

EAST COAST CONFERENCE

MEN ARE ENCOURAGED, CHALLENGED, & REFRESHED AT THE 2017 ECPC

Story by Katie Bass
Photos by Tom Price

More than 1,000 pastors, staff members, and future leaders representing over 200 Calvary Chapel churches stood together in anticipation as Rob Paoletti of CC Philadelphia, PA, began to lead the men in worship. Pastor Clarke Lauffer of CC of Westmoreland County, PA, recalled with a smile in his voice, “I always look forward to that first strum of the guitar ... As soon as Rob hits that first chord,

tears start coming into my eyes and I think, ‘Wow! God, You’re really here again. You’re really here to meet us.’”

Every spring, Pastor Joe Focht and the CC Philadelphia staff host the East Coast Pastors Conference (ECPC) at a scenic Christian resort at the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay in upstate Maryland. Joe appeals for CC

pastors to begin praying for the gathering many months ahead—asking the Lord for His Spirit to fall upon their time together.

This year’s theme verse was 2 Timothy 3:14: *But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them* (KJV).

Giving Life to Dry Bones

One of the seven main teaching sessions was led by pastor and Bible commentator David Guzik from CC Santa Barbara, CA. He taught from Ezekiel 37:1-14, in which Ezekiel prophesies to the dry bones and they come to life. He challenged the pastors, “I want you to have a confidence in God’s Word that is so great that an onlooker would say, ‘Are you a fool? You think that this thousands-of-years-old book is going to change lives?’ And you say, ‘Yes, indeed I do believe that. I believe that with all my heart. I’ve seen God do it time and time again.’”

Pastor Tony Clark of CC Newport News, VA, stated, “That principle is the backbone of who we are at Calvary



Pastor Tony Clark

Chapel. This is why we teach the Bible chapter by chapter, verse by verse, book by book, because we believe that the Word is living, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. CC Pastors are seeing around the world that this Word is transforming lives in the 21st century the same way it did in the 1st century. All we have to do is be faithful to teach it.”

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

HEBREWS 4:12

Pastor Gary Clark of CC Gloucester County, NJ, added,



Pastor Gary Clark

“Are you willing to stand on His Word? That’s a question everyone must wrestle with, pastors especially,” he said. “We can get into the game of trying to be all things to all people, using fleshly means to attract a crowd. But I never see that with Jesus. I see Jesus teaching them the Word. That’s what transforms.”

Pastor Ray Tomkins of CC Webster, NY, focused on another aspect of the teaching: “Prayer is very critical to the future of the church. Not only Calvary Chapel, but to the church at large.” He recounted that CC was born out of a revival and that revival is needed again. Ray continued, “When He revives the church, the overflow is the evangelization of society.”

Choosing Humility

In another session, Pastor Damian Kyle of CC Modesto, CA, shared on Acts 18:24-28 in which Apollos, a Christian evangelist, was taught more of the faith and was willing to be corrected by early church leaders Aquila and Priscilla. Damian told the men, “When we think of Apollos, we can tend to think of his greatness in the early church solely in terms of his eloquence. But it was his humility that was the real secret to his greatness for the simple reason that



Bottom Left: Jason Stewart (left), Pastor Kevin Henesy, and Antonio Roldan of Calvary Chapel Island of Grace, Holbrook, NY, worship in unity.

More than 1,000 men were refreshed in ministry at the East Coast Pastors Conference held in May at Sandy Cove, MD.

‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’
(James 4:6b).

Gary recalled, “I remember distinctly walking out of that teaching feeling crushed. Who has read the Bible enough? Nobody prays enough. What pastor is humble enough? It’s a wonderful crushing; a grape doesn’t produce [juice] unless it’s crushed,” he added. “One of the great acts of humility as a pastor is submitting yourself to the teaching of someone else.”



Pastor Ray Tomkins Ray also noted the strength of Apollos—he was a preacher with a teachable spirit. He said, “I think it’s important to be open to whomever God sends to you. Not just your mentor. Jesus said, *‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden. ... Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls’* (Matthew 11:28a-29b, KJV). It’s a beautiful rest when we’re being guided by humility.”

Tony pointed out that Apollos was a very learned man, mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24). Tony noted, “For him to be able to receive instruction the way he did shows humility. It’s something that so often we as pastors can lack. We have to make sure that knowledge doesn’t puff us up, but leads us to the throne of grace and to humility where we can receive instruction.”

Pastor Mark Abrams of CC Word of Life, PA, said the teaching showed the importance of pastors interacting. He cited 2 Timothy 3:14 which says, *But you must continue*



Pastor Mark Abrams

in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them. Mark explained, “I think every pastor should be connected with another pastor or someone who has been in ministry longer than you ... because you don’t have to make the same mistakes in the ministry; you might get tired in it but not of it. God was gracious enough to place wise counsel around Apollos and he responded to it.”

Encouraging Pastors

Every year, pastors look forward to the encouragement they know they will receive at the conference. “In so many different areas we were encouraged—whether it’s the music, the worship, and the concept to keep moving on,” remembered Pastor Ray. “I think a lot of times it’s very easy to be discouraged. When you go into ministry, there are so many intangibles. You invest yourself in teaching, counseling, nurturing, and mentoring; a lot of times you don’t see the return on the investment.”

Pastor Clarke Lauffer echoed the immense importance of pastors receiving encouragement at the conference. “It’s been a lifeline for me. If we didn’t have that conference,



Pastor Clarke Lauffer

probably many of us wouldn’t be in ministry anymore,” declared Clarke. “We can be doing ministry and not be in a good place with the Lord spiritually. We could be in a place of barrenness, depression, bitterness, or a potentially dangerous place of our sexuality.” Clarke continued, “The Lord’s bringing healing medicine to all of us as pastors because we’re all broken and we’re all a mess. He’s preparing us, He’s healing us, He’s bandaging us, He’s strengthening us to go back into battle again.”

Gary recognized the importance of getting away from everything. “You’re more apt to hear what God is saying to you. You don’t have the distractions of everything else pulling at you. These guys get to leave their jobs for a couple days, focus on the Lord, and fellowship. It changes your life because He wants to speak to you. For me it’s the refocusing again.”

Mark remembered the blessing of not only being encouraged himself at the conference, but also having the opportunity to encourage others. He said, “Some guys you can tell are down in the dumps. You may encourage somebody.”

Raising Up the Next Generation

Since the ECPC is not only for senior pastors, it has become an opportunity for pastors to bring many other leaders from their fellowship to catch the vision of Calvary Chapel. Mark described the value of bringing other men to the conference. “In our fellowship, we look at it as such a valued commodity. We’ll bring 30 guys. They start to understand the culture of Calvary Chapel. The DNA. We make them go through the Distinctives, but you intrinsically pick up something more when it’s fleshed out. We can talk about brotherly love or fellowship, but you experience it when you’re there.”

This is just one thing the men get to see lived out at a conference. Clarke pointed out, “It gives those guys an

Bottom left: Men enjoy times of fellowship during the conference.

Top right: Pastor Joe Focht of CC Philly (left) encourages his worship leader Rob Paoletti (right) and worship team member Matt Schuler (center).

Inset: Pastors Damian Kyle (left) of CC Modesto, CA, and Bill Stonebraker of CC Honolulu, HI, pray together during the ECPC.



understanding of what it is I'm responsible for, not to feel sorry for me or to think that I've got this impossible calling on my life. It also gives them a chance to come alongside me and understand the vision of what we're all called to do as pastors and leaders."

Ray Tomkins encouraged pastors to bring their younger men to start the process of passing along the baton to the next generation. He remarked that seeing so many young guys there showed that "our movement is just not a gray-ing movement. I'm at a place where in the next 10 years there's going to be the next generation coming up in our church and taking over."

Pastors who attended encouraged every pastor to not allow excuses to keep them from coming to the ECPC. Pastor Clarke Lauffer summed it up simply: "We allow God to do what He's going to do in our hearts in that conference; then we leave with a brand-new perspective that's not emotional hype. It's the real work of God's Spirit in our hearts to take us to a deeper place with Him and a greater usefulness with Him." 🙌

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Top: Pastor David Guzik (center) is prayed over by pastors (left to right) Lloyd Pulley, Don McClure, Bill Stonebraker (behind), Damien Kyle, and Joe Focht as David transitions from the role of senior pastor of CC Santa Barbara to teaching pastor to spend more time working on his Bible commentary, EnduringWord.com.

Bottom: Men worship the Lord together.