

MAY-JUNE 2017

# NURTURING FAITH

Journal & Bible Studies

**Click, friend  
and follow!**

*Nurturing Faith  
expands social  
media presence*

nurturingfaith.net 

## FROM THE INSIDE OUT

*Metanoia builds on  
community assets*

### **Islamic terrorism:**

*Separating myths from realities*

**CHRISTIANS ASK SCIENTISTS  
WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY  
ABOUT NATURE?**

# 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 21 for more information.**

## FOR SHORT-TERM BIBLE STUDIES

### ***NURTURING FAITH BIBLE STUDY SERIES***



**Orders: [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) / (478) 301-5655**

Ideal for groups seeking insightful, applicable Bible studies: Sunday school classes, weekday gatherings, Wednesday prayer meeting, retreats, annual Bible study emphases. Bulk discounts available.

Nurturing Faith Journal, Bible Studies, Books, and Experiences are trademarks of the publishing ministry Baptists Today, Inc.

# 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.

## OUR TEAM

### EXECUTIVE EDITOR

John D. Pierce  
editor@nurturingfaith.net

### CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER

Julie Steele  
jsteele@nurturingfaith.net

### MANAGING EDITOR

Jackie B. Riley  
jriley@nurturingfaith.net

### CONTRIBUTING EDITOR / CURRICULUM WRITER

Tony W. Cartledge  
cartledge@nurturingfaith.net

### ONLINE EDITOR / CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Bruce T. Gourley  
bgourley@nurturingfaith.net

### DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

John F. Bridges  
jbridges@nurturingfaith.net

### CHURCH RESOURCES EDITOR

David Cassady  
sreditor@nurturingfaith.net

### CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Vickie Frayne  
vickie@nurturingfaith.net

### CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

Jannie Lister  
jlister@nurturingfaith.net

### BOOK PUBLISHING MANAGER

Lex Horton  
lex@nurturingfaith.net

### SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

Lydia Fields  
socialmedia@nurturingfaith.net

\* \* \*

### PUBLISHER EMERITUS

Walker Knight

### EDITOR EMERITUS

Jack U. Harwell

## OUR COLUMNISTS

*The Lighter Side* – Brett Younger

*Theology in the Pews* – John R. Franke

*Questions Christians Ask Scientists* – Paul Wallace

*Being Church in Changing Times* – Center for Healthy Churches

*Diggin' It* – Tony W. Cartledge

Nurturing Faith is a trademark of the autonomous, national publishing ministry Baptists Today, Inc., a 501(c)(3) charitable organization founded in 1983 and guided by an independent Board of Directors. Baptists Today, Inc. and its subsidiary Nurturing Faith, Inc. produce Nurturing Faith Journal, Nurturing Faith Bible Studies, Nurturing Faith Books, Nurturing Faith Experiences and other resources. Daily news, blogs and other timely information, along with teaching materials and other resources, are available at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net).



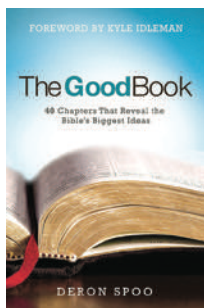
### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jack Glasgow, Zebulon, N.C. (chairman)  
Cathy Turner, Clemson, S.C. (vice chair)  
Nannette Avery, Signal Mountain, Tenn.  
Kelly L. Belcher, Asheville, N.C.  
Edwin Boland, Johns Creek, Ga.  
Donald L. Brewer, Gainesville, Ga.  
Ronnie Brewer, Bristol, Va.  
Kenny Crump, Ruston, La.  
Doug Dortch, Birmingham, Ala.  
Wayne Glasgow, Macon, Ga.  
Frank Granger, Athens, Ga.  
Cynthia Holmes, St. Louis, Mo.  
David Hull, Watkinsville, Ga.  
Bill Ireland, Ooltewah, Tenn.  
Becky Matheny, Athens, Ga.  
Bill McConnell, Knoxville, Tenn.  
Tommy McDearis, Blacksburg, Va.  
Andrew McGill, Chattanooga, Tenn.  
Cynthia Wise Mitchell, Birmingham, Ala.  
William T. Neal, Stone Mountain, Ga.  
Roger Paynter, Decatur, Ga.  
Ron Perritt, Baton Rouge, La.  
Charles Schaible, Macon, Ga.  
Tamara Tillman Smathers, Rome, Ga.  
Charlotte Cook Smith, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
Carol Boseman Taylor, Rocky Mount, N.C.  
Jim Thomason, Anderson, S.C.  
Sarah Timmerman, Cairo, Ga.  
Monica Vaughan, Greensboro, N.C.  
Laurie Weatherford, Winter Park, Fla.  
Clem White, St. Petersburg, Fla.

### DIRECTORS EMERITI

Thomas E. Boland  
R. Kirby Godsey  
Ann B. Roebuck  
Guy Rutland III  
Mary Etta Sanders  
Mel Williams  
Winnie V. Williams

*Nurturing Faith Journal* (ISSN 1072-7787) is published bimonthly by: Baptists Today, Inc., P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318 • Subscription rates: 1 year, \$24; 2 years, \$42; 1 year groups of 25 or more, \$18; 1 year groups of less than 25, \$24; 1 year Canada, \$42; 1 year foreign, \$100. Periodical postage paid at Macon, Ga. 31208 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address corrections to: P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318 • (478) 301-5655 • © 2017 Nurturing Faith • All rights reserved.



**MEDIA: GOOD BOOK  
KEEPS THE FOCUS ON  
LARGE, IMPORTANT  
BIBLICAL THEMES**

*By John D. Pierce*

**51**

# INSIDE

VOL. 35, ISSUE 3  
MAY / JUNE 2017

## THOUGHTS

- 9** To whom are we listening?  
*By John D. Pierce*
- 18** Theology in the Pews:  
Peace on Earth  
*By John R. Franke*
- 19** Our time is now  
*By Amanda Tyler*
- 43** Effective theological education  
fosters healthier churches  
*By Matthew Tennant*
- 54** Roberto Clemente's 'problem'  
is ours, too  
*By John D. Pierce*

## FEATURES

- 4 FROM THE INSIDE OUT:**  
Metanoia builds on community  
assets  
*By John D. Pierce*
- 42** Syrian Baptist churches minister,  
grow amid war
- 46** Islamic terrorism:  
Separating myths from realities  
*By Bruce Gourley*
- 56** Historically significant church  
celebrates 200 years  
*By Bruce Gourley*



**44**

### RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS

James A. Garfield (1881)

## INFORMATION

- 10** Prayer Breakfast organizer quietly  
influenced DC powerbrokers
- 11** Scientists ponder how to talk to the  
faithful about climate change
- 12** Lydia Fields expanding social  
media for Nurturing Faith
- 12** Baugh Foundation gift supports  
new publishing collaboration

### DIGGIN' IT

Collateral discovery  
*By Tony W. Cartledge*

**50**

- 13** Solar farm powers NC congrega-  
tion's ministries
- 14** Pew: Americans warming up to  
most religious groups
- 14** Church-sponsored Boy Scouts  
groups react to transgender  
decision
- 15** Jews support burned Florida  
mosque, \$18 at a time
- 15** Catholics, Jews mark history of the  
menorah together
- 38** Robert Parham led Baptists, others  
to engage ethical issues
- 40** Melissa Rogers: Religious organi-  
zations can engage government  
properly
- 41** Physician to refugees to be  
honored for human rights work

### QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS ASK SCIENTISTS

What does the Bible say about  
nature?

*By Paul Wallace*

**60**

Cover photo by John Pierce. Bill Stanfield (left) and Willie Brown are part of Metanoia, a nonprofit community development corporation bringing positive change to North Charleston, S.C., from the inside out. See story on page 4.

Worth Repeating .....8  
Editorial .....9

Lighter Side .....20  
Recognition & Remembrance ..... 38

Classifieds.....38  
Reblog..... 54





North Charleston police officers chat with Bill Stanfield following a lunch break at The Macon. The newly opened café along the city's once-vibrant Reynolds Avenue is a community development initiative of Metanoia.

# *From the inside out*

## Metanoia group builds on community assets

**STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY JOHN D. PIERCE**

**N**ORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. — The Macon, a newly opened café, is creating a buzz with its tasty breakfast and lunch offerings. Locals, including some North Charleston police officers who stopped by for lunch, expressed appreciation for the good food and comfortable setting.

This reclaimed building along once vibrant but long-struggling Reynolds Avenue is a sign of hope — as are other businesses, numerous homes, a new school, a shared garden and other community-enriching places throughout the Chicora-Cherokee neighborhood.

The café is but one of many initiatives of Metanoia, a nonprofit community devel-

opment organization that seeks to maximize assets within local settings on the south side of North Charleston.

### **COLLABORATION**

Bill Stanfield, a Baptist minister and the CEO of Metanoia, pointed toward the ceiling of the tidy restaurant and noted that earlier one could see all the way to the sky. The owner gave the abandoned building to Metanoia in 2009.

“I think he got the better end of the deal,” said Stanfield with a smile.

The once vacant building that drew squatters and illegal activity has been restored and put to good use. Behind the café are large spaces where entrepreneurial youth arrive after school to screen-print shirts and make jewelry they sell online. The building, which also houses volunteers,

was funded through grants and individual giving. After lunch, Bill met with local bankers about funding for other projects.

Learning to leverage the financial resources necessary for community development, he said, can be added to the growing list of “things I didn’t learn in seminary.”

The café is an example of the collaborative efforts that shape the ongoing good work of Metanoia. The space is leased to Duvall Catering for \$1 per month with an “open-book policy,” said Stanfield.

The rent will increase along with the profit margin — and the agreement calls for employees to be hired from within the community.

Attractive light fixtures donated for the café stem from a partnership with a local lighting company that employs 40 persons from the neighborhood.



## LAYERS

"It's like making lasagna," said Stanfield, in describing Metanoia's strategic, holistic development efforts in this Low Country community — as well as the various sources of funding and other resources that undergird each project.

And the first "layer" of many that make up this successful approach to community development is the most important one: the often-overlooked assets within the neighborhoods.

Those assets, rather than existing problems, are Metanoia's focus, said Stanfield. He, along with his wife Evelyn Oliviera, moved into North Charleston's Chicora-Cherokee neighborhood in 2002 — and have since expanded their family to include two sons, ages 7 and 10, who were adopted from Ethiopia.

Support from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina allowed them a full year to get acquainted with their neighbors and to build relationships of trust. Success, they knew, would not come from outsiders purporting to bring solutions to perceived problems.

Those human and financial investments continue to pay off in Metanoia's mission to build leaders, establish quality housing and generate economic development — recognizing that the best expertise is found within the community.

The organization's name is a transliteration of a Greek word defined in a variety of ways such as "reformation," "spiritual conversion," "change of heart" or "a positive transformation." In North Charleston, it also means "pushing forward to something better."

## MENTORS

A young leaders program was the first official programming. Now approximately 75 school children head over to St. Matthew Baptist Church for Metanoia's afterschool programs.

Eager mentors, some having come through the program years earlier, greet the children. Volunteers include students from the College of Charleston who are transported from the campus and back by Willie

Brown, a former local baseball star who played professionally for several years.

He and his wife, Patricia Brown, who serves as administrative assistant for Metanoia, were married in 1970 at home plate in West Palm Beach's Memorial Stadium, where Willie played for the affiliate of the Montreal Expos.

Mentoring is a major initiative of Metanoia — from helping students with their homework and monitoring their grades, to teaching leadership skills and how to make and handle money responsibly.

"We don't give away anything," Stanfield explained. "You have to bring something to the table."

For example, Individual Development Accounts are established for those in middle school to begin saving money for college. For each dollar raised and saved by the student, Metanoia invests three dollars toward the educational experience.

"Communities like this often have lots of services provided but few opportunities," said Stanfield. Rather than a charity mindset, Metanoia has an investment mindset, he said. "Investors look for potential and expect a return."

The church building with the tall steeple once housed a large Southern Baptist congregation. Now it is home base for the offices and many programs of Metanoia. Stanfield serves as an associate minister of the predominantly African-American congregation.

While "faith is the fuel in the tank for a lot of people who work here," there is no coercion, said Bill. He refers to the biblical parable of the sower, saying: "We want Metanoia to be good ground for people to grow in faith."

His connections throughout the area are deep and wide now. He meets monthly with the mayor's chief of staff to maximize opportunities for enhancing the community's infrastructure and empowering its neighbors.

"About every job someone does here, I've done before," he said. "There's no such thing as a typical day here."

## LESSONS

Fifteen years have passed since the young urban ministry couple moved into this neighborhood that had experienced economic decline and rising crime. They got involved in community organizations and local schools, and spent a lot of time listening.

Their asset-based approach, he said, provided an advantage.

"When you look at people from a deficiency standpoint, you're always going to be disappointed," he explained. "You look for their strengths, their capacities, and are willing to work with those."

As a result, Metanoia has become a major vehicle for bringing together the resources that has allowed the community



Metanoia CEO Bill Stanfield says the nonprofit community development corporation is community-based, asset-driven and rooted in faith.



to begin to experience renewal. And along the way a lot of learning has taken place.

“The key lesson I learned is that it’s a marathon and not a sprint,” said Stanfield, who follows the sage advice he was given: “Don’t go crazy over your victories or go in the tubes about your losses.”

Stanfield recalled visiting the late minister and social activist Gordon Cosby at the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C., years ago, and hearing him say: “One of the things you’ll be doing down there is getting used to failure.”

“He was right,” said Stanfield, noting that his calling is foremost to be faithful, not necessarily successful. That perspective, along with careful attention to his own spirituality, keeps him energized about his calling to this work.

Yet anyone who sees the obvious results of Metanoia’s deep investments here would

quickly note the successes too. Clearly, Stanfield is trusted and respected by his many neighbors for helping lead the slow but sure changes that continue to take place in this Low Country community.

However, he pushes back on any narrative that depicts him in heroic terms.

“It’s important how we portray ourselves to the neighborhood,” he said. “We are servants more than fixers — following the model of Jesus.”

Metanoia now has 10 full-time staff plus several part-time workers and numerous volunteers — and a budget of approximately \$1.5 million dollars, allowing for ongoing community development.

“Charleston is a good place to raise money,” said Stanfield.

Funds come from a variety of sources including the United Way, various grants and individual charitable gifts. And Bill’s

position is still funded through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina’s anti-poverty initiative.

The most gratifying moments, however, come from a simple, single word that he loves to hear, said Stanfield. That is, “when people in the neighborhood refer to Metanoia as ‘we.’”

## GOOD SIGNS

This North Charleston neighborhood remains a mix of great successes and continuing challenges. A new school has opened, and Metanoia is hopeful of acquiring the old school building to repurpose.

An urban farm grew out of a master gardener’s good work with the community garden project. Yet Stanfield says a grocery store is needed in the neighborhood as well.

Regardless of the need, the starting question is always: “What does the commu-



nity have itself to help solve this problem?”

Funds for a new recreation facility with sports fields are in the mix for this “community between two rivers” that currently has no public pool.

New and refurbished housing continues to spread throughout the community. Personal home ownership was an early priority for Metanoia. But, after the mortgage crisis, the emphasis shifted to Metanoia acquiring property to ensure affordable rental housing if and when the community — as Stanfield suspects — becomes a popular place to live again.

“We’re ideally located,” he said, noting that revitalization is also tied to a sense of safety. One area where Metanoia built or refurbished housing won a national award for crime reduction.

Metanoia has acquired about 15 lots for future development — and several houses are now under construction.

“Getting control of sites ahead of gentrification is important,” he said, expressing a commitment to what he called “gentrification with justice.”

Bill is generous with what he’s learned over the 15 years since he and Evelyn — who now teaches Spanish and does education ministry at a historic Charleston church — bought a house on Success Street and began the journey of “relational over transactional” community development.

As a result, Metanoia has become a “demonstration project” to show how distressed communities can channel resources to build “from the inside out,” and Stanfield is often asked to share those lessons with others.

When doing so, he confesses that the experiences over the past 15 years have impacted him personally.

“It’s easier for me to be here in this neighborhood than in the neighborhoods that think I’m a hero [for living here],” he said. “It’s changed me; I’m at home here.”

Through the many years of growth, Metanoia has stayed true to its three stated core values: being asset driven, community based and rooted in faith.

It takes a good dose of faith to move into such a community and invest so deeply. And it takes even more to stay through the



**YOUNG LEADERS** – A leadership-based after-school program for elementary school students was Metanoia’s first initiative. Now some former students have become mentors alongside other volunteers including students from the College of Charleston.

ups and downs to see what can result from such faithfulness.

Amid the remaining evidence of urban decline are many good and hopeful signs however — from the steady march of school children to after-school programs, to youth learning entrepreneurial skills and saving

money for college, to the widening spread of safe and attractive housing, to a sparkling new school, to a great new place to grab a delicious Panini and remember what used to happen right there.

It’s all about pushing forward to something better — from the inside out. **NFJ**





# Worth Repeating

*“My shoes squeak louder when I’m making hospital visits.”*

—Mike Gregg, pastor of Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas (Facebook)

“The dysfunctional marrying of Christianity to Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* is as much of an oxymoron as the equally dysfunctional fusing of Islam to the rage-filled theology of vengeance adopted by some Islamists.”

—UCLA law professor Jhaled Abou El Fadl (ABC)

“If we defend the rights of people to construct places of false worship, are we not helping them speed down the highway to hell?”

—Pastor Dean Haun of First Baptist Church of Morristown, Tenn., opposing Southern Baptist agency support for the First Amendment rights of American Muslims (BNG)

“When a people grow up where religious liberty is a given, it is hard to keep them from yawning at the idea.”

—Church historian Walter B. Shurden, who with his wife Kay established a lecture series with the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (*Report from the Capital*)

“The government should remember that establishments of religion not only harm the consciences of those who don’t embrace the favored faith; they also undermine the religion that the state endorses by sapping its independence and vitality.”

—Melissa Rogers, former executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships (Brookings.edu)

“Implying that authentic religiosity, Christian or otherwise, is defined by the incapacity to do evil is precisely what leads to tribalism

and religious bigotry. Instead, fight such bigotry by recognizing that righteous faith has never guaranteed righteous action.”

—Alan Levinovitz, assistant professor of religion at James Madison University (*Time*)

“... 57 percent of white evangelical Protestants thought it was very important to be Christian in order to be American.”

—Religion reporter Julie Zauzmer referencing a Pew Research Center study on what residents say it takes to truly belong in one’s country (*Washington Post*)

“That awe, wonder and beauty promote healthier levels of cytokines suggests that the things we do to experience these emotions — a walk in nature, losing oneself in music, beholding art — has a direct influence upon health and life expectancy.”

—UC Berkeley psychologist Dacher Keltner, co-author of a study published in *Emotion* journal that found nature, art and religion to be among life’s best anti-inflammatories (*Knowridge Science Report*)

“It’s a very difficult political time to raise a prophetic voice in terms of our response to the political climate that is in America today. So I tried to focus on the church and Christianity as I see it in America today and how American Christianity is wedded more to the flag than to the cross.”

—Pastor J. Wendell Mapson of Monumental Baptist Church in Philadelphia, speaking at a local conference of ministers (*Philadelphia Tribune*)

“There are now more full-time senior pastors who are over the age 65 than under the age of 40. It is urgent that denominations, networks and independent churches determine how to best motivate, mobilize, resource and deploy ... younger pastors.”

—David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group that released a new study in March on “The Aging of America’s Pastors” (BNG)

“I’m excited to provide a platform for more informed discourse about religion.”

—Diane Moore, director of Harvard Divinity School’s Religious Literacy Project that offers a free online course to promote religious literacy (HuffPo)

“When we are tempted to think about when the church has been its worst, we need to pause for a moment and remember when it was its best... We need to recall when members of the church family didn’t simply talk about God’s love; they lived it.”

—Joel Snider, retired pastor and a coach with the Center for Healthy Churches

## CORRECTION

In the article, “Was John Calvin a Five-Point Calvinist?” by Ben Self (March-April issue, pp. 46-47), the word “perseverance” was mistakenly substituted for “preservation.” The sentence should have read: “Many have suggested that preservation of the saints, though perhaps inelegant as a phrase, might have been a more accurate representation for Calvin.”



# To whom are we listening?

By John D. Pierce

On a recent road trip my radio dial landed on a comedy channel in hopes of bringing a little cheer to the mindless miles. Since my youthful days of staying up late enough to catch Johnny Carson's nightly monologue, stand-up comedians have been a favorite source of entertainment and often insight.

Comedians play an important role in our culture for reasons beyond bringing laughter, which indeed is good medicine. They often speak truth in ways that more serious proclaimers are unable to do so, or at least unable to be heard.

One comedic voice that caught my attention was Matt Braunger, whose routine turned to a critique of Christianity. So the volume went up on my radio as he said:

"Jesus didn't go upon the mount and say, 'Go forth and hassle people and make every social situation awkward.'"

Hmmm, I thought; I needed to hear that.

There is a spiritual discipline not often listed among prayer, meditation, fasting and so on. It is the need to intentionally hear other voices beyond our spiritual and sociological enclaves and to contemplate what is being said.

We need to ask: Who gets the most time in our ears — and, therefore, minds? The more daring might even chart listening habits over a week.

For many, it would be a favored radio or TV personality who stirs up certain political passions. Then there's the group of buddies who reinforce each other's preferences and prejudices — sometimes at the coffee shop or even in Sunday school where the conversation moves quickly from the biblical text to a favored soapbox.

Religious voices abound and compete for attention also. We tend to choose the ones that feel best to us.

Yet daily we encounter people who have something to say to us that is worth hearing — although we rarely invest enough of ourselves to know what's on their hearts and minds.

However, we can learn much — particularly from those who quietly struggle in ways we cannot imagine — when we give more ear time and interest beyond the comforts of our own shared experiences and beliefs. And, in doing so, we learn more about ourselves.

Our charge to proclaim is only as effective as our sensitivities to listen.

Yet sometimes we're so eager to impart our understandings of truth that we fail to see and hear how others view us, and the faith we hold firmly.

Sometimes we need to sit at a different table — to talk to someone who is more different than those we know best and listen to most often.

Sometimes we need to turn to a different station — and drop our defensiveness. Sometimes we need to place ourselves in the shoes of those whose experiences we have never known.

By leaving the emotional security of our religious and political enclaves, we can hear unfamiliar voices. And, in doing so, we have a better chance of hearing perspectives and even critiques that we need.

A recent Pew Research Survey (reported on page 14) studied how warmly

Americans feel toward various religious groups. One consistent factor was that one's good feelings were tied to the familiarity with persons of that particular faith.

That is, the better we know someone, the better we feel about that person's faith. The flip side is that our faith is better understood and appreciated and possibly embraced, as well, through meaningful relationships that include listening — and not just going forth to "hassle people and make every social situation awkward."

Jesus invested heavily in familiarity. He didn't preach from a hilltop and hide. He engaged those who were social outcasts, doubters and critics. He reached out respectfully to women and embraced children warmly. Even his closest followers were a mix of characters.

We would do well to get better acquainted with service industry workers; persons of varied ethnic, economic and religious backgrounds; and others whose voices we need to hear. We need to listen to Millennials, immigrants and comics.

Facelessness over familiarity causes us to see people as less than God sees them and calls us to value them. Often we hear only what others say about them — rather than attentively listening to them ourselves.

Our enclave religiosity — with its failure to become familiar with those whose struggles and blessings are beyond our purview — allow for generalized, impersonal perceptions of groups of people and often unfounded fears of them.

Perhaps what some of us fear the most is that we might hear something that makes sense — and causes us to rethink, even realign, our comfortable ways of believing and living. That, too, would be worth listening for. **NFJ**



# Behind the scenes

National Prayer Breakfast organizer Doug Coe quietly influenced DC powerbrokers

BY ADELLE M. BANKS

Religion News Service

**D**oug Coe, who died in February at age 88, was the well-connected organizer of the annual National Prayer Breakfast and a spiritual mentor to many politicians.

He was the longtime head of the International Foundation, a secretive Christian organization known as The Fellowship and The Family, that was responsible for bringing together politicians, diplomats and presidents since Dwight Eisenhower to Washington each year on the first Thursday in February.

Even through this year's gathering, at which President Trump spoke, Coe remained out of the limelight at the breakfast and its related events to which politicians and religious leaders flew in from across the globe.

"In a town where powerful people are constantly trying to increase their name recognition and their brand, Doug Coe was the opposite of that," said Michael Cromartie, director of the Evangelicals in Civic Life program at Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center. "He was a man who liked to work behind the scenes, who did not call attention to himself, who was a sort of a pastor to people in power."

When Coe was named to *Time* magazine's 2005 list of 25 influential evangelicals — and called "The Stealth Persuader" — he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the editors to remove his name and then declined to provide a photo.

A Medford, Ore., native, Coe was recruited to Washington in 1958 by Christian leader Abraham Vereide after working with the Young Life and the Navigators ministries. He and Vereide developed the precursor to the foundation that Coe led after his mentor's death in 1969.

Under Coe's leadership, the foundation turned its focus to people-to-people relationships, whether those were members of Congress, the military or the business world.

In a 2008 book, *The Family*, author Jeff Sharlet said Coe was viewed "with a mixture of intimacy and awe" by members of the organization.

"Doug Coe, they say — most people refer to him by his first and last name — is closer to Jesus than perhaps any other man alive, and thus privy to information the rest of us are too spiritually 'immature' to understand," wrote Sharlet, who lived for a month with the group.

Sharlet wrote that the foundation's hospitality facility on a historic property in Arlington, Va., was a "refuge for the persecuted and the afflicted," from Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas after Anita Hill's accusations of sexual harassment to James Watt, President Reagan's secretary of defense who was surrounded by controversy around his appointment.

Outside of the annual national gathering, Coe fostered additional prayer sessions with Democrats and Republicans — some of whom resided together at a C Street row house in southeast Washington — and meetings with global leaders that were sometimes called into question.

In a 2008 interview, Sharlet said Coe's organization had for decades been "playing matchmaker between American power and foreign dictators."

But Hillary Clinton, in her book *Living History*, was among those who praised Coe: "Doug Coe, the longtime National Prayer Breakfast organizer, is a unique presence in Washington: a genuinely loving spiritual

mentor and guide to anyone, regardless of party or faith, who wants to deepen his or her relationship to God."

Cromartie said Coe received criticism from the right and left for not being political.

"Doug was a very apolitical man when he got with people," Cromartie said. "He would meet with anybody if it would mean he'd get a chance to talk about Jesus to them."

And his efforts to avoid politics carried through to his determination to avoid "Christian" terminology.

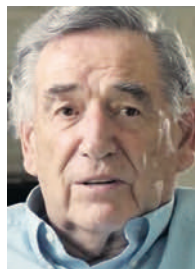
"His view was [that] the word 'Christian' was often a turnoff word because people associated it with politics of the right or of the left," Cromartie said. "He felt like it obscured the larger message of Jesus so he just didn't like the word 'Christian' and he used to humorously say 'Jesus wasn't a Christian.'"

Sharlet predicted that Coe would be more influential than conservative Christian leaders such as Pat Robertson and James Dobson.

"Dobson might be able to muscle his way on an individual vote or in an individual election, but Coe and the Family's influence is going to be much longer term, much more enduring," he said.

In a statement about his death, Coe's family said he continued even at the end of his life to move the focus away from himself and toward a favorite verse from the Gospel of Luke that reads "for the harvest is ready, but the laborers are few."

"Doug begged us not to make his passing about him, but rather continuously showed us how to make it about Jesus," the family said. "His wish was that this family of friends around the world would each gather with one or two in their small group in their own location at their next regularly scheduled time, and continue the prayer from Luke 10:2 that was his life focus." **NFJ**



Doug Coe

# Heads & Hearts

Scientists ponder how to talk to the faithful about climate change

BY LAUREN MARKOE

*Religion News Service*

**B**OSTON — After sessions on gravitational waves, nuclear forensics and artificial intelligence, one of the world's largest general science conferences invited attendees to hear from an Episcopal priest.

Fletcher Harper preached on climate change, and how to get a vast segment of the world's population to pay better attention to what scientists know but many others doubt: that the problem is worsening and portends disaster.

"My entreaty for scientists is to be able to speak publicly about why you care," said Harper, executive director of GreenFaith, an interfaith nonprofit that aims to galvanize religious people to safeguard the environment. "It's vital not to soft-pedal the dangers that we face. ... A great deal is at stake."

At a time when many Americans were in church, Harper and the academics on a Sunday panel about "leveraging religious support for climate policy" explained why and how scientists should pursue religious people as allies.

Most people are people of faith, said panelist Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist and committed Christian who is considered one of the most effective voices explaining the consequences of global warming to the religious.

Since three-quarters of Americans and an even larger percentage of the global population belong to a religious group, and since religion is how so many understand their world, it's incumbent upon scientists to describe the sobering and difficult problem of climate change in religious terms, she said.

"For long-term sustained action, we need hope. We need love. We need encouragement. We need that sense of shared

community of being in this together. And for many people ... faith communities often provide exactly that."

She called it "connecting our heads to our hearts."

The annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science took place in February as more scientists were engaging in public policy debates in response to the election of President Trump, who has called climate change a hoax and, as a candidate, promoted the debunked idea that vaccines are linked to autism.

Hayhoe and Harper offered several ways of framing the science to make it more palatable to the faithful.

Invoke the environment as a gift — the religious response to a gift is gratitude, but also responsibility, said Harper. Then, he said, talk about the world as "out of balance."

"That kind of metaphor is most familiar to people who are practitioners of the dharmic traditions (such as Hinduism and Buddhism), but it also resonates very consistently through Muslim teachings and writings and it resonates certainly for Christians and Jews."

"It also has the advantage of connecting people with their everyday experience," he added.

"When they realize that it's 50 degrees at 7 o'clock in the morning in Boston in the middle of February, it's not hard for people ... to agree with the fact that perhaps something is out of balance."

Also adding to the value of the religious as allies in the climate change debate is their organization, said panelist Matthew Nisbet,

a Northeastern University professor who studies communication and public opinion in science policy debates.

"Religion is more than just a belief system; it's also a community," he said. "Churches are among our most powerful, most important engines for civic engagement and public participation."

Evangelicals, several studies have shown, are also more likely than other Americans to doubt climate change. **NFJ**

—Lauren Markoe of Religion News Service is a recipient of the 2016 AAAS Science for Religion Reporters Award, part of an initiative to facilitate communication between religious and scientific communities.



Fletcher Harper

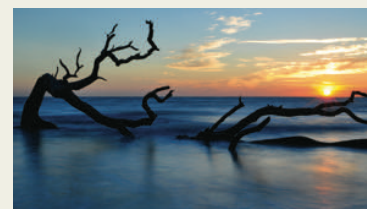


Decorate your home, church or office with the compelling images of award-winning photographer Bruce Gourley.

Images are available in many sizes as canvas prints, framed prints, metal prints, wood prints and more.

Nurturing Faith subscribers receive a 15% discount by using the Discount Code "YNMTSZ".

<http://brucegourley.photography>



# Lydia Fields does social media for Nurturing Faith

**M**ACON, Ga. — Nurturing Faith, the expanding publishing ministry of the nonprofit Baptists Today, Inc., has tapped independent graphic designer Lydia Fields of Gainesville, Ga., to develop and implement a comprehensive social media strategy. She is a visual arts and public relations graduate of Berry College and received a Masters of Christian Ministry from Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.



“Lydia knows social media strategy and our audience very well,” said John Pierce, executive editor and publisher for Nurturing Faith. “She brings exactly what we need to make fuller use of available communications to advance our expanding work.”

A grant from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation supports this needed role that will further the content and mission of Nurturing Faith with an active and engaging social media presence that uses emerging platforms to connect subscribers, raise awareness of available resources and engage readers on a daily basis.

“We want more people to know more of what we are providing,” said Pierce. “And we want more engagement from those who use, value and benefit from the varied Nurturing Faith products and services.”

To receive an occasional update from Nurturing Faith via email — with our promise to not overwhelm you or share your information — send your email address to [socialmedia@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:socialmedia@nurturingfaith.net), telling Lydia to “Put me on the list.”

“And be sure to click, follow and friend us,” said Lydia. The various social media can be found at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net). **NFJ**

## HEALTHY CHURCH RESOURCES

### *Baugh Foundation gift supports new publishing collaboration*

**M**ACON, Ga. — “Finally, a series of resources for local churches that are pragmatic, effective, based upon actual experience and user-friendly!” said Bill Wilson, president of the Center for Healthy Churches, following news that a gift from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation will support the development and publication of new and needed resources for churches during a time of significant change and envisioning.

In collaboration with Nurturing Faith publishing, the Center will produce a series of books and supportive materials addressing a variety of pertinent topics for congregations — drawing on the experiences and insights of pastoral practitioners who are ministers, consultants and coaches.

“For years the Center for Healthy Churches has provided a column in *Nurturing Faith Journal* and, more recently, we published together the excellent book *Weaving Strong Leaders*,” said Nurturing Faith editor and publisher John Pierce. “We will rebrand that book as the first in this series aimed squarely at strengthening ministers and congregations.”

Forthcoming resources, which are

being developed and prioritized, will be made known soon, said Wilson and Pierce, expressing appreciation for the growing collaboration and the generous support of the Baugh family.

“Thanks to the generosity of the Baugh Foundation and the collaborative endeavors of the Center for Healthy Churches and Nurturing Faith, the coming years will see a series of relevant tools and resources become available to a wide audience,” said Wilson. “This innovative venture brings together three organizations that love the local church and are dedicated to seeing it thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

Jackie Baugh Moore of the Baugh Foundation said the project will provide hope and health to congregations and pastors.

“This exciting and timely collaboration between the Center for Healthy Churches and Nurturing Faith will be a top resource for lay leaders and clergy seeking to grow healthier congregations and to lead through times of envisioning and transition,” she added. “You will recognize many of the writers as leaders with personal knowledge and extensive experience in church leadership and congregational life.” **NFJ**



CENTER FOR HEALTHY CHURCHES. NURTURING FAITH PUBLISHING AND EULA MAE AND JOHN BAUGH FOUNDATION COLLABORATION

# Sunny surprise: Solar farm powers NC congregation's ministries

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

MOUNT OLIVE, N.C. — It is not unusual for land to be bequeathed to a congregation that the donor loved. What is unusual, however, is for such land to provide solar energy that fuels the church's current and expanding ministries.

**F**irst Baptist Church of Mount Olive, N.C., a town best known for producing pickles out on Cucumber Boulevard, has two solar farms on donated land — and new resources for mission endeavors that otherwise would still be a dream.

"We're still in the visioning stage of exploring how the solar income can directly impact, or sponsor, specific new ministries in the coming years," said pastor Dennis Atwood, noting that initial revenues addressed some budget needs as well as increased giving to statewide mission causes.

"The presence of solar income has also enabled our congregation to continue vital ministries in our community such as Meals on Wheels, a food pantry, utilities assistance for families, and our annual 'Warm the World Day' that provides free coats, jackets and blankets to many of our neighbors..." he added. "We're not looking to make money and increase 'business,' but to leverage all our assets and spiritual gifts in a way that will impact people's lives for the sake of the gospel."

The positive use of the land is good for the public image of church, already known for its many contributions to the community, said trustee Charles McLendon.

"We were the first to have solar farms, at a time when they were never heard of in this part of the country," said McLendon. "I think [the community] can see it as a



very positive impact for the city and county. Clean operation, no noise, great tax base for the city and county."

Broader exposure from media coverage "skyrocketed publicity for both the church and clean energy," said church trustee Angelo San Fratello, who helps share the story in civic, corporate and educational settings.

The two tracts — 130 acres in one and 56 acres in the other — came to the church several years ago among other gifts from the estate of James Everette Joyner. They remained farmland until a renewable energy company contacted the church in 2011 about establishing the solar presence. By 2015, nearly 20,000 solar panels were in place — bringing energy and the resulting resources for ministry.

"I consider the solar farming venture to be a matter of good stewardship rather

than 'business,'" said Atwood. "Our church culture has changed for the better in the sense that people have embraced the concept of an asset-based approach toward the resources and ministries God has entrusted to us."

As a result, the congregation is taking a fresh look at its resources, he said, including existing buildings and properties, "and asking, 'Are we maximizing their use in order to further the kingdom of God?'"

Both the congregation and the community are widely supportive of this unexpected yet beneficial venture that would never have been a part of the congregation's long-range planning, church leaders said.

"Overall the public response has been very positive and supportive," said Atwood. "As long as First Baptist is committed to being a generous, missional church, there will be positive support." **NFJ**

The place to go between issues of the *Nurturing Faith Journal* is

**NURTURINGFAITH.NET**

- > **Blogs, breaking news, and the latest books, resources and experiences from Nurturing Faith**
- > **Daily religion news from around world, handpicked by online editor Bruce Gourley**
- > **Teaching resources, including video overviews and lesson plans, for the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge**



# Pew: Americans warming up to most religious groups

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

So how do Americans feel toward various religious groups?

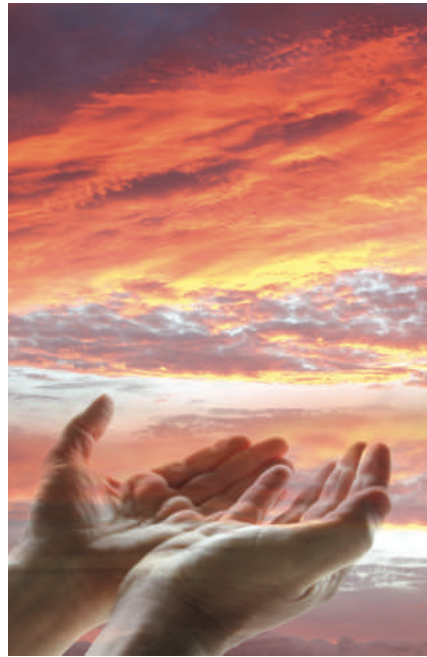
A recent Pew Research Center survey raised that question and found that, in general, Americans have more positive feelings toward religious groups now than they did in 2014.

Evangelicals were the only group to not see an increase — remaining at 61 on the 100-point “feeling thermometer” used by Pew. Mainline Protestants moved up from 62 to 65. Jews and Catholics also rose in the study with improved scores from 63 to 67 and 62 to 66, respectively.

Buddhists jumped from 53 to 60, and Hindus from 50 to 58. The coolest feelings were toward Muslims and atheists, though both groups saw significant increases.

Atheists had the largest gain, rising from 41 to 50 on the scale. Muslims jumped from 40 to 48 while still recording the lowest score in the survey.

These findings came from the Pew Research Center survey of 4,248 adults



conducted in January. According to Pew, the survey found wide variation in the ratings that U.S. religious groups give one another.

For example, Jews and Christians tend

to rate each other warmly while atheists and evangelicals continue to see each other more negatively.

Evangelicals are less definitive than and not as well known as some other groups. In fact, there was a noticeable drop in the percentage of persons saying they knew at least one evangelical. That decrease may also be tied to the number of persons who previously identified as evangelical but stopped using the designation due to political connotations.

Overall, 44 percent of Americans feel very warmly toward evangelical Christians and 38 percent put them in the middle of the scale. Cooler feelings about evangelicals are held by 18 percent.

Of those surveyed, 28 percent identified as evangelicals. When these self-described evangelicals were removed from the results, about one-third (32 percent) of the remaining non-evangelical Americans rated evangelicals rather warmly.

Regarding all the religious groups identified in the study, personal familiarity increased good feelings. **NFJ**

## Boy Scouts alternative sees uptick after transgender decision

BY ADELLE M. BANKS  
*Religion News Service*

Since the Boy Scouts of America decided to accept transgender youngsters, there appears to be growing interest in an alternative group — although the BSA does not require troops chartered by houses of worship to accept children who do not identify with their birth gender.

Nevertheless, the website of Trail Life USA, which bills itself as a Christian alternative, has had trouble keeping up with the people checking an online locator map for troops across the country since the late-January announcement.

“We’ve seen tremendous response,” said Trail Life CEO Mark Hancock in reference to the surge of membership

inquiries. “Where many people would say that they’re leaving Boys Scouts, we have many others that are saying that the Boy Scouts left them.”

New Trail Life troops have to go through a chartering process that can take weeks, but several indicators suggest its numbers are about to swell.

“We’ve pushed a few employees from part time to full time and pushed some from full time to overtime to handle the inquiries from troops around the country that are looking for an organization that’s more aligned with the original timeless values of Boy Scouts,” Hancock said.

Trail Life began in January 2014 and has moved from a virtual office to the 127-acre campus of a former boys home in Belton, S.C. Most of its troops are based in evangelical churches.

Participating boys, called “Navigators” and “Adventurers,” have outdoor adventures, earn badges and can seek the Horizon Award that Trail Life considers a parallel to the Eagle Scout rank. Many of the troop numbers correspond to Bible verses.

The BSA, which has nearly 2.3 million members, said it has received letters of support since its decision from a range of religious organizations — which charter the majority of Scouting units.

R. Chip Turner, former chairman of BSA’s Religious Relationships Committee, said congregations that run units still are responsible for membership guidelines: “Faith groups chartering Boy Scout units need to realize that the latest change only impacts them as they choose for it to do so.” **NFJ**

# Jews support burned Fla. mosque, \$18 at a time

BY KIMBERLY WINSTON  
*Religion News Service*

After a Florida mosque was torched in an arson attack in February, a local Muslim noticed something odd about donations made to a repair fund he launched.

Instead of the round numbers Adeel Karim expected — \$25, \$50, \$100 or more — the donations were in multiples of \$18 — \$36, \$72, \$90 and more.

“I couldn’t understand why people were donating in what seemed like weird amounts to the cause,” Karim wrote in a Facebook post.

“Then I figured out after clicking on the names Avi, Cohen, Goldstein, Rubin,



Medals at the 2009 Maccabiah games feature the Hebrew *chai* symbol. Photo courtesy of Creative Commons/BAWSWIM

Fisher .... Jews donate in multiples of 18 as a form of what is called ‘Chai.’ It wishes the recipient a long life.”

Specifically, each Hebrew letter has a numerical value; the letter “*chet*” equals 8

and “*yod*” equals 10. Together they form the Hebrew word “*chai*,” which has a numerical value of 18 and means “life.”

Karim’s local mosque, the Islamic Society of New Tampa, which had its exterior damaged by an arsonist, is just one beneficiary of a new wave of interfaith support amid increased hostilities toward religious and ethnic groups.

Other examples include Muslim military veterans offering to help guard Jewish sites from vandalism and Jonathan Greenblatt, head of the Anti-Defamation League, an anti-Semitism watchdog group, receiving a standing ovation after stating that if U.S. Muslims were forced to register with the government, he would register as a Muslim, too. **NFJ**

## Catholics, Jews mark history of the menorah with first joint show

BY JOSEPHINE MCKENNA  
*Religion News Service*

ROME — A 2,000-year-old stone block unearthed by archaeologists from an Israeli synagogue in the town of Magdala will be featured in the first-ever joint art exhibit mounted by the Vatican Museums and Rome’s Jewish community.

The block, featuring a relief of a menorah beside two jugs, will be part of an exhibit titled “Menorah: Worship, History and Myth,” tracing the history of the seven-branched symbol of Jewish faith (not to be confused with the nine-branched candleholder used during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah) and its influence on Christian art and artifacts.

The exhibit was announced in February by Cardinal Kurt Koch, head of the Vatican body responsible for promoting Christian unity; Rome’s chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni; and officials from the Vatican Museums and the Jewish Museum of Rome.

Koch welcomed the initiative, saying it underscored the spiritual heritage of the Catholic Church and the positive interfaith dialogue between the Vatican and the Jewish



community.

“This is an interesting initiative from a cultural point of view and its ideological symbolism,” said Di Segni. “Although the menorah is essentially considered a Jewish symbol, it also has a history in the Christian world.”

But the joint initiative of the two faiths will do little to solve the mystery of what happened to the original menorah stripped from the Second Temple in Jerusalem by marauding Roman soldiers and carried back to ancient Rome in 70 AD.

Depicted in the Arch of Titus relief inside the Roman Forum to mark the conquest, the menorah is thought to have

been stolen by invading vandals in the sacking of Rome in the fifth century.

Nevertheless, it was during the Roman Empire that the menorah became a strong cultural and religious symbol for Jews, appearing on graves, sarcophagi and catacombs on the outskirts of the city.

The exhibit, which runs May 15 to July 23 at both the Vatican Museums and the Jewish Museum of Rome, features 130 items, including paintings, documents and candlesticks.

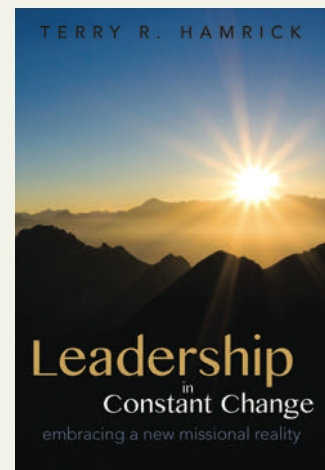
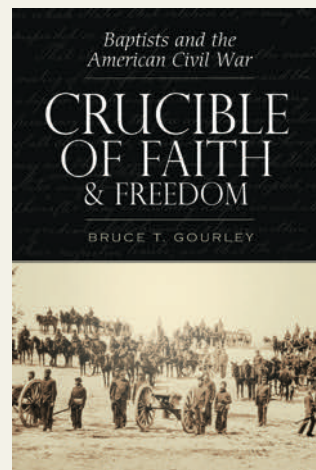
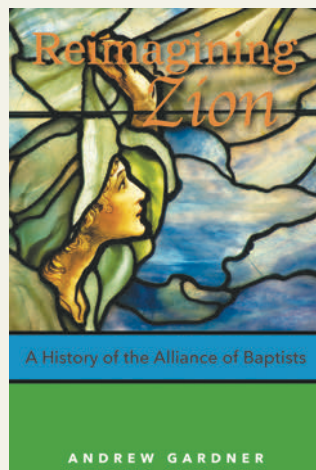
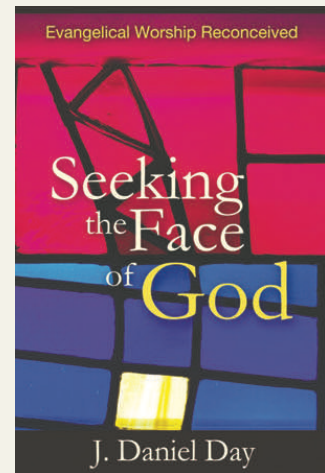
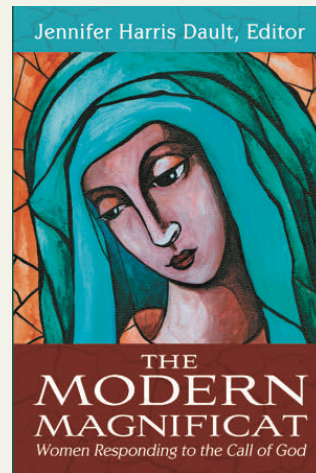
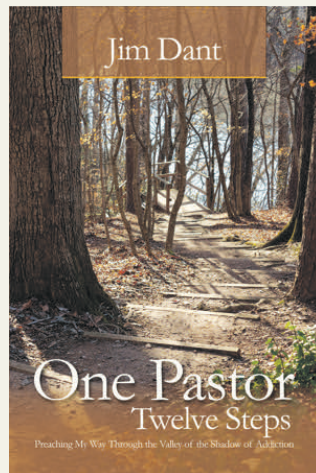
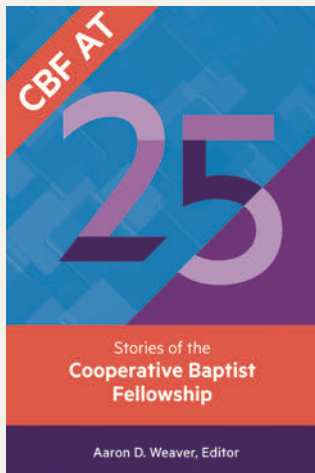
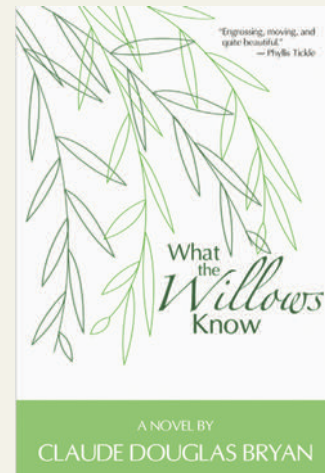
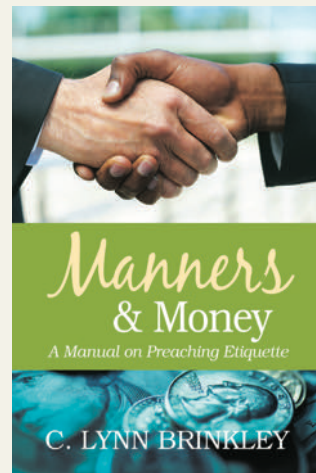
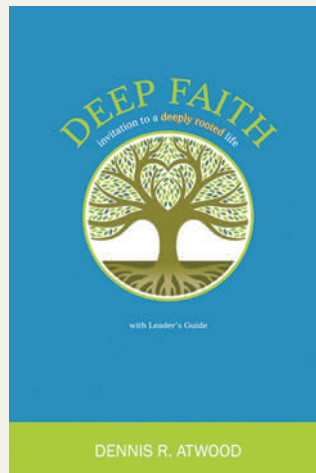
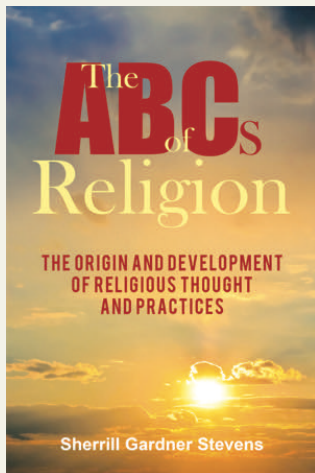
“We have some great works of art, including six or seven bronze candlesticks which also show the Christian tradition of the menorah,” said Arnold Nesselrath, deputy director of the Vatican Museums. “Many Christian churches simply pointed to their Jewish roots this way.”

Nesselrath said the exhibit was important to show how religions can work together and challenge perceptions of religious conflict.

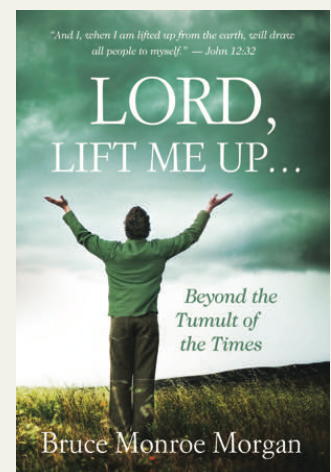
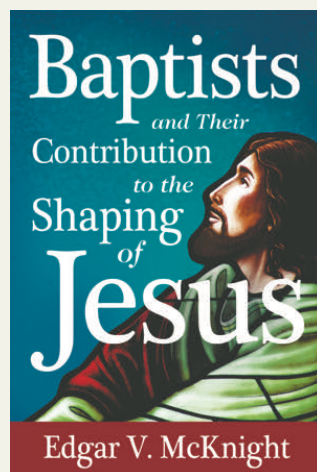
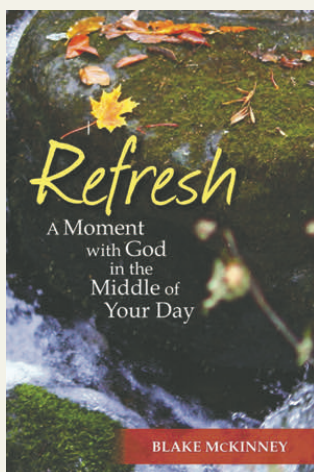
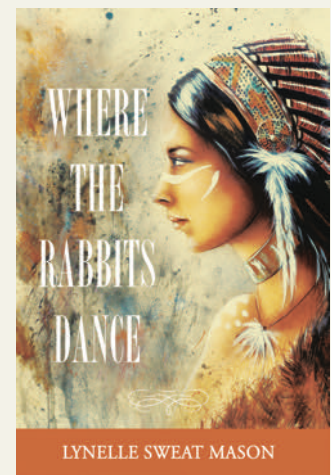
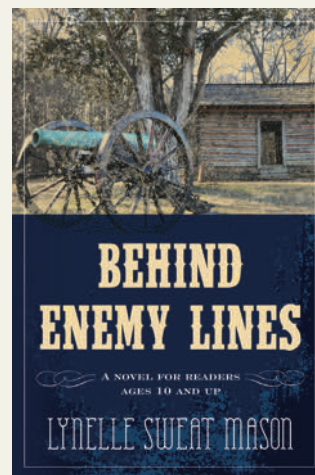
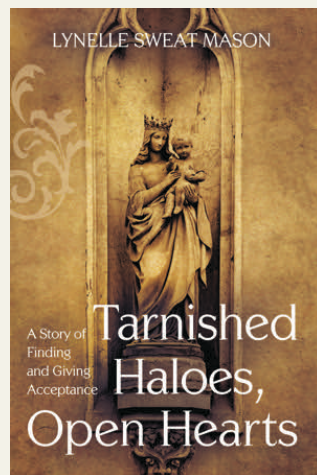
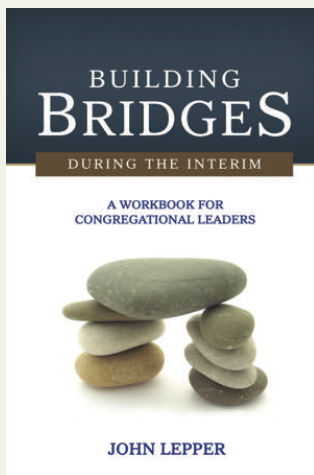
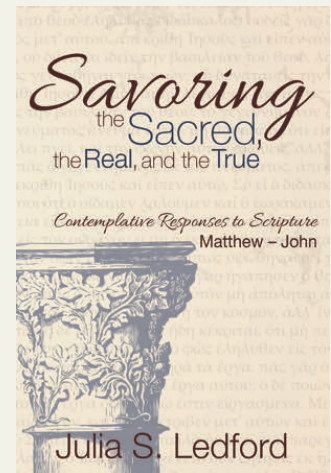
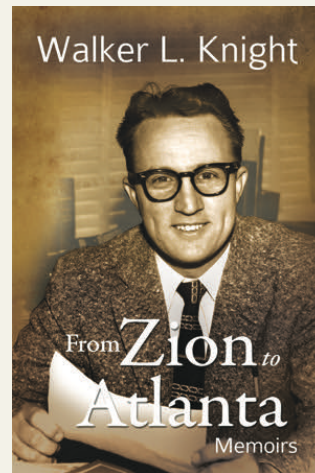
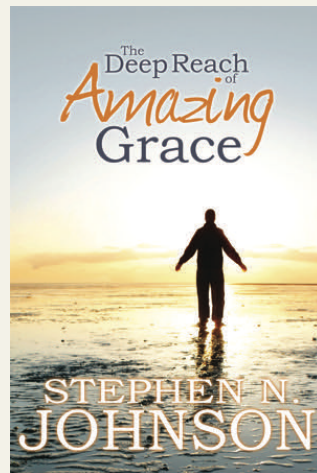
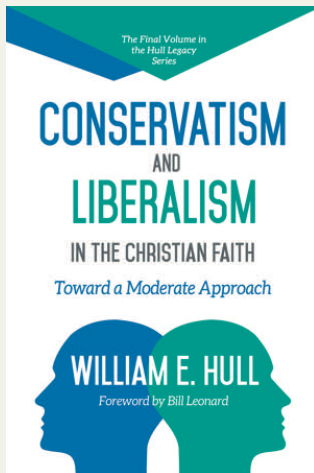
“Fundamentalism is not inherent in religion,” Nesselrath said. “We want to do this exhibition to show we can do something positive together and there is a long history of 2,000 years of mutual reference.” **NFJ**



# Great books from



a great publisher  
nurturingfaith.net



# Peace on Earth

By John R. Franke

One of the hallmarks of Protestantism is the idea that the church is always being reformed according to the Word of God. The advance of knowledge, changing circumstances and new experiences require the continual reformation of the church.

Our work is never fully completed in spite of our best efforts. While we don't arrive, it's helpful to ask: Where are we supposed to be headed? The apostle Paul points us in the right direction: peace, unity and harmony.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul employs the metaphor of the body made up of many different parts functioning together in mutual interdependence for the common good. In Ephesians 4, Paul pleads with the church to live a life of unity and peace.

The reason for Paul's insistence on this way of life is connected to his understanding of the gospel. He views the human condition as one of alienation from God and estrangement and hostility among humans. In response, God has sent Jesus to reconcile humans not simply to God, but to each other for the sake of peace.

In Paul's letters, a focal point of this activity is the relationship between Jews and Gentiles and the salvation that the gospel proclaims brings peace among them. In fact, Paul is more focused on this horizontal dimension of salvation than the vertical. The spirit is given to the church to empower it for participation in God's mission to establish a new community that transcends the divisions that so easily divide and cause hostility and suspicion among humans made in God's image.

In the New Testament this vision of new community is focused on the inclusion of the Gentiles in the family of God.

Ephesians asserts that the establishment of this inclusive community is part of the salvific mission of God to establish peace in the world. This divine plan is intended to bring unity to that which is currently scattered and fragmented in order to restore harmony to creation.

In Ephesians 2, Paul lays the groundwork for the importance of the unity in this new community called the church that he urges in chapter 4. Peace and unity are required because through Jesus Christ the two groups, Jew and Gentile, have been made one and ...

- The dividing wall of hostility has been broken down (v. 14).
- One new humanity has emerged in place of two, bringing peace to the world (v. 15).
- Both groups have been reconciled, putting hostility to death (v. 16).
- Both groups participate in the Spirit and have access to God (v. 18).
- Jew and Gentile are no longer strangers and aliens to one another (v. 19).

Through Christ and the Spirit, Jews and Gentiles are members together in the family of God.

The good news of the gospel is peace in the world and the end of the violence and hostility that destroys life and leads to death. This is a fundamental part of the message of salvation. The church is called to be a sign, instrument and foretaste of God's peaceable kingdom. Hence, Paul exhorts the church "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Returning to the question at the outset: Where are we headed in the process of continual reformation? The short answer is peace and harmony — in the church and in the world.

For the church in the context of the ancient world, it meant peace between Jew and Gentile. For the church in Christian Europe, it meant peace among competing Christian communities. For the church at the outset of the third millennium, it means peace among the religions of the world. Apart from such religious peace, there is no hope for the peace God intends for the earth.

The call to continual reformation means responding to the Word of God in relation to our particular circumstances. In 1517 talk of pursuing peace among the world's religions would have been unthinkable (in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the church couldn't even manage peace between Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists). In 2017 peace among Christians, Jews, Muslims and Hindus (among others) is imperative; the future of the planet may depend on it.

This doesn't mean giving up Christian commitments, but it does mean establishing respectful and hospitable relations with our religious neighbors for our mutual benefit. When we participate in such work, not only do we continue the reformation of the church, but our salvation — and that of the world — draws near. **NFJ**

—John R. Franke is theologian in residence at Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis and general coordinator of the *Gospel and Our Culture Network*.





# Our time is now

By Amanda Tyler

Several events targeting religious minorities for harm raise serious concerns for me about religious liberty. A rash of bomb threats at Jewish community centers, the desecration of graves in Jewish cemeteries, harassment and bullying of Muslim neighbors, and vandalism of mosques present challenges to our national experiment of freedom for a religiously diverse people.

In response, people of faith, especially Baptists, have a unique opportunity to live out our commitment to religious freedom for all.

From our beginning we Baptists have fought for religious liberty, not just for ourselves but for believers of any faith or no faith at all. Some of this was born from experience, when Baptists were “the other” in their European communities and then in the colonies.

It also comes from our understanding of soul freedom — the idea that each person has been uniquely created as a child of God — and that no person, not even the king, should attempt to interfere with an individual’s relationship with God. For the past eight decades the Baptist Joint Committee has carried on that historic commitment, defending and extending religious liberty for all.

Religious liberty is secured in the United States by the First Amendment’s guarantee that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The BJC has been serving as a watchdog on all of government to ensure that the state neither impedes nor promotes religion and its practice.

Our focus is rightly on holding government accountable, but religious freedom also can be jeopardized by acts of individuals. The dramatic surge in hate rhetoric

and violence directed at religious minorities — particularly Jews and Muslims — over the past several months is as much a threat to religious liberty as any law passed by Congress or executive order signed by the president.

Not only must law enforcement and political leaders fulfill their respective duties to investigate and prosecute criminal acts and to denounce bigotry, but also we as citizens and co-sustainers of our democracy must not abandon the important roles we play in protecting religious liberty.

So what is our response as those who care deeply about religious freedom?

As I see it, we have three critical ways to safeguard religious liberty for all in these challenging times.

First, the Scriptures teach us to choose love over apathy. Jesus left us with the Greatest Commandment, a single love imperative with two facets: loving God with our whole self means loving our neighbors as ourselves. The Good Samaritan shows us that loving our neighbor requires that we render help to someone in need, rather than passing on the other side of the road. We must be upstanders, not bystanders.

Our second call is for freedom, not toleration. As George W. Truett preached from the steps of the U.S. Capitol nearly a century ago, “Our (Baptist) contention is not for mere toleration, but for absolute liberty.” He explained, “Toleration is a concession, while liberty is a right. Toleration is a gift from human beings, while liberty is a gift from God.”

Right now some of our neighbors are barely being tolerated, much less left free

to exercise their religion. When a Muslim woman decides not to wear a hijab publicly out of fear, or a Jewish mother withdraws her son from a religious preschool because of terrorist threats, none of us has religious freedom. We should demand nothing less than absolute religious liberty for all.

Finally, we must affirm pluralism over diversity. Harvard University’s Pluralism Project defines pluralism as “the energetic engagement with diversity” — requiring “real encounter and relationship.” In other words, loving our neighbor isn’t enough to achieve pluralism. We must also know our neighbor.

Befriending a Muslim or Jewish person, encouraging interfaith partnerships and projects in our community, or even just endeavoring to learn more about the experiences of others will move us in the right direction.

Our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters are inspiring models for us. After some called for a “Muslim registry,” Jonathan Greenblatt of the Anti-Defamation League declared “this proud Jew will register as Muslim.” In the wake of vandalism of a Jewish cemetery, Muslims contributed tens of thousands of dollars in donations to help repair the damage.

As church historian Walter “Buddy” Shurden has said, “It is easy to holler freedom when you are the one who does not have it. It is a more principled position, however, to cry for freedom when you are in the majority but now lift your voice on behalf of new minorities.”

Baptists and others of principle, our time is now. [NFJ](#)

—Amanda Tyler is executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C.



# Just wondering

By Brett Younger

**D**ear friends were visiting from Georgia. They had been in Manhattan for three days and were excited to tell us all about it.

“We went to *Kinky Boots*. What a show! Have you seen *Kinky Boots*?”

“No, I haven’t been to *Kinky Boots*.”

“I’m surprised you haven’t seen it. It’s wonderful. We went to the Seth Meyers show. Have you been to *Late Night*?”

“No, I haven’t gotten to Seth Meyers.”

“He’s so funny. If I lived here, I’d go all the time. We had Junior’s Cheesecake. Don’t you love it?”

“I haven’t had it yet.”

“You’re kidding. Last night we saw Sally Field. We got her autograph and had our picture made with her. She looks great. Who’s the biggest celebrity you’ve seen?”

“Carol saw B.J. Novak.”

“I don’t know who that is.”

“Most people don’t.”

My friends think I am a bad New Yorker, because I have not had my picture made with Sally Field. I have been in Brooklyn for less than a year, and I want to think I am doing okay.

I know that if I ever do see a celebrity, I am not supposed to have my picture made with him or her.

I know the Louis Vuitton bags for sale on card tables on the street are probably not legit.

I know not to stop at the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ information table.

I know “Excuse me” is not a popular phrase.

I know that what I used to call a convenience store is a bodega, and pie is almost always pizza.

I know that you should give tourists directions — even if you are not sure where they are going.

I know that \$14 is a reasonable price



for a movie ticket.

I know that jaywalking is really just walking.

I know New Yorkers are not supposed to go to Times Square on New Year’s Eve, but I am confused as to whether I should have been to the Statue of Liberty by now. I am getting mixed signals.

I know that the best way to live in New York is with a sense of adventure. Or maybe my hometown is making clear what I should have already known. The best way to live anywhere is with a sense of wonder.

In the comic strip *Peanuts*, Snoopy’s brother Spike is sitting with his back against a cactus, writing a letter: “At night the sun goes down and the stars come out, and then in the morning the sun comes up again. It’s so exciting to live in the desert.”

We get used to sunrises, sunsets, mornings, evenings, the moon and the stars. We get used to music, art, friends, family, joy and sorrow. We get used to the wonders that surround us.

We should not pass through our one and only earthly life and miss its glories. We need a sense of awe or we miss what is most real. For most of us there have been moments when a word was spoken and we heard more than a word. We have seen more

than we let on. We have felt more than we can describe.

By a certain combination of words on a page, by the way paint is placed on a canvas or notes on a score, we have been moved because those words, colors and music speak to us of something beyond.

We sense the holy in the distant stars, the sudden brilliance of a tree that has been on our street for years and in what happens to a cup of coffee when the cream goes in.

People have been transformed by reading a single poem by Wordsworth, listening to a symphony by Bach or seeing a painting by Monet. For some of us it is less often Wordsworth than John Grisham, less often Mozart than Adele and less often Monet than Dilbert, but we keep looking for what lifts our spirit and makes our lives holy.

If we open our eyes, epiphanies — moments of God’s presence — lie like unopened gifts at every turn of the road and every stage of the journey. As we exercise our sense of wonder, we realize that the God beyond us is also in our midst. Live with a sense of awe. Listen carefully. Pay attention. Just wonder. **NFJ**

—Brett Younger is the senior minister of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York.

# Nurturing FAITH™

LESSONS FOR  
MAY / JUNE 2017

## BIBLE STUDIES



**The Bible Lessons that anchor the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies are written by Tony Cartledge** in a scholarly, yet applicable, style from the wide range of Christian scriptures. A graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div) and Duke University (Ph.D.), and with years of experience as a pastor, writer, and professor at Campbell University, he provides deep insight for Christian living without “dumbing down” the richness of the biblical texts for honest learners.

### ATTENTION TEACHERS: HERE'S YOUR PASSWORD!

- > The updated Nurturing Faith web site ([nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)) provides a fresh look and easy access to the Teaching Resources to support these Weekly Lessons. Subscribers may log into the online resources (video overview, lesson plans, Digging Deeper, Hardest Question) by using the current password: **nurture**.
- > Simply click the “Teachers” button in the orange bar at the very top of the homepage. This will take you to where you enter the password (**nurture**) and access the Teaching Resources. You will find the current password on page 21 (this page) in each issue of the journal for use by subscribers only.



Adult teaching plans by **David Woody**, Minister of Faith Development at Providence Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C., are available at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)



Youth teaching plans by **Jeremy Colliver**, Minister to Families with Youth at Smoke Rise Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, Ga., are available at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### *Forward Living*

May 7  
Acts 2:42-47  
Signs and Wonders

May 14  
Acts 7:55-60  
Faithful Unto Death

May 21  
Acts 17:22-31  
A God Unknown

May 28  
John 17:1-11  
The Lord at Prayer

June 4  
John 7:37-39  
A Pentecostal River

#### *Forward Progress*

June 11  
Psalm 8  
Not Quite Angels

June 18  
Genesis 18:1-15  
Not Dead Yet

June 25  
Genesis 21:8-21  
Not Long Alone

### IN THE NEXT ISSUE

#### *Forward Progress*

July 2  
Genesis 22:1-14  
The Closest Call

July 9  
Song of Songs 2:8-13  
A Time for Love

July 16  
Psalm 119:105-112  
A Lamp and a Light

July 23  
Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24  
A Life Exposed

July 30  
Psalm 128  
A Blessed Man

Aug. 6  
Psalm 17:1-7, 15  
A Prayer for Justice

Aug. 13  
Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28  
Selling Joseph

Aug. 20  
Genesis 45:1-15  
Making Peace

Aug. 27  
Exodus 1:8-2:10  
Saving Lives

**Thanks, sponsors!** These Bible studies for adults and youth are sponsored through generous gifts from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (Bo Prosser, Coordinator of Organizational Relationships) and from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation. Thank you!

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

May 7, 2017

Acts 2:42-47

## *Signs and Wonders*

Have you heard about the pretty young Irish potato who wanted to marry newsman Walter Cronkite, but his parents opposed the wedding because Cronkite wasn't a Russet, a Golden, or even a sweet potato? He was just a "common tater."

Most people don't like to think of themselves as "common." Sometimes we may remark on someone's misbehavior with "That's so common." Wealthy or famous people often avoid having to associate with "common people."

In contrast, New Testament writers admired the first Christians as common folk who lived in an uncommon relationship with each other: they chose to share a common fate, eat at a common table, and to support a common treasury.

Would this surprising movement last? Yes! We still gather as the church of Christ, as people who are continuing to be saved and to learning to follow Christ. Whether the trademarks of the movement's first glow remain is another matter.

Acts 2:42-47 is often described as a portrait of the early church, but we should keep in mind that no organization had yet been formed. Luke's intent was to portray behaviors marking the mass of new believers in the early days

### Acts 2:42

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

following Pentecost, not to depict a model church. ↓

It would be a mistake for us to think we must pattern churches of our era after the halcyon days following Pentecost, but we would also err if we ignore the characteristics that made the early Christian movement so distinct and powerful that it has persisted – in a wide variety of forms – for two thousand years.

Luke mentioned four notable characteristics of the first Christians (v. 42), adding a few details in vv. 43-47. He noted that the early Christians devoted themselves to: (1) listening to the apostle's teaching, (2) experiencing fellowship with one another, (3) breaking bread together, and (4) devoting themselves to prayer. ↓

### Devoted to teaching

Luke says the early believers were "devoted to the apostle's teaching." Where else could they turn? Jesus was no longer with them, so they had to rely on the disciples' memory of Jesus' teaching in addition to their Spirit-empowered preaching. There is little distinction between "teaching" and "preaching" at this point: both were designed to proclaim the gospel (good news) in ways designed to convict and instruct new believers.

The samples of their teaching/preaching that Luke provides show that it was firmly grounded in the Old Testa-

ment. Early believers are portrayed as coming entirely from the Jewish community: the people who heard the Spirit-empowered believers speaking their own languages may have been "from every nation under heaven," but were also "devout Jews" (2:5).

No doubt, the days following Pentecost were filled with much searching of the scriptures and listening to the disciples recount Jesus' core teachings. Luke focused mainly on Peter's evangelistic preaching, but we may assume the apostles also recounted ways in which Jesus had reframed the Jewish law and called for an ethic focused on love for God and for one another.

Ongoing instruction was necessary, not only to orient new believers to Jesus' teachings, but also to keep them on track through continued reminders of what it means to follow Jesus.

For the new Christian community, it was important to understand how the Jewish roots of the first believers had born fruit in the person of Christ. Modern believers should likewise recognize that the Old Testament is part of our Bibles. Our genealogy may not be Jewish and we don't live under the covenant instituted at Sinai, but the roots of our faith grow from Israel's story. Just as knowing the story of our own family background contributes to our self-identity, being in touch with our spiritual ancestors promotes a more well-rounded image of who God has called us to be. ↓

### Devoted to fellowship

Luke noted that "Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles"

Additional information at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)



(v. 43). This implies miraculous healings or other surprising acts, but perhaps the biggest miracle to emerge from Pentecost was a new sense of fellowship that bound together Jews “from every nation under heaven” in common cause and common concern.

The Greek word for it is *koinonia*, a term that came to be used as a prime description for people who lived in a close fellowship of mutual appreciation and generous sharing. “All who believed were together and had all things in common,” Luke said, “they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need” (vv. 44-45).

This is the point at which modern readers breathe a sigh of relief that today’s church members are not generally expected to follow their example. The spirit of sharing in the days following Pentecost may have been less ideal than we often imagine, but it still represented a sea change in values for many, as the new believers demonstrated a care for others that went beyond what the law required. It’s likely that the apostles’ teaching had included Jesus’ condensed version of what it means to live rightly:

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Do we still hold to that teaching, or do we think first and always of ourselves and our wants before considering others’ needs? Should any community member ever go without food or medical attention or housing when there are Christ-followers who could help?

As we follow the first believers in learning from the apostles’ teaching, we do so in community, with an aware-

ness of real people all around us, and their very real needs. If the Spirit of God is in us, the call to community will be there, too.

### Devoted to breaking bread

A sign of the early believers’ newfound sense of community was their notable interest in eating together. Indeed, the focus on time spent together over food recalls the many scenes in which Jesus enjoyed table fellowship with others, particularly with people who were considered too “common” to eat with upright folk.

Luke’s characterization of this as “the breaking of the bread” (literally) has led many to suppose that this is a reference to the Eucharist, and that may have been part of it, though Will Willimon suggests that early believers may not have recognized the difference: “In good Jewish fashion, when the blessing is said at the table, the table becomes a holy place and eating together a sacred activity” (*Acts, Interpretation* [John Knox Press, 1988], 41).

If the Lord’s Supper is implied, it must have been observed daily, for v. 46 tells us that “Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home (or, “house to house”) and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.”

Whether or not the Lord’s Supper was included in each meal, eating together was clearly seen as an outward sign of inner feelings of love and sharing within the community.

### Devoted to prayer

Luke’s reference to prayer in v. 42 includes the direct article: they devoted themselves to “the prayers.” This may indicate a continued observance of the assigned Jewish hours of prayer. The new believers continued to worship at the temple (v. 46): they had not stopped

being Jewish, but celebrated Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of their Hebrew hopes. Thus, “they spent much time together in the temple,” and did so “day by day.”

Prayer is an important element of private devotion, but there is something particularly powerful about the experience of praying in community, within the context of worship. Those who lead such prayers should be careful to recognize the sacred character of the moment, and not trivialize prayer with trite phrases that do not speak to the needs of the people, or offer polarized prayers that may please some parishioners but alienate others. Prayer is a crucial building block in the construction of a strong faith community.

Early believers were wise to spend much time in prayer. They knew that they needed it. Prayer continues to be a vital force in worship among people who are oppressed or living closer to the margins of society or survival. Have you noticed, however, that the more successful and self-sufficient we feel, the less emphasis we put on prayer?

We need not read Acts 2:42-47 with the idea that it portrays a model of the early church that we should try to copy: we rarely consider the first version of something to be the best, or prototypes to be better than the later models. Whether it’s a new car or a developing democracy, we like to think it will improve with time and effort.

Striving to be just like the first century church is not what the 21<sup>st</sup> century world needs, but that doesn’t mean we can’t learn important lessons from those early believers. They focused on growing in community through learning together, sharing together, eating together, and praying together. If those elements aren’t present in our churches, perhaps a reevaluation of our priorities is in order. NFJ



# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

May 14, 2017

Acts 7:55-60

## Faithful Unto Death

Have you ever gotten off to a good start with a new job or project, only to face an early obstacle that threatened to derail your efforts? Imagine taking a sales job in a competitive environment where monthly bonuses are based on the amount of business you bring in. You start strong, but then come down with a nasty bug that keeps you out of work for days. Will you ever catch up? Or imagine that you've begun a weight-loss program that's going quite well until a family holiday surrounds you with food you can't resist. Can you get back on track?

Our text is set in the early days of the Christian movement, which got off to such an amazing start that thousands of Jews decided to follow Jesus and were baptized in a matter of days. A Holy Spirit empowered revival broke out that saw people devoting their lives to learning about Jesus and enjoying such close communion that they shared their resources with one another as they ate, worshiped, and prayed together. What could go wrong?


### Trouble brewing (6:1-7:1)

The first hint of trouble within the emerging church is found in Acts 5:1-11, a dark and disturbing story of

### Acts 7:59-60

"While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died."

how two believers named Ananias and Sapphira sold some property and turned over part of the proceeds to the common treasury – but claimed to have given it all. Peter confronted them separately over the lie and both of them fell dead, an apparent warning against attempting to deceive God.

Disquiet again surfaced in Acts 6:1-6, where we learn that ethnic prejudice died hard: Jewish Christians who spoke Greek ("Hellenists") complained that their widows were being shortchanged in the distribution of food to the needy, while Hebrew- or Aramaic-speaking widows ("Hebrews") were getting the lion's share of the resources. The 12 apostles, who were doubtless stretched thin trying to orient so many new believers to the faith, called for the appointment of seven good people to oversee the food distribution while they focused on prayer and preaching. First chosen among the seven was Stephen, described as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit." 

The move seemed to quell the incipient rumblings, and Luke recounts that "the word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (6:7). But there was more trouble to come, especially

from those priests and their followers who did not convert, but who saw the Christian movement as a heretical threat to Judaism.

We soon learn that Stephen was much more than a soup-kitchen supervisor: "full of grace and power," he "did great wonders and signs among the people" (6:7). A contingent of outspoken Jews from various synagogues confronted Stephen over his new beliefs, "But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke" (6:11). Unable to defeat Stephen in a debate, they conspired to have someone falsely accuse him of blasphemy against both God and Moses, causing such a stir that Stephen was called before the Sanhedrin. There, false witnesses accused him of constantly "saying things against this holy place and the law" (6:13).

Despite the charges, Luke reports that Stephen's countenance "was like the face of an angel" (6:14) when the high priest offered him a chance to refute the charges. Stephen happily complied, launching into a sermon designed to demonstrate his firm grounding in Judaism as well as his belief that Jesus had come as the fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy, superseding the old covenant by offering himself as the ultimate sacrifice and introducing a new means of relating to God through grace.

### Trial by sermon (7:2-53)

Stephen began his sermon with a review of Israel's history that seemed calm enough, though his first words were a bristling "Brothers and fathers, listen to me!" Like some modern preachers, he began in a low-key fashion,

Additional information at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)



gradually warming up and setting the stage for the close, where he answered their heated accusations with fiery words that were bound to cause offense.

Stephen began with God's call to Abraham and the promise that one day his descendants would inherit the land where Abraham lived as an alien before becoming enslaved in another country for 400 years and then returning to the land of promise (7:2-7). 🇺🇸

Afterward, God "gave him the covenant of circumcision," so that Abraham circumcised Isaac, who became the father of Jacob, the father of the 12 "patriarchs," who sold Joseph into Egyptian slavery, but were later saved from famine when Joseph gained Pharaoh's favor and brought them to Egypt (7:8-16). 🇺🇸

Stephen then recounted the story of the Exodus, beginning with the birth and call of the Hebrew hero Moses and moving to Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the wilderness wandering, where the people rebelled by making and worshiping a golden calf (7:17-41). This led to the worship of other gods including the "host of heaven," which Stephen supported with a loose quotation from the Greek translation of Amos 5:25-27.

Knowing how important the temple was to his audience – and believing it had become *too* important – Stephen recounted how Israel first worshiped at "the tent of testimony in the wilderness" before Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem, but insisted that God did not dwell in a house made by human hands, citing Isaiah's critique of people who focused on the temple while God had said "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?" (7:42-50, citing Isa. 66:1-2a). 🇺🇸

With his critique of the temple as a foundation, Stephen "quit preachin' and

went to meddlin'," as we sometimes say, addressing Judaism's highest officials as "stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears," who were "forever opposing the Holy Spirit" as their ancestors had (7:51). 🇺🇸 As their ancestors had persecuted "the prophets who foretold the coming of the Righteous One," so he said they had become "his betrayers and murderers," people who had received the law but had not kept it (7:52-53).

Is there any wonder why Stephen's audience of staunch Jewish leaders were upset? "When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen" (7:54). Of course they did.

### Visions and stones (7:55-60)

As Luke tells the story, Stephen appeared immune to the tempers flaring around him. Caught up in the Spirit, he declared "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (7:55-56).

Why would this be so objectionable that people in the crowd covered their ears and rushed to drag Stephen from the temple grounds (7:57)? Recall that Stephen had just quoted Isaiah's oracle when speaking for God: "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool." Stephen now claimed that he could see into heaven, where Jesus ("the Son of Man") was standing at God's right hand. 🇺🇸 This would have infuriated those who had seen Jesus as a danger to Judaism. The burgeoning Christian movement appeared to be an even greater threat, and having people like Stephen claim to see Jesus working together with God could not help their case.

Convinced that Stephen was a self-professed heretic, the authorities dragged him out of the city without bothering to pass an official sentence,

and began the process of stoning him to death. The physical effort involved in this is evidenced by the note that the executioners removed their outer cloaks and left them in the care of Saul, a young but rabid supporter of traditional Judaism prior to his conversion (7:58).

In his dying moments, Stephen exhibited the same spirit as the Christ he worshiped. Luke says that he prayed "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" before crying aloud "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:59-60).

Wow. What do we do with a text like this? Should we feel badly because we don't see visions of heaven as Stephen did? Should we decide to go out and preach a sermon or make a Facebook post that is bound to offend unbelievers — or declare our readiness to be martyred for Jesus?

I suspect most of us have difficulty identifying with either Stephen or his angry and ultimately murderous accusers. Nevertheless, Stephen's challengers remind us of the danger inherent in allowing our loyalty to tradition or an institution make us deaf to the voice of the Spirit. How many of us have known people (perhaps even ourselves) who seem to care more about keeping things the way they've always been rather than being open to new possibilities?

On the other hand, Stephen's example stands as the kind of sold-out commitment that may seem alien to us. We live in a different day and a different context. Rarely do we even think of facing a challenge to be faithful unto death – but are we willing even to be faithful unto embarrassment, or faithful unto behaving ourselves when tempted?

We're not called to be Stephen, but we are called to be the best version of ourselves that we can be. What are we waiting for? **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

May 21, 2017

Acts 17:22-31

## A God Unknown

I was in Athens, studying philosophy. This was Athens, *Georgia*, where the university campus was no less impressive to me than its Grecian namesake would have been to ancient country boys who had come to town. My primary interest was science, however, so I wasn't as impressed with the philosophy professor.

On the first day of class, she asked me: "Mr. Cartledge, what is that you are sitting in?" Trying not to appear smug, I replied: "I'm sitting in a desk."

"Mr. Cartledge, how do you *know* that is a desk?"

"Because I know what a desk is," I said, with some confidence.

"Mr. Cartledge, is that *really* a desk, or could it be just your *idea* of a desk?"

Was she serious? It took a while for me to realize that she was introducing Plato's ideas about the difference between the ideal and the real: for someone who had always taken the reality I perceived for granted, that was a new way of thinking.

All of us want an understanding of reality that makes sense of life. Some think about it more deeply than others, of course. In the ancient world, the Greek philosophers and their students were most articulate in expressing their views, but an itinerant preacher named

### Acts 17:23

"For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you."

Paul had no qualms about going toe to toe (or head to head) with the intelligentsia of Athens.

### Familiar philosophies

Our text occurs during Paul's second missionary journey. Having visited several cities in Asia Minor, he and his companions crossed the Aegean Sea to the region of Macedonia, where they spent a tumultuous period in Philippi before moving on to Thessalonica and Berea, winning converts along the way.

When certain Jewish leaders mounted a campaign against Paul, he took ship and sailed along the coast to the city of Athens, leaving Timothy and Silas to continue the work in Macedonia for a short time, presumably in a more low-key fashion (17:1-15).

Upon his arrival, Paul made his way through the city and was distressed by the many images of gods, which he saw as idolatrous. Paul went first to the synagogues to debate with the Jews and Grecian God-fearers, as was his usual practice, but he also preached in the agora, Athens' famous marketplace (vv. 16-17). The agora was the heart of Athens: it featured several altars and temples, and was a gathering place for those who wanted to catch the latest gossip, socialize with friends, or debate with the various philosophers

and teachers who frequented the place. The primary marketplace in Athens occupied a flat area below the soaring Acropolis, where magnificent temples stood watch over the city.

Some listeners accused Paul of teaching about foreign gods (note the plural), since he spoke of "Jesus and the resurrection" (v. 18). Ancient peoples often expected male gods to have female consorts, so Paul's hearers may have misunderstood his meaning, interpreting *anastasis* (the word for "resurrection," which has feminine gender in Greek) as the name of a goddess, hence, "Jesus and Anastasis." ⚡

Ever eager to hear new ideas, some of Paul's listeners took him to the Areopagus, a council of elder officials who had some ruling responsibilities. They had originally met on Mars Hill, a rocky outcrop between the agora and the acropolis, but in Paul's day they met in the Royal Stoa, an open-air building near the edge of the agora (v. 19). ⚡

Luke notes that Paul entered a debate with the adherents of two competing schools of philosophy, the Epicureans and the Stoics. ⚡ Both philosophies provided belief systems to explain how life should be understood. Loquacious locals enjoyed the bantering of ideas: Luke wrote that "all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new" (v. 20).

### An unknown God (vv. 22-31)

The gospel Paul preached was clearly at odds with the teachings of the philosophers, in which deities played

Additional information at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)



only distant roles. Paul proclaimed the existence of a supreme God who sought a relationship with humans.

As Paul began his defense of the gospel, he demonstrated a quick wit and a masterful use of oratory. He used gentle flattery to warm his audience and seek common ground: “I see how extremely religious you are in every way,” he said (v. 22). Paul described walking through the city, so festooned with images of various gods, and said “I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (v. 23).

Paul probably knew that the philosophers generally regarded the Greek gods as either irrelevant or unconcerned with humans, but in a brilliant rhetorical move, he used the presence of an altar to an “unknown god” as the basis for a sermon on the God they had yet to meet.

The unknown god, Paul said, is “The God who made the world and everything in it.” Furthermore, “He who is Lord of heaven and earth does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things” (vv. 24-25).

The philosophers would have agreed that the gods did not need human temples. Still, Paul’s statement stood in sharp contrast to the Epicurean argument that life is solely the result of random atomic movements, and the Stoic belief that the gods determine the fates without concern for humans. It also challenged the worship practices of other Athenians who may have thought it needful to leave food offerings or other gifts at the altars of their patron gods.

Athenians popularly claimed to have sprung from the earth as a separate race from other peoples, but Paul called

that belief into question, arguing that all people are descended “from one ancestor” who had been made by God (v. 26a).

Paul’s hearers would not have caught his reference to Adam, but they were familiar with the argument that all humans are related. Paul went on to insist that, for all peoples, God had intentionally “allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live” (v. 26b).

Epicureans considered the gods irrelevant and the Stoics saw them as impersonal, but Paul proclaimed a God who wished to be known and was always near to earnest seekers (v. 27). Paul believed the people of Athens held mistaken beliefs, but he gave them credit for seeking deeper understanding. 📌

Philosophical systems grow from a search for the meaning of life, but Paul argued that people cannot find it apart from God: “For in him we live and move and have our being” (v. 28a). This would not have sounded strange to the philosophers, who were familiar with the idea that divinity is immanent in creation. Seneca, a Stoic philosopher known during that period, wrote “God is near you, He is with you, He is within you” (Epistle 41.1-2).

Having explored areas in which there might be some common ground, Paul moved toward a sharper critique of religions that value images of the gods. He began by quoting one of the Greek poets, who had spoken of humans as offspring of the gods (v. 28b). If the deity is powerful enough to create humankind, Paul argued, then surely any human attempt to portray a god in gold, silver, or stone was doomed to failure (v. 29).

Paul’s implication was clear: those who thought one could represent a god through human craftsmanship were

living in ignorance. God might have overlooked that in the past, but those who knew better needed to change their ways of thinking and acting. Paul used a form of the verb *metanoēō*, which means to change one’s way of life as the result of changing one’s thoughts and attitudes: it is commonly translated as “repent” (v. 30).

Paul’s call for his hearers to move from honoring images to putting faith in the true God was not just an exercise in right thinking; there were eternal consequences. All would face a day of judgment before Christ, Paul said, who had come to reveal true righteousness and who had demonstrated his authority by being raised from the dead (v. 31).

The belief in resurrection, in judgment, and in a god who cares would contravene both Stoic and Epicurean teachings. One might have expected the council to throw Paul out of town, and some sneered at his teaching, but others asked to hear him again. Luke records that a few people believed, including a member of the Areopagus named Dyonisius and a woman named Damaris, who must have been a woman of some reputation in the community.

What might a modern believer learn from this text? Paul’s strategy shows that effective evangelism begins with finding common ground. If we hope to bring others to accept Christ, we need to meet them where they are, seek to understand their current beliefs, and look for points of connection before explaining why we believe Christ is the true way.

Paul’s words are also an encouragement to all who live in a pluralistic world: Christian believers may be in a minority, but we can always trust that God is near to us, and that we are never alone, for “In him we live and move and have our being.” 📌

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

May 28, 2017

John 17:1-11

## *The Lord at Prayer*

**H**ave you ever been on the edge of something big, and felt the need for prayer? It may have been your wedding day, the hours before a long overseas trip, the first day of a new job, or a final exam at the end of a long semester. You may have felt certain it's what you wanted and confident that everything would go well, but still just uneasy enough to feel the need for a serious prayer.

Let's imagine how we would feel if the big event on the horizon was our own public humiliation and execution, a voluntary action to save our friends. Can we even imagine such a thing? If we could, we might understand something of how Jesus felt on the night before his arrest, when he felt the need to pray for himself, for his disciples, and for all who would come after them.

### Looking forward ... (vv. 1-3)

John 17:1-26 is often described as Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer." John does not speak of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane, as do Matthew and Mark, but inserts a lengthy farewell discourse between Jesus and the remaining disciples after Judas departed from their final meal

#### John 17:3

"And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

together. Mark and Matthew imply that Jesus prayed at great length in the garden – so long that the disciples kept falling asleep – but they mention only a few words: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Matt. 26:39, cf. Mark 14:36).

John does not speak as if Jesus prayed for hours, but records much more of what Jesus had to say in those last hours. The first part of the discourse focused on words of comfort and instruction (13:31-16:33) in which Jesus spoke to his disciples. The final part was a prayer (17:1-26) in which Jesus spoke to God in the disciples' hearing, interceding for his followers in a "priestly" fashion.

Jesus began the prayer with a request for himself (vv. 1-8), then shifted to a prayer for his disciples (vv. 9-19), as well as future followers who would come after them (vv. 20-26).

Look at the first verse and try to imagine the queasy feeling Jesus must have had in his stomach as he looked heavenward and prayed "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him" (vv. 1-2).

"The hour has come," Jesus said. His arrest would take place before dawn, with a long day of unimaginable pain and an agonizing death on

the cross to follow. He could not have looked forward to it, but knew that it was time.

What did Jesus mean by asking God to "glorify" him? That seems out of character for one who was humbly and unselfishly on the road to an ugly but voluntary death. We normally think of seeking glory as a negative thing, as a narcissist seeking to puff up his or her reputation in search of "vainglory."

Jesus' context was different: though one with God from the beginning (John 1:1), Jesus had voluntarily set aside heavenly glory to come to earth in the form of a man, reveal the Father, and suffer for the sake of all people. Jesus knew he would soon die and return to the glory of his heavenly throne.

In his incarnation as a human, Jesus prayed to God as Father, seeking assurance that in the coming days his mission would be accomplished, his sovereignty would be established, and the kingdom of God would be born on earth. Then all could recognize God's work and those who had come to know eternal life could glorify God, giving honor where honor was due.

Jesus' prayer reflects an earlier statement. After watching Judas leave the upper room, knowing that his fate had been set in motion, Jesus spoke of his glorification as a *fait accompli*: "When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once'" (John 13:31-32).

Additional information at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)





Glory, in this context, means much more than praise or honor. Jesus connects his glorification with the fulfillment of his mission in granting eternal life, which he defines in a surprising fashion: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (v. 3). For Jesus, the essence of eternal life is not the promise of lazy days in heaven, but the ability to *know God*.

In Hebrew thought, “to know” suggests far more than intellectual comprehension: it is to know God by experiencing God’s presence, a personal relationship of communion with God. Only through Jesus the Son can we come to know the fullness and glory of God, the source of our life.

### Looking back ... (vv. 4-8)

In v. 4 we can detect a subtle shift. Jesus had spoken of himself in the third person in v. 3, but now switches to a first-person address. Except for the near-repetitive request for a return to glory in v. 5, vv. 4-8 come across as a final report of what Jesus had done in his earthly life and ministry.

“I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do,” Jesus said, “So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed” (vv. 4-5).

And how had Jesus glorified God? In his words, “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word” (v. 6). To “make God’s name known” implies a full revelation of God’s character, which Jesus had delivered through his actions as well as his words.

We should note that “those you have given me” does not refer to

predestination or “the elect,” as some might surmise, or even to all believers. This part of Jesus’ prayer was focused on the disciples, whom God had chosen and “given” to Jesus to learn from him and to serve him. They had proven faithful in receiving God’s teachings through Christ, to the point of accepting the mind-boggling premise that Jesus had come from God into the world (vv. 7-8).

The Gospels often portray the disciples as stubborn, hard-headed, and slow to learn, but they *had* learned. They had taken Jesus’ teachings to heart, accepted him as Lord, and “kept his word,” seeking to live as he had taught them.

We who call ourselves “Christian” claim to be modern-day disciples. Have we taken Jesus’ teachings as seriously? What evidence is apparent in the way we conduct our lives? Does our living bring glory to God?

### Looking out for others ... (vv. 9-11)

With the disciples on his mind, Jesus prayed not for the world in general, but for the disciples in particular, “asking on their behalf.” They belonged to God, he said, but had been given to him (v. 9). As a result, “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them” (v. 10).

The thought that Jesus had been glorified through the disciples brings us to thoughts of their mission. As Jesus had revealed to the disciples the true nature and desires of God, so the disciples would be appointed to carry that same message to the world so others could come to experience God and to have eternal life. In this, Jesus’ direct prayer for the disciples was indirectly a prayer for all who would benefit from their ministry.

Although Jesus remained present with his disciples as he offered this

prayer, he knew that would soon come to an end. Having made a final commitment to his coming passion, Jesus thought of himself as already gone from the world, leaving the disciples behind (v. 11a). Thus, he prayed for God to protect them – not so much from danger or threats from the outside, but from divisiveness that might hinder their mission: “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (v. 11b).

Jesus went on to acknowledge that the disciples would face opposition from the world “because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (v. 14). Jesus did not ask that the disciples be granted supernatural security from human opponents, but from evil influences that could disrupt their unity and impair their mission in the world (v. 16): “As you have sent me into the world,” Jesus said, so “I have sent them into the world” (v. 18).

Think for a moment about your church, or other churches you have known. When has the church known its best days? When has it been least effective? What characterized the days of growth? Were more troubling days due to human opposition from outside the congregation, or from internal discord that sidetracked its mission?

Is it any wonder that Jesus’ primary prayer for the disciples was “that they may be one”? Surely believers could profit from praying for Christian unity, both in our congregations, and in our communities. Too many of us, for too long, have accepted racial lines, denominational divides, and ethnic exclusivism as par for the course, though they are bound to hinder Christ’s mission in the world.

What practical things can we do to come closer to Jesus’ desire that we all be one? **NFJ**


# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

June 4, 2017

John 7:37-39

## A Pentecostal River

**P**entecost. Christians observe it every year, some more avidly than others. Catholics, mainline denominations, and other liturgical folk switch their vestments and pastoral stoles to red, often with embroidered doves or flames to symbolize the Holy Spirit. Male pastors may wear red neckties, and women clergy may break out red shoes. It's generally a happy day.

For churches on the charismatic end of the spectrum, Pentecost can be even more special. Worshipers may feel moved by the Spirit to stand, raise their hands, shout, dance, or even speak in tongues. Like the psalmists, their worship is punctuated with vocal praise and bursts of applause, unlike those who believe Habakkuk 2:20 should apply to modern worship: "the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence . . ." 

Jews also celebrate Pentecost, though on the day before, seven weeks and a day from the second day of Passover. Greek speakers called it Pentecost (meaning "fiftieth") because it was held on the 50th day after Passover.

Observant Jews anticipate the arrival of Pentecost by counting the days, even as Christians may count the

John 7:37-38a

"On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.'"

days of Advent, or from Ash Wednesday to Easter. Jews don't use the term "Pentecost," but *Shavu'ot*, meaning "weeks." The festival, also called "Firstfruits," once celebrated the spring harvest of winter wheat (Exod. 34:22). Israel's traditions combined an agricultural holiday with a historical memory: rabbinic calculations in the Talmud claim that God gave the law to Israel on Mt. Sinai exactly 49 days after the first Passover celebration.


So, while Jews memorialize the giving of the law on Pentecost, Christians commemorate the giving of the Holy Spirit.

### Living water (vv. 37-38a)

Our text is not from the familiar story of the descent of the Spirit on Pentecost in Acts 2, but is drawn from an account in the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus speaks of the coming of the Spirit.

The setting of this text was also a festival, though it was not *Shavu'ot*, but *Succoth*, otherwise known as the "Feast of Booths" or "Tabernacles." That festival occurred in the fall, shortly after the solemn Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). It also combined agricultural and historical elements, celebrating the fall harvest while also commemorating Israel's 40 years of wilderness wandering, when the people lived in tents. In

Jesus' day, Jews would build temporary shelters and camp out in them during the week-long festival.

Much of John's gospel is centered around Jesus' visits to Jerusalem, all of which coincided with Jewish festivals, which faithful Jews sought to celebrate in Jerusalem when possible. 

The early part of John 7 locates Jesus in Galilee as the feast of Booths/*Succoth* drew near. His brothers urged him to go on to Jerusalem, but Jesus knew it would be dangerous for him, so he insisted that they go without him. "I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come," he said (v. 8). Later, however, Jesus decided to go, "not publicly but as it were in secret" (v. 10). After overhearing much conversation and debate concerning him, Jesus gave up his attempt at anonymity: at mid-week he went to the temple and began to teach (v. 14).

People listening to Jesus expressed astonishment that he could teach so forcefully without being a trained rabbi, but Jesus insisted that his teaching had its source and authority in God (vv. 15-18). He accused those who had criticized him for healing on the Sabbath of hypocrisy, noting that they circumcised on the Sabbath (vv. 19-24).

He and the crowd also sparred over whether he should be understood as the Messiah. Jesus did not claim the title outright, but insisted that though the people may have known him and his earthly background, they didn't know the one who had sent him. Some sought to arrest Jesus, "but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come" (vv. 25-36).

Additional information at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)





Today's text again finds Jesus in the temple, this time on the last day of the festival. If his prior teachings had not created a stir, this one would: "... while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink'" (vv. 37-38a, NRSV).


This translation is one of several options that are discussed more fully in "The Hardest Question" online. Theologians and exegetes have long debated whether Jesus or the believer then becomes the source of "the river of the water of life." Whatever the interpretation, the clear intent remains the same: Jesus invited all who were spiritually thirsty to come to him and drink, and the act of "drinking" from Christ is connected to belief. In other words, Jesus recognized the human thirst for spiritual wholeness and extended an invitation to receive from him, observing that only believers would take advantage of the offer.

The story of Jesus and the woman of Samaria comes to mind. When Jesus offered her "living water," she did not understand. He then explained, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will 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 4:13-14).

The Fourth Gospel also records Jesus speaking of himself as the bread of life (6:35, 48), or the light of the world (8:12, 9:5). His choice of water as a metaphor in this context was probably linked to a symbolic water ritual that accompanied the Feast of Weeks. Tractate *Sukkah*, from a collection of rabbinic writings known as the Mishnah, describes an impressive water drawing and libation ceremony performed each day of the

festival. A golden flask containing three measures of water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam, which was fed by Jerusalem's primary water source, the Gihon Spring. As the flask of water was brought into the city through the Water Gate, priests would announce its coming with three ceremonial blasts from the *shofar* (an instrument made from a ram's horn), blowing a *tekiyah* (a long blast) a *teruah* (a broken, toccata blast), then another *tekiyah* (*Sukkah* 4:9).

When the water cask was paraded into the temple, a priest would ceremonially carry it up the steps of the large altar, where there were two large bowls (whether of silver or pottery is a matter of debate), one for wine offerings, and one for the water ritual. As the congregation watched, the priest would pour a measure of the water into the bowl. The water would then spew out through two small openings near the bottom, creating a fountain effect as the water washed over the altar.

The ceremony must have been imposing and accompanied by exuberant praise, for *Sukkah* 5:1 adds: "Anyone who has never seen the rejoicing at the place of [water] drawing, has never seen rejoicing in all his days." 

### The coming Spirit (vv. 38b-39)

The latter part of v. 38 presents a conundrum, for it claims to quote scripture ("As the scripture has said"), but there is no Old Testament equivalent to what follows: "Out of his heart/side shall flow rivers of living water." As noted above, some interpreters take this as a reference to the believer, while others think the reference is to Jesus.

Most translations say the river of living water will flow "from his heart," but the word used is *koilia*,

which normally means "side," though it could also be used as a reference to one's heart. Some interpreters take it as a general reference to the body: NET has "From within him shall flow rivers of living water."

Others suggest that the quotation may have been shaped by the author's belief that when a Roman soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear during the crucifixion, "blood and water came out" (John 19:34).

While water is the topic, we are aware that the real subject is the Spirit, for which the "water of life" is a metaphor. When we come to v. 39, there's no question about who is speaking, as the narrator adds an obvious editorial comment: "Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

The NRSV translation is unfortunate, as a casual reader might take it to mean that the Spirit did not yet exist. This, of course, is not the case. A better reading is "for the Spirit was not yet, for Jesus had not been glorified." Some ancient copyists added "not been given" in hopes of clearing up any misunderstanding. The point is that while Jesus was still physically on earth, the Spirit was not yet come upon believers. Only after Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension – when he had been fully "glorified" – would the Spirit be given to the church.

The memorable Pentecost experience described in Acts 2 became the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that those who came to "drink from" him would receive the Spirit in abundant and overflowing ways.

Have you had a "Pentecost experience" of sensing the presence of Christ's Spirit within you? Tongues aren't required: only thirst, and belief. **NFJ**





# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

June 11, 2017

## Psalm 8

### Not Quite Angels

One of the great challenges we all face is finding our place in the world. For some people, it's less difficult because it's more limited: local culture or parents tell children what their place is, opportunities are few, and people may assume from childhood that they will live in the same village and watch cattle or plant rice until they grow old, with their own children following them. Other children may grow up obeying their parents' instructions to do well in school and become a doctor or an engineer; even to marry a person of their parents' choosing.

Those who live in freer circumstances have more opportunities and options, but sometimes feel overwhelmed and at a loss to find and establish their identity. In America, young adults are waiting longer and longer to get married, have children, or settle into a career. Many feel lost even into their 30s or 40s, unsure of who they want to be, what they want to do, or where they belong.

Psalm 8 cannot point us to a career or a mate, but it does help us to understand where we fit in the larger scheme of things – indeed, in the *largest* scheme of things – in relation to God and the world. 📖

#### Psalm 8:1

“O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

#### A majestic God (vv. 1-2, 9)

Have you ever stood beneath a clear night sky studded with stars, feeling overcome by how big the universe is and how puny we are? As impressive as it is just to look at the stars – which the ancients believed were fixed into a dome over the earth – those who comprehend even a hint of our current understanding of the universe must feel even smaller. We live in a small solar system near the edge of a massive galaxy containing more than 100 billion stars, and it's just one of an estimated *100 billion galaxies* in all.

The psalmist had no way of understanding that the earth is a planet rather than the center of the universe, or that there are untold billions of star systems surrounded by other worlds. Still, he didn't need to know that, any more than we do. A starlit sky is all we need to realize how small we are.

If we consider the size of the universe, and we also believe that God created all things, how could we think of God as anything other than possessing magnificence beyond our comprehension? Thus, the psalmist writes “O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens” (v. 1).

Those who recall the familiar King James Version may remember the opening words as “O LORD, our

Lord.” The initial “O” is not in the text, but added for English style. Literally, the text has “Yahweh, our Lord.” Yahweh is a personal, covenant name that God revealed to Israel (Exod. 3:15), always rendered in English by LORD, or occasionally GOD, in all upper-case letters. The word translated as Sovereign (“Lord”) is from the word *'adonai*, which means “lord,” or “master.” In different contexts, it could be used of human persons in positions of authority, but here clearly refers to God.

English translations don't convey it, but the word translated as “our Lord/Sovereign” (*'adonēnu*) is a plural form of the word. Grammarians refer to this as a “plural of majesty,” a way of making God's lordship even more emphatic. The term usually appears in the singular form, but here the psalmist is particularly interested in emphasizing God's greatness, so he uses the plural.

Having addressed God by the covenant name “Yahweh,” the psalmist connects divine splendor to the divine name: “How majestic is your name in all the earth!” 📖 As high as the heavens might be, said the psalmist, God's glory is elevated even higher. 📖

With verse 2, we come to the most puzzling part of the text, an apparent declaration that God can use even the praise of infants to silence all foes. The verse is clearly designed to expand upon the theme of God's magnificence, but its imagery interrupts the main flow of the psalm, so we'll leave a further discussion of that thorny verse for “The Hardest Question” online.

Additional information at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)





### A privileged people (vv. 3-5)

When most of us read Psalm 8, we are far less interested in a puzzling reference to babies and enemies, because it is the following question that grabs our attention: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (vv. 3-4).

The psalmist struggled with the mindboggling notion that God could create something as massive as the heavens and earth and still care for human beings. We can’t know if the psalmist conceived of God in anthropomorphic terms, or just happily used the metaphor, but he used the idea that God created the universe using only fingers as a way of emphasizing Yahweh’s limitless power. If such a God could be bothered to care about puny, squabbling humans, how amazing is that?

But God does care, he concluded, because Yahweh not only created human beings, but also “made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor” (v. 5). Again, those who grew up reading the KJV will remember a different translation: “For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels . . . .”

Which is it? Are we to think of ourselves as a little lower than God, or than angels? As usual, the answer is a matter of interpretation. The word is *'elohim*, the plural form of a word meaning “god” that could be translated as “gods” in a generic sense, as in Exod. 18:11, “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods.” Most of the time, however, it was used as an alternate term for the God of Israel, with the plural form being a “plural of majesty” designed to indicate that no singular term for god would be adequate.

The Old Testament also speaks of supernatural beings, created by God, who served on a divine council and did God’s bidding, often as intermediaries between heaven and earth. Hebrew commonly refers to these beings as “sons of God” (*benē-'elohim*), as in Job 1:6, where the NRSV uses the term “heavenly beings.” We typically think of such beings as “angels,” and the Septuagint translators read it in this sense, using the Greek term *'aggelous* (the double gamma [g] was pronounced as “ng”), the root of the English word “angel.”

How do we decide? The psalmist almost certainly has Gen. 1:26-27 in mind, where God spoke to the divine council and said “Let *us* make humankind in *our* image” before creating humans, both male and female. Thus, the idea is that humans were created not only in the image of God, but also in the image of the angelic assembly. So, some prefer to translate *'elohim* as “angels,” while others prefer the more common meaning of “God.”

At the end of the day, the meaning is little different. Humans are not only made by God, but share in God’s image, and in making them this way God has “crowned them with glory and honor.”

### A responsible dominion (vv. 6-8)

The poet’s recollection of the creation story continues in vv. 6-8, which recall Gen. 1:28, where God instructs humankind to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

The psalmist has seen such dominion in action, and praises God for having given humans charge “over the works of your hands,” putting “all

things under their feet” (v. 6). Sheep and oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, fish and everything living in the sea had come under human control (vv. 7-8). The psalmist’s point is that all life, from land to sea and sky, was subordinated to humankind: the work of God’s hands was put into human hands.

For the psalmist, the notion that God had not only taken notice of humans, but also given them control of life on earth, was such an astonishing notion that he could not resist bursting into praise once again, closing the psalm by repeating his initial thought: “O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (v. 9).

How do you think the psalmist might have responded if he could see just how greatly humans have multiplied, and to what extent they have exercised dominion? We must remember that God’s granting humans control over the earth in Gen. 1:28-30 includes accountability as well as authority. God did not put the earth into our hands so that we might exhaust its resources, pollute its water, and overheat its atmosphere.

The psalmist lived in a time when the earth’s population was small, air pollution was limited to cooking fires, and animals were not being forced into extinction on a regular basis. If he could catch a glimpse of what humans have done – and are doing – to the planet, he might not have thought it was such a good idea to put them in charge.

The poet has testified that God’s greatness is beyond comprehension, and yet God cares enough for humankind to grant them stewardship of the earth, and to desire a relationship with them. When you contemplate the beautiful poetry of Psalm 8, what challenges you the most? **NFJ**



# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

June 18, 2017

Genesis 18:1-15

## Not Dead Yet

Have you ever gotten news that seemed too good to be true – news so good that you could only laugh in disbelief? Maybe you won a big prize, or were selected for an honor, or got an unexpected promotion or raise. Maybe someone gave you an extravagant gift, or you learned that your first grandchild was on the way.

Today's lesson tells the story of a couple easily old enough to have great-grandchildren being told that they would soon conceive their *first* child. No wonder they laughed. I suspect we would have giggled, too.

### An abandoned hope

Genesis 18 is part of the extended story of Abraham and Sarah, which begins in the latter part of Gen. 11:26 and extends through Gen. 25:11. After growing up as Abram in the Sumerian city of Ur (near modern-day Basra, Iraq), Abraham migrated northward around the fertile crescent with his father and extended family. Their initial goal was Canaan, but they stopped and settled in the city of Haran, in northern Assyria (now near the border between Syria and Turkey).

Abraham presumably would have grown up acknowledging the moon god, worshiped as Nanna in Sumeria

### Genesis 18:14

"Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son."

and as *Sîn* in Haran. After Abraham's father died, however, Yahweh appeared to Abraham in some unmistakable fashion, calling him to worship a new God and follow Yahweh's leading to a new land. We can only imagine what that experience must have been like: Did God appear in physical form, or through an inner voice, or an impressive vision? The text does not say.

During the encounter, God called Abraham to leave his home and travel to a new place to be revealed on the way. The call was accompanied by an expansive promise that the LORD would bless Abraham and make of him a great nation, blessing others through him (12:1-3). Abraham was already 75 years old, but pulled up stakes and moved on, though he did not yet know his destination.

God led Abraham to the land that would later become Israel, repeating or expanding the promises at several points along the way. In 13:14-18, God promised to make Abraham's offspring like the dust of the earth, and to grant them "the length and breadth of the land" for them to live on. This made it clear that the promise involved both progeny and property.

Despite God's promise, years passed with no babies in sight. In time, Abraham despaired of having children and prepared to designate Eliezer, his steward, as his heir (15:1-3). Yahweh appeared again to assure

Abraham that he would have a child of his own, then led him outside. "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them," Yahweh said. "So shall your descendants be" (15:4-5). Abraham responded with faith, the narrator said, "and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15:6).

That promise was followed by a spooky night-time ritual of covenant making. God instructed Abraham to cut in half a three-year-old heifer and a three-year-old goat, placing the halves across from each other, along with a dove on one side and a pigeon on the other, with a path between them.

As evening approached, Abraham fell asleep, "and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him." Yahweh again insisted that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land, and Abraham watched as "a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch" passed between the two rows of animal parts as a sign of God's covenant promise. ♣


Still another promise is found in 17:1-22, where God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's to Sarah (both are dialectical variants of the same names, which mean "Exalted Father" and "Princess"). Speaking to Abraham, God promised specifically that *Sarah* would have a child, after which Abraham could have texted "ROTFL." Modern folk who use text-speak aren't really "Rolling On The Floor Laughing," but Abraham was:

"Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'" (17:17).

Additional information at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)





While Abraham was laughing, God was serious. Something about this promise was different, for it contained a new stipulation that Abraham must obey: he was to begin the practice of circumcision and require his children to maintain the custom throughout all generations (17:9-14). 

**A hospitable man  
(vv. 1-8)**


When we come to Gen. 18:1-15, God’s promise of progeny is repeated, but this time in a more personal manner. Abraham had been in the land for more than 20 years. Some years before, at Sarah’s urging, Abraham had fathered a son by Hagar, his wife’s handmaid (16:1-16). He seemed satisfied enough for Ishmael to be his heir (17:18), but God had other plans.

The story tells us that Abraham was encamped at a favorite spot called “the oaks of Mamre,” which was near Hebron, in a hilly area west of the Dead Sea. As he sat napping in the doorway of his tent in the heat of a dry afternoon, the old man looked up to find three men standing nearby.

The trio must have been impressive in appearance, for Abraham ran to meet the visitors, bowed with his face to the ground, and begged them to rest in the shade and take refreshments before passing on, “since you have come to your servant” (vv. 1-5).

Hospitality was, and remains, an honored custom among Middle Eastern peoples. Even enemies could receive hospitality and protection if they sought it. We are not surprised, then, that Abraham received his visitors with warmth and generosity, but he put on a particularly extravagant display.

Though pushing 100, Abraham *ran* to meet the visitors, *hurried* to ask Sarah to bake bread, and again *ran* to the herd to select a choice calf. He then

organized a lavish and hefty meal with dishes of fresh bread, beef, milk, and curds (a form of yogurt). Treating the visitors as honored guests, he “stood by them under the tree while they ate” (v. 8). 


**A wonderful promise  
(vv. 9-15)**

At some point during or after the meal, the visitors asked “Where is your wife, Sarah?” (v. 9). Had Abraham told them his wife’s name, or was their knowledge of her name the first clear indication of their supernatural identity?

Abraham answered that Sarah had remained in the tent. This is not surprising. Sarah wasn’t hiding or showing pique: it was customary for men to eat apart from the women, and for the women to remain out of sight.

One of the guests – presumably Yahweh – then declared: “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son” (v. 10). If Abraham had not yet guessed that his visitors were not ordinary people, that statement should have made it clear.

Sarah’s tent was close enough behind the guests for her to overhear the conversation. At 90 years old and long past menopause (v. 11), she had lost any hope of bearing children, but not her sense of humor: “So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?’” (v. 12). The thought of enjoying sex with Abraham in their old age must have seemed ludicrous.

The notion was not at all absurd in Yahweh’s book, however. “The LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son”’ (vv. 13-14). 

In the Hebrew, Yahweh’s response

comes across as incredulous, as if God couldn’t believe that Sarah would doubt. A more literal translation would be: “*Why, this? Sarah laughed, saying ...*” Yahweh’s description of Sarah’s statement is then more detailed and emphatic than previously reported. The narrator had mentioned only laughter at the thought of sexual pleasure, but God has Sarah saying: “Indeed, *truly*, will I bear a child when I am old?”

Yahweh went on to ask, “Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?” The word translated as “wonderful” (NRSV) is from a verb that can mean “to be extraordinary” or “to be amazing.” Since wonderful things can be remarkably difficult to accomplish, it can also mean “to be difficult.” Thus, NET has “Is anything impossible for the LORD?” and NIV 11 has “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” This is probably the better sense in this context.

The answer to the question, of course, is “No.” Nothing is too wonderful, too marvelous, too difficult for the LORD: even the gift of a child to a 90-year-old woman and her centenarian husband.

Fearing that God might be angered by her doubt, Sarah denied having laughed (v. 15), but she did indeed have pleasure as well as a son (21:1-7), when laughter was again the order of the day. Abraham had laughed out loud and Sarah had laughed more quietly, but when the boy was born, they happily named him “Isaac” (*Yitzhak*), which means “he laughed.”

“God has brought laughter for me,” Sarah said: “everyone who hears will laugh with me.” Today we may still laugh at the prospect of God granting a baby to an aged woman, but Christian descendants of Abraham can rejoice even more in remembering how God, in due season, granted another baby – to a virgin. **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

June 25, 2017

Genesis 21:8-21

## Not Long Alone

Have you ever faced a major setback that led to a surprising leap forward? Sometimes we complain that our progress in life feels like “three steps forward and two steps back,” or even worse, “two steps forward and three steps back.”

Still, an apparent obstacle or reversal may turn into an unexpected advantage. Some of the most successful entrepreneurs crashed and burned in their early ventures, but learned from failure to create a better product or a more effective business model. Any number of people have been rejected or discarded by someone they had expected to love for life, but kept going forward and found greater happiness, whether alone or with a new and better matched partner.

Today’s text describes a mother and son who were cast from a comfortable camp into a desert wasteland. On the verge of losing all hope, they discovered that they were not alone, and faced an impressive future.

### Trouble in the camp (vv. 8-13)

Last week’s text (Gen. 18:1-15) recounted the story of how God and two angels visited Abraham’s camp, near Hebron, and told him that despite

#### Genesis 21:14

“So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.”

their old age (100 and 90), he and Sarah would soon have a natural born son. They both laughed at such a preposterous idea, but in the face of all odds, Sarah gave birth to a boy. They named him Isaac, meaning “he laughed.”

Sarah’s good humor did not last, however. We recall that some years before, Sarah had given up on bearing a child of her own and decided to use her Egyptian handmaid as a surrogate birth-mother. She encouraged Abraham to inseminate Hagar, the plan was successful, and Hagar became pregnant (16:1-3). Unfortunately, she then “looked with contempt on her mistress” (16:4) and Sarah responded in kind, treating Hagar so harshly that the slave girl ran away (16:5-6).

Through a beautiful but often-overlooked encounter between Hagar and the “angel of the LORD,” God not only provided for Hagar’s needs in the wilderness, but also promised that her son – to be named “Ishmael” – would grow into a “wild ass of a man” and become the progenitor of uncounted offspring, though he would live at odds with his kindred (16:7-12).

God instructed Hagar to return to Sarah with a more respectful attitude (16:9), and the text implies that she did.

We read nothing more of their relationship for more than a decade, until the day when Abraham and Sarah held a feast to celebrate Isaac’s weaning. In those days, lacking the baby foods and nutritional supplements of today’s diet, children were typically weaned near their third birthday.

The happy celebration turned sour when Sarah noticed Ishmael, who would have been 17 or 18 years old if we take the text’s chronology seriously. Something about Ishmael and what he was doing offended Sarah, but we can’t be sure what it was. A literal reading of v. 9 could be “Then Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had borne to Abraham, playing.” The interpretive problem lies in our understanding of the last word, which is a participle formed from the same verb meaning “to laugh” that was the basis of Isaac’s name.

The participle is formed from an intensive stem, which can give it nuances ranging from “he laughed,” to “he played” to “he mocked” (laughing derisively). The NRSV assumes that Ishmael was innocent of ill will, translating the verse to say that Sarah saw Ishmael “playing with her son Isaac” (adding “with her son Isaac” after the early Greek version). The NET, on the other hand, casts Ishmael’s behavior in a negative light, choosing the more critical shading of the verb: “Sarah noticed the son of Hagar the Egyptian – the son whom she had borne to Abraham – mocking” (see also NIV 11 and NAS 95).

Whatever brought Ishmael to Sarah’s attention, she apparently could not bear the thought of Hagar’s son being on a par with Isaac. Forgoing

Additional information at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)





their names, she insisted that Abraham “cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac” (v. 10). Her demand “was very distressing for Abraham on account of his son” (v. 11). We can imagine what a hard place this created for Abraham, who loved his son Ishmael and did not share Sarah’s insecure jealousy.

Nevertheless, the narrator says God told Abraham to go along with Sarah and send them away, promising that Ishmael would become the father of a nation of his own, while the people to be known as Abraham’s descendants would be descended from Isaac, the chosen son of Abraham and Sarah together (vv. 12-13).

### Deliverance in the desert (vv. 14-21)

So once again, Abraham obeyed his wife, sending Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness with nothing more than a small supply of bread and water. They went miles to the south “and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba,” apparently lost. It would not have taken many days for both food and water to run out, and soon Hagar despaired for their lives. The narrator does not record any speech from Ishmael, though he later says that “God heard the voice of the boy.”

Ishmael would have been in his late teens, according to the canonical chronology, but the story speaks as if he were much younger, using a term typically employed for a small child.

After their scant provisions were exhausted and thirst had taken its toll, Hagar “cast the child” under a bush and then went “about the distance of a bowshot” away, believing the boy would die soon and not wanting to watch (vv. 15-16).

Hagar “lifted up her voice and wept,” the text says (v. 16), and we

assume Ishmael must have been crying, too, for comfort arrived when “God heard the voice of the boy” and “the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, ‘What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is’” (v. 17). This served as a reminder that though Hagar had hidden her son beneath the bush, he was not hidden from God.

The angel instructed Hagar to help the boy up and lead him by the hand, “for I will make a great nation of him” (v. 18). He then “opened her eyes” to a nearby well, from which she could refill the water skin and revive the boy (v. 19).

Both God and Hagar looked after Ishmael as he grew, according to v. 20: “God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow.” While they lived in the wilderness of Paran, south of the Negev and close to Egypt, Hagar arranged a marriage for him with an Egyptian woman (v. 21) – and that’s the last we hear of Hagar.

It’s also the last we hear from Sarah. Surprised?

### A tale of two mothers

We would not expect Sarah to appear in chapter 22, the story of how Abraham came close to offering Issac as a burnt sacrifice. If she had known what Abraham was up to, it would surely have been the death of her. Indeed, the next chapter begins with Sarah’s death in Hebron and the account of how Abraham purchased a burial cave for her – but much time had passed, for Isaac was 40 years old.

Take note of the ambivalent way the narrator portrays Sarah: he admires her beauty and her willingness to play along with Abraham’s tricks. But, he also sees Sarah as the first to give up on the promise of descendants by resort-

ing to surrogate motherhood rather than trusting God to grant her a child. Given Sarah’s age, we can understand that, but in the narrator’s mind, this puts Sarah in a negative light, a shadow that emerges more strongly when Sarah begins to resent the results of her own plan and turns against both Ishmael and her handmaid, who had obediently allowed Abraham to impregnate her.

But the narrator also shows mixed feelings about Hagar. She obeys her mistress and accepts her role as a surrogate mother, but adopts a spiteful attitude toward Sarah after becoming pregnant. When treated harshly, she runs away, only to return and bear the child, then be forced to leave the camp with no more thanks than a loaf of bread and a skin of water. In the wilderness, she dumps Ishmael under a bush and retreats, leaving him to die alone rather than staying to comfort him in what she expected would be his last moments.

Despite Hagar’s weak moments, she is granted two conversations with God. In the first encounter, God speaks to her and she speaks to God. Indeed, she assigns to God a new name – El Roi – and is the only person in scripture said to have done so (16:13). In the second encounter, Hagar does not speak, but God provides water and again promises that her offspring – like Abraham’s – will multiply beyond counting.

While biblical tradition asserts that the Israelites were descendants of Abraham through Isaac and then his son Jacob’s 12 sons, it likewise assigns to Ishmael 12 sons who became progenitors of their own tribes. As Jews look to “Father Abraham,” Muslims of Middle Eastern descent also consider Abraham to be their ancestor, but through his firstborn son, Ishmael.

Given the current tension many people feel towards those who follow Islam, it is good to remember that Muslims also call Abraham father. **NFJ**



## RECOGNITION & REMEMBRANCE

**Gina M. Brock** is associate pastor of Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., coming from Immanuel Baptist Church in Paducah, Ky.

**Dee Dee Coleman** is the first female president of the Council of Baptist Pastors of Detroit and Vicinity. She is pastor of Russell Street Missionary Baptist Church in the city.

**Will Dyer Jr.** is pastor of First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., coming from First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga., where he was associate pastor.

**Lt. Col. Elizabeth Harris-Lamkin** retired Jan. 7 after 22 years of military chaplaincy service. Endorsed by the Alliance of Baptists, she recently served as senior chaplain for the Georgia Air National Guard.

**Ralph H. Langley** died Jan. 13 at age 94 in Huntsville, Ala., where he was pastor emeritus of the First Baptist Church. He attended Mars Hill, then a junior college, before transferring to Baylor University. He was among the student leaders of an impactful, post-war youth revival movement that spread from Texas across the southeastern U.S. Other pastorates included University Baptist in Coral Gables, Fla., Wilshire Baptist in Dallas and Willow Meadows Baptist in Houston.

**Peter and Sarah McCurdy** of Ridgeway, N.J., began missionary service in Costa Rica in December 2016. They serve with the Federation of Baptists of Costa Rica in partnership with American Baptist International Ministries.

**Jennifer McClung Rygg** is pastor of First Baptist Church of Pendleton, S.C.

**Roy L. Thompson** died Jan. 8 in Cleveland, Ohio, at age 94. He served American Baptist Home Mission Societies (formerly National Ministries) in several capacities including new church and community development.

**Senior Pastor:** Azalea Baptist Church, Norfolk, VA, is seeking a full-time senior pastor. We are a moderate, community-minded church with strong military ties whose members come from diverse backgrounds. We affiliate with the CBF, CBF of Virginia and BGAV. We affirm the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message, and support both men and women in leadership positions. We also affirm that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is at the heart of Christianity. Our approach to evangelism and outreach is to develop loving relationships and reflect Jesus Christ in our daily lives. The candidate should hold a degree from an accredited seminary, and five years pastoral experience is desired. Applications can be sent to azaleasearch@aol.com or to Pastor Search Committee, Azalea Baptist Church, 3314 E. Little Creek Rd., Norfolk, Va. 23518.

**Children's Pastor:** Johns Creek Baptist Church, Alpharetta, Ga., is seeking a full-time children's pastor to lead our robust ministry to families with children, ranging from birth through fifth grade. Currently the ministry is comprised of more than 200 children on roll, with approximately 125 in weekly attendance. Candidates must be skilled in organizing, inspiring and leading a large number of experienced volunteers who are passionate about excellence in ministry. In addition to providing innovative program leadership, our children's pastor is a vital part of a collaborative team of pastoral leaders. Candidates should thrive in such an environment of mutual encouragement, challenge and support. Interested persons may email jcbcsearch@jcbc.org to request a detailed job description and/or submit a résumé.

### Robert Parham led Baptists, others to engage ethical issues

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — "His purpose was the same as the organization he founded and deeply cherished: to help people of faith advance the common good," said Kevin Heifner, chair of the board of directors of the Baptist Center for Ethics, following the March 5 death of the organization's founder and executive director, Robert Parham.



Parham, 63, founded the Nashville-based BCE in 1991. He grew up in Nigeria where his parents were Baptist missionaries and, after earning college and seminary degrees as well as a doctorate in Christian ethics from Baylor University, Parham worked with the former Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The mission of BCE expanded under Parham's innovative leadership to include the website ethicsdaily.com and documentary films dealing with poverty, racism, interfaith relationships, immigration and various issues of justice. **NFJ**

## CLASSIFIEDS

### *Baptists Today / Nurturing Faith has received gifts*

*In honor of ...*

*Jim and Pat Travis*  
From T. Furman Hewitt

*In memory of ...*

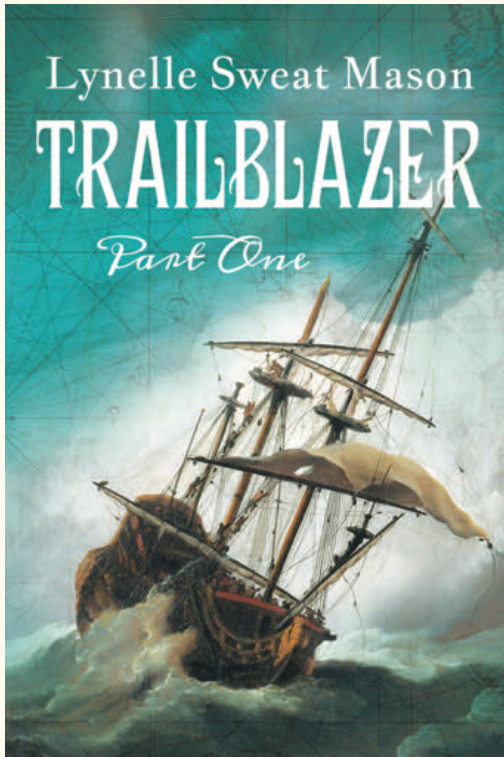
*Bryan Robinson*  
From Florence Robinson

*William G. Trawick*  
From Margaret G. Trawick

*Bob Cates*  
From  
Larry B. Atwell  
Elizabeth Dutton  
Kenny and Shirley Crump  
John and Martha Heneisen  
Janie and Hugh Peacock  
Willis and Glenda Potts  
Earl and Carolyn Tillman  
Clement and Carole White



# NEW FROM NURTURING FAITH



*Join young N.W. (Noble Wimberly) Jones and his family on a bold journey from their home in Lambeth, England to settling into the Georgia colony.*

Lynelle Mason loves stories — and loves to tell them — especially if they involve her home state of Georgia. *Trailblazer* is packed with historical details and will be enjoyed by readers of all ages as they join N.W. in exciting and challenging adventures.

—MARY JAYNE ALLEN  
RETIRED MINISTER OF EDUCATION  
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, CHATTANOOGA, TENN.

Lynelle Mason truly is gifted in making historical fiction come alive for her readers. Young readers will be captivated by the stories of hardship and perseverance of someone their age living in a very difficult time in our country's early history.

—LAURA M. COOPER  
ELEMENTARY LITERACY COACH  
CHATTANOOGA, TENN.

AVAILABLE IN PRINT OR DIGITAL DOWNLOAD AT [NURTURINGFAITH.NET/BOOKSTORE](http://NURTURINGFAITH.NET/BOOKSTORE)

## What makes Nurturing Faith Publishing *so unique?*

Many good attributes — such as excellence in writing, editing, design and printing — come together when publishing a book that pleases the author and readers. Nurturing Faith provides such excellence — and more.

Nurturing Faith is a publishing ministry that provides thoughtful resources for Christian living in a fast-changing, diverse culture. We're interested in more than just throwing words on a page and moving on to the next project.

An experienced team of editors, designers and marketers — with expertise in theology, history, biblical studies, Christian formation and more — is engaged with each book.

Authors are valued for their work and involved throughout the process. First refusal on future books is never required. We want the good experience to bring authors back for more.

Built-in marketing allows for wider exposure of books equaling hundreds of dollars worth of advertising in print and online at no cost to authors.

**Want to know more about publishing with Nurturing Faith?**

Visit [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) and click "Publish with us" under "Books" in the pull-down menu.





# How-to guide

## Religious organizations can engage government properly

**STORY AND PHOTO  
BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE**

*Contributing Editor*

**F**ALLS CHURCH, Va. — Religious organizations can and should be actively engaged with government representatives, said Melissa Rogers, speaking to the North American Baptist Fellowship executive committee and fellow members of Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, Va., in March.

Rogers, who previously served as legal counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty and directed the Center for Religion and Public Affairs at Wake Forest University Divinity School, worked in the White House from 2013-2017 as special assistant to President Barack Obama and executive director of the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Currently, she is a senior fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

Pastor Jim Baucom of Columbia Baptist Church said he had often asked Rogers to speak, but during her time in the high-stress atmosphere of the White House, she had asked to “just be a regular church member” and enjoy the church fellowship and worship outside of the daily grind in Washington.

Rogers spoke briefly of memorable experiences in working for the president, who she described as a genuine Christian who engages regularly with pastors and Christian leaders, talking about how faith impacts society. Instead of relying on speechwriters alone, she said, he was very active in developing his remarks for the annual prayer breakfasts, inserting scripture texts from memory and wanting to express his personal faith.

Obama and his wife Michelle set an

important tone by being unfailingly kind to others, she said, and by teaching their children to be kind.

Rogers spoke of successful collaborative efforts between faith groups and government, such as working for the release of Christian pastors Kenneth Bae and Saeed Abedini from unjust imprisonment in North Korea and Iran, respectively. Bae was released in 2015, and Abedini in 2016.

It was important that Christian groups were praying for their release and clamoring for government action on their behalf, she said.

Similarly, when the Ebola virus devastated West Africa, the president recognized that faith-based groups would be needed in the effort to fight the disease, and Rogers’ office was instrumental in coordinating them. Later, she helped facilitate a meeting between Obama and Kent Brantly, an American doctor who had contracted Ebola while volunteering at a clinic in Liberia, but fortunately recovered.

Obama’s welcoming handshake, with media present, helped to counteract unneeded hysteria and the fear some felt about volunteers who contracted the disease returning to the U.S. for treatment, she said.

In both cases, Rogers said, “We started on common ground between government and religious organizations; we had the same goals. We also had a willingness to collaborate and work together, including some who weren’t known for agreeing with the Obama administration.”

Both government and faith-based groups had unique capabilities, she said, and “we worked together relentlessly to

achieve our aims.”

Christian organizations that want to engage effectively with the government must focus first on being Christian and following Jesus’ teachings, she said — and to be authentically Christian is to be counter-cultural. The business of politics may argue that “the first should be first and enemies should pay, but our teachings are the opposite,” Rogers said, “and we have to be counter-cultural to be salt and light in the world.”

At the same time, she said, Christians must follow Jesus’ advice to be “wise as serpents and gentle as doves,” remaining alert so they can avoid being used as tools by the government. “There is no fake news in the gospel,” she said. Christians need to honor truth and be careful about how their relationships with government officials develop.

Citing Jesus’ advice to “render to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s,” Rogers said the church needs to do the work of the church, and not expect the government to do it. If the state magnifies religious teachings that it likes but downplays things it doesn’t like, “we end up with a funhouse mirror image of our faith.” Baptists, she said, must hold faithfully to their historic belief in church-state separation.

Beyond those principles, Rogers offered five practical suggestions for how religious organizations can effectively impact government.

First, she said, “Don’t wait for an invitation,” but be proactive in engaging with government. Religious folk are often too modest, she said, but should be more assertive “because you care about the things that truly matter and you are bridge builders rather than bomb throwers.”

Christians should introduce themselves to government officials and cultivate relationships, she said, offering ideas about



Melissa Rogers

how they can be helpful. Likewise, Christian leaders should be willing to make public statements about important issues and share them with government officials.

Faith-based groups should also “find a balance between prophetic and pragmatic,” Rogers said. “Should we recommend things we think are likely to be done, or focus more on those that are least likely to be done?” Believers should find a balanced way to do both, she said.

People of faith who want to engage the government should also recognize that “a good idea is not enough,” she said. “To be executed by government, it needs to be something that the government can do and that has some support.” Ideas presented by faith groups need to be backed up by supportive information about how they can be carried out.

Getting involved with government requires knowing one’s audience, Rogers said, which means getting to know politicians and their staffs. Politicians generally want to do the right thing, she said, but they are also concerned about their image and want to get re-elected, “so they look at things through a political prism.” As a result, faith groups who advance ideas need to make sure they understand secular ramifications of the idea, and be prepared to counter potential arguments against it.

Finally, Rogers said, “Go upstream.” People run for office because they want to accomplish something, she said. “If possible, you want your agenda to be part of what they want to do.”

That requires “going upstream” to contact political candidates as well as sitting officials, because “this helps get issues on leaders’ radar screens at a very early stage.”

She cited the example of a broad-based coalition of Christian leaders called the “Circle of Protection,” who are committed to ending hunger and poverty. They ask political candidates on all sides to produce a three-minute video of what they plan to do regarding hunger and poverty, and then share the responses with their members.

Whether upstream or downstream, Rogers said people of faith can make a real and positive difference. “Know that your engagement with government on behalf of people who are suffering matters greatly and can work amazing feats even in today’s world.” **NFJ**



## Medical doctor to be honored by BWA for human rights work

Cynthia Maung, a medical doctor who has devoted nearly 30 years to providing healthcare to refugees from Myanmar living on the Thai-Myanmar border, will receive the 2017 Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award this summer.

The award, given for significant and effective activities to secure, protect, restore or preserve human rights as stated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other declarations on human rights, will be presented during the BWA Annual Gathering in Bangkok, Thailand, from July 2-7.

Maung was among the displaced Karen who fled to and settled in Mae Sot on the border between Thailand and Myanmar. Since 1949, the Karen people, an ethnic minority group in Myanmar, have been fighting for an independent Karen State. Hundreds of

thousands of Karen and others from various ethnic groups have been killed in the conflict, and many Karen have fled across the border into Thailand.

In February 1989, five months after escaping Myanmar, Maung established the Mae Tao Medical Clinic in Mae Sot. Now the clinic has a staff of more than 600, delivers up to 15 babies per day, and fits 250 new and replacement prosthetic limbs each year. It treats between 300 and 400 patients daily, or up to 150,000 annually, including refugees, migrant workers and locals.

Also, the clinic trains medical interns, nurses and hygienists, and feeds more than 500 people twice each day. Maung’s clinical interests in obstetrics and women’s reproductive health have broadened to include issues of domestic violence and human rights.

Maung, who was born into a Baptist Karen family, was named one of *Time* magazine’s Asian Heroes in 2003. **NFJ**

# Syrian Baptists minister, grow churches amid war

STORY AND PHOTO  
BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE

*Contributing Editor*

For a Baptist church in Syria, stray rocket fire opened more than a hole in a wall: it expanded opportunities for mission.

**G**amal Makkar is pastor of the Baptist Evangelical Church in Damascus. Born in Egypt, he and his Lebanese wife Michelline first moved to Syria in 1997 to start a ministry through “Cru,” formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ. Michelline Makkar and Mouna Gharib, who continues to work with Cru, spoke about challenges facing Syrian Baptists during a March meeting of the North American Baptist Fellowship executive committee in Falls Church, Va.

Life in Syria was not always easy before the war, Gharib said, but “With the war, everything changed.” She, along with other residents of Damascus, were “in denial” about the war until they saw planes flying over and bombs starting to fall. When a rocket lodged in the roof of a fellowship and training center used by Cru, she said, “We prayed and went on, hoping by the next week it would be fixed.”

Residents still experience bullets whizzing nearby, or hitting a wall and dropping at their feet, but they persevere: “That’s how life is,” Gharib said. Cru works mainly with students, but all young men are required to serve in the army when they reach a certain age. Because of this, despite the male-dominant culture, student leadership has gravitated to women, she said. “It’s challenging. Life is not easy.”

Makkar said missionary work in earlier years established a number of Baptist churches in Syria, but when the missionar-



ies left, most of them were closed. One small church in Damascus persevered, however. Four members who were determined to keep the doors from closing continued to meet for 40 years.

In 2008, Makkar’s husband Gamal went to the elderly members with a proposal. Explaining that he was a Baptist pastor, he offered to serve the church as pastor, and they accepted. The new partnership was fruitful: From 2008 to 2010, Makkar said, the church grew from four to 120 members, and did not slow down. “Today we have 1,000 members,” she said, “and 600 children.”

That created a problem: a good problem, but a challenge nonetheless. The sanctuary held just 100 people, and church leaders were holding services every day to accommodate the many members. “We needed to widen the church,” Makkar said, “but we were not allowed to.”

Makkar believes God took care of the problem: “God allowed two rockets to hit the church on a day when no one was there.” Two of the walls fell down, she said, “and my husband took a hammer to another wall.” Though workmen were hesitant to help, the pastor finished the job of demolishing the damaged walls, then others joined in to assist with rebuilding, which received government approval. In the process, Makkar said, “We widened the church so now it can hold 500 people.”

Worship services continued amid the rubble while the church building was being

refashioned into an attractive sanctuary with much more open space inside. When the new church was dedicated, she said, 600 people packed the building, including Baptist leaders from nearby countries and other Christians in Syria who came “to see if this is true that a church could grow like this in the midst of the war.” When several bombs exploded nearby during the service, “My husband told the guests, ‘This is to welcome you.’”

Church members never determined which forces were responsible for the rockets, “but God used them for good,” Makkar said.

The church continues to face challenges. While Michelline Makkar is currently studying abroad, her husband Gamal remains in Damascus, leading the church. Many men in Syria have been killed in the fighting, and others have undertaken the risky venture of fleeing the country, hoping to establish themselves elsewhere so they can bring their families later. Women now compose 80 percent of the church membership, Makkar said. A ministry team of 33 persons works to assist the pastor, but most have been Christians for two years or less and need training, she said.

Baptists in Damascus are not alone. A Baptist church in southern Syria has 700 members, Makkar said, mostly of Druze descent. Syrian Baptists are praying that three Baptist churches that have been closed will soon reopen.

Elijah Brown, General Secretary of the North American Baptist Fellowship, said 10 Baptist churches currently remain open in Syria, but have no international support. He challenged representatives to become “champions for the incredible work they are doing there.”

“We need your prayers and support, your love,” Makkar said: “Please, take the initiative and be with us in this war.” **NFJ**



## BEING CHURCH IN CHANGING TIMES

*A column provided in collaboration with the Center for Healthy Churches (chchurches.org)*

# Effective theological education can foster healthier ministers, churches

Matthew Tennant

Once a seminary president began a program to reconnect professors and churches. Each summer, professors would serve in a church for three months — and the pastors could study and rejuvenate in the seminary context.

The president hoped the exchange would benefit pastors and professors. Yet, as the story goes, the professors revolted. In a heated staff meeting the president grew frustrated. He said to a theology professor, “When was the last time you conducted the funeral for an 8-year-old?”

The professor replied, “When was the last time you read a book of theology?”

We each have our own priorities. Sometimes an individual’s priorities become unbalanced. In seminaries biblical scholars might overemphasize Hebrew or Greek, whereas theologians and preaching professors focus on their own subjects.

A thoughtful, thorough curriculum will reduce overemphasizing or underemphasizing specific subjects. But what is the future?

Will future ministers and missionaries train in seminaries? Will they stay in residential apartments for three years of full-time study? With ever-increasing student debt load of recent college graduates, is the three-year Master of Divinity degree still tenable?

The cost of theological education does not match the potential future salaries. What is the answer?

First, seminaries and denominations must strive to bring the cost down. Seminaries, like churches and other institutions, have expenses. If the school can reduce

expenses, there will be more resources for education.

If churches and committed Christians see the value of theological education, they will contribute. When they do, their contributions can reduce tuition costs. Thus, the next generation of church workers can afford to continue doing God’s work.

Second, theological education will offer choices. This is a growing trend in seminaries now. Instead of a few tracks within the traditional Master of Divinity program, seminaries now offer various degrees. Some schools have diploma, certificate and license programs. These help students who feel God’s calling but lack a bachelor’s degree.

The choices do not mean watered-down training. Instead, they show responsiveness and sensitivity to today’s students. Providing options will allow more people to explore their calling.

Third, in the future, institutions will offer flexible schedules. Balancing classes, work and family has always been challenging. For students, daily classes offer the best approach for long-term retention. This is the best way to understanding complex ideas. Yet in reality, many people do not have that luxury. Evening classes might be the difference between attending and not attending for some students. If the class meets once per week, attendance is even easier.

Fourth, online classes and modules are here to stay. This fact chagrins old-style professors. The philosopher Martin Heidegger says that technology is not a means, but a way of revealing. Technology provides new opportunities for teaching.

Students can become immersed in a

subject. They can collect references online and use tools such as Evernote to organize their thoughts. The school and professors can track their progress. Learning can be adaptive instead of prescriptive. Technology opens possibilities and breaks down barriers.

No longer must students live in proximity to the school and professors. Social media supplements human interaction, but it cannot replace it. The challenge is to complement online classes and social media with interpersonal exchanges.

Getting students involved in church communities will strengthen churches and theological education. But it does not need students to be in the same city as the school. They can connect with churches where they live.

Fifth, theological education must not end when students earn a degree or certificate. There is no way to learn everything one needs to know while in school. Learning must continue after the excitement of graduation day has passed.

When institutions realize the need for lifelong learning, they will seek the input of pastors. They can use the input to plan study days and colloquiums. When pastors see the value of attending, they will look forward to them. What they learn will help their ministries flourish.

Theological education builds a foundation for successful ministry. It should reflect the changing needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Effective education can foster healthier ministers and churches. **NFJ**

—Matthew Tennant is pastor of Kilmarnock Baptist Church in Virginia.



# James Garfield (1881)

By Bruce Gourley

**T**he last of the log cabin-born presidents, James A. Garfield was born in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, in 1831. Fatherless at the age of two, he was raised by his impoverished mother on the family farm.

A shy, young Garfield immersed himself in the world of books. Attending a local Disciples of Christ congregation with his mother, he also became familiar with the Bible.

As a teenager and with the encouragement of his mother, Garfield undertook education at a relatively late age. Distinguishing himself as a student, Garfield later said of his young years:

“I lament that I was born to poverty ... and in this chaos of childhood, 17 years passed before I caught any inspiration ... a precious 17 years when a boy with a father and some wealth might have become fixed in manly ways.”

About this time Garfield, thus far ambivalent about religion, experienced a spiritual awakening at a camp meeting. Professing faith in Christ, in 1850 he was baptized in the Chagrin River and joined the Disciples of Christ Church.

Enrollment at Hiram College, a Disciples of Christ institution, followed. He excelled at his studies, and the school hired him to teach even as he took classes. In addition, Garfield, by now an accomplished and compelling speaker, preached regularly in nearby churches.

Transferring to Williams College in Massachusetts, a prominent New England school, Garfield graduated as class salutatorian. Following this positive experience in a world wealthier and more sophisticated than his rural, western upbringing in

Ohio, he returned home and taught again at Hiram College. Within a year the college hired him as president, a position he held from 1857–1861.

Others also recognized Garfield’s talents. Entering politics, from 1859–1861 he served in the Ohio State Senate as a Republican, remaining affiliated with the party throughout his career. Meanwhile, he studied law and married Lucretia Randolph in 1858, daughter of the co-founder of Hiram College and a devout Christian. In the ensuing years they raised a family of five children.

Fervently abolitionist, upon the outbreak of the American Civil War, Garfield on behalf of the state of Ohio assisted in the funding and raising of volunteer regiments, receiving appointment in August 1861 as a colonel in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Ohio infantry regiment. He fought bravely in numerous battles, including Shiloh and Chickamauga, obtaining the rank of major general.

Concurrently with his military service, Garfield was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Ohio in 1862. Re-elected eight times, he served in the House until 1880.

Garfield’s long congressional service led him to take positions on many issues reflective of the complexities of the post-war era. Although a proponent of black suffrage, of the prospect of the political equality of African Americans he privately expressed “a strong feeling of repugnance.”

During Reconstruction he opposed U.S. President Andrew Johnson’s anti-black agenda, yet in 1871 voted against the anti-Ku Klux Klan Civil Rights Bill of 1871, opposing the legislation’s granting to the president the right to suspend habeas corpus.

Otherwise the congressman was involved in the nation’s financial and tariff matters, serving on various related committees. In this capacity he affirmed the nation’s heritage of church-state separation, declaring: “The divorce between church and state ought to be absolute.”

Believing churches should receive no special treatment from government, he insisted upon the “equal taxation” of church property.

Weathering several political financial scandals during the 1870s, by the end of the decade Garfield emerged as one of the most powerful congressmen in D.C., a close ally of Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes, also from Ohio.

In 1880, amid a divided Republican Party and on the 36<sup>th</sup> ballot of a deadlocked nominating convention, Garfield was chosen as the party’s presidential candidate. He subsequently defeated Democrat and war hero Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock in a close general election contest, securing a moderate edge in the Electoral College while winning the popular vote by less than 2,000.

Garfield took office in March 1881 against the backdrop of a Republican Party still at odds from the bitter election season. The only preacher to ascend to the presidency, he resigned his position as an elder in the Disciples of Christ Church in order to serve the nation.

In his cabinet appointments the new president sought to heal divisions within his party, albeit with only limited success. On the foreign policy front Garfield sought freer trade in the Western Hemisphere, the construction of a canal through Panama,

*This is the 20th 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.*



and an expanded military presence and strength abroad.

Domestically, the president focused on civil service reform, civil rights and education. He appointed a number of African Americans, including Frederick Douglass, to prominent positions in D.C. In an attempt to prevent African Americans from becoming a permanent “peasantry,” Garfield proposed a “universal” system of education funded by the federal government.

Garfield resisted, however, calls for using government money for religious education, insisting that “it would be unjust to our people and dangerous to our institutions to apply any portion of the revenues of the nation, or of the States, to the support of sectarian schools. The separation of the church and the state in everything relating to taxation should be absolute.”

Regardless, Congress ignored his call for federal-funded universal education.

Apart from matters of taxation, one other circumstance led Garfield to elaborate upon the boundaries between church and state. For some 40 years U.S. presidents

had contended with the Latter Day Saints, or Mormons, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century denomination birthed in opposition to Christianity and characterized by long-running, often violent confrontations with local, state and federal authorities.

Headquartered in Utah Territory and openly flaunting U.S. anti-polygamy laws, the LDS Church yet claimed religious liberty as a rationale for their acts of defiance. Three years prior to Garfield taking office, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Reynolds v. United States* had ruled that religious practices were not a defense of criminal indictment.

In his inaugural address of March 4, 1881 the newly installed president addressed ongoing Mormon defiance of the court ruling:

*The Constitution guarantees absolute religious freedom. Congress is prohibited from making any law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The Territories of the United States are subject to the direct legislative authority of Congress, and hence the General Govern-*

*ment is responsible for any violation of the Constitution in any of them. It is therefore a reproach to the Government that in the most populous of the Territories the constitutional guaranty is not enjoyed by the people and the authority of Congress is set at naught. The Mormon Church not only offends the moral sense of manhood by sanctioning polygamy, but prevents the administration of justice through ordinary instrumentalities of law.*

*In my judgment it is the duty of Congress, while respecting to the uttermost the conscientious convictions and religious scruples of every citizen, to prohibit within its jurisdiction all criminal practices, especially of that class which destroy the family relations and endanger social order. Nor can any ecclesiastical organization be safely permitted to usurp in the smallest degree the functions and powers of the National Government.*

Otherwise, and although sometimes attending worship at National City Christian Church in Washington, President Garfield said or wrote little about religion while in office, in no small part due to the untimely end of his life.

On July 2, 1881 an aspiring office seeker, bitterly disappointed by the refusal of the Garfield administration to appoint him to a consular position, mortally shot the president. Despite the prayers of his distraught family and millions of other Americans, Garfield never recovered from the wounds, dying on September 19.

More than 100,000 Americans viewed the coffin of President Garfield as it lay in the nation’s Capitol rotunda. Afterward he was buried at Lake View Cemetery in Cleveland, Ohio.

Within weeks of his death a hurried biography of Garfield was published, noting of the recently-deceased president: “In all discussions on religious topics, James was the outspoken champion of entire religious freedom,” and “His Christian faith and behavior were both open, courageous, generous and impartial.”

The second president assassinated while in office, Garfield was memorialized by the American public for much of the decade, during which time several Disciples churches named buildings in his honor. NFJ



Panorama of the Great Mosque of Mecca (Masjid al-Haram) in Saudi Arabia.

# Myths *and realities* of Islamic terrorism

BY BRUCE GOURLEY

Comprising about 22 percent of the world's religious adherents, Islam is second in size only to Christianity. It is also the fastest growing religion.

Although American Muslims only number about three million, demographic estimates based on current growth trajectories indicate that Islam will likely become the globe's largest faith by the end of this century.

Yet Americans remain largely unfamiliar with Islam, a lack of knowledge that in years since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 has created widespread fears.

Amid the fear and hatred, perhaps it is not surprising that many evangelical Christians applaud political efforts targeting Muslim refugees, persons often deemed by detractors as likely terrorists.

Reality, however, says otherwise. According to an in-depth study of terrorism in America by the conservative Cato Institute, the number of Americans killed in terrorist acts committed by refugees since

1975 is precisely three. None of the killers was Muslim. And no Americans have been killed in terrorist acts by refugees since 1980.

Any given American citizen is far more likely to die from lightning, a dog attack, hornets or wasps, a home-grown Christian terrorist attack, choking, drowning, poisoning, pollution, a heat wave, an airplane accident, or even an asteroid attack, than by a Muslim refugee.

In addition, violence by American Muslims at large is also very rare. In 2016 the percentage of murders in the United States committed by American Muslims was .3 percent of total murders, a rate far below that of non-Muslim Americans.

Many Christians, to be certain, do understand that Muslim refugees and Muslim Americans are more peaceful than other Americans. Even so, few Christians strive to understand the Islamic faith and sort out the myths and realities pertaining to Islamic terrorism.

## Muhammad and the Quran

Founded by the Prophet Muhammad (c. 570-632), Islam followed Judaism and Christianity as the world's third

monotheistic religion.

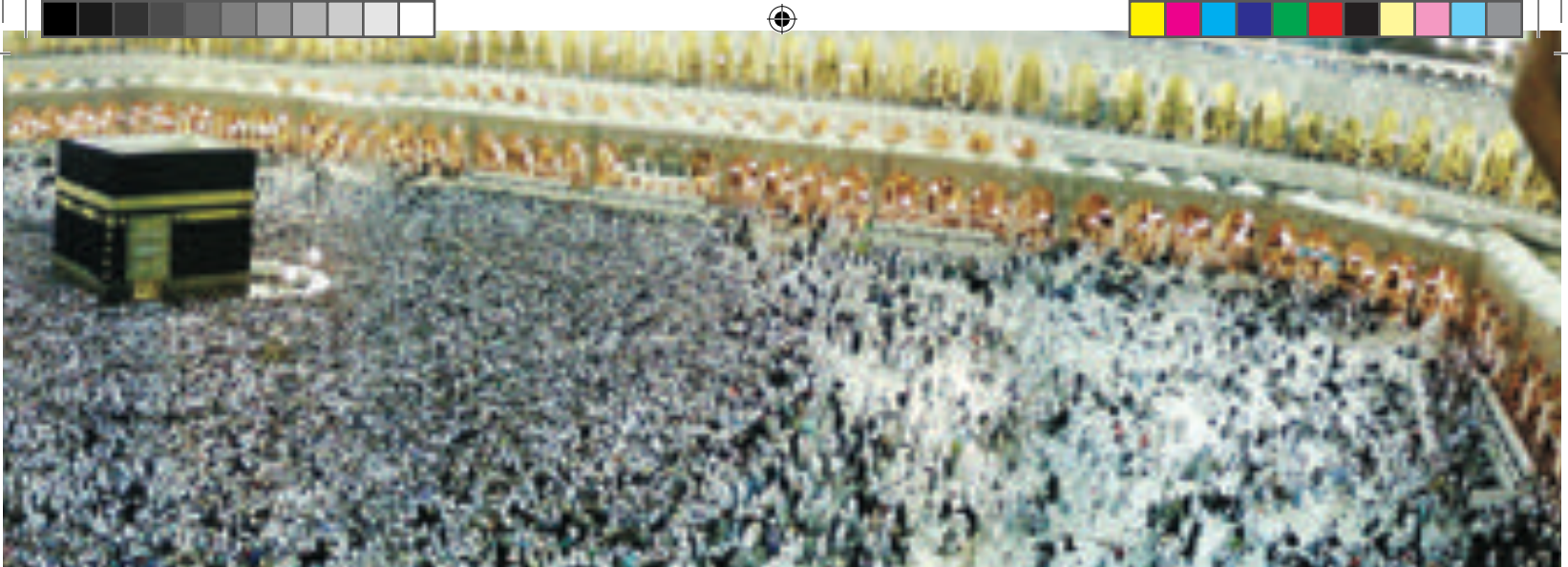
Born in Mecca in Arabia, Muhammad became a trader, or merchant. According to Islamic tradition, he was a descendant of Ishmael, son of Abraham.

During Muhammad's time the Middle East was comprised of many tribes, including a variety of Christian sects. He had contact with and was influenced by Christians and Jews, and possibly monotheistic Arabs.

In 609 Muhammad claimed a revelation from God — the God of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Like the biblical prophets, Muhammad preached that only the One True God was worthy of worship.

Other revelations followed, and in 622 Muhammad established the Islamic faith. The word "Islam" means "submission" to the will and laws of God, and applies to everyone and everything. All of existence, in short, is to submit to God, the ruler of all.

Meanwhile, Muhammad continued transcribing the revelations from God. Upon his death in 632, the revelations, considered the very Word of God, were compiled into the Quran. The Quran became the holy text of Islam and primary authoritative source of Islamic law.



Rooted within the Hebrew Old Testament while also embracing Jesus, the Quran reflects the Bible in terms of major themes, religious laws and central figures. Major themes include (but are not limited to): the relationship between God and humans, forgiveness of sins, prayer, helping the needy, honesty, wealth and sexuality.

Many Old Testament laws are contained in the Quran, including the Ten Commandments (slightly reworded and not in one location) and the concept of an eye for an eye and life for life. Old Testament prophets mentioned in the Quran include Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac.

In addition, the Quran praises Jesus as a prophet, mentioning him (“Isa” in Arabic) 25 times. As in the Bible, Jesus is a messenger and prophet of God, miraculously born of a virgin, and performer of miracles. But he is not the Son of God. And he did not die on the cross, but rather ascended into heaven.

The eschatology of the Quran is also similar to that of the New Testament. Jesus, Isa, will return. There will be a resurrection. The End Times will witness the coming of the antichrist — Dajjal — a war between good and evil, and a final judgment.

In the Quran, Muhammad — like Jesus — is a prophet. He is the preeminent and the final prophet, or “holy prophet.”

In time the word “Muslim” emerged to describe those of Islamic faith, followers of Muhammad. Muslims worship God using the name “Allah,” which is the ancient Arabic name for “God” and of the same origins as the biblical “Elohim” of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Jesus most likely spoke in Aramaic, a

precursor of Arabic. In Aramaic he would have referred to God as “Alaha,” a word that in time became “Allah.”

### Sunnis and Shias

Following Muhammad’s death Muslims split into two factions over the question of his proper successor, or caliph, a word referring to a Muslim civil and religious leader.

Some Muslims supported successors from Muhammad’s bloodline, a traditional means of lineage historically modeled by many city-states. They became known as Shias, or Shiite Muslims.

Other Muslims believed that Muhammad’s successor should not be limited to blood lineage but rather should reflect spiritual continuity with the Prophet. Placing a predominant emphasis on personal piety and observance of the Prophet’s customs, they became known as Sunnis.

Despite their differences on the question of lineage, both Shia and Sunni factions in the ensuing centuries developed militant spinoffs that embraced politics, and sometimes violence and warfare, in the spreading of their faith.

Within a few hundred years Muslim expansion made remarkable inroads into the Eastern regions of Christendom. Having resorted to bloody militancy since the days of Constantine, the Christian Church in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century waged war on Islam for control of the Holy Land. A series of Crusades against Muslims over two centuries ended largely in failure, as Islam remained entrenched in the East.

Centuries following the Crusades, the Sunni militant lineage produced what

became known as the Wahhabi tradition, a revivalist religion originating in the 1700s and giving birth to Saudi Arabia. In the late 1800s, and out of anger over the British destruction of many Muslim holy sites in India, Wahhabism developed into fundamentalism, initially non-violent and soon spreading into Egypt.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli Six Day War, however, led many Islamic fundamentalists to demand the imposition of Islamic law, or Sharia, as the source of political and judicial legislation into Egypt and beyond. Since that time, many Muslim-dominant nations to varying degrees have implemented Islamic law in a merging of mosque and state.

Today, Sunnis are by far the numerically dominant branch of Islam, comprising an estimated 85-90 percent of Muslims worldwide. Most Islamic fundamentalists are Sunnis.

Rejecting the perceived evils of the world, fundamentalists advocate for the application of Islamic law in order to purify the world. Within the Islamic fundamentalist worldview, both nominal Muslims and non-Muslims are infidels.

Fundamentalism, in turn, is sometimes a breeding ground for Islamic terrorism, or extremism. American national security analysts estimate a miniscule .007 percent of the world’s Muslim population are terrorists. Most Islamic terrorist activity is in the form of attacks upon other Muslims, often in the form of Shia and Sunni conflicts, in Muslim-dominant nations.

Although most practitioners of Islam are peaceful, fundamentalist expressions tend to dominate headlines. Harkening to



the Wahhabi roots of Islamic fundamentalism, most of the 9/11 terrorists were Saudi nationals.

## Sharia Law

Muhammad and the Quran are the starting points for understanding Islam, a diverse religion with a major fault line between Shias and Sunnis. Believers within both factions follow Islamic law, or Sharia.

Despite shared roots in the Hebrew Old Testament, Christianity and Islam have clashed since the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. Islamic fundamentalism emerged in the 1800s, corresponding to the emergence of Christian fundamentalism in the Western world. Today, some key American allies are Islamic theocracies in which Sharia is enshrined, including Saudi Arabia.

Functioning in similar fashion to canon law of the Roman Catholic Church, Sharia is written legal, moral and ethical philosophy. Evolving after Muhammad's death and drawing from the Quran and Sunnah (essentially the collected teachings and sayings of Muhammad), Sharia is divine, immutable, comprehensive, interpretive in nature, and defines how an individual Muslim is to conduct his or her life and behave toward others.

It also governs the manner in which Islamic communities, groups, social structures and economic organizations interact.

In short, Sharia is the prescribed religious path that Muslims follow. For most Muslims, Sharia is a path of peace and good will, in the same manner that Christianity, for most followers, is a peaceful religion.

Even so, many American evangelicals and conservative politicians are convinced that Sharia poses a danger to the United States. Pointing to at least one instance wherein a judge in New Jersey acknowledged the role that Sharia played in an estranged Islamic couple's attempt to arbitrate their differences apart from a courtroom, out of fear vocal opponents of Islam have led dozens of states since 2010 to introduce or pass legislation banning the use of Sharia — sometimes clothed in the language of opposition to “foreign laws.”

Such fears, however, are unfounded. It is true that Sharia is enshrined, in varying

degrees, in many conservative, theocratic Islamic nations, including Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen and, as previously noted, Saudi Arabia. These 21<sup>st</sup> century theocracies reflect a pre-Enlightenment worldview in which religion supersedes science and reason.

This political interpretation of Sharia mirrors that of the pre-Enlightenment, Christian theocratic American colonies of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, whereby Old Testament legal codes were the basis of colonial charters, legislation, laws, judicial proceedings, and social and cultural norms.

Jewish scholars have long recognized colonial use of the Mosaic Code (the Hebrew Torah, or first five books of the Old Testament) as, in the words of one, “the most potent force in the legislation of early New England commonwealths.” Another noted that colonial theocracies often enacted “a stricter, more fundamentalist observance than Judaism had ever seen.”

Today's Islamic theocratic nations, in other words, reflect the beginnings of Christianity in America: the state is united with the majoritarian religion, freedom of religion and thought does not exist, women are legally inferior and are discriminated against, homosexuality is forbidden, and many other oppressive measures are forced upon citizens.

In America, early religious dissent, of which Baptists were at the forefront, eventually brought an end to Christian theocracy. Similarly, Muslim dissent against conservative, theocratic expressions of Islam is today on the ascendancy. Many Muslims do not approve of harsh applications of Sharia.

Today, progressive Muslim sentiment is more prominent in the United States than elsewhere. In fact, American Muslims — many of whom fled or moved to America in order to escape theocratic rule and most following some form of Sharia in their private lives and communities — are more progressive than American evangelicals.

Obscured by public fears of Muslims are surveys and studies revealing that evangelical Christians are far more likely than Muslims to oppose the First Amendment's religion-state separation and to demand that religion — their religion —

shape government. In addition, evangelicals are far more opposed to same-sex marriage than Muslims.

Additionally, the public fear of and outcry over the imagined dangers of Sharia in America mask the fact that our nation's own theocratic past yet lurks within today's courtrooms.

According to a study of religion in judicial proceedings, Christian “judges' personal religious beliefs and religious education very often find a place in decisions they write.”

While “courts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rarely quoted the Bible,” biblical quotes in courtrooms since “are much more characteristic” and “a matter of great concern for anyone who believes that judicial decision-making should not be based on comprehensive doctrines such as religion,” wrote Sanja Zgonjanin in *New York City Law Review*.

Sharia, in short, is not a problem in U.S. courtrooms. However, another set of foreign laws, that of the Old Testament, remains a tool that many evangelical Christians are wielding in an attempt to demolish separation of religion and state and discriminate against persons of other religious faith or no faith, women, the LGBT community, refugees and immigrants, and other undesirable persons.

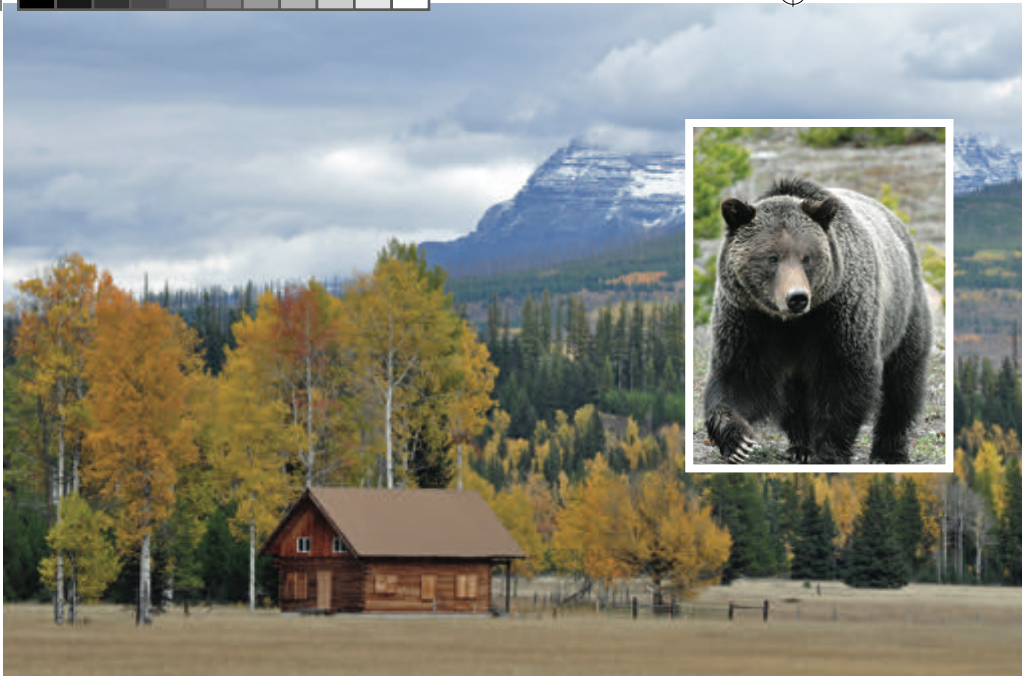
## Conclusion

Mythology, in short, shapes the fears and hatred that many Americans, particularly evangelical Christians, feel toward Muslims.

Islamic terrorism in America is a rarity. Rather, in the U.S., Christianity remains far more violent, discriminatory and theocratic-minded than Islam.

In addition, American Muslims, representing the leading edge of modern Islamic progressivism that embraces religion-state separation and freedom of thought, are a hope for Muslims worldwide.

Americans — Muslim, Christian and otherwise — have the opportunity to help spread freedom throughout the entirety of the Muslim world in the coming decades by remaining firmly committed to and advocating for our national heritage of religion-state separation and equal religious liberty for all. **NFJ**



# GO WEST

New customized opportunities  
from Nurturing Faith  
for restoration and exploration

*Guided by Bruce Gourley, writer, historian  
and adventurer based in Bozeman, Montana*

## SABBATICALS

Want to spend time in the Rockies being refreshed?

Bruce can plan just the experience you want — for as few as one person. Options are endless: Relax at a scenic ranch. Visit with creative Christian leaders in unique settings. Go fly-fishing, horseback riding, rafting or skiing. Explore Yellowstone and/or other national parks with Bruce's insider knowledge.

## CHURCH GROUPS

Want to bring a group out West?

Whether intergenerational, seniors, families, young adults, church staff — or any other — Bruce can plan and host a unique and memorable experience just for you.

*Bruce Gourley is the online editor and contributing writer for Nurturing Faith, an award-winning photographer and owner of the popular web site [yellowstone.net](http://yellowstone.net). To begin exploring any of these opportunities, contact Bruce at [bgourley@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:bgourley@nurturingfaith.net).*

Tell Your  
Church's  
**Story**

When looking for a church home, the web is the first place most people now look. What impression does your church website make?

Get a beautiful, mobile-friendly church website to tell your church's story.

We also offer logo, newsletter and worship bulletin redesign.

Contact Faithlab today.  
[faithlab.com](http://faithlab.com)

**faithlab**

Inspired Creativity



# Collateral discovery

By Tony W. Cartledge

**C**an militants associated with the so-called Islamic State be given credit for anything good? Not one thing, most of us would say.

Still, their misguided and destructive campaign to blot out priceless monuments from antiquity because they were associated with the worship of other gods — though centuries before Muhammed ever had visions of Allah — has led to a surprising discovery.

After sweeping into power in Mosul in 2014, the jihadists vented their vitriol by blowing up a mosque built around the famed “Tomb of the Prophet Jonah” (Nebi Yunus) in eastern Mosul. The mound is one of two known to comprise the site of ancient Nineveh, a long-running capital of Assyria.

In addition to blowing up the mosque and tomb — which could not possibly have belonged to Jonah — the plunder-seeking outlaws also tunneled into the mound beneath the tomb in search of ancient artifacts they could steal and sell to unscrupulous buyers on the black market.

Archaeologists have long known that other and older ruins lay beneath Nebi Yunus. Earlier excavations had begun years

ago, but were often interrupted and had not yet reached the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE palace that Assyrian records say was built for Sennacherib (705–681BCE), expanded by Esarhaddon (681–669), and later renovated by Ashurbanipal (669–627) before being partially destroyed by the Babylonians in 612.

After Iraqi troops drove out the insurgents and retook parts of eastern Mosul earlier this year, local archaeologists informed reporters for *The Telegraph*, a British newspaper,

about the tunnels — and what they found when they investigated them.

While the looters no doubt hauled away hundreds of portable artifacts, they left in place large wall panels, including a massive marble cuneiform inscription and a relief sculpture of divine figures using plant fronds to sprinkle the “water of life,” presumably for the benefit of the king or other humans.

The cuneiform text has yet to be

studied in full, but appears to describe events from the reign of Esarhaddon. Archaeologists are documenting what they can on an emergency basis before the hastily dug tunnels cave in. A full excavation will require a more stable political and economic environment.

While it is tempting to speak of the pilfering extremists’ actions as providing an unintended boon to archaeologists, we cannot speak kindly of the damage they caused, and can only wonder at what treasures they hauled away. Even if some artifacts are recovered, their original context has been lost and we can learn far less from them.

The episode does remind us, however, of how much lies beneath the ground, waiting to be discovered in careful and authorized excavations. Archaeology is not just about digging up dusty objects: what we learn from the past can inform our future.

These recent events also reinforce the importance of working for peace that not only allows the important study of peoples who have gone before, but also celebrates the lives of those who remain. **NFJ**



## SUBSCRIBE!

- > **For yourself** (\$24 one-year / \$42 two years)
- > **For friends or family** (Gift subscriptions same rates as above)
- > **For your Bible study class, church or other group** (\$18 each for 25 or more / \$15 each for 100 or more)

### To order:

Visit [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net).  
Call (478) 301-5655.  
Mail check to:  
Nurturing Faith  
P.O. Box 6318  
Macon, GA 31208-6318.

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

# Good Book keeps the focus on large, important biblical themes

A REVIEW BY JOHN D. PIERCE

*The Good Book* is a good book about the Good Book.

For those not raised on Sword Drills and Sunday school, it is an especially helpful resource for how to approach the Bible, which author Deron Spoo notes can be intimidating and “notoriously easy to misinterpret.”

The pastor of the First Baptist Church of Tulsa, Okla., is pastoral in his presentation of (as the subtitle claims) *40 Chapters That Reveal the Bible’s Biggest Ideas*. His “guidebook to the Bible” focuses on “signature chapters” that provide a framework for understanding the larger biblical story as well as its source.

At the outset Spoo affirms that “the ultimate benefit of reading the Scriptures isn’t greater familiarity with the Bible but deeper intimacy with God.”

Spoo, who considers the late Calvin Miller to be his mentor, takes the biblical revelation seriously without taking himself too seriously. He admits his own challenges in living out the biblical faith and confesses that he often worries “even though the Bible is peppered with ‘fear nots.’”

The author appears as a fellow traveler who discovers and points out guideposts, not an elevated expert removed from the daily struggles of Christian discipleship. In his desire to introduce others to the Bible — especially those who might fear wading into the unfamiliar waters — he uses contemporary analogies.

For example, he compares first grasping these signature texts in order to understand the larger biblical story to specific music that defines an artist. “To understand the Beatles, it’s essential to be familiar with the *White Album*,” he writes. “To know the Eagles well, listening to ‘Hotel California’ is a must.”

Spoo is conservative in his theology but avoids jumping from a biblical text to a popular soapbox — wisely and responsibly sticking to the larger ideas. For example, he sees Psalm 139 as more than the anti-abortion rallying cry it has become for many modern Christians. The psalmist purposefully and poetically conveys the intense, intimate and infinite love of God.

Spoo’s “big ideas” are thematic, not the formation of some narrow creed aimed at exclusion. For example, he notes that turning the Creation story in Genesis 1 into evidence for determining the age of the cosmos distracts from the wonderful truth in the Bible’s first chapter — that “you bear a striking resemblance to your Creator.” Humans were not an accident, and were created out of an act of love.

The book offers stimulating questions to encourage reflection and response such as related to Genesis 1: “What one action or attitude can you change today that will help you better reflect the image of God — your true identity?”

This approach is taken throughout the book. The reader is guided through various texts that reveal the large biblical themes worthy of being revisited and repeated.

While written with newcomers in mind, those of us raised on Sword Drills, Sunday school and two-sermon Sundays are not exempt. In fact, we may have a greater need to read the Bible with open minds and hearts.

For example, I am amazed at how much the theme of justice permeates the biblical revelation and how little attention it received in the biblical teaching, preaching and practice that nurtured me. Familiarity doesn’t always equate with faithfulness.

We need warnings such as: “Many of history’s most dangerous and destructive people have been those who assumed that God supported their every action and agenda.”

We need insights such as: “[Jesus] had the ability to see opportunity in the most unlikely people; he gave his attention to individuals whom most people found easy to ignore.”

We need reminders such as: “We ... often forget that God’s love for all people is

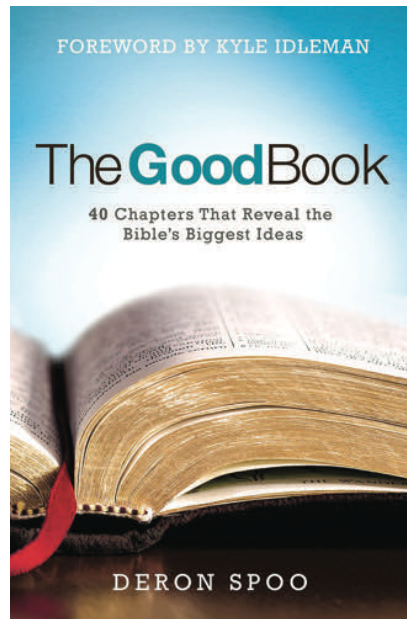
greater than our hatred for even our worst enemies.”

We need assurances such as: “In Jesus, God isn’t talking down to us; God is speaking with us face to face.”

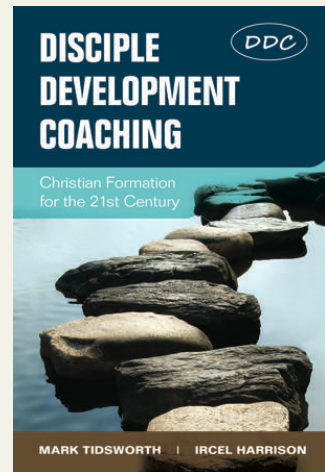
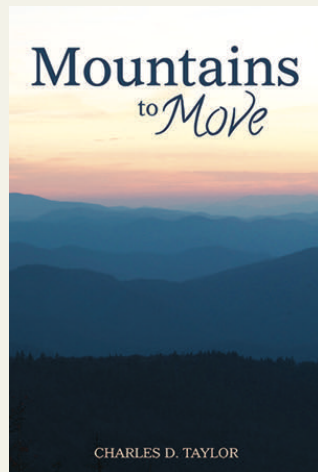
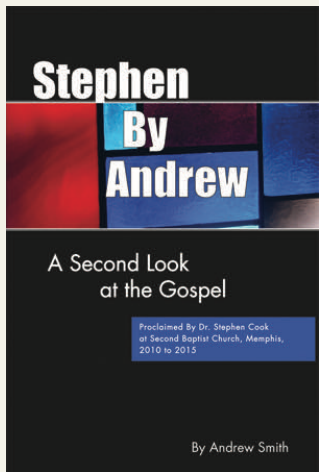
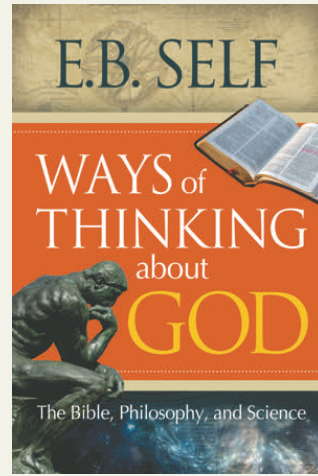
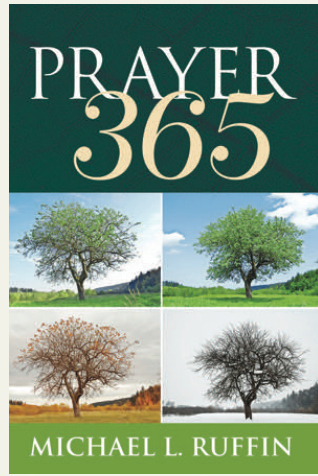
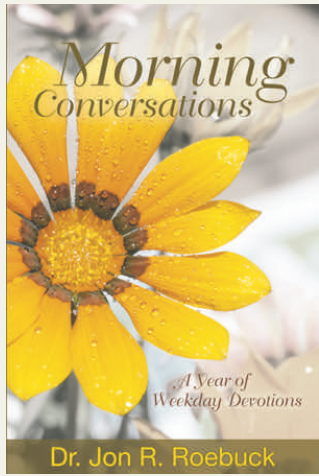
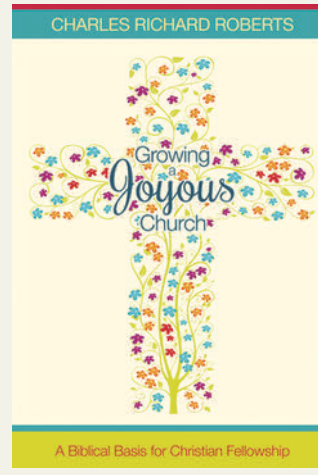
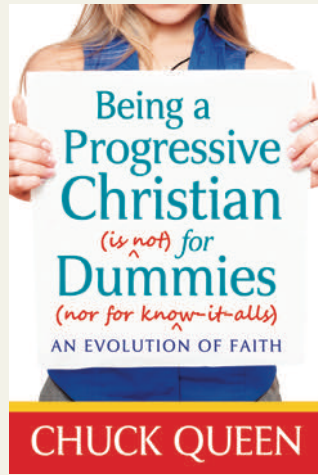
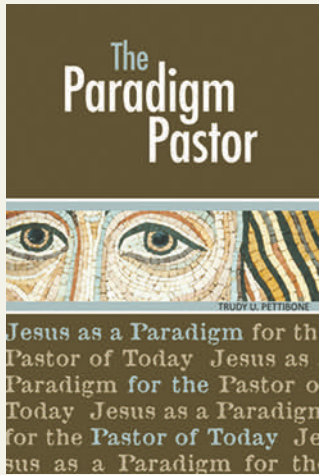
Spoo’s book provides some good sermon illustrations — reminding me of the late, great preacher Fred Craddock’s line that the one who steals from me, steals twice (or more).

But, more importantly, Spoo offers a needed reminder that digging with good tools makes mining the biblical revelation an ongoing, insightful and life-shaping endeavor. **NFJ**

*The Good Book: 40 Chapters That Reveal the Bible’s Biggest Ideas* by Deron Spoo (David C. Cook, 2017)

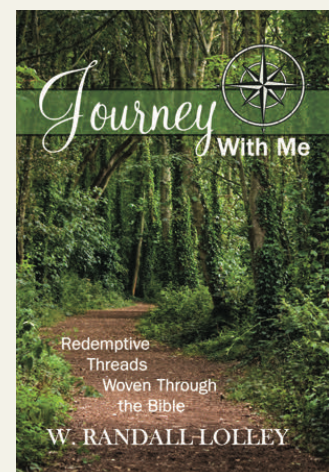
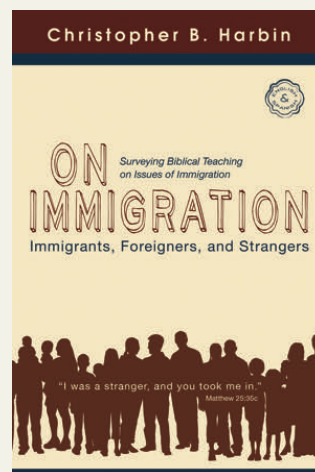
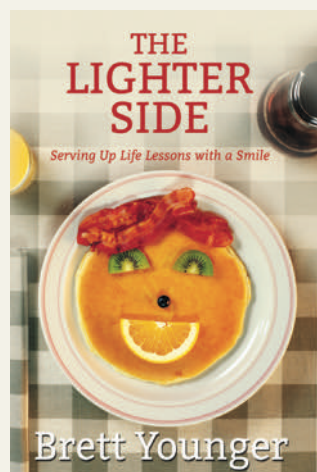
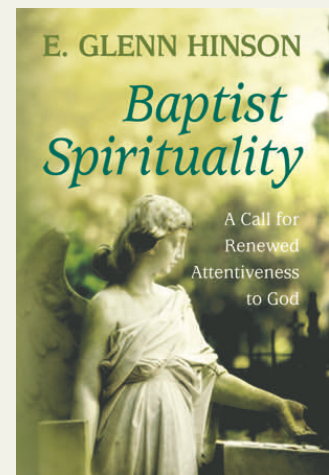
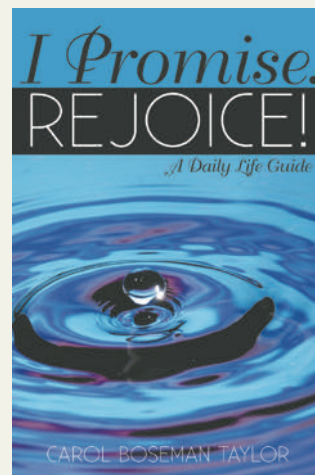
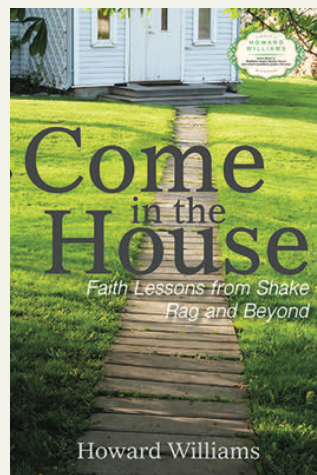
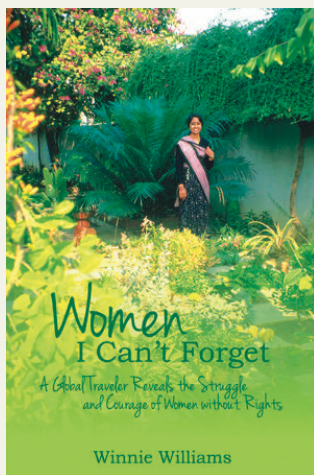
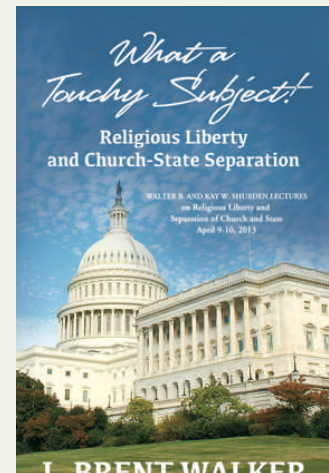
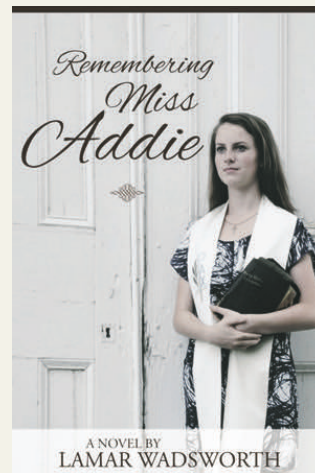
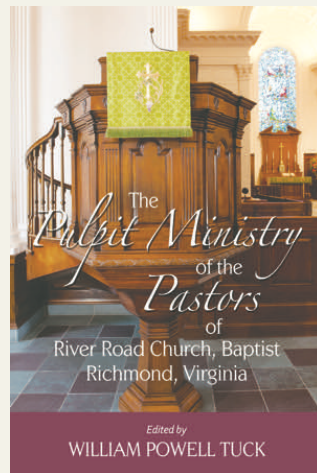
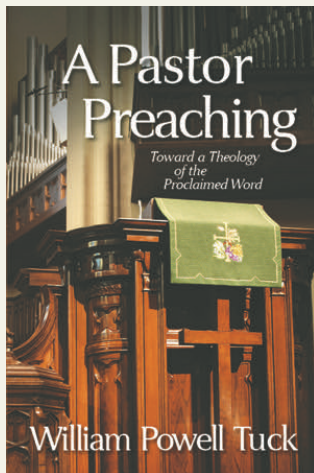


# MORE *Great books from*



# a great publisher

# nurturingfaith.net



# Robert Clemente's 'problem' is ours, too.

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Johnny Pesky, the late Boston Red Sox player and manager for whom Fenway Park's right field foul (really, fair) pole is named, said he'd seen but one hitter who could get solid wood on the ball as well as his friend and teammate Ted Williams.

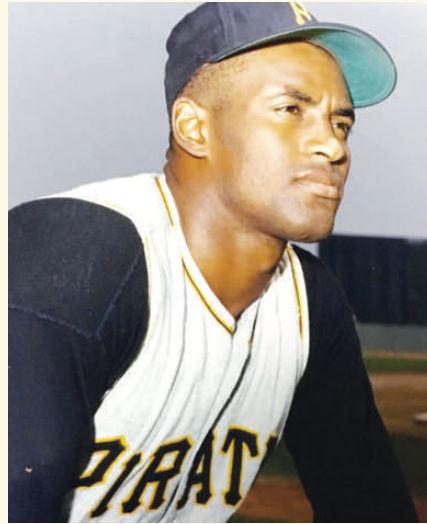
That person was Roberto Clemente, who played 18 years with the Pittsburgh Pirates, beginning in 1955. His career and life ended at the end of 1972.

On New Year's Eve, Clemente, putting compassion ahead of caution, boarded a faulty cargo plane loaded with supplies for earthquake victims in Nicaragua. Shortly after takeoff from San Juan, Puerto Rico, the plane crashed in the Atlantic Ocean and the body of the 38-year-old baseball star was never recovered.

Four times he had been named National League batting champion. He was league MVP in 1966 and World Series MVP in 1971. Repeatedly, he won Gold Gloves from 1961 to 1972, and often led the league in "assists" — meaning that his rocket arm in right field caught many runners trying to take another base.

Clemente was hailed widely for both his athleticism and humanitarian efforts. He received numerous commendations and was deservedly voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

However, his treatment as a young player coming from his native Puerto Rico to the states was far less dignified and truly shameful. When Clemente left the island to play professional baseball in the Los Angeles Dodgers organization he discovered unexpected discrimination based solely on skin tone — something African Americans here had long experienced.



Years earlier, as a starting pitcher for the Chicago Cubs in 1942, Hiram Bithorn became the first Puerto Rican to play in the major leagues. That was five years before Jackie Robinson "broke the color barrier." But Bithorn had light skin like all the other players in the majors.

Slugger Vic Power became the first Puerto Rican to play in the American League. But due to his dark skin, he met a different reception.

While racism is a most serious matter, Power was known to confront it with his quick wit. A long-told story from the 1950s recalls Power entering a diner and being told by the waitress, "We don't serve Negroes," to which he replied: "That's OK, I don't eat Negroes; just bring me some beans and rice."

Clemente received similar treatment to earlier professional baseball players with dark skin, especially during spring training in Florida where black players were excluded from social activities and forced to live in homes or dingy hotels away from the training complexes.

Also, in the '50s, white players received signing bonuses that averaged six times

what was paid to black and Latino players, according to David Maraniss, author of *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*. This biography was the primary source for this writing.

Recognizing Clemente's talents, the Dodgers tried to hide Clemente in their minor league system by not playing him when visiting scouts were in attendance. But the ever-shrewd Branch Rickey — the former Dodgers boss and instigator of Jackie Robinson's 1947 appearance — had taken charge of the Pittsburgh Pirates and acquired Clemente in the Rule 5 draft following the 1954 season.

In Fort Myers, the spring training home to the Pirates beginning in 1955, Clemente and other black players were subjected to the humiliation of Jim Crow segregation. While white players and their families enjoyed golf, swimming and other resort activities, Clemente was sent to a poor black neighborhood where, culturally, he had little in common other than coming from meager means and the color of his skin.

The hard-throwing outfielder was shy by nature, but his "sense of fairness" took over, according to Maraniss. He declared to himself that he would be "treated as a human being."

Some sportswriters described him as moody, intense or aloof. Clear double standards existed: white players who showed emotion were "fierce competitors" while darker-skinned teammates would be deemed showboating. Even Clemente's basket catches, much like those by Willie Mays, were panned in the press.

After the Pirates defeated the Yankees in the 1960 World Series — which featured Bill Mazeroski's dramatic walk-off home run — not all the heroes were treated equally.

As Maraniss tells it, the Fort Myers

Booster Club threw a big welcome luncheon at the start of spring training in 1961 to celebrate the reigning world champions. The big event drew the governor of Pennsylvania and the commissioner of baseball along with other dignitaries, along with the Pirates manager and some star players.

Clemente — the only player to hit in all seven games of the series — was not on the invitation list. As Maraniss noted, Clemente would not have been admitted into the Hideaway unless he was a waiter or dishwasher.

Black Pirates players were also excluded from viewing a film at a downtown theater that highlighted the 1960 World Series — as well as the annual Pirates golf tournament at the Fort Myers Country Club.

Wendell Smith, the groundbreaking African-American sportswriter who featured prominently in Jackie Robinson's story, led the public campaign against training camp segregation.

Not mincing words, Smith wrote in the *Pittsburgh Courier* to and for black stars of the Chicago White Sox who trained in Sarasota:

“Despite all your achievements and fame, the vicious system of racial segregation in Florida's hick towns condemns you to a life of humiliation and ostracism.”

Smith got specific, naming the acts of discrimination endured by black players in contrast to their white teammates — such as living and eating away from the team, the inability to catch a cab to the training facility, needing special permission to meet with their own manager at the team hotel, and being unable to bring their families to Florida to share in the spring training experience.

The Pirates camp experience in Fort Myers — where Clemente reported — was considered even worse for black players.

Regarding spring training 1961, Maraniss wrote of Clemente: “Here he was, a star player on the world champions of baseball, a reservist in the U.S. Marine Corps, still treated like a second-class citizen.”



Clemente and other dark-skinned players, who broke into major league baseball in the '50s, would be forced to stay on the team bus while the white players enjoyed a meal in a nice restaurant. Their food came later when teammates would bring a burger or something else back to the bus.

Clemente, who was unfamiliar with such racial discrimination in Puerto Rico, saw the practice as insulting — what he considered to be “begging for food.” He told the other black players that anyone caught doing such a thing would have to fight him to get it.

It is gratifying to remember Roberto Clemente — deemed by biographer Maraniss as “baseball's last hero” — for his gifted athleticism and the altruism that brought his earthly life to an early end.

But we need to remember as well that racism is ugly, awful, sinful and inexcusable wherever and whenever it is found. It is not the will of God, yet it is not easily overcome. It lingers and even gets resurrected.

Maraniss noted that the racial discrimination faced by Clemente and his black teammates in spring training 1961 in Fort Myers — at the same time the team was hailed as world champions — came 14 years after Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier, seven years after the U.S. Supreme

Court struck down separate-but-equal school segregation policies, five years after Rosa Parks wouldn't budge, and four years after Little Rock's Central High was forcibly desegregated.

We must not be naïve or dismissive due to progress that has been made: Racism is found not only in our history, but also in the present — often empowered by our politics.

Once when asked to name his heroes, Clemente started with Martin Luther King Jr. — affirming King's philosophy of non-violence as the means to social change along with the need to give voice to the voiceless.

Later the two would get acquainted, with King even visiting Clemente at his farm in Puerto Rico. When King was murdered in April 1968, Clemente led player efforts to delay the start of the baseball season until after King's funeral.

A younger black player for the Pirates, Al Oliver, considered Clemente a mentor and person of sterling character. He told Maraniss that Clemente “had a problem with people who treat you differently because of where you were from, your nationality, your color, also poor people...”

Well, Jesus had a problem with that too. We should all see that as a problem — and give voice to it. **NFJ**

Check out the **ongoing blogs** at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net).



For a schedule of 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities, visit:  
[fbcaugusta.org/announcements/celebrating-200-years/](http://fbcaugusta.org/announcements/celebrating-200-years/)

# Historically significant Augusta church celebrates 200 years

STORY AND PHOTO  
BY BRUCE GOURLEY

AUGUSTA, Ga. — First Baptist Church in America, founded in 1638 by Roger Williams in Providence, Rhode Island, is indisputably the most historically significant Baptist church in the U.S.

An argument can reasonably be made that the second most historically significant Baptist church in America is the First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga. Founded in 1817 in relative obscurity in downtown Augusta not far from the Savannah River, in 1845 the church became a household name as the host of the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

By splitting from Baptists of the North over the issue of slavery and forming a regional convention, Southern Baptists, alongside southern Methodists who also separated the same year over slavery, presaged the American Civil War. Historian C. C. Goen noted that the denominational separations represented an “inner civil war”

that propelled America toward inevitable military conflict.

Thus the future of the nation hinged, in part, upon the May 1845 gathering at First Baptist Augusta, the proceedings of which have been recited in thousands of books, academic papers, classrooms and digital publications.

Even so, in researching and writing the church’s 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary history, *A Journey of Faith and Community: The Story of the First Baptist Church of Augusta, Georgia* — to be released by Mercer University Press and the Baptist History and Heritage Society in August 2017 — I was astonished to discover unpublished, surprising plot twists to the story of the Augusta gathering.

Some of these discoveries will be the subject of a presentation during the annual conference of the Baptist History and Heritage Society hosted by First Baptist Augusta, June 1-3.

The conference is one of many events this year commemorating the anniversary and recognizing the church’s historic contributions not only to Southern Baptist life, but also to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The Augusta congregation was one of the earliest churches to identify as a CBF

congregation.

Throughout the church’s history missions has remained prominent, the involvement of members mirroring advancements in Baptist life at large from raising funds to supporting distant missionaries to the current missional emphases.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Augusta church evolved into a congregation lay-led by professionals representing the financial, legal, political and philanthropic heartbeat of Augusta. During this time the congregation birthed new churches in the city. The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed dramatic growth of a church comprised of members throughout the social-economic strata and engaged in local ministries.

Regionally, First Baptist Augusta often reflected, and sometimes challenged, southern religious, cultural and social norms. Although frequently accommodating the inherent conservative identity of the Deep South, the congregation at key points evidenced a prophetic witness.

During the antebellum years of slavery, for example, the congregation on several occasions sided with Augusta’s black community in the face of widespread white criticism. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup>



*First Baptist Church of Augusta, Georgia is celebrating 200 years of faith and community with the publication of a bicentennial history volume.*

## A Journey of Faith and Community

The Story of the First Baptist Church of Augusta, Georgia

BY BRUCE T. GOURLEY

Published by Mercer University Press and Baptist History and Heritage Society

Available August 2017 • Pre-orders: (706) 733-2236



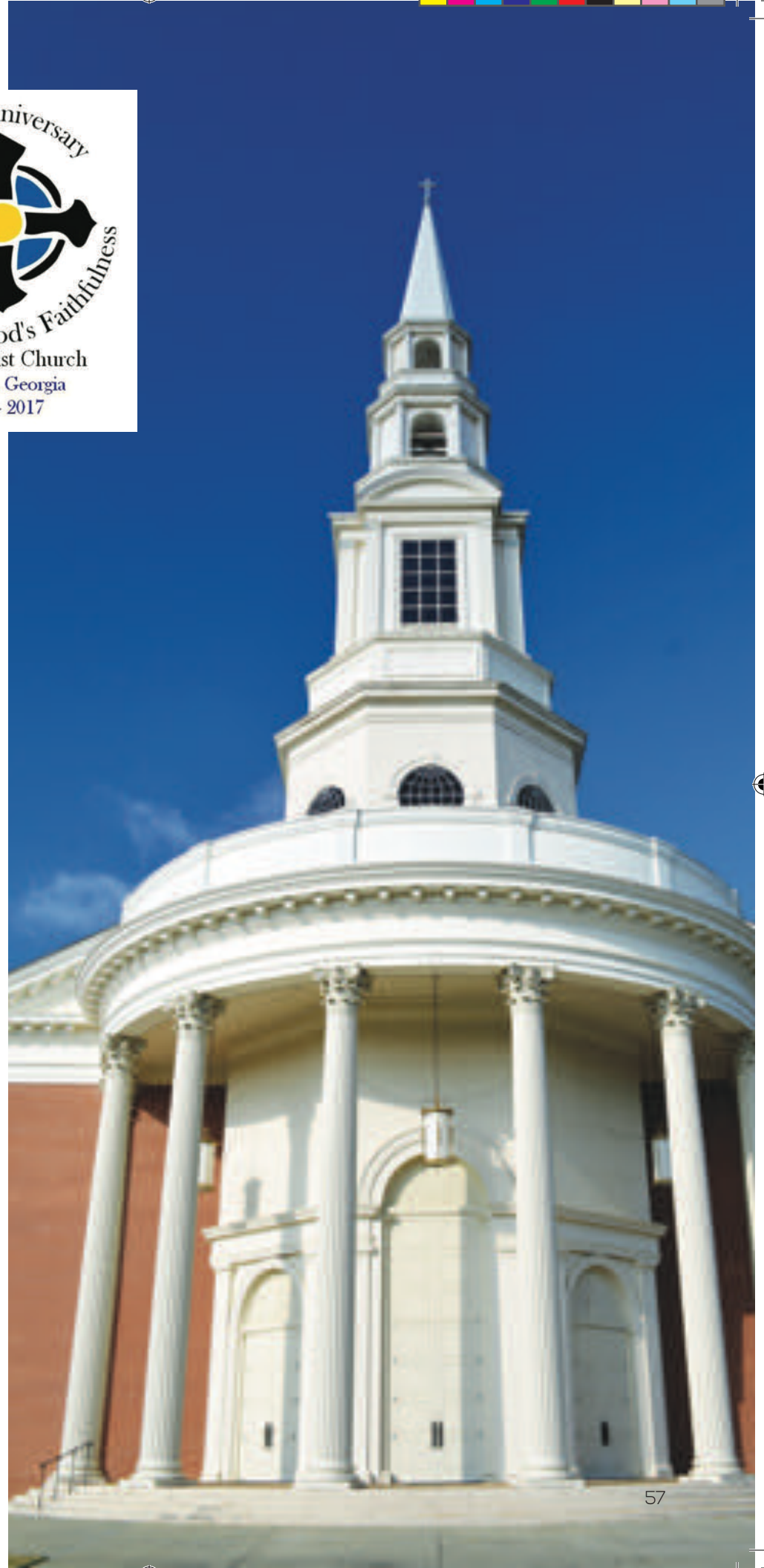
century leading women of the church established one of America's earliest Chinese Sunday school classes, befriending and ministering to the city's small Chinese community that often bore the brunt of widespread prejudices. Generations later, the church's Chinese ministry continues alongside other ethnic ministries.

Nationally, even after the founding of the SBC, First Baptist for many years maintained long-standing ties with Northern Baptists, including the historic First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, arguably the predominant Baptist church of the North in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the American Baptist Publication Society.

In the 1850s the church called a Northern Baptist missionary as pastor, and in 1893 hosted social gospel advocate Walter Rauschenbusch, one of the most prominent Baptists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Harry Emerson Fosdick spoke at the church in 1910. A number of the congregation's 20<sup>th</sup>-century pastors were well known outside of the South.

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a shifting of many historical strands — local, regional and national. In the 1970s the church relocated to the west end of a rapidly expanding city. Following the move the congregation assumed an increasingly moderate theological stance, embraced the ordination of women deacons and ministers, acquired a more diverse membership, dually aligned with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and took ownership of an expansive missions ethos at home and abroad.

The two-centuries-long struggle of the First Baptist Church of Augusta is concurrently the story of a congregation, a city, a region, a nation and the world. It is a story of remarkable people and transformational events of a faith community's journey in striving to follow Jesus Christ, the central focus of the Baptist faith past and present. **NFJ**



Feature

# Baptist History & Heritage Society Annual Conference

June 1-3, 2017\*

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH • AUGUSTA, GA.

“ *Biographies and Narratives:  
Baptist Experiences and Convictions* ”



#### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

**Carol Crawford Holcomb**

Professor of Church History and Baptist Studies  
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor



**Bruce T. Gourley**

Executive Director  
Baptist History & Heritage Society

#### INFORMATION / REGISTRATION

[baptisthistory.org](http://baptisthistory.org)  
BH&HS, 151 Broadleaf Dr., Macon, GA 31210  
(406) 600-7433

[baptisthistory.org](http://baptisthistory.org)

\* Begins with Fellowship of Baptist Historians Dinner, June 1, 4:45 p.m.  
Ends at noon on June 3.

*Hosted by First Baptist Church Augusta in partnership  
with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia*





# NURTURING FAITH EXPERIENCE

## *Personal Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*

### A Day with Dr. Albert Paul Brinson

9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
Thursday, Sept. 14, 2017  
Atlanta, Ga.

Visit Atlanta's historic sites of the Civil Rights Movement with interpretations from Dr. Albert Brinson, who experienced the struggles personally, along with the insights of other guests. Sites include:

Atlanta University Center Library  
Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel  
Atlanta Student Movement Boulevard  
The King Center  
Ebenezer Baptist Church  
... and more

#### LUNCHEON PROGRAM:

*Paschal's Restaurant*

Transportation on a charter bus provided throughout the day — beginning and ending at Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, 2715 Peachtree Rd., NE, Atlanta.

#### REGISTRATION:

\$125

(includes programming, admission fees, lunch, transportation)

#### Dr. Albert Paul Brinson

As a student at Morehouse College, young Albert Brinson was one of the organizers of the Atlanta Student Movement and served as communication chair for the Appeal for Human Rights Committee.

He appeared on the cover of *The Atlanta Journal* on March 9, 1960, after being arrested for participating in the well-executed sit-in at an Atlanta restaurant.

Throughout the 1960s he participated in nonviolent protests for human rights including the Birmingham demonstrations, the 1963 March On Washington, and the Selma to Montgomery March.

His pastor and father figure, Dr. Martin Luther King Sr., and older brother figure, Dr. M.L. King Jr., were mentors in life and ministry. He served as their assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta (1963-1967).

Later he served churches in New York and Virginia and retired as Associate General Secretary for American Baptist Churches USA. He worked with the South African Baptist Convention and NGO to ensure the open elections that resulted in Nelson Mandela becoming president.

This is a unique opportunity to spend time with a living source to learn about the past and continuing struggle for human rights and justice for all.



Itinerary / Registration: [nurturingfaith.net/experiences](http://nurturingfaith.net/experiences)

# Questions Christians ask scientists

## What does the Bible say about nature? — Cedric Lazlo, Rome, Ga.

In a sense, nothing. For us 21<sup>st</sup>-century people the words “nature” and “natural” stand in distinction to the word “supernatural” and everything suggested by it: the spiritual, the non-material, the divine, God, miracles.

A common view, shaped largely by the Enlightenment, is that nature runs according to set laws that might or might not be suspended now and again by a divine hand. Many who believe in God say such suspensions make room for miracles, and many atheists say they never happen at all.

Both views, however, are foreign to scripture, because the Bible does not recognize any distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Its understanding of the world is not ours.

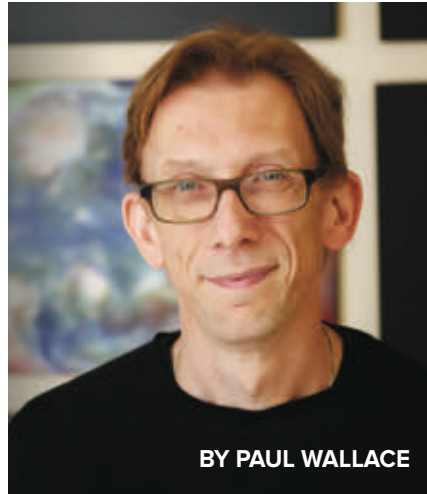
It says nothing about what we today call nature. It instead talks about *creation*, which stresses not the world set apart from God (as does the language of natural and supernatural), but the *relation* between the world and God. After all, there is no creation without a creator.

This is not to say that the Bible is silent about the sea or stars or animals or trees. It talks about these things often. But it always understands them to be intimately connected to God.

It refers to them always in a theological context and with the assumption, stated right up front in Genesis 1, that each and every created thing is a good expression of the divine character. It is precisely their rootedness in God that makes them good.

In other words, from the Bible’s point of view we may hope to learn something of God by looking to creation. When the Bible mentions creation it is by extension talking about the divine character. And it mentions creation a lot.

So, what does the Bible say about creation? It says a lot, but not everything it says is neatly consistent with the rest. That is, there is not a single biblical perspective of creation, but many.



BY PAUL WALLACE

*Paul Wallace is a Baptist minister with a doctorate in experimental nuclear physics from Duke University and post-doctoral work in gamma ray astronomy, along with a theology degree from Emory University. He teaches at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Ga. Faith-science questions for consideration may be submitted to [editor@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:editor@nurturingfaith.net).*

These perspectives combine in ways that seem to fill out a rich and complex personality. There are four pairs of contrasting traits that mix to form a kind of biblical character sketch of creation.

First, creation is *stable yet creative*. The integrity of creation is evident throughout the Old Testament. Beginning with the opening pages of Genesis, we confront a cosmos grounded in God’s will, while 1 Chron. 16:30 is just one of several passages claiming that “the world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.”

While some have understood this to mean that the earth is not in motion, the larger point is that we can trust the ground beneath our feet just as we can trust God. That is, both creation and the Creator are reliable, rational and prone to consistency.

Yet the world is given real agency by God and is itself deeply creative — a creative creation!

In Gen. 1:20 and 1:24 we find God

commanding the earth and the sea to bring forth swarms of living creatures. God does not create these fish and animals directly but is assisted by the elements themselves. We may conclude that God endowed creation with an ability to produce and sustain life on its own accord.

Meanwhile, Prov. 8:22-31 describes the created order as a boundless playground well suited to Wisdom’s creative imagination and love for the world. From the biblical point of view, this combination of steadfastness and inventiveness is an important mark of creation.

Second, creation is *promise-filled yet already jubilant*. Scripture often refers to creation with a future orientation. In Isaiah the earth holds the promise of redemption; the prophet uses a renewed creation as a symbol of Israel’s restoration.

“I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water,” the Lord promises in Isa. 41:18, and in chapter 11 Isaiah speaks to Israel of a future in which the wolf will lie down with the lamb and creation will be restored “in all my holy Mountain.”

And in Romans 8 Paul writes of creation as being in travail as a woman giving birth, groaning for future deliverance and adoption.

But joy already has a hold on the earth. This is true not only in the wisdom passage in Proverbs 8 but also in the book of Psalms, and especially in Psalm 104. This song rejoices in all of creation, from the stars above to the birds in their nests to the great sea monster Leviathan.

It revels in grass, trees, rain, and in creation’s bounty: oil, wine, bread. So the joy of creation is therefore both *already* and *not yet*.

Third, creation is *benign yet unsafe*. For much of the biblical narrative, creation acts as a kind of benign backcloth, regarded as an ever-present symbol of God’s goodness, power and providence.



Elijah is sustained by birds in the wilderness (1 Kgs. 17:6), Job is healed by a cosmic vision (Job 38:41), and Amos draws on images of creation to describe God's treatment of the wounds of injustice (Amos 5:24).

Yet creation is unsafe, particularly at the periphery. The wilderness is a place of uncertainty and danger, both on land and at sea. The edges of creation are chaotic and alien. Yet God loves these places and their creatures (Job 39:41).

The world — called “good” by God — is often undomesticated and unsafe. It is at times even hostile; the great sea monster Leviathan, clearly one of God's creations, is often described as a force to be overcome (see Psalm 74 and Isaiah 27).

In addition, the wilderness is also a liminal place, a realm at the boundary of the known and the unknown, where an unsafe and mysterious God might be encountered. The margins of creation are places of purification, an always-frightening experience.

There are many examples of this in scripture, including Gen. 32:22-32 (Jacob wrestling with God), much of the book of

Exodus (Moses and the burning bush; the delivery of the law at Sinai, the wandering of the Israelites), Mark 1:4-8 (John the Baptist), and Luke 4:1-13 (Jesus tempted in the desert). So it is that while creation heals, it also threatens.

Fourth, creation is *personalized yet indifferent*. In Genesis 2 a garden is created by God especially for us — a tailor-made home for humanity.

Meanwhile the Lord spreads out the heavens like a tent (see Ps. 104:2, Isa. 40:22, and Jer. 10:12). This image is an indication of the habitability of the earth and is a powerful symbol of the comforts and protections of home.

But in Ecclesiastes things take a dark turn. In that book creation exhibits a supreme indifference to human needs. The cycles of days, seasons, years, and lifetimes come and go without end and without significance.

For the author of Ecclesiastes creation seems pointless. In direct contradiction to much of the Bible, it is described as renewing nothing, producing little, and ceaselessly turning back on itself in a series of closed and

decaying loops.

“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity! The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises. The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north... all streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full... all things are wearisome; more than one can express” (from Ecclesiastes 1).

Similar sentiments are expressed in Eccl. 12:1-8. Another complexity is added to the mix: the Bible views the created order as both made for humans but also strangely aloof to our unending search for meaning.

Overall, then, scripture develops a view of creation that seems more like a personality sketch than a scientific treatise. Indeed, the Bible is pre-scientific. But more important than this is scripture's insistence that creation is a good creation of a loving God and thus provides a unique glimpse into the character of God.

Unfortunately, space does not permit us to explore just how well this four-part personality sketch matches up with traditional traits of God. Perhaps that will wait on another column. **NFJ**

*"Paul Wallace is an astrophysicist who writes with magic..."*

STARS BENEATH US

FINDING GOD IN THE EVOLVING COSMOS

THEOLOGY for the PEOPLE

Now available wherever books are sold  
[fortresspress.com/starsbeneathus](http://fortresspress.com/starsbeneathus)



# Giving matters

## MAKING A MONTHLY MOVE-UP

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

It's not for everyone, but I have discovered monthly giving to be a good thing. It makes my support of Nurturing Faith/Baptists Today simpler and more consistent — as well as more generous.

The “simpler” part means that my gifts are made at the time I pay my other bills each month. This can be done by check or, as I prefer, as a monthly charge on my credit card.

The “consistent” part means that we have funds coming in each month to help meet operational expenses. Another advantage is the ability to increase my overall annual giving by doing so monthly. That is, I'm more “generous” with my chartable



giving to this cause.

For those who support this ministry with faithful annual, biannual or quarterly giving, thanks! We need and appreciate those valued gifts.

For those who might find monthly giving to be simpler, more consistent and

more generous, we would love to have you support this publishing ministry in that way — at the monthly amount you choose.

To begin the monthly giving process, go online at [nurturingfaith.net/product/monthly-donation](http://nurturingfaith.net/product/monthly-donation) or call (478) 301-5655 or send your first monthly gift (and indicate your intentions) to Baptists Today, Inc., P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318.

Currently we have 60 individuals or couples (listed below) who give monthly. Our goal is to increase monthly giving to 200 donors by the end of the year.

This will help with ongoing operations and also increase overall funds needed to support this independent publishing ministry. **NFJ**

## THANKS TO THESE FAITHFUL MONTHLY GIVERS

Bill and Mary Jayne Allen  
Ruth T. Andrew  
Philip and Kelly Belcher  
Jack C. and Eve Bishop Jr.  
Edwin and Tereasa Boland  
Don Brewer  
Jack and Pam Buchanan  
Frieda H. Byrd  
Don and Judy Campbell  
Tony and Susan Cartledge  
Kent Cranford  
Ronald Davis  
Doug and Judy Dortch  
Walter Draughon III  
Tommy and Carol Dobbins  
Sarah A. Frost  
Tom and Judy Ginn  
Wayne and Karen Glasgow  
Anne Green  
Jody Griffin

Colin and Faye Harris  
Richard Hensley  
Garin Hill  
Billy Honeycutt  
Russell Honeycutt  
Howard and Elizabeth Hubler  
Jeri Jackson  
David Jordan  
Diane Jordan  
Tom Leuze  
Bub and Jannie Lister  
Ray A. Marchman  
Andrew and Mary McGill  
Brad and Cynthia Wise Mitchell  
Louise Munro  
William T. and Judy Neal  
Ruth S. O'Leary  
John and Teresa Pierce  
Elizabeth K. Reese  
Kathy B. Richardson

Alice B. Ridgeway  
Benjamin Roth  
Roy and Louise Runyan  
Drayton and Mary Etta Sanders  
William Savell  
Charles and Pat Schaible  
Jenny L. Smith  
Lila C. Stevens  
Trenton C. Thompson  
Ed and Sarah Timmerman  
David and Christy Turner  
Joe and Cathy Turner  
Neal and Pam Wacter  
Billy C. and JoAnn Wallace  
Richard M. Watts  
Willena F. Wilbanks  
Paul and Mary Ann Williams  
Winnie and Woodie Williams  
Scott and Vickie Willis  
Robert and Charlie Faye Wilson

# Leave a legacy; have a lasting influence

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Legacy gifts to Nurturing Faith, the publishing ministry of Baptists Today Inc., ensure a secure and hopeful future for a needed and valued voice.

We are deeply grateful for those who have included Baptists Today, Inc., in their estate plans. We encourage others who value this publishing ministry to join the faithful and generous persons who form the Nurturing Faith Legacy Society.

### Let us know ...

If you have included Baptists Today, Inc., in your estate plans, or when you do so, please let us know. Contact information follows.

### Let us help ...

If you would like assistance with estate planning, we can provide free confidential, professional help through our collaboration with the CBF Foundation. There are a variety of ways to leave a legacy gift. Want to explore them?

### Let us thank you!

Your commitment to ensure the future of Nurturing Faith/Baptists Today is something we want to celebrate — by including your names in the Nurturing Faith Legacy Society.

Your gift will have a lasting influence, and your generosity will be an encouragement and example to others who value this cause.

NOTE: If you have included Baptists Today, Inc. in your estate plans but wish for the gift to remain anonymous, please let us know. We'd like to be aware of your gift while respecting your wishes.

Please contact us to — let us know ... let us help ... let us thank you!

- Executive Editor John Pierce  
(478-301-5655 / editor@nurturingfaith.net)
- Development Director John Bridges  
(704-616-1725 / jbridges@nurturingfaith.net)
- Baptists Today, Inc.  
(P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318)

## Ways of leaving a lasting influence

A bequest through a will or trust is the simplest way to leave a legacy gift to Baptists Today, Inc. This gift may be a specified amount or a percentage of one's estate.

We are glad to explore other ways your good stewardship can have a lasting influence — including memorial gifts, stocks, mutual funds or real estate. Just let us know! **NFJ**

# With blessings come responsibilities

BY JOHN F. BRIDGES  
*Director of Development*

My appreciation for those who make Nurturing Faith possible has grown even more since becoming director of development last year. In talking with many others, I have discovered a similar deep devotion to this mission.

When reflecting on this important ministry, these thoughts come to mind:

First, thank you for all you do through your faithful and generous giving. This excellent work could not be done without the commitment of many.

Second, please consider increasing your support. One way may be through monthly

gifts — in any amount — that increase your total charitable giving through the year.

Third, pray for and encourage the Nurturing Faith staff committed to carrying out this important and expanding ministry.

Fourth, please tell others about this ministry and encourage their readership and support. A gift subscription is a good way to begin.

Stewardship is both a blessing and responsibility. I am increasingly aware of my desire to help secure the future of those things I believe to be very important. Nurturing Faith is one cause that blesses us and is worthy of our responsible stewardship.

Want to talk about how you can begin or expand your support? Contact me at 704-616-1725 or jbridges@nurturingfaith.net. **NFJ**



“Since the 1980s this publication has been a reliable resource over the course of my ministry. Now *Nurturing Faith Journal and Bible Studies* continues to grow as a high-quality publication. It is a pleasure to be a monthly supporter, and I encourage other readers to do the same.”

BILLY HONEYCUTT  
RETIRED DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS  
RUTHERFORDTON, N.C.

“As a former pastor and Baptist university administrator, I learned that reliable information made my work easier. I knew then and now that I could trust Nurturing Faith/Baptists Today to keep me informed. I am proud to be a monthly supporter.”

JACK BUCHANAN  
FINANCIAL ADVISER  
KINGS MOUNTAIN, N.C.

“We pay for many services on a monthly basis, so it just makes sense to support Nurturing Faith/Baptists Today on a monthly basis. We do so with gratitude for the inspiring and helpful articles and information in *Nurturing Faith Journal* — along with the Bible study resources for teachers/learners that we use each week.”

MARY JAYNE ALLEN  
CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR  
CHATTANOOGA, TENN.



# SEE YOU IN Atlanta

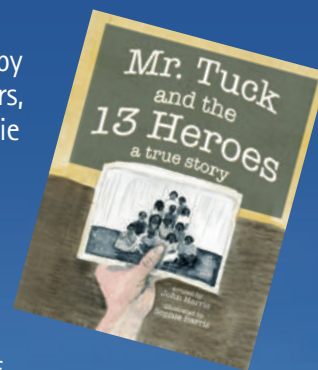
Nurturing Faith will be present for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, June 28-30, at the Hyatt Regency Atlanta.

We hope you will be there too. If so, please visit us in the Gathering Place!

Nurturing Faith is pleased to collaborate with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and many of its partners in a variety of ways to better serve congregations. For a complete schedule, registration and more about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, visit [cbf.net/assembly](http://cbf.net/assembly).

- Check out all that *Nurturing Faith* has to offer: Journal, Bible Studies, Books, Resources and Experiences.

- Attend book signings by *Nurturing Faith* authors, and by John and Sophie Harris, author and illustrator of *Mr. Tuck and the 13 Heroes* (sponsored by CBF Foundation).



- Share in the launch of a new Nurturing Faith book, *Cooperative Baptist Fellowship: Reclaiming & Re-Forming Baptist Identity* by Terry Maples and Gene Wilder.

[cbf.net/assembly](http://cbf.net/assembly)