

Flowers strives toward goal of loving God with every ounce of being

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Several years ago, on a drive home from church, Leighton Flowers' children sat in the backseat of the car, discussing which of their parents they loved most.

It was a common topic of conversation, so Flowers and his wife, Laura, knew what motivated their children's fluctuating answers.

"Some days, they loved Mommy the most, depending on what she fed them or allowed them to watch on television," Flowers explained. "Other days, they loved Daddy the most, depending upon if I tickled them or brought them home a surprise."

Profound theological insight from a 4-year-old

One particular Sunday, their daughter, Esther, declared she loved her father the most. Having learned from experience, Colson, her oldest brother, quickly informed her of the rudeness of such a statement, asserting it could hurt their mother's feelings. Cooper, the middle child, added they are supposed to love God most anyway. Esther pondered this for a moment and then rebutted, "But God doesn't cuddle with me!"



Leighton Flowers and his wife, Laura, have learned their share of spiritual lessons from their children. (Photo / Neil Williams)“Laura and I laughed,” Flowers recalled. “But over the next several days, as I thought about that statement, the more it really sank in. What my 4-year-old princess had voiced is actually what I have felt all my life but wouldn’t ever have had the nerve to say.

“Sure, we are supposed to love God above all, but how do you really get to know and love a person you can’t see or verbally hear? As Esther expressed, how can I know and love someone who doesn’t even cuddle with me? How do I relate to someone who doesn’t relate to me in the ways I want him to relate?”

Flowers, director of apologetics and evangelism for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, grew up as a “church brat,” so he understood his daughter’s quandary better even than she. Having been involved in the church so extensively for so long, first as the child of a minister and then as a minister himself, he admitted he often missed the proper motivation for doing ministry in the first place—love for God and obedience to him.

After hearing his daughter’s deceptively profound statement, Flowers realized he needed to examine his relationship with God and re-evaluate his outlook on ministry.

Special revelation and general revelation

Fortunately, God quickly provided a way forward, as Flowers again learned from his children. Following Esther's rebuttal that day, Colson replied, "Who do you think made Daddy?"

Although it took some time to be properly applied to his ministry outlook, this rhetorical question led Flowers to consider the revelation of God. Specifically, he began to consider that, in addition to revealing himself through the special revelation of Scripture, God also reveals himself through the general revelation of his creation.



Leighton Flowers "When we love human beings, we love the One who created them. When we really get to know his creation, we get a glimpse of the Creator," Flowers explained.

Flowers realized Esther's love for her parents is an expression of love for the One who created them. In the same way, Flowers' love for his children is an expression of a deeper spiritual love he has for the One who gave them to him.

In light of this new insight, Flowers concluded every blessing God bestows ultimately directs him back to God. So, he began to strive to follow that direction in order to know and love God better.

“This must be the ultimate goal of life—to learn how to know and love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength,” he said.

In the years since then, this personal goal has extended into Flowers’ ministerial goals. Functioning both as an evangelist and as an equipper of believers to share their faith with others, Flowers strives to lead by example in loving God with every ounce of his being and loving his neighbor as himself. This evangelistic ministry is motivated by his love for God, and through the blessings God provides in and through this ministry, Flowers sees God revealed.

Engaging the mind

Flowers’ journey to this point began when his mother led him to faith in Christ at age 7. In the years that followed, he remained active in church, and he felt called to vocational ministry while in high school. He pursued ministry training at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

“Reading, studying and discussing theological matters challenges me to grapple with concepts and perspectives that otherwise would be swept by in the busy pace of life,” he said. “If my goal is to know God and love him more, I must make time to engage my mind and expand my horizon.”

Following his graduation with a master of divinity degree in 2000, Flowers served as a youth pastor, was a regular speaker at youth camps, and later became the staff evangelist of a local church. That position allowed him to travel throughout the country to preach at youth events, revivals and church services of all kinds.

In 2003, in light of his experience, Flowers was selected to fill a position

previously held by his father—youth evangelism director for the BGCT. In 2016, he also began overseeing the BGCT’s apologetics ministries.

Equipping students for evangelism

In this position, Flowers manages efforts to reach and equip youth throughout Texas. One of these efforts is Super Summer, a weeklong training camp that seeks to develop young believers to their fullest potential as Christian leaders. Another effort is the two-day Youth Evangelism Conference, which aims to challenge students to share the good news of Jesus Christ and experience the difference a relationship with Christ makes.



Leighton Flowers visits with ministers to students during the Youth Evangelism Conference. (Photo / Neil Williams) Regarding specific methods for evangelizing youth, Flowers said: “Do not feel like you have to change how you do evangelism in order to reach young people. Be yourself. Tell your own story, and whatever you do, be real.”

Due to his upbringing in the church, this mentality has a specific application for Flowers. A large percentage of students who attend BGCT events were raised in the church, but many have lost the motivation for what drives them in reaching the lost. Addressing this loss of motivation is important, Flowers said, because reaching unbelievers “starts with the

‘why,’ with the purpose of evangelism.” One’s love for God and gratitude for what he has done by sending Jesus into the world should inspire obedience, he said.

Flowers learned this lesson from experience. So, he is uniquely capable of reaching students who come from such a background. Specifically, his relatable testimony opens doors to evangelize the lost and strengthen believers.

“Young people want to see someone who is genuine and real,” he said. “Just tell them your story, and don’t leave out your mistakes. Let them see that you have struggled just like they are (struggling now), and show them there is hope.”

Encouraging reports

Flowers noted he is humbled to be even a small part of all that God does in and through his ministry, which provides not only him but also other believers the opportunity to share the hope found in Christ. Whenever an event concludes, he rejoices as reports of God’s faithfulness pour in.

One report from a 2016 Super Summer session details the salvation of Kaylin, a student who largely had been absent from church during the preceding semester. Although Kaylin’s youth pastor initially was reluctant to let her attend the training camp, since it is designed for student leaders, a last-minute dropout left an open spot, and he sensed perhaps God wanted her to be there.

A few days into the camp, Kaylin informed the youth pastor she wanted to be baptized. After further counsel, however, she determined she never actually made a profession of faith in Christ. One of the Super Summer workers proceeded to walk her through the gospel, and Kaylin realized she both needed and wanted to make Jesus the Lord of her life.

When Kaylin told her youth pastor about her new birth in Christ, he was overjoyed. He exclaimed, "You weren't even going to come!" He later wrote in his report of the experience, "It was then that I realized that God gave me an incredible opportunity to celebrate the 'coming to life' of one of my students; a student who wasn't even planning to go, but God's faithfulness to pursue her and transform her heart won out!"

Flowers receives numerous similar testimonies, and he continues to be amazed to see how God uses the ministries he oversees to impact the world.

Although he previously struggled with relating to God, he now sees God clearly at work all around him, enticing him to know him better. Drawing nearer to God through obedience to his call, Flowers falls more in love with God each day, and that drives him to encourage others to do the same.

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