goes as long as it is defended for the sake of evangelism or promotes church growth. The single most decisive support for new methods is popularity. If people are buying, the product must be good. Public opinion has become an arbiter of truth, dictating the terms of acceptability according to the marketplace. The sovereignty of the audience makes serious, prayerful thinking about the will of God unnecessary, because opinions are formed on the basis of taste and preferences rather than careful biblical conviction and thoughtful theological reflection. Americans easily become "slaves of slogans" when discernment is reduced to ratings.¹

Webster drew our attention to a pragmatism that crept into American evangelical church life. It is a pragmatism based upon the principle, "If it

works, it must be good." It is a pragmatism that, as Webster pointed out, is defended in the name of evangelism and church growth.

My goal in this article is not to throw stones at church growth. I want our church to grow, spiritually *and* numerically! But in the midst of our desire to promote church growth, we've too often neglected one of the most basic, New Testament principles: the importance of developing godly elders. It's a principle Paul showed Timothy: "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (11 Tim. 2:1–2).

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF ELDERS

Our move to elders has been by far the biggest change to take place at Mount Vernon since my arrival in 2008. I believe that the most biblical model for church leadership is a group of elders who have the responsibility for meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation along with several deacons who have the responsibility for meeting the congregation's physical needs.

That churches should, wherever possible, be led by more than one elder is obvious from passages like Acts 20:17 where Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet with him; Titus 1:5 where Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders; and 1 Peter 5:1 where Peter encouraged the elders to shepherd the flocks entrusted to their care. In each instance the author refers to more than one elder serving a local church.

Many if not most nineteenth-century, Baptist churches in America had plural elder leadership. However, by the mid-twentieth century, American Baptist churches had adopted a CEO style of leadership with the preaching pastor as the elder-in-charge and the deacon body serving as a board of directors. This change was probably the result of two factors. First, the

¹ Douglas Webster, *Selling Jesus* (InterVarsity Press, 1992), 29.

rapid growth of churches during America's Second Great Awakening. There simply weren't enough qualified men to lead churches! Second, the compelling model of corporate America. If companies needed a CEO to ensure efficiency in the marketplace, surely churches needed one leader to encourage efficiency in the spiritual marketplace—or so we thought.

However, the Bible does not present us with a single-leader model. We find instead congregations led by a handful of godly men, each with the ability to teach others the Bible. Their job is to shepherd the flock by caring for the church, feeding her the Word of God, and protecting her from false teachers. Meanwhile, deacons are not a body that serves as a board of directors over the church. Rather, the deacons are servants (1 Tim. 3:13) who bring unity to the body of Christ by meeting physical needs that, if left unmet, could distract us from our core mission (Acts 6:1–7).

Elders are entrusted with the glorious and difficult task of getting involved in our lives, striving to see that we know the Word and follow it. Pastor Thabiti Anyabwile reminds us that this is not easy:

Repeatedly the Bible describes Christians as sheep. It is not a flattering description. But it is an accurate one. Christians are messy people. Our lives are filled with brokenness, waste, trouble, and sticky situations. We are timid, and we sometimes wander. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). This is why we need shepherds, men who know what to do with sheep, how to care for us, lead us, and navigate our mess! ²

This is the model of leadership that Mount Vernon adopted in 2010. I shepherd Mount Vernon with a number of godly men who want nothing more than to serve the church of the living God.

But what does raising up godly elders have to do with church growth?

One day while Jesus was spending time with his disciples, he told them a short parable about a blind man trying to lead another blind man. It didn't go very well, they both fell into a pit! Jesus was pointing out the importance of godly leaders, leaders with eyes to see the pits in the road and the wisdom to walk around them. “A disciple is not above his teacher,” Jesus said, “but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). The elders are the teachers of the congregation, the men the congregation is most likely to turn to for spiritual comfort, instruction, and rebuke. In the process, the members of the congregation will become like their elders. In other words, the strength of the elders will become the strength of the body as a whole and, sadly, the weaknesses of the elders will become the weaknesses of the church, too. It is foolish to think about church growth without simultaneously thinking about elder growth.

A HEART TO PRAY FOR OUR ELDERS

So you see, if we want our church to produce healthy, spiritual fruit, we need godly elders who know how to lead. With this in mind, I'd like to recommend some ways that you can pray for the elders God has raised up at Mount Vernon.

First, pray that our elders would have a desire to serve.

Nowhere does Paul require that every man desire to serve the church as an elder. However, Paul does state that those men who do aspire to the office are aspiring to something noble, something good. Pray that our elders remember that. Elders are the ones most likely to hear complaints about the church, most likely to know the difficulties facing individual members in the church and, therefore, most likely to grow weary serving

the church. At times like these, it is vital that our elders remember that the office, as challenging as it may be, is a noble one.

It is tempting to think of a body of elders as a group of men, sitting in a room, making decisions and recommendations regarding the direction and future of the church. However, the elders spend much more time reaching out to members in need, discerning the state of their spiritual health, and offering counsel and encouragement. This type of work is as exhausting as it is beneficial. So pray that our elders would recognize that the work God has called them to is precious. Pray that in the midst of their work, however tiring it may be, they would have a desire to serve.

Elders should do the hard work of letting members into their lives.

Second, pray that our elders would be holy.

So many of the qualifications that Paul gave Timothy had to do with the personal holiness of the elder. He is to be the husband of one wife—literally, a “one-woman-man.” He is to be sober-minded, self-controlled, and respectable. All in all, an elder is to be a pillar of virtue and a model to both the church and the outside community of what it looks like to live in the grace of God.

There should be an other-worldliness to the life of an elder. He should evidence the reality that this world is not his home, and so he is not enamored of the things it offers. He need not be a monk. He may, in fact, enjoy the many good gifts held out by our Lord this side of heaven. But the elder must find a way to be detached from the world in which he lives. As the old adage goes, he must be in the world but not of the world.

Writing as an elder to elders, the Anglican minister Charles Bridges referred to this kind of lifestyle as “the self-denying character of the cross of Christ.” He lamented the way so many elders wind up squirreling away their thoughts and their time without concern for the holiness of God. Bridges calls the elder to look at his life and ask what distractions are robbing him of godliness: “Whatever experience has proved to chill our fervour, to dissipate our mind, to divert our attention, or to occupy a larger portion of time or interest, is the ‘right eye,’ that we are called to ‘pluck out and cast from us.’” ³

As I write these words, Eliot Spitzer and Anthony Wiener, two disgraced politicians, are seeking election once more. They believe that a sufficient number of voters will overlook their sexual indiscretions and restore them to public office. The threshold for elected office is only as high as the people demand. But the same is *not* true for the church. God has set the standards, and the elder must be self-controlled, or he is not fit to serve.

Pray that our elders would guard their hearts against “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions” (1 John 2:16). Pray that they would make a covenant with their eyes not to look lustfully at a woman (Job 31:1). In short, pray that they would be holy. In Christ we can be holy by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray that the elders lead the way.

Third, pray that our elders would be shepherds at home.

Before Mount Vernon called me to be her pastor, I heard from more than one member of the search committee that the congregation was committed to calling a pastor who would faithfully shepherd his wife and

²Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Crossway, 2012), 47–48.

³Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (Banner of Truth, 1967), 137. First published in 1830.

children. The congregation wanted the pastor to model discipleship in the home. The search committee was on to something.

The church growth movement of the mid to late twentieth century had the unintended consequence of driving a wedge between faith and the family. Large churches had both the material resources and the personnel to cater to the individual needs of their members. Church became the equivalent of a shopping mall. Mom had her store, dad his store, the kids their store. The net result was dads farming out the responsibility for disciplining their wives and children to the ministry professionals hired by the church. And why have these dads fallen short? At least part of the problem, argues David Prince, is the lack of good role models:

Far too often, Christian fathers define success according to self-generated standards, forsaking their role as the shepherds of their home in an ambitious pursuit of power or achievement, material possessions or personal acclaim. Other fathers, typically young adults in what has been appropriately dubbed “Generation Me,” simply forsake their role as the family shepherd in the quest for self-pleasure and trivial pursuits. While it is common for evangelical pastors to bemoan the passivity of men in their congregation—passivity exhibited through a lack of paternal leadership in the home—too often the passivity they critique is nurtured by the very leadership model they present to families in the congregation!⁴

No pastor’s home will be perfect, but every married elder should strive to model a tenderness toward his wife, a patience with his kids, and a commitment to personally discipling each and every member of his household. Pray that our elders would be shepherds at home.

It is foolish to think about church growth without simultaneously thinking about elder growth.

Fourth, pray that our elders would be disciple-makers.

None of us is surprised when we read the apostle Paul urging believers to follow his example: “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 5:15-16). Paul concluded that his ministry could not be reduced to teaching. He had to model the faith. His heart for new believers is evident in his words to the church in Thessalonica, “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:8).

Paul is, of course, unique in that he was an apostle. But he establishes a pattern of Christian living for other believers to follow. We are to long for other believers to grow in their faith. They mature by hearing our words and by seeing our lives. Paul communicated the gospel, but Paul also shared his life. The two go hand-in-hand. By establishing this pattern, Paul was simply obeying the Great Commission, the command of Jesus himself to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19).

In order for this to happen in our church, elders must roll up their sleeves and slog their way into the lives of members. Not only that, elders

should do the hard work of letting members into their lives. This isn’t easy. Time and energy are against them! They have jobs to do, families to care for, rest to enjoy. But if the church of Jesus Christ is going to press ahead, if disciples are going to be made, then elders have to lead the charge.

So pray that our elders would be disciple-makers. Pray that they would find ways to fold believers into their lives. Pray that they would have wisdom to know how to encourage a culture of disciple-making at Mount Vernon.

Fifth, pray that our elders would be good teachers.

It has been noted by many that only two qualifications of being an elder are unique to the elder. First, according to Paul in 1 Timothy 3:6, an elder must not be a recent convert. And in verse 2 we are told that an elder must be able to teach. What does it mean to be able to teach? New Testament scholar Ben Merkle summarizes: “Elders must be able to communicate God’s Word in a way that is accurate and understandable.”⁵ I’d add that an elder should be able to find and communicate the meaning of a biblical text and accurately apply it to a member of the flock he shepherds.

It is easy for churches to expect too much from teachers. In our entertainment driven culture, we are tempted to demand our teachers to be part comic, part historian, part therapist, and part prophet. What we simply need are men who are able to open the Bible, explain a text, and describe its significance for our lives today. This may take place in a Sunday sermon, a Bible study, or even a one-on-one encounter.

Pray that our elders would do this regularly and do this well. Good teachers will be in the Word, wrestling with its meaning, praying over its implications, and looking for opportunities to share what they have learned. Thus it is important for an elder to spend personal time with God in his own private devotions. Congregations today are in less need of men committed to efficiency and in more need of men committed to truth. This commitment is on display when no one is watching—when the man of God is deep in a book of the Bible, looking to Scripture for the nourishment that matters most. Pray that our elders would be good teachers.

Sixth, pray that our elders would have the wisdom of Solomon.

As a young man, David’s son, Solomon, was given the opportunity of a lifetime. The LORD God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” Solomon asked for wisdom: “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (1 Kings 3:5, 9).

Today, every believer is promised wisdom: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). Nonetheless, elders have the unique responsibility of shepherding the flock of God, and they need wisdom from God to do it well. How will the elders answer the young man who wonders if he is suited for pastoral ministry? How will the elders decide whom to recommend to the congregation for positions of leadership? How will the elders decide what budget to recommend for the congregation’s consideration? How will the elders decide what it looks like when a spouse is abandoned? The questions go on and on, and the answers are rarely obvious.

God was pleased with Solomon’s request, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold I now do according to your word” (1 Kings 3:11-12). So, pray that our elders would have wisdom.

⁴David Prince, “The Pastor’s Home as Paradigm for the Church’s Family Ministry,” in *Trained in the Fear of God* (Kregel, 2011), 169.

⁵Ben Merkle, *Why Elders?* (Kregel, 2009), 68.

Seventh, pray that our elders would have the steadfastness of Job.

Life is full of trouble. Few problems are resolved quickly. The Christian life is one of suffering that is to be endured, not avoided. Thus James tells his readers, “Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11).

Read the book of Job and you’ll discover that he lost almost everything: his family, his wealth, his prestige, even his health. Like a newspaper in the rain, Job’s life seemed to dissolve before his very eyes. And yet, we are told that Job never accused God of wrongdoing. He was a godly man who was patient and steadfast in the midst of his troubles. He lived with resolute confidence in the sovereignty and goodness of God. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb,” Job cried out, “and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

For many Christians today, it takes only a thimble-full of suffering to lead us to despair. We are far too quick to give into temptation. Elders have a remarkable role to play in the body of Christ. They can model for us the patience of Job. They can show us that life without Christ is not worth living. They can prove in their attitude and their conduct that, as Jim Elliot put it, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Elders can model a joy that is not dependent upon our circumstances but rather upon Christ’s finished work on the cross. Do not pray that our elders would suffer, but pray that when they suffer, they would have the steadfastness of Job.

Eighth, pray that our elders would know the body.

Jesus taught that the world will know that we are his disciples by the love we have for one another (John 13:34). But how can we love one another if we don’t even know one another? Thus, an important part of the ministry of the elders is encouraging members of the congregation to be in one another’s lives. In a city as large as Atlanta, this isn’t easy. But the elders can help by being deliberate in their own attempt to know the congregation.

The elders do this in a number of different ways. We pray through the membership directory regularly, stopping to discuss how individuals are doing, and how we might be able to shepherd them better. We regularly phone or follow up personally with members. (You can probably tell that our membership directory is a very important tool for the elders.) We also try to take advantage of the public meetings of the church. Every meeting is an opportunity to “stir up one another to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). We should never attend a church simply to be there. We gather to praise God and encourage one another to follow Christ better.

Knowing each other doesn’t happen accidentally. We must make the time to invest in each other’s lives. And when the world sees the way we do just that, many of them will see that we are different. And when they see that, they’ll see that our Master is different. Lord willing, they will ask why, and they’ll discover that he is God.

Pray that our elders would know the body and love the body and, in so doing, model the gospel in an unbelieving world.

Ninth, pray that our elders would be evangelists.

A friend recently told me about her father’s visit to get his haircut. He sat down in the chair, looked at his barber in the mirror, and asked him, “Do you go to church?”

When his barber said yes, he followed up, “How do you know you’ll be in heaven?” The barber explained that he tried to live a good life. My friend’s father is a retired pastor now in his eighties, and he took that works-based answer as an opportunity to share the gospel.

This is what we want to see in the lives of our elders: a concerted effort to share the gospel with their neighbors, their families and, yes, with their

barbers! We want elders with evangelism on their heart. I like how Mack Stiles put it:

It’s good to think through settings where you might be able to share your faith. Do you have a trip coming up? Will you be on a school field trip? Are you greeting new people at church? I find that often the biggest obstacle to evangelism is a mental block to sharing. Make sure the gospel is on your heart and that you are open to God opening doors for you.⁶

Pray that our elders would be evangelists.

Tenth, pray that our elders would be humble.

Peter has wise counsel for local church elders. He urges them to serve willingly, even eagerly. But then he warns them to avoid being domineering (1 Pet. 5:1–3). Peter knew that elders would be tempted to pride, so he exhorted them to minister the way Jesus did, humbly. Our Savior is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He is not to be trifled with. And yet, surprisingly, he did not come in chariots of gold but in a manger of wood. Paul knew the significance of Jesus’ humility:

Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (Phil. 2:3–7)

If this is how our Chief Shepherd operated, how much more should elders, undershepherds of the flock of God, live and lead? Don’t misunderstand me: shepherds must boldly and bravely protect the church against false teachers. They must advocate purity, make hard decisions, and boldly proclaim the gospel in a world that doesn’t want to hear it. But the second their ministry is tinged with arrogance and pride, it ceases to be Christ-like.

Richard Baxter, a seventeenth-century pastor, warned elders of the sin of pride: “Consider I beseech you, brethren, what baits there are in the work of the ministry, to entice a man to selfishness, even in the highest works of piety. The fame of a godly man is as great a snare as the fame of a learned man. But woe to him that takes up the fame of godliness instead of godliness!”⁷

Pray that our elders would not serve out of a sense of self-importance or conceit, but out of gratitude for the amazing grace that Christ has shown them. Pray they would be humble.

CONCLUSION

I am so grateful for the men God has raised up to shepherd the church at Mount Vernon. The work is not easy, but it is wonderful. Will you pray for these men? Perhaps you aspire to one day be an elder. Look at this list of prayer requests, and begin to pray them for yourself.

All elders, including our own, are far from perfect. But even in their imperfection, there is room to give thanks. It reminds us that our confidence must never finally be in men but in our Lord Jesus Christ. God alone is worthy of our faith and hope. ■

~ Aaron Menikoff

⁶Mack Stiles, *Marks of a Messenger* (InterVarsity Press, 2010), 115.

⁷Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Banner of Truth, 1974), 145. First published in 1656.

August 2013

1	2	3
4 10:30 am Guest Preacher: Doug Young 10:30 am Lord's Supper	5	6
7	8	9
10 9:30 am Children's Teachers' Training 10:00 am Student Rafting Trip 1:00 pm Wee Worship Training 7:00 pm Missions Fellowship Dessert	11	12
13	14 7:45 pm Wee Worship Training	15
16	17	18 12:00 pm Family Picnic at Morgan Falls 4:30 pm Sunday School Leaders' Meeting
19	20	21 7:45 pm Wee Worship Training
22	23	24 8:30 am Equipping MVBC
25 9:15 am Promotion Sunday 7:00 pm Ice Cream Social	26	27
28	29	30
31 7:00 pm Missions Fellowship Dinner	30	31

EVENTS

CHURCHWIDE

August 4 10:30 am Lord's Supper

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

August 25 7:00 pm Ice Cream Social

Our next church-wide fellowship will be an ice cream social. Sign up sheets are available at Connections Corner.

ADULT

August 18 4:30 pm Sunday School Leaders' Meeting

August 24 8:30 am Equipping MVBC

One of three foundational courses at Mount Vernon, *Equipping MVBC: The Discipleship Class* will cover what it looks like to teach and disciple one another with the Word and how to take further steps in creating a culture of discipleship. Breakfast will be provided.

CHILDREN

August 10 9:30 am Children's Teacher Training

If you are serving as a teacher to our Elementary or preschool classes on Sunday morning, please come to our annual orientation session. Childcare will be provided if needed. Each session will be about an hour. Contact Doug Young for more details or questions.

August 10 1:00 pm Wee Worship Training

If you are serving on our Wee Worship rotation, please come to one of our annual orientation sessions. Childcare will be provided if needed. Each session will be about an hour. Contact Doug Young for more details or questions.

August 14 7:45 pm Wee Worship Training

August 18 12:00 pm Family Picnic at Morgan Falls

Families of preschool, elementary, and youth are invited to join us at Morgan Falls for a wonderful time of food and fellowship. The church will provide hamburgers and hot dogs, and sign up sheets for side dishes are available at Connections Corner.

August 21 7:45 pm Wee Worship Training

August 25 9:15 am Promotion Sunday

Children and students will graduate to their next class for Sunday School.

STUDENTS

August 10 10:00 am Student Rafting Trip

The students will go white water rafting on the Ocoee River. Contact Jacob Hall for more details.

MISSIONS

August 10 7:00 pm Missions Fellowship Dessert

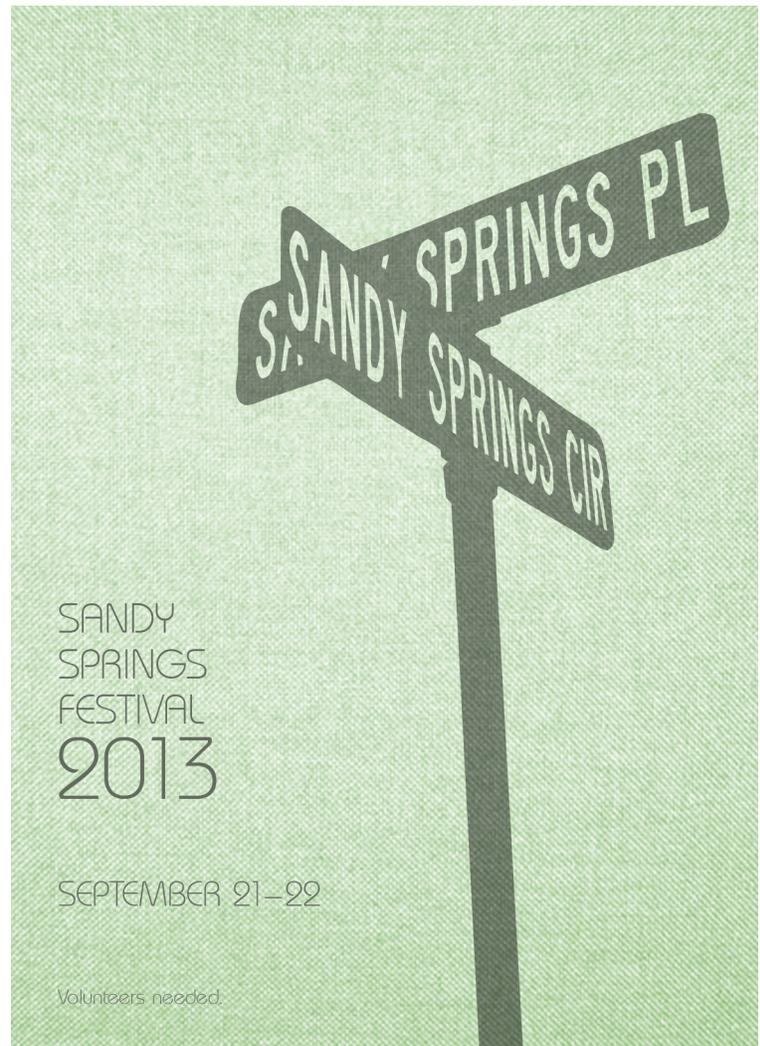
Joel and Carolyn Roberts will be hosting a dessert fellowship at their home to meet and hear from an Algerian pastor and his wife Please RSVP to Carolyn by August 7.

August 31 7:00 pm Missions Fellowship Dinner

There will be a fellowship dinner at the home of Sam Galbraith to meet and hear from an Egyptian pastor associated with MVBC. You will have an opportunity to hear what God is doing not only in Egypt, but also throughout the Middle East.

BIRTHDAYS

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|----|---------------------|
| 2 | Amy Lambert | 18 | Nancy Garner |
| 3 | Carolyn Versele | 19 | Linda Baugh |
| 4 | Mark McCallum | | Candy Houser |
| | Jo Anne Padgett | 20 | Bill Mitchell |
| | Minnie Reddick | | Pat Terry |
| | Gary Reid | 22 | Ben Brewer |
| | Wayne Tucker | | Dot George-Phillips |
| 5 | David Dorsett | | Jim Heiskell |
| | Suzi Voyles | | Ricky Hutchins |
| 8 | Anna Carron | 23 | Clint Daniel |
| | J. Lee Gregory | | Katherine Marshall |
| | Jim Wellman | 24 | Deana Menikoff |
| 9 | Ruth Murdock | 25 | Charles Harkey |
| 10 | Bill Franklin | 26 | Bob Wharton |
| | Troy Kubes | 27 | Larry Baugh |
| 11 | Kacy Chamblee | | Charlotte Dixon |
| | Anne Elizabeth Goodgame | 28 | Karen Ford |
| 12 | Peg Windham | | Darcelle Reid |
| 15 | Elinor Becknell | 31 | Julia Gurley |
| | Lisa Blackburn | | Ida Wheeler |
| | Ila Gressette | | |
| 17 | Paul Holtzclaw | | |
| | Carolyn Nygaard | | |
| | Janet Olver | | |





Mount Vernon

BAPTIST CHURCH

850 Mount Vernon Highway NW
Sandy Springs, GA 30327