

## A PhD in Biblical and Theological Studies: What Is It Good For?

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“Absolutely nothing!” might be the answer some recent PhD graduates would give to this question. The dream of many PhD students in biblical and theological studies programs is to get a full-time tenure-track teaching job, and some are able to achieve this goal. However, the number of PhD graduates far exceeds the number of positions available, which leaves many qualified candidates working in other fields or underemployed in academia. Various books have been written to help graduates find work outside of their field, such as Christopher L. Catherine’s *Leaving Academia: A Practical Guide*. However, books like this are often wide-ranging and not specific to biblical and theological studies. We have compiled a list of several options for careers that are linked to this field, and we would like to introduce you to some people with PhDs in biblical and theological studies who are working in these areas. Our hope is that the job search narrative would revolve not around the scarcity of tenure-track teaching positions but instead around the abundance of opportunities to serve God’s kingdom with the particular knowledge and skills gained in a PhD in biblical and theological studies. Click on one of the following links to read more about that field:

1. [Academic Teaching with Support Raising](#)
2. [Pastoring and Church Ministry](#)
3. [High-School Teaching](#)
4. [Administration](#)
5. [Editing and Publishing](#)
6. [Alternative Biblical Teaching](#)
7. [Chaplaincy](#)
8. [Campus Ministry](#)
9. [Teaching in Related Academic Areas](#)
10. [Bible Translation](#)
11. [Nonprofit Work and Parachurch Ministry](#)
12. [Theological Librarian](#)
13. [Adjunct Teaching](#)

## 1. Academic Teaching with Support Raising

*One of the closest parallels to a traditional academic job is teaching in a position that requires raising financial support. These positions are generally available in schools outside North America, and typically involve living in a different culture. Teaching in one of these schools fills a substantial need for the theological education of the global church and provides an opportunity for rich cross-cultural learning. However, significant time must be spent raising money, both in preparing to go overseas and in continued communication with financial supporters. In addition, these kinds of positions can involve a high level of administrative work and may not offer as much time or as many resources for publishing.*



**Dr. Stephanie A. Lowery**  
Theology Lecturer and Program Coordinator  
Africa International University (Nairobi, Kenya)

I'm currently serving in theological education in the Majority World—in this case, in Kenya, East Africa. To teach at a university in Kenya, a PhD is essential; the government requires it for a person to teach full-time and also to hold an administrative position. I'm a lecturer in theology, and currently also serving in an administrative role as program coordinator (head of department) and academic advisor for our undergraduate in theology students. As a full-time lecturer at an evangelical school, I am eligible for promotions based on experience and publications, just as I would be anywhere else. I am here as a missionary, so I have raised support to allow me to be here without causing the school any financial drain. One benefit of being a self-supported lecturer is that I really can teach just about anywhere I want; I have gone through just 2 interviews total since arriving here 5 years ago (one at each school where I've served).

Personally, teaching here in Kenya has long been my dream. In the Majority World as a whole, there is on average one trained church leader for every 450,000 people! So by investing here, I know I am making a substantial difference. I can influence students from across this vast continent: we currently have students from nearly 40 nations at our school. Also, by being in a cross-cultural setting, I am continually being pushed to grow and learn as I encounter different perspectives. For instance, one day in class a question came up about baptism under a flag, which was a practice I'd never heard of before. My students are from more communal cultures, which means they notice aspects of the biblical text that I (being from a more individualistic culture) have missed. The list of things I have learned simply by being in this context goes on and on.

I hope more people will consider serving in theological education in the Majority World. If this sounds interesting, please spend time praying about it and reach out to someone who is currently doing it to get their perspective. There are opportunities to come and teach short-term, to “get your feet wet.” I have never regretted being here; teaching cross-culturally can enrich your life in ways you can't imagine!



**Dr. Matthew Newkirk**  
 President and Professor of Old Testament  
 Christ Bible Seminary (Nagoya, Japan)

Early in seminary I became interested in two seemingly incongruent career paths: academic ministry and missions. Soon I found out that these career paths are actually not incongruent, since well-trained seminary professors represent a *huge* need on the mission field. The only incongruence was my lack of ministry imagination and a reluctant disposition toward the prospect of raising support. Let's face it: *no one* looks forward to raising support. And while I certainly experienced my fair share of discouragement and frustration during the support raising process, I also found it to be a richly rewarding and faith-deepening experience. Like many others, initially I viewed raising support as sort of a spiritualized form of Christian begging. But as I prepared to engage in it, my view shifted dramatically—rather than asking people to give something *to me*, I realized that I was offering them an opportunity to invest their resources in a gospel work *for God's sake*. (I've written more about a theology of supporting missionaries here: <https://newkirksinjapan.com/2014/09/05/toward-a-theology-of-supporting-missionaries>.) And to be honest, having a PhD was an asset during support raising. People knew that I had spent many long, difficult years training to serve this way, which gave them confidence to partner with me. Moreover, since my objective in entering academic ministry was to teach people about the riches of God's word and train them to live as fully-devoted disciples of Christ, support raising ended up being a great opportunity to teach and train people to view God's kingdom as the global reality that it is and to give sacrificially toward it.

On the mission field, I now serve as President and Professor of Old Testament at a small seminary in Nagoya, Japan. In this sense, the work I do here is the same as it would be if I were serving in such a role in North America, and therefore my PhD is equally relevant for my day-to-day life. I lead faculty meetings, teach classes, grade papers, do research, mentor students, and preach occasionally in nearby churches. The rather large difference, of course, is that after coming to Japan I spent two years studying Japanese full-time in order to live and serve here. Language acquisition varies for different people, and different languages present varying levels of difficulty for native English speakers (for rankings of languages in terms of difficulty, see here: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-language-training>). But one thing is clear to me: my years learning Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, German, and French—as well as the discipline required to complete a dissertation—provided very helpful training for me to engage in the rigorous work of acquiring a foreign language. I'll be honest, it can be frustrating to operate in a foreign language, especially in an academic setting, where precision of expression is ideal and you are not always as precise as when you speak in your non-native tongue. But there are also benefits that far outweigh the frustrations as you have the unique opportunity to experience Christian community and academic inquiry in a way that broadens your personal and spiritual horizons more so than if you were to remain in your native cultural setting.

My advice to those who are completing (or have finished) a PhD is as follows.

- First, I'd encourage you to consider whether you might use your gifts and education in a place, such as Japan, where trained professors are so scarce. The overabundance of PhD graduates versus the paucity of positions in North America is evidence that God may

want you to use your gifts elsewhere. You have received a tremendous privilege from God in your training, and while serving overseas as a supported missionary is certainly not for everyone, ask yourself whether your desired career path is fundamentally for the fame of God's name, or whether it is limited by your desire for comfort, security, and academic recognition.

- Second, that said, don't decide to become a missionary only after you fail to secure a tenure-track position in North America. Living and serving in another language and culture requires a level of dedication and commitment that cannot be faked or fabricated, so it doesn't work as Plan B for anyone. If you're open to the prospect of serving overseas, pray and ask God to direct you, engage in a full study of a biblical theology of mission (which I've written about here: <https://www.amazon.com/Fill-Earth-Creation-Mandate-Missions/dp/1532693400>), talk and pray with your spouse if you're married, and really try to discern if this could be God's calling for you. I always encourage people to consider missions, but I also emphasize that they need to be committed to missions as Plan A and not as a backup option.
- Third, talk with people who have already walked this path. Ask missionary professors what their experience has been like. Ask them for their advice. Contact a missions agency and ask about going through their assessment process to determine your readiness. Or feel free to contact me, and I'd be happy to dialogue with you about it ([newkirk.matt@gmail.com](mailto:newkirk.matt@gmail.com)).

Like earning a PhD, living and teaching as a supported missionary is full of both joys and struggles. Like a PhD it requires stamina, perseverance, and a dogged commitment to press on despite obstacles. Like a PhD it will push you further than you planned on going, but like a PhD it is 100% worth the effort.



**Dr. Daniel Owens**

Lecturer, Hanoi Bible College (Hanoi, Vietnam)

International Consultant, reSource Leadership International for Theological Education

Global Partner, Training Leaders International

Our family has served in theological education and mission under a financial support model since 2003. It is critical for us to carry out the calling God has placed on our lives because of the financial realities of the church in Asia. For those not having a compelling sense of mission, it may seem like a sacrifice to put in the effort to raise your support. But it is also a tremendous blessing in terms of gospel partnership, as Paul's letter to the Philippians describes. We have deepened in friendship with those who have walked with us these past 18+ years and made some new friends along the way. Don't discount this blessing too quickly. I have taught in two academic institutions in Asia. For both teaching posts, I raised financial support.

While in Singapore, my college provided housing, and I was able to teach the Old Testament in English. Singaporean society is highly educated, motivated, and globally connected. And the infrastructure is top-notch. Within walking distance (or a short bus ride) of our college was a Starbucks, a tasty independent burger place, an inexpensive hawker center with local

Singaporean specialties, an extensive and beautifully crafted botanical garden, and a reservoir complex with quiet trails (including monkeys and snakes). The joy of teaching there was the opportunity to invest in the lives of students from as disparate places as New Zealand, India, Thailand, Mongolia, and, of course, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. My Mongolian student is now the president of a theological college there. Every student is valuable in God's eyes. Yet it is also true that some students have a disproportionate impact on the expansion of the Kingdom of God outside the West, which is where much of the growth of the gospel is taking place right now. Their contexts of ministry can be raw, dangerous, and exciting. So teaching them is an incredible privilege and stretches those intellectual muscles that you developed in your PhD studies. If you teach in a school that serves a regional constituency, you are making a strategic impact on future church and academic leaders.

My main professional/ministerial context has been Vietnam. I spent many years learning Vietnamese, so when I arrived in Singapore I was able to speak Vietnamese with one of my students there. He has since become a co-author of a Hebrew grammar/workbook in Vietnamese and a biblical commentator in his own right. I have walked with him from his MDiv days until today, when he is waiting to defend his own dissertation. Following my stint in Singapore, I returned to Vietnam to help a fledgling Bible college in Hanoi. I was able to invest in the school by crafting the BTh program, establishing the library cataloging system, digitizing our student academic records, and setting up Moodle and teaching students to use it, which turned out to be critical as COVID-19 pushed us online. I also have helped start a Christian literature company, which has published three of my books in Vietnamese and many others either translated into Vietnamese or written by Vietnamese authors. This kind of pioneering work in theological education and Christian literature development is not for everyone. But from a global perspective it is the cutting edge of theological discourse. Academics in the West chew on many old questions (and some new ones), but the work is often maintenance or rear-guard defense of a movement struggling to stay relevant. That work is critical, but it is a highly competitive environment, both in finding teaching jobs and getting book contracts. Here I don't need to compete with anyone to have something to offer, whether as a teacher or as a writer. We help train leaders for a movement rapidly growing among ethnic groups who have only learned of the gospel in the past 40 years. Their questions are fresh and raw. Sometimes they seem odd to us, like the student who asked me just the other day whether *mannah*, being "the bread of angels" (Psalm 78:25, ESV, and the same idea as the student's translation), meant that angels also needed to use the restroom. It was a simple question, maybe even silly, but it was an opportunity to talk about genre and interpretation. Harder to answer is what students should do when a traffic policeman demands a bribe. So if you want a challenge to those intellectual muscles developed in your masters and PhD studies, consider investing in global theological education.



**Dr. Steve Pardue**

Program Director for ThM/PhD in Theological Studies  
Asia Graduate School of Theology (Manila, Philippines)

I went into my PhD studies knowing that I wanted to use my degree in an overseas institution. Having grown up in Asia, I saw that while US seminaries and Christian Colleges were oversupplied with teachers and undersupplied with students, the equation was exactly the inverse

in Asia. Even before accounting for rapid growth in the Asian church taking place every year, there is already an enormous Christian population in need of trained leaders who can shepherd and disciple them. My firsthand experience also told me that there were institutions in Asia prepared to offer high-quality leadership training, but that their greatest need was adequately trained faculty.

This trajectory informed the way I pursued my studies. I tried to choose a PhD program where there would be at least some like-minded students who were also preparing for work outside of North America, and I tried to connect with faculty who I knew had experience serving beyond the North American context so I could get their advice. In many ways, my path looked the same as my colleagues preparing for the North American job market—I tried to network widely, publish where I could, and think strategically about how my research interests could advance the state of knowledge in the field. I tried to have the mindset of someone competing for a selective job market, knowing this would allow me to contribute best to my future institution. But I was blessed not to have the same kind of anxiety about job opportunities that my fellow students had.

Of course, I had a different challenge—connecting with a mission agency and setting up a support network that would create the funds needed to teach at the institutions where I was aiming to work (which do not pay full-time salaries to their faculty in order to make their degrees affordable). For us, this process was actually easier than we expected; we were able to leave for our post in Asia the day after I received my diploma. Many of my colleagues had similar experiences. I think the main reason for this is that we had good partner institutions in Asia who were doing really excellent, strategic work, and they were able to help us communicate that to churches and individuals. We had also been very involved in our church for years, and they had a vision for missions that strongly aligned with our target ministry. In general, my advice to those considering this possibility is that it is actually exciting and encouraging to raise funds for a strategic role in missions where you have specialized training and good partners in the Majority World who are inviting (urging) you to join them. There are so many churches and individuals in the United States who want to be part of kingdom work in the Majority World and are looking for good opportunities to use their resources wisely. Also, it is notable that as Asian economies grow, schools here are increasingly able to fund or partially fund faculty salaries. So be on the lookout for arrangements like this.

Having been working in Asia for 9 years now, I would unreservedly recommend it. For me, I can't think of a better way to use my gifts and degree than helping Mongolian church-planters better understand the relevance of the Cappadocians' teaching on the Trinity, or helping a pastor of a Filipino megachurch think more carefully about how good exegesis can protect against the prosperity gospel. At the more advanced level, I get to work with students who will be writing textbooks for Asia's hundreds of millions of Christians, offering my two cents about how the history of the church or key insights from contemporary theology can inform their work. There are difficult things about our context (the Philippines), of course. Underdeveloped infrastructure causes headaches and drags on quality of life (terrible traffic, slow or inconsistent internet, air pollution, time-consuming banking processes)—though it's notable that many cities in the Majority World don't have these drawbacks. Of course, you will need to have an appetite for cross-cultural collaboration, which is supremely rewarding when it works well, but also requires

patience and tolerance for more friction than in monocultural work (longer meetings, more need to question your own thoughts, etc.). There will always be more teaching/church/committee work than you can do, as the scale of need is really enormous. But for me, all of those drawbacks are easily outweighed by the chance to work with eager, strategic students who are ready to meet the needs of the growing Asian church for healthy Christian teaching.



**Dr. Austin Surls**

Associate Professor of Old Testament  
Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (Amman, Jordan)

Greetings in Christ! Since 2015, our family has been living in Amman, Jordan. After two years of language study, I began teaching Old Testament full-time at Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary. The Seminary does not provide a salary for me, so we have had to raise support from dear friends and former churches we were a part of. I recognize that many attach a stigma or an onus to support raising, but we have found that it is a great opportunity to get friends and churches to think outside of their immediate context and to put their treasures where their hearts are.

I believe that my work has fewer responsibilities than some others who teach outside America. I teach two courses every semester (perhaps because I am teaching them in Arabic and the preparation and grading takes awhile [I have no TA]). I also do not have a formal administrative role (yet). Most of my time on the seminary campus is spent preparing lectures and grading assignments. This work is both exhilarating and humiliating at the same time, but there is *always* room for growth (linguistically, pedagogically, and pastorally). I hope the Lord will give me many years at this work, so that I can slowly increase the depth and breadth of my relationships and my service. In any case, raising children and living life in another culture has given us great experience that will certainly benefit myself and others should we ever return to America for other work.

If this is something you are considering, I suggest first that you read the following article: Keith D. Campbell, “The American Evangelical Academy and the World: A Challenge to Practice More Globally,” *JETS* 56/2 (2013): 337–53. Second, do not consider coming overseas if you only want to stay for 2–5 years: effectiveness in another culture comes very slowly, but is perhaps more rewarding personally. Third, email me if you want to discuss this further ([austindsurls@gmail.com](mailto:austindsurls@gmail.com)).



**Dr. Jamie Viands**

Lecturer in Biblical Studies  
Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (Nairobi, Kenya)

First, the premise that “the number of PhDs in biblical and theological studies is far higher than the number of available *tenure-track* positions” may be true, but it is not higher than the number of available teaching positions, especially in my context in East Africa. If only more with PhDs

in the West would be willing to come to Africa, they would find that instead of competing for available positions, there may be multiple schools begging them to come to fill roles that have been vacant for some time with no viable candidates to fill them. I teach at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, arguably the most well-known, most highly respected graduate school of evangelical theology on the continent outside of South Africa. We attract students from all over Africa (about 30% of our students come from outside Kenya), and we currently have about 350 students. Ideally we should have three or four full-time lecturers in OT and three or four in NT, but currently we have only two of each. Our senior NT professor is over 70 and hasn't retired simply because he is desperately needed and we don't know how to replace him yet. At the school in Kenya where I formerly taught, they offer Masters degrees in theology and biblical studies, but they have only one full-time faculty member with a PhD (in NT) in the University. He has asked me to teach their Old Testament Theology course because there is literally no one else that he knows of in the country who is qualified to teach it at Masters level. But since I simply don't have the time to teach it, the course will not be taught. Having been in Kenya for nine years now and networked a fair amount, I still know of only three or four other evangelicals in the whole country with PhDs in OT who are actively teaching. This is in a country that is 80% "Christian" and where there is a desperate need for pastoral training.

There are both pros and cons to having a PhD in biblical studies in Africa. In terms of the advantages, many countries in Africa are increasingly requiring PhDs to teach in universities. Kenyans are pursuing graduate level education at higher rates, and there remains a great need for advanced theological training for the sake of the growth of both local churches and African Christian theology. More well-trained Africans are needed to model faithful handling of Scripture and to combat syncretism and prosperity theology. Those of us with PhDs are in a position to train others at these higher levels. Since "high-power distance" cultures dominate Africa, those with PhDs are also automatically accorded greater respect and authority than is the case in the West. Though this reality is not entirely positive, it also tends to open more doors for influence for those with PhDs. We also have greater influence in our schools to effect change.

However, having a PhD in Africa does not always feel entirely positive. Those with PhDs are often recruited very quickly for administrative roles that can be time-consuming. Furthermore, serving as an administrator in a foreign culture can be challenging. Miscommunication, differing approaches to organization and oversight, and misunderstandings potentially leading to strained relationships are almost to be expected. At times, missionary teachers without PhDs feel more "blessed" than those with PhDs because they are left alone to simply focus on teaching and are not drawn into difficult administrative roles. Depending on the role, administrative work can enable one to implement a lot of positive change, but it does come at a cost in terms of time and energy (both physical and emotional).

Also, there are other tasks that can only be fulfilled by those with PhDs, including supervision of Masters theses and doctoral students. Although there are joys associated with such supervision, including the opportunity to encourage students to grow in exegesis at a higher level, this is an added time burden that is usually simply added to one's teaching load. Due to understaffing, some find themselves overseeing 20 Masters theses and 10 doctoral students at once at NEGST. There are other schools without Masters or Doctoral programs (or with few students) where this would not be an issue, but this is the current reality where I am teaching. As a result, it often feels as though there is little time for a break, and there is little or no available time for research, writing, and publishing.



Teaching overseas does also require support raising. Though such a prospect is understandably unattractive to many who have acquired a PhD, it need not be a painful process, and is even rewarding in some ways in terms of building a network of relationships with friends, family, and churches who are “on your team.” Though everyone’s experience is a bit different, this process of initially raising support could be accomplished in under a year. Although time is still needed to maintain contact with supporters while overseas, this need not take much time. The typical standard is to send out three to four email updates every year. While home, it is still generally expected that one will visit supporting churches, but there has been a shift in missions away from supporting churches toward individual supporters, who usually understand that you can’t (and won’t) see them all whenever you are home. In our case, we have only two supporting churches and 60 individuals, so we are required to do very little traveling while home. Although it is harder to find time for research and writing while teaching overseas, in my experience in Africa this is not because of the need to raise support and stay in touch with supporters, but due to the high demands of our institutions, understaffing, and the lack of any concept of a Sabbatical.

Although there are challenges and downsides in terms of teaching with a PhD in biblical studies in Africa, I believe that the advantages and opportunities far outweigh them. While some may see teaching in Africa as a “back-up plan” if one fails to land a job in the West, I would suggest there is no better place to be if one’s goal is not simply to have a well-paying job and a career but rather to have maximal kingdom impact. First, in Africa a PhD holder is not just another easily replaceable cog in the educational machine. Rather, in most cases they are filling positions that can’t or won’t be filled if they were to leave. We are truly (and sometimes desperately) *needed* here. Second, teaching here has the potential to have a tremendous impact on the health of local churches. Africa continues to struggle a great deal with various forms of syncretism, and (more recently) with the explosion of prosperity theology. Pastors in our schools here are not only wrestling with infralapsarianism but with fundamental issues concerning what the Gospel is and is not, and how one must properly interpret and apply Scripture to be a faithful preacher. In other words, teaching here is far from “merely” academic, and one readily and constantly senses that the salvation, discipleship, and sanctification of our students and their congregants is at stake. Third, although it can be harder to find time to publish, when one does find the time, there are far more opportunities to make genuine contributions if one’s focus is on speaking to the issues of the host culture. For example, I have found hardly anyone in Africa publishing in biblical theology or using biblical theology to address issues within the church. Thus, publishing in such an area is often breaking entirely fresh ground. For these reasons, personally, there is no place I would rather be teaching, despite the accompanying challenges. I would strongly recommend PhD holders to prayerfully and seriously consider teaching overseas in places like Africa where they are truly needed. Though it may be something of a “step of faith,” they very well may find deep joy and satisfaction in teaching and training in such a place.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

## **2. Pastoring and Church Ministry**

*A frequent path for PhD graduates is to enter church life, as pastoring involves many opportunities for teaching. Some larger churches may even have specialized roles like a campus pastor, teaching pastor, or scholar-in-residence that may be particularly suited to someone with*

*a PhD in biblical or theological studies. Many find church life more fulfilling than academia, as they interact with people more deeply and for a greater length of time. However, far less time is typically available for publishing (unless an agreement is reached with the church when taking the position).*



**Dr. Dan Brendsel**  
Incoming Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church (Hinckley, MN)

During my undergraduate studies, a good friend of mine did a summer internship with a missionary pastoring in a small village in sub-Saharan Africa. Some might argue that this man was “over qualified”: he held a PhD in biblical studies from a prestigious UK university, was fluent in some six or seven languages, and, I dare say, was generally smarter than you or me. Here he was ministering in a place that, by our standards, could well qualify as “the middle of nowhere,” isolated from the major centers of academic resourcing, discussion, and community, with a sphere of influence that was highly limited. My friend asked him if he ever felt his gifts and training were being wasted, to which he responded (I paraphrase, to the best of my memory of a conversation from two decades ago): “These precious people rely on their pastor almost implicitly. There’s no one with a university education, no fact-checking the things I say, no smorgasbord of other pastors and churches to consult or choose should my preaching and teaching be suspect. What I say about what God’s Word says, this they take very nearly as what *God* says. All my studies and training is not to get me some posh position in my upward climb in social standing; they are to help me speak responsibly to these people who may, much more than others, need such responsibility from their pastor.”

I have been thinking about this pastor’s comments a lot recently, as I am a few weeks out from embarking on my first senior pastor calling, in a small town, far from the resources of the college town where I have ministered as an associate pastor for nearly a decade. The role of a pastor is a weighty one. Whatever the location on the map, the authority and power (interpretive and otherwise) that a pastor wields is significant, and we are all well aware of the potential for and frequency of abuse. But some abuses may arise “innocently,” more from ignorance and naïveté than from a desire to take advantage. When I think of the reasons why a pastor would ever need a PhD, I think of that faithful missionary shepherding the flock in Africa. I think of the great tradition of pastor-scholars who led the church intellectually, as well as liturgically and morally, for most of the history of the church up until about the 19th century. And I think of my own flock, of their need for the Word, and of my role in speaking it forth responsibly. I better be darn confident that I have done my work, that I have put in the time to cultivate wisdom and good interpretive instincts, that I know what good judgments are and how to make them, and also that I have the awareness and humility to recognize the limits of my understanding in the broader landscape of scholarship and the history of interpretation. While there are surely many routes the Spirit uses to cultivate such habits and virtues, PhD studies for me have been a crucial part of that path. So I am deeply thankful to have had the opportunity to pursue doctoral work, and I am firmly persuaded that there is much (and there are *many*) that such intellectual labor is “good for.”



**Dr. Jeannine Hanger**

Adjunct Professor, Biola University (La Mirada, CA)  
Scholar-in-Residence, Coastline Covenant Church (Redondo Beach, CA)

I, like so many others, began my PhD with my sights set on a university teaching position; this has and continues to be the hope. Part of how that trajectory was confirmed for me was in the opportunity to teach biblical studies in a university adjunct role. While this is not the prized tenure-track position, it *is* the heart of what has been my goal—to invest in students by teaching the Bible. Since my path to and through the PhD has been such a drawn-out journey, adjunct teaching has nurtured this calling and keeps me fresh by offering immediate opportunities to apply the fruits of my research. This has been a cherished opportunity and the primary way my doctoral training has borne fruit to this point.

Another way one can utilize a PhD is in the church. Or put another way, one of the ways the church may be served is by utilizing all that is gained through the specific skills acquired in pursuing a PhD. How this is starting to play out for me is the opportunity to participate in a church plant as a “scholar-in-residence” of sorts. Paired with another like-minded friend, we have been tasked to engage in study, reflection, and conversation toward advising the pastoral staff on pertinent issues related to establishing and articulating theological positions, church polity and governance, along with recommendations for roll-out to the congregation. For me, the PhD program cultivated an instinct toward researching widely and reflecting deeply on all sides of an issue, making this endeavor a very rewarding way to contribute to the local church. And it has intensely practical implications for how our fledgling community will poise itself to relate as a family both internally and as we reach out to the community in which we have been planted.

While this is (and will continue to be) a part-time volunteer role, I can envision such a “scholar-” or “theologian-in-residence” position to grow beyond this. Larger church contexts may be well-served to employ someone dedicated to bringing biblical and theological training to their congregants. One thinks of Dr. Michael Heiser at Celebration Church, who functions as the Executive Director of their affiliate Awakening School of Theology for one version of this. Less ambitious than starting a training “school,” such a role could utilize someone with a PhD to bring in and curate discipleship and equipping resources and to oversee a church’s biblical teaching content—from podcasts and blogs to the various teaching ministries of the church. Finally, a scholar-in-residence could serve in an important advisory capacity. As the wife of a pastor, I have had a front row seat to how often the pastoral needs of a congregation can overtake a pastor’s margin for the kind of wide reading and depth of study needed to remain up to date on current events, theological debates, and approaches to ministry endeavors. I can see a relevant need to employ someone who carries both doctoral training and a heart for the church. This person would be uniquely poised to serve the pastoral leadership (and by extension, their congregants), as they sit on the frontlines toward researching, reflecting, discerning, and equipping the saints in a variety of important ways.



**Dr. Edward W. Klink III (Mickey)**

Senior Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church (Roscoe, IL)

Adjunct Professor, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL)

After spending almost a decade as a professor of New Testament at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University in southern California, I resigned my position (one year after getting tenure!) and returned to a northern suburb of the northern Illinois city in which I was born and raised in order to serve as a pastor. I always felt like I could fit in both worlds—the academy and the church, even if the worlds do not fit nicely together. My Ph.D. research at the University of St. Andrews (Scotland) naturally directed my trajectory toward the academy, yet I never viewed taking a professorial position at a confessional school as anything other than a form of (parachurch) ministry.

I started teaching at Biola/Talbot at the age of thirty and naively believed that I could serve in both the academy and the church simultaneously. I was mistaken. It became clear to me early on that a person would be forced to choose either the academy or the church as their “headquarters.” One would get my best time and energy; the other would have to get leftovers. My convictions also forced me to see that weekend pastoring was not sufficiently pastoral. That is, a pastor is not merely a teacher at an event but a day-to-day shepherd who knows and lives among the sheep. I saw the decision before me. I would either be a professor who serves the church in my spare time, likely in teaching roles, or I would be a pastor who serves in the academy when available. There was no middle ground. Since I could honor the Lord in either realm, I based my decision on one primary question: to which institution and mission did I desire to commit my life? Even though I loved serving in the academy and had the training and gifts to succeed, my passion was clearly for the institution and mission of the local church. Six months before turning forty years old, I took the role of senior pastor at an EFCA church and have served there now for seven years.

As I consider the nature of my pastoral role, I have been benefited by looking back in the history of the church to see the existence and practices of “pastor theologians” who would (and did) fit in both worlds and yet served as local church pastors. Over the past ten years I have also benefited from the vision and partnership of the Center for Pastor Theologians (<https://www.pastortheologians.com/>). With that perspective, I have strived to serve as a both a local church pastor and more broadly as a pastor theologian, with the latter happening as I continue to contribute to the scholarly discussions and ecclesial conversations. Since becoming a pastor, I have been able to participate in many writing projects. To be fair, I think a decade in the academy gave me a good foundation of writing opportunities and publishing contacts that not all pastors get. Besides several contributions to books and journals, since becoming a pastor I have finished a large exegetical commentary on the Gospel of John (ZECNT) and written a book called *The Local Church* (Crossway). I am also under contract for several forthcoming books, including a biblical theology on Creation-New Creation (IVP) and a theological commentary on the Gospel of John (Eerdmans). While writing clearly benefits and springs from my work as a local church pastor, I believe it also is a ministerial assignment of a pastor theologian.

I believe there is a place for pastor theologians in the church today. I can see how my Ph.D., when combined with the social location of local church pastoral ministry, provides ideal insights and perspectives into both God's Word and God's world. That is, a pastor theologian may be in the best position to speak and think theologically with and for the church. The pastor theologian is best suited to see not only what answers need to be given but also what questions need to be asked. In the pastoral context of weddings and funerals, pastoral visits and death-bed prayers, and the day-by-day walking and suffering with God's people in God's world, theology is forced to go deep enough to provide a solid foundation and yet wide enough to cover all the situations of the saints in the church. This is a high calling—not to an ivory tower but to an unremarkable local church that, when seen theologically, is an embassy of the Kingdom of God and the place in which God has specifically and eternally promised his presence and power.



**Rev. Dr. Matthew H. Patton**

Pastor

Covenant Presbyterian Church (Vandalia, OH)

Since getting my PhD in biblical theology, I have labored for about six years in pastoral ministry. I serve at a relatively small church of about 150 people, and until recently I was the only pastor, so I have a wide variety of duties. I do not feel underutilized as a pastor. Every aspect of word ministry (preaching, teaching, counseling) draws on all that I have learned and stretches me to the limit. I am regularly thankful for the depth the PhD gave me as I get questions of all kinds from the people of God. And there is nothing more challenging than preaching: bringing the life-giving word of God in a way that is intelligible and compelling to the people of God, as well as to perfect strangers who have no background in the Bible at all. Doctoral studies gave me a fluency in the Bible that greatly helps in this work.

I also have many special opportunities for using my doctoral-level training: I regularly teach a Hebrew refresher module for my denomination, as well as periodic adjunct teaching for various institutions. I am beginning to explore more overseas teaching opportunities. I have published three books in my tenure as pastor (one of them my dissertation), and I am now working to fulfill two book contracts, including a major commentary on Jeremiah. I also have had the opportunity to write some popular articles and to present at academic conferences. These things would not be possible without a very supportive board of elders, who encourage me to use these gifts to bless the larger church.

One important issue is balance. I have resolved always to give my church the very best I have to offer, not the leftovers. I never want them (or my family) to feel like they have to compete with my various academic projects for my attention. In many cases, my pastoral work dovetails closely with my academic work. For instance, I wrote a short study on Deuteronomy for Crossway. Before that, I taught through Deuteronomy in adult Sunday School. The discussions I had with them greatly enhanced my work. Before I publish my Jeremiah commentary, my co-pastor and I intend to preach through the book.

Another issue is isolation from other scholars. I greatly miss having other scholars to discuss issues with, and I greatly miss having easy access to a good library. Some of my work has suffered and gotten poor reviews because I wasn't as in touch with the guild as I ought to be.

Still, I believe that being a pastor makes me a better scholar. As someone in the trenches of spiritual warfare, being a pastor keeps me focused on the pastoral issues that drove the biblical authors to write what they did. There are so many distracting questions the guild asks, which take you away from the heart of Scripture, which is Christ crucified and raised for needy sinners. The word of God really is for the people of God, who possess the key of understanding, which is Holy Spirit-wrought faith.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

### 3. High-School Teaching

*While some might view it as a “step down,” teaching the Bible in a Christian high school plays an important role in the formation of many teenagers. The pay is lower than teaching in a college or seminary setting, but the rewards of working with teenagers can be high.*



**Dr. Austin Freeman**

Upper School Literature Teacher

Founder's Classical Academy of Mesquite (Mesquite, TX)

My doctorate is in systematic theology, though I now do research primarily in theology and literature. I teach at a classical charter school, and during the hiring process a PhD immediately makes an applicant a bigger fish in a smaller pond. Since secondary education offers compensation packages based on years of experience and qualifications, I was immediately placed in the highest pay bracket (equivalent to the assistant headmaster), even without any teaching experience. Pay rates are lower at many private Christian schools, but classical and/or charter schools receive funding from the state and so are virtually equivalent to teaching in a public school. Additionally, the curricula for classical schools are similar or identical to the curricula for many Christian honors colleges. I teach or have taught the *Iliad*, *Aeneid*, *Metamorphoses*, *Oedipus cycle*, *Bacchae*, *Beowulf*, *Canterbury Tales*, *Gawain & the Green Knight*, *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *Pride & Prejudice*, and *Henry V* in the core curriculum. I teach *Lord of the Rings*, the New Testament, and moral philosophy as electives or dual-credit courses. I also teach rhetoric and the senior thesis research paper.

Depending on individual skill, preparation is much less demanding than lecturing for a college or seminary course. As such, I personally have lots of time to pursue writing projects in academia. In the three years since I began working here, I have completed a large monograph, two journal articles, and five peer-reviewed chapters, and am currently editing two books. I am simultaneously free from the perils and pressures of the tenure committee and the publish-or-perish paradigm. I research and publish what I want when I want, all while leading seminar-style

classes with many bright students. I teach five periods (>4hrs) a day, alongside many faculty duties. I also run the school Dungeons & Dragons club twice a week during lunch.

Jobs like this are abundant and applicants can take their pick of where they want to live, rather than being forced into whichever location happens to have the rare opening at the time. I also take pride in the fact that I am preparing and shaping students before their worldviews have begun to ossify in college.



**Dr. Tyler Yoder<sup>1</sup>**  
Instructor of Humanities  
Culver Academies (Culver, IN)

I had life mapped out:

1. Follow B.A. with an M.A.
2. Present at conferences and publish in top-tier journals.
3. Complete a PhD and arrive at the glorious destination of a tenure-track university post teaching a 3-3.

I inherited this career map from others and followed it sedulously. The destination, however, was elusive. If the standard PhD to tenure-track post represents the litmus test for success, count me a failure.

As I finished coursework, presented papers at SBL, discussed research with peers and professors, submitted essays to journals, finished a dissertation, and secured interviews before graduation, the focus remained fixed on that tenure line destination. The trip was on course; all roadways appeared clear. But reality would eventually set in. With every passing year, as the SBL jobs report honestly informed me, the pickings grew slimmer, and the competition grew more competitive as the surplus of starving PhD's duked it out for a few golden tickets. I knew I wasn't the only desperate traveler left on the outside looking in. But I had never oriented my vision to consider an outcome different from a tenured professorship. There were rumblings of PhD's in the humanities across the country seeking out bureaucratic jobs or going into business. (Business? Wasn't that located somewhere between the third and fourth circles of hell?) I listened surreptitiously to the stories I heard, feeling woefully unequipped to know where to start. On the heels of the devastating blow of a failed campus interview, an existential crisis hit. Questions that cut to the core of who I am bubbled up in me. If my definition of success was being a professor...

*... have I wasted the last decade of my life?  
... how do I explain this to my family? Can I even provide for them?  
... what does this say about me as a person, not to mention a scholar?  
... is there any way to salvage or, dare I say, redeem this "closed door?"*

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<sup>1</sup> This is a shortened version of "Redefining Success: Reflections on a Nontraditional Academic Journey" at <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/SocietyReport2019.pdf>.

It just so happened that our flat in Baltimore stood a stone's throw away from a private secondary school. In the midst of my crisis, I was reminded of this institution and reached out to a friend who had connections in the Baltimore independent school network. What ensued was a conversation that captured my interest but did not relieve my doubt and shame. This was a high school, not Johns Hopkins.

The possibility led me to consider another opportunity at a boarding school in the Midwest. I somehow ended up on campus, fielding what seemed like a merciless barrage of questions from faculty and teaching a lesson on debt peonage in the ancient Near East (obviously!) to a surprisingly curious collection of sixteen-year-olds. Many questions revolved around instruction, each one a jolt. Others focused on ideas—big, complex, and captivating ideas—that I could already imagine integrating fruitfully in a classroom by drawing on my own training.

Even after interviewing and receiving an offer, doubts inside my head lingered about being a high school teacher and the “waste” of my training. I wouldn't be teaching courses on Hebrew or Akkadian, ancient Near Eastern history, or Western Civilization. But as I read the required texts for this course during the summer before my new position began, I was invigorated by ideas and questions that presupposed and applied the fundamental questions we study in the humanities, and to which I had devoted more than a decade of postsecondary education.

The rest is, as they say, history. I am now in the middle of my fourth year as an instructor of humanities. Looking back on my serpentine journey, I'm humbled by the journey itself and the process of personal exploration, doubt, regret, expectations, and decision-making.

Instead of teaching undergraduate surveys, upper-level electives, or graduate seminars on field-specific subject matter on a university campus, I now facilitate learning environments that track comparable material for students several years younger. Along the way, I've been empowered to learn alongside my students and partner with brilliant, like-minded colleagues, acquiring the equivalence of a practical M.Ed. We read, discuss, and debate texts together, prompting vulnerability in productive learning spaces. We observe one another teach. We foster cross-class experiences, where students dramatize plays, participate in writing workshops and symposia, and learn from teachers who contemplate what class could and should be, not out of necessity but the thrill and heuristic benefit of collaboration. At the same time, the institution champions the autonomy of individual instructors.

Such autonomy has offered me the freedom to integrate familiar, specialized material into my upper-level classes (e.g., Genesis; the Epic of Gilgamesh), which has, in turn, expanded my interests in different directions (e.g., Kierkegaard; the Bhagavad Gita; behavioral economics). In core humanities courses, I am encouraged to think creatively and introspectively about the learning experience I facilitate. Over the last three years my students have scrutinized Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* through the lens of a social history of antisemitism, considered the way mortuary archaeology can help explain the symbiosis between living and dead in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, assessed the impact of power structures on human behavior in Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul*, and debated conceptions of moral philosophy in Sandel's *Justice*. Readings in the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'an have combined with short stories from Flannery O'Connor or Ursula K. Le Guin to complicate their thinking about the nature of the good life. And I'm grateful for the freedom to teach just two classes at any given time during the year, freeing me up to spend time researching, writing, and enjoying a young



family. The school has sent me to SBL's Annual and International Meetings, regularly tracked down obscure sources, and supported my professional development and interests.

I'm not preparing for a traditional tenure-review process or teaching a slate full of field-specific classes. I don't have my own college campus office and students don't address me grandiloquently as "Professor Yoder." And that's okay. I teach classes in which discussions regularly pivot on complex ethical, religious, and sociopolitical matters. Since we live on campus, I'm never far away from those I love the most. The giggles and hugs I receive from my children after class each day when they come to walk me home likewise weren't expected. This is part of a critical redefinition of success to me now. These moments reveal a fuller map—with roads I had previously disregarded—where joy from a less self-centered kind of journey off the beaten path has replaced the happiness that comes from scaling a narrow, contrived mountain that I let myself and others tell me was the only summit.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

#### 4. Administration

*For a school to run smoothly, talented administrators are required to direct the ship, and scholars can find it to be a fulfilling role to help facilitate the work of others. However, it could be difficult to get a job in educational administration without first holding a full-time faculty position. In addition, administrative roles generally allow less time for publishing and teaching.*



**Dr. Clayton Coombs**  
Academic Dean  
Planetshakers College (Melbourne, Australia)

As the Academic Dean of Planetshakers College, an accredited third party provider of Alphacrucis College and a ministry of Planetshakers Church, I oversee the development and delivery of our academic programs; manage accreditation; recruit, train, and supervise faculty; and am working to develop a research culture. But unlike some deans in more traditional settings, I have a full teaching load as well. As a pastoral staff member of Planetshakers Church, I have the opportunity not only to teach in the college but to preach in our church services and other church-based education programs, and to travel to other churches in our network in Australia and overseas to preach, teach, and develop educational programs. From time to time I am called upon to consult with our church senior leadership and eldership on theological matters and to support and resource our preaching and teaching team.

My advice to PhD students is to broaden their horizons not merely beyond the 'tenure track' (whatever that is) but also beyond the US system. Think mission! The US is over-resourced with biblical scholars and theologians, but there are other parts of the world that could use your gift. I would also encourage PhD students to ask God to give them vision for how their gifts and training may be deployed in the local church context, particularly in large churches with educational ministries or Bible colleges. I know it is easy, particularly for those studying in

Christian Higher Education, to be skeptical of and to critique large churches, and if I were to be frank, I don't think Jesus likes it. Why not rather choose to focus on the good that such churches accomplish, join the team, and be the change that you want to see? You may be surprised at how God may use you.



**Dr. Douglas S. Huffman**

Associate Dean of Biblical & Theological Studies  
Talbot School of Theology at Biola University

While exceptions and variations can be found, there are basically two pathways to a career in higher education administration: by way of staff or by way of faculty. The staff route to an educational administrative job typically begins with a lower-level role at a college in the business services sector (e.g., accounting, marketing, information technology) or in the student services sector (e.g., admissions, financial aid, records, student development). While serving, the staff member becomes interested in the higher-level operations of the institution and seeks the training and graduate level education necessary for moving into an administrative role. Doctoral degrees in higher education administration are typically earned while continuing to serve on staff at a college or university the job.

Conversely, the faculty route to a role in educational administration begins first with an earned Ph.D. degree in an academic discipline and then a role on the faculty of a college or university. While teaching and researching at the institution within the academic discipline, the faculty member becomes involved in some of the administrative operations of the institution. This is often due to committee work and/or a stint as the academic department chair. Serving well in such roles sometimes leads to invitations to consider additional managerial responsibilities, often with course release time in exchange for the administrative labor. Many times, faculty members on this route to administrative service reach a point where they feel the need to assess their ability to be effective contributors to their academic discipline and/or to be responsible administrators. For faculty members preparing to shift their career energies toward higher education administration, the premier training program is the [American Council on Education's Fellows Program](#), a year-long cohort experience of learning, networking, and on-the-job mentoring.

My own journey into academic administration might be mapped as a midway variation of the two routes just described. While working on a master degree in biblical studies, as a source of income I took a staff job in the admissions office at a Christian college. Upon completion of that master degree, I got married and thought it best to remain in the staff job so as to adjust to marriage before pursuing doctoral studies. Thus, my temporary stint on staff went from one year to two years to four years with increased low-level administrative duties. But then I went back to graduate school to earn my Ph.D. so as to become a full-fledged professor and to leave this venture into administrative work behind ... or so I thought.

As it turns out, upon completion of the Ph.D., I was hired onto the faculty of the school where I had served on staff. And after three years as a full-time faculty member, the institution asked me to consider oversight of the admissions office in addition to my continued faculty service. My prior experience in the admissions business had help me realize some administrative abilities, so I agreed to the combination faculty-administrator role for a trial period with a clear

backdoor opportunity to return to full-time faculty should I so desire. Year by year, my administrative successes broadened my duties, increasing my oversight to include admissions, records, institutional research, church relations, financial aid, and graduate studies. Eventually I reached the place where the institution asked me to consider a vice presidential role, but I was not convinced that I had surpassed my effectiveness within my academic discipline; so, I requested that I be allowed to return to a faculty role in biblical studies. To steward well my administrative gifts, I agreed to serve as the department chair with a fitting course release to do so. Of course, the pull of administration began again, and a few years later I found myself serving at another institution (and arguably with a bit more balance) as associate dean overseeing the academic realm of biblical and theological studies and interfacing with various other administrative arms of the institution on behalf of my faculty colleagues.

This experience has given me the opportunity for considerable reflection on the purposes of educational administration. A good academic administrator is one striving to protect the educational endeavor by smoothing the way for students to have access to faculty and resources for learning and by empowering faculty to be more effective in their ministry to students. As an administrator, my goal is to help other faculty become more successful in their ministries. To add such a mission to one's aspirations can complicate a faculty member's life. Indeed, the ubiquitous struggle for balance in the life of an academic is heightened for faculty members exploring the world of higher education administration. All faculty juggle the responsibilities of teaching, scholarship, and service. And for the faculty member moving toward academic administration, the service component becomes larger, heavier, and more unwieldy. To extend this in the juggling metaphor, instead of three rubber balls (teaching, scholarship, and service), the administering faculty member juggles two rubber balls and a running chainsaw that might catch fire at any moment.

For myself, as an academic administrator, I have tried to think in terms of good stewardship. Recognizing that I have been gifted with some administrative skills (or "cursed," as some would say), I have felt a responsibility to invest myself in fitting roles for the proper stewardship of those skills. But I still feel the need to serve as a faculty member even as I serve other faculty members. In order to manage the service component in the juggling game as well as to retain some time and energy for teaching and scholarship, I have turned down opportunities to ascend to the realm of upper academic administration. Rather, I have been content to serve in middle management positions (e.g., department chair, associate dean, and other such roles), being sure to keep expectations clear with administrator's above me that I want to be treated as a faculty member. It seems that regularly teaching at least one course a term makes me a better administrator with more credibility among the faculty I seek to serve. Furthermore, a faculty contract that gives me summers for academic research has been helpful as well, even if administrative duties unavoidably creep into those precious summer months. On a practical note, whenever I am on campus, the administrator part of me is active, so I have found it most effective to have my personal library at home where I can retreat to attend to research and writing projects. On a related note, a faculty contract keeps me eligible for sabbaticals and research leaves, which in turn, affords me the opportunity to disciple other faculty members in carrying out some administrative duties in my absence.

Indeed, I wonder if the time will come for me to turn over my leadership duties fully to some other aspiring administrative faculty member so that I can step away from middle management. Will I step into upper academic administration, which is its own academic discipline, step back to full-time faculty in my original disciplinary realm, or step over to

retirement or some other ministry with new adventures? I'm not sure. But for me, all this has to do with stewardship as well. It's not about "getting to the top" so as to be "getting something back"; rather, it's about taking what I have been given and investing it into a worthy cause for the benefit of something bigger than myself. This is what academic administration should be about.



**Dr. Joanne Jung**

Associate Dean of Online Education and Faculty Development  
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University (La Mirada, CA)

I have taught in the undergraduate division of Talbot School of Theology since 2001. For the first six years, I was an adjunct professor, during which I completed my Ph.D. in Practical Theology, and I have been a full-time professor since 2007. In 2017, I accepted the administrative responsibilities as the Associate Dean of Online Education and Faculty Development at Talbot. Working closely with colleagues helps ensure the quality of Talbot's online course and program offerings. Developing and maintaining healthy relationships and communication within the school and with other departments across campus is foundational for the collaborations needed to extend the reach of our institution. The Faculty Development part of the role encompasses a wide variety of involvement in university-wide committee work and in-house faculty matters. My Ph.D. affords me the opportunity to continue teaching a half load of two courses per semester, which accommodates my administrative role.

My academic entry level as an Assistant Professor led to promotions to Associate and currently Full Professor. Promotion criteria include accomplishments in the scholarship of Research, Teaching, and Service. Along the teaching journey new interests were further piqued and established abilities continued to develop. As needs presented themselves, the skill set that included pedagogy, relationship-building, and problem-solving, were incrementally shared with the academic community. Opportunities were given to serve others out of my growing desire for others to offer their best for our students.

The inquisitive nature of research and the ability to make connections to that research led me to an interest in providing quality education in an online format, a key responsibility in my current role. Poor quality online courses with little or no engagement between students and their professors had characterized much of online education. This created a personal holy discontent that I felt compelled to address. My Ph.D., online teaching experience, and collaborative spirit gave credibility to my consultations with colleagues, articles, webinars, podcasts, and presentations for both within and outside the university.

Interestingly, my Ph.D. studies explored the discipline of conversation among the English Puritans. More specifically, their use of conference, which blended one's biblical literacy with care for one another's souls. The application of my research has contributed greatly to not only my profession and position, but most importantly, to my own character formation.

Research and writing evolved during, after, and well after my Ph.D. studies. As a professor, summers usually afford more intentional time to write. And though administrative responsibilities continue through the summer months, these lessen in demand and frequency.

These practical pieces of advice contribute to taking advantage of time devoted to writing while exercising self-care for my soul throughout the year:

- Spontaneous ideas need to be captured and recorded. Even when I tell myself I will remember it, I usually don't. So, I jot a discernable note to myself or audibly record thoughts onto a notes app on my phone. I later email these to myself and transfer them to a waiting document of other collected thoughts on my computer.
- Discern the best, most productive times to settle into reading, reflecting, writing, and editing. My best daily times are in the evening for about an hour, having collected notes to myself from throughout the day. I block out my Thursdays to work from home for times of midweek restoration and a different pace that allows more dedicated time for writing projects, which may be professional or institutional.
- My colleague Ken Berding advises that writing should be a worshipful experience. That's truth.

Advice to you the reader is simple: Pursue what God has in front of you, but hold your plans loosely enough to allow him to direct you in the way and ways you are to go. I would not have ever imagined the place God has me now. He has orchestrated everything so I might have an impact on the people and the world around me. Be observant of the intentional ways God weaves who he designed you to be with the range of people you have encountered, the places he has orchestrated you to have experienced, and the curiosity and confidence of where he is leading you from here.



**Dr. Michael Kibbe**

Dean, College of Communication and Theology, and Assistant Professor of Bible  
Great Northern University (Spokane, WA)

My name is Michael Kibbe, and I am administrator. [Admitting you have a problem is the first step to solving that problem, right?] I am also a theologian. Actually, that word "also" isn't quite the right one. Because I am an administrator, I *must* be a theologian.

My administrative title at Great Northern University is "Dean of the College of Communication and Theology." Sounds more grandiose than it really is. Mostly I convince the President and Provost to give my faculty what they need, and I convince my faculty to give the President and Provost what they need. I play a role in writing and distributing faculty contracts, completing faculty evaluations, proposing changes to the Faculty Handbook, and establishing the budget for the personnel and programs in my college. I also serve as an advisor to the Curriculum Committee, which governs such things as the Academic Catalog, B.A. core requirements, and the like. And we are currently in the 11th hour of a particular phase in the accreditation process, so I do a lot of document review and communication of that review to various interested parties on campus.

It is certainly true that my doctoral curriculum did not include training in accreditation, committee leadership, financial aid distribution, and the like. But my formal training in Bible and

theology at the doctoral level has been absolutely essential to my fulfillment of the duties assigned to me as an administrator. A couple of ubiquitous scenarios illustrate this point:

1. A faculty member might or might not be teaching things that violate your institution's doctrinal statement.

No amount of specificity in the doctrinal statement and procedures for handling violations of that statement is going to keep administrators from needing to exercise wisdom in that moment. A mentor of mine once told me (when I was a doctoral candidate pursuing employment at a confessional institution) that there is a "hermeneutics of the doctrinal statement." Recognition of this fact is crucial to healthy theological dialogue at a church, a missions organization, or a university. The question therefore becomes, in certain situations, "who is/are the chief hermeneutician(s) for the university?" In a healthy system, the answer is a combination of "those to whom is delegated the ultimate responsibility to uphold the (doctrinally constrained) mission and vision of the institution," and "those in the organization who possess the greatest theological acuity." The first group is probably the Board of Trustees, and the second group is hopefully the biblical/theological faculty.

In between these two groups stands the academic administration. What I as an administrator must bring to the table is 1) sufficient (to the faculty) grasp of the theological issues, 2) sufficient (to the Board) ability to communicate those issues in appropriate terms, and 3) sufficient (to all parties) clarity on the relation of those technical issues to the core values of the university.

2. Some members of your organization want the organization to take public stances on current social or political realities.

The first—and often forgotten—question is "*why?*": *why* would it be necessary and good for us to have a position and to make it public?" The answer is not "because *x* is going on and therefore we need to say something about it." The answer is in fact "because our organization plays a particular role in public discourse such that it is appropriate for us to enter into that discourse in a definitive way." But if you don't know what your organization is with respect first to Christ and then to the Church (big "C"), you can't unpack what it is with respect to the world. In other words, if your organization self-identifies in relation to Christ, its ecclesiological identity is primary and its public identity is secondary. I need to unpack the identity of Great Northern University as a "para-church" entity, before I can say whether we ought to take a public stance on a public issue. The answer to this question is not driven by enrollment metrics or financial pressures, or the general stance of individuals in or related to the organization. It is driven by theology.

The second question—assuming a public stance will in fact be taken—concerns the content and presentation of that public stance. And this question is no less theological than the first. For example: Great Northern University has an official position on marriage and sexuality. I don't have to tell you what happens if that statement is formulated without deep biblical and theological reflection. And I don't just mean the content—I mean the tone, the design, the presentation, the sensitivity to what sorts of things are being communicated and what sorts of things are not being communicated. And by the way: relational and financial and legal concerns pertain as well to this conversation, as well as, or perhaps ultimately, the need for wisdom to discern the relative pressures of each. Potential legal action (for example) is not the chief concern, but it is certainly relevant. Christian organizations are far too often guilty of being

thoughtless (both theologically and legally) and then crying “martyrdom!” when criticism mounts.

So to those having or pursuing a PhD in theological studies who are considering administration as a viable career choice: as in so many cases, what we most need is the wisdom to adjudicate between viable competing interests. Financial needs are real. Enrollment needs are real. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to such problems, particularly when their collective weight is placed on the shoulders of mission-specific curricular pieces like “everyone gets a Bible minor,” or some such thing. And at such times you need something like a Chalcedonian solution—fences that limit the range of options while leaving suitable space in which wisdom may be exercised toward a viable solution.

Administrators must be theologians—in the sense that they must purposefully bring their beliefs about God and all things in relation to God into every institutional endeavor. Graduate theological education does not, of course, guarantee success in this undertaking! But the sorts of virtues prioritized in that education (skilled interpretation of Scripture, humble engagement with diverse viewpoints, reticence to draw irreversible lines in the sand, awareness of the cultural locatedness of theological discourse)—all these are vital to fulfilling the calling of an academic administrator in a confessional context. And hopefully, the examples I’ve given barely scratch the surface of the ways in which my own theological training has helped me navigate—imperfectly!—the complexities of administrative decision-making in a Christian university.



**Dr. Nicholas G. Piotrowski**

President and Academic Dean

Indianapolis Theological Seminary (Indianapolis, IN)

As a lead administrator at a small seminary in the Midwest, my work basically breaks down into three responsibilities. One is to be outward facing towards the public, which means advancing the school’s visibility and fundraising. Another is to lead the staff, keeping everybody on mission, motivated, encouraged, and pulling in the same direction. Thirdly, I also oversee the academic department, which is not typical for a seminary president, but at a small institution it’s necessary.

My PhD is valuable because it gives the school a degree of credibility in the eyes of the public. For better or for worse there’s a perceived value to having a PhD among fundraisers and leaders of other ministries. But more importantly, it helps me in the academic department in relation to the kinds of concerns professors typically have. Sometimes there’s a disconnect between the administrative leadership and the academic leadership, but because I am active in the field of biblical studies and publishing, I think I understand the professors better and they appreciate that academic concerns remain at the fore of the administration, not just pragmatic concerns.

The advice I would give to someone considering such a calling (or suddenly finding themselves in such a role) is to be patient. Institutions like this grow slowly. Ambition and haste can be a deadly combination in this work. Make good relationships. Do not make enemies in the public. Pick the hills you need to die on. Also, be open-handed and generous in every possible way.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

## 5. Editing and Publishing

*The world of publishing plays an important role in the life of a professor engaged in the guild. While many who work in publishing have education in other fields, it is often advantageous for publishers to hire experts in the field of biblical and theological studies to work as editors. They are intimately involved in influencing professors, students and churches through a wide variety of publishing projects.*



**Dr. Christopher A. Beetham**

Senior Editor

Zondervan Academic

I work at Zondervan (located in Grand Rapids, Michigan) in their academic group with the official title “Senior Editor of Biblical Languages, Textbooks, and Reference Tools.” I am basically the editor for all things New Testament and Greek, though I oversee numerous other types of (mostly) academic books as well. My doctorate gave me a decisive edge over most of the other applicants for the position (so I was told), because Zondervan was looking for someone with strong skills in Greek who knew the field of New Testament and early Christianity well. I use my skillset and knowledge gained from my doctoral studies every day in this role, as they provide me what I need to edit our academic books with confidence and at a high level of professionalism and competency. I love working for a publishing group that seeks to provide outstanding resources both for the church and for the academy—books that will help equip church leaders and students to know Scripture and handle it wisely. It is not difficult for me to get out of bed in the morning and go to work (which, admittedly, during COVID is a one-minute commute to my home office) because of the sense of purpose and mission I derive from the work.

I did not set out to be an editor at a Christian publishing company; I kind of fell into the position for need of a job when my family was coming off the mission field in Ethiopia. Like most PhD students, I had dreamed of teaching in a tenure-track position at a seminary somewhere in the States. But over the course of our time at Wheaton, God unfolded his plans for my family. He placed in my wife and me a desire to help equip the global church when we realized the lack of opportunities for theological education among the churches in the majority world. Yet it is here where God is doing such an incredible work in our time. So, we set off for Ethiopia a week after I graduated from the doctoral program, and we served there in theological education for a decade. In the process of coming off the field at the end of our time, I applied for a few teaching posts and came in as a finalist for a few of them, but none of them materialized. When our family of seven finally landed back in the States in June 2015, I still did not have a job. But the Zondervan job had opened, and I had applied. A few weeks later, I was offered the position. I was initially thrown by this turn of events and discouraged. I had wanted to teach at the seminary level—all this experience and training and passion to train trainers. Was that all going to go to



waste? But God knew. Today, nearly six years into my editorial role at Zondervan Academic, I enjoy deep job satisfaction. I get to “read” amazing books every day (but let the reader understand!) and to interact with some of the brightest authors of the evangelical world. In joyful partnership with our authors, we serve the church and the academy and make an impact to help fulfill the Great Commission.

At Zondervan, I also have a colleague who holds a doctorate in Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern studies, and she handles all things Old Testament and Hebrew. I have another colleague with a doctorate in theology who handles projects in the area of theology, philosophy, and ethics. The three of us are production editors, but our group also employs acquisition editors, visual-content editors, and marketing colleagues who hold graduate-level degrees in biblical and theological studies. Two of these are pursuing doctorates in these areas. Our supervisor (a senior vice president and editor-in-chief) holds a doctorate in church history. Four of us adjunct teach at local institutions. Many of us are involved in teaching in our local churches. I write this to say that the Lord has been pleased to use our educational endeavors to help all of us secure great jobs that have a ministry component that infuses our lives with meaning and purpose.



**Dr. Nancy Erickson**  
Executive Editor  
Zondervan Academic

My primary job at Zondervan Academic is as a production editor of Hebrew Bible and related languages textbooks. A production editor at Zondervan Academic sees a book from the acceptable submission of a manuscript to publication. My tasks involve cleaning up the manuscript, i.e., copyediting and managing the editorial and proofreading process with the author and external academic freelancers. Other related tasks to seeing a manuscript from beginning to end include input on cover design and marketing copy. I have responsibility for anything related to the content of the book that finds expression in other areas or formats of the book, including follow-up reprints and other editions. As an academic I also acquire books that are related to my expertise, such as Old Testament and Semitics.

In addition to the broad tasks above, I am a resource for all of the publishing departments at Harper Collins Christian Publishing, including Bibles, kids, curriculum, and trade. I have my hand in many products related to my expertise.

My PhD is what landed me the editorial job at Zondervan Academic, not my years of editing experience. An academic publisher like Zondervan needs experts in the field in order to edit and engage with other experts in the field. My degree provides authors of similar academic training confidence in Zondervan Academic as a publisher for their manuscript.

In addition to my editorial work, I teach for a couple of seminaries and am engaged in my own research and writing for various academic publishers.



**Dr. Andrew Knapp**  
Senior Acquisitions Editor  
Wm. B. Eerdmans Co.

I am a Senior Acquisitions Editor for Eerdmans. Like many comparable publishers, Eerdmans distinguishes between acquisitions and project editors. I have worked in both capacities, and having a degree in biblical studies is helpful to both, so I'll say something about them both. As an acquisitions editor I acquire books. This involves working with authors on proposals, helping authors develop their proposals into better books—"better" in this world can refer to inherent literary and academic qualities, and saleability, and usually the two intertwine—presenting proposals to our publishing committee, fielding all kinds of questions and providing guidance as authors write, collaborating with series editors to invite authors and help shape series, vetting final submitted manuscripts to make sure they conform to both Eerdmans standards and the project as described in our offer-to-publish agreements, and more. After I officially accept a manuscript, it gets handed off to a project editor (see below), but I continue to stay involved with projects through to, and even after, publication, providing input on sales possibilities, the cover, the title, and more.

If acquiring covers the first half of a book's gestation—from proposal to accepted manuscript—project editing covers the second half, squiring the book the rest of the way to press. The project editor oversees a book's copyediting (sometimes doing it oneself and sometimes assigning it to external copyeditors), proofreading, corrections at all stages of the manuscript, indexing, and everything else in the approximately ten to twelve months from accepted manuscript to publication.

An advanced degree in biblical studies is required for my position in acquisitions, because I cover most of Eerdmans's Old Testament program, and is useful for project editing as well. Much of acquiring is networking, so knowing who is working on what, what directions the field is going, who writes well, and other details of biblical studies is key. At Eerdmans we sometimes use external peer review but often I vet manuscripts myself, and other editors often consult me on OT matters when their books wander into the world of ancient Israel. On the project editing side my background has helped me catch numerous errors, both major and minor, and helps me double-check transliterations, historical details, and other things.

Like every profession, editing has its advantages and disadvantages. Most importantly, at Eerdmans I enjoy my day-to-day work and find it rewarding. Acquiring books is both reactive, assessing what proposals happen to land on my desk, and proactive, pondering what nonexistent books should exist and then finding authors to write them. The latter, when it works, is particularly exciting. Also, while I focus on Old Testament, I am encouraged—perhaps required—to acquire outside this niche as well. I've acquired several books in the area of social justice, a topic I find stimulating and fulfilling. Acquiring has also allowed me to keep abreast of the field, as I attend conferences regularly, work with all sorts of scholars, and continue my own research. Project editing appeals to my natural fastidiousness and my love of language. Also, being right in the middle of the introvert/extrovert spectrum, having a foot in both worlds is great as acquiring requires putting myself out there and striking up conversations, while project editing tends to be more solitary work.

One drawback of publishing, especially with an extensive background in the field, is encountering so many fascinating projects that we cannot publish. Much of acquiring is rejecting proposals, which is almost as unpleasant as having a proposal rejected—especially when I like the project but we simply can't make it financially viable. Our mantra at Eerdmans is that we exist to serve readers, which is a philosophy I endorse. But often I'm discouraged that we can't generate readers for certain books that, I believe, should provoke more interest. Also, academic publishing overall faces many challenges these days with declining money going to the humanities in universities (and declining attendance in many church denominations), decreasing individual focus on buying books, and other harsh realities. The industry has changed significantly in recent decades, and must continue to adapt to a rapidly changing global situation, especially in higher education.

I can't rationally or ethically consider doing my own writing as part of my editorial work, so I work on it outside the 9-5. This is sometimes discouraging, but then I think of so many scholars teaching 4-4s and summer classes and things that I expect it's not much different. The biggest issue I have is that because I want to focus on family during weekends and vacations, I rarely, if ever, have major blocks of time, which are so much more effective for writing than little chunks. The upside is that both publishers I have worked for have strongly encouraged me to keep doing this work. Most people in publishing are here because they care about this sort of research, of course, and being something of an insider can open doors and occasionally lend me some gravitas with our authors. It also works to my advantage that I attend numerous conferences, so I have frequent opportunities to present my own work and talk with others dealing with the same topics.

I was fortunate to stumble into the editorial profession. During my doctoral studies at Johns Hopkins, I did grunt editorial work—proofreading, reference checking, etc.—for the Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period project, published by Eisenbrauns. Conveniently, just as I finished my dissertation, Eisenbrauns posted an application for an acquisitions editor with an advanced degree in both biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies. My academic training suited me perfectly for this—I had always dreamed of publishing my first book with Eisenbrauns—and I had a foot in the door with my RINAP experience. I also come by the sort of work honestly, being the son of an English teacher, the husband of a long-time editor, and being naturally OCD about all things grammatical and otherwise pedantic. After working with Eisenbrauns for a few years, I joined Eerdmans.

Like university teaching, publishing is a difficult industry to crack. I was lucky. To those interested, I recommend trying to get to know people in the field early. Most academic publishers work with a variety of freelance help for copyediting, proofreading, indexing, and other services. Find the publishers who work on the type of things that stimulate you—be it high-end academic publishers, confessional publishers, or some mix thereof—and learn the industry as best you can. Several times I have worked with colleagues I know from the field, and at least once, after working with a similarly trained scholar on several projects, I recommended them for a full-time position.



**Dr. R. David Nelson**  
Senior Acquisitions Editor  
Baker Academic & Brazos Press

I serve as an acquisitions editor specializing in theology and related subject fields for a major North American theological publisher. I work with authors to develop proposals for publishing projects and shepherd promising proposals through our reviews process. I also partner with authors as they write manuscripts for publication, offering counsel as they craft ideas into prose and encouraging them to avoid common writing pitfalls. Acquisitions work involves a good bit of vision casting and strategic planning. I give constant thought to books and authors I'd like for us to publish, and I work closely with colleagues in editorial, sales, and marketing to ensure that our program is both well rounded and on the cutting edge of trends in the discipline. I travel frequently, meeting with authors on campuses and at conferences, and occasionally leading workshops on publishing in theology and biblical studies.

While only a handful of folks in the industry hold positions in acquisitions similar to mine, there are many different kinds of jobs available in editing and publishing these days. Still, it is a highly competitive environment, especially for those just getting into it. Perhaps the best advice I can offer for someone trying to break into the world of theological publishing is to build up a portfolio of pertinent experience through internships, retail work, and personal editorial projects (e.g., serving as a research assistant and/or editing manuscripts for a professor) before applying for open full-time positions. Jobs at major presses tend to go to candidates who can boast experience in editing or publishing, and the more one can do to craft a resume accordingly, the better one's chances of getting hired. I am one of several PhDs in the industry of theological publishing at the moment, and most of us brought into our positions both academic credentials and prior experience in editing or publishing (in addition to earning a terminal degree in theology, I spent eight years in Christian retail, including three as manager of a seminary bookstore, and served as personal editor to an academic author during a doctoral fellowship).

It is difficult to measure the extent to which my PhD prepared me for or contributes to the work I do in publishing. As an acquisitions editor, it certainly helps for me also to participate in today's theological discussions. I have managed to publish quite a bit of my own work (such as it is) during my time with the press, and I suppose that such activity in the field has enabled me to make new contacts and to stay abreast of trends and new initiatives. However, I know a number of other acquisitions editors who neither possess PhDs nor publish their own work who are just as effective as (or more than) I am. As such, while it may be advantageous for me to have a PhD in theology to work in theological publishing, it is hardly necessary. Newly minted PhDs seeking to enter the industry would do well to realize up front that theological publishing is a step or two removed from full-time academic work. But for those who manage to adjust their vocational expectations, a career in theological publishing can prove invigorating and rewarding.



**Dr. Amy Paulsen-Reed**

Key Account Sales Rep, Academic Sales Manager, and Acquisitions Editor  
Hendrickson Publishers

I knew that I was not interested in jumping into the “piranha pool” that is the academic job market, and so I started researching a variety of options during the last year of my program. I looked into academic tutoring, college admissions, and college administration. I gave birth to my daughter 2 weeks after finishing my dissertation and gave myself a few months to focus on her before I got serious with the job search. Then, a friend of mine from school who had been working in academic publishing got in touch to let me know that a sales position had opened up at the publisher he worked for.

I was a bit skeptical about the idea of going into sales, since I’d always considered myself the opposite of what it takes to be a salesperson, which in my mind, meant a smooth talker who could talk anyone into buying anything. However, before my interview, I thought about it, and I hypothesized that sales is probably a lot like teaching undergrads: you have people sitting in front of you who probably care very little about what you’re trying to teach them, but it’s still your job to get them to pay attention. Similarly, I imagined that sales requires creative thinking to figure out what the client cares about and then present your message in a curated, strategic way. And I was right!

It turns out that my previous idea of sales was based on direct-to-consumer sales, which is quite different from business-to-business sales, which is what I do as a publishing sales rep. In business-to-business sales, the sale has to be a good fit for the client, because otherwise they’ll just return the items, which is a hassle for both sides. So, it has to be a win-win. To do well at business-to-business sales, you have to research your client as thoroughly as possible so that you can make recommendations that truly are a good fit for them. In addition to excellent research skills, communication skills are crucial, both in communicating in person, as well as following up over email. Analytical/critical thinking skills are also a huge asset in sales, since you are constantly analyzing sales reports and using them to guide your strategy going forward. Creativity and out of the box thinking are key, since you’re always confronting new situations and challenges. Lastly, the ability to learn quickly is also important, since as new products come out, you need to master their salient selling points so that you can decide both *what* and *how* to present to each individual client. Each client requires their own strategy.

What I love about sales is the amount of variety in my job and the space for creativity, strategic thinking, analysis, and research. Although I happen to be working in publishing right now, I can now take these business-to-business sales skills into a variety of fields and industries. It’s opened up a whole new career path for me with lots of room for growth and earning potential.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

## 6. Alternative Biblical Teaching

*In our modern age, much teaching happens through such means as social media, the Internet, and informal classes, not just in formal educational programs. Therefore, some scholars have sought to bring in-depth godly teaching into these spheres through teaching in-person classes offered at various churches or teaching online through short videos or podcasts. While it takes some initiative and creativity, this field is ripe with possibilities.*



### **Rev. Dr. Helen Paynter**

Director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence (<https://www.csbvbristol.org.uk/>)  
Biblical Studies Tutor, Bristol Baptist College (Bristol, UK)

I did most of my doctoral work (2011–15) while I was a Newly Accredited Baptist Minister in part-time pastoral ministry. I have always found that my academic study and my pastoral practice have mutually benefited each other; I think this was true even when I was engaging in very technical and detailed study of the Old Testament. It did, of course, require some grace on the part of my congregation, and both flexibility and firm boundaries on my own part.

The church where I was ministering during my PhD studies, and for some years afterwards, was a working-class church, where most members of the congregation had very few academic qualifications. It may seem that this would have been a bad fit, but in fact I think the opposite was the case. Obviously, it was very important that I didn't put on 'airs and graces.' But much more than that, I felt that the challenge of feeding my congregation at a theologically substantial but down-to-earth level, was something that required high theological skills. It has always made me sad that urban and working-class churches tend to be regarded as less desirable pastorates, and don't necessarily attract the most experienced or the most academically able ministers. It reminds me of the 'inverse care law' where healthcare tends to be concentrated upon those who need it least.

Although I now (since Aug 2020) have a full-time position in a theological college, for a long while I worked a portfolio role: part time pastoral ministry, part time adjunct lecturer, and also undertaking a number of writing and editing responsibilities. The challenge of this was that it was financially less secure, and I was only able to do this because my husband has a secure and reasonably remunerative job. However, the benefit was that I was able to work in a number of areas that were not particularly financially profitable, simply for the love of the task.

One of the things that I began to develop at this stage in my life was the Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence, which I initially set up as a lone initiative, under the auspices of Bristol Baptist College. This has now grown into a thriving research network with folks in many countries around the world. Getting this off the ground has been quite a labour-intensive task, but an enormously exciting one. I probably couldn't have done it while in a full-time academic role. My PhD gave me the credibility to do this, and to initiate conversations with people who might be interested. It also gave me the skills to embark on research in areas that were only tangentially related to my original research project, and the confidence to delve into disciplines that are quite new to me. Thirdly, it gave me sufficient experience to be able to contribute academically, to

write and edit books, and to begin to mentor younger emerging scholars on their academic journeys. I've actively cultivated a community of mutual encouragement and non-competition, and feel pleased that I've been able to set this ethos from the outset.

Finally, my PhD has given me the opportunity to write books aimed at a general Christian audience. Once again it opens doors with publishers, it trains the mind for deep study, and it gives credibility to the reader. I have no regrets at all about undertaking doctoral work.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

## 7. Chaplaincy

*A parallel path to the pastorate is the position of a chaplain, who ministers in such settings as hospitals, schools, the military, and jails. Most chaplains do not have doctorate degrees in biblical studies or theology. (Several schools have specific Doctor of Ministry degrees in chaplaincy.) However, since chaplains frequently have the opportunity to teach from the Bible, that kind of training would be an asset.*



**Dr. K. Loren Aderhold**

Chaplain

U. S. Army

The U. S. Army Chaplaincy has provided an opportunity for me to integrate my academic interests of warfare in the Bible and eight years of pastoral experience in a local church into a challenging and fulfilling vocation. The decision to begin this journey took place in the midst of the troop surges in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as a simultaneous significant shortage of chaplains in the Army. Since, I have found that there is no greater honor than caring for Soldiers and Families who make great sacrifices on behalf of our nation.

The daily life of a chaplain is embedded with Soldiers. You train and work alongside them which opens doors for incredible ministry and conversations about ultimate things in life. My service in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division involved parachuting and even serving as a jumpmaster, experiences very different from my tenure-track classmates. My love for teaching found life in practical seminars and retreats supporting healthy relationships and moral leadership. During my two deployments to Afghanistan, long days were spent leading worship services in a variety of settings; advising leaders on issues of morals, ethics, and morale; counseling Soldiers struggling with the difficulties of war and separation from Family; ministering to wounded Soldiers in Aid Stations; and ensuring fallen heroes were sent home with the utmost respect while comforting their colleagues. I cannot imagine a context of ministry which could be more challenging or more rewarding than communicating God's grace in the fog of war.

Time in service brings promotions as well as expanded and increased responsibilities. As a brigade chaplain, I coordinated the efforts of seven Unit Ministry Teams (a chaplain and their

enlisted religious affairs specialist) to provide religious support for ~4,500 Soldiers and Families. This was at the height of COVID, and we worked to help leaders overcome isolation and loneliness Soldiers experienced (and the ensuing harmful behaviors) due to constraints on physical interactions. As one continues to serve, there are also opportunities for additional training and education—I completed an MBA and an Executive MPA at Syracuse University whereas others pursue CPE or Family and Marriage Therapy programs. Such opportunities enable teaching and training platforms which are another very meaningful way to fulfill my calling as an academic.

Specifically, having done theological doctoral work provides significant credibility with leaders and empowers me for vital tasks as a chaplain. I leverage my ability to research and write clearly to advise commanders and Soldiers on ethical and moral decisions on the battlefield (and at home station); to educate units on the effect of indigenous religions on military operations; and to care for Soldiers facing moral injury from actions in combat. That said, my continuing research has necessarily had more breadth of subjects than depth of focus on my specific scholarly discipline of Old Testament studies (though it certainly influences much of my thought and advisement). Furthermore, there are scores of opportunities to teach and mentor. My preparation to be a biblical scholar and professor has equipped me for the multiple opportunities I have taught in formal settings such as: training healthy relationship skills for Soldiers and Families; training chaplains in homiletics and other skills; equipping partner nation chaplains to better minister to Soldiers and leaders; and “Church History” chapel congregation tours while in Europe. All of these allowed me to apply biblical/theological knowledge in educational settings outside of a traditional classroom. A final, and perhaps most important way my PhD in biblical studies has impacted ministry as a chaplain is in my teaching and preaching in chapel settings. Specifically, I have the tools to proclaim God’s Word faithfully and effectively, wherever I may be. This is true in the States, where military Families often attend chapel rather than a local church due to the transient nature of their career assignments. Even more, in deployed environments, Chaplains are often the sole minister in remote locations where Soldiers daily face their mortality. Soldiers at such sites need the truth of Scripture rightly applied to carry on with their mission. Skills gained in my PhD years of focusing on Scripture have empowered me to do this more effectively in these situations where it mattered most.

There are certainly challenges in this vocation. You live in the nexus of duty to God and nation and must vigilantly maintain faithfulness and relevance. Our Family has moved eight times in the last 14 years, meaning we’ve seen lots of places but have not been able to plant deep roots. Finally, there is little room for superficiality in this calling—you must often step into the breach of life’s ultimate brokenness and provide pastoral care and leadership.

That said, ministry is most fulfilling where the need is greatest. Applying my biblical training in ministry as a chaplain has been a rich experience for me. Moreover, serving alongside warriors has informed my understanding of Scripture, particularly as it relates to warfare and its aftermath. Finally, as a biblical scholar AND chaplain, I serve as a deterrent to Thucydides’ concern for “cowardly thinkers” and “foolish warriors.” Being a military chaplain has enabled me to apply my knowledge of Scripture in the most challenging of contexts.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)



## 8. Campus Ministry

*Like a college chaplain, a campus ministry leader is typically focused on ministering to undergraduate or graduate students. But rather than working for a Christian college to develop its spiritual programs, someone who does campus ministry creates Christian communities at (primarily) secular schools within a parachurch organization like InterVarsity or Cru or a particular denomination. A PhD in biblical studies would be of value for teaching the Bible in a campus ministry setting and could provide helpful experience for programs that target graduate students or faculty. But this kind of position usually involves raising support. Another option would be to work for the campus ministry organization to develop Bible study and training materials.*



**Dr. Peter Green**  
 Campus Minister  
 Reformed University Fellowship  
 West Virginia University (Morgantown, WV)

As a campus minister the focus of my work is on creating opportunities for students to know and experience God as he is revealed in the Christian Scriptures. This occurs in one-on-one meetings, small-group Bible studies, and large-group worship meetings. In one-on-ones we read and discuss the Bible either for its own sake or to apply the Bible to a specific issue or question the student is wrestling with. Small-group Bible studies are oriented around reading, discussing, and applying a book of the Bible over the course of a semester. In large-group worship meetings, I preach every week through a sermon series. In addition, an essential element of the work of campus ministry is training students and student leaders in hermeneutics, leadership, and pedagogy. This happens at training conferences and in one-on-one and small-group leadership meetings.

While having a PhD is not essential to campus ministry, there are several benefits. (1) The PhD brings a certain level of credibility to interactions with students, faculty, and staff. This is especially in contrast to many other campus ministry staff that have only a bachelor's degree. And it may open doors to adjunct or substitute-teach a class. (2) The knowledge gained in advanced study of the Bible and theology allows me to speak more knowledgeably with students when they have questions about the Bible and Christianity that arise from religion, philosophy, history, sociology, or other classes, especially when classes are taught from a secular perspective that undermines the reliability of the Bible and Christianity. (3) The research skills and resources acquired in PhD work aid in preparation for teaching and in finding answers to questions students ask. (4) The depth of knowledge about the Bible and theology (ought to) translate into a greater depth in my teaching, preaching, and counseling, and to my love for Jesus that will be manifest to my students.

Doing campus ministry also contributes to my continued development as a scholar of the Bible and theology. (1) It provides a context for me to continue studying and teaching the Bible in a wide range of different avenues (without the burden of grading!!!). This keeps me fresh and engaged with the Bible and scholarship. (2) It keeps me connected to the academic environment

(did I mention no grading?), including the university's library for continued research and guest lectures by invited scholars. (3) The pastoral role of campus ministry deepens my reflection on the Bible and theology, showing me what sort of questions the upcoming generation is asking, so that my thinking, writing, and teaching/preaching about the Bible and theology are grounded in the real needs of people instead of being preoccupied with esoteric and irrelevant debates that often pervade academia. (4) The academic calendar creates periods of lighter "on-campus" work that could be used for research and writing (if that time is not entirely consumed with fundraising).

Campus ministry is an excellent calling within which to use your skills, knowledge, and credentials as a PhD graduate.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

## 9. Teaching in Related Academic Areas

*A PhD in biblical and theological studies requires knowledge of a variety of topics, which could open doors to some related fields. For example, someone with that training could teach history, archaeology, or modern Hebrew. However, getting a position in these areas may prove difficult when competing with candidates who have doctoral degrees in those areas.*



**Dr. Matt Jenson**

Professor of Theology

Torrey Honors College, Biola University (La Mirada, CA)

Like many people with PhD's in theology and biblical studies (mine was in systematic theology), I did undergraduate work in something else. My bachelor's degree was in literature and philosophy. While in many cases, a person leaves his or her undergraduate education behind, I get to integrate all of my education in my current teaching. The Torrey Honors College is a great books honors program at Biola University. We don't fit the mold of this project exactly, in that about half of what we teach is Bible and theology, though it is outside Biola's school of theology. (We're housed in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.) But where schools of theology these days often focus on the historical context of the biblical texts, in our great books approach we do close reading of the texts in English translation as part of the canon of texts that have shaped Western civilization. Thus, even when I'm teaching the Bible and theology, it's as part of this different conversation. I absolutely love it! We are less beholden to genre distinctions, and in the same course students read Homer, Plato, and the Pentateuch. While there are losses (our students have little sense of the ancient Near Eastern parallels to OT literature or of the important conversations in second-temple Judaism), there are big gains.

The other thing about our great books program that makes it a bit of an outlier these days (though perhaps not as much if one considers the history of education) is that our classes are discussions and not lectures. My job as a faculty member is to ask an opening question that will lead into a discussion based on a close reading of the text, and from there I am meant to get out of the way, allowing the text to teach and playing the role of Socratic question-asker. There are losses here, too. It's so easy for students to miss things! But our philosophy of education suggests, and we trust, that if students struggle together to understand a book and, more importantly, the world that book is talking about, they will be better prepared to understand their world, God's world, and to play the part the Lord has called them to in it. All of this dovetails with the strong emphasis on mentoring that we have and that many will find in great books programs (especially if class sizes are small). I pastored for a short time before coming to Torrey, and I almost stayed on rather than taking an academic post. I realized, though, that so much of what I loved about pastoring—having permission to share the very good news of Jesus with people, helping morally and spiritually form people, walking with them through difficulty—I could do as a mentor and faculty member in this Christian great books program. Fifteen years later, I am grateful to say that has been the case.

I can't recommend teaching in a "great books" or "classical" or "honors humanities" program enough. There are many of these at the collegiate level, and they seem to be sprouting up everywhere at the secondary level, too. There's a freshness to the work, as you teach across so many different kinds of books. There's a sense, too, that you're talking about ideas that *matter*. And you get to see how the Christian faith has always already been a part of the conversation. Furthermore, by teaching material across the centuries, you and your students have a good shot of being delivered from what C. S. Lewis so memorably called "chronological snobbery." I've got two pieces of advice for someone who's curious about this field. Firstly, read, read, read—and read widely, transgressing the boundaries of your discipline. My work is constantly funded by the reading I do for the sheer pleasure of it. Secondly, and perhaps surprisingly, focus your graduate studies on a big meaty topic within your discipline. Academic jobs are hard to come by. And, even while great books programs like people with lots of interests, they don't always know what to do with people who have overly idiosyncratic PhDs. I did my dissertation on sin in Augustine, Luther, Barth, and a post-Christian feminist writer. That's straight theology. It gave me a footing in the theological tradition, and from that expertise I was able to walk confidently into other areas.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

## **10. Bible Translation**

*Since a doctorate in biblical studies involves extensive research into the biblical languages, a natural career path would be in Bible translation. Most likely, this would involve consulting with projects in a variety of languages to give expert guidance on how to understand the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Being able to play a role in helping people across the world read the Bible in their heart language would be very rewarding. However, these positions are usually based on raising support.*



**Dr. Bryan Harmelink**  
Translation Consultant  
Director for Collaboration, Wycliffe Global Alliance

As a translation consultant, it has been my privilege to come alongside translation teams in various stages of their work from the early stages of beginning translation to the later stages of publishing and making the completed translation available for use in the community. It has been an honor to not only work with but become friends with amazing people the Lord has called to help build His Church through Bible translation.

A translation consultant typically serves as a resource person for translation teams as they seek to find solutions for the translation issues they face. It might seem obvious that the skills and knowledge gained through PhD programs in biblical studies, biblical languages, or other related disciplines would equip someone to make a great contribution to the translation of the Bible into other languages. This may be true, but from my experience, I would say the main value added from my doctoral studies at Westminster in Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation is not how much I learned, but how those studies showed me how little I know. The greatest value added from my studies, then, is summed up in the phrase hermeneutical humility.

How does this relate to my work as a consultant? When I work with translators and others in the global Bible translation movement, I hope I'm there as someone on a journey of learning and not as someone who has shown up with all the answers. This is one dimension of hermeneutical humility—the realization that I don't have all the answers. This is not a denial of the things I have learned and can bring to my work as a translation consultant, but a respectful realization that I am only one person in conversation with others who bring their gifts, knowledge, and abilities to their work in translation. A consultant's role is to come alongside translation teams to help them discover solutions to their questions.

In the Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation program I studied many things that are truly relevant to working in translation, especially when translation is understood as a hermeneutical and theological practice. My work as a translation consultant in the global Church today gives me many unique opportunities to draw on multiple disciplines from my studies: biblical theology, church history, hermeneutics, textual criticism, awareness of global theologies, knowledge of biblical languages and exegesis, etc.

If you're thinking of pursuing a PhD in biblical studies, biblical languages, or related disciplines, I encourage you to explore how you might be able to serve the Church in the global Bible translation movement.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

## **11. Nonprofit Work and Parachurch Ministry**

*A PhD in biblical and theological studies provides skills that could be used in a variety of nonprofit or parachurch organizations that engage in activities like political activism or pastoral*

*support. Since one of the great challenges for many scholars is facing the gap between scholarly work and “real life,” nonprofit work and parachurch ministry allow scholars to use their biblical training to address real needs on the ground.*



**Dr. Kristi Miller Anderson**  
Research and Programs Officer  
4th Purpose Foundation (<https://4thpurpose.org/>)

Though my work from a secular worldview would be described as activism, to me it’s just an ongoing exegesis of biblical social justice expressed in secular vernacular. The Old Testament has much to say about our attitudes and interactions with the societal outcasts who are vulnerable to abuse by people in power (especially within the court system). My PhD in Old Testament/Hebrew did not help me land a job in the prison reform nonprofit space, but it has prepared me to do this work in many ways. Theologically, the knowledge of God’s attitude toward my target population, as depicted over thousands of years in various cultural settings, ensures that I always head in the direction of human dignity and goodwill. Practically, the dissertation process equipped me with research and writing skills that I employ regularly as I identify and disseminate best practices of penal reform from around the world. I also draw from the exercise and experience of teaching in that I must inspire and educate correctional leaders in effective ways in order for change to take place.

I, too, started out hoping that my educational journey would lead to a full-time tenure-track teaching position. As much as I love teaching in the biblical studies realm, however, I figured out early on that I didn’t want to spend my professional career finding answers to questions that nobody seemed to be asking. I knew I had to take this rich educational experience and make it come alive for me in “real life” ways. If more of our highly qualified and skilled people in PhD programs across the country would turn their efforts to tackling the worst of societal woes, we would see God’s Kingdom come and we would force our exegesis and theology to extend out of the classrooms and into the “real world.” Our interaction with theological academia from that context, whether through adjunct teaching or writing, gains a whole new layer of credibility.



**Dr. Trevor Laurence**  
Executive Director  
Catechesia Institute (<https://catechesia.com/>)

The process of completing a doctorate does not merely equip one with new knowledge and skills. It is simultaneously a person-forming exercise—the person shaped in the crucible of PhD studies is in significant respects a different person from the person who started. This means that, when contemplating the utility of doctoral study, one must not only ask, “How can I use the information I will gain?” but also, “How can I participate in God’s mission as the person I will become?” From the beginning of my doctoral studies, one of my animating aspirations was to direct what I would learn and who I would become toward blessing both the academy and the

church, engaging in rigorous scholarship while addressing the wider body of Christ with the hard-won fruits of those labors. Aware of the well-documented challenges facing students seeking traditional academic posts, and unenthusiastic about uprooting my family from the deep relationships of our local church to follow whatever opportunity might emerge (which, I'll add, is a less discussed but nonetheless tremendously consequential cost of life in academia), I set about establishing an institution that would root us in place and engage in the substantive work I dreamed of doing.

The Catechesia Institute is a nonprofit that exists to cultivate biblical imagination in, with, and for the academy and the church. Catechesia endeavors to create and distribute ecclesially minded scholarship and holistically formative resources that aid scholars, pastors, and laypeople in developing the instincts necessary for navigating the story of God's word and for navigating God's world according to that story. In my role as executive director, I get to put my training to work—research, academic publication, conference participation, public engagement, and writing for ecclesial audiences are ongoing tasks as I contribute to Catechesia's mission, and I look forward to expanding our activities to offer multimedia resources, instructional courses, and hosted symposia. At the same time, founding and leading a nonprofit like Catechesia involves all sorts of other responsibilities as well: website development and maintenance, budgeting and nonprofit tax compliance, inviting and editing written submissions, coordinating with a board, organizational planning, and fundraising, to name a few.

Nonprofit work with the Catechesia Institute provides a context for directing the formation I received in PhD study toward an exhilarating end: helping God's people inhabit God's narrative. How might current or prospective doctoral students prepare for a future with a nonprofit institution? Those intrigued by the vision of an existing entity would do well to establish a relationship with the organization and its leaders, to explore possibilities for involvement while one is yet a student (volunteering, contributing written material, attending events, receiving mentorship), and to even focus one's research in areas that contribute to and prepare one for those types of labors. For those interested in potentially launching a new initiative, consider what unmet needs exist within your local community when contemplating an institutional *raison d'être*. Invite the counsel of your close support network to discover if they too see the impetus for the venture and your fitness to lead it. Reach out to the heads of similar organizations to learn from their best practices and the obstacles they have experienced. Consciously construct and conduct your PhD research—and all the other practices of your life—with an eye toward becoming the kind of person who is able to follow in the way of Jesus faithfully and to bless others in the realm in which you hope to professionally invest.

Nonprofit work, especially with a fledgling enterprise, requires prayer, patience, and perseverance. And doctoral study can be a rich training ground for precisely those virtues.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

## 12. Theological Librarian

*Critical to the functioning of any theological school or program is having a well-stocked theological library. Although university and seminary librarians typically have backgrounds in*

*library science, sometimes it is helpful for them to have experts in biblical and theological studies to carefully curate library resources in that field. Working in a campus library would provide an opportunity to stay abreast of the latest research and allow for continued writing. However, it would be essential to also get a MLIS degree to work in this field.*



**Dr. Stephen R. Spencer**  
Theological Librarian  
North Park Theological Seminary (Chicago, IL)

“Theological Librarian” can describe multiple job positions and responsibilities. Most often, the phrase describes a person who is responsible for reference and instruction in a theological school. Sometimes the person is the sole staff person responsible for biblical/theological/ministry students in a larger library with other staff responsible for other duties. Sometimes a theological librarian is the staff person responsible for the reference and instruction duties in a theological school. Sometimes the title designates the director of a library in a seminary. In those cases, such an administrator usually has additional staff persons to assist, sometimes a larger number. In larger seminary settings, other library responsibilities such as collection management (selecting and deselecting the library’s resources), cataloging (the description and classification of the resources, i.e., the information you find when you search in the catalog), managing the circulation desk, interlibrary loan, and electronic resources are assigned to various staff members, some of whom may have advanced degrees in biblical or theological studies.

I have used my PhD in a variety of ways over the years. My degree (from Michigan State University, College of Arts and Letters) was in Interdisciplinary Studies and included coursework and comprehensive exams in history, philosophy, and religious studies (medieval and Reformation-era Christianity). Over the years I taught each of those disciplines individually and in varying combinations as a tenured faculty member in seminaries and liberal arts colleges. I taught for 30 years and later taught the research methods course in a seminary as an adjunct for six years. I have also served in libraries for many years in various capacities.

My library experience is broader than theological librarian. I have worked in libraries as a student worker, as part-time librarian for theology, philosophy, and history, as collection development librarian in a liberal arts college with graduate programs, as cataloger in a university that includes a seminary (including archival cataloging) and as theological and cataloging librarian in that school. I also have served as head of reference and as interim director of archives.

In all those roles, the breadth and depth of my doctoral studies has been invaluable. Coordinating the selection and weeding of materials for a broad liberal arts collection, cataloging resources in various media, and doing reference and instruction work for biblical, theological, and ministry students (and the rest of the students in the university) all draw on as much knowledge and experience of as many disciplines as we can bring to the task. Professors have indicated they appreciate working with librarians who know their disciplines and are familiar with the language and resources of their fields. Students likewise appreciate help from librarians who have taken similar courses and understand the challenges of the assignments.

Theological librarians have many reference/teaching opportunities, sometimes before an entire class, but more often with individual students, whether scheduled or not. Adjunct teaching opportunities are also often available to librarians with appropriate degrees. Some librarians with PhDs prefer to concentrate on research and publication rather than teaching, whether in their free time or as part of the responsibilities and opportunities for library faculty positions. (Some library positions are classed as faculty, others as staff, depending on the institution.)

An MLIS degree (Master of Library and Information Studies) or equivalent is usually required for theological librarian positions, though sometimes people are hired with the stipulation that they acquire that degree after they are hired. A PhD is surely not required for theological librarianship, but the degree will enrich the contribution of librarians and benefit faculty and students.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)

### 13. Adjunct Teaching

*Although teaching as an adjunct professor full-time is not financially viable in most cases, adjuncting part-time can be a great way to keep one foot in a classroom while pursuing one of the other options listed above. (Some of the testimonials in other categories include references to adjuncting.) For those who do not depend on teaching for the majority of their income, it can offer fulfilling interaction with students and continued connection with the scholarly world.*



**Dr. Brittany Kim**

Adjunct Professor

North Park Theological Seminary (Chicago, IL) and Northeastern Seminary (Rochester, NY)

Adjunct teaching has allowed me to connect with students and stay active in the academic world while giving me the flexibility to be the primary caretaker for my three young children. Although many women have successfully navigated tenure-track positions during their childbearing years, I didn't want to try to juggle a demanding career while my children were little, even if I were able to land an elusive job. And since my husband was supporting our family with his pastoral work, I didn't feel any pressure to secure a livable wage after graduating. As an adjunct, I have complete control over my schedule, so I'm able to adjust my teaching load based on the changing needs of my family, as well as my writing commitments and other projects. When it became clear that my older children's needs would (at least for a time) be best served by homeschooling, adjuncting gave me the freedom to do that. And since I've taught in several schools, I've developed relationships with many wonderful professors, administrators, and students. I love being in the classroom and engaging with students as we wrestle with the biblical text and explore new ideas together.



Adjuncting is not without its challenges. I don't have much choice about what I teach, and a high percentage of my classes have been new preps—some in areas outside my field of Old Testament, such as the Gospel of John and the Pauline Epistles. The silver lining is that I have now prepared a wide array of notes and classroom materials that I have been able to draw on in other contexts, such as church classes and small groups. Another challenge is that I'm not fully integrated into the schools where I teach, though I have much appreciation for the various ways that some administrators have tried to include me in the larger community. And unlike tenure-track professors, whose jobs provide them some time to write (at least over the summer), I get paid only for the time I'm teaching and prepping for my classes. So I have to ask questions like, "Can I afford to write that?," given that much academic writing doesn't pay me to hire a babysitter.

Despite these difficulties, I can't imagine *not* adjuncting. The learning that I do as I'm preparing to teach and my interactions with students are incredibly life-giving. And I'm thankful that adjuncting has made it possible for me to teach during this season of mothering young children without all the added burdens of a tenure-track position.

[\[Table of Contents\]](#)