

Conference Sessions

1) "Taking Every Thought Captive": Living in Freedom from Stinking Thinking

Chaplain Phil Merten

"What was I thinking?!?" - that's more than just a cry of frustration, it's the question we need to seek answers for. Chaplain Merten walks alongside people in their process of recovery from addictions, and he's come to appreciate their labor of questioning and relearning the thought patterns they've gotten accustomed to. It's really the same work God gives all his people: to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" and "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). We'll look at some of the ways "stinking thinking" shows up, and at the grace God gives to give us a new way of thinking.

2) What's Big Starts Small

Mike Novotny

Despite all of the church services, home devotions, and Christian conferences, our lives often seem stuck in the same patterns as previous years. Many of us are just as angry and impatient and insecure as we were a year ago. Given the power of hearing God's Word (Rom. 10/Is. 55/Heb. 4) and all of the Word that we have heard, how can this be?

Jesus knows. In his most quoted parable (Mt. 13/Mk. 4/Lk. 8), Jesus explains exactly how the Devil, the world, and our flesh attack the "seed" of God's Word, namely, through pride, pain, worries, wealth, wants, and not waiting. By revealing how these six threats attack our faith, Jesus teaches us how to protect the Word until it grows into something bigger than we would have believed, "one hundred times what was sown."

Interested in Jesus' insights on spiritual growth? Then this breakout is for you.

3) Married or Buried—What's the Difference? Learning to say, "I (still) do"

Kurt Wetzel

Marriage can be heaven or hell on earth. The Bible speaks in glowing terms about marriage, and it also describes how awful it can be in a sinful world. The instruction God gives his sons who've said, "I do" (and those who will one day say, "I do"), is hard work. But it is good work, and it yields abundant blessings. This session will examine some of the directives and pictures God gives for Christian marriage. We'll explore key passages with fresh eyes, hear some true stories about God's work in others' marriages, and encourage each other for the good work God has put before us. Marriage can be difficult; it can also be wonderful. God wants to bless your life with your bride. Learn from Jesus how to lead and love her by the Word.

4) Lessons from a Christian Conversation about Race

Mike Westendorf

In the wake of the death of George Floyd while in police custody Mike helped develop and lead a round table conversation about race from a Christian perspective. A total of 4 videos were produced and released in the summer of 2020 by Time of Grace Mile Markers, with the hope that it would be balanced and helpful from a Christian and Biblical worldview and perspective. Seeking first to listen, then to dig deeper, the videos brought many reactions. For our session, Mike will be joined by a few others to share what was learned as we all processed events and conversations along with the substantial challenges that come when talking about this content matter. Given the constantly changing perspectives around this conversation in America we will do our best to provide time for questions as we seek to listen and speak from God's perspective, with a godly attitude and compassion for one another in this Christian setting.

5) It's A Great Time To Be A Christian!

Bruce Becker

The cultural landscape in which we live seems to be deteriorating all around us. We see moral decline, political chaos, racial tensions, pandemic worries, gender issues, anti-Christian chaos, and with fear and a malaise permeating everything. Our culture is in crisis. That makes it a great time to be a Christian! In Jeremiah 29, as the Israelites faced an enormous culture change in being displaced to Babylon, God told them: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." In this post-Christian culture, we have so many opportunities to reach people with a message that dispels fears and provides hope. In this workshop, we will explore these opportunities and see why it is a great time to be a Christian!

6) Lead Me, Father

Bill Monday

Fathers are called by God to lead their children as a mirror image of God, the Father of us all, from whom fathers get their very title. It's the greatest calling one can receive next only to loving one's own spouse and loving God Himself. Contrary to popular opinion, this calling requires training ever since the fall of mankind into sin. It also requires endless prayer: "Lead me, Father, as I lead the children you gifted me with back to you!" (Hear the call of your own children in that very prayer as they lift their eyes to you!) Finally, the One who calls you will equip you for the work at hand, and will cover over all your shortcomings through the blood of his Son. Let us only humble ourselves and learn how to be fathers whom God calls us to be! This offering covers what it means to be a Christian father and especially critical points on parenting as a dad.

7) Gender and Jesus: understanding and responding to the transgender topic

Nathan Wordell

With little knowledge of gender and a lot of knowledge about Jesus, we can show transgender individuals how much Jesus loves them. What is transgender? We'll aim to understand the terms, practices, and beliefs regarding the topic of gender. What does the Bible say? We'll aim to understand how the Bible's message about Jesus applies to those who struggle with gender identity. What do we do? When we put gender together with Jesus, we'll be ready to with a Christian response to the transgender topic. Answering these questions together, we'll learn more about ourselves and our Savior.

8) The Journey of Grief – Walking Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Joe Radsek

I've always considered David's words in the 23rd Psalm, "walking through the valley of the shadow of death" to be especially comforting and reassuring during those life-threatening challenges in our lives. Since the death of our daughter in 2010 however, I have also come to appreciate how well these familiar words speak to the journey of grief when a loved one dies. It's been said that life is a journey rather than a destination. I have come to believe that the same is also true of grief. Grief is a journey on which we come to terms with the "new normal" that is now our life, following the loss of someone we love. And while virtually everyone makes this journey (and most of us several times over), the road, that each of us travels through our grief, is unique. Join me as we explore The Journey of Grief — walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

9) Delighting in the Interdependent and Complementary Partnership of Male and Female
Rich Gurgel

"It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Those words from our LORD on the sixth day of creation have a greater application for the relationship of male and female than just our homes. While God designed the beauty of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female to bless our homes as the foundation of all society, our grasp of the beauty of this partnership was intended by God to impact how we deal with one another as males and females everywhere in his world. And, beyond our homes, nowhere is it more important to grasp how God designed this partnership to operate than in our congregations. This session will focus on how we can grow in our congregations in making the most of this interdependent partnership that God designed for our blessing and the blessing of many others through us.

10) Preparing for the Path
James Buske

— One of the biggest and most difficult transitions in life is from the "Hight School years to on your own". The struggle and adversity during this transition are vital for preparing for the path. In this session we will dig into 5 biblical examples of dad's preparing young men for the future path. We will also examine what young men learned and applied as they transitioned to being on their own and living out their lives of service.

11) When Roles Change: meeting the needs of our aging parents
Pastor Curt Seefeldt

As our parents age, roles change. When we were children, God gave our mom and dad direct responsibility to provide for our overall well-being so we could achieve independence as adults. As our parents age, God often gives us the responsibility to provide care for them. In our session we will address the changing and sometimes challenging responsibilities which come our way when our parents come to depend on others for their safety and well-being. We will learn to appreciate our changing roles as a calling from God, a way to repay our parents for the care and instruction they have given us (1 Timothy 5:3). We will also learn to lead our families to use their skill sets to become respectful and genuinely helpful partners and make our parents' final years on earth a blessing for them, for ourselves and for their children's children (Ephesians 6:1-3).

12) Digital Outreach and Discipling in an Online World

Michael Ewart

Jesus (and later his disciples) preached and taught publicly, engaging people where they were. But what does that look like today? Where are people now? They're online. They're connecting, collaborating, and communicating via Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, SnapChat, Twitter, and other online platforms. In this session, we will explore why we must use digital platforms for outreach and discipling in an online world. The presenter will give specific examples and suggestions for developing and enhancing your church's digital ministries. Participants are also encouraged to share their digital successes so we can learn from one another.

13) Conquerors Release Leadership Potential in Others

Peter Panitzke

Our congregations are filled with successful business men and women, leaders who accomplish so much Monday through Friday. What are the secrets that business has learned to release their leadership potential? Are we as God's Church allowing them to use their talents? Or are we holding them back? Are we encouraging our called leaders to exercise courageous leadership? Let's discuss how we can release leadership potential in God's Church.

14) Serving Together

Joel Heckendorf

Called workers and lay leaders either fail to trust one another or don't recognize the necessity of utilizing each other's gifts, and the ministry suffers. God-willing, this session will open the eyes of all people attending, that they all are "leaders" in carrying out the functions of ministry, no matter what position they hold in the congregation. God's people can and need to "serve together" without necessarily serving together on boards, committees, etc.

15) "Welcoming and including people with special needs in your congregation"

Jesus Cares

In this workshop at staff member of Jesus Cares Ministries will have a panel discussion with several families who have children with special needs about what congregations can do to welcome and include people with special needs. This is far more than just having a Jesus Cares program for these individuals. It is cultivating a mindset and outlook that they are people like the rest of us and we need to make them an included and welcome part of each congregation. We will also look at the tremendous mission field which churches should realize in reaching out to the special needs community.

16) Why Men Are Failing to Lead (and what to do about it)

Gary Jeffers & Jeff Gunn

One of the major reasons American society is crumbling is because men are no longer sure what to be or how to act in today's world. Society continues to blame men and emasculate them. Television shows and movies make fun of the father figure as someone who is stupid and cannot lead. What do we do about this? Pastor Jeff Gunn and Gary Jeffers will share personal insights about their friendship, how to start a men's group where men can learn and grow together to be the leaders of their families, churches, neighborhoods and communities.