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THE Bull Pen REVIEW



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Preface: What is the Bull Pen Review?



THROUGHOUT HISTORY, WHENEVER reformation has seized the Church, the first mark has usually been a revival of Word-centered worship. The driving element of this has historically been *expository preaching*.

This reformation of preaching has consistently been followed and bolstered by efforts of writing and publication, for the education and edification of the people of God. The audience and circulation runs a wide breadth. Charles Spurgeon published *The Sword and the Trowel*, which focused on engaging pastors and church leaders. More recently, John Piper during his time at Bethlehem Baptist Church would send out a weekly newsletter titled “The Bethlehem Star,” written strictly for his own congregation. Pastors like John Newton were known for a robust ministry of personal correspondence via letters.

And of course, writing for the local church is at the very foundation of our faith: The New Testament is an arrangement of twenty-seven *written* documents, *most* of them letters to specific local churches, all aimed at instruction and edification and equipment of the saints.

Our aim is similar for the Bull Pen Review. We long to strengthen, edify, educate, and inform the congregation God has graciously entrusted to us through the ministry of not only proclamation, but the pen. We aim to continue in this tradition, and enrich the love of Bull Street Baptist Church for Christ Jesus through this bi-monthly periodical.

A word about the layout.

Culture: At BSBC, we have six distinctive cultures which the elders hope to see our church treasure and continue to grow in. These articles will explore different topics and answer different questions to help our church grow in these “cultures.”

Historical Retrieval: To study history is to practice humility. Whether it’s events, theological developments, or historical figures, we are part of a great tradition, and we want to appreciate the house on which we are building.

Theology: The church thrives on a diet of healthy doctrine. Every sermon has to weigh the balance between that doctrine and its application. These articles are a way for us to help the church continue growing in a more systematic understanding of God, his Word, and his world.

Book Review: Of the writing of many books there is no end—how much more so when it comes to reading them! (Also, another reason why we’re writing *articles*, and not full books!)

Some books are worth reading; some are not. We hope in these reviews to commend some good resources to you, and suggest how to read others with a careful and critical eye.

Thought for Food: More of a devotional thought, based usually on a single passage or pair of Scripture, written for your reflection and spiritual benefit.

Vice, Virtue, Verse: A brief definition and description of a vice and a complement virtue, along with a “fighter verse” you can memorize to grow in this area. If you don’t have a plan for memorizing scripture, start here!

Ask a Pastor: Do you have a question you’d like answered by all of the pastors, or by one in particular, which might be helpful for the rest of the congregation to hear? Send Pastor Andrew an email with the topic line “Ask a Pastor.” We will answer no matter what—but perhaps you’ll spark a conversation that could benefit others as well!

CULTURE: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Charles Spurgeon, the Pastors' College, and Leadership Development

Taylor Lazenby

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON (1834–1892) is widely regarded as one of the best preachers who ever lived. Miraculously converted in a Primitive Methodist chapel under the preaching of a layman, he became a full-time pastor by the age of seventeen. By twenty-one he was the sole pastor of the congregation that would become the Metropolitan Tabernacle, one of the first megachurches in history.¹

He pastored the Tabernacle for over thirty years. During that time, more than sixty ministries grew out of the church. Spurgeon had a hand in many of them, but he cared for none more than the Pastors' College.²

His love for training pastors was born, appropriately, out of his passion for the gospel. On August 5, 1855, Spurgeon preached a sermon from 1 Corinthians 9:16 entitled "Preach the Gospel." He explicated how God delights in saving sinners through the proclaimed word. He saw and showed in that sermon the power of God's word, wielded by God's Spirit through preaching, to regenerate sinners. Spurgeon concluded that if preaching is God's normative pattern of converting sinners for his glory, then we need more preachers.

The Pastors' College officially began the following year. The first student, T. W. Medhurst, an apprenticed rope maker and lay preacher in London, was admitted. Spurgeon was personally involved in

his training. Once a week, they would meet together for several hours to study theology, church history, and homiletics. One year later, Medhurst's preaching had improved so much that he received a unanimous call to serve as the senior pastor of the Baptist Church at Kingston-on-Thames.³

In the coming years Spurgeon would continue to pour himself into the Pastors' College. He covered the expenses (tuition, books, housing) for the dozen or so students, using the proceeds of the sale of his printed sermons and books in the United States.⁴ This strategy was sidetracked, however, by the American Civil War. Spurgeon, an outspoken critic of slavery and an abolitionist himself, suffered a devastating loss of income as the Confederate States of America systemically burned and banned the sale of his publications. This resulted in an operating shortfall for the college.

Spurgeon, with the approval of his Elders, took the matter to his congregation. He could no longer support the Pastors' College out of his own income—he needed tremendous help. By God's grace, the Metropolitan Tabernacle stood in the gap alongside their beloved pastor and passed the following motion at their July 1861 members meeting:

Our Pastor having told the Church of his Institution for educating young ministers, and having informed them that several were not settling in country chargers and laboring

1 For a newer popular level biography of the Life of Charles Spurgeon, see Alex DiPrima, *Spurgeon: A Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2024).

2 More than sixty ministries were started out of Metropolitan Tabernacle during the Spurgeon pastorate. For a full list see Alex DiPrima, *Spurgeon: A Life*, 248–249, cf. 22.

3 Geoff Chang, *Spurgeon the Pastor: Recovering a Biblical and Theological Vision for Ministry* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022), 224–227.

4 Chang, *Spurgeon the Pastor*, 229.

with great success, it was unanimously agreed, – that this Church rejoices very greatly in the labours of our Pastor in training young men for the ministry and desires that a record of his successful and laborious efforts should be entered into the church books— Hitherto, this good work has been rather a private effort than one in which the Church has had a share, but the Church hereby adopts it as a part of its own system of evangelical labours, promises pecuniary aid, and its constant and earnest prayer.

No longer would the Pastors' College be a ministry of Spurgeon alone. It was now under the Metropolitan Tabernacle as a ministry of the church that would receive full funding. From this moment on, the ministry of leadership development grew exponentially:

Initially it was a two-year program, but later it would grow to three. For their education, students engaged in courses in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, biblical studies, theology, history, classical literature, ethics and philosophy, English studies, rhetoric, logic, preaching, and more. Classes were divided by junior, middle, and senior levels. Courses were rigorous and disciplined, but also were marked by a collegial spirit... Every subject was geared toward the pastorate, not the academy. A few students did go on to pursue careers in scholarship, but most graduates went on to be pastors and missionaries.⁵

Spurgeon wanted the student experience to be rooted deeply in the local church. His vision for pastoral training was to be carried out in the local church and for the local church. In doing so, those who came through the Pastors' College received a holistic ministry education: theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral.

Spurgeon and the Pastors' College Legacy

⁵ Chang, *Spurgeon the Pastor*, 233.

The legacy of the Pastors' College is not the individual pastors that were raised up and sent out (although that is quite a legacy itself!). Rather, it is the churches that were established throughout Great Britain and the world by the pastors that were trained. Between 1865 and 1876, Metropolitan Tabernacle⁶ planted fifty-three new baptist churches in London alone. By Spurgeon's death in 1892, nearly half the baptist membership in London was found in churches that found a pastoral tie back to Spurgeon and Metropolitan Tabernacle. Training future pastors pays dividends into eternity—though a pastor may die, the Word will continue and the church will stand.

In time the Pastors' College became Spurgeon's College, an independent institution that, after 169 years, closed in the summer of 2025.⁷ But the *church* never stopped the work of training leaders. In 1975 the Metropolitan Tabernacle gathered the work back under its own roof as the London Reformed Baptist Seminary, which trains pastors to this day.⁸ The church kept teaching men to preach, as it had since long before Spurgeon.⁹

Surely, We Can't All Be Spurgeon, Right?

No. We can't. Most pastors will never preach to thousands, and most churches will never plant fifty congregations in a decade. Spurgeon's gifts were extraordinary, and they have been unmatched since, and any aspiration to be "the next Spurgeon" will lead to either delusion or discouragement.

⁶ Mike Nicholls, *C.H. Spurgeon: The Pastor Evangelist*. (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1992), 175–177.

⁷ The Pastors' College unfortunately separated from the Metropolitan Tabernacle in the early 20th century, joining the theologically liberal Baptist Union.

⁸ See <https://metropolitantabernacle.org/seminary/>

⁹ The training of preachers at the Metropolitan Tabernacle ran long before the Pastors' College and has continued long after it. From Benjamin Keach in the 1600s to John Rippon in the years before Spurgeon, the pastors of that church had been forming men for the ministry for generations. The Pastors' College was Spurgeon's own contribution to a work his church had carried since long before he arrived.

The other danger of a life like Spurgeon's is that we might venerate it. We set the man on a shelf as a giant from a grander age and admire him from a safe distance, quietly concluding wrongly that his kind of faithfulness is out of our reach. His fruit? Further than the closest star. But his faithfulness? As accessible air and the sunrise. The lesson Spurgeon leaves us is not his gifts—it is his *love* for God and the gospel.

Out of that love came his care for the kingdom over his own territory. He trained his best men at great cost and then sent them away, glad to be a ministerial giving-tree. The churches planted out of the Metropolitan Tabernacle filled England with the gospel, and Spurgeon counted every man he gave as the kingdom's gain.

I am not asked to be Spurgeon. I am not asking you to be him either. But our Lord is asking us to love what Spurgeon loved, and to give ourselves where God has placed us. For Bull Street that means a plain and weighty thing: to be a church that treasures the glory of God and gives itself to raising up the next generation of preachers, so that long after we are gone, Christ will still be proclaimed from pulpits we helped to fill.

That work is open to us. May we be found faithful in it.

HISTORICAL RETRIEVAL

How Do We Look On History?

Ross Thompson

Anthony lives in a bustling metropolis and views history progressively. His ancestors were, at best, ignorant rubes who missed out on modernity's gifts; at worst, they were cold and calloused, lacking the enlightened empathy Anthony knows to be a self-evident virtue. He judges a person's morality by their proximity to the present. Humanity is a rocket ship carving progress into the heavens—we might not know where we're headed, but we're making progress! For Anthony, newer is always better: today can sneer at yesterday, and your best self is your most modern self. Modern (wo)man has the potential to be more moral than anyone in history—and already is, unless out of touch with history/herstory.

Debbie lives in rural Alabama with her husband, two children, several chickens, and a few goats. For her, a moral life starts with gratitude for those who came before: modernity is a pothole in history's road, best avoided by *emulating* your ancestors. But her husband started to wonder if she'd swerved into the wrong lane when he came home one July day to find the A/C off, the station wagon traded for a chuck wagon, and his architecture-degreed wife scrubbing clothes, quilting blankets, and churning butter—all by hand.

Anthony and Debbie represent two ways of responding to history: one views the past as a disappointing obstacle to overcome, the other as a rigid guide for everyday life. The first ditch runs deeper and poses more danger to Christian belief; the second is one of today's more tempting errors for conservative Christians. Both fail to capture history's true role in the *Christian* life. The first stance looks down on the faithful who've handed down wisdom through Christian history; the second gives history a

supremacy that neglects God's advancing kingdom. One tears down. One doubles down. Neither builds.

A better perspective reads history as crucial to the Christian life: our faith isn't in an abstract idea, but in a historical man who died a historic death. This article considers an example from 2 Kings of how Scripture values history, aiming to uncover the lens through which biblical authors view historical figures—a template for how we might approach our own history.

In 2 Kings 9–10, the author tells of Jehu, the king of Israel God tasked with punishing the house of Ahab and Jezebel. In the few chapters where he appears, Jehu carries out a series of executions across the divided kingdoms—executions that provide a complicated picture for historical analysis.

On one hand, God sends a prophet's son to anoint Jehu king, commissioning him to carry out justice on the house of Ahab and Jezebel—a noble deed for the Lord. On the other, Jehu commits atrocities along the way, including killing Ahaziah, king of Judah, outside the scope of his duty. He's a brash, warmongering man who kills, lies, and destroys without hesitation. The author of 2 Kings so wants to capture Jehu's bullheaded nature that he even reports on his reckless driving:

Now the watchman was standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came and said, "I see a company." And Joram said, "Take a horseman and send to meet them, and let him say, 'Is it peace?'" So a man on horseback went to meet him and said, "Thus says the king, 'Is it peace?'" And Jehu said, "What do you have to do with peace? Turn around and ride behind me." And the watchman

reported, saying, “The messenger reached them, but he is not coming back.” Then he sent out a second horseman, who came to them and said, “Thus the king has said, ‘Is it peace?’” And Jehu answered, “What do you have to do with peace? Turn around and ride behind me.” Again the watchman reported, “He reached them, but he is not coming back. And the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, *for he drives furiously*.” (2 Kings 9:17–20, ESV).

All this points to a Jehu who is less a fine scalpel of precise faithfulness than a jagged cleaver of general usefulness in fulfilling the Lord’s purposes.

How would Anthony and Debbie react to Jehu? Anthony would denounce him outright: he failed in the manner, so he’s a man of bad times we need to reject to be on the *right* side of history. Debbie might call him a hero—he brought judgment on Ahab and Jezebel and fulfilled God’s purpose, so we ought to venerate him, maybe even follow his example of public engagement. She might even start agreeing with Anthony that the jaggedness is a feature, not a bug, and wonder if we could use more of it.

Am I caricaturing real people with made-up characters? Yes, and the shoe fits: real Anthonys and Debbies read history the same way, turning every Jehu into a caricature. Both perspectives read history through the lens of a particular consensus. Modernity’s *consensus* assumes progress is linear and moral, so historical figures are guilty until proven innocent by our sensibilities. Debbie’s consensus assumes the inverse: society is devolving, so the good life means conserving and retrieving, on the assumption that nearly everything used to be better.

But 2 Kings offers a better way of thinking about the past than caricatures built on bare consensus. What biblical principles lead to good historical analysis? Can reading about Jehu teach us how to read Napoleon, Donald Trump, or Winston Churchill?

Fortunately, the Bible has much to say about how we ought to understand truth—and at its core, history

is an exercise in understanding true events across time. As Christians, we know truth isn’t formed by consensus, no matter its source. The consensus view holds that truth comes from what the majority agrees to: If enough people agree that men can be women and women can be men, that becomes true within that society.

That kind of truth-craft probably sours your stomach, because as Christians we hold that what God states as true isn’t just a claim—it’s truth itself. The story of Jehu doesn’t exist in a scriptural vacuum: he brought judgment on Ahab’s house as an instrument of the Lord, yet he also overstepped the boundaries of his mission. Outside Scripture, historical figures aren’t directly anointed by a prophet’s hand, but they still have a divinely given purpose—even figures as ferocious as Jehu, or worse. Biblical histories like his point to a truth both our caricatures miss: Scripture’s writers speak of history as observers. The author of 2 Kings narrates Jehu’s actions, sinful and faithful alike, but rightly leaves the final judgment—when faithfulness is weighed and names are read from the book of life—for later. Carried along by the Holy Spirit, he doesn’t redact, sanitize, or ignore Israel’s flawed figures, because that judgment wasn’t his to render. Neither is it ours.

Consider another figure: Martin Luther, father of the Protestant Reformation, whom many look to as a hero of the faith for standing against the Catholic Church’s false doctrines in the 16th century. But some of Luther’s later writings were deeply antisemitic, including a 65,000-word treatise, *On The Jews and Their Lies*, calling for the destruction of Jewish homes and synagogues and for rabbis to be forbidden to teach under threat of death. Checking back in with Anthony and Debbie, we’d probably hear: Anthony—”This is exactly why I don’t pay attention to people like Luther; he was a backwards guy who wanted to burn synagogues. I don’t need anything from someone like that.” Debbie—”Luther was a hero! Maybe he said those things, but we can’t judge his whole life on a few bad statements. (Besides, my husband says they’re the ones controlling things anyway.)” Both are off.

Luther's protest of Rome was admirable and faithful; rejecting him out of hand means either regressing to a pre-Reformation state or pretending it never happened. But his antisemitism was reprehensible, and handwaving it—or worse, embracing it—risks becoming a stumbling block, or leading us into sin ourselves. Either interpretation seeks to render a final judgment on Luther: a reckoning of social salvation or condemnation to determine his fate, or that of whatever historical figure we're analyzing.

If we set ourselves up as the final arbiters of historical figures' worthiness, we'll fall short. Our goal should be like that of Scripture's own historians: to rightly see history's contours and rightly understand the faithfulness or sinfulness of historical figures—without taking on the job of venerating or condemning them by social consensus, a job that was never ours to hold.

THEOLOGY

The Emboldening Power of the Spirit in Acts

Andrew Ballard

AS JESUS PREPARED to ascend, the apostles asked him, “Lord, will you at *this* time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). It was a natural question; Jesus had been talking about the kingdom since his resurrection. But Jesus redirected them to their task: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Jerusalem → Judea and Samaria → the end of the earth. This is an alternate version of the Great Commission. Instead of the gospel spreading through nations (or “peoples”), it spreads geographically; instead of “make disciples,” Jesus says “be my witnesses.” This verse also previews the structure of Acts: In chapters 1–7 the gospel overturns not just tables, but all Jerusalem; in 8–12 the word advances throughout the region; and starting with Paul’s commissioning at Antioch in chapter 13, the witness explodes outward to the end of the book and the ends of the earth. A key part of that witness is *the Spirit’s empowerment*.

How does the Holy Spirit empower the apostles to be Christ’s witnesses? Perhaps not in the way you’d think. We picture miracles, prophecies, tongues, resurrections—and rightly so, as these are powerful helps from the Holy Spirit. But these remarkable events actually played a *subordinate* role in the witness of the word. Miracles and gifts like prophecy, tongues, or healing function as *signs* in Acts. They point like a neon arrow to the speaker, as if to say, “Here, listen to *this* guy!”

The (most) important thing is the preaching itself. When the apostles witness, they *always* preach the gospel (they use signs, if necessary), and the most

consistent way the Spirit empowers them is with *boldness*. Boldness to declare the truth. Boldness to not shrink back in fear. Boldness to suffer for the sake of the witness. That boldness is their greatest need, and what the Spirit is most eager to supply. Consider a few examples of this boldness in Acts..

Boldness at Pentecost

At Pentecost the Spirit clearly stood behind the Joel-fulfilling prophecy. Less obvious in our English translations is that the Spirit also stood directly behind Peter’s speech that followed. Scholar Alan J. Thompson writes,

In Acts 2:4 the word used to refer to the Spirit’s enabling of ‘all who were filled with the Holy Spirit’ to speak in other languages is *apophthengomai* (as the Spirit enabled them). The same term is used a few verses later to refer to Peter’s activity as he lifted his voice and ‘addressed’ the crowd (2:14). The use of the same term twice in this immediate context to refer to the activity of speaking indicates that Peter’s address is also enabled by the Spirit.¹

When the 120 disciples prophesied in tongues, Luke didn’t call it “witnessing.” Peter’s speech *was*. Peter asserts Christ’s resurrection, exclaiming that “of that [event] we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32). Verse 40 adds that “with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them.” So Luke viewed both events as coming from the Spirit, but only the gospel’s proclamation was the “witnessing” Jesus had

¹ Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 27 of New Studies in Biblical Theology (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2011), 132–133.

commissioned. Pentecost served the preaching, but Pentecost was a one-off, and preaching continued.

The Spirit empowered Peter's speech, but what did that empowerment look like? *Boldness*. Peter points the finger directly at the crowd and hangs the guilt of Jesus's murder on their consciences (Acts 2:23). His words were sharp enough to "cut" his audience (2:37)—reflecting the Spirit's boldness-empowering work, especially given Peter's own earlier denial of Christ (see Luke 22:54–62).

Boldness in Conflict

Given the adversity the disciples faced in Jerusalem, it's easy to see why they needed boldness to keep preaching. Peter continues pointing the finger straight at his audience, using the invective vocative:

You delivered [Jesus] over and denied [him as God's servant] in the presence of Pilate. ... *You* denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and *you* killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this *we* are *witnesses*. (Acts 3:13–15, emphasis mine)

He speaks the same way to crowds, priests, and elders. Now notice their response to threats in Acts 4. The chief priests threaten the apostles violently, punctuating their words with the puncture wounds of whips. *Stop*—the healings? The tongues? The miracles? No: *Stop speaking and teaching in Jesus's name*. *That* was the threat.

Peter and John rejoined the group and reported back. How did the believers respond? How did they pray? Not for more gifts of prophecy, more tongues, or more healing. The grammar of Acts 4:29–30 shows how they understood their role and need: They ask God to stretch out his hand to heal (a present active infinitive) and to perform signs and wonders (a present middle/passive infinitive), but the two imperatives reveal their real request: "*look* upon their threats and *grant* to your servants to continue to speak your word *with all boldness*" (Acts 4:29). The prayer is answered

in verse 31: "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit," so that "[they] continued *to speak the word of God with boldness*." In response to growing opposition, the Spirit *emboldened* them to bear witness by speaking God's word.

Trace the Theme in Acts

I don't have space here to trace this theme through the whole book. You see it before the Jerusalem council (Acts 5:27–33), throughout Paul's ministry—in Damascus (Acts 9:15–29), at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:45–49), at Corinth (Acts 18:5–11), at Ephesus (Acts 19:8)—and in his defenses before governors and kings (Acts 22–26). The book ends with Paul preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus "with all *boldness* and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31). The example of the apostles is encouraging for us too: Even if we don't see miracles or prophecies, we're called to witness just like the apostles did, and though we have many reasons to be timid, the Spirit will empower us just as he did them.

So here's my invitation: As we spend the next two years in the book of Acts, ask yourself, "To what degree am *I also* called to be a 'witness' to Christ?" I'd suggest you're called to the same degree the apostles were, though in different contexts and capacities. Whatever degree you're called to follow their example, expect a comparable need for boldness—sharing your faith and bearing witness to Christ's kingdom can be intimidating, frightening, costly, and even dangerous. But to the extent we need boldness, we can trust Acts was written for our instruction: The Holy Spirit gives Christ's witnesses all the boldness they need to be faithful.

So whenever you see someone bear witness to Christ in Acts, ask the Lord to empower you with that same boldness. And then, trusting he will, and go bear witness!

BOOK REVIEW

The Mission of the Triune God

Book by Patrick Schreiner Review by Andrew Ballard

WHO WOULD YOU say are the main actors in *The Acts of the Apostles*?

At first glance (that is, if we read the title) we might say, “Well, the *apostles*, of course!” If you surveyed the book, you might find that Peter and then Paul really stand out from the rest of the apostles. Maybe it should be retitled *The Acts of Mostly Peter and Then Mainly Paul*. But then you go back and re-read it carefully and see that Luke says his first book (the Gospel of Luke) is about “all that Jesus *began* to do and teach” (Acts 1:1 ESV). So perhaps the sequel is about “all that Jesus *continued* to do and teach”?

And then you read Patrick Schreiner’s book, and you realize that God, in his divine nature and triune personhood, is the main actor in the book.

One reason it is helpful to speak of *the triune God* as the main actor, rather than Jesus *solely*, is that Acts is a *transitional* book (p. 21). It is a book about the establishment of the Church *in continuity with God’s longstanding* (dare I say *eternal*) *plan*. The Father has long been orchestrating his own plan to establish his kingdom in the world (chapter 1), which was enacted through the incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of his Son (chapter 2), and which is now being facilitated through his Spirit (chapter 3) in the Church on earth (chapters 4–7).

Which is to say: Acts is a story about the triune God fulfilling his mission through his Church. It gives the Church its origin story. It also gives us, in many ways, our blueprint. It reminds us of where we’ve been and outlines the manner in which we are to keep going. Schreiner does not get into every detail of the book; this is not a commentary. Rather, Schreiner offers a *theology* of the book of Acts. Schreiner asks, *What*

are the big ideas that this book features? He explores those ideas at a level that we rarely have time for in Sunday services, yet that helps you read the book more insightfully. If you want encouragement, some helpful categories, and better questions for digging deeper into Scripture, I recommend Patrick Schreiner’s *The Mission of the Triune God*.

THOUGHT FOR FOOD

Legacies That Last

Andrew Ballard

WHAT IF I'M DYING during seminary?
Should we still go, or should we return home?

That was the question in my mind after I rammed my thumb into a used drug needle in Minneapolis. The accident happened while I was working downtown in the summer, saving up money before my first semester of seminary. It kicked off a tornado of doctor's visits, blood draws, and phone calls to hear about lab results.

It also kicked off a whirlwind of questions. What if I had contracted HIV? What if I only lived for five more years? Would it be worth it to go to seminary for four years, if I only got to pastor for one year? Would it be better to just go home, and spend the final days near extended family?

Hezekiah faced a similar situation in Isaiah 39. After giving him a death sentence, God relented and added fifteen years to Hezekiah's life (Isa. 38:5)—the Lord's mercy for the Lord's glory:

For Sheol does not thank you;
death does not praise you;
those who go down to the pit do not hope
for your faithfulness.
The living, the living, he thanks you,
as I do this day;
the father makes known to the children
your faithfulness. (Isaiah 38:18–19)

So far so good. But his actions reveal a disconnect between his lips and his heart. He loved the present world—his own comfort and pleasure—more than what God treasured, wasting the good gift of an extended life. We'll first look at Hezekiah as a warning of what not to do, then at the better way to live in the face of death.

A Pitiful Portrait

Look at Isaiah 39:1:

At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. And Hezekiah welcomed them gladly.

This is not just a warm reception. When this godless ruler shows him attention, Hezekiah *rejoices—exceedingly* happy, overcome with joy. In his eagerness, he goes too far—

And he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. (Isa. 39:2)

What's going on here? Well, Hezekiah **revealed his treasure in more ways than one**. He put a premium price on the world's opinion of him and his kingdom, valuing affirmation enough to act recklessly. **He treasured the Babylonian elite's good opinion** enough to use—and lose—what God had entrusted to him. By putting them on a pedestal, Hezekiah gave them a glory and trust owed to the Lord alone. That's why Isaiah confronts him—look at verse 3:

Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?” Hezekiah said, “They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon.” He said, “What have they seen in your house?” Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house. There is *nothing* in my storehouses that I did not show them.”

Isaiah tells him this foolishness will end in catastrophe. Hezekiah responds in an embarrassing, cowardly way:

Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in *my* days.” (Isa. 39:8)

Jesus once warned his disciples, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). Hezekiah’s treasure wasn’t in the storehouses of God’s eternal faithfulness—he invested it in the sinkholes of momentary pleasure and comfort, unfazed by the disaster he was bringing on his children. Why? Because *he* wouldn’t have to deal with it; he’d have comfort and pleasure, and could let the next generation figure it out.

1. Treasure your Fathers.

Hezekiah did not treasure the inheritance for his children because he did not treasure the inheritance from his fathers. In the first part of his pronouncement, Isaiah says,

“Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, **and that which your fathers have stored up till this day**, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD.”

Hezekiah’s forefathers had filled and preserved the temple and the king’s storehouse over generations. Instead of using that wealth wisely, he spent it to boost his own glory and buy others’ good opinion—never treasuring or feeling grateful for what he’d been handed down.

2. Treasure Your Children.

Verses 7–8:

And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have

spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my days.”

That’s the sort of attitude Hezekiah displays here. He both allows and tacitly approves of his children losing their future—some of them would be castrated and enslaved in Babylon.

And Hezekiah says, “Well, at least there will be peace and security in *my* days.”

Don’t be like Hezekiah.

If your parents, or previous generations, ripped you off or failed you, it’s easy to blame them and play the victim. Resist that kind of thinking. Proverbs 13:22 says, “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous.” Hezekiah opened the tab for his children to close out later—the opposite of good parenting and true masculinity.

3. Treasure the glory of God above all else.

Hezekiah sought comfort, support, help, affirmation, and attention from man—things God alone deserves. This is a dominant theme in the first part of Isaiah: when Israel trusts the nations, she gives man the glory God alone deserves. That’s not just foolish; it’s offensive. As he says in Psalm 50:15,

“Call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

This is *exactly* the lesson Hezekiah was meant to learn when God delivered him from his sickness, as it says in chapter 38:17,

Behold, it was for my welfare
that I had great bitterness;
but in love you have delivered my life
from the pit of destruction,
for you have cast all my sins
behind your back.

Why? Why does the Lord do this? For the sake of his glory and worship. Sheol does not praise God, but

The LORD will save me,
and we will play my music on stringed instruments
all the days of our lives,
at the house of the LORD. (Isa. 38:20)

Conclusion: Treasure Christ

Glory to God.

Gratitude for the last generation.

Generosity to the next generation.

That's how we should live—and how Hezekiah should have responded to God's gift of an extended life.

At the end, Hezekiah mishandled his treasure because he didn't have the right treasure—more than that, he wasn't the right treasure. *That's* the point. The thing to be valued above all else in this story is God himself. That's the task Hezekiah failed, and the task only Jesus Christ could succeed at. Ultimately, this little hole in Israel's history isn't about how we can be better than Hezekiah. **It's about the Christ who is.** Jesus is worthy of all our treasure because he is this life's treasure—both the one who honored God and the God who deserves our honor. When we treasure him for who he is, we'll treat all our lesser treasures the way Hezekiah *should* have treated his.

That's why we decided to stay in Minneapolis. Before the bloodwork came back clear, we knew something more fundamental was true: Jesus Christ is our treasure, worth all our energy, finances, strength, and effort. Maybe we'd only get five years; if so, let's invest them in the storehouse of heaven, where we'll receive an eternal return.

By God's grace, that was around five years ago. I'm healthy and disease-free. But I still have an expiration date and a limited number of days. So do you. You don't know if you'll live five more days, let alone five more decades. So we face the same question Hezekiah did: *What will you live for? What will you die for? What will you treasure?*

For me, whether I live or die, my aim is to live for the treasure of Christ. What about you?

VICE, VIRTUE, VERSE

ANXIOUSNESS There is a sense in which anxiety can be a vice, or a virtue, or an affliction. I once heard a friend comment that motherly anxiety is the *virtue* that keeps the world spinning (and I think he was right). Paul was “pressed” by his anxious burdens for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28). And yet, as we all know, Jesus famously taught us not to be anxious (Matt. 6:25; cf. Philip. 4:6). And *yet* and yet, the Apostle Peter suggests only proud people *practice* anxiety (1 Pet. 5:6–7).

How can we know whether our anxiety is a vice, a virtue, or an affliction? Perhaps the difference is whether our anxiety drives us to *do* something (for example, *pray*, like we see in both Philippians 4 and in 1 Peter), or our anxiety is *itself* the thing we are *doing*, or our anxiety is something being done *to* us.

REASONABLENESS *Reasonableness* measures our response to imperfect circumstances. The greek word is translated most often as *gentle*, and is clarified as *lenient*. The *reasonable* man can tolerate oscillations in providence and vacillations in people like a palm tree can bend with the breeze (or the coastal hurricane). A reasonable man knows how to contextualize: Everything in my life falls under the category of “In God’s hands,” and he loves me and listens to me. A reasonable man knows what’s beyond his job description, he knows the right number for customer service, and he knows how to phone for help (let the reader understand).

Because of all this, a reasonable man does not make a practice of anxiety—but he does use anxiety for practice.

PHILIPPIANS 4:5–7: Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

ASK A PASTOR



QUESTION: *Why Do The Pastors Write Out Their Prayers?*

ANSWER: Wonderful question. For background: Every Sunday during our Lord's Day service we have a specific time of prayer that a pastor leads. The pastor will intercede for our own church and for other gospel ministry the Lord is doing through other churches, organizations, and agencies that we care for or partner with. After hearing many of these pastoral prayers over the last few years, many within our congregation have come to pick up on something unique about this prayer time: The prayers seem to be manuscripted.

Let me offer three reasons why we have moved to written (manuscripted) prayers.

The Holy Spirit Works in the Preparation, Too!

A common worry about a written prayer is that it leaves no room for the Spirit to move. But why can't it be the case that a written prayer provides extra room for the Spirit, since it requires the pastor to start praying before Sunday morning even arrives?

We tend to assume that Spirit-led prayer has to arrive on the spot and unrehearsed. Yet we ask nothing of the kind from our preaching. Our pastors spend the better part of a week inside a single text, laboring over its meaning and pleading that God would press it into their own hearts long before they ever carry it out to the congregation. We receive the sermon that results as a work the Spirit has attended, and the long hours of study behind it only deepen our confidence that God is speaking through it.

I'm convinced that preparing for a corporate prayer is no different. When a pastor sits down midweek to weigh what our church most needs to bring before

the throne, and when he searches the Scriptures for words God has already given us to pray, the Spirit is at work in that quiet labor. The prayer manuscript that reaches the pulpit on the Lord's Day is the fruit of that Spirit-attended preparation, offered up with the same dependence every prayer requires. Over time, I am confident that even our prepared prayers will grow ever more deep and wide as we explore the riches of God's grace.

Preparation is a Guard Rail Against Monotony

Left to the moment, we all fall into ruts when we pray. The same phrases rise to the lips, and the same short list of requests comes around week after week, simply because those are the words nearest to hand. I'm sure you have heard some of the same kind of prayers time and again if you have been around churches for any length of time—"Hide the pastor behind the shadow of the cross.... water the seed that has been planted here today.... give us ears to hear..." Not that any of these are bad in themselves, but the more a pattern is repeated, the more it becomes rote, and the harder it is to carry meaning. The object of every element of the service is to build your faith, and that requires engaging your heart through your mind, which means we have to constantly labor to avoid the rut of repetition.

Writing the prayer out beforehand quietly guards against this rut. Given time to prepare, a pastor can carry the fuller breadth of the church's life before God, naming the missionary our people seldom remember and the sister church across town whose burdens rarely reach our minds. The manuscript keeps him from circling the same worn ground and frees him to lift up what the pressure of the moment would otherwise crowd out.

Everything Is a Teaching Moment

Perhaps most importantly, the pastor's public prayer teaches even as he pleads before God. When a pastor weighs his words in advance, he is also shaping how our congregation learns to pray. The order in which he brings his petitions, and the Scripture he weaves throughout, disciples us week by week toward a fuller and more biblical prayer life of our own. A manuscript is one way our pastors take our charge to heart, laboring over the few minutes they will pray aloud so that those minutes might train us for the long hours we spend praying alone.

The Lord bless you,
Pastor Taylor

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