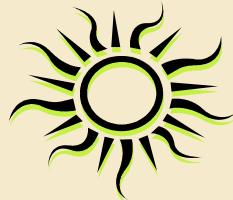




Native



Sons



Equipping Native Leaders; Empowering Native Christians

PASTOR RON BURNETTE

RIDING A DEAD HORSE

The tribal wisdom of the Dakota Indians passed on from generation to generation says that when you discover you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount. In modern education and government, far more advanced strategies have emerged:

1. Buy a stronger whip.
2. Change riders.
3. Threaten the horse with termination.
4. Visit other countries and see how others ride dead horses.
5. Train the dead horse to envision the desired outcome of his work.
6. Provide additional training and funding to increase the dead horse's performance.
7. Lower the standards so dead horses can be included.
8. Promote the dead horse to a supervisory position.
9. Reclassify the dead horse as "living impaired."

From: www.Ridingadeadhorse-Native-Americans.com

PRAYER POINTS

- Levi, Alicia, and the boys.
- Guidance developing the CNLDs.
- For God to raise up Native pastors and missionaries to Native people.

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"It's a hard journey. A lot of people think that once you are a Christian, it's a bed of roses, but it's not. Fighting my demons—drugs, alcohol, lust, bad music, bad friends— is one of the hardest journeys I've taken on." Pastor Ron was reflecting on his life since giving his heart to Jesus.

He was strung out on drugs, alcohol, and weed after finalizing a divorce from his wife, who had been cheating on him. Ron notes, "Divorce is one of the worst and most painful things I've ever been through." He left for Phoenix to get away from it all but went deeper into drugs. A year passed, and he grew tired of "the life." He had been given a Christian hot-line phone number, and he called it. The woman asked him if he had ever given his heart to the Lord. He said, "Yes, about 5 years ago, but it didn't work." She asked if he wanted to try again. He said, "Sure," and she led him in the sinner's prayer. Though he was strung out, he says, "I knew something had happened. God came into my life." This was in May of 2001.

His sister took him to the Phoenix Teen Challenge (TC) two days later. He sat through orientation and was told to come back on Tuesday. Reluctantly he agreed. From Friday through Sunday, he went on a bender. On Monday, he went to his sister's house sick and hungover. Tuesday, she

took him to the TC, where he remained for the next 13 months. "I really got saved and was disciplined there. God just cleaned me up." Afterward, he returned to Phoenix to



Pastor Ron Burnette

find work but found none. TC asked him to become a counselor at their center in Tucson. He agreed and served there for \$75 a week for the next 9 months.

While serving as staff at the TC, he met someone from American Indian College (AIC) who encouraged him to attend. He applied and was accepted, leaving TC for good. But Ron says, "I was fearful of leaving TC. It had become a safe place, and I feared falling back into drugs and alcohol." So, after leaving TC, he returned to the

White Mountain Apache Rez for 2-3 months before entering AIC. His first major victory was grocery shopping without taking alcohol from the alcohol aisle.

Pastor Ron was 30 when he gave his life to Jesus and 32 when he started AIC in the fall of 2003. He says, "I was excited but did not know what to expect. Ron majored in Christian ministry and graduated after 4.5 years. It wasn't easy; he wanted to quit many times. Once, he decided he would quit at the end of the day, but he told no one. Then, at the end of one of his classes, a Navajo girl dropped a crumbled piece of paper in front of him and walked off. He opened it. Each sentence was on a separate line. It read, "Stay here until the end of the day. Stay until the end of the week. Stay until the end of the month. Stay until the end of the year." And on the final line, "Stay until you walk across the stage and get your diploma." Ron was shocked, "I told no one, but God had spoken to that girl." Because of this, he stayed and earned his degree.

After AIC, many churches asked him to come and be their pastor or youth pastor. However, he felt he needed more tools and enrolled at Assembly of God Theological Seminary (AGTS) in the

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

Theresa and I are well. Her mom, Shirley, is still enjoying the warmer AZ winter with us but is planning to hightail it to VT in May when it begins to get hot here. I am working with Pastors Ron & Marty Paxson. They want to launch a Native school of ministry together on their Rez. There are individuals from both their churches who are interested. However, the pastors need to work with the people to decide on a workable meeting schedule before setting a launch date. I will be itinerating in NY state in July. This will be my first itinerating trip since 2019 because of COVID.

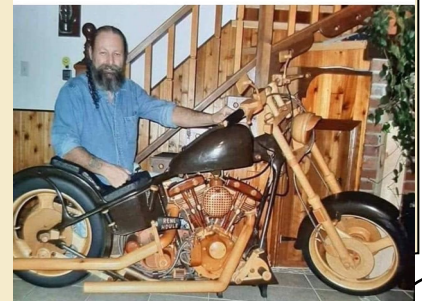
Theresa continues to enjoy teaching pre-school. The school is very supportive, and Theresa has been able to do many creative things with the children. She is enjoying both her coworkers and her children.

Levi, Alicia, Dillon, and Torrin are all well. Levi has been thoroughly enjoying online trading card sales. Although the company is a startup, it is growing and has already hired two new workers. Alicia continues to enjoy maternity nursing. The boys are doing well. Dillon just turned 11, so he is now a "Tween."

Caleb and Erin have settled into married life. They are forging many knives, which they sell on Etsy under the company name, "Set It All on Fire." They frequently use a rustic style. Erin just finished an "eye of Sauron" inspired by the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. They gave us one of their blades for Christmas. It is stunning, sharp, and functional.

Anyway, as always, thanks for all your prayers and support!

It's got a wooden frame, wooden engine, wooden wheels, and a wooden gas tank. Did he ride it? No, wooden start...



counseling program. In Springfield, Ron experienced culture shock. He says, "It was so of color, just whites. It was hard for me to focus, work, and go to class. I began to fail all my classes. I was homesick and not doing well." He was reading the Word, praying, and attending church less. Springfield has other races, but he did not see much of them. Many at the school encouraged him and offered to help him with his studies, invited him for meals, and even to stay overnight. Still, he was terribly homesick and not doing well spiritually. At the end of the semester, he returned home.

He began working for the Apache Behavioral Health Services (ABHS) but continued to struggle spiritually. He says, "When I did attend church, my heart was hard." After a year, he thought he wanted to go back to school. He quit his job ("which I should not have done") but did not return to college. After further struggles, he began to return to the Lord, including attending Cedar Creek AG. He began working at ABHS again as well.

At Cedar Creek AG, Ron began to grow spiritually, and his faith stabilized. In 2018, Pastor Martinez told Ron that he felt God wanted him to become the associate pastor. Ron became afraid and said, "No." Two months later, Pastor Martinez asked again. Ron put him off, Pastor Martinez asked again three months later. Hesitantly, Ron agreed. The church held an anointing service, installing Ron as the associate pastor. He served as the associate for two years, though not credentialed until Pastor Martinez died suddenly on 12/8/21. Ron discovered him in front of the parsonage. The congregation wanted Ron to become the new pastor. He senses that this is God's will and is preparing to take his credentialing exam. However, the church is not sovereign, so the district has the

final say in choosing a pastor. His presbyter, Pastor Marty Paxson, is advocating for Ron with the District. Hopefully, he will become Cedar Creek AG's new pastor once he takes his exam. I ministered at the church recently and believe he is an excellent choice for the church. He loves people, has a passion for God's Word and discipling others, and understands the people and their needs.

Ron was raised in Traditional Apache spirituality. This involves various spiritual dances and ceremonies. He says, "People cuss, drink, and sleep around at the dances." When he attended AIC, he saw many of these same behaviors among the students, which shocked him because he thought it would be a holy place. In fact, many Traditionalists mock Christians because they see no difference in their lives. However, Ron says, "God showed me to focus on Him. This was hard to do, but He showed me some good Christians." He spent his time with those who were strong spiritually and looked for those who "whole-heartedly served the Lord." Tom Blackman from TC was a key mentor. Ron says, "I stuck close to him. I knew his walk was real. Seeing and being with strong Christians helped me a lot, especially when I was young in the Lord and impressionable."

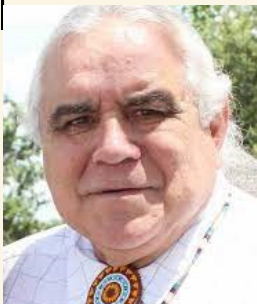
Pastor Ron sees discipleship as a critical need in the church. He says, "Congregations often think this is only the job of the pastor, Sunday School teachers, and evangelist. The people in a congregation need to understand that they have important roles to fill in reaching and discipling others. We should not just show up to church and expect to be fed. Each person needs to know that they need to pour into others. Everyone needs to do their part." Ron notes that he grew rapidly at

Cedar Creek AG and rose in leadership because of God's grace and because he was pouring into others. Biblically, this is true. Jesus speaks of living waters (Jn. 4:10-11; 7:38). Living water moves like a river. It has an inlet and an outlet. A pond without an outlet becomes stagnant and foul. Christians who pour into others grow spiritually, but those who do not plateau and stop growing.

Ron thinks that discipling others is especially important considering the things going on in our world right now. He says, "Things are going from bad to worse. It feels like we are getting into birth pains, like it's the beginning of the end. It is going to get worse before we have some relief. So, the church needs to be awake. Come to church, get fed, and do your part. Don't be afraid, especially about events in the world." Ron often speaks about world issues like Russia's war against Ukraine with his people. He has people in the church, especially among the elders, who he would like to start using in ministry at the church. When I visited, I met with a large group interested in taking Bible courses by creating a local ministry school on their reservation with other churches. I am talking with Pastor Ron and Pastor Marty about making this happen.

While talking with Ron about his journey and our journeys with the Lord and the difficulties, I had agreed with him, saying, "Yes, it can be grueling at times." He liked the word grueling. "Yes, it's grueling, but it is worth it. Some traditionalists claim we serve the same God, but we don't. We have a medicine man who gave his life to Jesus and now attends our church. He says, 'Christian prayers are better and stronger than the traditional stuff.'" Our God is mighty, and He has worked mightily in Pastor Ron's life.

A Native Perspective on Christianity



Rev. Robert Soto is a Lipan Apache pastor serving several churches in TX. What follows are excerpts from an interview with him from Comment magazine at www.comment.org/i-didnt-become-an-apache-i-was-born-an-apache.

Rev. Robert Soto

A Native perspective of Christianity: "As a Native at the time of my conversion, it was natural to associate Christ with the problem and not the solution. I would see contemporary teachers of Jesus acting in ways that harmed Natives in the church, and I'd think, 'Well, that must be what Jesus was teaching.' After all, he was Jesus, this was a Christian church, and the church follows the teachings of Jesus. But one day I came across a Bible verse, John 10:10, when Jesus says, 'For you have come to kill, steal, and destroy, but I have come to give you life, and life to its fullest.' And I thought, 'Wait a minute. To kill, steal, and destroy? Those are the three things that the church came to do to Natives. They killed us, stole our land, and destroyed who we are and who we were created to be.' All of a sudden I realized that it wasn't Jesus

doing all these injustices, like in the boarding schools and all that kind of stuff, but it was denominational preferences."

On reconciliation services: "No matter how many times people try to tell me they were sorry, I say, 'Yeah, but you're going back to your home and you're going back to your stress-free, problem-free lives. You're going back to the piece of land you call yours, and your family. And here, we're still struggling with all these issues, nothing's changed for us. ... In a massive state, I don't think there can ever be reconciliation. But you can start in a personal way.' ...

Ten years ago, I was going over to northern Illinois to speak at a church. At the end, a lady pastor came to me, and some elders and they said they were going to go and do a reconciliation service for the Lakota people. And I said to them, 'Don't bother.' Because they told me they were going to give gifts and blankets and things like that. I said, 'Don't bother. Don't do it.' And she goes, 'Why not?' I said, 'Unless you're going to do this as a long-term relationship, don't even bother going. You're going to go with your blankets and you're going to feel fuzzy and warm, and you're going to come back and say, what a great testimony. We told the Indians we're sorry and they gave us hugs and they forgave us, and we gave them

blankets, and that's it.' And they said, 'What do you expect us to do?' I said, 'Go ahead and do your service, but before you go just call the pastor or whoever your contact is and say, is there a clinic in the area? And if there is, ask him to give you the phone number and a contact person. And then call that clinic and say, we're with this church here in Illinois, and we want to ask you, what do you need in your clinic to make it more functional? And ask them for a list of things. And then when you give them the list of things, you go and do your best to fulfill everything there. But then don't do it just once, or maybe two or three times a year. Keep going back to the same place, the same people, the same church. Go back to that same clinic and keep asking them: What else do you need? What else do you need? What else do you need?'

This church has one of the most successful outreach programs among the Native community that I've ever seen. It's just this little church. Because they're now returning four to sometimes as many as five times a year, and every time they go, they take a trailer full of supplies. And then they set up their tents and they have a group, and they give little concerts and people come to the Lord. People respect them because all of a sudden, they see a church that's gone beyond the words and put their words into action. And their ministry is succeeding that way."