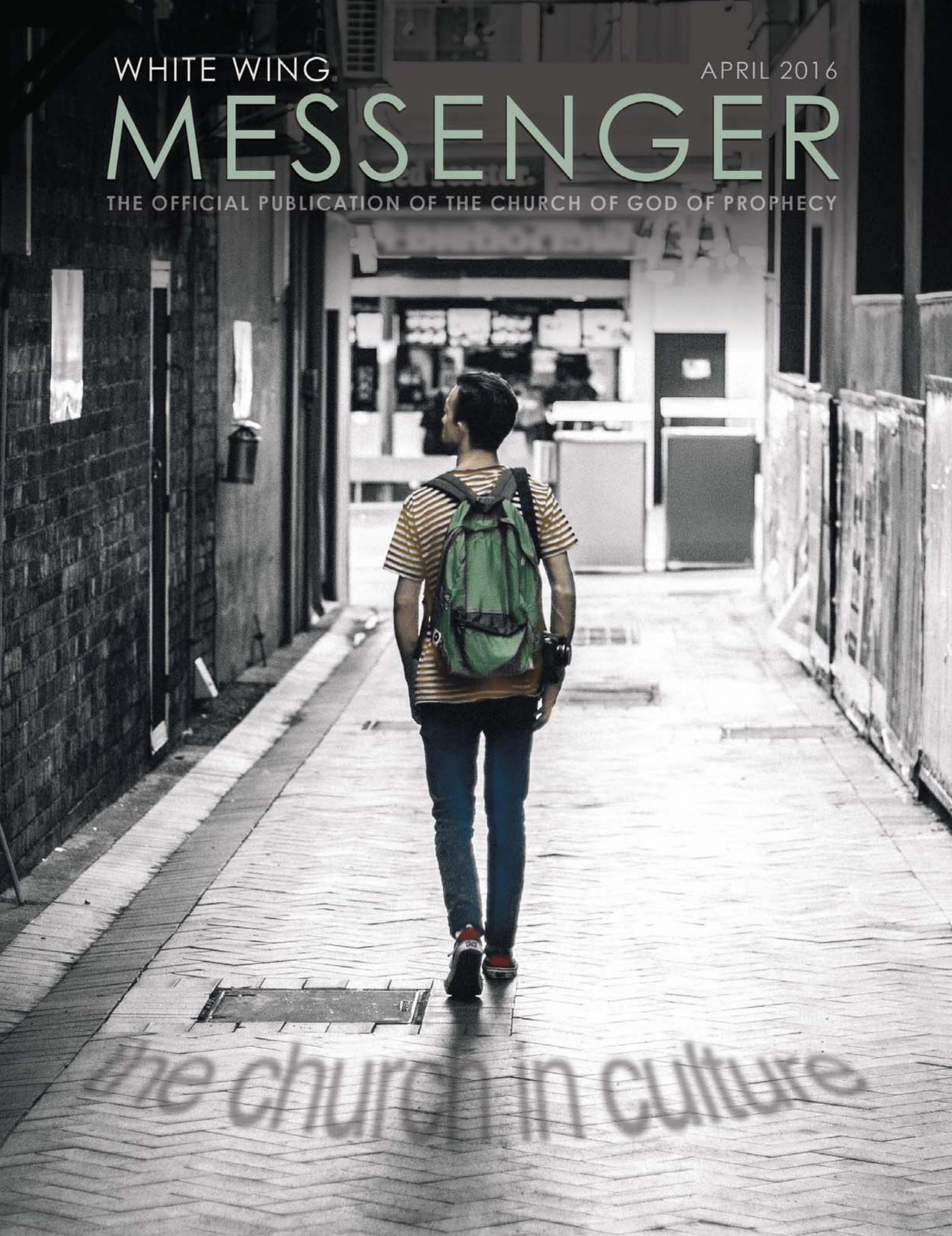


WHITE WING

APRIL 2016

MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY



the church in culture



BUILDING A FAITH THAT STANDS

Many years ago, I took my firstborn daughter to a local park on a warm spring day. She was happy and carefree, smiling and laughing. We had a wonderful time as her little, three-year-old legs roamed every inch of the park and adventured through playground equipment. A few days later while in prayer, that image was brought back to my mind. Except this time, the image wasn't as cheerful. In my mind I could see my daughter running through a field while in the background a startling picture of a lion-like figure emerged and began prowling behind her. I immediately began praying concerning the image and was brought to a familiar passage found in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Our world is constantly changing. While this has always been true, the pace at which our world is changing

appears to have accelerated as shifts in culture, particularly in sexual morality, continue to occur. This world is very different than it was even a year ago. As parents and children's ministers, it would be easy to become overwhelmed by the thought of navigating our children through this strange world. The task can seem impossible as our faith, principles, and standards are challenged from every direction. And yet, we bear the responsibility to insure the enemy doesn't devour the destinies of our children with the lies he is offering through our present culture. So, how do we strengthen our children's faith in God so that their faith will impact culture?

Accepting Our Challenge

As parents, extended family, children's ministry leaders, and mentors, we have a responsibility to train our children so that they have an accurate, biblical

worldview laid in the foundation of the Word of God. Although our culture is broken, suffering, and confused, through the help of Holy Spirit we can help our children develop a rock-solid faith. Our failure often comes on two fronts: 1) not making the development of rock solid faith a priority, and 2) a lack of understanding of how to train our children to live out their faith while living in an immoral culture.

Making Faith Formation a Priority

There's no way around it, faith formation must begin at home. If we want our children to develop a faith that influences their lives and the world around them, then our homes must also model this kind of faith. Families must find a way to make daily prayer and Bible study a part of their home life. These practices can be further enhanced through conversations and sharing personal

testimonies. While this takes time, the investment will reap benefits. Proverbs 22:6 reminds of God's promise, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

Local churches and ministries also have a role in the faith formation of children. It is their responsibility to support families throughout this process, as well as to embrace God's value for children and their place in the Kingdom of God. Since the Father places a high value on the salvation and formation of children, their evangelism and discipleship should be a priority in every church.

Give Them an Accurate Identity

Culture tells our children that their identity is defined by culture itself. It says that their circumstances, environment, and past define who they are and that who they are is malleable, able to be changed or altered. Our children must understand that their identity is deeply rooted in Christ, and that doesn't change. It is not an identity based on lists of rules and requirements, but instead on who Jesus is and who they are because of Him.

Our children were made by God, reflect His image, are loved by Him, and have the potential to love Him in return. They are forgiven, protected, and valued by Him. Because He created them, He knows them, and because He knows them, He gives them guidance to live well in the midst of cultural immorality and godlessness.

At a very basic level, our children should know that God made them, He loves them, and He wants to be their friend. This basic approach to understanding their identity provides a foundation upon which additional truths can be built. We must remind our children of these truths often and reinforce them with scriptures and Biblical accounts.

Share the Word of God

Through each phase of a child's life we can enlarge their understanding of who they are in Christ by teaching truth from God's Word that establishes a

foundation for making godly decisions. To do so, we must give our children an accurate understanding of scripture, teach them what it says, and explain why it says so.

At home, families can follow Scripture reading plans or age-appropriate storybooks or devotionals. The goal should be daily time in God's Word and application to the child's life. Parents should model a love for God's Word and a desire to spend time in personal devotion. Scripture memorization is also key to hiding God's Word in the hearts of our children. Families should select a verse or passage and set responsible goals to memorize it within a week, month, or so on.

It is not enough to tell our children that following Biblical teachings is what "good kids do." They must understand that we do these things because we are followers of Jesus and therefore we live differently than our world in some ways. They will only know the truth found in God's Word when it is revealed through personal or corporate reading and reflection.

Be Truthful About Our World

Unfortunately, time and experience have taught us that simply lifting up a standard of moral superiority for our children has not worked. In many cases our children are eventually driven into pride or despair as a result of this approach. Instead, our children must understand the basic truth of Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." They must know that we have all struggled with sin, and that we have all been broken. They can understand that because we were once broken and fallen, we can understand this brokenness in the world. And because we have experienced (and will continue to experience) Christ's forgiveness and restoration we have truth to share with others.

Families should consider the words used when referring to culture. Is there a balance of truth and grace in how we refer to individuals, lifestyles, media, and more? Do we pray for these individuals? Children can best learn

the Father's compassion, concern, and desire for reconciliation through the words we use in front of them.

Encourage Them to Shine

For the past year, my consistent prayer for my children and those I minister to has been that they would "become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' Then you (they) will shine among them like stars in the sky as you (they) hold firmly to the word of life" (Philippians 2:14, 15 NIV).

One of the greatest tools the enemy likes to use with each generation is the desire to conform. As a child and teenager, I can remember the paralyzing fear that would overcome me when I felt I simply "didn't fit in." We must teach our children that conformity with the world is of no benefit. Instead, they must understand we must conform to the image of Christ, not the false image the world desires for us to be.

Model God's Healing and Forgiveness

In reality, we have all made mistakes that we prefer our children not know about. We fear that revealing such details places us in positions of weakness or hypocrisy. Our children should know that we have faced—and sometimes given into—temptation. As appropriate and when led by the Holy Spirit, we should share our struggles with our children. The Bible reminds us, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9 NIV).

Our children can be taught to embrace—with boldness and courage—the peculiarity of being a child of God in this world. They will only do so by understanding their identity in Christ and realizing He has a far better way for them than what's offered by our broken culture.

—Shaun McKinley, Cleveland, Tennessee