

LIFE Ministries

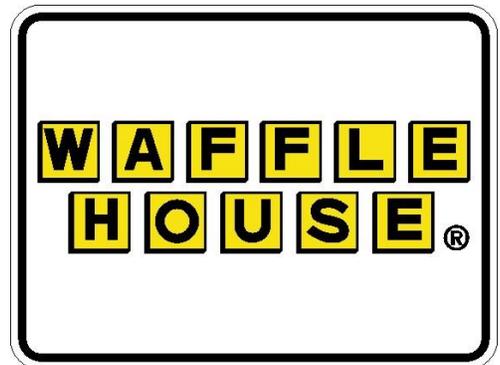
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Waffles and the Church

It's an early morning in early July and I am enjoying a multi-cultural, breakfast experience at the Waffle House on Hwy 280 in Birmingham. Nothing like a syrupy waffle to start the day off right. This morning reminds me that there is no need to go halfway around the world to experience diversity. It exists right here on 280. I met a white couple from Greystone who is contemplating whether to buy a 5k or 6k gun vault for their basement. Then there was my waitress, a weathered white gal who is trying to make ends meet. I talked briefly with a young, black lady who is working her way through school and life. Seated at the bar is a mixture of racial and socio-economic backgrounds. All of this experienced "under the yellow sign."

I sometimes wonder if the church ought to look more like the Waffle House than the White House. One can be down-to-earth, ordinary, and community-like while the other tends to be polished, political, and a bit artificial. One is marked by common need and run-of-the-mill servants while the other leans toward hierarchy and bureaucracy. One is defined by small, open space that encourages conversation and community while the other can be large, spacious, guarded, and isolated.



I grew up as a PK (preacher's kid) and have now been in ministry for 20 years. I love, deeply love, the local church. She is God's bride and chosen community of faith. We are the covenant people of God. At the same time, I continually grieve over the state of our churches. This type of grief could easily lead to apathy, anger, and condemnation...on my part. Truth be known...sometimes it does. But hope rises from the ashes of my anger and lights the path forward. The local church remains God's beacon of grace to a grace-starved world.

From that heart, let me share a few random "tension" thoughts for His bride...

Grace and Law.

The church has been wrestling for 2000 years over the relationship between grace and the law. The western mindset has a need to figure this one out. I hope that we can experience common ground in the tension between these two. Emphasize law over grace and you get legalism. People are left with the "god with a big stick" who hates them and mildly puts up with them. As Paul declared, the law was meant to be a tutor not a dictator. On the other hand, we can elevate grace without grounding it in the law. The weight of grace matches the weight of the human condition which the law highlights.

We are messed up folks in need of messy grace. The Old Testament law is like a tow truck carrying a wrecked car to the garage of grace. We are wrecked and God is big enough to handle our brokenness.

I pray that we can maintain this tension of grace and law.

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Prophets and Pastors.

The church needs prophets and pastors. We need men and women who will speak the truth and call God's people to repentance. The strong voice of the prophet is not always popular but is necessary. The prophets of old were God's megaphone to a broken world. Some of you are prophets. Your personality and voice are needed. But the prophet needs a pastor. A pastor provides the strength of a shepherd, fighting for the hearts of God's people. Pastors season love with grace and truth while nurturing the flock of God. Some of you are pastors. Your calling and voice are needed. Pastors and prophets...two voices speaking of one Truth, one God. We need each other in the local church.

I pray that we can maintain this tension of prophet and pastor.

Emotional and Spiritual.

Up until 50-60 years ago, there was a direct correlation between the emotional and the spiritual when it came to walking with God. Traditional pathways of relating to God combined thinking with feeling, the head with the heart. With the psychological boom in the 20th century, a slow divide began to take place in the church. The other day, a friend referred to one church as "light church" because of its high emotion and another church as "deep church" because of its intense and serious teaching. Wow, what a tragedy! The church is the teaching and testifying presence of God in the world. We are to proclaim the truths of God's word and His heart toward people. We are to share stories of grace and hope. Our minds then get enlightened and our hearts get lifted.

I pray that we can maintain this tension of emotional and spiritual.

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Church and World.

We have all heard the cliché, "be in the world but not of it." Basically, the church is meant to be a peculiar, borderline "weird," group of folks. Our lives, marriages, and relationships should not match the world. There should be something uniquely strange about the way that we love God and love others. Followers of Jesus Christ should be set apart in how we live. At the same time, our "set apartness" should breed humility not pride. You see the tension? Set apart and holy yet present to the neighborhood and world God has placed you in.

I pray that we can maintain this tension of being a community of saints (set apart) among a community of sinners in a broken world.

"Yes ma'am, I'm ready for my ticket." Well, breakfast at the Waffle House is done and a few more random thoughts shared with you, our friends and allies in ministry. I guess what I am trying to say is that LIFE Ministries is committed to the local church. We want the bride of Christ to have healthy marriages, healthy pastors, and healthy relationships. We will continue to fight toward that end. Your support, prayers, and calling are vital to this endeavor. Thanks!

Grateful for you,
Randy

PS...To be honest, summer months are always challenging for the ministry. We are solely dependent on friends just like you to keep the ministry fueled financially. Do not hear "guilt" or "obligation" on this one...only hear an invitation. If God leads you to give or join our monthly team of donors, then follow the Spirit's leading (see enclosed card).

PSS...If you would like to explore this topic of "church," I would recommend John Stott's book, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor*.