

MOODY

ALUMNI & FRIENDS

WINTER 2025

ALUMNUS — of the — YEAR

Dann Spader '74

Founder, Sonlife Ministries

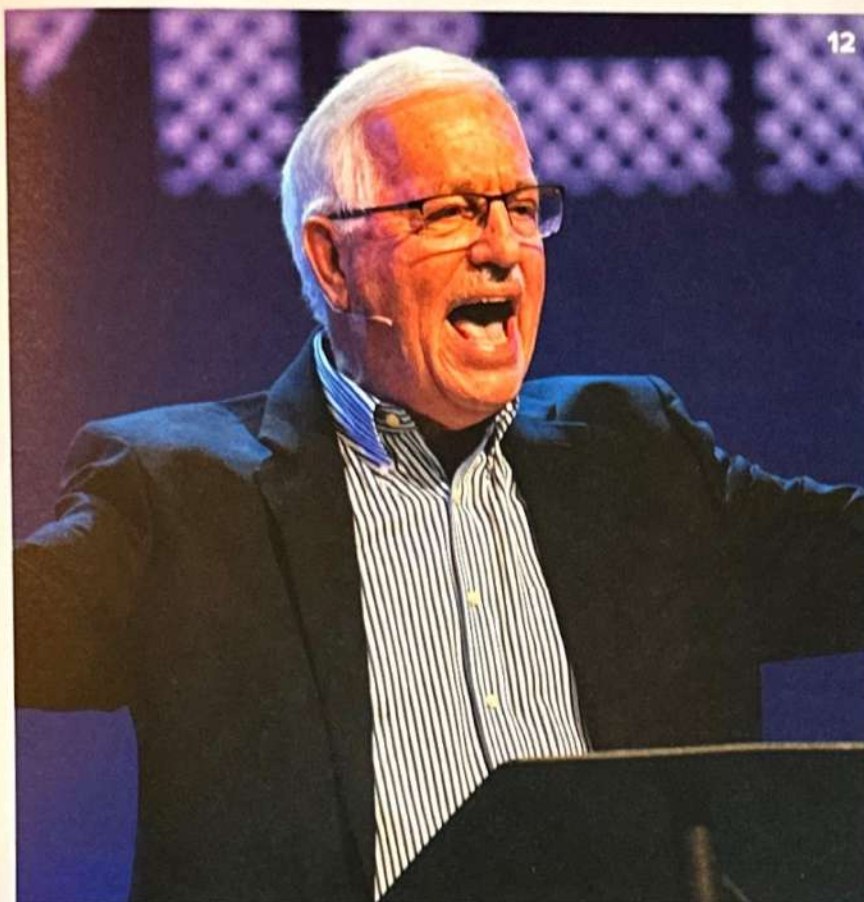
EX-MORMON FINDS MOODY
AND MINISTRY P. 17

REACHING CHILDREN THROUGH
THE STUDY OF KIDS P. 22

DR. GEORGE SWEETING:
A LEGACY OF FAITH P. 28

CONTENTS

moody.edu/alumnimag
VOLUME 75, ISSUE 01



12 Son Worshiper

Since his radical conversion, Sonlife founder Dann Spader has trained thousands to disciple others.

17 Sound of Freedom

After finding freedom in Jesus, this Moody-trained ex-Mormon ministers to sex-trafficked women.

20 Giving Publishing One Last Try

A college course gave Austin Wilson a passion and career. Now he's helping shape church culture.

22 Sweet Salvation

Karl Bastian, founder of Kidology.org, started sharing the gospel at 10 years old—and hasn't looked back.

28 Honoring His Life and Legacy

Dr. George Sweeting (1924–2024) left his mark on Moody and the world.



IN EVERY ISSUE

- 05 Moody Highlights
- 25 Life & Ministry Notes
- 32 Present with the Lord
- 36 Why I Give to Moody
- 38 Bold Steps
- 39 Flashback



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SWEET SALVATION

Karl Bastian, founder of Kidology.org, started sharing the gospel with kids at 10 years old—and he's never looked back

BY ANNELIESE RIDER

If God's called you to ministry, what's growing up got to do with anything?"

When 10-year-old **Karl Bastian '92** came home on a Friday night and told his mother he was called to be a children's evangelist, she shortened his timeline from eight years to five days: "That's wonderful! You start Wednesday!"

'I WILL COME FOR THIS ONE GIRL'

On her first day of released-time education Bible classes, 12-year-old **Patti Leibforth '64**—Karl's mom—was the only student in her class at the Mennonite church in Chicago's McKinley Park neighborhood.

The leader offered Jerry*, a Moody student teaching the class for his Practical Christian Ministry (PCM), the option of changing ministries.

"My mom heard him say, 'No, I will come every week, even if it's for this one girl,'" Karl recounts. "She was surprised that he would value her so much when he barely knew her. It was her first taste of just how much Jesus loved her."

By the end of that year, Jerry had led Patti to Christ. In time, Patti's three siblings and her widowed mother would come to Christ as well.

"That's why I wanted to go to Moody," Karl interjects, as he tells how Jerry's influence changed his

mom's life. "I wanted to be someone who changes the lives of children and the entire direction of their life."

After high school, Patti attended Moody and was paired with a flute player named **Doug Bastian '64** for her PCM. Like Moody's former president Dr. George Sweeting who gave the gospel through "chalk talks," Patti drew evangelistic chalk art, performing live drawings while Doug played the flute. What started as an assignment turned into friendship and then into love, and they were married after graduation.

LED TO CHRIST BY CANDY

"I always joke that I was led to Christ by candy because I'm a kids pastor," Karl, also the founder of Kidology.org, says. "Candy Kroll was a lady in my church who, if you shook her hand on Sundays, you ended up with a candy in your hand."

Candy babysat Karl while their younger sister was being born. While he was with her, four-year-old Karl told Candy he didn't want to be mean like the neighborhood kids he'd played with that afternoon. Candy didn't sugarcoat the truth:

"She said, 'Well, those boys are mean because they don't have Jesus in their heart,'" Karl remembers. "'I don't know how you'll turn out because the kind of person you'll be is determined by who controls your heart.'"

That day, Karl invited Christ into his heart. Six years later, a children's evangelist came to his church, and 10-year-old Karl was captivated by the magic tricks, ventriloquist dummy, and flannelgraph.

"I loved learning from the way he used such creative visuals and I clearly understood the gospel at a deeper level as a result," he says.

During the closing at the end of the week, Karl prayed a simple prayer: "God, I want to do what he does when I grow up."

That night, he made one of the magic tricks he had seen at church and told his mom he planned to be a children's evangelist when he grew up.

"A lot of good mothers would have said, 'That's wonderful! You'd be great at that someday!'" But Patti set Karl up with a magic trick, a gospel illustration, and a puppet she bought at a thrift store, then added him to the weekly programming for their church's Wednesday night kids club.

She said, "If God's called you to ministry, what's growing up got to do with anything?"

'SHE LOOKS LIKE SHE NEEDS A PEN PAL'

When Karl was in high school, a missionary to the Philippines—**David Yount '57**—visited his church in Illinois. Karl decided that the pretty girl in the missionary's family picture needed a pen pal.

"I was a sap. I wrote her a poem," Karl says, laughing at the memory. "It was very spiritual, of course, about God protecting her in times of trial and whatever. I mean, girls in high school dig that, right?"

Whether it was the poem or his friendly note that interested her, Sara wrote him back. Before long, Karl developed a "great burden" for the Philippines, and he wrote to



Ten-Year-Old Evangelist
(above): Karl Bastian knew his calling early.
Moody Alumni
(right): Karl with his mom, Patti, at graduation.



Sara's father and asked if he could come visit.

He wrote back and suggested he get a year of Bible college first. So after his freshman year at Moody, Karl visited the Philippines, ready to teach children the gospel and eager to meet his pen pal.

"I went there for eight weeks. In the eight weeks, I did over fifty evangelistic programs all over Manila," Karl recounts. He wasn't busy every moment, though—Karl still managed to share a first kiss with Sara at the base of a smoking volcano near Baguio.

After another year Sara came to Moody as a freshman, and in 1993 Karl graduated. A year later he and **Sara (Yount) Bastian '98** were married.

AN INTERNET-SIZED BOLT OF LIGHTNING

After graduating, Karl became the first part-time kids pastor at The Moody Church. But needing something full-time, he took a children's and youth pastorate at a church in Chicago's north suburbs in 1994.

As he gained experience in children's ministry, people began to ask for Karl's help in their own ministries. Soon, he realized that his unique approach would be useful for anyone seeking to disciple kids, but he had a problem: How would he get it out there?

"And then in December 1994, God hit me with a bolt of lightning: You are going to enlist, equip, and encourage children's workers around the world through this thing called the internet."

Acting immediately, Karl launched Kidology.org. His kids ministry philosophy is simple: To minister



Happy Couple (above): Sara and Karl as Moody students.
Faithful to His Mission (right): Kidology's Karl Bastian today.



well to kids, you have to minister to them within the context of their culture—hence the title *Kidology* (*the study of kids*).

"You may not like Harry Potter, but you better read it or watch it," Karl says. "You need to be able to understand why kids like it, you know, then be able to articulate, 'Well, here are my concerns about it.'"

Before he understood what was happening, Kidology.org took off. A friend donated a race car to the ministry, which Karl sold to hire the first employee. Then, he won a grant for \$50,000 and hired a programmer to build a better website and develop a membership program.

He also offered free advertising to ministries, and because of this, they promoted the website and the resources: up-to-date training content, teaching curriculum, books for kids, children's ministry event planning guides, and much more.

FINDING A MINISTRY-LIFE BALANCE

But as Kidology boomed and he grew busier working full-time with both his online ministry and a full-time pastorate at the church they'd moved to in Colorado in 2009, Karl had a rude awakening.

"I had been going full steam in children's ministry for years. I was busy to an unhealthy extreme," he says. "I was headed for disaster, and ironically, when the best thing in the world happened—adopting a child—things began to fall apart."

Within six months of getting their son Luke, everything in Karl's life began to collapse. He stepped away from his role as a pastor to reassess his priorities, invest in his own health, and pour into his family.

As he neared the end of two years, with the newfound knowledge that he didn't always have to go-go-go, and sometimes loving his family meant saying no to other things, Karl realized that running a full-time online ministry wasn't fulfilling his core calling.

Although he still greatly desired to train others to do children's ministry, something was missing.

"I want to stay in the trenches in ministry," Karl says. "One of my passions is relational ministry. I love every Sunday. I want to lead kids to Jesus. I want to teach. I want to know kids."

So he resumed his work as a kids pastor, still also running Kidology, but now taking a more measured approach, keeping the ministry to a manageable size, and prioritizing his family.

In December 2024, Karl and Sara celebrated 30 years of Kidology.org!

"It's not your size that matters; success is faithfulness to your mission," Karl says, admitting that there have been both challenging times of need and inspiring seasons of abundance in the Kidology ministry. But at the end of the day, he's learned to trust God's consistent provision and focus on his real mission: "Am I still reaching and teaching as many kids as possible and equipping and encouraging others to do the same?" ■

*In honor of Jerry's influence on Karl's mother's life, Karl set up a grant through Moody—the Patti Bastian Children's Ministry Scholarship—for one current Moody student a year to get \$1,000 toward their housing bill.