



PERSPECTIVE

DECEMBER 2021

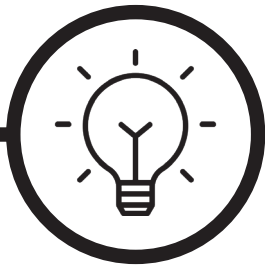
CHERISHED PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN

ROME & ANTIOCH

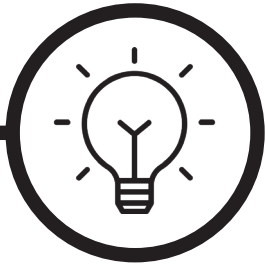
CONTENTS



ARTICLE 1
Cherished Partnership Between Rome & Antioch
John Folmar



BOOK HIGHLIGHT 3
Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken
by David Powlison
Recommended by Dustin Butts



BOOK HIGHLIGHT 4
Voices: Who Am I Listening To?
by Andy Prime
Recommended by Mike Blackburn



BIBLE READING PLAN 5
Take Up & Read
December

Cherished Partnership Between Rome and Antioch

THE CHURCH AT ROME: LAUNCH PAD FOR GOSPEL ADVANCEMENT

Paul's letter to the Romans has been called "the greatest missionary support letter in the history of the world." The apostle wrote it to expound "the gospel of God," and then to solicit their support in his missionary enterprise to the western-most part of the known world, Spain.

"I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while" (Rom 15:24).

Rome was to be a gospel platform, a new launch pad for further work westward into Europe. Paul wanted the church in Rome to assist him.

Just as (years earlier) the church at Antioch had fueled evangelism westward into Asia minor, so now the church at Rome would fuel evangelism westward to Spain.

Today, many people think of missions agencies as the crucial players in global evangelization. And it's true, for years these agencies have pooled resources and expertise to make a valuable contribution to the global cause.

But in the New Testament, the local church is the engine that drives strategic missions work.

Many of our cities today are like Rome: strategic—located at important crossroads, touching on unreached people groups. Dubai is in the dead center of the most unreached population on the globe.

Increasingly, global cities around the world are home to multi-national churches that worship in the English language, the *lingua franca* of our day. These churches reach countless national and ethnic groups, even through English as a second language. In an age of globalization and Facebook, more and more unreached people speak English, even though it's not their first language. Their universities teach in English. They do commerce in English.

International churches are an often-neglected platform for reaching the unreached.

This is what the United Christian Church of Dubai aspires to be. We want to be faithful to God's Word, to love one another deeply from the heart, and to reach out with the good news to the many nations that have converged in Dubai. And when expatriates return to their ancestral homes (places like Kazakhstan, Somalia, and Iran), they will take the gospel back with them.

Our strategy is simply New Testament Christianity:

- ✦ Declaring the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)
- ✦ Making disciples, baptizing and observing the Lord's Supper (Matt 26, 28)
- ✦ Abounding in our love for one another (1 Thes 3:12)
- ✦ Training mature believers who will then teach others (2 Tim 2:2)
- ✦ Proclaiming repentance and forgiveness to all nations (Luke 24:47)

Consider one example. In 2013, we planted a new congregation in the northern-most emirate of the UAE, Ras Al Khaima (RAK). The Muslim sheikh had invited us to build a church building there, in a city of 300,000 located at the strait of Hormuz, 40 miles offshore from Iran.

After the church was gathered, some people began moving to RAK just to be a part of the community and live out the Christian life there, hoping to engage with the local people. Some members worked in the Sheikh's palace there—one was the Ruler's chief of staff. Several built friendships with their Emirati neighbors and were able to share the good news with them.

One church member taught at a private school and had several Emirati high school students in her history class. While teaching on the Protestant Reformation, this teacher required the Emirati students to learn about the doctrines of grace, and they actually memorized TULIP! So, somewhere in RAK, there are young Emirati high school students who know about total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints!

Every year, dozens of locals and religious leaders visited the pastor's home for an officially-sponsored "Christmas Education Event" to hear the true message of Christmas! Such opportunities were unprecedented and, by God's grace, are continuing.

Healthy churches overseas are launch pads for gospel work. There is a reverberating effect as the gospel is proclaimed and God's people are built up in maturity, enabling them to reach out more faithfully to the outside world.

THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH: SENDING, SACRIFICING, SUPPORTING

The first "overseas mission" was originated by the Holy Spirit and planned and executed by members of a local church.

"Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and

teachers...While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:1-3).

What resulted from this mission? The establishment of new congregations in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Fast-forward to the end of their initial journey: "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14:23). Sometime later, they returned to Antioch and reported to the sending church "how [the Lord] had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples" (Acts 14:27-28).

Their method was to go, evangelize, plant churches, establish biblical leadership (to govern those churches), and then commit them to the Lord in prayer.

Notice how costly this enterprise was. Can you imagine losing not one but two leaders of the caliber of Paul and Barnabas? What about the people back home? What about the many pastoral needs crying out for attention there in Antioch? The marriages, the pastoral care, the evangelism! Couldn't Paul and Barnabas have effectively served those needs back home? Yes, but this church was willing to send out powerful, productive leaders to push the boundaries of the gospel farther than they had ever been pushed before. The church at Antioch paid the price to make it happen.

They were generous, outwardly focused, self-sacrificial.

Like Antioch, Mount Vernon Baptist Church is a "missions-minded" church that cares about God's work beyond the walls of your building—whether in Clarkston, Nairobi, or Dubai. You possess an Antiochian excitement for gospel advancement, plus a wealth of resources in people, experience, and finances. You have shown a willingness to sacrifice the time and energy of your elders to train other church leaders, so they can serve other churches more fruitfully. Your goal isn't church growth, so much as it is gospel growth. As Colin Marshall wrote in *The Trellis & the Vine*, "We must be willing to lose people from our own congregation if that is better for the growth of the gospel...Some of your best people—in whom you have invested countless hours—will leave you. They will go to the mission field."

Among the work you have supported in the UAE alone (not to mention other places):

- UCCD's pastoral internship program, enabling us to train and equip more men for gospel work

in places like Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Somalia, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, India, Nepal, Japan, the UAE, and beyond.

- When UCCD's budget was impacted, your pastor emailed, "We hear that UCCD might be having some financial difficulties given the economy in Dubai. Is that true? We'd like to help if we can, but we just want to make sure the rumor we heard is accurate." The rumor was accurate, and you did help.
- Immanuel Church of Fujairah, where you sent Jesse Brannen and family.
- Melissa's evangelistic work among an unreached people living in Al Ain.
- Personal support of the Folmars during an extended family leave of 2021.
- FOCUS, the UAE's church-centered, evangelistic student ministry.

It's all too easy to lose interest in supported missionaries who haven't been around for a while. There is so much closer to home demanding our attention and prioritization. But you have visited and encouraged supported workers overseas, extended generous hospitality to missionaries stateside, cared for us pastorally, reminded us of the importance of our ministries, and built us up through preaching and teaching.

You have also kept a missions focus by being a healthy, faithful church yourself—through regular, weekly preaching and teaching focusing on God's glory and the gospel priority of taking the gospel to the unreached language groups of the world. As a result, you have been committed to regular prayer, both private and public, mindful that, in the case of Antioch's supported workers, it was God who had "opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27).

Thus, God gets all the glory. In Antioch, the Holy Spirit had set Paul and Barnabas apart, guided their steps, empowered their preaching, and opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So it is with all of us. It is our privilege to be in partnership with you in the greatest cause.

— John Folmar

Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken

Written by David Powlison

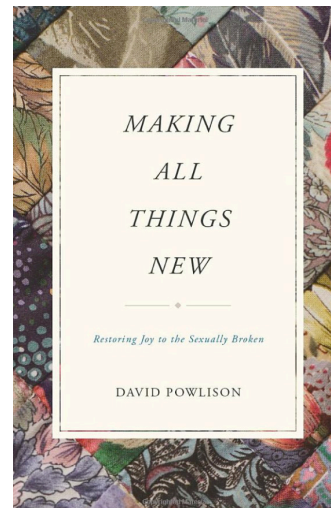
In *Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken*, David Powlison invites readers to “Imagine sexuality transformed into a garden of wise love, safety, wisdom, self-control, and delight” (11). For many of us, that possibility is hard to fathom. We have learned from painful experiences that our sexuality, like every other aspect of our humanity, is broken by the fall. In light of that, it can be hard to think all the damage could ever be undone. And as hard as it is to imagine in the world, for the sexually broken, it is even harder to imagine in our lives. Yet, Powlison reminds us this is exactly what the gospel promises.

With pastoral sensitivity and care, Powlison gives gospel hope to the sexually broken and helps us live in light of its transforming power. He begins *Making All Things New* with a threefold, biblical vision for sexuality, reminding us from Scripture that the Christian faith revels in sexual fidelity, is candid about sexual wrongs, and brings genuine transformation. Next, Powlison shines a light on the sexual brokenness in our lives and in the world, from the poison of pornography to the pain of sexual victimization. He goes out of his way to show that immorality is not just a male problem, and victimization is not just a female experience. He also reminds us that “Jesus Christ is ‘no respecter of persons.’ The degradation of sex is gender-blind, and Jesus’s self-sacrificing mercy works with both females and males to transform sex into an expression of love, light, and fruitfulness” (50).

In the second half of the book, Powlison turns his attention to the process of renewal. He helpfully explains that renewal is a longer, deeper, wider, and more subtle battle than we often think. When we understand these realities, we see with increasing clarity the significance of Christ in the work of renewal. He alone has the strength to transform our hearts and lives, and, praise God, he is committed to doing just that.

Making All Things New is one of the most hopeful and pastoral books I’ve read. As hard as it is to imagine a world in which sexual brokenness and all the damage it does are transformed and renewed, Powlison convinces us that it’s not only possible but certain. And he shows us that it isn’t just possible when Christ returns, but now through the transforming power of the gospel.

— RECOMMENDED BY DUSTIN BUTTS



Excerpts From the Book

1

“The Son of God came into the world to save sinners. You do not need to fear telling the truth about yourself. He already knows. He has come to bear our wandering and our woe that we might turn to him and find a new life that is filled with goodness.”

— *Making Renewal Personal*, p.29

2

“The key to getting a long view of sanctification is to understand direction. What matters most is not the distance you’ve covered. It’s not the speed you’re going. It’s not how long you’ve been a Christian. It’s the direction you’re heading.”

— *Renewal is Lifelong*, p.62

3

“The Lord addresses the fainthearted in a very different way than he addresses unruly and lustful desires. When you are gripped with apprehension, or you doubt that your Father could ever love you, or you’re confused about how to think and what to do, or you flinch at the memory or possibility of being harmed, he simply says, ‘I am with you. Do not be afraid. I know what you are facing. I will never leave you or forsake you.’”

— *Renewal Brings an Increasingly Subtle Struggle*, p.103

Voices: Who Am I Listening To?

Written by Andy Prime

The little book entitled *Voices: Who Am I Listening To?* by Andy Prime surprised me. When I first opened the book, I was expecting possibly something a bit watered down about people paying more attention to the world than to God, but I was quite mistaken. *Voices* is a short book that warns all of us “that in all our getting to get wisdom” as the Proverbs teach us. We are to pay attention to God’s abiding word and heed the warnings shown us, especially in the Proverbs as written by the great king Solomon some thousand years ago.

In short order, Prime uses a character named Gary whose life and failures are examples throughout, starting with his very sinful life of pleasure and lust, then moving into his conversion to Christ and the continuing struggles he encounters after becoming a believer. The book aims to teach how to listen to the voice of our heavenly Father in light of the myriad other voices in the world vying for our attention every hour of the day and night. Prime uses a plethora of key verses to guide us in biblical wisdom, helping us to avoid the pains and tough lessons that come from our disobedience to God’s holy Word. In addition, there are plenty of memory verses proposed that pertain to the temptations that try to lead us down the wrong paths.

Voices is a book for everyone, from a new believer to a person mature in the faith. Although I have known the Lord for 48 years, I found this book to be a great reminder of getting back to the basics of the faith and latching hold of the great treasury of Scripture at our disposal, helping us to deal directly with sins that are common to men and women throughout the world.

– RECOMMENDED BY MIKE BLACKBURN



Excerpts From the Book

1

“And the more we listen to the voice of sin, the more we’ll reject the voice of God.”

– Who Should I Listen To, p.34

2

“The best way of guarding our heart is to keep far away from the way of evildoers.”

– What’s Most Important, p.71

3

“The fight to walk on the path of wisdom is a fight to be fought every single day... We need to be ready to say ‘no’ to the voice of temptation multiple times every day.”

– What If I’ve Been a Fool...Again, p.101

DECEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

December 1	Mark 9:1–13	December 17	Psalms 109
December 2	Isaiah 42	December 18	Matthew 1:1–17
December 3	Matthew 20:20–28	December 19	Matthew 1:18–24
December 4	John 1:1–18	December 20	Exodus 12:33–51
December 5	Philippians 2:7	December 21	Psalms 81
December 6	Hebrews 5:1–10	December 22	Joshua 3
December 7	Hebrews 12:1–17	December 23	Exodus 19
December 8	Matthew 26:36–46	December 24	Numbers 20:1–13
December 9	John 10:1–21	December 25	Deuteronomy 8
December 10	Romans 5:12–21	December 26	Psalms 114
December 11	Philippians 2		
December 12	Philippians 2:8		
December 13	Isaiah 7:10–25		
December 14	Isaiah 8:1–10		
December 15	Matthew 28:11–20		
December 16	Psalms 54		

***Sermons in bold**

TAKE UP & READ



Mount Vernon
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