



Pastor Dennis Davenport, who has led CC High Desert, CA, for 26 years, anoints Walter De Pauw with oil as believers gather to pray. Walter is wearing dark glasses because he had a stroke that impaired his vision. He has since made a full recovery.

Sustained by Living Water

Story by Debra Smith
Photos by Geraldine Wilkins, unless otherwise noted

Calvary Chapel High Desert in Hesperia, CA, is an oasis of biblical teaching that focuses on equipping the saints for the work of the ministry.

Bible study leader Nancy Flannery looked up in surprise. Of the 15 high school girls in her discipleship group, one 10th-grader had rarely spoken. The teen typically struggled to make eye contact, Nancy said, and had seemed uncomfortable conversing one-on-one. Yet, beginning with the words, “The Holy Spirit showed me something,” the girl had just volunteered to address the entire room. “For her to speak up like that was amazing,” Nancy said.

Calvary Chapel High Desert in Hesperia, CA, has been sharing Jesus and strengthening God’s people for more than three decades. Pastor Dennis Davenport, after growing up viewing Christianity as a system of rules, came into relationship with God in 1973 at Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, CA. Dennis eventually served at Harvest as Greg Laurie’s assistant pastor for three years. Then upon guest-preaching once at CC High Desert, “I fell in love with the people,” he said. “So did my wife. They were responsive. We could see that.” The couple moved north to begin leading the church in 1984.

Equipping the Saints

The church’s website proclaims, “It is our desire ... to help every believer become a functioning member of the body of Christ.” Ministry isn’t merely, or even mostly, to be done by professional pastors and ministers, CC High Desert emphasizes; rather, the preaching of God’s Word produces mature believers who can in turn minister to others:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-12

The Titus Women’s Ministry where Nancy observed a quiet teenager grow in courage is one such opportunity for mature believers to equip those less experienced. Inspired by Titus 2:3-5’s exhortation that the older women teach the younger, the program links groups of 10-20 young girls with two adult leaders. Participants establish the habit of studying God’s Word by using a daily Bible study, and groups meet once or twice monthly to discuss what they’ve learned. Leaders sometimes offer additional discipleship and service opportunities, such as delivering food to the homeless at Thanksgiving.

The church’s small-group adult Bible studies began in 2000, when firefighter Rudy Gilson approached Dennis about beginning a financial stewardship ministry. Rudy and his wife Debbie soon launched a course using a video curriculum from Crown Financial Ministries. Upon its completion six months later, another group was eager to begin. Today, the couple has conducted the class twice yearly for almost a decade, and course completers’ desire to continue discussing God’s Word in small groups led the ministry to expand by offering a book-of-the-Bible or topical study each half year. Currently, a 30-member leadership team facilitates eight small groups; about 140 people worship together weekly before breaking into groups to watch the Crown video or discuss 1st Peter.

Let the Little Children

At CC High Desert, “We don’t have child-care,” according to Associate Pastor Christopher Rodriguez. “We have children’s ministry. We’re teaching the kids, not entertaining them or babysitting.” After growing up as a self-described “die-hard atheist who felt too smart for the rest of the world,” Christopher began believing in God when his infant son survived a fall from a second



Usher Tom Kenyon helps congregants with seating Sunday morning.



Pastor Dennis Davenport preaches.



A young man, left, asks Rick Card for prayer after the service.



Preschool, first, and second grade Sunday school teacher Eddie Jackson encourages a young student with a hug. Children are excited to attend class due to Eddie's enthusiasm to share God's Word with them.



Sunday school teacher Michael Schumacher teaches a Bible story to a kindergarten class.



Dennis shares God's Word as people gather for a baptism at Spring Valley Lake.

Photo by Mike Hough

floor onto concrete. Prior to that, "I was so arrogant I'd get upset when I heard people glorify God for their talents," Christopher said. "I'd think, *What about you? You're the one who practiced or worked to gain that skill.*" But Christopher's self-sufficiency ended as his wife handed him their 8-month-old son, head flopping and eyes rolling, in 1992. "I cried out to this God I didn't believe in," Christopher remembered, "asking Him not to take my son." It was Christopher's first prayer; 30 minutes later, medics at the emergency room pronounced the baby fine. "That was the day I quit being an atheist," Christopher said. That week, he purchased a \$5.99 paperback Bible.

Christopher began reading God's Word intermittently. At the steel mill where he worked, "I would write Bible verses on my hard hat because I thought they sounded cool," he said. Christopher frequently told people that God saved his son, but five years passed before he and his wife Christina heard the Gospel and became Christians. That moment came in 1997, when the Rodriguez's neighbors invited them to a Harvest Crusade. After the invitation to trust Christ as Savior and Lord, "I told my wife I was going down to the front," Christopher said, where believers were waiting to pray with converts. "Not until I got there did I realize she had come with me."

Christopher and Christina soon began teaching Sunday school, and he remained in the steel industry for eight more years. Then in 2005, Dennis asked Christopher to consider joining the church staff. Under Christopher's leadership, Ezekiel 44:23 has become a key verse for the children's ministry: "And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." Chris explained, "That doesn't mean these

kids will never mess up. Will they sin? Yes, of course. But teaching them to discern—to tell the difference between right and wrong—is a large part of what God has called us to do. If we can do that, they will have what I didn't—an ability to know what will hurt them in the long run."

Shannon MacLeod has taught CC High Desert's kindergarteners for a dozen years. Each Sunday and Wednesday she enjoys seeing children she taught. "I get hugs from kids in all different grades," Shannon said. "I love those hugs—and as you watch the children grow, you see the Lord working in their lives." In her class, Shannon seeks to teach compassion in numerous ways: She enthusiastically promotes the children's ministry's canned food drives, frequently guides her students in prayer for kids without adequate food and clothing, and annually encourages them to earn money for missions by performing odd jobs around the house or neighborhood. Over the years, Shannon has seen her former students grow to serve in other ways, including VBS and mission trips to Mexico—where she and her husband John have ministered alongside several children she taught. "It overwhelms me how the Lord uses them for His glory," Shannon said.

Pastor Dennis commented, "In the early days of ministry, you think you have to make things happen. Then eventually you realize that God does the work—all He's calling me to do is teach His Word faithfully and let people do what He's gifted them to do." 🙌

CC High Desert, CA
www.calvarychapelhd.com
calendar@cchighdesert.com
760-948-2812