



FBC MERIDIAN

June 2017 MeridianLife Letter

by Josh King

FBC Meridian,

Dearest saints, it has been a joy to sit under Colossians with you this year. I continue to believe that God is making us a holy people in Christ to the glory of His name by His all sufficient Word. I look forward to spending time with you in the remainder of 2017 in Ruth, Psalms, and 1 & 2 Peter.

Many of you have endured trials of various kinds these past months, and I have seen our Lord sustain you and magnify himself in you. I have seen the body express love and sorrow. Praise be to God. May we be conduits of the comfort we receive to other parts of the body (2 Corinthians 1:3–7).

May we continue to put on and put off. We are not perfect. Let us take heed lest we fall. Still, I have never known a sweeter fellowship. It is my distinct honor and privilege to serve as one of your shepherds.

Family Business

In this letter you'll notice a more formal tone *at times*. There will be a corresponding move at our MeridianLife Fellowships. We will clearly delineate when we move to a time of "family business." As some of you know, I have an allergy to the term "business meeting." This is for two reasons. First, the church is not a business. Second, there are frequently few things less Christian than a church business meeting. Nonetheless, the elders feel it would serve the body well to clearly identify when we have entered into "*family business*." *Family* was added to help curb my sneezing (this is me emphasizing that the formality will only come *at times*).

This formal tone will come in the form of recommendations from the elders. These will be clearly identified and stated. As recommendations they will come before the body as just that, recommendations. Although they do not need a first or second motion to be voted on, they will be discussed, and, if it appears that further discussion would be wise, the recommendation may be tabled. This may be done either at the elder's discretion, or by a motion to table the discussion until the next meeting. Also, these recommendations are open to revision.



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Along with this, we will start publishing minutes recording our *family business*. These will be available on the website in the member's section. This naturally means we will need someone to record said minutes. I would like to express gratitude to Lori Hushbeck for her years of service as our church clerk. Lori is stepping down from this position. Now we *really* need someone.

Having thus set the table, let me serve up the first recommendation, shiny formal place setting and all.

The elders recommend Linda Bennett to act as church clerk.

Note the official-y looking italics and intended paragraphs, kind of like a fancily folded napkin. Forgive me, I digress. The elders have spoken with Richard and Linda, and Linda is eager to serve. A system has already been discussed in which we believe these matters will be handled efficiently and in a way that serves our body well.

Membership

Jack Wilson has been visiting with our body for several months now. He came to us by the referral of our friend George Mayes, pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Lawton. He has been a regular part of the Hill's LifeGroup and has come to the elders requesting membership. His testimony is attached. Concerning Jack:

The elders recommend Jack Wilson be welcomed into full fellowship with this body transferring his membership from Emmanuel Baptist in Ardmore, OK.

Elder Apprenticeship

The elders want to again present the "elder apprenticeship program" before the body, adding some clarifications. The program as attached is a description of apprenticeship itself, nothing more. It is not an official church document. It is not a description of the qualifications for an elder as those are given in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and embedded elsewhere in the New Testament. Further, the qualifications, duties, calling, and dismissal of elders are items addressed in our church's by-laws. This is simply a description to be given out to those interested in an apprenticeship. It is meant to describe the apprenticeship as such, nothing more. The apprenticeship program can be readily modified by the elders to each situation regarding content, assignments, and duration.

The elders already have the responsibility per our by-laws of discipling souls and thus testing those who desire to be elders. Article II, Section 2-C says:



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“Elders are responsible for the spiritual ministry to the church, the implementation of discipline, and the oversight of the souls of the church members.”

Article II, Section 2–D on the calling of an elder states:

“If anyone desires the position of elder they may present themselves to the elder body. (1 Tim 3:1) After review of his qualifications, the elder body may present him as a candidate for the office of elder in a duly called business meeting.”

Paul commanded Timothy “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2).” Though Timothy was unique, functioning as an apostolic delegate, we believe this command carries force for those who serve as the elders of a church. As shepherds of the flock, elders should take the lead in discipling men to be elders, but this does not exempt the church at large from doing their part to test a man according to the qualifications listed in the New Testament.

We’ve put flesh on these things already. Soon after the new constitution was approved in October of 2011, I put forward an appeal for all who sensed a calling to eldership to approach me. Three men came forward and a year of testing and training ensued. In May of 2013 Bob Gray, Mark Myers, and John Sherrill were brought before you by me to be affirmed as elders. We simply want to formalize and open up this process.

In the past it was more common to speak of an *external call* and an *internal call* to ministry. The internal call is the “desire” spoken of in 1 Timothy 3:1. The external call is the church’s validating that professed external call. It is true that God’s call trumps ours, but not a man’s self-pronouncement of his calling. J.L. Dagg wisely cautions:

“Every man who believes alone, that he is called of God into the ministry, has reason to apprehend that he is under delusion. If he finds that those who give proof that they honor God and love the souls of men, do not discover his ministerial qualifications, he has reason to suspect they do not exist.”¹

Frequently in churches today, a young man expressing his desire is sufficient for the church to license him and/or send him to seminary with their blessing (many seminaries require a recommendation from the applicant’s local church). Subsequent churches then frequently see a seminary diploma as the stamp of a minister. It is our

¹Croft, B. *Test, Train, Affirm & Send Into Ministry*. Leominster: Dayone; 2010: 51.



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belief that the church has suffered in many ways because of this, and the fault is not that of the seminaries, but the churches.

Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has stated:

“I emphatically believe that the best and most proper place for the education and preparation of pastors is the local church. We should be ashamed that churches fail miserably in their responsibility to train future pastors. Established pastors should be ashamed if they are not pouring themselves into the lives of young men whom God has called into the teaching and leadership ministry of the church.”²

The elders desire a formal elder apprenticeship so that we as a church might squarely take on the task and responsibility which is the Church’s alone. The Church may not delegate. Seminaries may only aid. Further, because we wish to see Reformed Baptist churches with a Biblical leadership structure proliferate, and because of the dearth of such churches, we want to open this apprenticeship to any outside our body who might be seeking to be duly tested, affirmed, and sent by a church.

At present we do not anticipate more than one such person participating at a time. Still, there could be a need for multiple apprentices from within our body at one time. Say God calls three young men to the ministry from within our fellowship around the same time and they all desire to go to seminary soon. We would not want them to wait for consecutive apprenticeships, year following year, before we would send a letter of recommendation to a seminary. Further, we would not want the presence of a current apprentice who came from outside of our body to prevent a man from within our body from being tested.

This should help to illuminate how the apprenticeship relates to one becoming an elder. Sometimes, a man upon completion *may* be set before the church as an elder. At other times, the apprenticeship may end in affirming a man’s calling and sending a letter of recommendation to a seminary for further training. Apprenticeship is a formal and measured time of training towards eldership. Training, testing, affirming, and discipling such that a man is ordained as an elder may require much more or less than this.

Also, I hope this clarifies that we do not want to become a repository of elders. While there is certainly a need for the church to train, test, and affirm elders for the next generation, there is also a need to send them out. We are not the Lord. He adds to His flock. He calls men to the ministry. It is our task to be faithful: faithful to feed the sheep and faithful to train new shepherds to feed the sheep. If God calls a man, that man



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should step up. If the man steps up, the church should as well. If the church seems elder heavy, all should pray either that Jesus' sheep hear his voice and are added to the local flock, or, that trained and affirmed workers are sent out into the harvest.

So, with these clarifications:

The elders recommend that they be given authority to implement and oversee an elder apprenticeship wherein those interested will be first tested by the elders and then, upon their recommendation, be brought before the body for final approval.

Monthly Fellowships

Concerning a calendar for our monthly fellowships:

The elders recommend that we have monthly fellowships to be held on the first of the month when possible. LifeGroups may opt in each year as to whether or not they want to host a fellowship. A calendar will then be drawn up and distributed by a fellowship coordinator. The coordinator will also facilitate any scheduling changes that may need to be made.

Should this recommendation be approved, Robin West has graciously volunteered to serve as a fellowship coordinator.

Elder Confession of Faith and Name Change

The elders will be taking extra time this summer in hopes of completing our elder confession of faith and presenting it to you for approval by the end of the year. The confession is based on the Belgic Confession, which we would encourage you to read, knowing that we are making significant edits in some cases.

At the same time we plan to recommend we change our name to "Meridian Church." We hope to present these two items at our December meeting as they are both constitutional level proposals. As we hope to have the Confession in your hands months in advance for review, likewise a paper explaining more fully our reasoning for changing our name, but please feel free to talk to us about these things.

Grace and Peace,

On Behalf of the Elders,

Josh



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Jack Wilson's Testimony of Faith in Christ

My story is not unlike the many testimonies that you've seen or heard, but it is mine. It's my subplot in the larger narrative called "Time." If you'd like the Cliffs Notes version, I'd suggest reading Ephesians 2. However, I suspect you'd like some specific plot points, and it is here where I will provide you with them.

My upbringing wasn't actually in the church. I can't actually recall ever being in a church building as a child. The absence of any Christian upbringing didn't mean that I didn't have a worldview. I wouldn't call my inherited worldview "atheistic", the word "apathetic" is a better fit. I didn't care if there was a god. I wasn't raised to care if there was a god for whom I must answer to.

I entered middle school still not caring. I had several friends who invited me to their church gathering, and I took one up on their offer. All I can remember is how strange the experience was. Everybody was talking about Jesus. Everybody was singing about Jesus. Uncomfortable wasn't a strong enough word to describe my state of mind. However, things would change in a matter of six years.

I can't exactly remember when or why my thoughts changed about Jesus, but they did. I can recall thinking, "If any religion is true, it's gotta be Christianity." While the hardcore secularist would look at my reasoning and scoff, I'm glad I thought the way I did. I didn't have a staunch objection to the Christian faith, which allowed me to hear the Gospel clearly. During the summer before my senior year of high school, I was invited to the church where my grandfather attended. Much like my change of thought about the faith, I can't recall what the sermon was about, but it was enough to convict me. The sermon must've included the horror that is the sinfulness of man, as well as the beauty that is the Son of God. When the message concluded, the altar call was given, I responded, and I was baptized the following week. I don't know for sure if I was regenerate then, but I know that I'm regenerate now. I now proclaim with the Apostle Paul, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" I now believe that the Triune God of the Holy Scriptures created the world by the word of His power. He created man to image of His own likeness, but they rebelled against their Creator, causing their offspring to fall into the same state they had fallen into, that of total depravity. Our God will not be caught off guard, for this was His plan from before the creation of the world. God the Father planned from eternity past to save a people for His glory, and that's exactly what He would do through His Son. The Son, the second person of the Trinity, took on flesh and fulfilled the law that mankind could not fulfill. It is through faith in this Christ alone that I now have peace with God, and I have been instructed by the God-Man to take this Gospel into all the nations.



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Elder Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship?

The church was commissioned to make disciples, teaching them to observe all that her Lord Jesus Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19). One thing He has commanded is that his church be led by elders/pastors/overseers (these terms are interchangeable). Raising up, testing, and ordaining elders is the role of the church. Seminaries may assist the church in this, but they must not supplant her.

This is why FBC Meridian has an elder apprenticeship. We want to raise up elders from within our church and for other churches as well.

Two Tracks

While discipleship is lifelong, and should both precede and follow apprenticeship, this is a formal and focused time of training for the specific purpose of raising up elders. Going through the apprenticeship doesn't qualify one to be an elder, but it is meant to be a part of discipling men who have a desire to shepherd God's flock toward that goal.

There are two tracks for elder apprenticeship. *Track one* is referred to as an *intern-apprenticeship*. This is a one year intensive internship. This track works best for: 1. Someone coming to FBCM from another church, 2. Those preparing for, or having just completed seminary, 3. Young single men, or married men without children, 4. Those who can work part-time. This is not a paid internship, but housing with utilities may be available.

Track two, simply an *apprenticeship*, is more flexible, but for convenience a two-year plan is assumed by giving two months to each assignment given below. This track works best for men within our body who have families and full-time jobs.

Structure

Apprentices will take part in elder meetings, join elders during counseling sessions and pastoral visits, read a number of books and write papers on them, be given teaching opportunities, develop a sermon series and potentially preach it, and be given various other ministry and administrative tasks.

Additionally they must take the systematic theology course offered during their time as apprentices (intern-apprentices can only take two of the four semesters). Apprentices have additional course work as indicated on the attached syllabus.

Application and Requirements:

All persons interested in apprenticeship must fill out the apprentice questionnaire and submit a resume with five references (three for non-intern apprentices). To be considered for the current year, these must be received by May 1st. The intern-apprenticeship will last for a full year beginning in August.

Apprentices must be or become members of FBC Meridian, agreeing with the congregational affirmation of faith and the church covenant. Apprentices coming from outside of FBCM will need to go through the membership process as part of their application. They will be presented to the body as apprentices, with membership pending their coming. As members they must be involved in the life of the body by attending the weekly worship gatherings, participating in a LifeGroup, and attending all MeridianLife fellowships.

Required Reading

[The approximate number of pages to be read is indicated to help you pace your reading]

Theology:

1. *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer (279)
2. *The Cross of Christ* by John R.W. Stott (342)
3. *Delighting in the Trinity* by Michael Reeves (130)
4. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* by B.B. Warfield (430)
5. *One with Christ* by Marcus Johnson (240)
6. *Christ of the Covenants* by O. Palmer Robertson (300)
7. *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem (1167)

Discipleship:

8. *Temptation and Sin* (Volume 6 of Works) by John Owen (648)
9. *The Whole Christ* by Sinclair Ferguson (229)

Ecclesiology:

10. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever (243)
11. *The Deliberate Church* by Mark Dever (202)
12. *The Lord's Supper* by Richard Barcellos (114)
13. *Christ-Centered Worship* by Bryan Chapell (300)

Preaching:

14. *Preaching and Preachers* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones (340)
15. *Preaching the Whole Bible* by Graeme Goldsworthy (256)

Biography/History:

16. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (2 volumes) by Iain Murray (1154)

Culture:

17. *Christless Christianity* by Michael Horton (259)

Leadership/Ministry/Productivity:

18. *What's Best Next* by Matt Perman (325)
19. *Lit!* by Tony Reinke (188)
20. *The Pastor's Book* by Kent Hughes (539)

Marriage and Family:

21. *Father Hunger* by Douglas Wilson (202)

Reading Schedule:

For most of your reading, a summary of no more than one page is required discussing: 1. anything you learned that was new or surprising, 2. any differences you have with the author, and 3. any questions you have after reading.

One chapter of *The Pastor's Book* will be discussed each month.

Iain Murray's biography and John Owen's works on sin and temptation must be read by the end of the internship with a five page paper due on each. This is to help apprentices learn how to read large works in small chunks and slowly digest them to draw out more spiritual nutrition.

For apprentices on *track two*, we recommend you take two months for each assignment and read volume one of Murray's biography and John Owen on sin your first year, and the second volume of Murray's biography the following year.

Month 1

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 1
- Paper due for *What's Best Next?*

Month 2

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 2
- Papers due for *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* and *Lit!*

Month 3

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 3
- Paper due for *Knowing God*
- First sermon rough draft due

Month 4

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 4
- Papers due for *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* and *The Deliberate Church*
- First sermon revision due
- Second sermon rough draft due

Month 5

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 5
- Paper due for *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*
- Second sermon revision due
- Third sermon rough draft due

Month 6

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 6
- Papers due for *Delighting in the Trinity* and *Christ of the Covenants*
- Third sermon revision due
- Fourth sermon rough draft due

Month 7

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 7
- Paper due for *The Whole Christ*
- Fourth sermon revision due
- Fifth sermon rough draft due

Month 8

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 8
- Paper due for *Christ-Centered Worship*
- Fifth sermon revision due

Month 9

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 9
- Paper due for *Preaching and Preachers*
- Further sermon revisions
- Potentially lead LifeGroup studies

Month 10

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 10
- Paper due for *The Cross of Christ*
- Further sermon revisions
- Potentially lead LifeGroup Studies

Month 11

- Discuss *The Pastor's Book* chapter 11
- Papers due for *The Lord's Supper* and *Father Hunger*
- Potentially preach sermon series

Month 12

- Paper due for *Christless Christianity*
- Five page papers due for *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* and *Volume 6* of Owen's works.
- Potentially preach sermon series