

West Suffolk Baptist Church

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant



West Suffolk Epistle



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The Antidote to Anemic Worship

Evangelical Christians have been especially attentive to worship in recent years, sparking a renaissance of thought and conversation on what worship really is and how it should be done. Even if this renewed interest has unfortunately resulted in what some have called the "worship wars" in some churches, it seems that what A.W. Tozer once called the "missing jewel" of evangelical worship is being recovered.

Nevertheless, if most evangelicals would quickly agree that worship is central to the life of the church, there would be no consensus to an unavoidable question: What is central to Christian worship? Historically, the more liturgical churches have argued that the sacraments or ordinances form the heart of Christian worship. These churches argue that the elements of the Lord's Supper and the water of baptism most powerfully present the gospel. Among evangelicals, some see evangelism as the heart of worship and therefore plan every facet of the service—songs, prayers, the sermon—with the evangelistic invitation in mind.

Though most evangelicals mention the preaching of the Word as a necessary or customary part of worship, the prevailing model of worship in evangelical churches is increasingly defined by music, along with innovations such as drama and video presentations. When preaching the Word retreats, a host of entertaining innovations will take its place.

Traditional norms of worship are now subordinated to a demand for relevance and creativity. A media-driven culture of images has replaced the word-centered culture that gave birth to the Reformation churches. In some sense, the image-driven culture of modern evangelicalism is an embrace of the very practices rejected by the Reformers in their quest for true biblical worship.

Music fills the space of most evangelical worship, and much of this music comes in the form of contemporary choruses marked by precious little theological content. Beyond the popularity of the chorus as a musical form, many evangelical churches seem intensely concerned to replicate studio-quality musical presentations.

In terms of musical style, the more traditional churches feature large choirs—often with orchestras—and may even sing the established hymns of the faith. Professional staff and an army of volunteers spend much of the week in rehearsals and practice sessions.

All this is not lost on the congregation. Some Christians shop for churches that offer the worship style and experience that fit their expectations. Those dissatisfied with what they find at one church can quickly move to another, sometimes using the language of self-expression to explain that the new church "meets our needs" or "allows us to worship."

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



The Antidote to Anemic Worship

Continued from Page 1

A concern for true biblical worship was at the very heart of the Reformation. But even Martin Luther, who wrote hymns and required his preachers to be trained in song, would not recognize this modern preoccupation with music above all else as legitimate or healthy. Why? Because the Reformers were convinced that the heart of true biblical worship is the preaching of the Word of God.

Thanks be to God, evangelism does take place in Christian worship. Confronted by the presentation of the gospel and the preaching of the Word, sinners are drawn to Christ in faith and the offer of salvation is presented to all. Likewise, the Lord's Supper and baptism are honored as ordinances by the Lord's own command, and each finds its place in true worship. But music is not the central act of Christian worship, and neither is evangelism or even the ordinances. The heart of Christian worship is the authentic preaching of the Word of God.

Expository preaching is central, irreducible, and nonnegotiable to the Bible's mission of authentic worship that pleases God.

The centrality of preaching is the theme of both testaments of Scripture. In Nehemiah 8, we find the people demanding that Ezra the scribe bring the book of the law to the assembly. Interestingly, the text explains that Ezra and those assisting him read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). This remarkable text presents a portrait of expository preaching. Once the text was read, it was carefully explained to the congregation. Ezra did not stage an event or orchestrate a spectacle—he simply and carefully proclaimed the Word of God.

This text is a sobering indictment of much of contemporary Christianity. According to the text, a demand for biblical preaching erupted within the hearts of the people. They gathered as a congregation and summoned the preacher. This reflects an intense hunger and thirst for the preaching of the Word of God. Where is this desire evident among today's evangelicals?

In far too many churches, the Bible is nearly silent. The public reading of Scripture has been dropped from many services and the sermon has been sidelined, reduced to a brief devotional appended to the music. Many preachers accept this as a necessary concession to the age of entertainment. Some hope to put in a brief message of encouragement or exhortation before the conclusion of the service.

The anemia of evangelical worship—all the music and energy aside—is directly attributable to the absence of genuine expository preaching. Such preaching would confront the congregation with nothing less than the living and active Word of God. That confrontation will shape the congregation as the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word, opens eyes, and applies that Word to human hearts. ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



Brotherly Love

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ~ Romans 12:10 ESV

Young siblings are inclined to elbow and nudge each other and to complain about each other. If we are honest, sometimes our idea of “brotherly affection” in the church is marked more by that kind of thinking and conduct than it is by love and gratitude. When we look around at one another, instead of singing that we’re glad we’re part of the family of God,” we can often think deep down, “I’m surprised you’re part of the family of God.”

Paul calls us to a better way.

In this verse, love is described using family words. *Philostorgoi*, translated here as “love,” comes from the Greek word *storge*, which refers to the devoted love of parent for child. Philadelphia, translated here as “with brotherly affection,” is the word used for the love between siblings (as in the name of the city of Philadelphia, the “City of Brotherly Love”). Back in Romans 8, Paul has already reminded his readers that they’re together as members of one family by God’s grace (Romans 8:12-17). Now, because they have each been brought into the family on the same basis—namely, in Jesus—they have every reason to be devoted to one another.

This kind of love requires not only genuine affection but also humility. The NIV translates the second sentence in this verse as “Honor one another above yourselves.” This resembles what we see in Philippians 2, where Paul writes, “In humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Scripture calls us to put others first. We are to learn to play second fiddle without complaining or perversely seeking to be commended for doing so. The only competitive element among a church family should be that of seeing who can raise up and do good to others the most. Thinking of this kind of loving brotherly affection brings us back to Jesus, who loves to call us His brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11-15). For Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:6-7). It is Jesus who shows what true brotherly affection is; it is Jesus who loves His family perfectly in this way, outdoing all others in showing honor; it is Jesus whom we are called to be like, and whom we are living like each time we choose to love with Christlike brotherly affection. Today, then, love like Him. ~ *Alistair Begg*

The Church and Israel in the Old Testament

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve to be a worshipping community: He would be their God and they would be His people. The fall, however, shattered their fellowship with one another as well as with God, a division that was deepened even further in the next generation when Cain murdered his brother. The trajectory away from God begun by Cain’s line ended with a counterfeit worshipping community in Babel (Genesis 11). At the same time, a line of true worshippers ran through Seth to Abram—Abraham—whom God promised to make a great nation and through whom He promised to bless all nations of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3).

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



The Church and Israel in the Old Testament

Continued from Page 3

God promised Abraham's grandson Jacob that He would make his twelve sons into a harmonious worshipping "community of nations" (Genesis 28:3) that would be known by his new name, "Israel." Significantly, the Hebrew word used here for "community" is *qāhāl*, which the Greek translation of the Old Testament often renders as *ekklēsia*, "church." This goal of a worshipping community was reached after the exodus from Egypt when the people came to Mount Sinai. There God declared the Israelites to be His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5–6). The Lord promised to dwell among them as their God (Exodus 29:45). But the people had no sooner committed themselves to this covenant relationship with the Lord than they abandoned Him. While Moses was at the top of the mountain receiving instruction from the Lord, the people were at the bottom fashioning false gods. It was clear from the outset that the "holy nation" had no power to live up to its calling.

The prophets unfold for us the rest of Israel's history: in spite of God's faithfulness to them, they were corrupt and rebellious children (Isaiah 1:2) and an adulterous wife (Hosea 1–3). This heritage of unfaithfulness belonged equally to the northern and southern kingdoms: Israel and Judah were two twisted sisters from the same family (Ezekiel 16; 23) who would each face the punishment of destruction and exile (Ezekiel 4:4–6). The Lord could not dwell in the midst of such an unholy people. He abandoned His chosen dwelling place in Jerusalem, leaving His people at the mercy of their Babylonian enemies (Ezekiel 8–11).

Yet the destruction of Israel in the exile could not be the end of the story. Because the Lord had attached His name to Israel, the nation would have to be restored lest His holy name be profaned among the nations (Ezekiel 20:14). The promises made at Mount Sinai had to be fulfilled (Jeremiah 33:20–21), so the two nations of Israel and Judah would be restored by the Lord into a single, reunited body made up of all of the clans of Israel (Jeremiah 31:1) under a single king (Ezekiel 37:16–22). The most important promise was the spiritual transformation of Israel into a new people whose unresponsive hearts would be changed into new hearts under a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–33) by an outpouring of God's Spirit (Ezekiel 36:22–28). The new Israel would become the Lord's servant, a light for the Gentiles, bringing healing to all nations (Isaiah 42:6, 10). However, the new Israel depicted in Isaiah 40–48 continued to be a struggling and weak people who needed constant exhortation to pursue obedience as well as encouragement to trust in God's faithful love for them. To fulfill God's purposes, another, better Israel would be required, a servant who would take Israel's place, doing what Israel was unable to do, fulfilling her calling to bring light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6).

This servant "Israel" took flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. From the moment of His birth, He reenacted Israel's history, going down to Egypt so that He could be the true son whom God called out of Egypt (Matthew 2:15, quoting Hosea 11:1). Just as Israel passed through the Red Sea, Jesus passed through the waters of baptism (Matthew 3) before being led out into the wilderness, where He successfully faced the same temptations that Israel had failed to endure (Matthew 4). At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus read aloud Isaiah 61:1–2, declaring that the Scripture had been fulfilled in His hearers' presence (Luke 4:18–19): He was Himself the promised Servant upon whom God's Spirit rested. As the new Israel, Jesus perfectly fulfilled the demands of the law. The new covenant that Jeremiah anticipated was established in His blood (Luke 22:20). Jesus fulfilled God's original design for human holiness, thereby personally embodying the new Israel for which the prophets looked.

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



The Church and Israel in the Old Testament

Continued from Page 4

Since Jesus Christ is Himself the new Israel, all those united to Him by faith are also incorporated into the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). He is the true vine, the classic Old Testament image for Israel, and we are His branches (John 15). Because Christ is the living cornerstone of God's house, those who are joined to Him become living stones in that house (1 Peter 2:4–5) and can be described by the same terminology that described Israel in the Old Testament: in Christ, we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Being part of this new covenant Israel is, thus, not a matter of physical descent from Abraham, but rather sharing Abraham's repentance and faith (Luke 3:8). The new people of God includes Jews and gentiles together (Galatians 3:28), as both are grafted into the new olive tree, Christ/ Israel (Romans 11:17–24). That does not mean that God has forgotten His promises to those physically descended from Abraham (Romans 11:1). Certainly not! But not everyone who is descended physically from Israel is part of the new Israel (Romans 9:6). The restoration of Israel promised in the prophets is accomplished as the gospel is preached to Jerusalem and Judea (the southern kingdom), Samaria (the northern kingdom), and to the ends of the earth, thereby finally bringing God's light to the gentiles (Acts 1:8).

In the book of Revelation, John heard God's people described as a group of 144,000 made up of the twelve tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:4–8). Yet when he looked again, he discovered that the same group was an innumerable crowd from every tribe and nation (Revelation 7:9–12). The Lord's bride, the image used in the Old Testament for Israel, is the church and will one day be defiled by her sin no longer but beautifully adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2). In that day, God's original purpose and plan for Israel—to have a united, holy people belonging to Himself—will finally be fulfilled in the marriage of Christ and His church. ~ ***Dr. Iain Duguid - Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.***

Emulating the Supreme Model

God has given great men and women to the church. The biblical giants serve as valuable models—despite their imperfections. Were we to elevate Paul, Abraham, or David above Christ, we would be guilty of idolatry. The same would be true if we exalted Martin Luther, John Calvin, Thomas Aquinas, and others above Christ. We respect these saints, but only insofar as they are faithful to Christ and point beyond themselves to Christ. This was certainly the style of the apostle Paul, who labored tirelessly for the cause of Christ. We love and honor him for that labor. Likewise, we honor the giants of church history. But even the theological “giants” are sub-apostolic, never speaking or writing with an authority equal to an apostle.

At the same time, we recognize that a vast gulf separates Augustine from Jim Jones. People like Augustine and Luther have contributed theological insights of such magnitude that their names are representative of key thoughts. Few in church history are worthy of such recognition. The suffixes “ian,” “ist,” or “ite,” (e.g., “Calvinist”) are valuable to identify truth but have little positive and much negative value when applied to personalities. We know that Augustine, Luther, and Calvin were not crucified for us. Thank God for role models who have influenced your life; then thank Him for the Supreme Model who died for you. ~ ***Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. (1939—2017)***

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



2026 West Suffolk Spring Family Conference June 26 and 27, 2026



Dr. J. Ryan Davidson has been serving as pastor at Grace Bible Chapel in Hampton, Va. since August of 2008. Ryan is married to Christie, and they have four wonderful children. Ryan holds degrees from Samford University (B.A.), The College of William & Mary (M.Ed.-Counseling), and Southern Seminary (Th.M.) in Louisville, KY, and a (Ph.D.) in Early Christianity/Pastoral Theology from The Free University of Amsterdam, Netherlands. Ryan also enjoys teaching around the world in various places and serves as Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at International Reformed Baptist Seminary (IRBS). Ryan likes fishing with the kids, enjoying his wife's culinary delights, running (every once in a while), and fellowship with friends around the table.

Session 1:

The Friday evening session (June 26th) was entitled, "A Garden Foundation: A Theology of Family." Taking us back to the creation account in Genesis chapter 2-9, Ryan spoke on the creation of the family with the account of the creation of a woman. Ryan pointed out that both men and women are needed to tend to God's world. He introduced the concept, which he would refer to in all three sessions of the conference, of there being three particular spheres of authority which God has ordained, even in these early chapters of God's Word: the family (a husband and wife, and sometimes being blessed with children), the church (God's people), and the Civil Magistrate (the government, which may take the form of a king, a president, a dictator, or any of several other forms).

Marriage was described as a complimentary arrangement, where each spouse supplies what is lacking in the other. Though the wife is described as the helper, it should be thought of as one who supplies what the husband lacks. In the same way, the husband supplies what the wife lacks. In the marriage a one-flesh union is formed. Such a union may produce children, but the absence of children does not prevent the union from being a family.

The end of Genesis 2:25 indicates an attitude of innocence, and provides a bridge to Genesis 3:1, where the serpent is introduced. The result of sin, rebellion against God's rule and His sovereignty, is a desire to cover yourself, as Adam and Eve did with leaves. Innocence is lost, and shame appears.

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



2026 West Suffolk Spring Family Conference

June 26 and 27, 2026

Continued from Page 6

Session 1: (Continued)

Ryan noted that before the fall, God instructed them to work. Thus work is not a part of the curse. The emphasis of all this is keeping leadership where it belongs, and keeping roles appropriate, as God has instructed. Men are to lead in the home, not lording it over the wife or children, but lovingly, as Christ does. Also not avoiding leading or pushing inappropriate decisions on to the wife.

The family is ultimately the backdrop against which the gospel message is displayed. Referring to Ephesians 5, Ryan noted that submission is unto the Lord. It is about Christ. Loving your spouse is also about Christ.

The leadership of the husband is limited to the home (unless he holds a position of leadership in another sphere of authority). That is, while the husband is to lead at home, he does not usurp the roles of church leadership at church.

The ultimate purpose of marriage is to picture the gospel of Christ. Ephesians 5:22. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. Parenting is a picture of God and his children.

Session 2:

The morning session on Saturday (June 27th) was entitled, “Unto the Lord: The Family at Home.” The theme is how we conduct ourselves, looking forward to Christ, beginning with reference to 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Ryan observed that Peter’s use of the word “likewise” tells us that the submissiveness described applies to both husband and wife. This is the pattern Peter has shown as he discussed submission to governments, masters and servants, and now husbands and wives. The submission is to “your own” husband. That is not a command to submit to all men in the church. Submission is to be as Christ submits to the Father. The family is always addressed with respect to the fear of the Lord, so this submission is also with regard to the fear of the Lord.

Husbands are told to give honor to their wives as to the weaker vessel. This is a reference to physical strength, not to some notion of weaker intellect or abilities. Christian masculinity has less to do with how hard you can swing an axe, and more to do with how we can carry fine china. It is a careful strength. Men are to give honor as co-heirs with Christ, in hope of the resurrection and in unity to aid spiritual strength. Children are to be raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

West Suffolk Baptist Church



West Suffolk Epistle



2026 West Suffolk Spring Family Conference

June 26 and 27, 2026

Continued from Page 7

Session 3:

Saturday afternoon (June 27th) the session was entitled, “Gates & Dwellings: The Family at Church.” The primary text was Psalm 87:1-3. Ryan noted that Zion is typified in Jerusalem, and points to the people of God. When the Psalmist says, “the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob,” he is not saying that he does not love the dwellings of Jacob (Israel), but that, he loves Israel, but loves the gates of Zion (that is, the church) even more. The Lord loves public worship even more than private worship.

Hebrews 12:22-24 tells us that there are innumerable angels at the gathering of God’s people. 1 Peter 1:10-12 indicates that the angels long to look into the glories of the gospel. Ephesians 3:10 indicates that the wisdom of God is made manifest through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Together, these indicate that the angels have a genuine interest in what is happening in the worship of the church.

Because of this, how we conduct ourselves in church worship is very important. To that end, training children at home to sit quietly, so that not only the parents, but the rest of the congregation can hear the message, hear the Scriptures read, and prayers offered, and participate in singing, and the ordinances is a high priority. It is not simple, and cannot be expected to happen quickly. It takes patience and it takes consistent effort.

As Calvin says, angels know the wisdom of God, and angels see God’s work in the church that God loves.

Discipling and Disciplining

There is a strange dichotomy in the language of the contemporary church. Much is said and written about the important function of discipling new Christians, while at the same time the function of church discipline has almost vanished. Today, discipline is a word used to refer to the instruction and nurture of the believer. It does not usually carry the connotation of ecclesiastical censure or punishment.

In one sense, this modern version of discipling is linked to the New Testament model. The term disciple in the New Testament means “learner.” The disciples of Jesus were students who enrolled in Jesus’ peripatetic rabbinic school. They addressed Him as “Rabbi” or “Teacher.” To follow Jesus involved literally walking around behind Him as He instructed them (the word peripatetic comes from the Greek word *peripateo*, which means “to walk”).

The New Testament community was forbearing and patient with its members, embracing a love that covered a multitude of sins. But in the New Testament, church discipleship also involved discipline. Part of apostolic nurture was seen in rebuke and admonition. The church had various levels or degrees of such discipline, ranging from the mild rebuke to the ultimate step of excommunication. ~ *Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr. (1939—2017)*

West Suffolk Baptist Church

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West Suffolk Epistle



If you have a birthday or anniversary in July that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries July 2026

Birthdays

*Sadie H. (13)
Elijah D. (16)
Jubilee H. (18)*

*Teresa H. (21)
Emily L. (25)
Nic G. (29)*

Anniversaries

*David and Jennifer A. (4)
Les and Jessica T. (17)*

Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles Jeremiah 29:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.



***West Suffolk Baptist
Church
Leadership***

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Please submit information to the editor by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or its leadership.