



# HEARTLAND HAPPENINGS

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE HEARTLAND CHURCH NETWORK

## AVOIDING DISTRACTIONS

BY MARK ELLIOTT



I have mentioned some of the unique cultural challenges that are deeply impacting American Christianity today: emotionally-driven decisions, information overload, sensory overload, and our accelerated pace of life. Today I want us to look at an issue that has been common to humanity since creation itself: our desire to know all that God knows. When we are seeking to know what only God can know, we will not be doing what God has clearly told us we should be doing.

Because I don't have time and space to start in Genesis and work my way through the Bible, permit me to cherry-pick two very familiar incidents in the life of Jesus that I believe will make my point. Ultimately, my goal is to reveal how far off the mark we have gotten as it relates to having a true Biblical Worldview. We are often focusing on the

wrong things, majoring on the minor things, and becoming distracted by the little things that interest us.

The Olivet Discourse encompasses three passages of scripture: Matthew 24:1-25:46, Mark 13:1-37, and Luke 21:5-36. Each opens with Jesus' statement that a day will come when not one stone of the temple shall be left upon another. And in each passage, the disciples quickly respond with the question, "When will this happen and what signs can we expect to see prior to it happening?"

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# START

EXISTS TO ASSIST IN THE STARTING OF CHURCHES BY PRAYING, PROMOTING, PREPARING, AND PROVIDING RESOURCES FOR CHURCH PLANTERS AND NEW CHURCH PLANTS.

## FROM PRISON

TANNER DEVEREAUX

Whenever someone asks me to share my testimony the song, "My Story" by Big Daddy Weave echoes in my head! Seriously, when I first heard this song, I swore it was written just for me. Through all the pain and heartache growing up, there was hope that wouldn't let go. Where I felt no love from those who should have loved me most, there was Love that never gave up. In my darkest most grave sin, Christ died for me there, and His grace is greater than all the destruction I have ever caused... *The truth is in the lyrics, "to tell you my story is to tell of Him!"* I could tack on; "I was once blind but now I see," and we could just about end the story here. But God gets glory in the testimony of what He allowed me to go through and what and where He saved me from, so let me tell you, my story.

My parents have never been together. As far back as I can remember they have been divorced and separated. It wasn't until my wedding at 26 years old that I got to witness both my father and mother in the same room together. My dad had his issues as an alcoholic and my mom struggled with drug use and relationships. Divorced parents meant two homes, and it seemed like everything I owned could fit in grocery sacks, *like a twisted game of tennis I was constantly hurled back and forth between homes, and unfortunately, I was the ball.* To this day I still don't know the truth behind why I had to live with my dad and how my mom only got every other weekend and Tuesdays, but I do know that this tore me apart as a child. Stuck in a sick and prideful game between the two people I loved the most.

## TO PASTOR



**"IF I TOLD YOU MY STORY**

**YOU WOULD HEAR HOPE THAT WOULDN'T LET GO**

**AND IF I TOLD YOU MY STORY**

**YOU WOULD HEAR LOVE THAT NEVER GAVE UP AND IF I**

**TOLD YOU MY STORY**

**YOU WOULD HEAR LIFE, BUT IT WASN'T MINE**

**IF I SHOULD SPEAK THEN LET IT BE**

**OF THE GRACE THAT IS GREATER THAN ALL MY SIN**

**OF WHEN JUSTICE WAS SERVED AND WHERE MERCY WINS**

**OF THE KINDNESS OF JESUS THAT DRAWS ME IN OH TO**

**TELL YOU MY STORY IS TO TELL OF HIM"**

*MY STORY, BIG DADDY WEAVE*

I had terrible examples growing up, but I made my own choices. At each home, I had access to whatever substance I wanted to use and by 12 and 13 years old I was regularly using pornography and alcohol at my dad's, and marijuana at my mom's. My parents weren't the only bad examples. As the youngest I had two older brothers, one grew pot and the other has been an active Sureño gang member for fifteen years or better. So, by thirteen years old I was the man around my friends. *I had the drug hookup and big friends to back me.*

At fourteen, I moved to Missouri with my mom, and it wasn't long before I got acquainted with the drugs that plagued this Midwestern state. By 17, I had been using and manufacturing methamphetamine for over a year. I would beg, borrow, steal, sleep with women, and do whatever else it took to get high. By the time I was 23 I had been incarcerated more times than I could count, and I was on my way back to prison for my third time. *The drug turned me into someone I never thought I would be... A monster.*

Between my second and third stints in prison, I received my first bible from a sweet lady I call Granny Rose. *She gave me this Bible and told me how Jesus could change my life if I would let Him.* I tossed the Bible aside and continued to use drugs, manipulate women, and steal property. I can remember vividly, times when I would be using meth and Granny Rose would text me. She would send me exactly what she was praying for me, she would send me scripture and witness to me!

In January of 2018, my crime spree had caught up to me and I was incarcerated yet again in the Missouri Department of Corrections on parole violations and new pending cases. In the cold walls of a prison in Fulton, Missouri, my cellmate handed me a copy of what I later knew to be Romans Road. This copy took the onramp at Romans 3:10, *"as it is written: 'There is no righteous person, not even one; 11) There is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks out God; 12) They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, there is not even one.' 13) 'Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving,' 'The venom of asps is under their lips'; 14) 'Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness'; 15) 'Their feet are swift to shed blood, 16) Destruction and misery are in their paths, 17) And they have not known the way of peace.'18) 'There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

**"SHE GAVE ME THIS BIBLE AND TOLD ME HOW JESUS COULD CHANGE MY LIFE IF I WOULD LET HIM."**

*How has my life changed?* Well, it started in prison. A week after I was saved, I prayed that God would always place a man in my life to disciple me through life, He has kept true to my prayer. All throughout prison God sent me men like volunteers and chaplains to help me grow in my walk and land my doctrine as a Southern Baptist. *I stayed in my bible, prayer, and fasting for a year and a half.* It was inside those razor-wire fences that I truly felt free for the first time.

God has been using me in a variety of ways since I was saved, most of it has been behind the pulpit or in leadership. At Ozark Correctional Center I served as the inmate Christian General Representative where I organized events, placed orders, and met with other inmate Christians and volunteers. While there I served as devotion leader for Friday night worship service and leader in Celebrate Recovery. I was released in June 2018 and went into Freeway Ministries Discipleship program in Springfield, MO. I joined Crossway Baptist Church and began serving in K-2nd grade, middle school, rotation teaching in Sunday school, and organizing outreaches. *Since I've been reborn, I have got to see my mom be saved and baptized as well! God is transforming my family one by one!*

I married my bride, Naomi, in September of 2019, and it has been the second-best thing to ever happen to me. She was sold out for missions as well as I was, and it really sealed the deal. We answered our call to missions, and *I answered my call to pastor/preach in January of 2021* and we began to work with the North American Mission Board and Heartland Church Network as church planters.

## FROM PRISON, TO PASTOR CONTINUED



We completed our assessment with NAMB in August and received a green light to plant in Omaha, NE where we are now. Crossway Baptist Church ordained me and sent us off in November of 2021. Lord willing, I will be transferring from Baptist Bible College to Spurgeon College at Midwestern this spring.

*May God always get the glory for our testimonies. The same Grace that saved me, can or has saved you too.*

**WE COMPLETED OUR ASSESSMENT WITH NAMB IN AUGUST AND RECEIVED A GREEN LIGHT TO PLANT IN OMAHA, NE**

# 2022

## ANNUAL STRATEGIC THEME

During this next year, the focus of the churches in this Network is for each one to teach one. We've been given the honor of giving Good News to our neighbors. As you begin setting goals for this New Year - pray about who God has placed in your life. Who are you to teach this year?

# EACH ONE TEACH ONE

***For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. We are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. ... He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us His very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds. You must teach these things and encourage the believers to do them.***

**Titus 2:11-15**

# SUPPORT

EXISTS TO PROVIDE QUALITY LEADERSHIP TRAINING, TECHNOLOGY ASSISTANCE, RELEVANT RESOURCES, AND COOPERATIVE PROJECTS TO SUPPORT CHURCHES.

## RESOURCE LIBRARY

Did you know that the HCN office has a library filled with Bible Studies, books, and other resources that are free for your use?

We also have a great online resource library. Mark has created multiple book summaries for people who don't have time to read an entire book!



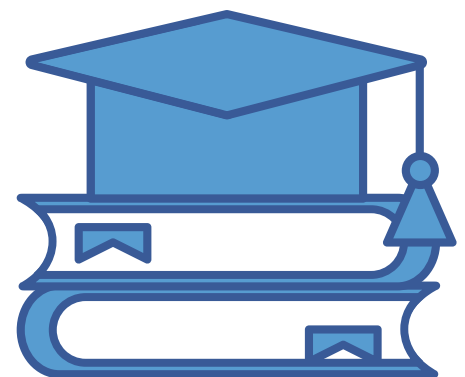
## BLOCK PARTY TRAILER



As you begin or continue to make plans for 2022 remember we have Block Party Trailers available to rent for the churches and ministries of the Heartland Church Network! From a community outreach event to an end of Vacation Bible School celebration, the Block Party Trailer is a great asset for your next event! The Block Party Trailer includes a bounce house, inflatable challenge course, popcorn machine, snow-cone machine, and a sound system! To reserve a BPT for your next event visit [HeartlandChurchNetwork.com/support](https://HeartlandChurchNetwork.com/support).

## CONTINUED EDUCATION

The Heartland Church Network facilitates several opportunities for pastors, ministry leaders, and volunteers to further their educations. Whether through the CLD partnership with Spurgeon College & MBTS, the Heartland Bible Institute, or Biblical Counseling certification - HCN is passionate about *equipping the saints*. For more information visit [HeartlandChurchNetwork.com/continuing-education](https://HeartlandChurchNetwork.com/continuing-education).



# MT. MORIAH COMPLETES BUILDING ADDITION

*Dr. Ralph Lassiter*

As I reflect on our construction journey, I acknowledge that the building is not the church. 1 Peter 2:5 clearly states that we ourselves “like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

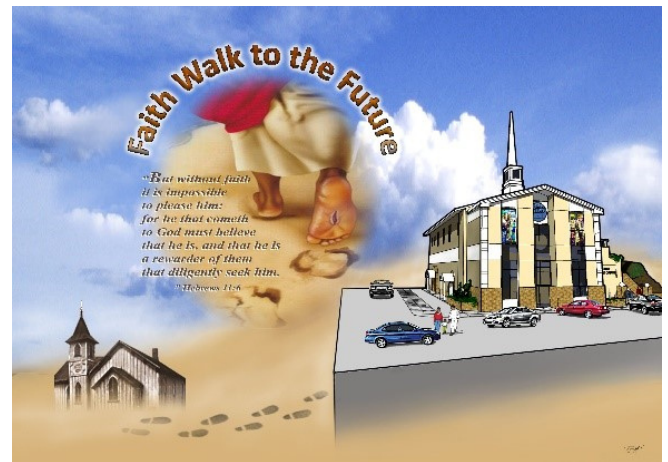
At the same time the people are asked in Haggai 1:4, “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?” Well in 2005 Mt. Moriah was not lying in ruins but sufficient attention had not been given to the condition of our church structure. Most significant was the lack of access to the sanctuary and office areas for those who had mobility challenges, an inadequate kitchen, children’s classrooms in need of “warmth” and no handicap equipped restrooms. Therefore, a decision had to be made - “Do we renovate the existing church?” or “Do we relocate?”

After an extended period of prayer, the decision was made to answer those questions by first conducting an engineering and architectural assessment of the building. This was the first of many blessings bestowed upon us as the engineering assessment was completed at no cost by a friend of the church and the architectural assessment was also completed at no cost by my brother and retired pastor, Dr. Franklin Lassiter. Results of the assessments were clear - (1) the building is structurally sound; and (2) worth expanding & renovating since the replacement costs would be at least four times the estimated cost of all renovations. These assessments were our way of obeying the command to “Count the cost” before building as given in Luke 14:28.



With this information in hand, it was now time for the church family to follow the directions of the Lord given in Haggai 1:8 when He said to “Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified.”

Therefore, we moved forward fully confident that if we “Commit ‘our’ work to the Lord, ‘our’ plans will be established.” (Proverbs 24:3).



So, we committed ourselves under the theme “Faith Walk to the Future” and began a five-phase improvement plan that spanned over 10 years:

1. Repair, paint, and enhance the sanctuary.
2. Create a new entrance on the north side of the church.
3. Renovate the lower level and classrooms.
4. Expand the kitchen area, pantry, and restrooms.
5. Build the addition in front of the existing church.

*Continued on page 10*

# CONNECT

EXISTS TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATIONS, CONNECT MINISTRY LEADERS BETWEEN CHURCHES, AND TO ASSIST CHURCHES TO MORE EFFECTIVELY CONNECT WITH THEIR COMMUNITY

## Christmas Fellowship

The 2022 Pastors and Staff Christmas Fellowship will be held on January 8 at Millard Social Hall from 11:30-2 pm. This is designed to be a time of encouragement and fellowship for pastors, staff, and their spouses. For a large church that would be the senior pastor and ministry staff along with their spouses. For smaller churches, it will be the pastor (full-time, bi-vocational, or volunteer) and those he views as the leadership team (full-time, bi-vocational, or volunteer), and their spouses.



## Updating Directory!

One of the primary missions of the Heartland Church Network is to connect ministry leaders between churches and to assist churches to more effectively connect with their community. In order to best stay connected, we are updating our directory! To update your church or personal information, please visit [HeartlandChurchNetwork.com/connect](https://HeartlandChurchNetwork.com/connect) to fill out our "Get Connected" form OR call the office at 402-551-0608.



# AVOIDING DISTRACTIONS

## CONTINUED

Keep in mind that they had been walking daily with Jesus for three years, and had heard him repeatedly challenge them to be holy, set-apart men who were truly different in a desirable way. Immediately preceding the Olivet Discourse, Matthew records Jesus' denunciation of the religious elite with a series of woes, because they taught one thing and lived another. His disciples had also heard Him say, "This generation is a wicked generation; [because] it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah" (Luke 11:29).

As we read the Olivet passages we find that Jesus weaves the more immediate fulfillment of the destruction of the temple that occurred in 70 AD with His second coming which is still yet to happen. We also see a strong and repeated encouragement for the disciples to guard their hearts and to not become discouraged.

- "Take heed that no one deceives you" (Matthew 24:4).
- "See that you are not troubled" (24:5).
- "But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (24:13-14).
- "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (24:35).
- "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (24:36).

As Jesus wraps up His discourse, as recorded in Matthew, He tells them to always be prepared by being obedient to all that He had been teaching them, because the consequences of disbelief, disobedience, and distraction are severe.

*"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*

*Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:42-51).*

The same strong exhortations are recorded by both Mark and Luke:

*"Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping" (Mark 13:35-36).*

*"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36)*

**AVOIDING DISTRACTIONS, CONTINUED**

Having heard Jesus tell them to focus on being an obedient disciple instead of worrying about when and how He will return, it should be instructive to us that they repeated the process a few months later. If it happened to them, it can and will happen to us. Just prior to Jesus' ascension Luke tells us:

*"Then they gathered around Him and asked Him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' After He said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven' (Acts 1:6-11)*

I must admit that my pragmatic nature kicks in when I hear Jesus repeatedly states that knowing the time of His return is not something we can know. Instead, He repeatedly told His disciples to focus on knowing and obeying God's commands. With that in mind, I have summarized the book of Revelation and eschatology into one very short statement and two short questions: God wins! Are you on His side? If so, are you helping others find out how to get on His side?

Ultimately, our focus should be on the things that interest God and not what interests us. There are plenty of difficult and obscure Biblical passages that can distract us. And there are plenty of Biblical Doctrines that we seek to rationally explain that we are asked to simply accept by faith: the trinity and the humanity versus deity of Jesus are just two of them. Don't get distracted! Keep the main thing the main thing—making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples...for the Glory of God.

Yours in Christ,  
Mark Elliott



## MARK'S INSIGHTS

*Mark Elliott is in his 29th year of serving as an Associational Missions Strategist. He is passionate about serving the local church and shares weekly insights on current cultural issues impacting the local church.*

*Please visit [www.heartlandchurchnetwork.org](http://www.heartlandchurchnetwork.org) or call the office, 402-551-0608, to subscribe to Mark's weekly articles. You can also find previous articles on our website.*

# MT. MORIAH ADDITION CONTINUED



*Ribbon Cutting by Pastors Lassiter and Williams*

Each step on this journey was a walk of faith and evidence of God's power, faithfulness, and love. In addition to the Mt Moriah Church family "rallying" to the need in prayer, contributions and sweat equity, so many others joined with us to make this vision a reality. We thank Mark Elliott for his support throughout the building process resulting in the assistance of the KNCSB Foundation, mission teams from Arkansas, Kansas & Missouri and Life Spring Church, locally.

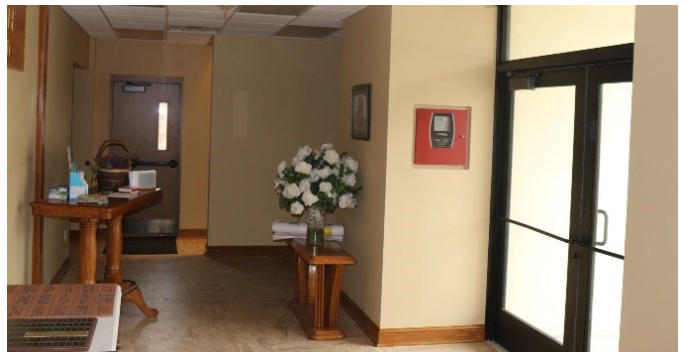
Designated as the "Narthex", the new addition was dedicated to the Lord on October 24th of 2021 with celebrations in song, prayer and God's Word shared by our AMS, Rev. Mark Elliott and Rev. Dwayne Hawkins of the New Era Baptist State Convention of Nebraska.

Although I am not a firm believer in the concept "Build it and they will come", the Lord has added to our church family through 11 baptisms since the dedication. We have hosted COVID-19 vaccine clinics resulting in over 330 adults and children receiving the vaccine. Each clinic was combined with the sharing of the gospel, prayer and a community give-away where several hundred pounds of clothing, toys and household items were given to the needy in the community.

So, on behalf of my co-laborer, Pastor T. Michael Williams and the entire Mt. Moriah Church Family, we are immensely thankful to the Lord for all that He has done. We also acknowledge that He is not finished with us, nor have we completed the mission of making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples...!



*The New Mt. Moriah*

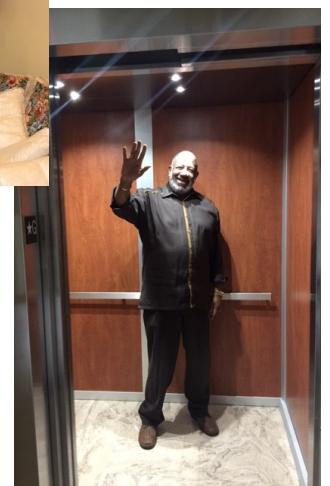


*Lower Lobby Entrance (above)*



*Vestibule (above)*

*Testing the Elevator - it Works! (right)*





# LOOKING AHEAD

## CHILDREN'S CAMP PLANNING MEETING

If you'd like to be a part of planning Children's Camp this year, join us for a meeting January 12 at 9 a.m. at the HCN Office or via Zoom. Some points they'll be discussing: crafts, recreation, speakers, themes, needed staff (nurses, lifeguards).



## LEADING CHURCHES IN THE MIDWEST IS CHALLENGING.

Do not miss the upcoming Midwest Leadership Summit! Over three days, you will receive dynamic insight from leaders and pastors who are making Southern Baptist Ministry work in the Midwest. The culture here makes our work challenging- and all the more important. This event for church leaders is presented by your state convention in partnership with Baptist conventions in the Midwest and national SBC entities. Contact the HCN office to register.

## Minister & Spouse Retreat

The 2022 Minister and Spouse Retreat will be held April 29 and 30 at Lied Lodge in Nebraska City, NE. This is a short time of restoration for ministers and their spouses and a chance to connect on a deeper level with other ministers in the network.



## SAVE THE DATE PIVOT 2022

EQUIP ENGAGE ENCOURAGE

Sunday, Aug 28, 2022

## PIVOT 2022

Quotes from two 2021 attendees of how they would describe this conference:

*"A great place to learn about how to make your church impactful in empowering members to be Christ's disciples."*

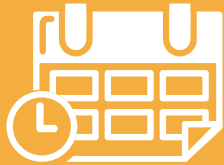
*"Relevant topics to incorporate into your ministry."*



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### January

- 8 Christmas Fellowship
- 12 Children's Camp Planning Meeting
- 18-22 Midwest Leadership Conference - Springfield, IL

### March

Pastor's Wife Appreciation Month

### April

- 29-30 Minister & Spouse Retreat

### Mark Elliott, AMS

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