

Is the Era of 'Pastor as Motivational Speaker' Over?

David McGee was born two months premature and faced a mountain of physical obstacles right off the bat. At birth, his tongue was attached to the front of his gums, he was 95 percent deaf, and it took nine surgeries before he could speak or hear.

Starting at age 10, he turned to drugs and rock 'n' roll—eventually spending time in jail. He continued down a rebellious road, which led to frequent arrests. It seemed that everyone had given up hope—except for his grandmother, who knew God would never give up on her grandson.

As a result, in 2008, David McGee founded Cross the Bridge Ministries and The Bridge church in central North Carolina. With more than 2,000 church members, as well as a vast audience on more than 500 TV and radio media outlets, you might think David McGee is very motivational. But his teaching style is distinctly different from many of today's pastors and Christian media personalities.

Media producer and consultant Phil Cooke sat down with McGee to find out why.

Phil Cooke: In a nutshell, how did a former rock musician find himself leading a church?

David McGee: At the age of 17, I prayed to receive Jesus as Savior in a Teen Challenge program. I hungered to know God and eagerly pursued the Bible training courses offered by Teen Challenge. My love for music led me to pursue music further, and so I later attended the School of Music at the University of North Carolina Greensboro with a guitar major and vocal minor. I made a decision to play music professionally in the secular industry for several years. After years of wayward living, bar scene arrests and living hopelessly, the death of

my loving Christian grandmother redirected my focus, after which I heeded the Lord's call to devote my music and life to serving Christ.

Cooke: Like so many churches, The Bridge started in your and your wife Nora's living room, and today you have more than 2,000 members. When it comes to growth, what's been your secret?

McGee: Research shows America's largest generation is thirsting for in-depth biblical teaching. They want to know what's in the Bible and how it pertains to their lives today. I never started the church with the intentions of growing a big church. Instead, the church has grown big Christians. With a desire to know God's Word, I believe the relevant teaching of the Bible—chapter by chapter, verse by verse—communicates the timeless truths our attendees have hungered for.

Cooke: You're a verse-by-verse Bible teacher. No themes, no snappy branding, no motivational speeches—and yet you're packing the church. Do you feel people are looking for more serious engagement with the Bible today?

McGee: Absolutely! Today's generation is in desperate need of someone who can relate to issues of everyday life and share the love of Christ in a real way. Our ministry does just that, and we have the opportunity to fill this vital gap through God's Word.

Cooke: You're located in Kernersville, N.C., between Winston-Salem and Greensboro. Churches in bigger cities like Dallas or Atlanta have bigger populations to draw from. Based on your experience leading a church in a relatively rural area, what would you say to encourage other pastors in similar situations?

McGee: I would say share your personal story, to which your congregants can relate. Demonstrate to them, with the credibility of personal experience, why the Bible is relevant

today. And do it expositionally, not compromising what the Word clearly says.

Cooke: You have a growing media ministry on radio and TV. Why should media be important to Christian leaders today?

McGee: Matthew 28:19-20 commands us, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Media platforms are where the lost are. We will meet them right where they are—on TV, radio, Internet and social media platforms.

Cooke: The Bridge is launching your newest outreach—The Bridge Houses—for homeless men, women and children. Where did the idea come from, and what’s your vision with The Bridge Houses?

McGee: The Bridge House came out of a burden to understand a vision God had laid on my heart. I was disheartened for the addicted and the homeless. I longed to understand their story. So I quietly, not disclosing to the staff, actually checked myself into a homeless shelter/rehab center to experience it firsthand. There, I ate what they ate, slept where they slept, and heard the stories of each life I encountered.

I knew what I had to do. Immediately I shared with our team, and we began putting hands and feet to the call God had laid on my heart. Our first Bridge House is now housing eight men experiencing structured discipleship. Two men have graduated, and a third will soon be as well. We have obtained two more houses that will now allow us to help women and families. The Lord has blessed this call.

Cooke: Your daily devotional, *Cross the Bridge to Life*, is a popular book, and it’s being launched on the YouVersion Bible app. What’s next for David McGee?

McGee: I am already in the process of working on a few new books and continuing the vision God has called me to. We look forward to what the Lord has called us to do for His kingdom. We stand ready to do His work until the whole world hears.