

MARCH-APRIL 2016

# NURTURING FAITH

Journal & Bible Studies

## Shakespeare, the King and the KJV

Theologian Fisher Humphreys  
tackles the question:

**DO CHRISTIANS AND  
MUSLIMS WORSHIP  
THE SAME GOD?**

## ‘START SOMETHING’

*Student sit-ins helped  
break racial barriers*

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**IS THIS  
BAPTISTS  
TODAY?**

# YES!

Discover what’s  
new, what’s not

**Day 1 brings trusted  
voices to airwaves**



# Welcome to

## NURTURING FAITH JOURNAL & Bible Studies

### IS THIS BAPTISTS TODAY? YES!

**W**elcome to *Nurturing Faith Journal & Bible Studies* from the publishing ministry of Baptists Today, Inc.

Why the change? The short answer is because times change.

Last fall, an envisioning committee took a close look at all we were doing, brought in others with unique insights, put everything on the table, and ended up with some creative ideas embraced by the Board of Directors and implemented by the staff.

We discovered that we could actually produce a higher-quality publication

bimonthly and develop a more robust website while reducing operational expenses.

Unlike many newspapers, secular and religious, our publication is not in circulation decline. Adding the excellent *Nurturing Faith Bible Studies* by Tony Cartledge and the online teaching resources gets the credit for the growth and stability.

That move a few years ago did two additional good things: It showed how print and web can be used together effectively. And it brought a good brand name to light.

Since then, Nurturing Faith, Inc., was

formed as a subsidiary to publish books and other resources. We received a trademark for Nurturing Faith, and launched *Nurturing Faith Experiences*.

Consolidating the brand name *Nurturing Faith* brings continuity to this multifaceted publishing ministry — with this signature journal carrying on its unique and important role during shifting times.

As Board Chairman Don Brewer put it: “While our appearance is changing, our DNA remains the same — an autonomous news journal for critically thinking Christians.” **NFJ**

### WHAT HAS CHANGED — AND WHAT HAS NOT?

**T**he answer is mostly in your hands. The look, size, feel and frequency are different. This allows for the Bible studies and the journal issue to have the same dates.

A new [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) website is under construction that will bring together the best of the current *Baptists Today* and *Nurturing Faith* sites and more.

**As a result, subscribers will get more from both the enlarged, bimonthly (print or digital subscription) journal and the expanding, daily-updated website.**

So please delve into this first issue of the bimonthly *Nurturing Faith Journal*, which continues the mission of *Baptists Today*

through a consolidated brand and a bit of freshness.

With just the flip of a few pages you will find much that is familiar: original feature stories, the popular quotations page, the editorial and other commentaries, Brett Younger’s delightful “Lighter Side,” and much more including the scholarly, but applicable Bible studies.

We’ve also added new columnists — Colleen Burroughs and John Franke — with others to join in future issues.

Most importantly, the long-held mission continues: to openly address issues and trends that impact Christian living and ministry, to provide thoughtful analysis and helpful resources, and to share

*“The new bimonthly magazine is a visually stunning design that will appeal to a much broader audience without sacrificing Baptist principles and a distinct point of view.”*

—Will Dyer, Associate Pastor for Discipleship and Young Adults, First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga.

inspiring stories of faith and hope.

The purpose, principles and people behind this mission remain the same. We are simply embracing fresh, cost-saving and wider-reaching ways to address the issues of Christian living in a fast-changing world. **NFJ**

# OUR MISSION

THE MISSION of *Nurturing Faith Journal* is to provide relevant and trusted information, thoughtful analysis and inspiring features, rooted in the historic Baptist tradition of freedom of conscience, for reflective Christians seeking to live out a mature faith in a fast-changing culture.



## GREAT BIBLE STUDY IS IN YOUR HANDS!

*Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge are scholarly, yet applicable, and conveniently placed in the center of this journal. Simply provide a copy of the journal to each class participant, and take advantage of the abundant online teaching materials at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net). These include video overviews for teacher preparation or to be shown in class.*

*See page 23 for more information.*

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**IDENTITY & OPPORTUNITY:**

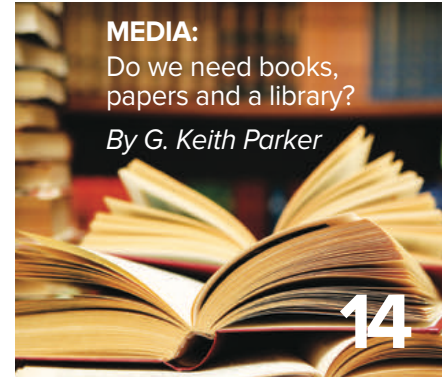
A conversation with Mercer President Bill Underwood

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**COVER PHOTO** by Bruce Gourley of a window at First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn.

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Story and photos  
by John D. Pierce

Albert Paul Brinson points to his youthful image as one of nearly 200 college students recruited in 1960 to hold peaceful “sit-ins” at 10 Atlanta restaurants that refused service to African Americans. The protests put Brinson in jail, along with other students, and on the front page of *The Atlanta Journal*. “It couldn’t have gone off more perfectly if Cecil B. DeMille had directed it,” he said of the well-orchestrated actions that helped bring social change.

# Start something

College students’ 1960s sit-ins helped bring down racial barriers

**A**TTLANTA — Non-violent protests, in which African-American students would “sit in” at lunch counters in Greensboro, N.C., in 1960, led the Woolworth Co. to remove its policy of racial discrimination in the South. Similar “sit-ins” were held in other cities.

Albert Paul Brinson, now a retired American Baptist minister with lifelong ties to the family of Martin Luther King Jr., was a 21-year-old senior at Morehouse College recruited as part of the well-orchestrated Atlanta Student Movement that put him in jail and on the front page of the March 15, 1960 edition of *The Atlanta Journal*.

## PRECISION

“It couldn’t have gone off more perfectly if Cecil B. DeMille had directed it,” Brinson

recently told some current students touring the exhibit, “Start Something: Activism and the Atlanta Student Movement,” that continues through the end of March at the Robert W. Woodruff Library of the Atlanta University Center (AUC).

Inspired by the Greensboro sit-ins, campus leaders from Morehouse, Spelman, Morris Brown and Clark colleges, Atlanta University and the Interdenominational Theological Center — which made up the AUC — were determined to do something to bring change to the home base of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Those plans were carried out with great preparation and precision, said Brinson, under the leadership of Morehouse College President Benjamin Mays and others.

“The whole thing was coordinated,” said Brinson, recalling secretive late night

training that included fasting and rehearsals, with taunting by white students from neighboring schools recruited by campus leaders.

The strategy, he added, “was clever.”

## APPEAL, ACTION

A few days before staging the highly public, sit-in protests in local dining places, student organizers produced “An Appeal for Human Rights” that was printed as a full-page document in Atlanta newspapers. Urged by the presidents of the six related schools and conceived by students, the appeal called for an end to racial discrimination that “is not in keeping with the ideals of Democracy and Christianity.”

“We sat down and brainstormed about what to include,” Brinson recalled. “We worked with this for nights.”

The final document, edited by Roslyn Pope, president of the Spelman College Student Government Association, “went out first,” said Brinson. Then the action followed.

“We were told to dress well and be on our best behavior,” said Brinson, designated as the spokesperson for his group of students.

The many nights of intense, but highly confidential training made the protests successful, he said — as well as the personal, spiritual preparation for carrying out the mission as planned.

“It became a spiritual experience when the waitress snatched the napkin holder off the table,” said Brinson.

Then the manager came over to ask what the students wanted. The well-rehearsed, polite response was given again and again by Brinson: “to be served.”

## JAIL TIME

The protests were carefully scheduled to get the most attention possible, said Brinson.

He led a well-dressed group of students to a cafeteria across from Union Station — at a time when reporters from the nearby newspaper offices would be headed to lunch.

Nine other restaurants were simultaneously targeted for the non-violent protests. Of the nearly 200 participants, 79 were arrested when the polite students refused to leave without being served.

Brinson, who was baptized as an 8-year-old by “Rev. King Sr.,” as he called his father figure, was relieved to see the respected pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church enter the jail. The night was growing long following the lunchtime arrest.

“I’ll take A.D. King, Otis Moss and Albert Brinson,” he recalled overhearing the pastor say to a jail official. “This is a property bond; if I can get some more, let me know.”

While taking a bus home, Brinson was surprised to see his face on the cover of the newspaper — identified only as a “Negro.” Fearful of recognition, he hopped off at the next stop and walked home.

Brinson said he didn’t consider the experience to be historic or heroic.

“I was just Al from ‘the corners,’” he said. “It was just the right thing to do then.”

## INSPIRING OTHERS

The sit-ins “started something,” but did not accomplish the larger task. The Committee on Appeal for Human Rights would work tirelessly for several years to mobilize students to fight against segregation laws.

The peaceful protests by students in Atlanta and elsewhere, however, have inspired others to take courageous stands in the face of injustice. And Brinson makes it his mission to take every opportunity to teach younger generations of the price paid for their freedom.

Often that involves an impromptu history lesson — if not a scolding.

A Morehouse sophomore from New York confessed that he’d not made it over to the King Historic Site yet. He probably has now after Brinson’s stern response: “Young man, people come from all over the world, yet you’re just a few blocks away...”

Morehouse students, said Brinson, felt a particular need to engage in the 1960s protests when one of their own alums emerged as the leader of the civil rights movement.

“We had to do something special,” said Brinson. “It was the home campus of Martin Luther King Jr.”

To Brinson, however, he was just “M.L.,” an older brother figure who was “always joking.” King encouraged Brinson in his call to ministry following a brief career as a teacher and then in a groundbreaking role in the airline industry.

“M.L.,” said Brinson, enrolled him in seminary and on Aug. 4, 1963 presented Albert to the Ebenezer Baptist Church where he joined the ministry staff with the well-known father-and-son team.

“They were family to me,” said Brinson of the King family.

Martin Luther King Jr. and others his senior provided excellent examples for how to live out faith in difficult times and how to bring about change with the weapons of peace and love.

Those lessons came to life for Brinson and other students who put on their Sunday best and headed to Atlanta restaurants where the color of their skin prohibited them from being served.

The goal, however, was larger than integrating a few dining places, he noted. “Wherever life took you, it was segregated” — schools, hospitals, transportation.

“We wanted more than hot dogs.” **NFJ**



Albert Brinson gives firsthand accounts of the Atlanta Student Movement to current students (left to right) Da'Shaun Harrison, Yemisi Miller-Tonnet and Avery Jackson. They met Brinson while touring an exhibit at the Atlanta University Center's Woodruff Library with Morehouse professor Samuel Livingston (right).

# Worth Repeating

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*“When someone gives careful reasoning behind changing their position, it’s not weakness; it’s strength. It’s called thinking.”*

—Psychologist Craig Malkin, author of *Rethinking Narcissism: The Bad — And Surprising Good — About Feeling Special* (*Psychology Today*)

“There is no way to justify 456 percent interest. It’s stealing, taking advantage of the poor. It’s usury of the first order. What we’ve got is criminal.”

—Birmingham-Southern College President Emeritus Neal Berte on predatory lenders that prey upon the financially vulnerable ([AL.com](#))

“We as a church understand the importance of learning about the accomplishments of African-American people. Therefore, we realize that if we don’t tell and preserve our own history, our children will never know their real value.”

—Pastor Howard-John Wesley, on Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., making a \$1-million pledge to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African-American History and Culture set to open this year ([eurweb.com](#))

“It feels like stating the obvious to say ‘evangelical voters’ are not a monolith that can be reliably relied upon by any politician. But what should go without saying apparently needs repeating: To say ‘the evangelical vote’ without any further specification is almost meaningless.”

—Trevin Wax, managing editor of The Gospel Project ([RNS](#))

“Just 55 percent of Millennials responded positively about their perception of religious institutions — an 18 percent dip since 2010. This represents an important shift, as older generations are now more likely to view religious groups positively.”

—Kristen Rein reporting for *USA TODAY College* on a Pew Research Center study

“Is this the best we can imagine?”

—Elizabeth Mangham Lott, pastor of St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, responding to Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. encouraging students to arm themselves against potential threats from Muslims ([BNG](#))

“It’s really being able to touch history. But also to be part of a future that can be better than the past.”

—Pastor Reginald Davis of the African-American First Baptist Church in Williamsburg, Va., that was founded secretly by slaves in 1776, on the recent restoration and ringing of the church’s historic bell acquired in 1886 (*Virginia Gazette*)

“It’s different when you’re in the middle of it. It’s not just ‘those people’ over there. When you have family in the heart of danger, war becomes much more personal.”

—Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel Janée Angel, who serves Arabic-speaking people in Antwerp, Belgium, on the struggles of her husband Hary’s family trapped in war-torn Syria ([BNG](#))

“Many white evangelicals ... have gone so fully off the rails as an institution, that Jesus is no longer a concern. His life, ministry, mission, and manner are inconsequential and frankly bad for business. As a result, they no longer care whether or not they are emulating him or honoring him, just capitalizing on his name recognition.”

—Pastor John Pavlovitz of North Raleigh Community Church, blogging at [johnpavlovitz.com](#)

“Our national discussion about immigration, refugees and Muslims has exposed a spirit of bigotry and hatefulness, even among followers of Jesus. Today the world looks at the United States and wonders if we really are still a nation that believes all people are created equal. Our racism and nationalism have erected more walls than bridges.”

—J. Lee Grady, former editor of *Charisma* magazine and author of *10 Lies The Church Tells Women* (*Charisma*)

# Affinity — and beyond

By John D. Pierce

**A**ffinity is the “natural liking” for someone, or a connection based on “similarity of characteristics.” Therefore, affinity shapes many of our relationships, individually and corporately.

Often, this is true of faith relationships. We are drawn to those who share our priorities and passions more so than all who bear the same denominational label. We simply engage in conversations, experience learning and share ministry with those with whom we find commonality.

Many of us have experienced and observed this shifting beyond exclusive denominational boundaries over recent decades. Perhaps it has happened for some without awareness or particular intent.

However, it is certainly true that many more-moderate Baptists who used to cooperate heavily, if not exclusively, with other Baptists now relate more broadly. It is the simple experience of being drawn into relationships of affinity.

When in the pastorate, Bill Wilson, now director of the Center for Healthy Churches, made a casual comment that stuck with me. He observed that Habitat for Humanity “gave Baptists permission” to engage more freely in ecumenical ministry. And it felt good.

By the way, Bill is as active as ever in Baptist life and his organization has close Baptist ties. Yet Bill and his consultants work beyond exclusive Baptist boundaries — wherever shared values and other affinity take them. Many Baptist-rooted organizations and institutions take a similar approach.

Fundamentalist exclusion by some Baptist associations and conventions pushed many more-moderate Baptist congregations and individuals out of their denominational

cocones and, remarkably, into healthier, ecumenical relationships where differences were respected while allowing room for collaboration around common ministry priorities tied to community needs.

It is a simple fact that many Baptists are now more ecumenical than before. This is not the result of a weakening of commitment to historic Baptist principles but a matter of discovered affinity with those of other denominational brands.



Thumbing through past issues of this news journal reveals that many of the features of interest to our readers relate to Baptists and non-Baptists without a great deal of distinction. It's not like articles about Jimmy Carter, Martin Luther King Jr., and Will Campbell are of interest to Baptists only — or that ones related to Barbara Brown Taylor, John Claypool, Tom Long, Rachel Held Evans and Nadia Bolz-Webber are somehow outsider information.

It's a matter of affinity, not exclusion or compromising one's own unique faith tradition. That is, we are more apt to engage with those who share common understandings of the faith and similar practices rather than those who simply bear the same label.

For example, many Baptists, including me, feel much closer to some Christians of other denominational traditions than many fellow Baptists whose beliefs and practices seem alien to us. Therefore, we are attracted to those with similarities other than mere denominational identity.

Such affinity should not be miscon-

strued as a weakening of one's strongly-held identity or deep commitment to that which historically makes Baptists distinctive.

However, firm Baptist commitments to religious liberty, freedom of conscience and biblical faith don't preclude engagement outside of denominational life. In fact, such widely appreciated commitments often are what infuse a wider embrace.

Often my friend and mentor Bill Neal refers to the “Baptist diaspora” that — for various reasons — has former Baptists now engaged in nondenominational or other-denominational congregations and conventions. For most of these once-Baptists, they left a particular Baptist home but not all of their Baptist identity and connections.

Affinity is a really good word, and one that well describes how many Christians, individually and corporately, relate to others. This understanding, hopefully, informs the rebranding of *Baptists Today* — once the more-exclusively focused *SBC Today* — as *Nurturing Faith Journal*.

On one important level, it is simply a consolidation of a good brand name we use on a variety of resources: Bible studies, books and experiences. But it is also an acknowledgment of the good effects of affinity.

*Nurturing Faith Journal* has a distinctive Baptist identity. But perhaps — thanks to the Baptist diaspora and others who might value our collaborative nature — it will not feel exclusive.

These changes are not a weakening of our Baptist focus and identity, but a widening that matches the relationships of faith and practice that already exist. Hence *Nurturing Faith* is for Baptists — and beyond. **NFJ**





Story and photos  
by John D. Pierce



**Top:** Peter Wallace, producer and host of *Day1*, points to a map showing the more than 200 radio stations carrying the well-produced programming that features sermons by preachers from various mainline denominations.

**Above:** Dock Hollingsworth, pastor of Atlanta's Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, records a Lenten sermon to be broadcast March 6.

# DAY1

Broadcast ministry offers thoughtful sermons, well-produced programming

ATLANTA — It's not hard to find preachers on the airwaves. Just turn the dial. And, often, that's what listeners do when they come across showy, fortune-promising, alarmist preachers who rule the religious airways. They turn the dial elsewhere or off.

But such pulpit-pounding celebrities and wannabes are not the only on-air voices to be found nationally — thanks to the weekly broadcast and online ministry of Day1.

## MAINLINE

"We've always kind of been in our own realm," said Peter Wallace, who guides the ongoing work of Day1, a broadcast ministry with roots going back to *The Protestant Hour* radio programs begun in 1945. "We open it up to the



**Above:** The professional quality of *Day1* broadcasts results from the high-tech studio and the production talents of Donal Jones who has worked the controls for 27 years.

broad range of what we call mainline denominations.”

Wallace said the weekly broadcasts include “very well-respected” preachers, often pastors, from churches connected to The Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), American Baptist Churches, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other denominational groups.

Dozens of prominent ministers and leaders from the various denominations serve on the Day1 advisory board and assist Wallace in selecting preachers for the ongoing programming that now airs on more than 200 radio stations of various formats across the U.S. and beyond.

“Stations like that it’s ecumenical and well produced,” said Wallace.

## MESSAGES

“In a time of religious skepticism and superficiality, Day1 puts out into the deep waters of the faith,” said Tom Long, Bandy Professor Emeritus of Preaching at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology.

For Long, who serves on the Day1 advisory board, the broadcast ministry has a personal dimension. It goes back to his seminary days when he was a DJ at a radio

station in rural South Carolina.

“Someone has quipped that in the South the farther to the right a radio station is positioned on the AM dial, the zanier is the programming on Sunday morning,” Long recalled. “We were at 1590 AM, and sure enough, Sunday was a wasteland of shrill Bible thumpers and screaming fundamentalists, except for one program — *The Protestant Hour*, which was the predecessor of *Day 1*.”

Long said he was mesmerized by the preaching he heard at that time, especially from a Lutheran pastor and seminary professor, Edmund Steimle, whom he tried for a while to emulate.

“Eventually I found my own preaching voice,” said Long, “but I date my passion and commitment to the ministry of preaching to hearing those *Protestant Hour* sermons in my radio headphones.”

## QUALITY

An impressive recording studio and the gifted production skills of 27-year veteran Donal Jones ensure high quality programming. Coughs, stomach growls and stumbling words that might be picked up by a Sunday pulpit microphone never make the airwaves. There is even the welcomed opportunity for “re-dos.”

In addition to the sermon, the smooth-

voiced Wallace includes a conversation with the respected preacher of the week to provide further insight into the designated text and topic.

“It’s amazing how precise this is,” said Dock Hollingsworth, who entered the studio late last year to record his Lenten message on the Prodigal Son to be aired on March 6.

Unlike guest preachers who travel from all around the nation, Hollingsworth simply walked down a long hallway at Atlanta’s Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church where he is pastor. The Day1 offices and studio moved there from a nearby Episcopal church in 2013.

## COLLABORATION

Wallace, who as a child pretended to be a DJ and is ordained in The Episcopal Church, said the 70-year-old broadcast ministry that once benefited from required free public service time on radio stations and stronger denominational funding has faced many challenges.

A trimmed staff and other concessions have been made over the years. Yet he remains optimistic thanks to broad support that comes from those who share an affinity for the thoughtful, faithful messages that go out over the airwaves and Internet.

“You can thrive when you collaborate with other like-minded organizations and churches,” he said.

He also expressed appreciation for those who encourage him in his work such as Bill Self [who died in January], retired pastor of Johns Creek Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Ga., and chair of the Day1 advisory board.

“Bill became a close mentor to me,” said Wallace. “He loved this organization.”

It was Self, said Wallace, who put him in touch with Second-Ponce de Leon leadership about the possibility of moving the Day1 operations to some vacant educational space. It was a great move, he added.

“It was like this space was designed for us,” said Wallace. “And Second-Ponce has been phenomenal in working with us.”

To find local stations carrying the Day1 broadcasts as well as to access sermons and other resources online, visit [Day1.org](http://Day1.org). **NFJ**

# Interfaith coalition launches 'Know your neighbor'

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

**W**ASHINGTON, D.C. — Representatives of 15 nonprofit organizations gathered at the White House last December to launch a new effort to “celebrate and protect America’s tradition of religious pluralism.”

Called “Know Your Neighbor (KYN),” the project encourages Americans to move beyond religious and ethnic stereotypes and to foster conversations on religious diversity and respect.

“As a nation of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, non-religious and more, we live and work

together; yet, we are often unaware of the basic traditions and deepest values of our friends and neighbors,” reads an introductory statement at [knowyourneighbor.us](http://knowyourneighbor.us).

“We need to develop a greater understanding of one another — beyond the caricatures and the sound bites — because knowing our neighbors matters,” the introduction continues. “More importantly, we believe a deeper understanding in one another reveals our common humanity.”

American Baptist Churches USA was represented at the meeting. Outgoing General Secretary Roy Medley said of the coalition’s mission: “In our inter-religious interactions, neither of us dilutes our faith,

and neither of us understands the other’s faith to be a barrier to building a community in which everyone is honored equally.”

Suzii Paynter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Brent Walker of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty also participated in the launch.

Walker, who took part in a panel discussion, said America’s religiously plural democracy and religious freedom depend not only on constitutional protection against governmental interference, but also “on the willingness of American citizens on a personal level to understand and respect each other, including our differences.” **NJF**

## Hillary, Donald, Francis join Obama as ‘most admired’

BY CATHY LYNN GROSSMAN

*Religion News Service*

**A**mericans’ most admired man and woman in the world are — once again — President Barack Obama and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

But the shocker in the Gallup Poll’s Most Admired List released at the end of 2015 may be the No. 2 spot in the survey, where Donald Trump tied Pope Francis in the year the pontiff visited this country for the first time.

Jeffrey Jones, in his analysis for Gallup, observed that Trump’s headliner controversies on the campaign trail made the business mogul “top-of-mind for many Americans” in the open-ended questionnaire. Trump was in the top 10 in 1988-1990 and in 2011.

But as often happens in these polls, the folks behind No.1 have barely a fraction of the votes. While 17 percent of those surveyed named Obama, only 5 percent named Trump and the pontiff.



And the percentages trail down rapidly from there to the point where, given the margin of error in the survey of 824 U.S. adults — plus or minus 4 percentage points — they’re all in a statistical tie. Sen. Bernie Sanders came in at 3 percent and Bill Gates at 2 percent.

Clustered at the bottom of the list with 1 percent each are the usual contenders, including revered religious figures such as the Dalai Lama and evangelist Billy Graham along with George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. GOP presidential candidate Ben Carson also received 1 percent.

This is the 59th time Graham has appeared on this list since 1955.

For women, most admired status often goes to government leaders, politicians and TV stars. With her 14th time at the top, Clinton set the record for number of years leading the list, for either men or women.

But winning the Nobel Prize helps. The young activist for women’s education, Malala Yousafzai, came in second, at 5 percent of the votes behind Clinton’s 13 percent.

Oprah Winfrey, who launched a series on faith on her television channel, tied first lady Michelle Obama with 4 percent each.

Americans put Carly Fiorina in a tie with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and long-admired Queen Elizabeth at 2 percent.

Hanging on with 1 percent: Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Ellen DeGeneres and — still popular — Sarah Palin. **NFJ**

# Anti-Muslim rhetoric puts Sikhs on edge

BY KATHERINE DAVIS-YOUNG

*Religion News Service*

It's a weekday afternoon, and Jaspreet Singh is usually at work, but power drill in hand, he's attaching new "security cameras in use" signs to the outside of the Sikh temple in Buena Park, Calif.

Singh took the time off from his job as an information technology manager to protect the temple where he serves as a board member after he learned it had been vandalized.

"I was definitely shocked because our community is very peaceful. We don't preach any hate. We respect all religions," he said.

He was less surprised when he found out that the graffiti painted onto the walls of the temple's parking lot and a truck parked there included slurs about "ISIS" and "Islam." "Whenever terrorists attack, or any such incidents happen, there have always been backlashes," he said.

And anti-Muslim backlashes have often targeted Sikhs, who are frequently mistaken for Muslims. The turbans worn by Sikh men in particular prompt the perpetrators of hate crimes to assume that their targets follow Islam.

The graffiti at the temple, Gurdwara Singh Sabha, was discovered in early December, four days after terrorists with connections to radical Islamists killed 14 people in San Bernardino, about 50 miles from Buena Park. The Sikhs in Buena Park, where the gurdwara (house of worship) serves 1,000 people, were hardly the only members of their faith targeted after the San Bernardino massacre.

"We're already seeing a spike in incidents. We've had several reports of community members experiencing hate speech," said Gurjot Kaur, attorney with the Sikh Coalition, a national organization that provides legal assistance to Sikhs facing discrimination.

Sikhism is the world's fifth-largest religion, with about 25 million practitioners, including more than 500,000 in the U.S. It



originated in Northern India independently from Hinduism, Islam and other religions. Most Sikh men wear turbans and beards as signifiers of faith.

Their style of dress lines up with stereotypical symbols of terrorism, said Simran Jeet Singh, professor of religion at Trinity University. (He is not related to Jaspreet Singh; many Sikh men use the surname Singh.)

"My father came to this country in the 1970s. Back then, he was called 'ayatollah.' When I was a kid I got called 'Osama bin Laden.' Now we're being called 'ISIS,'" he said. "All of these xenophobic slurs come from a misunderstanding of who Sikhs are."

Simran Jeet Singh said often anti-Muslim political rhetoric lumps together unique religions and Middle Eastern and South Asian ethnic groups.

Soon after terrorists linked to the Islamic State group attacked in Paris last November, for example, Canadian Sikh journalist Veerender Jubbal was photographed to appear as one of the suicide bombers. The image spread widely around the Internet and some news media even published the image, believing it to be authentic.

Sikhs have also often been targets of violence. Days after the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, a man ranting about "towel heads" shot and killed a Sikh gas station owner in Mesa, Ariz.

In 2012, a white supremacist killed six Sikh worshippers in their Wisconsin

gurdwara. And in September 2015, a man shouting "terrorist" beat a Sikh man unconscious outside Chicago.

That perpetrators of these crimes should attack Sikhs, mistaking them for Muslims, is not surprising, said Randy Blazak, a professor of sociology at the University of Oregon who researches hate crimes.

"The notion of hate crime is always based on not just who the target is, but the perception of who the target is," Blazak said. "There are often anti-gay attacks where the victim isn't gay or anti-illegal immigrant attacks where the victim is not actually an illegal immigrant."

Simran Jeet Singh said excusing discriminatory acts as cases of mistaken identity skirts the larger issue.

"By framing it as mistaken, there's an implication that there's a correct identity who should be targeted," he said. "And it takes away agency and accountability from perpetrators, like it should, in some way, be forgivable."

Whether or not attackers strike their intended targets, Simran Jeet Singh sees anti-Muslim sentiment and actions as evidence of a larger problem. "Political rhetoric now is certainly fanning the flames of ignorance and fear," he said.

Buena Park's Sikh community understands that firsthand.

When Jaspreet Singh headed to the store to buy security equipment and supplies to clean up his vandalized gurdwara, he said a woman in the store's parking lot shouted expletives at him, telling him to get out of the U.S. Still, he said he has loved living in the U.S. since arriving from India 12 years ago, despite the bigotry directed at him and his community.

The teachings of his faith remind him to stay optimistic.

"If a tragedy happens," he said, "all the communities should come close and protect each other rather than splitting ourselves and hating each other and blaming each other." **NFJ**

“Religious freedom is now in the eye of the beholder.”

— Charles Haynes of the Newseum Institute

# Liberty for some

Americans prize religious freedom for Christians, less for others

BY CATHY LYNN GROSSMAN

*Religion News Service*

**E**ight in 10 Americans say it's very or extremely important for people like themselves to be allowed to practice their religion freely.

However, support for religious freedom plummeted when people were asked about other traditions, according to the survey released at the end of 2015 by the National Opinion Research Center for Public Affairs Research and The Associated Press.

The survey of 1,042 U.S. adults found that overall:

- 82 percent called religious liberty protections important for Christians
- 72 percent prioritized it for Jews
- 67 percent for Mormons
- 61 percent for Muslims

For Christians, the percentages were nearly identical when asked about people like themselves. The AP-NORC poll was conducted online and by phone. The overall margin of error is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Charles Haynes, director of the Religious Freedom Center of the Newseum Institute, told AP that ideas of religious liberty have become politicized and polarized.

“Religious freedom is now in the eye of the beholder. People in different traditions, with different ideological commitments, define religious freedom differently,” Haynes said.

But Republicans and Democrats were statistically tied in prioritizing religious



freedom for Christians but not for Muslims in the survey, conducted Dec. 10-13, while campaign rhetoric about Muslims was intense.

- 88 percent of Republicans said it was important to protect the religious liberty of Christians, while only 60 percent said so for Muslims.
- 83 percent of Democrats said the protections were important for Christians, while only 67 percent said so for Muslims.

Political independents lagged on all the measures, with fewer than 69 percent supporting religious freedom for Christians, 57 percent for Jews, 56 percent for Mormons and 49 percent for Muslims.

The survey was conducted after extremist Muslims launched terror attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif. In the aftermath, there's been a wave of vandalism and arson at U.S. mosques.

According to AP, earlier polls with the NORC have found “dwindling confidence in the government's defense of religious liberty, with 75 percent in 2011 saying

the government was doing a good job, compared with 55 percent who said so [last December].”

Americans, particularly Christians, are tense about the religious mix with more non-Christian immigrants and the rapid rise of people with no religion.

The latest Pew Research survey of America's religious landscape found that although Christians make up 70 percent of Americans, this is a significantly less Christian country than it was seven years ago, with the percentage down nearly 8 points from 2007.

People with no religious identity rose 6.7 percentage points in the same period. The rising influence of these “nones” helped boost support for the legalization of same-sex marriage, an issue hard-fought against by evangelical Christians and Catholics.

Muslims and Hindus, while still very tiny minorities in the U.S., also increased their share of the religious marketplace. And attention to their rising numbers, together with political rhetoric about potential Muslim immigration, may have shaped views revealed in the survey. **NJF**

# ‘Another calling’

## Conflict and burnout among top reasons pastors quit

BY CATHY LYNN GROSSMAN

Religion News Service

Sometimes a call from God is not enough to keep pastors in their posts.

Many evangelical pastors who quit before retirement age found “another calling” either off the pulpit or out of ministry altogether. But many also say they were driven away by conflict and burnout. So says a new survey of former pastors from four denominations.

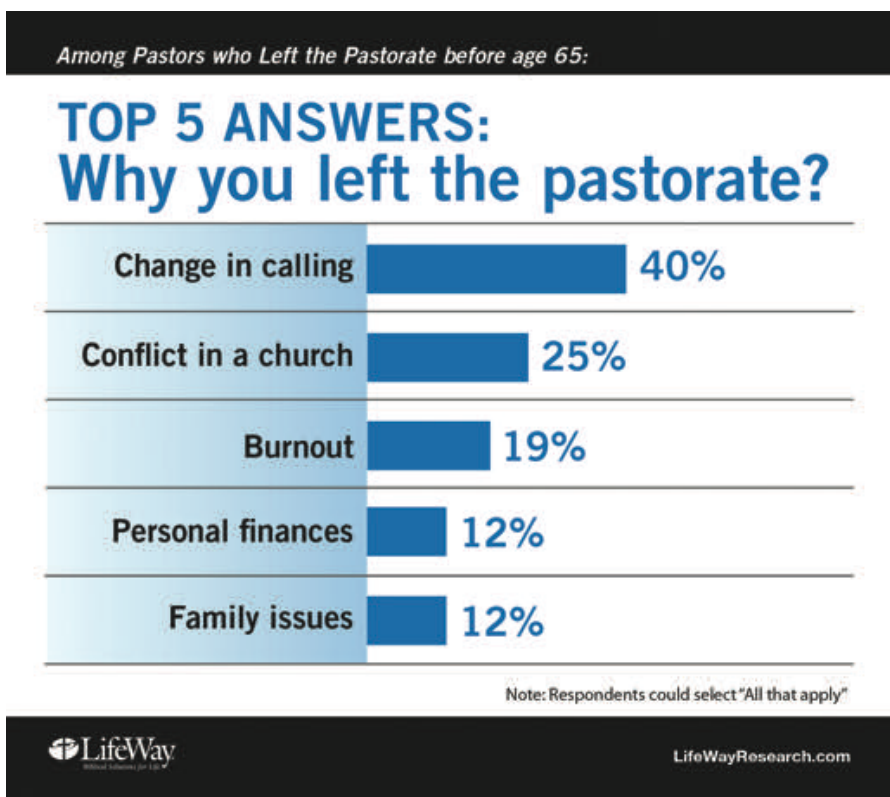
The single biggest reason (40 percent) for leaving was “a change in calling.” Conflict in the church drove out 25 percent. And 19 percent succumbed to burnout. Those were the top three reasons in the survey by LifeWay Research, released in mid-January.

LifeWay surveyed 734 former pastors drawn from lists provided by the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, Church of the Nazarene and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Several said they came into their pastor posts unprepared for intense demands for counseling and untrained in dealing with church boards and were soon overwhelmed by the lack of support.

“Almost half of those who left the pastorate (48 percent) said their church wasn’t doing any of the kinds of things that would help,” said Ed Stetzer, executive director of the Nashville-based research organization. Specifically:

- 48 percent of the former pastors said the search team didn’t accurately describe the church before their arrival.
- 27 percent said their churches had no list of counselors for referrals.
- 22 percent never spelled out exactly what they expected of their pastor.
- 12 percent had no sabbatical plan for the pastor.



And very soon there was trouble:

- 56 percent said there were clashes over changes they proposed.
- 54 percent said they experienced a significant personal attack.
- 48 percent said their training didn’t prepare them to handle the people side of ministry.

“Many seminary programs don’t even require courses on the people side — they’re focused on theology, biblical languages and preaching, which are important, but almost half of the pastors felt unprepared for dealing with the people they were preparing in seminary to lead and serve,” Stetzer said in a press release.

“These things are interrelated,” Stetzer said. “If you’re burning out, chances are

when conflict arises you’re not going to respond well, and that will make the conflict worse.”

Conflict is a killer for churches, too, according to the latest edition of the American Congregations studies by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

The 2015 report is based on reporting by clergy or senior staff at more than 4,000 congregations.

“Serious conflict crushes growth,” said the report’s author, David Roozen. He found that congregations that had only little or no conflict were more than 50 percent likely to have shown growth in worship attendance in the last five years.

But among congregations that reported serious conflict, only 29 percent showed growth. **NFJ**

# Do we need books, papers and a library?

By G. Keith Parker

Do we really need books, newspapers, a library or bookstores in this modern technological age? The short answer is, “Absolutely yes!”

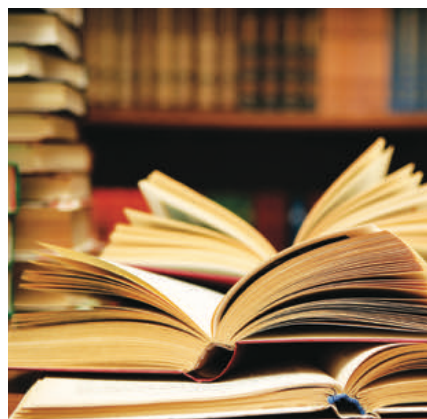
**B**ut why? School kids have their textbooks on Chromebook notebooks, and we can get news on the computer and our cell phones or other online means. We can read books on Kindle or E-readers. We can “save trees” by skipping paper of all forms.

These and many more arguments are tossed about to claim that technology has replaced the old-fashioned means of sharing information and learning. But wait, let us be careful and learn from history, both past and present about the role of shared information.

In 1439 the Gutenberg Press provided a means to have the mass printing of books and papers. This invention provided the most profound transformation of the actual structure of society. Until then, most written material was done by hand and only a few people were literate. They controlled the information, ideas and direction of everyone’s life.

As the middle class learned to read and information could cross borders, the role of the written word increasingly helped free people from ignorance, and the control by powerful people or organizations. The Reformation and Renaissance could happen only with the sharing of ideas and information. People could read in their own language and communicate across borders.

When Martin Luther translated the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into German (1522), he helped unify multiple local



dialects into a common language. Likewise, the contemporary translation of scripture into English by William Tyndale made available to average folks their own copies — an act that cost Tyndale his life.

Since those days the use of information has been a major part of controlling masses, of seeking and finding freedom, of finding spiritual direction and all sorts of communication between peoples. Over the centuries societies have shared their values and ideologies by the printed and spoken word.

The first thing most political revolutions do is to destroy those forms of printing. Only “approved” books or papers can be shared or sold. Every totalitarian country seeks to control what information its people have.

For example, some years ago while working in Europe I was asked to help a medical doctor in Communist East Germany get certain psychiatric texts used in West Germany. In order to pass his psychiatry exam — the same as in the West — he had to learn from those books, which were required, but locked up by the East German Communist party as dangerous.

The founding of our United States was heavily influenced by the revolutionary ideas from France and other lands. Freedom of the press was a major amendment to our Constitution and cherished by our forefathers and mothers. Books, newspapers, religious literature, political pamphlets and many other forms of communication were cherished parts of their lives.

So why do we need printed material in the day of smart phones and Google? For a simple reason: the Internet is extremely vulnerable. We do not like to think of what a solar storm producing an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) can do to our Internet, our satellites and electrical systems. A recent study from the National Academy of Sciences indicates the cost would be in the trillions.

Other experts show that there is a 12 percent chance of a big sun storm in the next decade. The last major solar storm was in 1859, long before we were so dependent on electronics, although it did destroy many telegraph systems.

Data stored in the “cloud” is not as concrete as a book. Such a natural EMP occurrence cannot be stopped or helped but could profoundly impact all of our communication with each other, our schools and the sharing of vital information.

Worse than that, in my opinion, is the ability to sabotage as in modern cybercrime. I refer to not only hacking into large “safe” systems, but also the ability to control what “information” goes online. Already, defensive measures are being researched and taken to try to prevent some rogue nation from creating a man-made EMP via a nuclear blast in the atmosphere. Hopefully such massive, destructive measures can be prevented.

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*EDITOR’S NOTE: This perspective by historian Keith Parker adds to the ongoing conversation within and beyond our publishing ministry about the balanced use of print and web technology.*

But my concern is the vulnerability of our dependence upon information gained only from the Internet and books online, all easily changed at will, and to re-direct ideas about history, values and basic news.

In my lifetime, the many “revolutions” in many lands have been begun by burning books and taking over newspapers, radio and TV. Only the ideology of the victors is allowed. Education becomes indoctrination to one ideology or religion, no longer tools with which one can examine and compare different ideas.

China has a massive surveillance and content control system with a censor who is responsible for material, both online and offline, that might be seen as dangerous to social security and public order. The reportedly massive numbers of jailed cyber-dissidents and journalists are accused of “communicating with groups abroad,” “signing online petitions,” and “calling for reform and an end to corruption.” Although some hackers can get around forbidden websites, at great risk, the average person is not capable of such.

We have great freedom to read not only

the news but also differing opinions, such as letters to the editor or opposing articles. How vital are those books in each library as they tell the stories, histories and lives of days gone by? We learn how they coped with changing worlds and new ideas. How special it is when a student can read from a book a differing opinion from what the class notes said and then ask the teacher about it?

In 1970 while I was at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, a new student showed up at the university lunchroom. He had just escaped from Communist Czechoslovakia with his two most precious items: his life and one book from the free world. I will never forget that look on his face sitting with that book clutched to his chest, now in a free land with thousands of books around us for the unlimited reading.

We take for granted our access to books, papers, bookstores and libraries. People around the world are hungry for shared information, especially in their spiritual traditions.

Many years ago the late Gerhard Claas, a Baptist leader from Germany, was criticized for “destroying” a Bible during a trip to the

Soviet Union. The critic failed to tell the whole story. Folks came from many little isolated churches begging for Bibles and he divided his one copy into the different books, giving each group one part with the understanding that they would rotate with each other.

I hope books or Bibles do not become so rare that we must share them this way, but I send this call to fight for the freedom of the press that can't be easily changed by the “delete” key, for support of our libraries and bookstores, for reading different opinions and ideas, for using the tools we learn in serious education to discern right from wrong.

Technology is great, but not our modern god. It is only a tool. Technology is good and many prefer that medium, but it is vulnerable. Yes! We really do need books, newspapers, a library and bookstores! **NFJ**

—G. Keith Parker, a former professor at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüschtikon, Switzerland, is a well-published historian. He lives in Dunn's Rock, N.C. This article first appeared in The Transylvania Times in Brevard, N.C.

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# More than feelings: God is love

By John R. Franke

That God is love is one of the most common assumptions of Christians concerning the character of God. This assertion is found repeatedly in the Bible and has been regularly affirmed throughout the history of the church. But what does it really mean to say that God is love, and what are the implications for Christian faith?

I would suggest that the answer to this question begins with another question: What was God doing from all eternity before the creation of the universe?

In one sense this might seem an irritatingly speculative question. One early Christian reportedly responded to such an inquiry by quipping that God was preparing an unpleasant place for people who asked questions like this.

While this response is humorous and apparently full of wisdom in the face of some of the speculations that have been offered concerning the precise nature of God's eternal life, it may also be short-sighted with respect to the belief that God is love.

When we affirm with scripture and the Christian tradition that God is love, we are not simply making a statement about the feelings of God toward creation and human beings who are made in God's image. Instead, we are affirming something about the very nature of God's being and actions.

God is love for all time — past, present

and future — because God lives eternally in the communal fellowship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit as they participate in the giving, receiving and sharing of love. In other words, the life of God has been and will be characterized by love.

This divine love is found in the reciprocal interdependence and self-dedication of the Trinitarian members to each other. Father, Son and Spirit are bound together in the active relations of love throughout eternity. This love, expressed and received by the Trinitarian persons among themselves, provides a description of the inner life of God throughout eternity apart from any reference to creation.

In addition to enjoying the support of the biblical witness and the tradition of the church, love is an especially fruitful term for comprehending the life of God since it is an inherently relational concept. Love requires both subject and object.

Because God is a triune plurality-in-unity and unity-in-plurality, God comprehends both love's subject and love's object. Hence, the statement that God is love refers to both the internal Trinitarian fellowship among Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who together are the one God by virtue of their interdependent relationality, as well as to the external actions of God in creation and providence. Because God is love, God loves.



This understanding of God has profound implications for all matters of Christian faith and life. For instance, we can understand the act of creation as a reflection of the expansive love of God, whereby the triune God brings into being human persons, and establishes a relationship with them for the purpose of drawing them into participation in the divine fellowship of love.

In this way the love of God is expanded beyond Father, Son and Holy Spirit to include others. From this perspective, love is the central expression of Christian faith and extends even to our enemies. In the words of Jesus: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven ..."

Because Christians worship the God who is love, we must love all people including those who are our enemies. Nothing less than our witness to the gospel is at stake. If we ignore this most basic calling or fail to live it out in the world, we are not faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and are not practicing Christian faith no matter what else we may say or do.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8 NRSV). **NFJ**

—John R. Franke, who received his doctorate from the University of Oxford, is theologian in residence at Second Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis and general coordinator of the Gospel and Our Culture Network.

# Reimagining mission

By Colleen Walker Burroughs

A few years ago I found myself standing in virtual lines with dozens of organizations seeking to sign up summer volunteer groups with local ministries.

We all had motivated students prepared to rake, organize, paint or to read with children. However, the soup kitchens, senior centers and children's programs were already full of volunteers and had to turn us away.

One creative non-profit offered to let visitors pay to help feed their local homeless community. That's when I bailed and flew to the next city.

In Atlanta I met with Carrie McClung Dean, co-pastor of Edgewood Church with her husband Nathan. As she bounced her baby on her lap, we talked about volunteer opportunities. Carrie had clearly fallen in love with this community, and her commitment to her neighbors was inspiring.

"Your students could sort through the stacks of coats we have in boxes, but if they organize our elementary school's coat closet, how will the local parent organization ever learn that they need to run it themselves?" She made a solid point.

For two decades our office had been organizing volunteer opportunities for thousands of students. Our goal is to find mission work that matters — helpful jobs for students that might otherwise be left undone. We want to be the presence of Christ in places where overworked, under-

funded non-profits need extra hands.

However, it is no secret that there has been a seismic shift in the landscape of local and global mission. Anyone paying attention has read *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert and *Toxic Charity* by Robert Lupton.

My conversation with Carrie and others called for a reimagining of our organization's philosophy of mission. As painful as an honest self-evaluation can be, we needed to acknowledge our dependency on finding volunteer assignments en masse to meet our own programmatic needs.

It felt a little like unhealthy dependency. Who really needed whom? Even worse, if we discovered that our students were inadvertently enabling cycles of poverty, were we willing to stop sending them as volunteers into the world? It was a sobering conversation, one that could threaten the viability — or at least foundational identity — of Passport.

Change is scary. Questioning the validity of one's core values shakes up comfort zones and shines a spotlight on shortcomings. No one wants to discover that she has just spent an entire career enabling 100,000 well-meaning teenagers to enable brokenness in the world. Thankfully, that is not where we landed in our process of reimagining.

Our students have accomplished some amazing, life-giving work from the slums of Kenya to the backstreets of Boston. But, no one gets it right all the time. Every organization, church and missionary needs to take a

critical look at why it does the things it does.

If the answer is because "that's the way it has always been done," or "because we just love to do it," then keep digging.

The rise of volunteerism and ease of travel mean the world is flooded with volunteers. Most volunteers have time and money, but no particular skill. This makes evaluating the way we choose to "do mission" in the world more critical than at any time.

Just because we can organize a coat closet doesn't mean it is helpful. It may just perpetuate cycles of poverty in an inner-city school by eliminating an opportunity for local parents to be more involved. Just because we can fly across the globe to volunteer does not mean it is helpful or good stewardship of mission dollars.

Leaders of student groups, congregations and denominations need to ask such tough questions before crossing town and, especially, before flying around the globe.

Passport recently spent some concentrated time asking such tough questions. We wanted to reimagine ways to offer a thoughtful expression of Christ's love in the world. We wanted to identify and deconstruct outdated mission habits, and thereby avoid enabling cycles of dependence.

We sought to identify what was working. Like everything in life, it is an ongoing conversation. Feel free to engage us in it! [NFJ](#)

—Colleen Walker Burroughs is vice president of Passport, Inc., a national student ministry based in Birmingham, Ala. ([passportcamps.org](#)), and founder of Watering Malawi ([wateringmalawi.org](#)). This is the first of six columns about rethinking one's corporate philosophy of mission.



# Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?

By Fisher Humphreys

**T**oday many people are asking whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God. I think they do, and I will try to explain why by inventing a dialogue between a Christian and a Muslim.

**Christian:** There is only one true, living God.

**Muslim:** I agree. There is only one true, living God. We Muslims, like Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians centuries before us, usually refer to God with the Arabic word Allah, but to facilitate our conversation I'll use the English word God.

Christians and Muslims also agree about the origin of the universe:

**Christian:** God created the universe.

**Muslim:** I agree. God created the universe.

The fact that God is Creator means that God transcends the world, just as a novelist transcends her novel or a composer his music. And since only persons can create, God is personal, not an impersonal force or the personification of abstract values.

Christians and Muslims also agree that God acts in the world's history. In addition, they agree about some of God's acts. For example:

**Christian:** God called Abraham to be God's servant.

**Muslim:** I agree. God called Abraham to be God's servant.

At this point the Christian and the Muslim have identified the one they are

talking about: the one, true, living God who is the transcendent, personal creator of the world and who called Abraham. They both worship this God.

However, Christians and Muslims do have important disagreements about God's acts in the world. Each makes claims about God's acts that the other does not accept. Here are two examples:

**Christian:** God became incarnate in Jesus.

**Muslim:** I do not agree. God did not become incarnate in Jesus.

**Muslim:** Muhammad is God's greatest prophet.

**Christian:** I do not agree. Muhammad is not God's greatest prophet.

We have now come to the critical point in our argument, and it is this: Even when the two speakers are disagreeing about God's acts in the world, *they are still talking about the same God*. In fact, it is only because they *are* talking about the same God that they are in a position to disagree about what God has done in the world.

So why do some Christians and Muslims say that they are worshiping different gods?

I suppose that sometimes Christians say it as a reaction to the terrorism that some Muslim extremists carry out: "If they do *that* in the name of the god they worship, their god can't be the God and Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ." This reaction is understandable, but the conclusion is unnecessary and mistaken.

It seems to me that, whatever their motives may be, some Christians and Muslims simply decide that their initial agreement that God is the transcendent, personal one who created the world and who called Abraham is not a sufficient identifier for God.

They then add to their identifier for God things that are exclusive to their respective faiths. So, for example, the Christian may add an incarnation identifier, and the Muslim may add the Muhammad-the-greatest-prophet identifier.

They are free to do this, of course; it is a choice they can make. But there is no logical necessity for them to do it.

Once they have agreed that they are talking about the one, true, living transcendent, personal God who created the world and who called Abraham, their disagreements about what God has done do not require them to think that their conversation partner is no longer talking about the same God.

We Christians should be able to understand this. After all, we disagree among ourselves about what God has done in the world.

For example, the majority of Christians believe that God has appointed bishops to be the leaders of the church, but millions of other Christians do not believe this. This disagreement is very serious. It has been a major factor in the division of the church into so many denominations.

But so far as I know, no one has ever suggested that, since Christians disagree



about what God is doing in the world, they are talking about different gods.

So when Christians say they worship a different god from Muslims, they (1) have chosen to do something that (2) is logically unnecessary and that (3) they don't do when they have disagreements with other Christians about what God has done in the world.

And there is something else. When Christians choose to adopt more exclusive identifiers for God, they can undermine their own faith.

God did not reveal the Incarnation to Israel in the Old Testament era. Therefore when Christians say that anyone who does not believe that God was incarnate in Jesus is worshiping another god, they are de facto saying that the Christian God is a different God from the God of Abraham, Moses, David and Isaiah.

Christians who believe the message of the Old Testament should never make such a claim.

I believe that what we have here is a question of truth. It simply is true that there is only one true, living, transcendent, personal God and that God created the world and called Abraham. And it simply is true that Christians and Muslims and Jews all worship that one God.

But there are other issues in addition to truth. I will mention two: understanding and peace.

We Christians are aware of our responsibility to give a witness to our Christian faith. One way we earn the right to be heard by Muslims is by listening to them. We patiently engage in a conversation with them, and when the time is right we give our witness in love.

Dialogue and evangelism are not mutually exclusive; they are mutually reinforcing.

My friend Gerald Wright has spent decades in conversations with Muslims, and he says that in very practical terms conversations with Muslims are more productive when both parties go into them affirming the truth that they are talking about the same God.

Then there is the issue of "peace on earth," to quote the angels (Luke 2:14). I fully agree with Swiss theologian Hans



Küng about this: "There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions."

To this I would add two things. First, today the two religions that matter most for world peace are Christianity and Islam. The reason is that together they comprise more than half the people on earth (56 percent, according to statistics published in the January 2016 issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*).

Second, recognizing that we both are talking about the same God makes it possible for Christians and Muslims to stop accusing each other of idolatry and to begin working toward understanding each other better and thereby working toward peaceful relationships with each other.

Two learned and influential scholars, Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, have famously written that what is happening throughout the world today is a clash of two civilizations: Christianity and Islam.

This may be true, but it is also misleading, and it is to the credit of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama that they have both refused to accept this as a complete account of things. Both leaders have insisted that it is not Islam per se but radical Islam that is perpetrating so much horrific violence in the world.

Nevertheless, religion is contributing to conflict in our world, coloring it and energizing it. Most of us will not be able to contribute directly to the resolution of the

global conflict, but all of us can contribute indirectly by recognizing that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. When we do this we are taking a step toward peace on earth. We also are following the teaching of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9).

One of the most important modern Christian statements about Islam was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church at its Second Vatican Council in 1965. In a document titled "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" the Council summarized beautifully the view that seems true to me:

Upon the Moslems, too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of heaven and earth and Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to His inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. ... They prize the moral life, and give worship to God especially through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. **NFJ**

—Fisher Humphreys is professor of divinity, emeritus, of Samford University, and a member of Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Ala. He can be reached at [fisherhumphreys@gmail.com](mailto:fisherhumphreys@gmail.com).

# To the cross, to the tomb: then Resurrection

By Jack Glasgow

**A**sh Wednesday came early this year. We were reminded again of God's ancient words to Adam, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Indeed, illness and death do not wait: I made three funeral home visits during the first six days of the new year.

Trying to "hold on to the happy" of Christmas is a life strategy that never works. Happiness comes to us, but so do challenge, illness, failure, disappointment, brokenness, evil and death.

Scripture tells us of the time when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).

Immediately after some of the high water marks of his life and ministry, Jesus invariably reminded the disciples and thereby himself of the cross that was before him.

Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus then teaches that the Son of Man must be rejected and even killed.

Christ experiences the miracle on the Mount of Transfiguration. Then, Jesus quickly reminds the disciples that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of men — and sets his face toward Jerusalem.

The Lenten season is for Christians a turning of the face toward Jerusalem.

Human nature runs from Jerusalem and its cross and suffering. We want to run from bad news, from signs of mortality, from danger and evil.

Clinging with all our might to grasp happiness and escape the unpleasantness of life, we set our face toward past pleasantness and do all we can to avoid all that hurts. Unfortunately, all this approach to



Photo by John D. Pierce at  
Wadi Qelt in the eastern West Bank.

life yields is unrelenting fear — fear that the bad will overtake us, that we will not be able to hold on to our happiness forever.

In Lent, Jesus speaks to us his oft-spoken encouragement: "Fear not."

Do not spend your life in the vain hope that it can avoid suffering and pain.

Do not live fearfully that the happiness you have experienced will flee and never be replaced.

Do not live dreadfully in a state of denial — denying your own mortality, your own sinfulness, the hurts and suffering of the human family, and the pervasive presence of unrelenting evil.

Instead, turn and face reality.

Confess what is true as well as what is inevitable about yourself and the world you live in. Set your face toward Jerusalem, and do not be afraid of the journey.

The journey of faith continues.

The hope, love, joy and peace of Christmas will indeed go with us. The light of Epiphany will continue to shine. But, ultimately life must be lived with all of its challenges.

Faith is not our escape from the harsh realities of living, but it is our equipping to live redemptively and abundantly in the midst of all life brings.

The ashes, the crosses, the nails, the thorns, the prayers and litanies of confession, the passion of Holy Week — all these things await us. Let us set our faces toward Jerusalem and embrace the journey once again.

To the cross, to the tomb: then Resurrection! [NFJ](#)

—Jack Glasgow is pastor of Zebulon Baptist Church in Zebulon, N.C., and serves on the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith*.

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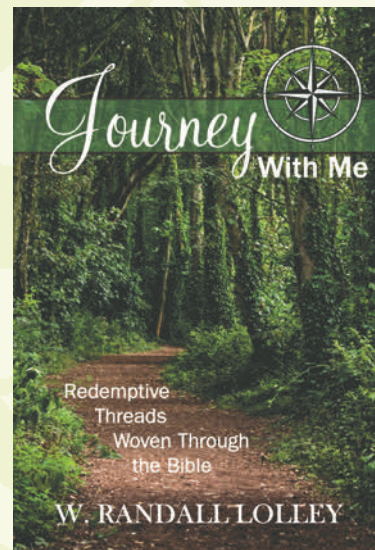
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# A prayer offered by an indoor minister at an outdoor wedding

By Brett Younger

*Lord God Almighty, we have gathered in this place, this park, outside, miles from a respectable church sanctuary, to join these two people in what we hope is holy matrimony. We pray that every wedding will be sacred — even those that take place in settings more fitting for a folk arts festival.*

Lord God Almighty, forgive me if I should have given this assignment to a younger, hipper minister. Several people wish I had said “No,” but Ashley was so cute when she was four years old and insisted on sitting on my lap during the children’s sermon.

I know that she has not been to church for a while — by “a while” I mean at least 10 years — but when she asked me to perform this wedding, I thought we would be at the church with pews and the cross. She neglected to mention that we would be here at the Heaven on Earth Spa and Wedding Arboretum.



We pray, nonetheless, that you will look mercifully upon Ashley, in her ankle bells, flower crown and not-quite-white dress, and Evan in his Urban Outfitters formal wear.

Lord God Almighty, I feel like an airline stewardess leading passengers through the safety speech. No one is listening, but it is important, so I am going through with it.

I know that some would like for me to hurry up so they can get to the gluten-free, farm-to-table, locally-sourced, chipotle-flavored, artisanal cake. They are eager to drink too much organic beer and

dance suggestively, but they can just hold their horses, because now that I mention it, a horse would not be out of place at this wedding. The butterflies that the groom feels may be actual butterflies. Bambi might walk up and nibble the bridal bouquet. Birds could flutter around the bride’s head.

Lord God Almighty, we wish it was 20 degrees warmer. Scheduling an outdoor wedding in March is rolling the dice. Perhaps if we had known it would be 50 degrees, the bridesmaids’ tiny turquoise dresses would cover more and my dear wife Barbara would not be using a tablecloth for a blanket. Lesson learned.

And if it is not too much trouble, it would be helpful if you could stop with the wind already. We have given up on any candles staying lit, but a lot of expensive hairdos are blowing away and the pages in my Bible are not staying put.

Help us pay attention to the reading of 1 Corinthians 13. We feel free, however, to ignore the Apache blessing that the bride’s sister is about to read — as no Apache would recognize it. And let me make it clear that I do not approve of the lewd song the one female groomsman will be singing.

I wish we had an organ or a piano, but I confess that I liked the guitarist’s prelude. It sounded like something Taylor Swift might have sung before she started singing too loud.

Lord God Almighty, please remind

those who are only now arriving and are at this moment shuffling people around so they can have a spot on a bench or a hay bale, that while others’ eyes are closed, you are watching them. You might also jog the memory of the fancy photographer who agreed not to move around during the ceremony; that includes the prayer.

As we think about the generations that preceded this couple, we cannot help but wonder what those couples who were married in church buildings in weddings that cost \$25 including the license and a haircut would think. But we also know that we are here by your grace, as well as that of match.com.

Things change, but couples keep making this brave attempt to love one another. In a few minutes when they read the vows they wrote and promise to “dream big dreams, feel the wind of hope, laugh every day, and discover myself on this crazy journey we call life,” know that they are promising “for better, worse, richer, poorer, joy, sorrow, sickness, health, to love and cherish, as long as we both shall live.”

We pray this in the name of Jesus, who went to a wedding and provided refreshments of which I would not partake. Amen. NFJ

*—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology.*



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# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

March 6, 2016

## *When Old Becomes New*

I became a Royal Ambassador in a narrow, stuffy, upstairs room in the gable end of an addition to the Hephzibah Baptist Church, outside Lincolnton, Ga. It was not my home church, but it was the closest one that offered an RA program.

I remember playing baseball, including an exciting day when the preacher slung the bat, causing a compound fracture in another boy's lower leg. But I also recall reading missionary stories, memorizing Bible verses, and singing an off-key a capella version of "The King's Business." ↓

But another memory goes beyond the varied activities: it is a concept of identity. I learned as a 10-year-old boy that I was an ambassador for Christ, and I have never forgotten it.

Do you have a sense of being Christ's representative in the world? Can you remember when or how you first acquired it?

### **Our motivation (vv. 11-15)**

When Paul wrote the letter from which today's text is taken, he was deeply concerned for a church that had been torn by strife and weakened by misguided behavior. Paul had been instrumental in founding the church at

### **2 Corinthians 5:17**

"So if anyone is in Christ, ... everything has become new!"

Corinth, but had been absent for some time. Some members did not accept Paul's right to advise or upbraid the congregation, but the apostle was determined to address some troubling issues among people that he loved. In today's text, Paul seeks to motivate his readers by explaining his own sense of calling and identity as an ambassador for Christ who has a responsibility for others.

In the previous chapter, Paul wrote of his own life and ministry, but with v. 11 he shifts to an emphasis on the purpose of his ministry: to seek the reconciliation of all people with God. Paul's motivation grew first from "the fear of the Lord."

In the Old Testament, the fear of the Lord was sometimes identified with a blanket of dread that Yahweh caused to fall upon enemies in battle, but more commonly described the awesome respect inspired in God's own people.

Such reverence was Paul's meaning: he understood that his life was an open book before God. He would never forget the blinding light and powerful voice that had stopped him cold on the road to Damascus and changed his life (Acts 9). Paul knew enough about God to have a healthy respect for divine power. He knew how God had turned him away from his former practice of persecuting Christians. He did not wish to be confronted that way again.

Paul also believed that all people

would face a future judgment before Christ, and he had just mentioned that in v. 10. "Therefore," Paul said, "knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others" (v. 11a).

Paul and his companions were not primarily interested in persuading others to accept them as leaders (v. 11b), nor were they fishing for praise (v. 12). They did, however, want the Corinthians to believe their motivation was divinely inspired: "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you" (v. 13). Had Paul's mental stability been called into question?

Someone might accuse Paul of insanity, as Festus later did (Acts 26:24), but not of duplicity. What he and his colleagues did, they did for God and for others. [See the online "Hardest Question" for more.]

Paul's motivation was not just the fear of judgment, but the love of God: "For the love of Christ urges us on" (v. 14a). Paul and his missionary companions had personally encountered God's steadfast love, revealed in Christ. They believed that Jesus had died for them, as for all people (v. 14b), and that those who put their lives in God's hands no longer live for themselves, but for Christ (v. 15). As Christ is the author of a new life and future for the believer, he is also the proper focus of that rejuvenated life. ↓

### **Our perspective (vv. 16-19)**

A new life leads to a new perspective. After meeting Jesus, Paul no longer saw life through a human point of view only. He had once considered Jesus

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to be just another man, and a major troublemaker at that, but no longer. “From now on,” Paul said, he was living a different kind of life: he had learned to see Jesus through spiritual eyes, and that experience had given him a spiritual perspective on others, as well (v. 16).

This is not to say that Paul no longer appreciated the humanity and needs of other people. He was very much in tune with his own frailties, often reminding readers that he was no superman, but could boast only in Christ. While in touch with the physical, Paul’s transformation into a “new creation” allowed him to see deeper spiritual needs lurking behind the human façade. He no longer saw persons as people who could become newly acceptable through obedience to the law, but as people who could become a new creation through openness to Christ (v. 17).<sup>u</sup>

Paul’s writings suggest that he had always been driven. He had thought of himself as a man with a mission from God even when he was living as a Pharisee and working to purge Judaism of the new Christian influence.

As he wrote to the Corinthians, Paul was still moved by a sense of mission, but his perspective had changed radically. He no longer persuaded people to reform, but to be reborn. Paul wanted others to have the remarkable experience he described by saying: “everything has become new!”

No longer persecuting Christians, Paul’s new mindset had led him to embark on a “ministry of reconciliation” (v. 18) between God and humankind. He was moved by the stunning belief that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (v. 19a). Paul understood that only God could bring about such forgiveness. We often think of God

and Christ as being separate, but Paul insisted that God was “in Christ” as he lived and died on our behalf. While only God could make forgiveness possible, Paul believed Christ-followers also have a role to play, because God is “entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (v. 19b).

You may have known people who couldn’t be trusted with a butter knife. How staggering to consider that God has entrusted the message of divine-human rapprochement to us!<sup>u</sup>

### Our position (vv. 20-21)

So it is that Paul comes to the term that has been lurking in the background all along, the Greek word we translate as “ambassador.” The word as it appears in v. 20 is actually a verb: *presbeuomen* means “we are ambassadors.” The noun form of this same word was used to describe Roman legates who provided leadership in bringing newly conquered territories from the transitional status of “Imperial Provinces” to the full integration of “Senatorial Provinces.”

As political ambassadors functioned in the emperor’s behalf to incorporate new territories into the Roman Empire, so Paul saw himself as an ambassador for Christ, laboring to bring more and more persons into the Kingdom of God (v. 20a).

On Christ’s behalf, then, he appealed to the people of Corinth to “be reconciled to God” as persons who had been made righteous through the sacrificial work of Christ (vv. 20b-21).<sup>u</sup>

Paul would have us to understand that every believer is called to be an ambassador for Christ, and that imparts a heavy responsibility to represent him well. Occasionally we are reminded that our country has hundreds of ambassadors and state department officials who represent American inter-

ests in countries throughout the world. It is imperative that such officials understand the importance of being circumspect in their behavior and careful in their speech. They cannot say either more or less than the government they represent wants them to say. They do not speak for themselves, but for the president and the Congress who appointed them.

While ambassadors learn to understand and work within the parameters of local custom, they remember that they are citizens of another land to which they owe primary allegiance.

The old RA hymn begins with the words “I am a stranger here, upon a foreign land . . .” Ambassadors for Christ remember that this earth is not their eternal home, though it is very much their natural and present one. We are, as it were, “adopted ambassadors,” representing a kingdom that we have never seen except as we experience the presence of God in our lives.

It is not inherently easy for us to live as Christ’s representatives, for our human nature knows more of the world at our feet than the world beyond. We might like to know more about eternity, but for now we are limited people who must work within the boundaries of this world of time and space. We never forget, however, that our ideals, our ethics, and our standards of behavior have their source in that world we have yet to see with our eyes. We are ambassadors for Christ, entreating others to be reconciled to God as we are.

Consider what it means to be “entreating others to be reconciled to God as we are.” Spend some time thinking about those three words “as we are.” Do our ways of loving and living reflect that we have been reconciled to God? Can we be effective ambassadors for Christ any other way? **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Isaiah 43:16-21

March 13, 2016

## God's New Thing

**H**ave you ever felt so tired or stressed or misunderstood that you were at the end of the proverbial rope? You may recall a popular poster or Facebook post featuring a kitten hanging on to a rope, with a slogan suggesting that if you reach the end of your rope, you should tie a knot and hang on.

But is that the best we can do? To just hang on and hope we don't fall into whatever dangers lie below? Is there no hope of something better?

### The God who speaks (v. 16a)


In today's text, a prophet called Isaiah spoke to a captive people at the end of their rope. Prophets didn't talk like ordinary people, at least during the Old Testament period. When they believed they were speaking directly for God, known to the Hebrews as Yahweh (translated in all caps as "LORD"), prophets tended to preach in poetic oracles. Boldly, they dared to begin with the words: "Thus says the LORD ...," or to conclude with "... says Yahweh."

In the pointed and challenging oracle we're now considering, Isaiah speaks for the Lord who controls both the sea and the tides of war (vv. 16-17a), but who also understands

### Isaiah 43:19

"I am about to do a new thing; ... I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

the grief of those who are defeated, depressed, feeling as if their fire has gone out, or dwelling on the past (vv. 17a-18).

To those who feel imprisoned or exiled, Isaiah said, God is preparing to do "a new thing," to make a hopeful pathway in the wilderness and to flood the dry desert of their existence with a life-giving river (v. 19). Fearful people could find the security of knowing that God cared for them in the midst of their wilderness, promising them the water of life in such abundance that even the creatures of the desert would offer praise to the divine redeemer. 

### The God of new things (vv. 16b-21)

What's going on in this text? To whom is Isaiah speaking, and why does he want them to look forward instead of backward? And what might any of this have to do with us?

This oracle comes from a part of Isaiah's prophecy that scholars call "Second Isaiah," or "Deutero-Isaiah." The Isaiah for whom the book is named lived and prophesied in Jerusalem during the eighth century, B.C.E.

The kingdom was divided at that time, with most of the tribes living in northern Palestine with their capital in Samaria (Israel), while a smaller kingdom known as Judah occupied the south, with its capital in Jerusalem. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem but directed his preaching to the people of

both kingdoms. His preaching warned the people to turn from their wicked ways and devote themselves to God, lest evil befall them.

The people of the northern kingdom, who seemed particularly prone to idolatry, were the first to taste divine judgment. They fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E., during the first Isaiah's lifetime.

The southern kingdom of Judah also grew more distant from God, although there were periodic attempts at national renewal. Nearly 100 years later, in the latter part of the seventh century, the prophet Jeremiah and the young King Josiah sought to instigate a revival of interest in the worship of Yahweh, but it seemed to have been too little and too late.

In the early years of the sixth century, Judah was overrun by the Babylonians, who had taken power from the Assyrians. After the initial conquest in 597 B.C.E., King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that many of Judah's best leaders and most promising young people be marched into exile. Many more followed in 587 B.C.E., after the puppet king Zedekiah rebelled, leading the Babylonians to sack the city of Jerusalem and destroy the temple.

For a generation or more, the people lived a captive existence in the land of Babylon. They were allowed a limited amount of freedom, but they could not build a temple to Yahweh, return home, or restore Jerusalem and possess the land of the promise that had defined them for so many years. For the faithful, it was a dark and nearly hopeless time.

In the midst of that bleak period,

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God raised up a new prophet to carry on the former Isaiah's work. Whereas Isaiah of Jerusalem had lived among a free people and had spoken of judgment to come, Isaiah of the exile lived among a captive people who had already been judged, and he spoke of a future and a hope.

In Isa. 43:16-21, the prophet addressed captives who were bemoaning their fate, recalling God's great acts of the past but apparently not believing that God still had power to work in the present. They remembered how God once redeemed Israel from their bondage in Egypt by making a way through the Red Sea and by drowning the pursuing Egyptians. But they apparently didn't think God could do anything about their current imprisonment.

The divinely inspired prophet wanted to break the captives out of that cognitive rut. "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old," he said. "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (vv. 18-19a). Isaiah wanted the people to think new thoughts and have new hopes, to know that God still ruled with a love for Israel that had not given up.

"I will do a new thing," God said. And what was that new thing? It was a pledge that God would lead them out of Babylon and back to the Promised Land. God would make a road through the wilderness for them, and make rivers run in the desert to provide the people with water and make possible their crossing. God's blessing to Israel would be such that even the wild animals of the desert, like jackals and ostriches, would give praise to God for blessings bestowed (vv. 19b-21).

The time had come to stop looking backward. "Forget those things that are in the past!" Isaiah said. "Look

forward to something new!"

And God's promise came true – not in the way Isaiah described, for he spoke in metaphors, as prophets often did. A highway did not unroll itself beside streams erupting in the desert to facilitate Israel's return to the land of promise. Instead, an army led by King Cyrus the Persian conquered the Babylonians in 538 B.C.E. Soon after, the new monarch issued a decree allowing the Hebrews to go home. 📖

Many had become comfortable in Babylon and chose to remain there, but waves of Hebrews were once again free to return, rebuild, and restore Jerusalem as the center of worship to Yahweh, the God whose love never ends.

### And more new things ...

But that was not the end of God's ability to bring about new things. Nearly 600 years later, God's people were still falling short of God's expectations. There was no lack of priests and other religious leaders who sought to keep the people on track, but many had become insulated, rule-bound, and focused more on ritual observance than ethical obedience.

In many ways, they were not unlike other peoples: even religious folk can be remarkably self-centered. When John the baptizer arrived on the scene, he told priests and parishioners alike to repent (Matt. 3:1-12).

That was when, so the Gospels declare, God dared to venture into our world through the life and person of Jesus Christ. As God incarnate, Jesus came into our world declaring that he himself was the way of life and the water of life. To his disciples, Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). To the Samaritan woman at the well, he said "those who drink of the water that I give them will

never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:14). 📖

Through Christ's death and resurrection, something absolutely new and marvelous took place. We don't have to live in the old ways, dominated by sin and failure. We can come to know something new: the forgiveness we find through the shed blood of Christ leads us to the refreshing water of the Holy Spirit's presence. God is still the God of things that are alive and new.

The Apostle Paul knew this. In a letter to the Corinthian Christians, he said: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Christians in today's world may know what it is like to feel lost, overwhelmed by bad habits and unable to change. They may feel imprisoned by an unrewarding job, an unappreciative family, or unsupportive friends. They may be tempted to spend the present pouting over the past and thus failing to see a better future.

Isaiah would say to them, as he said to Israel: "Forget the past. Look to the future. Trust in the new thing that God wants to do in you."

There is no promise that God will make our bosses any nicer, our children more cooperative, our spouses more attentive, or our neighbors more caring. But there is always the promise that we are never alone when the Spirit of God lives in us. There is the promise that God will be with us in the midst of our trials and will help us to bring something new and something good even from the darkest days of life. 📖

God wants to bring good changes into our lives, but we must answer the question: will we choose to remain in the fading days of the past, or come along on the road of life? **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Luke 23:1-49

March 20, 2016

## *The Dark Night Before the Dawn*

**E**aster is coming, but we can't get to Sunday without going through Friday. In church tradition, the day that marks Jesus' crucifixion is called "Good Friday," but any goodness about it comes from our perspective. It certainly wasn't a good day for Jesus.

Some things are beyond our comprehension. We don't like to think about dying in any form, and we cannot begin to imagine what it was like for Jesus to experience the pain and the shame of crucifixion.

Have you ever dreamed of dying in a violent fashion? Did you panic? Perhaps you have a small taste of what Jesus faced – but he was not dreaming.

**From Pilate ...  
(vv. 1-5)**

After Jesus' arrest in the garden, he underwent a show trial before the Sanhedrin that lasted through the night. The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 priests, scribes, and elders. It was the supreme governing body of the Jewish people, and the Romans allowed it wide-ranging powers of self-government, though capital punishment was not among them. The ruling council considered Jesus to be a threat to Judaism and pronounced him worthy

**Luke 23:28**

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

of a death sentence, but they had to petition the Romans to confirm the penalty and carry out the execution.

Thus, the assembly rose as a body and dragged Jesus before Pontius Pilate, who ruled Jerusalem as the Roman Procurator of Judea from 26-36 C.E.

Jesus' "offenses" involved purely religious matters, but the Jewish leaders knew they would not succeed in having Jesus put to death unless they could portray him as an insurrectionist against Rome. Thus, they accused him of "perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king" (v. 2).

The first two charges were patently false, for Jesus had steadfastly kept himself apart from nationalist politics, and had even endorsed the payment of taxes to Caesar (20:20-26). The third charge was an exaggeration. In Luke's gospel, Jesus made no explicit claim to be the Messiah, though he did not deny it when asked (22:67-70).

Pilate's attempt to ask Jesus an incriminating question led only to frustration, and he quickly dismissed the charges, saying "I find no basis for an accusation against this man" (v. 4). The chief priests persisted, however, insisting that Jesus had made trouble from Galilee to Jerusalem.

**To Herod ...  
(vv. 6-12)**

Hearing the reference to Galilee, Pilate saw a way to get himself off the hook, for Herod Antipas was the Roman tetrarch in charge of Galilee. Herod just happened to be visiting in Jerusalem, presumably for the Passover, even though he was only nominally Jewish.

Perhaps Pilate had heard that Herod was curious about Jesus and wanted to see him, and he saw this as a way of improving their relations. So, Pilate sent Jesus and his accompanying accusers off for a hearing before Herod (vv. 6-8), an encounter that only Luke records.

Herod had executed John the Baptist, but with mixed emotions. He had heard of Jesus' reputation and become curious, desiring to witness one of the miracles he had heard about (v. 8, cf. 9:7-9). In this he was sorely disappointed, for Jesus did not perform miracles on cue. Not only did Jesus refuse to demonstrate his divinity, but he also declined to answer Herod's lengthy questions, despite the taunting accusations of the chief priests and scribes (vv. 9-10).

Herod found no evidence of guilt, but perversely joined the Jewish leaders in mocking Jesus before sending him back to his new friend, Pilate (vv. 11-12). The royal robe he draped on Jesus' shoulders was a sign of ridicule, not respect. ↓

**And back again ...  
(vv. 13-25)**

By the time Jesus was dragged back into Pilate's court, the Roman ruler had tired of the matter and attempted to end it. He called all the accusers together,

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recounted their charges, and reminded them that neither he nor Herod had found any evidence of criminal activity worthy of death (vv. 13-15). Since Jesus had apparently become something of a nuisance, however, Pilate ordered that he be flogged, and then released (v. 16).

Note that Luke does not portray Pilate as negatively as other writers. Luke's primary interest was to demonstrate that Christ had done nothing worthy of death, and the corroboration of the two Roman rulers confirmed it. The word Luke uses for "flogged" (*paideusas*) literally means "teach him a lesson." It could indicate anything from a stern warning to a beating. Mark is less charitable toward Pilate, stressing that Pilate had Jesus scourged with a cruel whip (Mark 15:15).

The growing crowd of accusers refused to let either Jesus or Pilate off so easily. They shouted down his efforts to have Jesus released, leading Pilate to fall back on one last effort. He offered to set one person free as a goodwill token for Passover, and gave them a choice between Jesus and a noted insurrectionist named Barabbas. The crowd demanded that Barabbas be released and Jesus crucified (vv. 17-25).

Jesus' execution was perhaps the greatest single miscarriage of justice ever allowed. Barabbas (cf. Mark 15:7) was patently guilty of the very crime for which Jesus was accused. Luke has Pilate insist for the third time that Jesus was innocent (v. 22), yet he allowed the true enemy of Rome to go free, and permitted the crucifixion of an innocent man. Indeed, it was not Pilate who set the sentence, but the crowd. Pilate simply went along with their wishes.

Evaluating the mob scene at his door, perhaps he decided that this was the only way to preserve order, and he saw an opportunity to ingratiate himself to the influential Jewish leaders as well.

Luke makes it clear that Pilate was a poor administrator of Roman justice, but he carefully lays the true blame for Jesus' death squarely at the feet of his own people. 

### To Calvary ... (vv. 26-43)

Jesus' sleepless night, constant torment, and final scourging apparently left him too weak to bear his cross beam, as was the custom. Simon of Cyrene, who was pressed into service to carry it (v. 26), would have been a native of North Africa. Mark tells us that he was the father of Rufus and Alexander, who must have been well known to the early church (Mark 15:21).


Jesus' march to the cross was much like a funeral procession before the actual death, except the mourners were not alone, for the jeers of Christ's opponents were added to the loud wails of women who lamented for him (v. 27). Jesus responded sharply: if they really understood what was happening, he said, they should weep for themselves and their children rather than for him. Jerusalem had rejected Jesus, and one day it would be destroyed in apocalyptic violence (vv. 28-31).

The guilt of Jerusalem was magnified as both soldiers and crowd members continued their mocking of Jesus. Jesus prayed for his tormentors even as they nailed him to the cross and hung him up to die, but the unmoved soldiers gambled for his clothing (perhaps the new robe given by Herod), while the mob surrounding the cross taunted him as a would-be king receiving his proper come-uppance (vv. 32-38).


There is great irony in the charge, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" (v. 35). Jesus' accusers did not understand that, precisely because

Jesus was the chosen one of God: he could not save others (including them) and save himself at the same time. Christ had to lose himself in order to save the world.

Modern readers must wonder if we understand this truth any better than the throng surrounding the cross. Are we willing to lose ourselves or give up our time and treasure for the sake of others? Have we caught Jesus' lesson yet?

Only Luke records the story of the penitent thief (Mark suggests that they both joined in mocking Jesus, cf. Mark 15:32b). One of the two criminals crucified along with Jesus seemed to perceive who Jesus was, and asked Jesus to remember him "when you come into your kingdom." In a memorable promise, Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (v. 43). 

### And death (vv. 44-49)

In the final account of Jesus' death, Luke again focuses on the truth that Jesus died as an innocent man, and even records the centurion's testimony to that effect (v. 47). While supernatural signs abounded to herald Jesus' true divinity, Jesus cried loudly in committing his spirit to the Father.  Even in this darkest hour of pain and despair, Jesus knew that the Father was waiting and ready to receive the Son.

Luke concludes with a reminder that "all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place (v. 48), and also that Jesus' followers, including the women from Galilee, had helplessly watched the day's events (v. 49). There was no shortage of witnesses to this defining moment: at once the most horrible and the most wonderful event in the history of humankind. **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Luke 24:1-12

March 27, 2016

*Ladies First*

Is there any happier story than the one Christians celebrate on Easter Sunday? It is such a familiar account, retold multiple times every spring, and yet it remains fresh and inspiring.


Imagine it, if you can. Feel the cool damp of dawn. Hear the chattering of birds still hidden in the shadows of the trees. Remember how they came, in the misty morning moonlight, to the garden with the rock-cut tomb. Into the flickering dawn they came, trembling with grief, these women who loved Jesus so. Mary Magdalene was there, striding purposefully ahead, and Joanna, and another Mary, and yet others behind them.

Laden with fragrant spices they came, myrrh and aloes and ointments made for the dead. Laden with heavy hearts they came to do this one last thing, to extend this one last kindness, to prepare the Lord's body for his everlasting rest.


This they did because they knew Jesus was dead, truly dead—not sleeping, not in a coma, but dead. The Gospel writers take great pains to make sure we understand that Jesus was as dead as any man can be. And, so far as the women knew, so far as the men knew, so far as anyone in Jesus' world knew, death was final.

Luke 24:5

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

So far as they knew, when the stone tomb itself had been worn away by the ravages of time, death would still be young and strong. 

## A morning mystery


When the women arrived, Luke tells us, the massive stone that sealed the tomb was no longer propped in place, but had been rolled to the side, and when they went to investigate, the tomb was empty: the body of Jesus was gone (vv. 1-3).  Gone!

One would think the women who clambered sorrowfully into the dark and chilly tomb would erupt from it with great rejoicing, but not one of the women said "Hallelujah, he is risen just as he told us!" or "I never doubted that he would rise again!"

The story makes it clear that they had not expected a resurrection: their whole purpose in visiting the tomb was not to see if Jesus was still there, but to prepare his body for permanent residence. In Luke's story, not one of the women responded with a happy or hopeful thought. Instead, he says "they were perplexed" (v. 4). The Greek word Luke used can mean "to be at a loss," or "to be bewildered." Had the tomb been robbed? Had the Romans removed Jesus body? It's not surprising that confusion reigned.

And then comes the good news. Then comes the angel into the picture: not one angel in Luke's gospel, but two: grand, shining figures in dazzling

clothes who beamed into view before the women, driving them from perplexity to distress. "They were terrified," Luke says, "and bowed their faces to the ground."

But that was before the angels spoke, before they heard those scintillating, fascinating, captivating words: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again?" (vv. 5-7). 

And as they did remember, they dropped the heavy spices and ran from the garden as quickly as their sandaled feet could carry them. They rushed back to the place where the male disciples were hiding, breathless but bubbling over with the good news. In voices still shaking and quaking, through lips still shivering and quivering, the women told the news: "He's not there! ... He is risen, just as he said! ... We saw angels!" (vv. 9-10). Or so we might imagine.


But the men, the pragmatic, sensible men, the chosen apostolic men, did not believe them. Lost in their own grief and bewilderment, they thought the women had lost their minds. "But these words seemed to them an idle tale," Luke says (v. 11). The word Luke used was in no way complimentary: it describes foolishness or utter nonsense.

Surely the men wanted to believe, but how could they accept the word of women who babbled on about angels and an empty tomb? Surely they were delusional. One of the men, Luke says, wanted to believe so fiercely that he had to see for himself – and so

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Peter ran from the room and sprinted to the tomb. The same Peter who had promised to die for Jesus and then denied him in a single night, the very Peter whose name meant “Rock,” ran through the awakening streets to see if the stone door was indeed ajar, to see what was in the tomb – or not.

When he found the garden deserted, he stooped and looked into the cool, dark chamber, seeing nothing but empty grave clothes lying in a deflated heap. Peter turned and went back to the others, not running, not victorious, not even convinced that Jesus had risen; but puzzling, wondering, “amazed at what had happened” (v. 12). 

“Amazed,” Luke said. The word can mean marveling, wondering, surprised, astonished. When Peter left the tomb, he was stunned. Can you imagine how he was feeling, what he was thinking?

### A dawning truth

Can you imagine a less triumphant way to tell such a marvelous, victorious story? At first the women witnesses were “perplexed.” Then they were “terrified.” They shared their experience only to hear the men accuse them of spreading nonsense. Peter went to check out their story, and could only shake his head, “amazed.”

Even the earliest witnesses had a hard time believing that Jesus had truly risen from the dead. Modern folk may also have a hard time believing. Rational, enlightened people don’t like being perplexed, or terrified, or befuddled by thoughts of Jesus’ resurrection.

But there are good reasons to believe the resurrection is true. Think about it. Could the early church have arisen from nothing – and in the face of persecution – if there had been no resurrection? Can you imagine that Paul and other early believers would

have followed Christ to the point of dying for the sake of a story they had made up?

For another thing, if we were going to invent a story about Jesus’ resurrection, wouldn’t we paint the disciples in a better light? Instead of showing them as perplexed and astonished and doubting, wouldn’t we have them accept the joyous news immediately and celebrate in triumph and sing “Christ the Lord is risen today, a-a-a-lle-lu-u-ia”?

No, if we were making this story up, I suspect we would never portray such forgetful disciples greeting Jesus with such ambivalence. We would portray them as confidently expecting Jesus to rise, then gathering to greet him and to sing hosannas when he walked from the tomb.

But the whole point of the stories as we have them is that even Jesus’ closest friends did not expect him to rise from the dead. They were as shocked as anyone. Jesus had to appear to them over and over just to pound it into their skulls and their spirits that he really had arisen from the dead.

But when Jesus convinced them, they stayed convinced. They came out of hiding and into the light. They changed their speech from shameful denial to courageous confession. The same disciples who were so defeated in Luke 24 became the ones of whom Luke later says “With great power the apostles gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

I don’t know any way to account for that change except this one thing: that the Gospel writers are telling the truth – that Christ did in fact rise from the dead, that he has conquered death, that his reign is ever-living and everlasting.

The earliest Christians certainly did come to believe it. When


Peter preached his first sermon, he proclaimed: “This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32).

What the Apostle Paul described as his “first gospel” was an account of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-8).

When Paul and his companions called for a confession of faith, it was this: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:8-9).

### Modern mornings

In our own day, we remember that first Easter every time we gather on Sunday to worship God. The Jews worshiped on Friday night and Saturday, the Sabbath, but Jesus was raised on “the first day of the week,” and that had such an impact on the early Christians that they began to speak of it as “the Lord’s day” (1 Cor. 16:1; Rev. 1:10), and that is the day they chose to worship the God whose love was revealed through Jesus Christ.

The tradition has continued through the years, and today every Sunday service is a reminder that Jesus was raised on the first day of the week. Every congregation of believers who gather testifies that the resurrection is real, that Jesus lives on. 

Reading the Easter story is more than something we do to remember. The story also demands that we ask ourselves if there is evidence of the Lord’s resurrection in our lives. Christ was not simply raised from death to walk on the earth again: the scriptures insist that Christ, through the Spirit, not only lives, but also lives in us, and the way we live should be an ongoing testimony to the reality of Christ’s life-transforming resurrection.

And that’s a thought worthy of long meditation. **NJF**



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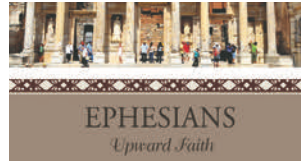
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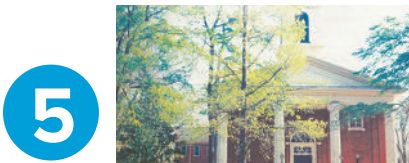
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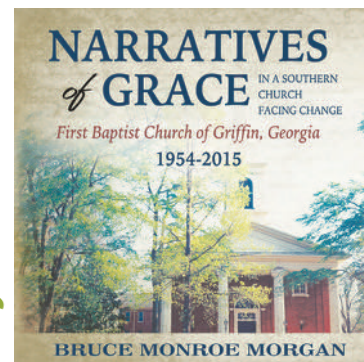
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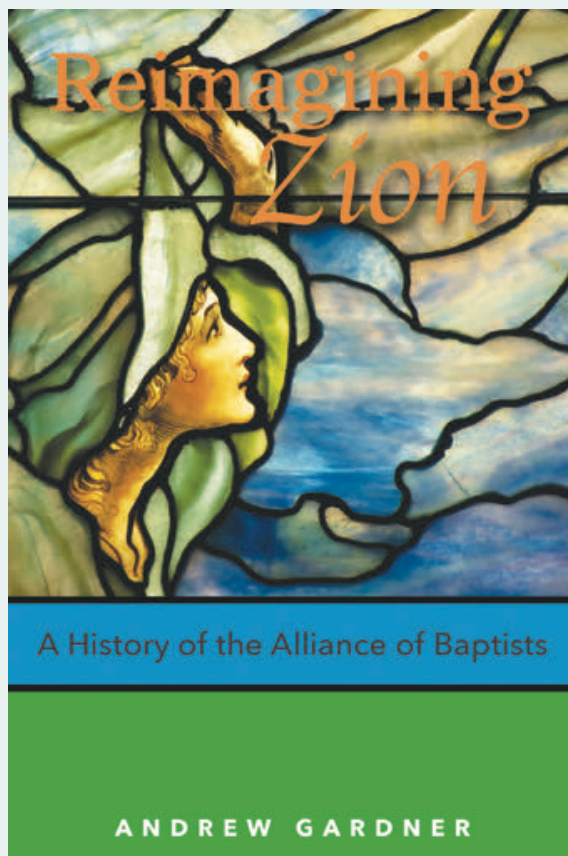


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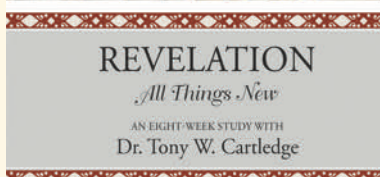
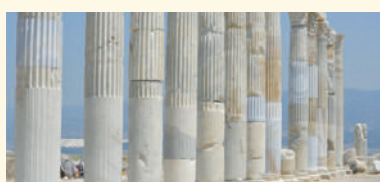
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# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

April 3, 2016

John 20:19-31

## *A Disciple We Can Like*

In the village of Glendale Springs, N.C., just off the Blue Ridge Parkway, sits a tiny Episcopal church called the “Church of the Frescoes.” A marvelous fresco painting covers the entire wall behind the pulpit area of the church, attracting thousands of visitors each year. The scene depicts Jesus and the disciples gathered around a long table for their last Passover meal.

The artist used local people as models for the different disciples, and included the pastor posed in a serving role. The artist’s own face is in the picture, too. Following a longstanding artists’ tradition, Ben Long painted himself as “Doubting Thomas.”

Visitors to the church note that, no matter where they are standing, Thomas seems to be looking directly at them, as if asking “What do *you* think?”

### **Absent Thomas** (vv. 19-23)

Thomas does not appear in the first scene of the story that so shaped his reputation, and is not mentioned at all until the second scene. Unlike the disciples who cloistered themselves in secrecy following Jesus’ crucifixion, Thomas was out and about. Was he out keeping watch, or obtaining provisions, or just needing some time alone? The text does not say.

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### **John 20:29**

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’”

It was in the evening of the first Easter Sunday that John says Jesus suddenly appeared to the dumbfounded disciples, who were quite certain they had locked the doors. Seeing their shock and fear, Jesus offered what their troubled hearts needed most: “Peace to you,” he said.

His followers needed peace: they must have thought they were seeing a ghost. As the angels who predicted Jesus’ birth had offered comforting words to Mary and Joseph, as angels at the tomb had told the women to fear not, so Jesus counseled peace.

Knowing that the disciples would be confused and questioning, Jesus voluntarily showed them the marks in his hands and feet (v. 20). It was important for them to understand that, despite the apparent differences in Jesus’ appearance (after his *disappearance!*), he was not just some spectral visitor, but the same person they had loved and followed along the dusty roads of Galilee. But, there was also something remarkably different. Jesus was helping his disciples to trust his spiritual presence by showing them a physical connection.

The faith of the early church is clearly reflected in the way this story was remembered and related, for the author immediately has Jesus turn to the church’s mission, and to the empowering spirit. As John tells it, Jesus said “As

the father has sent me, so send I you” (v. 21). Other early traditions preserved Christ’s commission in different ways, but with the same intent (compare Matt. 28:19-20, Acts 1:8).

As Christ was related to the Father, so Christians were related to Christ. As Christ had come into the world to accomplish his unique mission, so his followers were to venture forth in pursuit of their own calling to spread the good news of the kingdom of God. The death and resurrection of Jesus had opened wide the kingdom’s doors: to his followers lay the task of leading others to find the way.

According to John, the Holy Spirit came and rested upon Jesus at the beginning of his ministry (1:32-33), and Jesus had promised to bless his followers with the Spirit (14:15-31). Now, Jesus “breathed on them” and said “Receive the Holy Spirit” (v. 22).

The Spirit’s presence and leadership would be necessary for the church to carry out its role of mediating both forgiveness and judgment to the world (v. 23; compare Matt 16:19, 18:18).

The idea that Christians have the authority to forgive – or to withhold forgiveness – is a bit frightening. Yet, Christ clearly empowered the church to practice grace in a hard and demanding world. The same command in Matthew is followed by a rather extensive discourse on the supremacy of forgiveness over judgment (Matt. 18:21-35).

### **Doubting Thomas** (vv. 24-25)

The text says nothing about how Jesus departed from the bewildered disciples on that first Easter evening: readers


often assume that he vanished as suddenly as he had appeared (compare Luke 24:31). In any case, v. 24 moves us to a time when Jesus has left the scene and Thomas enters.

A study of Thomas' intriguing character must begin with his name. "Thomas" was not really a proper name, but a Hebrew or Aramaic nickname, meaning "the twin." "Didymus" is simply a Greek version of the same name. Scholars have scratched their collective heads in wondering who Thomas' twin was, but without result.

Thomas was a devoted and occasionally outspoken disciple. When Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick, the religious authorities were already seeking to do him harm (John 10:31).

It would be dangerous for Jesus and his followers to leave the relative safety of their trans-Jordanian camp and travel to Lazarus' home in Bethany, only two miles from Jerusalem. But, when Jesus insisted on going, Thomas declared his willingness to join him, even if it meant death (John 11:6).

Thomas' desire to remain close to Jesus is also reflected in John 14. During the Passover meal, Jesus spoke of his coming death in terms of going to the Father's house to prepare a place for his followers, adding "you know the way where I am going" (vv. 1-4).

All of the disciples must have been confused, but it was Thomas who spoke up: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (v. 5). Jesus responded with the familiar but enigmatic "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (v. 6). 

Perhaps these vignettes are intended to suggest the depth of Thomas' grief when Jesus was indeed

taken away from him. When he returned to join the others after Jesus' appearance, the news seemed too good to be true. Surely Thomas *wanted* to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, but his grief was too deep for facile acceptance of someone else's word. The others claimed to have seen the Lord, including wounded hands and side. Thomas refused to believe Jesus was truly risen until he could see and touch Jesus' deadly scars for himself.

Have you ever tried to put yourself in Thomas' sandals? What would it have taken to convince you that Jesus had truly risen from the dead?

### Believing Thomas (vv. 26-31)

A week later, according to John, Jesus again appeared among his disciples without bothering to open the door that they kept firmly closed. This time Thomas was present, and Jesus sought to open the door of faith that remained closed in Thomas' heart.

We can only begin to imagine the quiver in Thomas' stomach when Jesus called his name and challenged him to touch his hands and side (vv. 26-27). When he had done so, Thomas said the only thing he *could* say: "My Lord, and my God!" Thomas acknowledged that Jesus was not only *alive*, but also *divine*, and worthy of worship.

Thomas' presence in scripture is of immense value to the church, for we can identify with his struggling honesty as he sought to believe something far too good to be true. Most thoughtful Christians have periods of doubt as they travel life's journey. Sometimes, like Thomas, our questions are raised by things that seem *too good to be true*: Is there really a loving God behind this great universe, and if so, does God really care about individuals like me?

On the one hand, isn't it just too incredible to think that the eternal God would choose to enter the world in human form and experience death in our behalf? On the other hand, if the gospel message were not too good to be true, it would hardly be good enough to save us. As Jesus challenged Thomas, so he challenges us to believe, even though we have not seen (John 20:29).

John concludes chapter 20 by moving beyond doubting Thomas to confront doubting readers. Jesus did and said much that was not recorded, John wrote, but the things in his gospel were written "so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (v. 31).

Doubt comes easy to us. We may doubt God's presence when something happens that seems too bad for a real God to allow. But, if we did not question our faith in the midst of tragedy, we wouldn't be thinking at all.

When we doubt God's presence because the innocent suffer, we would do well to remember the truly innocent one who suffered on Calvary for our sakes. By the power and presence of Christ, we may also learn to accept tragedy, to absorb it, and to overcome it with grace.

When we are tempted to cry that life is not fair, we can remember that the great Lord of the universe has nail prints in his hands and a wound in his side that goes all the way to the heart.

Doubt is a natural part of life, and *it is the growing edge of faith*. An unquestioned faith is an untested faith, and much less likely to hold up in times of trial. The strongest Christians are those who have worked through their doubts to the point of experiencing Christ's benison: "Blessed are those who do not see, and yet believe." **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

April 10, 2016

John 21:1-19

## One Shepherd to Another

**H**ave you noticed that the call of God often seems clearer or stronger when we are in a retreat setting? Somehow, when we're sitting by a lake, or on the seashore, or in a quiet wooded glen, we may feel as if God is speaking directly to us.

There is a reason for this. For many of us, it is only in the quiet of such sylvan settings that we stop long enough – or are quiet long enough – to hear God speak.

Peter may have been in something of a retreat mode when Jesus came to him, following the resurrection, and talked to him about what he should do with the rest of his life. Let's recall the story.

### A story about fish (vv. 1-14)

We know little about interactions between Jesus and the disciples during the short period in which Jesus appeared on earth after his crucifixion and resurrection. After the story of how Jesus appeared to the 11 remaining disciples, featuring “doubting” Thomas, the Fourth Gospel recounts another encounter between Jesus and seven of the disciples. This time the location is by the Sea of Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee), and the focus is clearly on Peter.

John 21:15 –

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’”

Perhaps at a loss for what to do in those uncertain days, Peter had announced that he was leaving Jerusalem for Galilee, where Jesus had called him from a life of fishing near his home in Capernaum. Had Peter decided to return to his old job, or were he and the others in need of food? Or, was he hoping to see Jesus again? John's gospel does not mention it, but both Mark 14:28 and Matt. 16:7 say the disciples were told that Jesus was going to Galilee. 📖

“I'm going fishing,” Peter said, and his natural leadership ability swayed some of the others to join him (v. 3). 📖 For a while, they may have wished they had remained in Jerusalem: the men spent the entire night rowing from place to place, then casting their nets and drawing them back in, but had nothing to show for hours of exhausting, back-breaking labor.

As they came toward shore in the early dawn mist, Jesus appeared and called to the men, but from 100 yards away (v. 8), they did not recognize him. Jesus asked if they had caught anything, then told them to cast their nets in a different place. Surprisingly, the men did not grumble: perhaps they thought it was a local elder who knew of a productive spot over a brush pile. In any case, they flung the net wide and

pulled the cinch, immediately feeling the tug of a massive catch.

With that, “the disciple Jesus loved” – presumably John – recognized that the stranger must be Jesus. He elbowed Peter, saying “It is the Lord!” Peter did not hesitate, but threw on his tunic and dove into the water, swimming ashore while the remaining six men struggled to bring the boat and their straining haul of fish in to shore. 📖

Dragging the boat, the fish, and their haggard bodies onto the rocky shoreline, the disciples saw that Jesus had already prepared a campfire breakfast of fish and bread. He invited them to add some of their newly caught fish to the coals. In a scene reminiscent of both the feeding of the multitudes (John 6:1-14) and the last supper, Jesus distributed bread and fish, and they sat on the shore together, tearing at fresh bread and grilled tilapia while drying out in the warming sun (vv. 9-14). 📖

### A talk about sheep (vv. 15-19)

At this point, all of the disciples but Peter drop out of the story. Had they fallen asleep with full bellies and exhausted bodies? Were they busy counting and cleaning fish? We don't know, for the author now concerns himself only with Jesus and the brash disciple who had vowed never to deny him – before doing so three times.

Jesus and Peter had unfinished business going back to Peter's denial, and Jesus addressed him with such solemnity that he called him by his legal name: “*Simon, son of John!*” That got Peter's attention. Then he asked an unexpected question: “Do you love me

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more than these?”

We can almost hear Peter’s mind working. The wary disciple might have noticed the emphasis Jesus put on the word “love” (John translated it with the Greek word *agapaō*, often used to describe Jesus’ unconditional love). “Do you love me more than these?”

Was Jesus asking if Peter loved him more than the other disciples loved him, or did he want to know if Peter loved him more than he loved his fishing boats or his friends? We don’t know. Peter wanted to profess his love, but he also knew his weaknesses. He had proclaimed eternal loyalty to Jesus once before, but later pretended that he didn’t know him. Peter was probably more careful with his words after that.

So, perhaps he *wanted* to say “Yes, Lord, I love you faithfully and unconditionally.” But maybe he didn’t have that much confidence in his own love. So he answered “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Here John uses the Greek verb *phileō*, which tends to be less intense than *agapaō*. In any case, Jesus accepted what Peter was willing to give, and he gave something in return: he gave a command. “Feed my lambs” (v. 15).

We can only imagine Peter’s response. “What? Feed my lambs? Jesus never owned a lamb in his life!”

While Peter sat there with question marks all over his face, Jesus looked deeply into his puzzled eyes and repeated the question. “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?”


Peter must have flinched. He knew that the Lord had reason to doubt his love. Still, it hurt to hear him ask the second time. But Peter responded as he had before. “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Again, those two different words for love. Jesus asks for unconditional love. Peter promises something less.


And Jesus repeated his command, in a slightly different form: “Look after my sheep” (v. 16).

As Peter pondered the difference between sheep and lambs, perhaps wondering if this was a different command and what it meant, Jesus spoke again – still solemn, still formal. “Simon, son of John, *do* you love me?” Here Jesus switched to Peter’s less intensive word for love.

We can imagine a tearful Peter recognizing what Jesus had done. When the struggling disciple could not come up to Jesus’ standard of unconditional love, Jesus came down to where Peter was, and challenged him there, as well.

We suspect Peter would also have noticed that Jesus had asked him three times to affirm his love – once for each of the times he had denied him. The crusty fisherman-turned-disciple was chagrined but undaunted: “Lord, you know everything. You *know* that I love you.”

For the third time Jesus said simply, “Feed my sheep” (v. 17). 

Then Jesus gave to the worried disciple a special gift, a word of encouragement and prophecy, an assurance that Peter would indeed prove to be faithful, even to death. A younger Peter had been prone to stubbornly follow his own way, but “When you grow old,” Jesus said, “you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will clothe you, and lead you where you do not wish to go.” The author explains that Jesus was predicting the manner of Peter’s death. He would learn to obey God’s will, and not his own (vv. 18-19a). 

This touching story suggests that for every failure, there is the opportunity for forgiveness. Three times Peter had denied Christ, and three times Jesus offered him the chance to profess

his love and be accepted anew. Peter accepted the offer. In later years, a letter attributed to Peter declares: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by his wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Pet. 2:24-25).

Each of us must confront the ways in which we, like Peter, have denied Christ. We can deny Jesus through words we say (or don’t say), and through the things we do (or don’t do). We don’t always show convincing evidence that Christ lives in us.

If someone challenged us to prove we are Christians, how would we respond? Would we display our baptismal certificate or picture in the church directory? Would that be convincing?

All of us fail to be everything that Christ wants us to be, but the Lord does not give up on us. Jesus reached out to Peter where he was – in all of his doubts and self-recriminations, in all of his uncertainties about himself and his own commitment. Jesus accepted Peter, and he symbolized that acceptance by giving Peter a task, showing Peter the way, and calling him to follow (v. 19b).

While the focus is on Peter, this extended story contains two apt metaphors that speak to us all: Christ-followers are called to catch fish and to tend sheep. When Jesus first called Peter and Andrew, James and John, he challenged them to become fishers of men (Mark 1:17, Matt. 4:19). Now, he challenges Peter to a more pastoral role: to care for the people Jesus loves.

Whether in retreat settings or Sunday school rooms, in our work places or on the street, Jesus’ challenge still rings: “Do you love me? Then feed my sheep – follow me!” **NJF**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

John 10:22-30

April 17, 2016

## Ask the Sheep

**O**n a dark night in August of 1971, after an eye-opening summer mission experience in Indonesia, I boarded a plane from Jakarta to Bombay (now Mumbai).

During a two-hour layover in Bangkok, I wandered among the various airport shops before pausing at an intriguing kiosk to purchase a belt reportedly made from cobra skin. The young woman behind the counter giggled self-consciously as I paid for the belt. Finally, she covered her mouth and tittered: “Tee hee – you Glen Campbell!”

Campbell’s music was very popular in the Far East during the early 1970s, and at the time I wore contact lenses, had a similar hairstyle, and played guitar. I smiled at the young lady, sang the first line of “By the time I get to Phoenix,” and returned to the plane, leaving her wondering if I was the real deal.

Have you ever seen someone that you thought might be a celebrity, but you weren’t sure, and you were afraid to ask? Those who pressed Jesus in today’s text were not at all shy about asking if he might be more than an ordinary man. Could he really be the Messiah?

“Tell us!”  
(vv. 22-24)

Much of John’s gospel is built around

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John 10:27-28 –

“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.”

the context of the Jewish festivals of worship such as Passover and Tabernacles. The context of today’s text is the “Feast of Dedication.” This festival, also called “Hanukkah,” was held in the Jewish month of Chislev (2 Macc. 1:9), roughly equivalent to mid-November to mid-December on the Roman calendar. The Feast of Dedication celebrated a series of victories by the Maccabees, a heroic family who had spearheaded a drive for Jewish independence in the second century B.C.E.

Prior to the Maccabean uprising, Israel had been ruled by the notorious Antiochus Epiphanes, whose Syrian (or “Seleucid”) army wrought horrible deprivations upon the Jewish people. According to the Books of the Maccabees, the cruel ruler outlawed the worship of Yahweh, and from 167-164 B.C.E. he profaned the temple in Jerusalem by erecting a pagan image on the altar and slaughtering pigs there (1 Macc. 1:54, 2 Macc. 6:1-7). This is probably what was referred to by the “abomination of desolation” spoken of in Dan. 9:27 and Matt. 24:15.

Syrian rule came to an end when Judah the son of Mattathias, a Jewish priest, led a successful revolt. Afterward, the Jews cleansed the temple and rebuilt the altar. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of Chislev, three years after its desecration, they rededicated the restored temple (1 Macc. 4:41-61). The celebration

lasted for eight days. Today’s Hanukkah festivities continue to commemorate that “Feast of Dedication.”

During that joyous season, a group of Jewish leaders confronted Jesus as he was walking inside a section of the temple known as “Solomon’s Porch” or “Solomon’s Colonnade,” a row of impressive columns that supported a roof. A nice element of local color is evident: the colonnade was open on the inside toward the temple, but closed on the outside. It was on the east side of the temple, one of the few places that provided shelter from the biting east wind that could sweep across the desert in winter. In cold weather, it was the natural place to be.

Those who confronted Jesus asked a question that the Synoptic Gospels put only in the mouth of the high priest (e.g., Luke 22:67), but which John’s gospel credits to “the Jews” in general. They had never seen anyone act as Jesus did, healing the sick and teaching with authority. Yet, Jesus would not publicly claim the title of Messiah. Thus, “the Jews gathered around him” and confronted Jesus with the question: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly” (v. 24). The Greek term “Christ” is equivalent to the Hebrew word “Messiah” — both mean “anointed.”

The leaders of Israel appear to have thought Jesus was playing games or intentionally fostering uncertainty, and they wanted to end it. If he indeed claimed to be the Messiah, they wanted him to admit it, so they could test his claim and deal with him one way or the other. The phrase translated “keep us in suspense” is a Greek idiom that

literally means “take up our life,” and sometimes carried the connotation of annoying or provoking, as in “wasting our time.”

We can understand the Jewish leaders’ concern. Jesus worked miracles and taught with authority, characteristics one would expect in the long-awaited Messiah. But, one would not expect the Messiah to couch his ministry in such mystery. They wanted a clear answer. Sometimes we also may wish for some sort of sign to prove that God exists, but God is not in the “signs on demand” business: faith is required.

**“I told you!”  
(vv. 25-26)**


Jesus’ examiners asked for a straight answer as to whether he was the Messiah, but his answer was not the “yes” or “no” they had requested. “I did tell you,” Jesus said, “but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep” (vv. 25-26). Jesus insisted that it was not necessary for him to make a public claim to being the Messiah — did not the miraculous deeds that he did in God’s name speak for him?

In Matthew’s gospel, John the Baptist had also sent messengers to ask the same question, and Jesus had given a similar answer, pointing to his mighty works (Matt. 11:2-6). Did not his awesome abilities say all that needed to be said?

In effect, then, Jesus refused to deny his role as the Messiah, but also refused to apply the epithet to himself. Regarding Jesus as the messiah is not a matter of public declaration, but of private belief. Those who questioned Jesus did not believe, he said, because they did not belong to him — they were not his sheep.

The Old Testament used shepherd

language when referring to the Davidic king as well as to God. Related readings were popular during the feast of Dedication, so it was only natural for Jesus to use the shepherd metaphor, which he had already employed extensively just prior to the confrontation in the temple (vv. 1-21). Jesus had spoken in parables of the sheep-gate and the shepherd (vv. 7-10, 11-16). Now he had more to say about the sheep themselves.

The fourth century church father John Chrysostom argued that those who don’t follow Jesus do not refuse to do so because he is not the shepherd, but because they are not sheep. They do not believe Jesus because they do not belong to him. They are not of his flock. 

Chrysostom’s argument sounds a bit like the old question of which came first: the chicken or the egg? Do non-Christians fail to believe because they don’t belong, or do they not belong because they don’t believe? What do *you* think?

**“I hold you”  
(vv. 28-30)**

Jesus went on to speak plainly about the relationship between himself and his followers, continuing to use the metaphor of a shepherd and his sheep: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (vv. 27-28).

William Hull once pointed to a beautiful balance described in v. 27: the sheep *hear* the shepherd’s voice (i.e., they are open to the gospel message), and they learn that Jesus already *knows* them. Convinced of Christ’s care, they *follow* him in a relationship of trust. As they follow, Jesus *gives* to them eternal life, which no one can destroy. Thus, Jesus describes the dynamics of disciple-

ship with a series of effective verbs: the sheep *hear* and *follow*, while the shepherd *knows* and *gives*. “We listen but he speaks; we ask but he knows; we follow but he leads; we receive but he gives” (William E. Hull, “John,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9 [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970], 308).

With vv. 29-30, Jesus amplifies his teaching while also indirectly addressing the issue of messiahship: “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” Those who trust in Christ are secure because their shepherd protects them, and they can trust the shepherd because he is one with God the Father. To trust in Jesus is to trust in God.

John’s intent is not so much to reflect on metaphysical or mystical aspects of the relationship between the Father and the Son as it is to emphasize the effective line of defense that protects Jesus’ sheep. In this regard, “the Father” and “the Son” are of one mind and purpose, loving and caring for the sheep.

We should be careful, when reading this promise, that we do not presume too much. Jesus does not promise that the sheep will never be harmed or face difficult trials. He does not promise that they will not be cold or hungry or misunderstood. What he promises is that he will give to them eternal life, and that no one can snatch them out of the Father’s hand. Jesus was speaking of eternal security, not temporal ease. Yet, that very hope gives us strength to face hard days, as Paul likewise testified: neither death, nor life, nor any power in heaven or earth can separate us from the abiding love of God (Rom. 8:38-39).

Sometimes it’s good to be a sheep. **NFJ**



# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

April 24, 2016

John 13:31-35

## *A Serious Summary*

**H**ave you ever noticed that the popular music you listened to in your teenage years always seems superior to anything you've heard since?

For people my age, no artists will ever compare to groups such as the Beatles, the Four Tops, or the Supremes. For me, no contemporary singer-songwriter can hold a candle to Don McLean, James Taylor, or Carole King. Readers who were teens in other decades will have differing opinions about when music was the best it will ever be.

Scientific studies have shown that the music we hear as our brains develop from age 12 to 22 becomes hardwired in particularly rewarding neuronal pathways. It is intertwined so tightly with our social, cognitive, and identity development that it becomes the soundtrack of our lives. 📌

That's why I'm glad to have come of age at a time when Christian youth were singing an old folk song that began like this: "Love, love, love, love. The gospel in one word is love. Love thy neighbor as thy brother. Love, love, love." 📌 I sang "Love Lifted Me" as a child and "I Love You, Lord" as an adult, but the one that sticks is the one we sang at every youth retreat I ever attended or led:

**John 13:34 –**

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

"Love, love, love."

Maybe that's one reason why John 13:31-35 has always been a favorite text for me. Maybe it's because Jesus' message there is so simple and straightforward. Let's take a closer look.

### *A new glory (vv. 31-32)*

The Gospel of John, like those attributed to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, was shaped within the life and experience of the early church. It was the last of the Gospels to be written, and it speaks clearly to the needs of people who were struggling to come to grips with who Jesus was and how they were to follow him. The Fourth Gospel, more than any of the others, emphasizes Jesus' teaching about the importance of learning to love like Jesus if we expect to live like Jesus.

The setting of today's text is in Jerusalem, on the night of Jesus' arrest. It was after the poignant meal we often call "the Lord's Supper," but before Jesus and his disciples left the upper room and headed for Gethsemane. Just prior to v. 31, Judas had left the room, a dark harbinger of things to come.

In telling the same story, the Synoptic Gospels move quickly from the supper to the garden, but the author of John's gospel includes a lengthy farewell discourse and intercessory prayer (13:32-17:26) that began with

Jesus explaining that the world as the disciples knew it was about to change: he would be leaving, and they would have to learn to get along without him.

In a confusing mixture of tenses, Jesus told his closest followers: "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him" (v. 31). He then added: "If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once" (v. 32). What are we to make of this shift from past to future tense?

A likely solution is to recognize that Judas' departure to reconnoiter with those who would arrest Jesus had set in motion the crucifixion story through which both the Son and the Father would be glorified. Once Judas left, the die had been cast: there was no going back. The divine story would push inexorably toward its climax.

Because the passion story had begun its certain march, Jesus could speak of his glorification in the past tense. Because it had not yet reached its end, elements of glory remained in the future. 📌

### *A new commandment (vv. 33-35)*

The disciples needed to understand that Jesus as they had known him would soon be gone. "I am with you only a little longer," Jesus told them, and "Where I am going, you cannot come" (v. 33). 📌 Jesus had said similar things in conversation with Jewish leaders, but that was in a different context. He did not tell the disciples that they could not find him, or that they would die in their sins, as he had told the Jews who

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had questioned him (7:34, 8:21). He went on to tell Peter that though he could not follow then, he would come later (13:36), and he explained to all that he would prepare a place for them in the Father's house (14:2-3).

In the meantime, the disciples would have work to do. Jesus couched that work in the form of "a new commandment," saying "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (v. 34). Jesus might appear to be absent, but his presence would continue to be seen in the love of his followers: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (v. 35).

Why did Jesus call this commandment "new"? The rabbis had long cited Deut. 6:4 and Lev. 19:18 as the greatest of the commandments. The first called on the faithful to love God with all of their being. The second was to love their neighbors as themselves. Jesus had agreed that those two commands summed up the law and the prophets, according to Mark 12:28-31.

What was so new about Jesus' command in v. 34? It's that qualifying line: "*Just as I have loved you.*" Lev. 19:18 called for those who love God to love their neighbors as they loved themselves. But here, Jesus said we are not to measure our love for others by how much we love ourselves, but by how much he loved us. That's another thing altogether.

The kind of love that Jesus showed – a self-sacrificing love that led him to forsake the security of heaven for a hard life and a hard death on earth – that's something different. To call for his followers to demonstrate *that* kind of love really was something new. 

### A verb, not a feeling

When Jesus stood (or sat) before his disciples on that dark night and tried to

prepare them for life without him being around to hold their hand and be their conscience, he could have given them a long string of instructions, but instead, he left them this one commandment: "Just as I have loved you, love one another."

That's the bottom line. That's how we are to live as Christians, and how others will know we are Christians. The Apostle Paul said much the same thing in 1 Corinthians 13. We can make all kind of noise and sing with the voice of angels. We can build an impressive worship center. We can have a worldwide TV show and wear three "WWJD" bracelets and keep an electric candle burning in our window every night, but if we don't love like Jesus did, we're just blowing smoke and making noise.

If that is the case, then it's clearly important that we learn something about loving people. The first thing to learn is that we can't just love others when we feel like it or when they appear to be lovable. Jesus did not go to the cross because he was overcome with gushy feelings for sinful and spiteful people. He went to the cross because it had to be done.

Parents don't take loving care of their children or of each other because they are constantly filled with warm and mushy feelings. The truth is, sometimes what we feel toward our children or spouse is anger or resentment or frustration or disappointment or even hopelessness. But people who know what love is keep right on caring and keep right on loving and keep right on doing good even when their love is rejected or unappreciated.


Do you remember the movie *Forrest Gump*? Forrest knew that truth. "I am not a smart man," he told Jenny, his childhood sweetheart, "but I know what love is." And he did.

There was never a moment in that memorable movie when Forrest was not showing faithful love to his mama, or to his buddy Bubba, or to Jenny, or to his son.

We're all aware that it isn't always easy to love people. Indeed, Jesus knows that better than any of us. Those who nailed him to the cross, and those who ordered them to do it, hardly inspired feelings of love and forgiveness. Sometimes we may find it hard to love, too.

A group of Americans once went to visit Mother Theresa at one of the homes in Calcutta where she and the nuns who worked with her gave tender care to the sickest of the sick, to people who had nowhere else to turn. In many cases, the most they could accomplish was to help someone die with dignity with a clean body in a clean bed, but they persevered.

In a book of prayers and meditations called *A Gift for God*, Mother Theresa recalled what happened when the tourists left.

"Before leaving, they begged me: 'Tell us something that will help us to live our lives better.' And I said: 'Smile at each other; smile at your wife, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at each other – it doesn't matter who it is – and that will help you to grow up in greater love for each other.' And then one of them asked me: 'Are you married?' and I said 'Yes, and I find it difficult sometimes to smile at Jesus.' And it is true, Jesus can be very demanding also, and it is at those times when he is so demanding that to give him a big smile is very beautiful." 

We live in a troubled world filled with people who can also be demanding, and we serve a God who calls us to love them. Can we begin by smiling at all we meet? Can we *love* one another? **NFJ**

# Ceremonial faith is not enough

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

The U.S. is beset with what I'll call "ceremonial Christianity." Before identifying and addressing that concern, a little background as to how I reached that term and concept might be helpful.

Separation of church and state has gotten a bad rap in recent years. It is this ingenious American concept that allows faith to flourish freely and protects the rights of religious minorities.

Those who fail to appreciate religious freedom (based largely on misinformation) or seek some form of government preference for their religion over others — if not a downright dangerous theocracy — often point to formal government references to the divine such as the inscription of "In God We Trust" on currency.

Pulling in a few quotes from the nation's early leaders — with words such as "Sovereign" and "Divine" and "Almighty" — adds to their case for a national religion.

However, just a little digging will reveal that nonspecific national references to "God" have been upheld as constitutional based on the legal conclusion that they are merely "ceremonial deism." That is, these godly references and slogans are vague and nominal.

Perhaps that appeases some people who want a nod toward God from their government. My own faith orientation is not toward a nondescript, vague deity, however, but toward the God revealed most fully in Jesus Christ.

And all that I ask of my government is equal freedom to believe and worship in my own specific ways — without preference or prevention. Thank God (specific or ceremonial), the First Amendment guarantees such freedom.

Popular opinion suggests that a proposal such as the First Amendment



would not garner much support today among many Christians — although early Baptists were the strongest advocates of religious liberty for all.

Why the change in perspective for many evangelical Christians today? There are a few reasons.

Once-persecuted minorities — Baptists, Methodists, Quakers and other much-maligned Christian groups — have grown to hold considerable political and economic power. Concern for persecuted minorities now seems of little interest to many people compared to protecting their own positions of influence.

Then there is the fear of growing religious diversity. Other faith traditions are viewed as a threat to cultural dominance. And fear, as well noted, is the tool used by many preachers and politicians to advance their own causes.

Yet there is another factor to consider, if we are honest: There is a lot of "ceremonial Christianity" taking place.

It is the civil religion with which many

American evangelicals are most comfortable — blending national ideals with just enough of Jesus to call it Christianity.

Like ceremonial deism, however, ceremonial Christianity is not enough.

We should be less concerned about how our particular faith reinforces our personal preferences or plays out well in the public arena and more concerned about whether we are actually following the God revealed in Jesus Christ, regardless of the changes and challenges to be faced.

It is staggering what so-called "Christian values" mean to many American evangelicals. They simply do not reflect what Jesus deemed important.

"Ceremonial Christianity" allows for baptizing national allegiance and political ideologies in the language of faith — as if simply calling something "Christian" gives it the endorsement of Jesus.

Most remarkable is how much of Jesus' life and teachings get ignored by those who often claim a high allegiance to Christian scriptures.

The "ceremonial Christianity" within American evangelicalism is the simple wrapping of faith-filled words around a package of comfortable conclusions. Such mislabeling is confusing and misleading.

Politicians play ceremonial Christians like snare drums — invoking God's endorsement of whatever sounds soothing to fearful ears.

Someone has rightly said that the difference between a conservative and a liberal Christian is which scriptures they ignore. Indeed no one is pure in motive and wholly faithful in grasping and fulfilling the Way of Christ.

Yet that confession is the best starting place for our humble attempts to be Christian. In doing so, we might actually dare to move from a ceremonial faith of our own creation to the daily challenges of following Jesus. [NFJ](#)

# Beware the tube of demons

BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE

Recently the Internet was abuzz with the mind-boggling footage of two prosperity preachers defending their need to have private jets.

In a Dec. 29, 2015 episode of Kenneth Copeland's *Believers' Voice of Victory* talk show, he and guest Jesse Duplantis began with the relatively reasonable argument that it would be difficult for a much-in-demand speaker to fly commercial to speaking gigs in different cities several days in a row — though they elevated “difficult” to “impossible.”

Copeland claimed to be “very conservative” in predicting he would have to stop 75-90 percent of what he does if he had to fly on commercial airlines.

The pair's primary arguments went in other directions, however. The conversation began when Duplantis tried to introduce a reading of Amos 6:1 — ironically, a critique of smug and wealthy religionists “who are at ease in Zion” — with a story about how God spoke to him directly about spiritual stagnation as he was flying back from a crusade, leading him to unbuckle his seat belt and stand up to address God.

Copeland interrupted: “You couldn't have done that on an airline,” apparently implying that one cannot converse with God quietly, in the presence of a seat-mate, or without standing up and moving around. Citing Oral Roberts' position, Copeland said God-given private planes should be recognized as a sanctuary that protects the “anointing” of the evangelist.

“This is so important,” Copeland said, referencing himself, Duplantis and fellow prosperity preachers Keith Moore and Creflo Dollar by name: “The world is in such a shape, we can't get there without this. We've got to have it.”

Just wondering: Does the unshapely world's future hang on the ability of

pandering evangelists to convince larger numbers of people that God also wants to make them rich? Would they really be flying to all those rallies if there were no payoff from gullible audiences who fill the coffers of their “ministries”?

The most disturbing aspect of the pair's conversation is an apparent belief that preachers of their stature are on such a spiritual level that they need to speak only to God and not be bothered with actual people.

Famous folk like them couldn't fly commercial, Copeland said dismissively, because people would be coming up and asking them “to pray for 'em and all that,” which would “agitate the spiritual.”

“In this dope-filled world,” Copeland said (to the enthusiastic agreement of Duplantis), boarding a commercial airline is “to get on a long tube with a bunch of demons, and it's deadly.”

“We got a dying world around us,” Copeland added. “We got a dying nation, and we can't even get there on no airline.”

“That's right,” agreed Duplantis.

Is that right? Are the *hoi polloi* who fly commercial inhabited by demons, too dangerous or too lost for self-styled spiritual giants to encounter?



Does this dying world depend on preachers of a perverted gospel who can't be bothered by actual people as they jet around, talking only to God and to faceless crowds?

Is there really a wealthy Nigerian prince who wants to share his millions with us, if only we'll send a few thousand dollars in legal fees?

C.S. Lewis' Screwtape and his cronies must be chuckling into their mile-high martinis. **NFJ**

—Reblog selections come from the editors' ongoing blogs at [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org).

## LAST CALL!

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# Turning to Textweek

Preachers find, share resources for lectionary-based preaching

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

**M**any ministers have textweek.com bookmarked on their computers — at least those ministers (including a growing number of Baptists) whose preaching or teaching follows the three-year cycle of scripture texts as designated by the Revised Common Lectionary.

“This is a resource I use as a supplement to my research in commentaries and other traditional print resources that I have on the shelves in my study,” said Stephen Cook, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn. “I find it to be a very accessible resource for a wide cross-section of materials.”

Cook said he is impressed with the “enormous amount of information” for each Sunday’s scripture readings.

“What I most often utilize are the site’s links to articles from various academic journals, homiletics professors and other local congregational ministers,” he added.

Worship planners, said Cook, have access to prayers and litanies that can add “new perspectives and fresh voices” to worship services — especially during seasons of the Christian year such as Advent and Lent.

“I will often explore the offerings they provide from different denominational backgrounds to add depth and perspective to these seasons with which Baptists are still, generally speaking, less at home.”

David S. Naglee, a district superintendent in the North Georgia Conference of United Methodists, considers a login to Textweek a weekly exercise for sermon preparation.

“I particularly appreciate the incredible collection of commentary and exegesis articles for each text of the day as well as links to more in-depth journal articles,” he said. “There is a wealth of material in one

*“I am aware that my website reflects my own theological leanings, and am always looking especially for material with which I disagree.”*

—Jenee Woodard

place that always offers a new insight and fresh perspective on the text.”

Preaching professor Brett Younger of Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology recommends the site to his students.

“When I started teaching preaching, I recommended that students look at the major commentaries like *Interpretation* and *New Interpreter’s*,” he said. “But when they turned in their sermons the footnotes were from bad websites like *desperatepreacher.com* and *getmeasermonquick.org*.”

He realized that “most preachers are more likely to visit the Internet than the library.” So he started directing his students to Textweek — “because it is both thoughtful and accessible.”

Now he logs into the site during class to discuss with students the best way to use the many resources found there.

For many Baptists, Younger noted, following the church year and preaching from lectionary-designated texts is a new discovery.

“In the churches in which I grew up we had high, holy days, but most of them did not go back centuries or have much to do with the history of the church,” he said.

“We celebrated the Sunday before Christmas (though we never had a Christmas Eve service), New Year’s Eve Watch Night Service, Spring Revival, Youth Revival (which was in the gym because sometimes the special music included a guitar), Easter (but never Good Friday), Mother’s Day (but not much on Father’s Day), Promotion Day,

High Attendance Day, Fall Revival, and G.A. Coronation.”

So he was pleasantly surprised a couple of Decembers ago when, during a phone conversation with his Southern Baptist mother, she mentioned Advent.

“I almost dropped the phone. ‘Mom, are you observing Advent?’ She explained that it was a new thing; they had just gotten some material from Nashville,” he said with a laugh.

Younger notes that for centuries, most churches and most Christians throughout the world have shared an understanding of the church year that grows out of the central stories in scripture.

“The seasons of the church year parallel the seasons of our faith,” he added. “We live with the kind of expectation that we feel at Advent, the hope we celebrate at Christmas and the promise we remember at Epiphany.”

“We live with the penitence we confess at Lent, the sorrow we know in Holy Week and the joy we experience at Easter,” he continued. “We are becoming the church we see at Pentecost.”

The longest season of the Christian year, Younger noted, is labeled “ordinary time” or “common time” — adding that “most of our days feel ordinary.”

Hence he recommends Textweek and other resources attuned to the church year to his students preparing to lead or already actively leading in worship.

This online trove of preaching/teaching resources — textweek.com — is the brainchild and ministry of Jenee Woodard, a Bible scholar and United Methodist who lives in Jackson, Mich. *Nurturing Faith* editor John D. Pierce asked her about the home-based ministry that has widespread use and influence.

[See interview on page 45](#)

## Q&A with Jenee Woodard

**NF: How did the idea for Textweek come about?**

JW: Textweek began in about 1996 when my then 2-year-old son was being diagnosed with autism. I was applying to various schools to study text criticism, and it very quickly became obvious that the severity of his disability would make it impossible for me to study in traditional ways.

Yet, the Internet was new, and I could see ways to look at comparative texts (commentaries, etc.) quite easily by indexing them on the same HTML pages. So, Textweek was created for my own study and my own interest in how different Christians throughout time have seen texts differently and lived them out differently.

**NF: What is the mission of Textweek?**

JW: The mission of Textweek has gone beyond that of my own study to helping pastors and others in the church see other interpretations of the text than they might be most easily drawn to. Just as I find it interesting and helpful to see alternate interpretations, I like to present links to alternate interpretations of texts.

**NF: Have you discovered a growing interest in lectionary-based preaching?**

JW: I have been interested in lectionary-based preaching since I went to Augustana College (now Augustana University) in Sioux Falls, S.D., a Lutheran school.

I used the lectionary as I set up “The Text This Week” because it provided a convenient scaffold for deciding what a pericope would be, and for organizing the work. People who are not preaching on the lectionary can use the scripture index to get to the material without using the lectionary.

**NF: How do you gather content, and what are the parameters for the kind of materials you post?**

JW: I gather content by looking for leads in current material and social media. Very often, people send me links to their own work. I will link pretty much anything that says something.

I am aware that my website reflects my own theological leanings, and am always looking especially for material with which I disagree.

**NF: How would you suggest a newcomer approach the site?**

JW: Lectionary preachers should be able to follow the indexes to find what they’re looking for. The pages are long, and I am looking at some ways to make finding things easier. Others can use the scripture index.

**NF: What good evidence have you seen that the site is widely used and appreciated?**

JW: My website statistics show between many hundreds of thousands to over a million readers using well over two to four million pages per month. And I get emails from people who find my work useful. I always appreciate them.

**NF: How can those who value Textweek contribute to its success?**

JW: Those who value Textweek can use it and enjoy it and pray for me as I put the links together.

I also can always use donations, and there is a “support” link on the front page of the website. Businesses, schools and organizations can advertise at the site, though I only take “on subject” ads and not those that do not further the mission of the website. **NFJ**

[textweek.com](http://textweek.com)

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# William Henry Harrison (1841)

By Bruce Gourley

From George Washington to Martin Van Buren and with the lone exception of John Quincy Adams (a devout, albeit doubting, Universalist), the American presidency remained religiously aloof. Socioeconomically, none of the eight pretended, for the sake of political expediency, to be other than who he was.

William Henry Harrison, the ninth president, eschewed public transparency and inadvertently sparked a religious revival of which he knew nothing.

Born into a prominent and wealthy Virginia planter family in Charles City County in 1773, Harrison would become the last president birthed as a British subject. His father, Benjamin Harrison V, signed the Declaration of Independence and served as governor of Virginia from 1781 to 1784.

An establishment Anglican (Episcopalian), the elder Harrison confronted an ascendant movement for religious liberty for all and church-state separation led by religious dissenters (Baptists foremost) and two future presidents, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

The younger Harrison attended an elite Presbyterian college, only to be removed early by his father due to revival influences at the school. A second educational endeavor came to an abrupt end when William joined an abolitionist organization. (Later, a slave-owning Harrison denied prior abolitionist sympathies.)

Sent to Philadelphia to study medicine, William soon learned of his father's death. He received land in his father's will, but no cash to continue his education.

Henry Lee III, Virginia's new governor and a family friend, arranged for the young man to join the U.S. Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment as a commissioned junior officer. Assigned to Cincinnati in the Northwest Territory, Harrison fought in the long-running Northwest Indian War. He served capably in the Army, signed a treaty acquiring much of present-day Ohio, attained the rank of lieutenant, married, sold his Virginia landholdings and acquired an Ohio estate, began a family, and resigned from the Army in 1798.

Harrison then accepted a presidential appointment as Secretary of the Northwest Territory (1798), became the first congressional delegate from the Northwest (1799-1800) and served as the first governor of the Indiana Territory (1801-1812).

While governor, in 1811 he again donned military attire to lead a territorial army against a coalition of Native American warriors, emerging victorious in the then-minor Battle of Tippecanoe. In the War of 1812, Major General Harrison commanded the Army of the Northwest, winning a key victory at the Battle of the Thames.

Thereafter, a deistic Harrison joined the Episcopal Christ Church of Cincinnati, though rarely attending services. Politically, terms as a U.S. representative (1816-1819) and senator (1825-1828) preceded a brief

appointment by President John Quincy Adams as minister to Colombia (1828-1829).

Returning to his Ohio estate, Harrison supplemented his income with earnings from contributions to a biography of his life. National aspirations remained, yet after an unsuccessful 1836 run for the presidency in the newly-formed Whig Party (created in opposition to the perceived tyranny of Andrew Jackson), Harrison served as clerk of courts for Hamilton County.

Throwing his hat into the presidential ring one more time, Harrison garnered the Whig nomination in 1840 to oppose sitting Democratic president Martin Van Buren. The Democrats mocked Harrison as a folksy old man who preferred sitting in his log cabin drinking hard cider, a reference to a period of time in which Harrison operated a whiskey-distilling business on his estate.

Gauging the public mood, the aristocratic Virginian and his supporters turned the tables on Van Buren by crafting a narrative of a humble frontiersman and brave hero of the great Battle of Tippecanoe, while disparaging the common-born Van Buren as a wealthy elitist.

A reimagined Harrison won the presidency and, on inauguration day, became the first president to be photographed. In his inaugural address of March 4, 1841, partially written by Daniel Webster, he reiterated the secular nature of the nation:



[Continued on page 47](#)

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*These are the ninth and tenth in a series of articles by historian Bruce Gourley on the religious faith of U.S. presidents. Gourley is online editor and contributing writer for Nurturing Faith Journal and executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society. His latest book, *Baptists and the American Civil War: Crucible of Faith and Freedom, a compilation of articles from the recent series on Baptists and the American Civil War, is now available from Nurturing Faith.**

**HARRISON from page 46**

We admit of no government by divine right, believing that so far as power is concerned the Beneficent Creator has made no distinction amongst men; that all are upon an equality, and that the only legitimate right to govern is an express grant of power from the governed.

The new president also paid public homage to Christianity while expressing commitment to religious liberty:

I deem the present occasion sufficiently important and solemn to justify me in expressing to my fellow-citizens a profound reverence for the Christian religion and a thorough conviction that sound morals, religious liberty, and a just sense of religious responsibility are essentially connected with all true and lasting happiness; and to that good Being who has blessed us by the gifts of civil and religious freedom, who watched

over and prospered the labors of our fathers and has hitherto preserved to us institutions far exceeding in excellence those of any other people, let us unite in fervently commending every interest of our beloved country in all future time.

One month to the day later, Harrison died of complications from pneumonia, the first president to die in office and his term the shortest of any president.

Reminiscent of earlier efforts to Christianize George Washington upon his death, the minister presiding over Harrison's funeral at Washington's St. John's Episcopal Church declared, absent of any evidence, that the president had recently purchased a Bible, read it daily and intended to join the church the Sunday following his death.

That Harrison rarely mentioned God in his own letters and writings remained unstated.

In a nation grappling with slavery, greed and poverty, the unexpected death of the president briefly reignited the smoldering revival embers of the recent Second Great Awakening. In sermons many

Christian pastors and evangelists in the spring of 1841 reminded their listeners that death could come at any time, even in the midst of prosperity.

Some criticized the nature of political elections. Others reiterated the nation's heritage of church-state separation.

Baptist pastor Samuel F. Smith of Waterville, Maine (author of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee") blamed the excitement of the 1840 election for dampening religious fervor, declaring: "In the heat of party strife ... Divine things were almost neglected."

Horatio Potter, minister of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Albany, N.Y., in his "Discourse on the Death of William Henry Harrison," praised the rejection of "all connection between Religion and the State; leaving, as the Constitution does, this great source of all conservative influence to the voluntary support which it shall be able to command from individuals."

A brief period of memorial sermons aside, the Virginian and frontiersman, religiously distant and deprived by death of a full term in the White House, left behind one lasting national legacy: the crafting of presidential candidates' résumés to fit the public mood. **NFJ**

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# John Tyler (1841-45)

By Bruce Gourley

Upon the death of President William Henry Harrison in April 1841, the United States of America entered uncharted political territory. For the first time, a man not elected to the presidency ascended to the nation's highest office.

**Y**et in seeming continuity the new president, John Tyler, hailed from the same Virginia county, Charles City, as had Harrison.

Both Harrison and Tyler (born in 1790) belonged to aristocratic, slave-holding and politically dynastic families, their fathers serving as governors of Virginia. Nonetheless, they traveled divergent paths to the presidency.

Harrison traversed educational upheavals, the death of a debt-ridden father, a period of military service and a quiet decade of farming prior to his presidential election. Tyler, on the other hand, entered law as a young man, experienced no financial difficulties, bypassed military action and avoided career detours.

Elected to Virginia's House of Delegates at the age of 21, Tyler won a seat as a U.S. representative five years later. A Democratic-Republican, he like many other Southern politicians unwaveringly supported the interconnected issues of states' rights and slavery, including the western expansion of slavery.

Nonetheless, Tyler perceived his House position as inadequately influential and the pay less than desirable.

Returning home, Tyler briefly practiced law en route to the governorship of Virginia and a subsequent 1828 election as a U.S. senator from Virginia. States' rights remained his overarching ideology.

Tyler's greatest political challenge took the form of threats from slave-owning South Carolina elites to nullify federal tariff

legislation in favor of states' rights (the Nullification Crisis). President Andrew Jackson challenged South Carolina, and Tyler openly opposed Jackson. Escalating tensions led Tyler to resign from the Senate in 1836.

The resignation, however, did not indicate surrender. Already a contender for the vice presidency, Tyler defected to the emerging Whig Party.

Nominated by Virginia's pro-slavery Whigs, his low-key campaign garnered only 47 electoral votes in the 1836 campaign. Remaining politically active, four years later Tyler secured the vice-presidential position on William Henry Harrison's winning presidential ticket.



His vice-presidential inaugural speech focused on his political passion: states' rights.

A month later Harrison died and Tyler took his place. Although the sixth of 10 presidents born in Virginia, he immediately faced uncharted waters and congressional disagreements on constitutional directive.

A determined Tyler rejected the contention of the Democrats that he could serve merely as "Acting President," instead establishing solid precedent for full presidential succession.

The unusual nature of Tyler's presidency extended beyond his ascendancy. In the face of a national financial crisis,

his refusal to acquiesce to Whig leaders' demands for a national bank led the party's congressional delegation to expel him from the party, after which all but one cabinet member resigned.

Tyler's vetoes of federal tariffs and that of a bill distributing a portion of federal revenues to states further enraged Whigs. In attempted retaliation, they sought Tyler's impeachment — another first — but failed. Though of little consequence, Whigs eventually effected the first presidential veto, albeit of a minor bill.

Often opposed by Whigs and Democrats alike, congressional rancor and stalemate characterized much of Tyler's presidency. A closely contested but successful congressional annexation of Texas concluded his tenure in office.

Religion, meanwhile, rarely surfaced during Tyler's presidency. Raised in an Episcopal family, the unchurched Tyler did not express belief in God. As president, however, he firmly upheld the constitutional separation of church and state in an 1843 letter to a prominent Jewish leader in Baltimore:

The United States have adventured upon a great and noble experiment, which is believed to have been hazarded in the absence of all previous precedent — that of total separation of Church and State. No religious establishment by law exists among us. The conscience is left free from all restraint and each is permitted to worship his Maker after his own judgment. The offices of the Government are open alike to all.

Continued on page 49

TYLER from page 48

No tithes are levied to support an established Hierarchy, nor is the fallible judgment of man set up as the sure and infallible creed of faith. The Mahomedan, if he will to come among us would have the privilege guaranteed to him by the constitution to worship according to the Koran; and the East Indian might erect a shrine to Brahma if it so pleased him. Such is the spirit of toleration inculcated by our political Institutions. The fruits are visible in the universal contentment which everywhere prevails. Christians are broken up into various sects, but we have no persecution, no stake or rack — no compulsion or force, no furious or bigoted zeal; but each and all move on in their selected sphere, and worship the Great Creator according to their own forms and ceremonies. The Hebrew persecuted and down trodden in other regions takes up his abode among us with none to make him afraid.... and the Aegis of the Government is over him to defend and protect him. Such is the great experiment which we have tried, and such are the happy fruits which have resulted from it; our system of free government would be imperfect without it.

In the same letter Tyler echoed a line of reasoning then popular among white Southerners, contorted logic separating bodily freedom from that of the mind:

The body may be oppressed and manacled and yet survive; but if the mind of man be fettered, its energies and faculties perish, and what remains is of the earth, earthly. Mind should be free as the light or as the air.

In so stating, Tyler ignored a corpus of Southern state laws prohibiting education of slaves and public dissent against the practice of slavery.

Electing not to pursue a second presidential term in 1844, Tyler retired from politics and returned to private family life on his large plantation in Virginia. During the ensuing years he fathered seven children by his second wife, worked his slaves hard, lived the life of an aristocrat and summered at a seaside home.

During this time Tyler again reiterated his conviction of religious freedom for all:

The intolerant spirit manifested against Catholics, as exhibited in the burning of their churches, etc., will so soon as the thing becomes fairly considered, arouse a strong feeling of dissatisfaction the part of a large majority of the American people; for if there is one principle of higher import with them than any other, it is the principle of religious freedom.

African-American slaves, however, remained undeserving of freedom. Supporting Southern secession in 1861, Tyler engaged in Confederate politics until his death in 1862. *NFJ*

Minister to Children

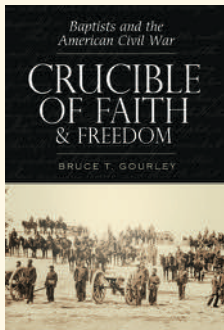
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## Good reading

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Civil War provides a grand opportunity to consider precisely what Baptists — North and South — were saying from their pulpits, in the press, and through official resolutions from that time. Bruce Gourley brings such perspectives to life by making good use of careful and significant research, creatively taking a chronological approach using primary sources.



[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)

# 3 reasons Christians should back religious freedom for all

Ed Stetzer

Americans are overwhelmingly concerned about religious liberty — that's good. What's troubling, but perhaps not surprising, is that they are less enthusiastic about those liberties for some religions.

According to a recent poll by The Associated Press and the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center, 82 percent said religious liberty protections were important for Christians, compared with around 60 percent who said the same for Muslims and the religiously unaffiliated.

Yet, religious freedom is not merely an important issue — it is our “first freedom.” What Americans, especially Christian Americans, must understand is this: Religious freedom for some is not religious freedom for long.

LifeWay Research data might help explain the lower enthusiasm for the religious freedom of Muslims. About 40 percent of Americans believe Muslims are a threat to religious liberty. However, that does not explain why Mormons, who are not seen as a threat to religious liberty, get lower favorable responses in polls.

Partly, it may be that religious freedom means different things to different people. Another reason may be that these faiths are smaller and less mainstream.

Yet, we must be clear about religious freedom, its definition and value to our nation. Regardless of people's faith, or lack thereof, it is important for Christians, Hindus, atheists, Muslims and everyone in between to work for religious freedom for all.

So, what do we mean when we talk about religious liberty? For some, it brings to mind a Kentucky clerk not signing a

same-sex marriage certificate or Hobby Lobby not providing certain contraceptives [in the employees health insurance plans].

Many may believe the religious freedoms of Jews and Christians are beneficial to the “Judeo-Christian” nation but think granting those same freedoms to others would endanger our safety. Working for the religious freedom of someone else may appear to be endorsing their beliefs. This is a faulty line of thinking.

We must pursue religious freedom for all. Here's why:

The First Amendment does not protect certain faiths, but all faiths, and people of no faith. It's a dangerous idea to let majorities and government decide whose religious freedom is worth protecting. Historically, U.S. Christians have recognized this. A well-known agitator pushing for what would become the First Amendment was a preacher named John Leland. He made it clear: “All should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians.” And, for what it's worth, Turks were Muslims.

Minority faiths need the most protection. We see a similar reality with freedom of speech. Popular opinions do not need protection. This is why freedom of the press and freedom of religion are both mentioned in the First Amendment.

When Christians allow the government to pick whose freedoms are recognized, we undermine our own religious liberties. As an evangelical, whose beliefs are increas-

ingly out of touch with the majority culture, I defend religious freedom now, because I may need those protections later.

The majority of Americans and Protestant pastors believe religious liberty is on the decline in our nation. We should recognize that we can prevent those erosions by standing for the religious freedom of others.

I want freedom of religion because I believe the gospel will advance in a free and open market of religious ideas. I want all to hear the gospel, even those who think I should not share it. But as an evangelical, I believe all are made in the image of God and must have the freedom to choose or change their faith.

Yes, religion has been — and is — used to promote and condone violence, and we would be naïve not to see the link between Islam and Islamist radicalism. But we can address such issues in any faith, without undermining the general founding principles of our nation. The actions of a minority of Muslims do not mean the entirety of that faith should forfeit religious freedom.

Around the world, nations often deny religious freedom. Let's show the world a better way — one our Founding Fathers laid forth.

When Christians demand religious freedom for ourselves and do not speak up for others', we miss the teaching of Jesus, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). [NFJ](#)

—This column by Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research, is provided by Religion News Service.



# Being church in changing times

## I once was lost, but now am found

By Bill Wilson

After 40 years, my mother-in-law does not know me. She is pleasant, and always asks how my family and I are doing. Yet she cannot remember who I am or why I am in her room. The fog of dementia has enveloped her mind, and her memories have been erased.

**A** sad reality of this insidious disease is the way it leaves its victim feeling lost. When we lose our memories, we lose a part of us that is distinct. We are left with only the present, without our past or the ability to envision a future.

The result is we feel as though we are lost. That is the word we often use for my mother-in-law: she looks, feels and truly is lost.

Often I engage with churches that seem to be lost in similar ways. Some push away from a rich history in the mistaken notion that their past is a burden to be jettisoned. Doing so cuts them adrift, without an anchor component of their identity.

Others ignore the realities of the present, opting to live in either a toxic state of nostalgia or yearning for an unrealistic future. They overlook the seismic changes in their community and/or culture at large and grow increasingly irrelevant to their community.

Still others choose to hope that the future will become less frightening or will somehow become more like the past they

so fondly remember. The future is to be resisted, and so they avoid looking ahead for fear of what they might become.

After working closely with more than 100 congregations in recent years, my observation is that healthy churches fully engage their past, their present and their future in a balanced way.

All three must be part of their thinking, planning and praying. When any one dimension is ignored or fixated upon, the result is some form of feeling “lost.”

So, what does it mean to engage our past, our present and our future as a church?

To engage our past is to acknowledge the legacy, core strengths, critical incidents and unresolved issues that have brought us to this moment in time.

Every congregation is tempted to forget or overlook those who have gone before us and upon whose shoulders we stand. It is always a worthy exercise to remind ourselves of our church’s founding vision, and the hopes and dreams of those who preceded us.

In addition, as with our nuclear family, exploring the key shaping events and hard lessons learned is a way to gain understanding about who we are and why we do some of the things that seem unique to us.

Pushing back even further to the church’s founding in Acts is a valuable reminder of why the church began. Any study of our local history must begin with a thorough review of Acts 2.

To engage our present is to seek to answer honestly the questions of “Where are we, really?” and “How effectively are we being the body of Christ?” One is a question of context, and the other of effectiveness.

Exploring demographic data often reveals a world of opportunity that exists nearby. Honest assessment of our current work, worship and ministry can be a sobering wake-up call to those who assume a level of effectiveness that does not actually exist.

To engage our future is to invite the congregation to peer into the community through the eyes of Christ. Rather than ask, “What kind of church do we want to be?” the question becomes “What kind of church does Christ call us to be?” Those are two very different questions.

Feeling lost is disconcerting and disorienting. Like individuals, a church finds itself when it embraces where it has come from, where it actually lives and where it senses God is leading.

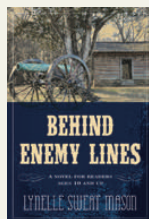
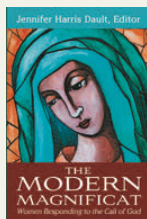
When we balance our past, present and future, we find an identity, a mission and a passion that is otherwise missing.

God bless us on the crucial journey from being lost to being found. **NFJ**

—Bill Wilson is founding director of the Center for Healthy Churches.



## Good reading starts here

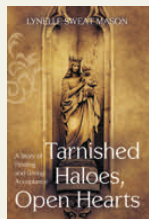


### THE MODERN MAGNIFICAT

Jennifer Harris Dault shares the stories and struggles of 23 women who heard God's call to ministry.

### BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Lynelle Mason crafts a young reader's historically accurate story of how the Civil War came to Chattanooga and North Georgia, as told from a 12-year-old's point of view.

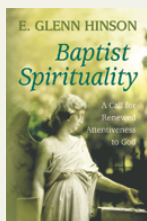


### LEADERSHIP IN CONSTANT CHANGE

Terry Hamrick offers adaptive leadership principles and tips on embracing missional qualities that can lead to discovering God's vision for churches.

### TARNISHED HALOES, OPEN HEARTS

Lynelle Mason forthrightly tells a story of giving and finding acceptance in people and places behind the common masks of fragile humanity.

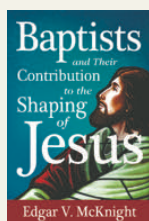


### BAPTIST SPIRITUALITY

Glenn Hinson seeks to recover the contemplative tradition of the 17th century for Baptists in our modern age.

### REFRESH

Blake McKinney believes that God intends for our faith to intersect with our everyday life, so offers devotional readings to help facilitate that contact.



### THE DEEP REACH OF AMAZING GRACE

Steve Johnson urges fellow "ragamuffins" needing "a handout of amazing grace" to explore the profound richness of God's outlandish grace.

### BAPTISTS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE SHAPING OF JESUS

Edgar McKnight traces the story of Jesus in an insightful and thoughtful fashion appealing to scholars and laity.

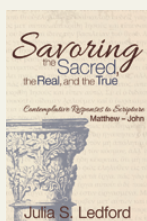


### FROM ZION TO ATLANTA

Walker L. Knight shares in his autobiography a message of missions ministry that focused on grace, compassion, inclusion and reconciliation during his five decades as a religious journalist.

### GOING BACK TO NEW ORLEANS

Bert Montgomery shares stories from friends, neighbors, and classmates in and around New Orleans based on their journey through the storm Katrina and into interconnected wholeness.

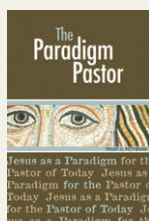
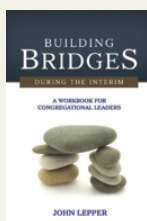


### SAVORING THE SACRED, THE REAL, AND THE TRUE

Julia Ledford seeks to open a fresh perspective into the Gospels through prayers that foster dialogue between the Word of God and the reader — and with the world.

### LORD, LIFT ME UP

Bruce Morgan shares inspirational thoughts and an anthem of gratitude based on the hymn, "Higher Ground."



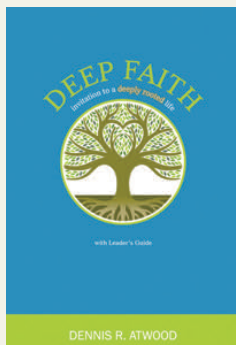
### BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE INTERIM

John Lepper helps lay leaders build a healthy bridge between pastors by knowing what to expect and how to proceed with various tasks during the interim period.

### THE PARADIGM PASTOR

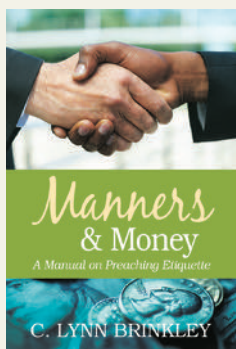
Trudy Pettibone focuses on scripture texts that support the various aspects of Jesus' pastoral ministry and relate to the calling of pastors in general.

## Books worth a look



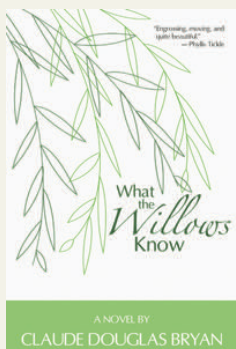
### DEEP FAITH

Dennis Atwood introduces ordinary Christians to the core issues vital to personal and corporate spiritual formation and a more intentional and deeper faith.



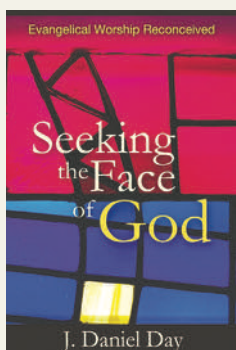
### MANNERS & MONEY

Lynn Brinkley addresses the issues of preaching and hosting etiquette in a manual written for current and future ministers and for teachers and churches.



### WHAT THE WILLOWS KNOW

Claude Bryan tells the story of a university professor who returns to his rural hometown to deal with internal demons and external injustice.



### SEEKING THE FACE OF GOD

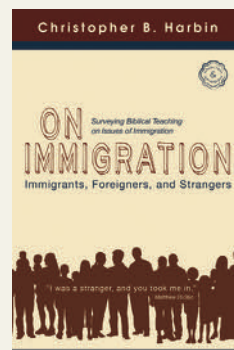
Daniel Day shows how the practices of the ancient church and the theological wisdom of later centuries present worship as a joyful discipline.



[www.nurturingfaith.net](http://www.nurturingfaith.net)

### ON IMMIGRATION

Christopher Harbin examines what the Bible says about our attitudes, reactions and interactions related to immigration and how to treat people of a different group, identity, ethnicity or origin.



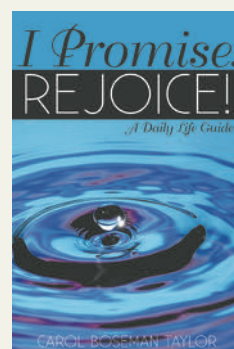
### HOPEFUL IMAGINATION

Mike Queen and Jayne Davis tell of how an “Old First” church adapted to changing times and managed not only to survive, but also to thrive by approaching ministry in new and different ways.



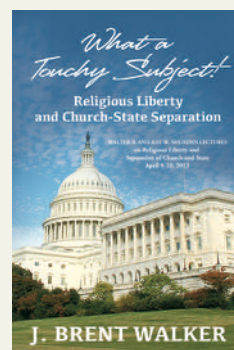
### I PROMISE. REJOICE!

Carol Boseman Taylor shares a reflection for each day in a year resulting from her journaling approach of recording what God offers her through the simple art of listening.



### WHAT A TOUCHY SUBJECT!

Brent Walker identifies the historical and theological principles that undergird freedom of religion.



# Identity

## and opportunity

“At Mercer every student majors in changing the world.”

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

MACON, Ga. — Mercer University President Bill Underwood took his post 10 years ago, coming from Baylor University where he was a law professor and interim president.

**H**is father had been a Baptist pastor, and his son is now a graduate student in religion at the University of Chicago. Last fall Underwood joked to a group of ministers that he’s glad their “affliction skips a generation.”

Credited as a visionary leader, Underwood’s administration has experienced wide-ranging accomplishments such as increased enrollment, vast physical additions and improvements, expanded academic programs including two new medical school campuses, winning sports teams and community revitalization.

His arrival a decade ago came at a time of opportunity and challenge, building on the leadership of now-chancellor Kirby Godsey who had engaged the campus community, expanded the university’s professional schools and built up its academic reputation — and dealt with disgruntled Baptists.

For decades the Baptist-rooted university had experienced tension with the increasingly fundamentalist Baptist state convention in Georgia from which it received funding. Convention leaders pulled out of that relationship of more than 170

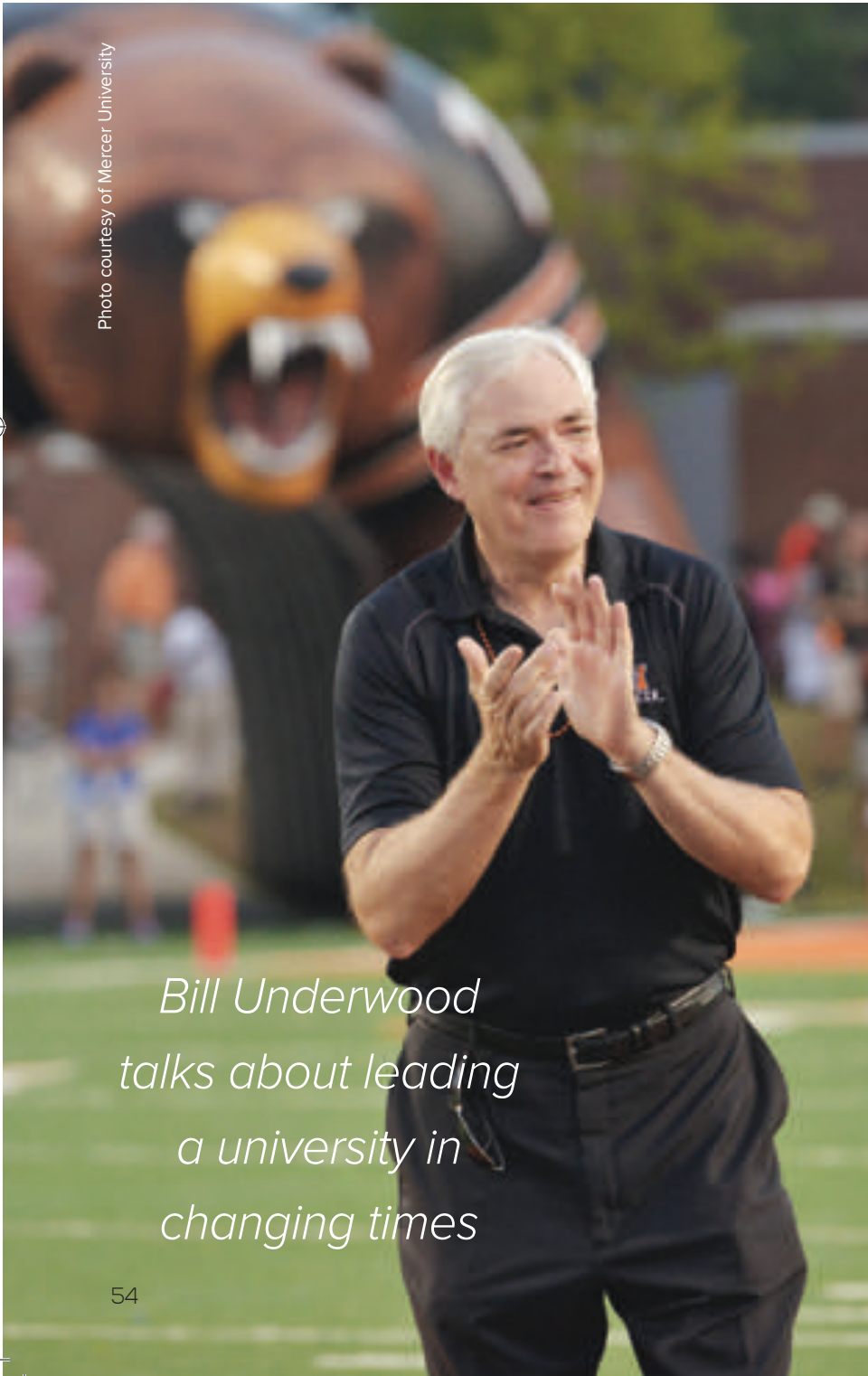


Photo courtesy of Mercer University

*Bill Underwood  
talks about leading  
a university in  
changing times*

years just as Underwood was assuming the presidency.

Trustees, wanting to retain the university's Baptist identity apart from the tempestuous relationship with fundamentalist convention leaders, approved bylaws requiring the university president to be Baptist as well as half of the trustee board.

Voluntary collaboration with like-minded Baptist organizations was further pursued, including Mercer's key role in planning the first Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant in 2008 that brought together thousands of Baptists from across racial and convention lines for dialogue, worship and ministry.

The university has maintained a close relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and Mercer's McAfee School of Theology has a predominant but not exclusive Baptist identity. The university's Atlanta campus now houses the American Baptist Historical Society and its impressive archives.

"I think that [Baptist] heritage provides some grounding for us," said Underwood in an interview with *Nurturing Faith* editor John Pierce. The following conversation is adapted from that interview.

**NF: A university's identity affects recruitment of students and donors and a lot of other things. Ten years ago you came to Mercer right after the Georgia Baptist Convention had voted to sever ties with the school. So you dealt with the fallout from that. How do you define, and what have you done to try to define, the identity of Mercer University?**

BU: I think this is nothing new. Our first commitment is to provide an extraordinary academic experience for students, and that has been the highest priority here whether we were affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention or not.

We certainly continue to emphasize the quality of the academic experience. But there are some special features to that academic experience that you do not find at other schools that share a commitment to academic excellence.

The Mercer on Mission program relates directly to our Baptist heritage, and it is something that is remarkably appealing to young people. Programs like that have fueled

the growth and energy at the university and have extended our Baptist heritage in a way that is highly relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When you tell young people they can be involved in developing a new generation of prosthetics and then fitting landmine victims in places like Vietnam, that is really appealing to those who are looking for ways to live meaningful lives.

Or when you tell them that we have chemists here working on ways of solving the problem of mercury poisoning that exists in Africa and South America and they can be a part of that and implement their solutions ... That just has tremendous appeal.

Mercer on Mission has become central to our undergraduate experience here at Mercer, and it defines the university in a way that is very appealing to young people.

**NF: How did Mercer on Mission come about, and how has it expanded?**

BU: The idea for a program like Mercer on Mission was initially presented to me by Scott Walker, then pastor of the First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas. It was when I was at Baylor, but I was not there long enough to do anything with his idea.

When I came to Mercer I remembered that idea. During my first meeting with our university chaplain Craig McMahan, I told Craig about Scott's idea and asked him to implement it here at Mercer.

Craig has just done amazing work in taking that concept and continuing to develop it, refine it and expand upon it. The program today is larger than it has ever before been. We had 200 students engaged in that program this year at 13 different sites around the world.

**NF: So, is your hope to continue to grow the program? Is there a goal to have a certain percentage of undergraduate students participate?**

BU: Our goal is to eventually have every undergraduate student participate in [Mercer on Mission]. When you walked on the campus this morning, you saw all these bright orange banners hanging on the signposts with the slogan: "At Mercer every student majors in changing the world."

That is our aspiration for the school,

and that is what Mercer on Mission is all about. So our hope is that one day this will be a part of the experience of every student who comes here as an undergraduate.

**NF: How does that convey the philosophy and the identity of Mercer to prospective students?**

BU: It communicates to people that this is a university with a soul. It is a university that wants to inspire students to take their God-given gifts and talents and to begin experiencing what it means to use those gifts and talents to lead full and meaningful lives.

I am obviously not a theologian or a minister, but when I look at the parable of the Good Samaritan, the question that led Jesus to tell the parable was properly understood as "Master, what must I do to lead a full and complete life?"

At the conclusion of the parable Jesus says, answering the original question, "Go and do likewise." I think what we are trying to do is have our students experience what it means to lead a full and complete life, because we believe that once they have had that experience they will want more of it.

**NF: Does that identity have a broader appeal than just to Baptists and even those from other Christian traditions?**

BU: Absolutely. I think it has widespread appeal among a large segment of young people today who are looking for meaning in their lives.

**NF: You pulled a real coup by getting President Jimmy Carter to become a trustee. I know you first got acquainted in planning the initial, massive Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant in 2008. What has his relationship meant to you and the university?**

BU: Well, he is among our most active and engaged trustees. What I did to attract him was to share what we were trying to do with Mercer on Mission — which had a special resonance with him given the work at the Carter Center.

I think he saw that work as worthy of investing his time and effort. So President Carter helps whenever I call and uses his influence to advance the work we are doing in a myriad of ways.



**NF:** For many students the most significant experiences are the relationships with faculty. How do you encourage those kinds of relationships?

**BU:** When I was an undergraduate student at a little school in Oklahoma, I had a professor I had gotten to know. I loved this guy; he was a great professor. I took every class he taught and did a couple of independent studies with him as well.

One day he saw me outside the library and asked what I was going to do when I graduated. And I told him I really was not sure. I thought maybe I would be a basketball coach or something like that. He said that would be great, that a teaching profession is important.

Then he said, “I have seen you in class; you can do anything you want to do; you can be a U.S. senator if you want to be that” — which I did not want to be.

But the point of the conversation was that here was someone for whom I had deep respect, expressing that kind of confidence in me and really causing me to raise my sights as to what was possible.

It is something the faculty and I talk about frequently: the opportunity to help every one of these young people raise their sights as to what is possible for them to accomplish. It is something our faculty is committed to; they love the students here and if you do not, this is not a good place to teach.

At the general faculty meeting [last] year I shared with them my story, and it is good for all of us. I am a faculty member. It is good to remind ourselves of the special opportunities we have.

**NF:** One of the ways you raise visibility for a university is through successful

sports, and you have certainly done that here. Was that something you saw as an opportunity when you arrived? And how did that develop?

**BU:** When I came to Mercer it was a difficult decision because I consider Texas home. Most of my family is in Texas. I loved where I was at Baylor.

But when I came on my own to visit, before interviewing, I felt like this was a really special place and that, outside of Georgia, [it was] a pretty well-kept secret in the world of higher education.

That is not a good thing. The more people know about the work you are doing and recognize the importance of your work, the easier time you have attracting resources whether it is talent or financial or whatever.

In our culture one of the fastest ways to raise profile is through sports. The day we beat Duke in the second round of the NCAA basketball tournament, the number-one Google-searched term in the world was “Mercer University.”

**NF:** And you always want the Google search to be about a positive thing.

**BU:** Right.

**NF:** You have raised visibility to the point that Google and ESPN and others know about Mercer. I would think it also does some healthy things for the “town and gown” relationship, right?

**BU:** Certainly sports is a way to raise visibility, but there is something else about sports in our culture: It is a great tool to use in building community.

When you come to a Mercer basketball game or a Mercer football game, you will see people from just about every walk of life.

You will see people pulling together for that two or three hours who do not otherwise agree on anything.

I think you can build community through sports in ways that, in our culture, are very difficult to do otherwise. I see that here in Middle Georgia; I see it on our campus.

The number of students and faculty you see walking across campus wearing Mercer T-shirts is a reflection of the community-building that has resulted from the success we have had in sports.

**NF:** Colleges and universities can be closed communities. You can have people who have lived around schools all their lives but have never been on campus. Sports or cultural events are often needed to draw them in.

**NU:** That’s why we have tried to sell Mercer athletics as Macon sports teams. The football team wears stickers on their helmets that say, “Macon Made,” to reinforce the idea that this is Middle Georgia’s team.

**NF:** What are the biggest challenges facing higher education now, and what are some particular challenges you are facing?

**BU:** One of the biggest challenges, and something we have really taken on, is making sure this kind of educational experience is affordable for young people. There was a time when colleges and universities raised their tuition 6 and 7 percent year-after-year-after-year, and a few still do that. But we have moved pretty far away from it.

We have not raised tuition in our medical school for five years now because it hurts our mission to raise our costs. We are trying to get doctors into rural communities in Georgia to practice primary care. So we

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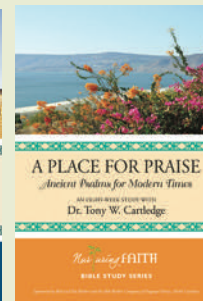
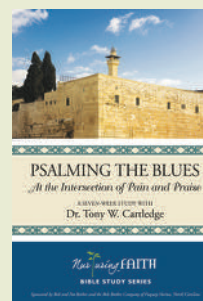
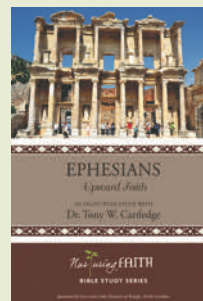
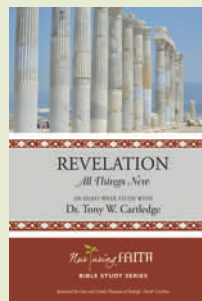
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need to hold down our cost at the undergraduate level.

We have pretty much tied any tuition increase to the consumer price index in our region so that over time there is no real increase in cost. We implemented that five years ago. I think over the last five years we have had the lowest tuition increases of any private school in the South.

That is because we value the diversity of the campus and the idea that we want this kind of program to be accessible to young people. But I think that is a major challenge we all have in higher education. How do we enhance the quality of what we are doing while at the same time controlling the cost?

**NF: What is the next big thing for Mercer?**

BU: Well, that is a good question. I am not sure what the next big thing is, Johnny. You may have to ask my successor. I guess it is enough to carry out the many things that are going on now.

I mean we do have a lot going. We are about to break ground on what will be the largest and most expensive building we have ever built: a new \$42-million undergraduate sciences center on this campus.

We are continuing in our efforts to make Macon the best place to live in the Southeast. The announcement that we are bringing back the Capricorn Studio as part of the \$25-million, mixed-use residential retail development downtown is an example of that.

Having a vibrant culture scene in Macon is part of the renaissance of this city. We are looking at putting some art programs



Amputees, who lost their legs to landmines in Viet Nam, receive prosthetics developed and fitted by faculty and students as part of Mercer on Mission. Mercer University photo

downtown for similar reasons. We think that kind of vibe in an urban community creates a real positive environment.

**NF: Mercer is obviously the biggest positive impact on the city of Macon. And, obviously, Macon's health is very much tied to Mercer's health.**

BU: Oh, yeah. Kirby Godsey, who was the greatest leader in higher education of his generation, recognized that you cannot build a great university in a decaying community because bright, talented and creative entrepreneurial young people are not attracted to decay. So we have a strong interest in Macon's continued renaissance because it makes it easier for us to attract talent to the university.

**NF: What has been the biggest surprise to you over the last 10 years?**

BU: That is a good question, but something I would have to reflect on. I learned a lot of things. I was really not qualified for the position when I came. They took a chance on someone who had very little experience in higher education leadership roles. As a consequence, they had to live through a learning curve for me and I am sure there were several false starts along the way.

**NF: But many more good starts.**

*Editor's note: Mercer University provides office space on its downtown Macon, Ga., law school campus to Nurturing Faith Publishing, for which we are grateful.*

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## RECOGNITION & REMEMBRANCE

*Editor's note: For a more timely delivery of information about people and places, "In the Know" listings will be found soon on the expanding website [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net).*

### Donna Forrester, who led Fellowship in early 2000s, faced long illness

Donna Forrester, who died Dec. 31 at age 66, served as minister of pastoral care and counseling at First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., from 1989 until 2006 when she retired on disability. She served the 2000-2001 term as moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.



### Mercer mourns "Papa Joe" Hendricks who helped integrate the university

Joseph M. Hendricks, who died Dec. 19 at age 81, served Mercer University for more than 40 years. Known lovingly as "Papa Joe," he played a key role in the Civil Rights Movement such as bringing African student Sam Oni to campus in 1963 amid controversy. Hendricks held several positions including director of religious activities, dean of students and professor of Christianity.



### Pat Pattillo known for communication skills, influence

Wesley (Pat) Pattillo, who died Dec. 22 at age 75, served for 10 years as associate general secretary of the ecumenical National Council of Churches USA. He retired in 2011 to Birmingham, Ala. Earlier, Pat led communications and development efforts at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he influenced a generation of young Baptist communicators. He also held positions at Samford University and Hong Kong Baptist University.



### Fred Prouser was celebrity photographer, generous benefactor

*Variety* called Fred Prouser, who died last year at age 63, "a fixture on the red carpet and a recognizable face to the stars." The Los Angeles-based photographer for Reuters captured classic images of Ellen DeGeneres, Whitney Houston, Al Pacino, Angelina Jolie, Michael Jackson, Dolly Parton and scores of other celebrities. In his estate he left gifts to Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith and other moderate Baptist causes related to religious liberty and identity.



### Gifted preacher Bill Self built strong congregations

William L. Self, who died Jan. 9, a day before his 84<sup>th</sup> birthday, retired in 2012 after 20 years of leading Johns Creek Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Ga., through times of tremendous growth. Earlier he was pastor of Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta. He served on the boards of the Alliance for Christian Media and Day1. A lectureship on preaching in his honor was established at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.



### Willetts to assume deanship of McAfee School of Theology

Jeffrey G. Willetts, professor of divinity, founding dean and former vice president at the John Leland Center for Theological Studies in Arlington, Va., has been appointed dean of Mercer University's James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology, effective July 1. **NFJ**



Nurturing Faith honors the memory of former director Mary Jane Cardwell of Waycross, Ga., who died Jan. 13 at age 58. Her warm laugh, kind spirit and generous heart will be missed.

# How is Beloved Community cultivated in polarizing times?

By Emily Hull McGee

There's nothing like a good crisis to call a community together, right? I say this slightly in jest, as no community would ever wish a crisis upon itself. However, it's in those times that a community is forced to respond.

We wonder: Will we be brave or scared? Will we be prophetic or priestly? Will we split or strengthen? Will we hunker down or open up? Will we exclude or include?

The options are hardly ever as binary as this or as the pundits and politicians would have us to believe. The ones whose living depends on the masses, believing that what divides us is more compelling than that which unites, feed on our fear and disorientation.

You name the issue and you'll find a lot of us picking a side, throwing up our blinders, surrounding ourselves with allies, and refusing relationships with those who disagree ... until there's a crisis.

Our church rang in the first Monday of 2016 with a bomb threat, forcing the evacuation of 150 kids in our Children's Center and 50 church and center staff. We watched as the police surrounded the place.

The bomb squad suited up in hazmat protection and deployed robotic protection. Local news reporters lined the perimeter. Yellow tape squared our space, creating an island where no one could venture. For hours we had no way of knowing what would happen next.

But then peace began to cover us. Compassionate teachers began to call parents one by one. Church employees

rocked babies, and warm renditions of "If You're Happy and You Know It" broke out among the toddlers and preschool children. As parents arrived, the fear in their faces subsided when they spotted their children, calm and cared for. Gratefully, the threat was as empty as the "suspicious package" that started the whole mess.

In days since, I've realized that it may have been a hallmark moment still in its infancy, a marker for the Beloved Community of First Baptist Church of Winston-Salem. Because since then, we have had renewed, honest conversations with a diverse group of parents about the school of learning we all love.

We've welcomed three law enforcement officers from the Winston-Salem Police Department and two district attorneys to address 100 parents and staff about their follow-up to the incident, knitting citizen and leader together in a season when this relationship is fraught with violence. We've begun thinking again about how our building can be safe but not a fortress, protective but porous.

Our church and Children's Center staff have set aside differences to work seamlessly for the good of the whole. And best of all, it has given us space to share our church's commitment to live as people of love who follow the light of our Prince of Peace.



It's in the chaos of crisis that polarities fall away. In crisis, the truth that we belong together crystallizes and compels us toward one another. We remember again that we *are* our brother's and sister's keeper.

We are oriented again to the way of love that leaves no one out, regardless of color or ideology or wealth or education or sexuality or gender or voting record. Even if for just a moment, we remember that we are far more alike than we are different, far more humane than cruel, far more together than apart.

That is how a Beloved Community is cultivated by the God who gifts us to one another in relationship.

Crises pass, thankfully. But the fog of fear seeps back in and clouds us from seeing one another as God does: beloved fully, freely, equally and unconditionally. However, we must remember that the unanimity we experience in these moments is real — not an illusion.

The togetherness that swept our nation after 9/11 wasn't just imagined. The way that millions of all types of people gave generously after Hurricane Katrina and mourned deeply after Sandy Hook wasn't a dream. They were our "beloved communities" at their best.

I don't wish a crisis upon anyone. But I do pray for clarity of oneness and fearlessness to invade us for the sake of the gospel and the beloved communities who embody it. **NFJ**

—Emily Hull McGee is pastor of First Baptist Church on Fifth in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Story and photo by Bruce Gourley

# Shakespeare, THE King, & the KJV

Poet and playwright William Shakespeare was born in this Stratford-upon-Avon home in 1564. After his death 400 years ago, in April 1616, he was buried in the nearby Church of the Holy Trinity. His shaping of the English language impacted the translation of the King James Version of the Bible.

## Great English playwright influenced popular Bible translation

*Four hundred years ago, the most influential English writer in history died on April 23, 1616. William Shakespeare changed our language and shaped our scriptures.*

**M**essengers scurried around Europe in 1487, ducking into pungent-smelling shops where stained men and boys toiled away at strange-looking wooden contraptions. From now on, the courier announced at each stop, the shop's products required the approval of Pope Innocent VIII before being sold. Or else ...

Shop men inevitably exchanged glances at the news. All were familiar with increasingly common bonfires of vanities. Some winced from memories of the torching of their own works. A few, witnesses of human sacrifice, recalled the smell of burning flesh. But for most, the horrific memories merely steeled their determination.

Traffickers in and entrepreneurs of

words, these printers lived on the edge. For centuries books had been banned by the Catholic Church.

Few Europeans could read, not that it mattered: only some 30,000 books existed as late as the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, most in Latin. Among the dozens of heavy wooden, movable-type Gutenberg printing presses now scattered across Europe, few produced English works. And printers often did not bother to ask if authors had obtained the approval of the Church.

Eleven years after the pope's warning to printers, Oxford University professor John Colet translated the Bible into English, an offense long punishable by death. Publishing his work was far too dangerous.

But in the confines of his classroom he began reading the Bible to his students. Some had likely viewed one or more of the few public Bibles in Europe, large Latin tomes chained to a church altar. All

marveled at hearing, for the first time, the scripture read in their native tongue. And they immediately spread the good news.

From near and far, thousands soon streamed to Oxford. Crowds gathered around Colet. Spellbound, they stood shoulder to shoulder for hours on end and strained to hear the words of God spoken in English.

Depending upon one's point of view, Colet represented the desecration or the liberation of the Holy Book.

Pope and crown seethed, but the wily professor had friends in high places. And so day after day and week after week he read, unleashing holy words from bondage. And the crowds kept coming.

Thirty years later when William Tyndale printed the first English New Testament, hundreds of print shops existed and books numbered in the tens of millions, making papal censorship difficult.

The printing of English Bibles, however, remained punishable by death. For 10 years Tyndale skirted the wrath of the Church, even as his Bibles routinely fueled bonfires. The outlaw's odyssey ended in 1536 with his burning at the stake.

Tyndale's martyrdom aside, having traveled from word of mouth to printing house, English scriptures were a fixture. As the Protestant Reformation weakened the power of the Roman Catholic Church, bonfires of vanities became less and less frequent.

Under Henry VIII England broke from Rome, after which the king in 1539 commissioned the authorized English Great Bible for use in the Church of England. A second authorized tome, the Bishop's Bible, appeared in 1568.

Meanwhile in Scotland, the independent Geneva Bible rolled off the presses in 1560. There was something subversive about unauthorized scriptures. Innovative verse and chapter divisions made for easier reading. Marginal notes cleverly skewed the king's authority. The literate masses loved it.

At the heart of the evolution of English biblical translations pulsed a new age of scholarship. A rapid maturing of Modern English characterized the English Renaissance and birthed professional theater.

Into this dynamic time was born one William Shakespeare to a glover in 1564 in the village of Stratford-upon-Avon. Baptized as an infant into the Church of England, he received a basic education in grammar, read the Geneva Bible, at the age of 18 married Anne Hathaway, soon started a family, and along the way became a writer.

By 1592 he surfaced as an up-and-coming actor and playwright in London. Two years later he appeared in two comedies watched by Queen Elizabeth, a lover of plays.

More royal performances followed, the mark of success. By the end of the decade Shakespeare's theatre company emerged as the most popular in London, leading to the actor's purchase in 1597 of the second-largest house in Stratford.

Two years later his company opened the impressive London Globe theatre on the banks of the Thames River. Following

the reign of Elizabeth, a newly-anointed King James I, also an enthusiastic patron of the arts, in 1603 awarded Shakespeare's company a royal patent, upon which the company became known as the King's Men.

Collectively, the popularity of English scripture, vitality and dynamism of the Modern English language, and emergence of professional theatre enabled Shakespeare's seemingly meteoric rise.

He was a man of his times and a man of the people, liberally incorporating into each of his plays biblical stories and allusions familiar to the masses. In comedies and tragedies and histories, Shakespeare's canon included homage to most of the biblical books in some thousand or more instances, with Psalms and Genesis leading the way, and the Geneva Bible his preferred translation.

Royalty, too, took center stage in Shakespearean plays, in no small part to pay homage and ensure continued favor. The playwright's relationship with James I, however, included periods of tension following a failed attempt to assassinate the king in the 1605 Gunpowder Plot.

Uncomfortably for Shakespeare, authorities traced the perpetrators back to his home village of Stratford-upon-Avon and to friends of his father. Executions took place near Shakespeare's Stratford estate, with him likely home at the time. Innocent and never implicated, Shakespeare penned *MacBeth* in response to the plot and to clear his own name from possible unspoken suspicions.

One year prior to the plot, James, critical of the popular but independently-crafted and subversive Geneva Bible, commissioned a new authorized translation for the purpose of quelling public dissent and enforcing religious conformity. Some 47 scholars from the Church of England labored for seven years to produce a manuscript that hewed to Church of England ecclesiology, hierarchical structure and beliefs about ordained clergy.

Published in 1611, the King James Bible, as it came to be known, included in the original title the words, "by his Majesty's special Commandment."

Shakespeare remained active during this time, introducing on the stage 10

new plays, including *MacBeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest*. As both playwright and actor, these latter years of Shakespeare reflected his great popularity.

His full renown and genius, however, did not emerge until after his death. Looking back, all manner of acclaim, much but not all true, shaped the public's memory of the Bard.

Centuries after his death in 1616 arose theories that Shakespeare helped translate King James' Bible, cryptically hiding his name in Psalm 46. However, although the KJV chapter does include the words "shake" and "spear," the same is true of some prior English translations.

Nonetheless, William Shakespeare influenced the wording of the King James Bible through his unique and substantial contributions to the English language.

Characterized by the addition of many new words (often Latin and Greek), evolving Modern English during Shakespeare's life allowed the playwright space to craft new and creative words that spoke to audiences with great emotion, depth and subtlety.

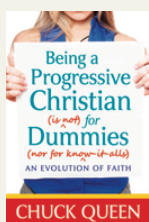
All told, Shakespeare coined an estimated 1,700 or more new English words, a remarkable 10 percent of the total of the words he employed in his writings. Testifying to the playwright's far-ranging influence upon the English language, translators of the King James Bible often turned to Shakespearean words as they toiled over their work.

A few Shakespearean words used in the KJV are "lower" (19 times), "dawn" (2), "bloody" (16) and "road" (1). The words are now so ubiquitous that we can hardly imagine life without them. Yet literary babes these words of Shakespeare were when penned into the King James Bible, a translation that quickly surpassed in popularity the Geneva Bible due to the beautiful, poetic language fostered by Shakespearean-infused Modern English.

More than any other single person, Shakespeare rebirthed the English language, his literary contributions arising from the embers of bonfires of vanities, building upon the first popular English Bible (Geneva), and enabling and shaping the most popular Bible in world history. **NFJ**



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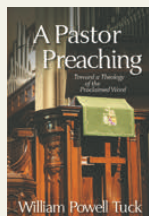
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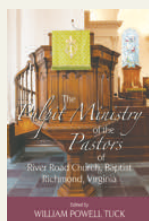
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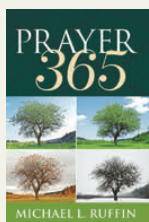
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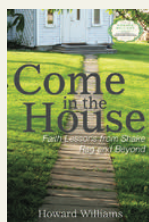
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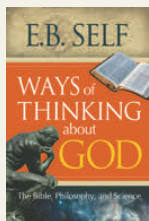
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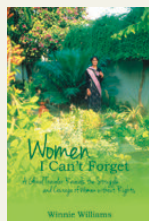
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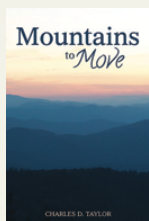
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