

## “Revisit the Blessing of Conference”

By Andy Giebler

Sunday, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014

It's good to be home. It's good to be back here. I'm thankful to have a leader to work with in Parrish, and we work well together. The things that I've learned from him... I just want to say that it's great to be back, and as I was going, and Parrish is the one I have to thank, but I want to thank all of you, because, I've got my phone with me, and I'm getting texts, and I'm hearing everything that's going on, and I know the sacrifices that are made when we take twenty people from this congregation. I want to say that you guys did a wonderful job with the absence of so many people. It's because we have a ministry; we don't have a social club. We don't have a group of people just to have fun together; sure, we do that, but we've got one common cause, and that's to see people saved. I'm going to ask a few people to share this morning—it's not going to be all listening to me, although I've got so much to share from conference that I could probably stand up here for another hour. I'm not going to do that, at least, not today. First, I'm going to ask my wife, Sonia Giebler, to share what she got from conference; the blessings that God gave her.

**SONIA:** It's great to be home. It was an incredible time at conference. Andy and I are just so excited to have just recharged our batteries. Spiritually speaking, as a husband and wife team, it was a great time to refocus on God's plan in our life, as individuals and as a team for our ministry. It was an awesome time of just wholesome fellowship, and a time to rekindle friendships and just be with likeminded people that love God; it's an extended family. We're definitely glad to be home, because we miss you all so much. There were so many nuggets of gold shared throughout the entire week-end, through the entire time that we had the privilege of being there. The focus, and the main scripture was about being an overcomer. What does that mean to me personally, as a person? Have I become complacent where I'm at today, with what God has called me to do? Am I trying to have that attitude of—that negative attitude of, “I'm defeated,” that attitude of, “I can't.” Am I just like the scripture taught? Am I an overcomer or am I a grasshopper? I am so glad that God is equipping us with the tools to go out there and share with all those souls that just need to get over that hump, so that they can make it the next moment, the next day, the next hour, the next day—whatever it might be. It might just be simple thing—I know that I harp on that a lot—but it might just be that one little talent that God gave you, to just go out of your way, even when the flesh doesn't feel like it, to go out of your way to say hello to someone, to just hug someone, to lend a listening ear. Those are things that, believe it or not, as outgoing, and as sociable, and as talkative as I might seem, those are things that I've overcome. If you leave it up to me, I'd much rather just enjoy, and listen, and let life pass me by. Believe it or not. But, I know that there's a work to be done; I know that there's an urgency for me to go out there into this world and share of this goodness; share of the grace that God has given me to be able to be the woman of God that I am today. I'm not perfect, by any means, but I am striving to be the woman of God, equipped, to be there, just like the women that I have come under, that have come before me, to be there to encourage, to be there to teach, to be there to just wrap my arms around—whatever the situation... You don't have to tell me your whole life story. I didn't have to tell my whole life story to many people that opened their arms and embraced me. This is what it's all about. We should all have an urgency to wrap our arms around those people who God has entrusted to us, wherever we might find ourselves, so that we can be the overcomers. I'm telling you, I'm excited; I don't know if you can tell, I have so much to share—I took notes—I have so much to share, but, as Andy said, I'm not going to take everybody else's time; I'm going to be a good sharer and leave some time for others. It was a great

time in the Lord, we gained a lot of great tools on how to be better leaders, how to care one for another, how to grow in God, how to just be overcomers. God has given us talents; we need to use them. There is an urgency to go out there and to help each other out and spread His goodness. Let people know that there is more to life than just having a nice pair of shoes and a nice purse, or a nice suit, like Parrish would have; there's more to life than just those things of this earth. That life everlasting; that price that Christ paid that none of us could. Another thing was, is there anything standing between you and what God wants you to do? Yes, there's a lot of stumbling blocks on a daily basis—I recognize that, and I'm sure that you all run into that—but, God is equipping us with all those tools that putting on the armor of God will be able to defeat anything that comes our way, just like the Scripture that was our main Scripture, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:37-39) I'm so proud to be a part of this ministry; I'm proud to be in it with you all, and I pray that we will just take one soul at a time to further His Kingdom. Thank you for your warm welcome to us; Andy and I are just so excited to be home, and we look forward to everything that God has for us in the next few years.

I see Sister Donna Ferguson here; I want to catch her before she has to leave again. I know she works a crazy schedule. Why don't you come on up? I know you spent a week in Virginia; I don't know how they did without you at work... When Donna got there, she jumped in with both feet, and it didn't matter that she was from out of town, it's her ministry and she was able to jump in and do whatever was needed to do.

**DONNA:** Morning! It's kind of like—I don't know—those of us who are teachers and have worked with young children, or, those of us who remember your school days, and you know the right answer and you're sitting in your chair, and your teacher's looking through the room, and you're thinking, "Call me! Call me!" That's kind of the way I felt, sitting in that chair; I was really hoping that Andy would call me up to share a little bit with you. I have a lot of snapshots in my mind. It's kind of like Sonia was saying, it's like your cup is just running, and there are so many things that you want to share and you want to talk about. I think that one of the things that was really important for me—and, for me, life-changing—was, in our day-to-day lives, sometimes we get in a rut, or a routine, and we need to shake it up a little bit, and, for me, the conference shook it up a little bit. I haven't seen many of those people in ten years, maybe fifteen, twenty, some of them. It was like we never lost the beat. It was kind of like, the conversation that we ended ten years ago, we just picked it up and carried it on. It's a little crazy, but it's the Spirit of God, because it rings true. When you walk up to somebody and you resonate that Spirit that they have and that you have and it's just that common thing that you have in common—it doesn't matter if you've known that person for five minutes or ten years, fifteen years, it just is a beautiful, beautiful thing. God just gives you something to talk about; you've got something in common. One of the things I remember when we first walked through the door—just got off the plane, walked in—I remember Pastor Brand had a big video thing, and I was like, "Ray guns in the house!" So, all of you that were not able to make it, we represented. There were—our music department, those that were able to make it... I know Bill Adams, Mike and Linda Alford, drove all night long, and walked right into conference. It was a blessing to have them there. People really sacrificed to make it, when, technically the flesh would have been okay to stay home, I'm sure. Sonia and Andy were great representation, as far as our music department. It was wonderful, wonderful worship. (I don't want to talk too long! I have so much to say!) For me, also, the conference was about not re-inventing the wheel. I don't need to re-invent the wheel—what I need to do is to go back to the basics. That's what the conference was about to me. There was a time-management work-shop—there were a lot of

awesome workshops; you could pick the workshop that you needed to attend, based on what your goals were, what your interests were. They were—it wasn't as though we had hired people to come in and speak, we have been blessed with a ministry that is world-wide and, like Sonia said, many gifts and talents—people from within the ministry from all over held those workshops. This workshop was with Rich Snow and Debbie Paine. I just have to tell you guys, Rich Snow looks awesome. He's doing really great. I don't know if those of you who know him remember when he left here, he was very sickly. I was concerned if he would even make it; he was really ill. I would have never known hi when I saw him. But, that time management workshop really helped me realize what was sucking the life out of me in certain areas. In other areas, what I felt like I had an overflowing ability in, I could take from and manage a little bit better. I mean, let's face it, we all still have twenty-four hours in a day, but, sometimes in life, we don't feel like we're getting things done, and why? One of the things that might go to the side might be your spiritual reading of the Bible, your prayer time, things like that; the basics kind of went to the side just a little bit, and, some of the other stuff, I realized that I was increasing it to the point that—I needed to even it out a little more. So, I just want to say thank you so much, it was a blessing, blessing, blessing—did I say blessing?—blessing to be there. It's good to be back, though; it's good to be home, worshipping with you.

Kirk, come up and share with us, and, after that, Bill Adams.

**KIRK:** Jennifer was being rebellious, and she said, "Just tell him no!" She's a teenager. She just wanted to see if I would do it. It kind of reminds me of when I was at the conference, and Pastor Paine was having different people come up and share and I didn't know if he going to call me or not, but, I thought, "If you asked me to come up right now, I've got all these other things in my head, I don't know if I'm even going to be coherent." Then, people are sharing their testimonies of how they got saved and so forth, and it was just kind of like, it connected all those thoughts and everything. It all kind of came to me, and he was like, "Hey, Kirk, I know you knew that I was going to call you up," and it was right then I knew he was going to call me up. Anyway, the conference really is all about family. I think that really summarizes it for me. If you listen to the testimonies, a lot of people reconnected with their faith, and so forth. First, I think the place that we start is just thinking, this church family, I didn't really know if I was going to be able to go. It was a hard decision to decide, because we have a newborn in the house, and I was going to be leaving them—the wife and the daughter to take care of him, when I was away, and that was not really a nice thing to do. But, I also knew that there was a church family here that was looking out and making sure everything was taken care of here, so I felt confident to do that. Getting down there, of course, getting connected, reconnected with all these people. As Donna said, it was just right back in, and the fellowship just takes off right where you—as though you'd never gone. It truly is a blessing. I love to see how people are growing. You go to these different workshops, see different people present. The quality of information, and the amount of history that you can see that they're learning and applying; it was really encouraging as well, as opposed to going down there and, "Oh, that wasn't very well prepared," and you're disappointed. But, of course, it was all really good. It was great; really edifying. So it was very encouraging. The worst thing about the conference is that we weren't all there. That really makes it—you know, if you have a family reunion, and only part of the family goes, and it's like, "What happened? We got down there, now where's everybody else?" So, it's one of those things, you know, what was encouraging about was hearing about all the blessings that were happening here, and how everybody was really ministering and sharing. Hearing about the worship services going on, and so forth, and then coming back, and it's like wherever you go, there's family. There's no family like your immediate family, so, being here is awesome. Being down there is also awesome, because we know—those of us who have been around long enough, we understand that we are just one big family, and we've stirred the pot many times; we put people in different places, and there really is no way of

separating the threads, the connections of fellowship. Anyway, it was great. I was able to stay with the Ulysses's and work with them, and that was all so—you know, I'd get to spend more time with them, but not always with the whole family—and see what they were doing. Their kids are really getting more involved, and doing more things. You see the years, and you see them grow up and start to establish their own ministry; it's encouraging to see. Jim Ottoson—one of the hopes that I had had was that we were going to get together and hang out for a little bit, but it wasn't happening, and it wasn't happening, there was too much going on—good things, but just keeping us occupied—and then the final day—Sunday, I left Monday morning—we were able to go out, and grab something to eat, and, again, just sitting there, it in a formal setting, just able to share and talk about what God is doing in our lives and encourage one another, and just talk about what a blessing it is to have brothers—sisters as well, but—people in the faith, and regardless of our differences or what we would think would be generally wouldn't want to meet and sit and talk, but we would see how the presence of God and our love for the Word of God has changed us and moved in our lives and just makes us united like nothing you could ever imagine. I could go hang out with somebody that does exercise or cycling or kettlebells, whatever it is I like to do, if they could do it, too, and that would be cool, that would be nice, kind of enjoy it, but there is nothing that recognizes like those people who go through the same thing. I thought it was kind of cool that the conference theme was about overcoming, because that's really—if we ever have a testimony, we have something that links us together. We have gone through all these same common battles, whatever it would be, we know what temptation is; we know what it is to see persecution, we know what it is to feel weary, and all those things. We know what it is to have someone come and encourage you, or pray with you, or pray for you and you don't even know it; to be edified by worship, to be edified by hearing the Word of God, and we understand all that, and that's really what makes us the family of God that we are. So, I'm just really thankful for that fact, and I appreciated just being there, sitting in that family, and knowing those things, knowing how some people are able to—you know, the breaking point of the family would be people that receive all these pearls, but never talk about them. "I know you're going through a battle; I went through that, too, but we can't talk about that, because I don't want to talk about what I did, how bad I was," or whatever. When they had those workshops—there was one I actually missed, but it doesn't matter—there were people who were able to stand up and say, "Hey, I've really been working with this issue, and I need some help and encouragement and everybody else would come and rally behind them. It's not like people would do that, and people would go, "Oh, sorry to hear that; I can't talk to you anymore." It's important that that church family be there, because, obviously, we're not much of a family if we're dysfunctional. Again, it's the fact that we're there, the fact that we do know the struggles, and the fact that we're able to talk about it and to encourage one another that makes us what we should be.

**BILL:** So, able to overcome. Able to overcome what? I thought about that for about a week, but, most of the things in our lives that we have to overcome are ourselves. In ourselves, of ourselves... The clock didn't actually tick faster; we just slowed down. What an absolutely fantastic time, last week-end. My brother was giving me grief, telling me to enjoy my vacation; I said, "Vacation? I want you to stop and think about this for a second. We are going to get off work, after a full day, drive sixteen hours, arrive in time for worship service, and not sit in a chair, but I'm working! We're going to have some workshops after the worship service. Maybe have some time to grab something to eat; spend some time with our friends." That week-end was not a vacation, but, Parrish, it was like walking into Home Depot and somebody giving you a blank check. Can you imagine? But, you have to use those tools for good. To go into everything that I picked up last week-end would take hours. But, from today forward, all of us who went, and got those tools, and brought them back here, and everywhere we go, through the week, we get the opportunity to use them. We were able to—you know, I like what Donna said, she didn't need to recharge the batteries so much as get something additional. Honestly, I went down there

looking for that big red button; the one that everybody says, “Don’t push that button!” We had such a good time with the brothers and sisters down there. People that we hadn’t seen in years; people that, thank God for social media, we were able to keep up with some of them here and there. There are strapped for time as we are here; spread as thin, doing all the things that need to be done. It really does just give you a boost to be able to spend time with people who you’ve known for so long; people who are speaking the same thing—seeing that family; going to that family reunion—people who are still of the same mind, still saying the same thing, still going through the same battles that everybody else around them is. Knowing that we’re not isolated and that we’re not alone in God really, really provided a blessing every single hour we were there. Honestly, when’s the last time that I got to sit down and have a conversation with Mike Alford, who works third shift? We had sixteen hours down, and fifteen hours back, to just converse; good conversation. God bless every one of you; I’m so glad that I was able to go. Let’s do something.

I’m looking around the room at some people that I would like to share, but I’m looking at the clock, and they just don’t match. What I would like to do, if you went to conference, would you stand. I did that, because I want you to see who went to conference; ask them what they got out of it. You may be seated. I’ve gone to conferences in the past, and I’m thinking, “We’re going to go to these workshops, and we’re going to have worship, and that’s great.” I’m thinking these workshops—you know, I can go to a workshop anywhere. I’m looking at the list, and I realized that, yes, these were things for personal growth, but they were more than that. Our leaders got together, and they put together workshops for our spiritual growth as a ministry. Things that—not just, I need, to make me better as a minister or as a person, but what we need as a ministry to take us to the next level, because we’re growing. There’s no stopping this, unless we stop it. If you want growth, it’s there. It’s amazing that, when I got that aspect, that that’s what it’s for, it’s not just to be able to sit in somebody’s workshop and listen. It’s to advance us as a ministry. Pastor Thomas started off with forty years of ministry. 1974 is when this ministry was established; it’s been forty years. We’re celebrating forty years as a ministry. Gave me a perspective of—talking about ministry, this ministry didn’t start out in a building; it didn’t start out with a bunch of chairs in a sanctuary. It started out on the street, in a pizza place, in a coffee shop, in someone’s home... What I got out of what he shared was ministries not something you spend; it’s something we do; it’s our way of life. I want to highlight one part of our ministry, not that any *person* is more important than another, but, in the last forty years, God has given us a very special ministry towards our military. I’m not shy about that, and I won’t apologize for it. We’re not about building our ministry *on* military people; we’re not about just trying to fill our chairs with people from the Navy base. I know when I joined the Navy, I was blessed, within a few weeks of graduating bootcamp, that I met someone, and I found the fellowship center, and I found something real in my life. That’s what were blessed to do on the military base. Now, granted, Pastor Davis, his slogan was always, “We’re a ministry for all people,” and that hasn’t ever been diminished, but God has given us an ability to go on that base, to work with people, to be in a place where we may see a sailor for five minutes, a few hours, a few weeks, a few months, you never know. It’s not about us just saying that they’re a part of our church right away, it’s about ministering to them. I know there were times when God told me, “Go talk to that guy,” and I was faithful to do what God told me to do, and I never saw the guy again. That doesn’t mean that was in vain; the seed was planted. I was so blessed to walk into the sanctuary and see Jessica McGaughey. She is a sister that was baptized here about a year and a half ago, and I walk in the sanctuary, and I see her, she’s standing there, she’s got an usher badge, she’s in ministry, she’s doing things. I had several other brothers walk up to me and tell me how they got saved here in Waukegan. Pastor Paine did something—first, I want to ask, how many people in this room were saved while they were in the military. I was too, I got saved shortly when I was just out of bootcamp. One thing Pastor Paine did was he asked everyone to stand up who has been in the ministry

at two different duty stations; been able to leave one duty station and go to another? That's something God has blessed us to be able to have—you may be seated—around the country and around the world. We had a man who—on a ship—shared with someone in Sri Lanka. It's illegal to convert them to Christianity, but he did it anyway. He said, "My pastor will come and baptize you." That's a pretty gutsy statement. He stepped out knowing that what he was doing was against their law, and the man did, he called up, later on, and we have faithful brothers in different countries because of that.

For the sake of time, one more thing that I really need to share: The Friday night service, "More than Conquerors." Pastor Paine kind of drilled down on the thought of, some of us have been doing this for so long, we're in a valley. Some of us have been in the valley so long that we don't even think we can see the next mountain. We've been doing what we've been doing so long that maybe we can't even see the mountain behind us. Sometimes we can grow weary, but the encouragement is: it's worth it. There's nothing in this life worth more than what we're doing right now, living for God. God has something for all of us to do. In Romans 8, Paul was talking to the church, he was talking to home, he was talking to people who had given up their careers, given up their homes, given up their livelihood for this Gospel, to teach this Gospel.

**Romans 8:18** *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

There is nothing to compare with what God's got for us. This right here is worth it. I can't stress that too much. God has got something for each and every one in this room to do. It doesn't matter if you think you've been dry for too long. God is not—Todd made a statement earlier which I thought was real interesting: The blood of Christ is not to weak for anything that I've done. It will cover us. I'm going to skip down to thirty-seven:

**Romans 8:37-39** *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

It doesn't matter what it is; God is bigger than any of it. I would encourage you to listen to the services; they are on the web right now. They're available to listen to. The Sunday morning service, just a snippet out of that: Talking about Moses, it said that he sent twelve to go into the Promised Land; the land that God said, "This is yours, go take it." Twelve of them went out, and two men brought a good report, ten men brought an evil report. Two said, "Let's go; let's do it. Right now!" and ten said, "No, we can't do it; we're like grasshoppers in their eyes." The question he asked was, "Do you want to be a grasshopper?" It's a choice. Do you want to be a grasshopper in their eyes, or do you want to go and take it? I say we can go and take it. He said, "Do you want to take that, right now, or do you want to wander around in the wilderness for forty years?" They wandered around in the wilderness for forty years until they all died. Each one of us are sitting back, looking at our choices. Those ten men that brought back an evil report, it wasn't just those ten men that were affected. It was their entire tribe that was affected. Each and every one of us sitting here—the encouragement is—we can affect good or bad. We have that power, because if we take what Christ has given us to do, we take what God has put on our hearts to do, we take those times, and grow with it, and work with our leadership, and seek God for what He's got for us to do, there's nothing that we can't accomplish. As much as we talk about leadership, and I just love everyone that works with us, and that's important, because God set things up a certain way. But, there's also something to be said for what God puts on your heart. That's one thing that I saw. God gave me something that I saw that was so huge. We had an altar service, and Pastor

Wilson walked around, and he said, “Who needs a prayer?” and he didn’t call them up to the altar; whoever said they needed a prayer, he said someone go pray with them, and three people went to go pray with them. He did that all the way across the sanctuary. I was standing up front with my guitar, and I was thinking, “Okay, I need to go pray,” and God just told me to stop. Why? because he wanted me to see that. What that means to me is, yes, me and Parrish are the leaders of this fellowship and there’s a way things need to be done to keep things in order because we want to work as a group. Each and every one of you are important; you’re important because of what each and every one of you can do. I don’t have to do it all; Parrish doesn’t have to do it all. Frankly, if I did try to do it all—we’ve seen people try to do it; it doesn’t work. It takes each and every last one of us to do it. That’s why I want to leave you with this as an encouragement: One) We are what God called us. We can do this. We each have a role to play in this ministry. We each have something to do, and God has put something in each and every one of your lives, no matter who you are, no matter where you’ve been, no matter what you’ve done, no matter what you haven’t done. I believe that. I could say more, but they’re going to kick us out of here before long. Give God a praise.

