

BUILD MY LIFE

"REMEMBER ME"

NEHEMIAH 13:1-31

Peter Greer and Chris Horst have written an award-winning book entitled *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches*—and I might add individual Christians as well. The thesis of the book is simple enough: Without careful attention, faith-based organizations drift from their founding mission. It's that simple. It will happen. Slowly, silently, and with little fanfare, organizations routinely drift from their purpose, and many never return to their original intent. Harvard and the YMCA are among those that no longer embrace the Christian principles on which they were founded. But they didn't drift off course overnight. Drift often happens in small and subtle ways. Left unchecked, it eventually becomes significant.

Once declared righteous by faith in Jesus, believers embark on a quest—a personal and corporate journey, if you will—to become more like Jesus (Ro 8:29). In no time, they inevitably learn that mission accomplishment requires vigilance in the face of the world, the flesh, and the devil, all determined to frustrate their quest. Without doubt, "The Lord's people are under constant pressure to behave in the world's way." One commentator describes the threat in the following colorful words: "Of the church in the world it has been said that while the place for the ship is in the sea, it can only mean disaster when the sea gets into the ship, and this is the truth. Sub-Christian bilge is always seeping into the church and needs to be pumped out; sometimes, too, a battening down of hatchways is needed to prevent the vessel's

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— J. I. Packer

being swamped by this or that inundation. When God's people cease to be on watch against the world, *they are already in its grip*, and continuous weakening is all that can be expected as long as this negligence lasts. Meantime, worldly-mindedness, thus induced, will be leading to broken vows and broken lives. The history of Israel makes this plain" (J. I. Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 178, italics added). Fortunately, the history of Israel also makes it plain that although inevitable this drift is nevertheless reversible.

This Week's Core Competency

Faithfulness – I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

"Faithful" has a variety of related antonyms: the obvious "unfaithful" and "disloyal," of course, but there are others, like "apathetic" and "indifferent," "fickle" and "vacillating," "rebellious" and "disobedient," "worldly" and "carnal," to mention just a few. For example, "worldliness" is unfaithfulness with respect to God's call to holiness, that is, his call to "Come out from them and be separate," as Paul puts it (2Co 6:17), quoting the Old Testament (cf., Isa 52:11; Eze 20:34, 41), which refers "not to the day to day contacts that believers have with unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-10), but to the matter of pagan worship," (Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, TNTC, 137)—as well as pagan worldview. Unfaithfulness in the form of conformity to the world is a constant snare to individual believers and the body of Christ. One commentator with a handle on the problem writes: "The New Testament writers regularly speak of the world in a human and cultural sense, meaning society organized apart from God and against God, and they see the world as always trying to squeeze Christians individually and the church

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corporately into its own mold—the mold, that is, of the predominant preconceptions, prejudices, behavior patterns, and style of life of the particular time and place in which God's people find themselves. The church is the body of Christ, called under the leadership of Jesus, its head, to permeate and purify society and inject God's values, which are the true human values, into its life. Christ will thus to transform culture through the church's agency. But Satan's empire (that is, pagan and secular ideologies and the communities that embrace them) strikes back, and the conflict is continuous" (Packer, 177-78).

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Nehemiah 13:1-31

1 On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, 2 because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.) 3 When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.

4 Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, 5 and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests.

6 But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission 7 and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. 8 I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. 9 I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.

10 I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and musicians responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. 11 So I rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the house of God neglected?" Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts.

12 All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil into the storerooms. 13 I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zakkur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because they were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their fellow Levites.

14 Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.

15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading

winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. 16 People from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. 17 I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? 18 Didn't your ancestors do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity on us and on this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath."

19 When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. 21 But I warned them and said, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will arrest you." From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. 22 Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.

23 Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. 24 Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. 25 I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. 26 Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. 27 Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"

28 One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest

6. Do you think Nehemiah overreacted to the fact that half of the children of mixed marriages did not learn the language of Judah at home? Explain.

7. Are "foreign women" to blame for "mission drift" in the Judean community? Explain.

8. What do you infer about the spiritual temperature of Jews in those days from the situation Nehemiah described in verse 28?

9. **Discussion:** Talk about contemporary threats to the spiritual well-being of individual believers and the body of Christ today comparable to the three in Nehemiah's day.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

"Nehemiah served his first term as governor for 12 years before being recalled to court (13:6), after which he returned to Jerusalem (13:7) for a second term whose length cannot be determined" (The NIV Study Bible, note on Ne 5:14). How long he remained in Susa (1:1) before returning to Jerusalem is not known. However long it was, it was long enough for the Judean community to lapse in their commitment to follow the Law of God given through Moses and to obey carefully all his commands, regulations and decrees (Ne 10:29), which they had made earlier (10:29-39). So upon returning, Nehemiah implements reforms in three areas of community life. Chapter 13 is punctuated by three prayers found in verses 14, 22b, and 31b, marking the end of Nehemiah's description of each of his reforms. His first reform described in verses 1-13 involves *sanctifying the sanctuary*; the second described in verses 15-22a involves *safeguarding the Sabbath*; and the third described in verses 23-31a involves *hallowing marriage relationships*.

Following the reading of the Book of Moses (Dt 23:3-6), the people exclude those of foreign descent from the assembly of God's people. One commentator explains: "This must refer to exclusion from ceremonial worship. Foreigners were prohibited from the worship service. Apparently some foreigners were allowed to remain in the city . . . Removal of foreigners should not be viewed as racial exclusivism.

As always, foreigners could become part of Israel by conversion (cf., Ezra 6:21; Ruth 1:16-17)" (Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NAC, 268).

Regarding the sanctuary, while Nehemiah is away, Eliashib, a priest, provides Tobiah the Ammonite, a well-connected foe of Nehemiah (cf., 2:10, 19; 4:3, 7-8; 6:1-4, 12-14, 17-19), with a room in the temple for his personal use. This is more than a bad idea; it is an evil thing (v. 7). Tobiah has no business utilizing a room in God's house, intended to be used to store "grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests" (v. 5), as a strategic location for his own mischief making. Apparently, the room is available at the time because it is empty, and apparently, it is empty because the people have stopped bringing their tithes and offerings to the Levites, making it necessary for them and the musicians responsible for temple services to return to their fields to feed their families. The people had said, "We will not neglect the house of our God" (10:39), but just a few years later they did. Nehemiah rectifies the situation by evicting Tobiah, purifying the rooms he has occupied, reinstating the tithe, and putting reliable men in charge of the storerooms. Nehemiah prays "Remember me for this" (v. 14), namely, what he has done for God's house.

Regarding the Sabbath, God himself had warned his

people through Isaiah the prophet, refrain "from doing as you please" on the Sabbath. It is "my holy day" (58:13), no business-as-usual day. And again the people had said, "When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day" (10:31), but just a few years later they did, giving in to economic realities. One commentator writes: "Before the exile there was a growing impatience with the sabbath law. Amos in the 8th century BC could see the merchants chafing at the weekly shut-down of business (Amos 8:5); and sure enough, by Jeremiah's time they had had their way. Load after load of merchandise poured in and out of the city on the sabbath. Jeremiah's warning of what must follow (Jer. 17:19-27) was clearly in Nehemiah's mind as he saw the forbidden burdens in transit (15; cf. Jer. 17:21, etc.) and spoke of history repeating itself (18). The bustling scene of verses 15 and 16 shows how rapidly the trickle which must have begun in Nehemiah's absence (cf. verse 6) had become—as such trickles do—a flood" (Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, TOTC, 143). Nehemiah rectifies the situation by rebuking the nobles for their complicity in desecrating the Sabbath, closing the gates to Jerusalem on that day, and prohibiting merchants from camping outside the city gates with their wares. These measures effectively discourage "merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods" (v. 20) from coming to Jerusalem on the Sabbath.

Regarding marriage, the people had said, "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons" (10:30), but just a few years later they did. Indeed, mixed marriage, which posed a threat to the spiritual integrity of the community (cf., Dt 7:3-4;

Ezr 9:1-2), was a persistent problem in Israel, involving not only ordinary people but leaders as well. Nehemiah is struck by the fact that half of the children of these marriages in his day are not learning the language of Judah at home. In the words of one commentator: "This sent Nehemiah right up in the air: not only because it was the breach of a vow, but because it meant that these children would be unable to share in Israel's worship, or to learn the Law effectively, and so would not be able to pass on Israel's faith to the children that they themselves would have in due course, so that the future spiritual unity of the nation would be at risk" (Packer, 192). Even the family of the high priest is affected. One of Eliashib's grandsons is married to the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, another one of Nehemiah's infamous foes. In the ancient East, marriages involving prominent families were often arranged to secure political advantage and to form alliances, which likely accounts for this union. Nehemiah rectifies the situation by rebuking and disciplining the men who married "women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab" (v. 23), warning them against the possibility of history repeating itself (vv. 26-27), and chasing Joiada's son from the scene (v. 28).

The chapter and book closes with Nehemiah's short summary of his achievements, about which one commentator writes: "*I cleansed . . . I established . . . I provided . . .* makes a far less brilliant epitaph than Caesar's boast, 'I came, I saw, I conquered.' But Nehemiah's work was the making of his people. His reforming zeal, partnered by the educative thoroughness of Ezra, gave to post-exilic Israel a virility and clarity of faith which it never wholly lost. This would have been the memorial most to his liking" (Kidner, 146).

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word. *The Message of the Passage*

Guard against "mission drift," an ever-present danger to Christians and the Christian community, by remaining vigilant in your commitment to obey all that God has commanded you.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Identify any "mission drift" you see in your own life.

Identify what you need to do to rectify it.

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **that day** "This reform evidently began on the day that the walls were dedicated (v. 1; cf. 12:43, 44). Discovery of the law that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of the Lord (Deut. 23:3-4) led the leaders to exclude all foreigners from the restoration community" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Nehemiah," 2019 ed., 57, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/nehemiah.pdf).

v. 4 **Eliashib the priest** "Eliashib (v. 4) may have been the high priest (3:1, 20; 13:28). Williamson argued that he was not the high priest, but another priest who was related to Tobiah, by nature or by politics. Tobiah (v. 4) was the Jewish Ammonite 'Godfather' who had opposed Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild the walls (2:19; 6:1, 17-18)" (Constable, 58).

v. 4 **Tobiah** "Nehemiah's old enemy had always had admirers and sworn supporters in the highest circles of Judah (6:17-19). Himself the bearer of a good Jewish name (see on 2:10), he had married into one of the leading families, and his son into another, as reported earlier; now it emerges that the high priest himself was a connection [see note on v. 4 Eliashib the priest]. Tobiah never lacked audacity. Where even a toe-hold in the temple would have been a conquest, he obtains a room the size of a small warehouse, and has it cleared for him by the religious authorities themselves (7). It was doubtless a special satisfaction to see his personal belongings take precedence over the very frankincense for God and the tithes for his ministers; but best of all he was at the nerve-centre of Jerusalem, ideally placed for influence and intrigue" (Kidner, 141-42). "For Tobiah, the room no doubt served as a base from which he could begin to develop again those contacts which he already had (cf. 6:17-19) and so to foster a more 'liberal' and 'open-minded' policy that would integrate Judah into the wider network of Levantine provinces" (H. G. M. Williamson, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 16, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 386).

v. 6 **thirty-second year** I.e., From Apr. 1, 433 B.C. to Apr. 19, 432 B.C. "It had been perhaps twenty years since the original commitments were made (this is the common guess; Nehemiah does not tell us how long he was at Susa before his second stint began) . . . How old was he when he came back to Jerusalem? He nowhere mentions his age, but he would hardly have been appointed governor in the first place had he been less than forty, and that means that chapter 13 finds him not far from sixty, give or take a few years. He was thus approaching the end of his career and was at a point where consolidation of work previously done naturally and rightly seems important. This, perhaps, was why he asked Artaxerxes to give him a second spell as governor" (Packer, 177, 181).

v. 8 **household goods** "A parallel to the occupation and desecration of the temple by Tobiah comes from a century earlier in Egypt, where Greek mercenaries had occupied the temple of Neith at Sais. Upon the appeal of the Egyptian priest Udjahorresnet, the Persian king had the squatters driven out and the temple's ceremonies, processions and revenues restored" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Ne 13:9). "The room which was given to him was a storage room for all kinds of products intended for the cult and for the support of the priests and Levites. These products were regarded as sacred (12:47). It was thus an act of desecration to bring into a sacred chamber a profane person such as Tobiah" (F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT, 261). It was an "evil thing" (v. 7).

vv. 14, 22b, 31b **Remember me** "Nehemiah does not pray about his achievements vaingloriously, like the Pharisee in the parable (Lk. 18:10-14), but filially, as a child to a parent. For children to want their father to know what they have done for him, and so to go to him and tell him about it, is natural and not wrong and the filial instinct of the regenerate constantly moves them to behave this way with their Heavenly Father, just as Jesus' filial nature once moved him to pray: 'I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me . . . ' (Jn. 17:4-5)" (Packer, 185).

v. 23 **married women** . . . "Much is made in the Old Testament of the immediate disloyalties inherent in mixed marriages, but Nehemiah was struck by another aspect namely the corruption of the next generation. The babble of languages among the children (24) was not only a symptom but a threat: it meant a steady erosion of Israelite identity at the level of all thinking and expression, and a loss of access to the Word of God, which would effectively paganize them. A single generation's compromise could undo the work of centuries" (Kidner, 144).

v. 25 **pulled out** "Plucking the hair from another's beard was an action designed to show anger, express an insult, and mark someone to scorn (2Sa 10:4; Isa 50:6; cf. Code of Hammurabi 127; *Herodotus* 2.121)" (Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Ezra and Nehemiah," in *The Bible Expositor's Commentary*, rev. ed., 4:565).

v. 28 **son-in-law** Cf., Ne 10:30. "According to Lev 21:14 the high priest was not to marry a foreigner . . . The union described in this verse was especially rankling to Nehemiah in the light of Sanballat's enmity (see 2:10)" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Ne 13:28).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

When my kids were toddlers, I remember putting them in timeout for the same thing at least six times a day. They were always handed a "get out of jail free" pass when they agreed to stop whatever crazy behavior got them in trouble in the first place, only to repeat it 23 minutes later and start the whole process over. They say it takes 21 days to form a habit. I don't know about you, but I can eat great for 21 days and then day 22 rolls around and I'm feasting on Cheez-its. Why do we slip back into our old habits so easily? We can read the story about the Israelites in Nehemiah 13 and think, "I would never do that," but really, we are no different. We might pursue morning prayer or a daily devotion with our family for a few days then life happens, and it falls off the radar. Faithfulness requires commitment, dedication and heart change. When one of these things lapse the others are quick to follow. The only way we can stay steadfast in our faith is with the help of the Holy Spirit. This is a great time of year to begin a regular routine of family prayer, Bible study or worship. Jeremiah 29:13, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." We are praying for your family to stay steadfast in your pursuit of Christ this year, to seek Him with your whole heart!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Ne 13

1. Describe what Nehemiah found when he returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.
2. What were the people doing on the Sabbath and why was that wrong?
3. Why did God not want the Israelites to marry people that weren't Israelites?

What Do You Think

Why do you think the Israelites slipped back into their old sin habits?

What R U Going To Do

Invite a friend to help keep you faithful to God this week. Decide together to read your Bible and/or pray every day. Check on your partner throughout the week and encourage them to be faithful in seeking the Lord. Pray for each other every day.

Core Comp

Faithfulness - I am loyal to God and others so they know they can count on me.

Memory Verse

Ps 105:1-5 – Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known among the nations what He has done. Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts. Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always. Remember the wonders He has done, His miracles, and the judgments He pronounced.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed Scrolls _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James, and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella, and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. She has attended Pantego Bible Church for more than twenty years and has been on staff for more than five years.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

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