

I grew up in a devout Southern Baptist household where the unusual coexistence of fundamentalist doctrine and a zeal for social justice defined my upbringing. My parents' rigid devotion to scriptural inerrancy necessitated a serious commitment to the "least of these." We, therefore, took in as many foster children as our modest home could accommodate. The rooms of our suburban dwelling resembled a European hostel with bunk beds that lined the walls, lodging abused and neglected children in small, yet comfortable, spaces. Although I changed diapers while my peers played sandlot baseball, I understood the importance of what we were doing even then.

In my childhood church, practicing Christianity meant refraining from smoking, drinking, swearing, and engaging in premarital sex. My parents, however, taught me that faith transcends personal piety and that the Christian life is more than sterile, outward expressions of religious observance. It is messy, inconvenient, and exhausting, as it requires making real sacrifices for the needs of others. Desiring to adopt the faith of my childhood as my own, I attended Ouachita Baptist University to become a pastor. Studying Scripture, however, with all its difficult ambiguities, made me question many of my fundamentalist doctrinal presuppositions, encouraging me to abandon the Southern Baptist tradition. Thus, without a church in which to pursue ordained ministry, I postponed my pursuit of a Master of Divinity. Instead, having witnessed a broken legal system as a child, I chose law school as an alternative path to commit myself to public service.

After graduating from law school in 2010, I began working at Walmart's corporate headquarters. However, the desire to serve others—the same desire that initially drew me to ministry—encouraged me to join the military in 2013. I received my commission around the time the military sexual assault scandal broke, and, consequently, my career focused on prosecuting these crimes.

As a prosecutor, I have encountered terrible evils that pushed me to fight—as my parents did before me—for the vulnerable. I have seen parents who sodomized their young son to death, listened to women describe their brutal experiences of sexual assault, and been obligated to view horrendous images of child pornography because of my dedication to collect evidence and secure convictions on behalf of victims. Yet, in this, I have also witnessed the triumph of justice and great acts of redemptive grace,

which helped me vanquish the cynicism and Hobbesian-like pessimism such experiences can instill. Moreover, these regularly reminded me of the Bible's message of hope in the face of evil—reminders that pulled me back to my first love: the study of Scripture.

As my time in uniform draws to a close, I am now seeking admission into Yale's Master of Divinity Program. I have passionately loved the Bible since I was a child, and I desire to dedicate my life to its study, as my experiences in a foster home and fighting for the abused and victimized in the military have further aroused my appreciation for the life-altering power of Scripture's message. Thus, to achieve this end, I would like to attend Yale to prepare for a Ph.D. program in New Testament as well as for lay ministry in the church, government, or non-profit sector.

I fell in love with Yale and its diverse faculty and student body when I visited its campus this fall. Moreover, the legacy of Yale Divinity School is apparent in the works of its faculty and alumni, and I hope to be a part of this incredible heritage as I prepare for a top-tier Ph.D. program. Yale's M.Div. Program, with its required courses in five distinct areas of study, will provide me with a well-rounded education to serve in both academia and lay ministry, and the flexibility of its degree plans and partnership with other university departments will allow me to explore my interests in other fields such as business and law. Furthermore, Berkeley and the Annand Program will deepen my affection for the Anglican tradition, which I first discovered in college and rediscovered while in the military.

I genuinely believe that appreciating the Bible entails understanding the diverse manners in which others study and interpret it. Consequently, Yale's ecumenical community specifically appeals to me, as I don't desire to use Scripture as a tool to forge a specific denominational view. Instead, I long to become a better scholar, citizen, and believer by collaborating with Yale's world-renowned faculty and top-caliber student body. I also believe that my experiences of growing up in a home dedicated to fighting for the most underprivileged and serving as a prosecutor, where evil was not merely an abstract idea but a palpable reality, will provide a unique perspective on the teachings of Scripture. I am overly grateful to the admission committee for their consideration and would treasure the opportunity to join the Yale Divinity School community.