

# THE SOUTHWESTERNER



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## FEED US! Cody Westbrook

For as long as I can remember, I have heard preachers sound the alarm about the sad state of preaching in many pulpits throughout the country. Johnny Ramsey would often talk about preachers who “didn’t preach enough Bible to fill a thimble.” I recall Andrew Connally lamenting an occasion on which he stepped into a pulpit for a gospel meeting and found a sermon outline book the local preacher had preached from the night before without any study or preparation of his own. Countless preachers tell of occasions of travelling somewhere to preach a gospel sermon only to have members come to them at the end of the service and express how they don’t hear sermons like that anymore, and they wish their preacher would just preach the Bible. Brethren, these reports are neither fabricated nor out of date. It is tragic, yet true, that within so many congregations of the Lord’s people there is a famine in the land “of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). But this famine does not exist by the will of the people. While it is true that many “turn their ears away from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:4), it is also true that many are spiritually starved and long to be fed (Matt. 5:6; 1 Pet. 2:2; etc.).

A recent UN report stated that over 820 million people worldwide suffer from starvation. Malnutrition causes a number of problems from weight loss and anxiety to stunted growth and impaired brain function. Our physical bodies cannot operate normally without the required nutrition. The same principle applies to the spiritual man. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). Without an insatiable desire to feed on God’s word (1 Pet. 2:2), spiritual malnutrition results. We become weak (Heb. 5:12-13), carnal (1 Cor. 3:1-3), and will ultimately die. God said of

Israel, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). A land full of those who refused to proclaim God’s word resulted in the demise of an entire nation. There was no truth, mercy, or knowledge of God in the land (Hos. 4:1). They were spiritual adulterers (Hos. 1-3) and idolaters (Hos. 4:12-13), and therefore God rejected them (Hos. 4:6b). Spiritual starvation is just as catastrophic to the health of the church today as it was to Israel then. We sometimes wear ourselves out looking for answers to spiritual problems within our congregations. Could it be that those problems are the result of a weak spiritual diet?

No excuse is acceptable for a lack of Bible preaching and teaching. Preachers are commanded to “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2). They must preach, “Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23), and “Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). New Testament preachers preach “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). They follow the command of 1 Peter 4:11 – “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.” Too many preachers are preoccupied with “righting the wrongs of the church” and helping the church maintain “relevance” in the modern world by shaking the dust of the preachers of the past from our feet. Such is utter foolishness. It is true that the church must be aware of the times and our preaching should contain relevant application for the issues faced daily. But that does not require us to remove Scripture from our sermons and replace it with emotional appeals and empty speculation that seems to be on the cutting edge of theological “wokeness” to us but realistically is the spiritual equivalent of serving hot water and calling it soup. Is that how Peter preached to an audience containing some whose hands were still stained with the blood of Jesus (Acts 2)? Is that how Stephen preached to

ungodly Jews of the same disposition (Acts 7), or how Paul preached in every synagogue he visited (Acts 17:3-4)? No. Those men were gospel preachers who recognized the power of God's word to save (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12) and, therefore, their sermons were filled with Scripture. Shame on every preacher who refuses to follow their example.

We should also recognize that the responsibility for spiritual malnutrition does not fall solely at the preacher's feet. Occasionally someone will observe that the greatest problem the church faces is a dearth of sound preachers. But that doesn't capture the whole picture. Responsibility for a spiritually starving congregation falls ultimately at the feet of the elders. Godly elders will ensure that their congregation is wellfed even if that means they must take care of the preaching themselves. Elders are commanded to "take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28, KJV). A shepherd's job is to hold

fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict (Tit. 1:9).

Shepherds must ensure that their sheep are fed well and protected from those that mean them harm. No member should starve because no eldership should allow it to happen. No excuse is acceptable for an eldership tolerating non-biblical preaching that leaves the flock longing for nourishment.

That any member of the Lord's church would long to feast on God's Word without ever being satisfied is a travesty. Yet that very scenario unfolds on a regular basis. Make no mistake about it, there are many people in this world, Christians and non-Christians, who long for the Word of God. People want answers; they want the truth; they want to know about the God who loves them and the Savior who died for them and what they must do in order to live an abundant, well pleasing, life in the sight of God. We should be encouraged by the fact that there are many who say, "Feed us!" But we should also feel the weight of responsibility to make sure that it's done. Preachers, preach the Scripture! Elders, demand that preachers preach the Scripture. Members, settle for nothing less. So that it may never be said again, there is a famine in the land, "not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11).

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## RUN THE RACE

Tom Moore '86

There is an old story about the Greek Marathon. Muscular, conditioned runners paced nervously near the starting line for the long-distance race. The time was near. They "shook out" their muscles, inhaled deeply, and put on their "game faces." In the midst of it all, a young stranger took his place at the starting line. His physique was awesome. Taking no notice of the other contestants, he stared straight ahead. Two prizes would be awarded the winner of the Marathon: a magnificent bouquet of flowers and the honor of standing beside the king until the conclusion of other contests.

There seemed to be no question among the runners about who would win the prize. It is alleged that the stranger was offered money not to run. Someone else attempted to bribe him with property. Refusing the offers, he toed the mark and awaited the signal to run. When the signal was given, he was the first away. At the finish line, he was the first to cross, well ahead of the rest. When it was all done, someone asked the young man if he thought the flowers were worth as much as the money and property he had refused. He replied, "I did not enter the race for the flowers. I ran so that I could stand beside my king!"

We have a race before us as well,

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

Our goal is to cross the finish line that we may stand with our King in heaven.

The world though, is offering us its lures to entice us not to faithfully run the Christian race. Materialism is the downfall to many a Christian runner. The apostle Paul declared,

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted

after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:9-12).

*The Defender, Mt. Vernon Church of Christ Weekly Bulletin, July 22, 2019.*

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## **“I AM WEAK BUT THOU ART STRONG”**

Don Walker '79

**I**t took seven years of living as a wild animal before Nebuchadnezzar knew “that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men” and before he humbled himself (Dan. 4). Belshazzar knew of Nebuchadnezzar’s humility, and still did not learn (Dan. 5:22). Oh that men would learn that when they humble themselves before the hand of Jehovah, He extends His hand to help.

We live in difficult and trying times. It seems that even the normal necessities of our lives can become burdens which seem to weigh us down to the point that we wonder if we will be able to take another step. Add to that the challenges of “peer pressure,” of being a light that shines in dark places, or the challenge of just not being swept away with the crowd, and we wonder if we will make it at all. It is easy to see why Jesus said, “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:14). The Greek word translated “strait” means “narrow, or pressed against.” Paul used another Greek word, which has this word in it, when he wrote, “We are troubled on every side, yet not **distressed**” (2 Cor. 4:8). Ours is a life of challenges, but we cannot afford to allow them to hinder our spiritual progress or bury us under a pile of worldly rubble. We, with the Apostle Paul, must determine to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). The language of the apostle is very illustrative. The “mark” Paul speaks of is a “mark or goal upon which we can fix our eyes.” Paul’s picture is of one who is competing in a foot race. The runner has turned the corner and is in the home stretch, where

he can see the goal and his gaze is fixed upon the prize.

If we are not careful, we can begin each day as if our success is determined strictly by our ability, and our ability alone. We can too easily face the day, all alone in self-sufficiency all because we failed to stop and consider our God and petition Him for help. Instead, we should humbly rise and proclaim, “I am weak, but Thou art strong.”

As we begin our day, while we walk in the way, and when we lay down to rest at the end of our day, we do well to acknowledge our need and dependency on the God we love, trust and serve. It should serve as a great comfort to each of us that we can “cast all our cares upon Him; for He cares for us” (1 Pet. 5:7). When we learn to trust our God and lean upon Him, then we learn the true joy and rest of which our Lord spoke.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt 11:28-30).

Often times we have individuals respond confessing sin and requesting prayers that they might have the strength to live, as they should. Those that do such are an indication of the longing we have to live properly before our Lord. They also indicate the challenges that so often arise. Of course, each one of these individuals must do their part, but it should be just as obvious that we, that brothers and sisters, can also help them to be strong. Every one of us can say honestly, “I am weak”. Along with that proclamation we must also turn and say, “Thou oh God, art strong”. Only in so doing will we be able to rise above this mundane world and soar. Let us each one remember the other in our prayers and actions. Let us so labor that we may be like Philemon when Paul wrote of him, “For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother” (Phi. 7). Until next time, let us encourage, exhort, and edify each other and let us each study our Bibles more and more.

*The Forest Hill News, Forest Hill Church of Christ Weekly Bulletin, October 23, 2019.*

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**Record for the Week of December 8, 2019**

Bible Class .....	154
Morning Assembly .....	226
Evening Assembly .....	160
<b>Iglesia de Cristo</b>	
Morning Assembly .....	N/A
Contribution .....	\$N/A

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**PLEASE REMEMBER IN PRAYER:**

**Owen Harris**, son of **Jamie & Lauren** broke his arm last week.

**Betty Kellsmurphy** is suffering from clinical depression.

**Autumn Felps** will have ankle surgery December 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Health Concerns:** Mark DeAvila, Lucile Johnson,  
Diana Rodriguez, Sue Shamburger, Bonnie Thetford,  
Bud Wade, Teresa Williams, Angela Young, Jo Young.

**Shut-ins:** Jeannette Hansen, Rosemary Garrett,  
Jon & Caroline Little, Bobby Johnson, Elvira Martinez,  
Ginny Oswald, Jan Smith.

**Others:** Ronald Adkisson, Lee Barr, Rodney Boes,  
Olivia Carson, Caleb Crouchet, Bill Ellison, Bonnie Gomer,  
CK Holt, Deborah Hoover, June Lee, Pearce & Connor Lewis,  
Nell McCown, Bill & Nancy Ponds, Cynthia Puente,  
Max Stanley, Kay Westbrook, Gib Young.

**We're Going Paperless!**

*January 1, 2020*

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Bill Siebert  
Mark Speir

**Preacher:**

Cody Westbrook

**SOUTHWEST SCHOOL OF BIBLE STUDIES**

**Director:**

Steven Lloyd

**Associate Director:**

Clay Bond

**WORSHIP AND STUDY OPPORTUNITIES:** Sunday, Bible Classes 9:30 am, Worship 10:30 am and 6:00 pm

Tuesday, 10:00 am (September-May), Men's and Ladies' Bible Classes | Wednesday, Bible Classes, 7:00 pm

**RADIO PROGRAM** – *The Word of Life* | Sunday, 7:30 am | KLBJ, 590-AM and 99.7 FM | online at [swcofc.org/word-of-life](http://swcofc.org/word-of-life)