



How to Start Preparing for Seminary Today

A LIVE WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

Dr. J. Ligon Duncan & Dr. Charlie Wingard

STEP MORGAN:

Welcome to today's seminar on how to prepare for seminary. My name is Step Morgan. I'm the Director of Admissions for Reformed Theological Seminary's Jackson campus. It's my privilege to introduce today's speakers. Before I do, I'd like to share just a couple of quick housekeeping details. First, this webinar has been videoed live and if you'll scroll down on your page you'll notice there's a chatbox. If you will enter a question there, later in the webinar we will have our speakers address your questions. Please do take the opportunity to ask the speakers the questions that you have. Second, at the conclusion of the webinar, stay tuned; I'm going to be sharing a special offer with you.

Our speakers today are Dr. Ligon Duncan and Dr. Charlie Wingard. Dr. Duncan is the Chancellor and CEO of Reformed Theological Seminary and the John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology here at RTS Jackson. He holds degrees from Furman University, Covenant Theological Seminary, and University of Edinburgh. He first joined the faculty of RTS Jackson in 1990 and after a few years continued to teach as an adjunct instructor and has now been a member of faculty or instructor with us for 29 years. He entered pastoral ministry while pursuing his seminary degree, being licensed to preach, and served a number of congregations. He's now been an ordained minister of the gospel of the Presbyterian Church in America for 29 years, most recently serving as the senior minister of historic First Presbyterian Church in Jackson.

Dr. Charlie Wingard is our Dean of Students and Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology. He holds degrees from the University of the South [as well as Vanderbilt Divinity School and Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary]. He also entered ministry well before he was ordained a minister. He was serving as a student pastor of multiple congregations while in seminary and is now an ordained minister for Christ, loves his Word, His church and I've benefited greatly from being their student and so I'm excited that you have the opportunity.

Dr. Duncan, Dr. Wingard, please share with us and how we might best prepare for seminary.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

And a lot of people don't know that Yazoo City is actually the center of the known universe.

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

It is and if you don't believe it just ask anyone that lives there. It's a wonderful place to serve I've been a minister there for the past four years and I'm in now the fifth year of my honeymoon with that congregation. It's just been a special, special relationship.



DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

I had the joy to serve that congregation as an interim pastor back in 1992 after their pastor was killed in an automobile accident and they were better to me than I could have possibly been to them. And I know that you've experienced the same kind of love and appreciation that did.

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

They model care for the pastor.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

They really do. And we get now the opportunity to care for some future pastors today.

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

What a privilege.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

And we're delighted that you've joined us and we want to be maximally helpful to you as you think about preparing for pastoral ministry and preparing for seminary in order to prepare for pastoral ministry. And I thought we might start, Charlie, by you giving your top five words of counsel to people who are preparing for pastoral ministry, and then I'll do the same and I bet you there'll be a lot of overlap and then we can talk about some specifics that come up in our conversation.

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

I think the most important thing is to walk closely with the Lord, whether you're just starting ministry or approaching the end of your ministry. From beginning to end, you have to walk closely with the Lord. That means a strong devotional life, spending time in the Word every day. I encourage all my students to read the Bible in its entirety once a year, committing large portions of it to memory. We actually require that in class because it's so important to long term success and in ministry.

Then I encourage students to read voraciously - read biographies of ministers, missionaries, read systematic theology, read classical works on the pastoral ministry. From the very start when you sense God's calling of you to ministry, start reading voraciously.

"From the very start when you sense God's calling of you to ministry, start reading voraciously."

Stay in close contact with your church's governing board. You want their feedback. You want them to be supportive of you. You want them to be affirming you in your call to ministry, and



if there're reasons you shouldn't pursue that call then you want to have men who are honestly speaking into your life. Those are, I think, important spiritual matters that we should give emphasis to. Two other matters that I would encourage you to consider.

"Cultivate your writing and your speaking gifts."

If you haven't started college or are in college I would encourage you to take courses in which you are encouraged to write clearly and to speak clearly. This is important if you're going to be effective in the pulpit. So, cultivate your writing and your speaking gifts.

And the last one: I teach practical theology; this is as practical as it gets. Watch your money. So many students come to seminary and they face hardships, family hardships, are not able to complete their studies because of the debt load they bring out from their college studies and I don't want that to be your story. So, keep your debt low while you're in college. Get good financial counsel and I think that that will put you on a good road to a prosperous ministry.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Those are great. I'm probably going to say the same things in slightly different words. Here's my outline: Bible, catechism, church, godliness, finances, spouse. So, I'm going to do six. Phillip and Step asked me to give my top five pieces of advice but I'm going to be transgressive and do six instead. So, let me talk through each of those.

To reiterate what you just said, knowing your Bible better is the key to faithful pastoral ministry. And if it's the key to faithful pastoral ministry, it's the key to preparation for faithful pastoral ministry. I don't think anybody has ever gotten to seminary and said, "You know what. I know my Bible too well." I think all of us - in fact I was reading Sinclair Ferguson, our colleague and Chancellor's Professor at RTS wrote an article, probably five six seven years ago, called the Ten Commandments for preachers. And the very first commandment of his Ten Commandments for preachers was "Know your Bible better." And he commented on how many times in the ministry he has thought to himself, "I could have served those people better. I could have helped those people more if I knew my Bible better." And I thought of myself, "If Sinclair Ferguson is saying to himself he could have been more useful if he knew his Bible better, then I surely better know my Bible better." So, you'll never ever say, "I know my Bible too well."

And one of the things that we want to do in the context of a theological seminary is help you down the road to being a master reader of the Bible. That is someone who understands the Bible well, who knows how to explain the Bible to other people and who is drawing the source of your own life and ministry from that Bible. And that really starts before seminary.



And I would echo what you said, Charlie, getting into a discipline and a plan of reading the whole Bible through at least once a year and then picking up some special tools so that you can have a better grasp of and command of the whole of the Scriptures. When I was doing my doctoral work in Edinburgh, I was a single man and that meant that my schedule was my own in a way that it's never been since I got married and had children and was serving in ministry, and so one of the things that I did is I took a very long devotional time—the longest devotional times that I've ever had in my life. I was sometimes spending three hours in the morning just doing devotions. I've never been able to do that since because of the schedule of life and ministry, but that was a really crucial time for me, and one of the things that I did was I outlined the whole Bible over the course of about a year and a half. Now I used things like William Hendrickson's survey in the Bible, I used William Hendrickson's New Testament commentaries, I used the Tyndale Old Testament commentary series. I went to standard, helpful Bible commentary series to help me outline the Bible.

But I wanted to do several things. One, I wanted to have a grasp of what's the major theme or themes of each book of the Bible. What are the major passages in the Bible that I need to be aware of? What are the verses in the Bible that I need to have committed to memory and can I give a good outline of those Bible books? Now of course people that are going into Presbyterian ministries and who are going to be examined by a presbytery, you're going to have to do some of that. The credentials committee is going to ask you to outline Romans, or ask you to outline Genesis, or ask you to outline Philippians. And so that's a good thing to start doing now.

But that was extremely helpful for me. I grew up in a Bible-believing church under faithful Bible exposition. I had parents that loved the Lord, loved the Bible, read the Bible for themselves, taught us the Bible, read the Bible to us. So, I had all sorts of advantages that many students that are coming to seminary do not have, and yet, I still needed more Bible. So, nobody listening to this today will waste a second of your time by giving yourself more to knowing the Bible.

"Everybody that we talk to says they lack Bible knowledge when they come to seminary."

And one of the things that we keep finding - we love our students at RTS, and as we go around to our sister institutions, they love their students, too. Their students are smart. They're eager. They're earnest. They're consecrated. But everybody that we talk to says they lack Bible knowledge when they come to seminary. So, investing yourself in Bible knowledge is just huge. Because we're going to put your nose right in the Word

of God for three or four years while you're at RTS. And any good Bible believing seminary is going to do the same thing. But the more you bring, the more you'll get out of it. And so,



having a plan right now where you're getting into the Bible is going to help you appreciate more what you get at a good seminary.

The second thing I would say is memorize the Shorter Catechism. Now I know that I may not be talking to everybody listening today may not be coming from a Presbyterian and Reformed background. But you need to know at RTS, everything that we do is taught from a standpoint of a Reformed, confessional perspective. And every student in the MDiv program here is going to memorize the Shorter Catechism. So, go ahead and do that now. Again, I grew up in a church where that was emphasized. I memorized the Shorter Catechism twice and forgot it once. So, you know by the time I'd gotten to seminary I had already been in the catechism.

And what it does is, it gives you, first of all, a grasp of technical theological language because there's going to be more of that language in this kind of study than any other place you'll ever meet it in life. And it's really - technical language in any discipline is shorthand, you know, so that you say with one word what would take you a sentence or even a paragraph to say you'd learn that language. So, what does justification mean? What does sanctification mean? What does glorification mean? What does election mean? What is effectual calling? If you memorize the Shorter Catechism you'll know all of that, so that when you're reading it in Birkhof or Bavinck or Hodge, you've already encountered that in the catechism.

And so, I would recommend, especially if you're coming to a Reformed, confessional seminary, and especially if you're coming to Reformed Theological Seminary, go ahead and memorize the Shorter Catechism. You're going to do it here and it's going to give you a grid for understanding systematic theology, because we believe in both biblical theology and systematic theology. That is, we think the Bible needs to be read redemptively and historically, sort of chronologically. You'd have to know what God is doing from creation to fall to redemption to consummation and how the various parts of the Bible fit in that. But we also believe that the Bible needs to be read from the standpoint of systematic theology. That is, you have to understand the topics of the Bible and how they are related to one another.

And in reading the Bible from the standpoint of biblical theology and systematic theology you will read your Bible better and the catechism will actually help you do that. So, I would recommend that you go ahead and memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism. And while you're at it, make sure that you've read the Westminster Confession I think you recommended that Charlie and

"Read the Westminster Confession, the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism. Delve into that because they will give you a system of theology in shorthand."



I totally agree. Read the Westminster Confession and the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism and delve into that because what they will do is they will give you a system of theology in shorthand. And that will only help you when you are in systematic theology classes in seminary, and frankly not just systematic theology classes but Old Testament and New Testament and pastoral theology. All theology is applicable. And having that theology at your fingertips will enhance what you're doing, whether you're in preaching class, or whether you're in personal sanctification, or whether you're in Introduction to Pastoral and Theological Studies, or whether you're in Genesis to Deuteronomy, or the Gospels, or whatever course you're in, it's going to help you. So, it's know your Bible and memorize your catechism.

"Commit yourself to the local church. We believe that it is primarily a local congregation of Bible-believing Christians that discerns a person's call to the ministry."

And then also to reiterate what you said, Charlie. Commit yourself to the local church. We believe that it is primarily a local congregation of Bible-believing Christians that discerns a person's call to the ministry. And you need both that fire in your own belly to want to go into pastoral ministry but you also need others - your pastor, your elders, your family - a lot of times you need the people that know you best in the congregation to say, "You know what?

I think you may be called to go serve the Lord." Because Satan will make you doubt that all the time and if all you have is your own desire and you don't have pastors saying, "Chip, I see the gifts of ministry and you and I see a heart for service in you. And I see an ability to explain God's Word and the desire to help God's people and I think I see the call of God on your life." Coming from your pastor, that's huge. We're looking for that, you know, when students apply at seminary, we want to know what does his pastors think about this? What do his elders think about this? So, your commitment to a local congregation, because that's what we all need as pastors, is that serving mindset that we're here to serve other people - they don't exist for our benefit, we expect. And go ahead and get started, going and work that out in your bloodstream, before you even come to seminary, be involved in a healthy local congregation, go to the Lord's house Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday night, whenever the doors are open, drink in as much as you can but serve as well in that context and get your pastors and your elders to give you direction on places where you can helpfully serve in that context.

I can remember as a teenager going to my elders and saying, "You know I'm feeling this internal sense of call to the ministry I'd like you to keep an eye on me and tell me if you see that gifting." And they said, "Well we want to put you to work in the church." And I said, "Well where?" Well they assigned me to the nursery. Now I was a high school football player, and they assigned me

to the nursery, and the next Sunday I was changing diapers in the nursery. That was very good training for the elders to call me to do that. And then they put me in Ms. Barbara Wiesenbergs' junior-high girl's Sunday school class. That will humble you. But I loved that. They just put me to work in places in the church and had older, wiser adults watching over me to see how I did in those settings and they wanted to see if I was going to serve.

"I think that's one of the most important things that a young man preparing for ministry can do is teach children's Sunday school."

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

I think that's one of the most important things that a young man preparing for ministry can do is teach children's Sunday school. Get in and have to work with the text and be able to explain it in accessible language. I don't think there's anything more valuable.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Absolutely true. And you know at First Pres Jackson, Ms. Barbara Porter did such an amazing job for so many years with our seminary interns, helping them be able to talk to children in a way that children could understand. And invariably you would have really smart guys, godly guys that were awful in their abilities to communicate with really young children and I'm talking three, four, five, six, seven-year-old kids. But Mrs. Porter who had taught first grade and kindergarten for her whole life, she knew how to talk to young people. And she would get hold of those young seminarians and help them know that this is how you talk to children. What an enormous blessing that is for a person's life and ministry. To go back to our friend Sinclair again: Sinclair told me that the hardest books that he has ever written are his little books that he wrote on doctrine for children. He has the Big Book of Questions and Answers about God and the Big Book of Questions Answers about Jesus. And he said, "Those are the hardest books I've ever written," because he's trying to explain the Bible and theology to little children. Well all of us need that.

What are the two or three options for online reformed seminaries that you would recommend?

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Do you have any opinion on that, Charlie?

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

At the Jackson campus, I'm on the web I'm sure less than anybody, so I'm going to let you.



DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Well I mean, let me toot my own horn for a minute here. I think the Reformed Theological Seminary, Global is really state of the art. We were actually the first seminary in North America, first accredited seminary in North America, to be approved for online distance education. And so, we're still in many ways the gold standard there. Now let me quickly say that it cannot compete with being face to face. And look, my online students tell me that. My students that are doing hybrid programs tell me that. If you give them the option of doing online or being in the room with Charlie Wingard or Guy Waters or Mike Allen or Scott Swain or Mike Kruger or Bob Cara or John Fesko or whoever else, they will take every single time being in the room with that person. And these are students that were born with one of these in their hands. I mean they came out of the womb with an iPhone. And so, they're very techie. They know how to do things. I mean, I don't know how to do streaming television. I have to ask my children how to do that. I have no idea. But I know that there are a lot of people, my guess is most of the people that are watching this are younger, I know that you live in a world where screens proliferate everywhere.

"Research shows that the best kind of situation for theological education is in a situation where you are known"

But interestingly the research shows that the best kind of situation for theological education is in a situation where you are known and you know that you are cared for, and screens cannot do that for you.

So, a lot of people will say to me, "Are you threatened by online education?" and I laugh.

No, I'm not threatened by online education because online education can't compete with that human factor of Charlie Wingard knowing you, caring about you, having a relationship with you and then being able to write a reference for you one day. You know, a screen can't write a reference for you. And so, to be known is huge in pastoral ministry.

That said, I love the resources that RTS is able to provide and there are other seminaries that provide wonderful resources. For instance, Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia has an online counseling degree that they do with the Christian counseling education. That's a wonderful curriculum. And I could mention other seminaries as well, but if you're really interested in online, I would suggest that you go to RTS Global and talk with David John, or talk with Alice Hathaway, or talk with one of the other folks in Global, and we'll shoot straight with you about what the pluses and minuses are for online education and what the advantages and disadvantages of doing that may be. But my speech to everybody is the more personal theological education is the better. So, I think our students here will tell you online is



wonderful for giving you flexibility but it can't compete with the kind of personal, face-to-face experience that you have in an RTS classroom.

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

And let me add, as we're thinking about preparing for seminary, one of the best things I think you can do to get a sense about what seminary is about and be prepared for seminary when you arrive is to get the RTS mobile app and listen to some of our classes online. I do travel in to work at RTS. It takes me about 45 minutes to get here and I've gone through several courses. I've gone through Dr. Duncan's covenant theology course, which I highly recommend. It'll just give you a feel for what it's like to be in the seminary classroom. So, whether you're registered globally as a student or not, take advantage of the resources that we offer.

"Get the RTS mobile app and listen to some of our classes online."

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

And those resources are available free. If you go to the Reformed Theological Seminary mobile app and you can download that on any platform. You can download it on Apple, on Android, on Google, on all the other stuff you can get access to - it's north of 45 courses for free. And I do the same thing. I listen to courses. I would have loved to have studied under Mike Kruger. I would have loved to have studied under Scott Swain. I would have, you know. So, I get to go on online and listen to my own guys teach and I want to learn, too. So that's another example of how digital platforms do allow you to avail yourselves of things that you wouldn't be able to access otherwise. So, we'd like to make that stuff widely available. Everywhere I go in the world, I find people that have RTS' mobile app on their phone and they're utilizing the material and that's a good way to use digital online material. But that's all available for free and go to rts.edu and find out about the mobile app or you can go right to your platforms and download the RTS mobile app. Everything's available there. You can listen to chapel messages - all sorts of extra materials are available on that RTS mobile app.

Phillip was just telling me that the sound went out while you were answering the first question and that question that answer was so good. I want you to say it again.

If you're going to get a letter of recommendation outside of your pastor who do you go to?

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

You need an academic reference - someone who has watched your work in college, who can verify to the institution that you're capable of doing academic work in a graduate institution.



That's something that you must do, but then you need personal references. Now I serve in a denomination that does not ordain women to the office of teaching elder, but it's important for women to recognize the gifts of those that are pursuing ministry, affirming that they see that men are not only able to minister to men but also effectively to women. So, I encourage that in the personal reference section, you also include a reference from a woman.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Okay here's another really good question.

What does reading or devotional life look like with your family and kids?

And I'm assuming that's before and during seminary? Any advice and counsel on that?

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

I think what we want to do when you're in seminary is to think strategically. You want to set achievable goals in the area of personal and family devotions and we're talking about family devotions here. So, I would recommend doing is what my dad did with me. After we ended our evening meal, we ate together - I think that that's a healthy discipline. After we eat our meal together, he led us in the reading of Scripture, comments on the Scripture, and then together in prayer. It was usually 15 to 20 minutes, not anything extended, but it got us into the discipline early in the evening, before children start to melt down and parents also. It gives us an opportunity to minister effectively to children during a time where they can be receptive. Now for what you do with your spouse, there's so many good devotional books that are out there. Lynne and I, right now we're reading a beautiful book that is a compilation of pure enriching our lives. Wonderful resources are available to you. And if you need them just e-mail me.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Read the Bible, pray, and sing together. Read the Bible, pray, and sing together. And like Charlie said, don't have a picture of Puritans sitting down for three hours at the dinner table while their children in perfect silence take in every word that you say. Picture kids throwing spaghetti at one another and hating broccoli and crying and doing something really briefly that is going to be worked into the regular routine of life and it's amazing how many young people will look back on those times and say, "What I appreciated most was hearing my father's voice read the Scripture and pray for me." I've lost count of how many people have told me that later in life, it seems like it wasn't the toys that they were given or the various social advantages that they were afforded, but a father that prayed for their souls and read the Scripture and loved God enough to care about their own spiritual well-being.

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

You think it's the consistency that should be at the forefront.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Absolutely true. Consistency trumps everything else. And you know "Blessed is he who begins family devotions over and over again." You know don't let your ideals defeat the reality of just keeping at it. Keep slugging through. Because it's really hard in our day and age. And again, you know people sit around [with their phones]. Put those things away, get those out away from [you], and have a family meal together. That is a revolutionary thing. Don Whitney is another person who has a great little book on family worship that would be very helpful to you. But all the advice that Charlie just gave, I would just say, "Yes."

"Blessed is he who begins
family devotions over
and over again."

And for your own personal devotions again, at the heart of them needs to be the reading of Scripture. However that looks for you and for me it's different all the time. Sometimes I'm following the Robert Murray M'Cheyne reading plan that basically gets you through the whole Bible once, the New Testament and the Psalms twice, in a year it's four chapters a day. Crossway.org - the publishers and Justin Taylor, the vice president there, has a wonderful set of free Bible reading plans that you can go to. I think we even linked to them, Phillip, in the RTS preparation for seminary thing, I think we have a link to them there. So, read your Bible; that's at the heart of it.

Let me suggest as well, learning hymns and psalms and committing them to memory. I remember my senior colleague when I first came to RTS Jackson to teach was Doug Kelly. And Dr. Kelly had a habit. They love to show hospitality. So, with their five children, they would have professors and others in the home on Sunday afternoons. We would eat a big meal after church and then after a while, after we talked around the dinner table after the children were dismissed to do their various thing, Dr. Kelly would retire to his little office, and he would have a Bible on one knee and a hymn book on the other knee, and he would spend much of the afternoon memorizing Scripture and hymns. And so, I think most pastors don't know their hymn books well at all. So, any time that you give to learning the great songs of the historic, protestant tradition, that's a huge investment in your own soul and in your future congregation's, I would say. You have the Bible and singing, Bible and good hymns and Psalms as a part of your devotional life. But again, just as in family worship, the key is consistency in personal devotions. It's all about discipline.



DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

And I would add one thing I found helpful in my own personal devotional life is reading books of prayers. Arthur Bennett's *Valley of the Vision*, Matthew Henry's *Method of Prayer*, volumes of Spurgeon's prayers. I've found these to enrich my devotional life immeasurably.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Totally agree and sometimes I just can't get words out of my throat. And there are a lot of reasons for that. Sometimes it's just early in the morning. Sometimes it's there's stuff going on in life that it's just hard for me to get my own words out of my throat. So, reading a psalm and turning it into a prayer to God. Reading books like Matthew Henry's *Method for Prayer* or Palmer Robertson's updating of it *A Way to Pray*. Or Arthur Bennett, *Valley of Vision*, or the little book a Christian-focused publication did of daily prayers. Those kinds of things are a real help. I totally agree with you about that.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Here's some more questions that have come in.

What is your recommended reading list in preparation for seminary?

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

Well, first and foremost we've talked about the Bible - that's fundamental. Other readings that I would encourage students to undertake before they come to seminary: read the Westminster standards over and over again, especially memorize the catechism. My parents had me memorize the catechism and that meant when I went to college I was a fledgling theologian. They had given me the categories through the catechism to build a strong theology. Other books that I would recommend that you read before you come, especially if you're going to be a minister. John Owens *Sin and Temptation*, that volume in the banner series. I would recommend that you read J.C. Ryle's *Holiness*. I would recommend that you read biographies of great ministers—Calvin, Edwards. Get a feel for what it was like for them to be in the ministry. Read the great missionary biographies like Henry Martins. These will stir your soul. My favorite minister from another era was Charles Simeon. You can get the little book biography about him through Handley Moule or by Hugh Evan Hopkins. These stories about ministers who serve faithfully, they'll stir your soul to be a faithful minister.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

By the way, my sort of preparation for seminary reading list is going to be made available I think to everybody that's on the webinar this afternoon and I think it'll be mailed out to you. Is that right? Okay, so it will be. And so, it will echo a lot of the things that Charlie has just said. So, take advantage of that when it gets mailed out this afternoon.



DR. LIGON DUNCAN: Here's somebody asking.

I live in a city with an RTS satellite campus. Is there an advantage to attending in Jackson?

You want to make a plug for RTS Jackson and I'll make a general comment about this.

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

There are several reasons why I think it is great to be at RTS Jackson. I live in Mississippi by choice and I love living in the Jackson, Mississippi area. There are numerous reasons for that. The first one is all of our faculty members here are active churchmen. That means what you learn in the classroom is coming from the standpoint of people that are actively weekly engaged and serving God's people. I didn't have that when I went to seminary. This makes all the difference in the world. We also are able to sit down and have faculty prayer groups here, meals with faculty members.

More practical things: the cost of living in Jackson, Mississippi is rock bottom. I don't think you can study any place else in the country for less money. We have an active campus life where you can live on campus and be involved with other seminary students. Your wives can be a part of the women's fellowship here. And then something that's particularly of importance to me is our preaching circuit. By the time I took my first church as an ordained pastor, I had preached hundreds of times. That was such a blessing in my life. Well you can get something like that on our field education circuit. Step Morgan, who introduced us, he's preached more than 150 times on our circuit. Other ministers, excuse me ministers-in-training, have preached more than 100 times on the circuit. That's going to enable them to show up at their first church as a seasoned pastor and I'd love for you to have that experience.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Those are all good words. One thing that people may not know is that Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson is the only confessional, Reformed seminary in the world that is in a predominantly African-American city and community. So, you know a lot of people want to talk about being multi-ethnic and reaching out. You know there's there's no better place to learn that in practice than at RTS Jackson.

Now let me say as you're thinking about seminary there are multiple factors that go into whether you stay where you are or you go somewhere else. And every RTS campus has its own strengths and weaknesses and pluses and minuses for you in your particular situation. So, as you mentioned cost of living in Jackson it's kind of hard to compete with that anywhere.



You know, I mean you know it's an extremely expensive cost of living in New York City, in Philadelphia, in D.C., in Los Angeles, in San Diego, in Dallas. It is not expensive at all in Jackson.

"There are more internships in area churches in Jackson than for any other confessional, Reformed seminary in the world."

Another big factor is internships. There are more internships in area churches in Jackson than for any other confessional, Reformed seminary in the world. So, you've got to think through a bunch of factors like that. I love—I mean obviously, I'm the chancellor of all of RTS—I love all of RTS equally. You know I love all of our campuses, but what you have to start thinking

about yourself is one to go back to what I said before: the the more personal the better. But then you also have to start thinking about the ancillary things of life. What's my church life going to be? Where am I going to live? What's life going to be like for my wife or for my children?

And it's those things that you'll want to definitely think through and look our admissions guys are ready to talk to you about that. Most of them have had to make those decisions themselves. So, there they are here to help you make a good decision. Our deal is we want you where the Lord wants you. And we simply want to help you make the best possible decision. Obviously, I'd love for it to be somewhere in the RTS system, but in the end, we want you to be where the Lord wants you to be. And there are gonna be different reasons and factors why you choose one place or another. And the best guys to talk to about that are our admissions staff because they've had to think through this themselves. They're in constant conversation with folks that are thinking through those factors. They will probably bring things to your attention that you have never thought about that can have a really significant impact on the quality of your experience. So, talk to the admissions guys and they'll introduce you to other guys and on the RTS campuses as well who can help you make a really good decision.

Okay. Here's another question for you, Charlie.

What's something that you studied in seminary that surprised you in how useful it was once you became a pastor?

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

I think the most important little book I read at the liberal seminary that I attended, I was going around in the bookstore and found the book by Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield entitled *The Devotional Life of the Theological Student*. And in that book and it's stuck with me all these years he says, "Don't put your devotional life against your academic studies. Make all your turning to the books a turning to God." And I have been immeasurably blessed by that insight.



DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Yeah, and by the way, that is one of the books that's on my recommended list for preparation for seminary, *The Religious Life of Theological Students*. And I love his illustration he says, "You wouldn't ask of a soldier is it better for you to have your left leg or your right." It's better for you to have both. So, both your knowledge and your learning of the truth as well as a devotional life both of them. And by the way, our motto at RTS is a Mind for Truth, a Heart for God is really speaking to that very very same issue.

Okay I've got another one for you. Charlie.

What is your advice for students juggling full time job family and church ministry responsibilities?

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

The first thing I would say is my heart goes out to you. That is a lot to do to be able to do at the same time. I've done that. I recognize how difficult it is. It's very, very challenging it can put all sorts of stresses on your life. But one of the things that the Lord is doing is showing that he, by supplying his grace, is going to enable you to overcome obstacles that are in the way between you and you taking your first church. So, I find these invaluable. Also, you're not unique in your congregation. Other people are having to live with the same stresses on their life. So, you can thank the Lord that he's enabling you to minister to your congregation out of personal experience as you find his grace to be sufficient for you.

"He, by supplying his grace, is going to enable you to overcome obstacles that are in the way between you and you taking your first church."

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Here's the other thing. Welcome to the rest of your life. I mean you know what you're doing in seminary is going to be a picture of what you're trying to juggle as a minister for the rest of your life. You're not going to stop studying as a minister. There's going to be an exam due every Sunday morning at 11 o'clock and there will be no extensions. And so, you're going to be—and people are going to be having heart attacks and they're going to be having marital crises and kids are going to be running away and there can be all sorts of community issues and national issues coming up and you're going to be juggling job, preparation, family all of that for others. So yes, it's a pressure cooker right now, but it prepares you for what you're going to do for the rest of your life. You're going to have to make triage kind of decisions for the rest of your life and you do have to pay attention to your family, and you do have to pay attention



to your spouse, and you do have to pay attention to your own health, and there needs to be some respite from the relentless pace of pastoral ministry. But boy, right now is where you start preparing how to juggle that, don't you think?

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

I think that that's exactly right. And one of the reasons I love teaching Pastoral Theology. I've been in ministry 39 years. Every stress that was mentioned in that question has been a part of my life. Some of them continually for these 39 years. But I can say with absolute truthfulness, I love the pastoral ministry; I want my students to love pastoral ministry as much as I do. I never wake up in the morning wishing I was doing something else. And I believe that can be your story, too.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Here's another one, Charlie.

Which church would be more valuable in discerning my call - my church at home which knows me very well, or my church at college where I only attended for about a year, but I'm currently more involved there?

That's a great question because we see so many people feel called the ministry while they're in college, maybe in a campus ministry, maybe ministering in some other way. And so, they're away from their home church, they're in their college church. Which is more important for discerning their call, Charlie?

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

I think both of them are. You need to listen to the people that walked with you before you sensed your call to ministry. You cannot discount their wisdom, the value of their counsel. But thank the Lord that while you're in college you've come to see your place as a servant in the church. You want all their input too.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

By the way, I agree totally with that answer. Here's one about further education.

How would you counsel someone desiring higher theological education?

Someone wanting to go on and do a ThM, someone wanting to go on and do a DMin, someone going on and doing a PhD. And there is another question which I'll answer in a second, but Charlie any counsel for someone like that?



DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

Well, when students come and talk to me about pursuing PhD work, I do not have a PhD, I have a Doctor of Ministry, and I tell them you need to talk with one of our professors that has a PhD. It's important that you talk with people that have gone through that process. But with regard to Doctor of Ministry, I think this is one of the most valuable programs that RTS offers. It allows students to get together - the last one I taught, there were seven of us - and we just sat down and for a week talked about issues of pastoral ministry. I had responsibilities to teach them, but we discussed how ideas that we were learning about in our readings would be implemented in in our churches. We talked about problems that we find in implementation of those ideas. It allows you to sit down in a collegial atmosphere and think together for an extended period of time about the work of ministry that you're doing.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

That's a great answer. I would also say, one reason it's so important for you to sit down with one of the professors as you think that through, is there are a whole cluster of decisions and factors that you need to take into account when you're making that sort of a commitment to go do advanced work. One of course is your own academic aptitude and your professors are going to be in a better position to say, "Yes, I see the gifts academically you need for say pursuing a ThM." [I pursued higher education] right out of seminary, not because I thought I would ever be teaching in a seminary, but because I was single, I had the opportunity to do advanced study that I thought would enhance my pastoral ministry in the local church. I wanted to be a resource to other pastors, because we live in a world that's very antagonistic to historic Christian truth claims and to the faith and we need people with extra academic equipment to help bolster everybody that's involved in pastoral ministry.

And I had a love for learning. I could write fairly well and I had the ability as a single man to go and do that for a whole lot less than people who have a family have to spend in order to do that work. And I thought, "If I don't do it now I may never be able to do this later on. Once I'm married, once I have a family, once I'm in ministry." And so, I went to my professors, I went to my pastors, I went to my elders, I really sought counsel on whether I ought to do that. And in the end, the final determining factor was the provision of financial resources to do it. Even as a single man,

I would not have been able to do that, had not a way been made for me to afford to do that.

"The one big question that a student needs to ask 'Why am I pursuing that?'"

But the one big question I'm thinking is that a student needs to ask "Why am I pursuing that?" If you think, for instance, that you're going to go teach at a university, one day, I mean you just

need to recognize that there is a PhD glut at the university level. Now if you're thinking of a theological seminary what you need to think about is this. There is also a PhD glut at the seminary level because there are more people desirous of teaching than there are positions in theological seminaries available. Now there are some areas that are more challenging than others. It's really hard for me to find PhDs in Old Testament that can check off all of our boxes at RTS. It's easier for me to find someone to teach church history than it is for me to find someone to teach systematic theology or Old Testament. So there again you need really wise counsel from professors and from pastors and those who know you, before you go and pursue doctoral work. I think you know we're Presbyterians we believe in an educated ministry and there is value for people to have DMins and PhDs and to do ThM. The executive director of our Houston campus right now is pursuing a ThM at PRTS in Grand Rapids and I'm fully supportive of that. That's a good thing. He's going to learn a lot about theology and historical theology that will help him in ministry. But one big question is "Why am I pursuing this? What do I want to do with it?"

DR. CHARLIE WINGARD:

And if I understood you correctly, foundational in your thinking is, you're going to serve the church more effectively, and be a more powerful witness to the world.

DR. LIGON DUNCAN:

Absolutely true.

STEP MORGAN:

Thank you for participating in today's webinar with us today. As Dr. Duncan indicated, our mission is to serve the church by preparing leaders for the church and so whether you end up studying with RTS or another place, we are here to serve you. We recognize that choosing a seminary is an enormous decision and so we want to make as many resources available to you as possible.

So, I want to share another opportunity with you. During the webinar today, Dr. Duncan said, "Nothing competes with being face to face." And so, I want you to have the opportunity to be face-to-face, and so on Tuesday, October 29, RTS Jackson will host a preview day for prospective MDiv students and you'll be able to meet more of the faculty. You'll actually get an opportunity to sit in on class with Dr. J.V. Fesko, and Dr. Mike McKelvey, Dr. Ben Gladd. You will also have an opportunity to meet our students. Dr. Duncan mentioned several RTS alumni today and mentioned what a high caliber group of folks they are. And I was surprised to learn what a significant aspect in seminary experience the interaction with fellow students is, so we want you to meet our students. We even want to show you part of our city. The 29th of October



will also be the first day of our annual John Reed Miller Preaching Lectures. This year's guest lecturer will be Rev. H.B. Charles. You'll have an opportunity to hear from him. If that's not enough to sweeten the deal, one attendee will also receive a \$1000 book stipend which can be used in your first year of study, so watch your inbox for an email from me and I'll be sending more information to you on how you can come participate in that preview day.

