SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2017

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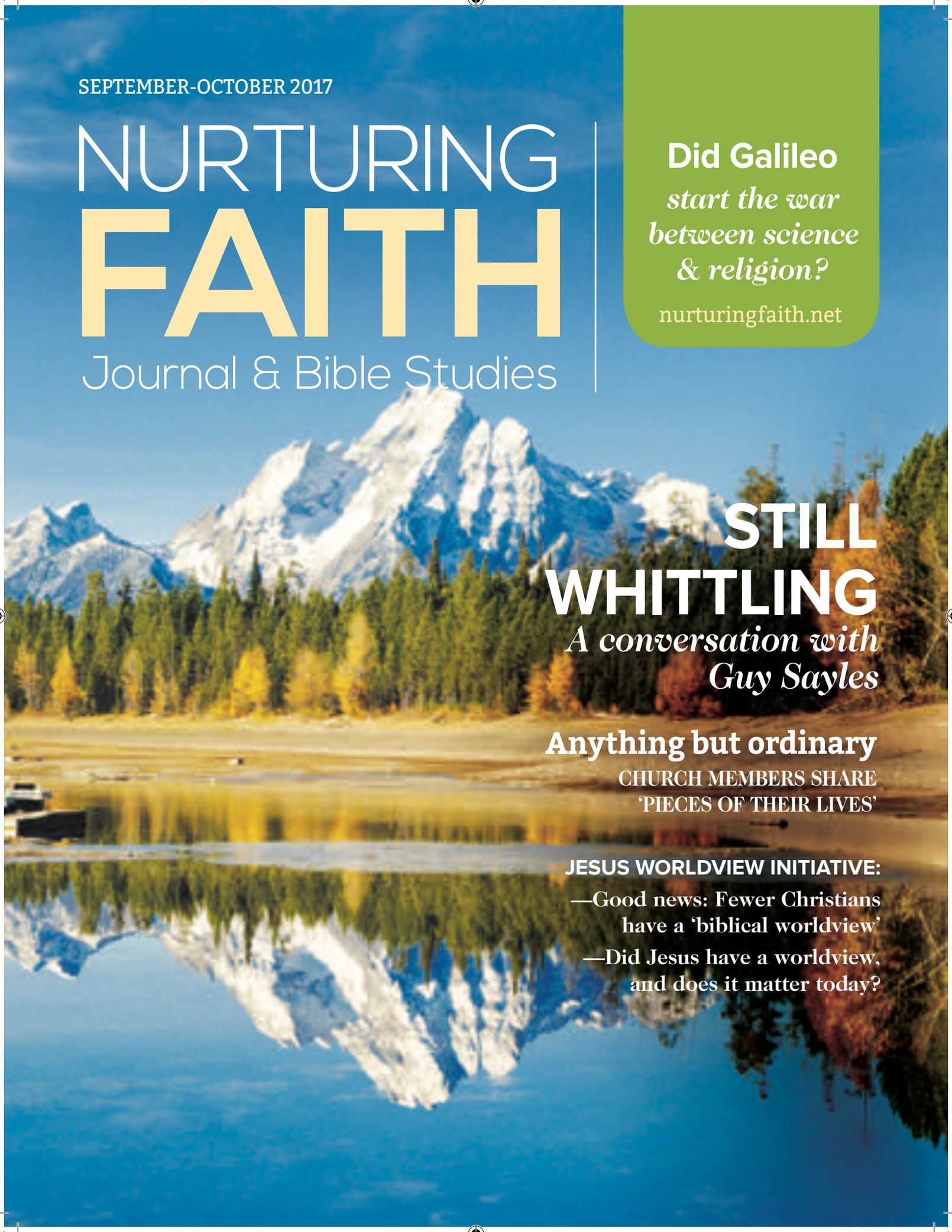

STILL WHITTLING

A conversation with Guy Sayles

Anything but ordinary

CHURCH MEMBERS SHARE 'PIECES OF THEIR LIVES'

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—Good news: Fewer Christians have a 'biblical worldview'

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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.

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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

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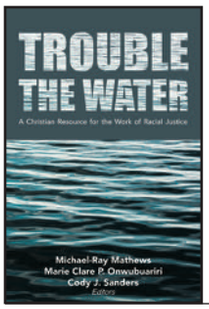

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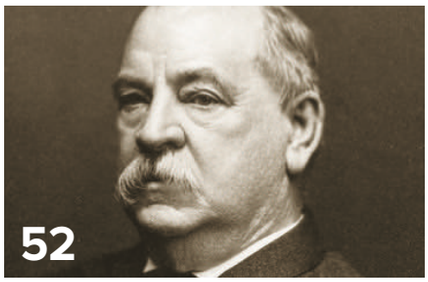

RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS
Grover Cleveland (1885-1889)
By Bruce Gourley

SHIFTING GEARS — Following a diagnosis of multiple myeloma, Guy Sayles left the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Asheville, N.C., in January 2015 to give more time and energy to his treatments and, in turn, has found new perspectives and ministry opportunities.

Still Whittling

A conversation with Guy Sayles about vulnerability, discipline and lifelong learning

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — After more than 13 years, Guy Sayles left the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Asheville in January 2015. More of his waning energy, resulting from multiple myeloma, and fuller attention were needed to manage the blood cancer that had recently been discovered.

New ministry opportunities opened to work with divinity students at Gardner-Webb University and to join the religion and philosophy faculty at Mars Hills University. Guy has preached in numerous churches and served as interim pastor, most recently at Asheville's Calvary Baptist Church.

Earlier he served as pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis and First Baptist Church of Locust Grove, Ga., south of Atlanta, his hometown. He blogs at fromtheintersection.org.

Nurturing Faith Journal editor John Pierce caught up with Guy recently at a bakery in West Asheville where they began the following conversation.

NFJ: Recently you asserted that your early images of a "man" came from "football and Sunday school, Green Berets and missionaries, James Bond and Captain Kangaroo, the Allman Brothers and Royal Ambassadors, Clint Eastwood westerns and Jesus on his way to the cross." Over the years, how have you sorted out all of those contributing factors — and what has been the result?

GS: I think what we call a "self" is made up of images, stories, assumptions, roles and experiences that shape us.

Writer Brian Doyle, who just recently died, had a delightful poem ("Maybe the Future is a Story that Hates to Wait") that includes these lines:

> Maybe children are made of stories more
> Than they are of bone and hair and
> turkey sandwiches.

Maybe the way to think of a
teenager is as a wry story
That's all verb and no object as yet.
Maybe we guzzle
Forty stories with every breath we
draw and they soak
Into us and flavor and thicken and
spice the wild stew
We are. . .

We do "guzzle stories" which "soak into us," and the stories we soak up in our formative years tell us who we should be. The stories come with, and conjure, images: pictures or emblems that show us how to move through the world, how to relate with other people, and how to deal with the challenges and opportunities we face.

The stories also carry mostly implicit assumptions about how the world works, about what is true and untrue, and about success and failure. The stories, images and assumptions influence the way we handle the roles we're given and choose, and they filter our experiences.

So, the stories I guzzled early on and the images that others hung in my psychic gallery gave me conflicting understandings of what it meant to be a "man." The version of masculinity I soaked up included toughness and tenderness, competition and compassion, adventurer and homesteader, renegade and model citizen.

I didn't get much help from those stories and images in figuring out how to live with these polarities, these tensions. Was there, for example, a way to be "tough" that didn't include aggression and violence and a way to be "tender" that didn't exclude resolve and resilience?

My sorting of these images and stories was pretty haphazard until my young adult years. Eventually, I "got it" that the story and image of Jesus had the power to remake and transform the other stories and images. I came to trust that becoming more like Jesus is, at the same time, becoming more our honest-to-God selves.

It wasn't a matter of "imitating" Jesus, but "incarnating" his character and commitments within the limits of my own circumstances and temperament. To do that requires denying my old or false or ego-dominated self, experiencing the cross-like pain of the death of whatever in me isn't like Jesus, and the rising of a new or true or Jesus-centered self.

Becoming more like Jesus means whittling away at whatever inhibits the emergence of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" in my character. I've got a lot of whittling yet to do; it's a lifelong task and gift.

NFJ: What was your initial reaction to your cancer diagnosis, and what have your illness and its treatments taught you about yourself and God?

GS: Before that diagnosis, the most serious illness or injury I'd had was a result of high school football: a couple of surgeries to repair a badly mangled ankle. I didn't take any medication, and I only saw my primary care doctor for my annual physical. So, there's a sense in which the diagnosis was a shock.

In another way, though, I wasn't surprised. For about a year I'd been saying, "I'm more tired than I should be." It was taking me longer to recover from seasons of especially hard work or from strenuous exercise. It turns out that fatigue is a leading indicator of multiple myeloma. Ironically, its treatment also increases fatigue.

What I most deeply believe about God — beliefs that, thankfully, my experience of cancer has tested but strengthened — is that God does not cause our pain, but loves us too much to waste it.

God does not will our suffering; instead, God is with us as we struggle. So, while God did not want me to have cancer, now that I do, God can use it to teach and shape me.

I'm realizing how vulnerable I am and scrambling for the courage to admit that vulnerability. It's uncomfortable, to say the least, but it's crucial, since our inescapable vulnerability is the thing we have most in common with everyone else.

I'm learning to live with pain, physical and otherwise, including the pain of tighter limits on my energy and a nearer, though, of course, unknown horizon. Those narrower limits and that closer horizon nudge me to seek greater wisdom about what matters most and how best to use my remaining time.

More than anything else, I now have visceral and immediate experience of the bedrock truth that "nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God." Sometimes, all I know is that there is "no separation," and it is enough.

NFJ: We grow up with proverbs, even clichés that have limited application or depth. But laughter really is good medicine, isn't it?

GS: It really is. Norman Cousins once called it "internal jogging." Martin Luther famously said that the best response to the devil is to laugh at him; and, for me, closely related, is the ability to laugh at my own "devilish ego" — at my pride, pretensions, posturing and power seeking.

When I can see those things in myself, it's a grace to laugh at them. "There he goes again," I say to myself.

NFJ: Do mountains make a difference for you?

GS: They do, but it's hard to say precisely what kind of difference. I enjoy the perspectives that come both from looking up to them from the valley and from looking across a vista from the heights.

In both ways, I feel drawn into wonder and experience transcendence; and I feel appropriately small and temporary. There's freedom in remembering a sense of scale and duration.

NFJ: What disciplines did you develop later in ministry that you wish had been part of your earlier life as a minister?

GS: I didn't become a "serious" (whatever that is) reader of poetry until midlife and mid-ministry. Had I been a more frequent and disciplined reader, there would have been more time for it to enrich my language and stretch my imagination.

And, I still haven't incorporated a robust-enough sense of Sabbath into my life.

NFJ: You saw remarkable changes in church and society from the time you became a pastor until your retirement. How did you navigate those changes, and what guidance would you offer other ministers serving in such a dynamic time now?

GS: I'm grateful that my dad's family had deep roots in Pentecostalism; they were faithful and fervent members of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.). They gave me the strong sense that, through the Spirit, God is still speaking, still creating and recreating, still leading the church, and still gifting people — men and women, young and old — for partnership with God in the world.

I take seriously the Gospel of John's understanding of the relationship of Jesus to the Spirit. Jesus says: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (16:12-14).

We haven't yet heard everything Jesus has to say. Jesus is, for Christians, the fullest revelation of God we have, and the still-speaking Spirit will lead the followers of Jesus to respond to life in ways that are consistent with his character and conduct.

The Spirit helps us to imagine and to discern together how Jesus is at work among us, and I believe that his work is always on the side of greater justice, mercy, freedom, equality, inclusion, peace and joy.

NFJ: What do ministers really need from lay leaders, and what do lay leaders need from ministers?

GS: Ministers and lay leaders need mutual understanding. I think we ministers need to include in our understanding of lay leaders the easy-to-forget truth that they do what they do as "volunteers."

The ministries of laypersons are carried out in the context of very demanding lives. We are most often "on the clock" when we work with them; they, on the other hand, are using time they also have to apportion to family, community and self.

Ministers need for lay leaders to understand that it's difficult to challenge the people who pay their salaries and vote on their continuing in their jobs. There are very few prophets on a payroll; but the church needs the bracing challenge of prophetic insight.

I don't mean, by the way, harsh diatribe as much as I mean truthful naming of the ways in which all of us — ministers included — hedge on God's call to justice and peace.


'I feel drawn into wonder and experience transcendence [by mountains], and I feel appropriately small and temporary.'

NFJ: What three books would you recommend and why?

GS: In some ways, it's a challenge to recommend only three; and, in other ways, it's hard to come up with three. Here's a shot at an answer:

• Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God,* because it marked for me the beginning of a long process of coming to understand, to the extent that understanding is possible, that the cross is not something God did to Jesus but, rather, something God experienced in and with Jesus. Somehow, in Jesus, God experienced what it means to be godforsaken; and, through Jesus, God suffers our "godforsakenness" along with us.

• Edwin Friedman's *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue,* because Friedman's appropriation of Murray Bowen's family systems theory gave me the most insightful and most practical view of pastoral leadership I ever found. It showed me a way to stay vitally alive — not merely to survive — amid the demands of ministry.

• Julian (Juliana) of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love,* because she broke brittle ground in me and helped sow seeds which bore fruit in my experience of Christ as "our Mother," of the transfiguring power of suffering, and of the assurance that, no matter what, "all shall be well."

NFJ: Teaching is also learning, especially when a later career move. What have you learned from teaching in a college setting?

GS: I have learned that consumerism has a stranglehold on higher education. The notion that the quest for truth has value in itself, including inherent value for the quester, is rapidly fading from the scene.

Educators are under increasing pressure to demonstrate the vocational and economic value of what they offer to students: Will it help them get a good job?

I understand the anxiety that generates this pressure: college is expensive, and families can't help but expect that their investment will yield returns that are, at least in part, tangible. I think it's important, though, for us to retain (or regain) a sense of education as formational of identity prior, or, at least, in addition, to training for employment.

I've also learned that young adults want guidance from people who respect them, who are willing to listen to them, and who believe in their possibilities. Spoken or unspoken, that hope for what we sometimes call "mentoring" is what students bring with them to campus. NFJ

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.

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The King Center
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… and more

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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

Good news: Study shows fewer Christians have 'biblical worldview'

By John D. Pierce

Barna Group is a research organization that seeks to identify trends in religious faith and practices but does so with an odd definition of what is a "biblical worldview."

So when a recent report revealed (according to Barna's definition) that "only 17 percent of [American] Christians who consider their faith important and attend church regularly actually have a biblical worldview," I considered it to be good news.

Although the research methods employed by Barna produce accurate statistical data, the results are useless — or worse, misleading — because they are rooted in a narrow, faulty definition of biblical faithfulness that emphasizes noncore doctrines and, more troubling, deemphasizes the life and teachings of Jesus.

Through the publicist who distributed these findings I sought, to no avail, some clarification on how Barna determined this definition of "biblical worldview" since it follows no familiar confessional statement, is strangely selective in its doctrinal pickings, and has so little to do with Jesus.

Within Barna's six-point definition of a "biblical worldview," only one point even references Jesus. And that requirement calls for a mere affirmation of his sinless life — something doctrinally sound, but not what Jesus most closely associated with salvation and discipleship.

It is interesting to note that this one point of affirmation about Jesus requires simply *believing* something about Jesus, not actually *doing* what Jesus called his followers to do. However, one does not have to read far into the Gospels to know that Jesus was clearly more interested in finding followers than lining up persons who would simply affirm his sinless state.

In this sense, Barna provides an easier way to be "biblical" than does Jesus. It is an attempted shortcut — a common one among professing Christians — to express beliefs about Jesus rather than taking on the greater challenge of actually doing the hard stuff Jesus calls his followers to do.

Perhaps Barna might gauge this for us: How are we doing at following the life and teachings of Jesus when so seduced by the power, prejudice and fear that surround us?

The worldview Jesus offers calls for radial self-denial, inclusive love, risky grace and generous mercy. Jesus never stood before a crowd or instructed his disciples to walk the aisle and confess his sinless state and affirm aloud that Satan is not merely symbolic in order to be counted within the fold.

Rather he called for confession, renewal and a response to "Follow me!" So the defining question of one's Christian faith and therefore worldview, it would seem, should be tied to how well one actually follows Jesus.

However, Barna defines "biblical worldview" as "believing that (1) absolute moral truth exists; (2) the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; (3) Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic; (4) a person cannot earn their way into heaven by trying to be good or do good works; (5) Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; (6) God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today."

It's not that these points are irrelevant to theological discourse, but that none of those six, including the single reference to Jesus, has anything to do with following Jesus — the primary call of the gospel.

Therefore, if Barna concludes that only a small minority of professing Christians holds a "biblical worldview" by this definition, then perhaps that is good news. Hopefully, it means the majority is more invested in seeking to follow Jesus than checking off these less important and, in some cases, highly debatable doctrinal boxes.

Jesus told his disciples they would be defined by their love, not their confirmed belief in a literal Satan or the omniscience of God. He had much harder and riskier standards embedded in his words and example — that moved his followers from affirmation to action.

If so, shouldn't Christians be defined by a biblical worldview that actually emphasizes the high calling of Jesus found in the Bible?

Honestly, the results of Barna's study would be more convicting of those of us who claim to follow Jesus if the biblical definition required us to admit whether or not we heed such calls as:

"Anyone who lives by the truth comes into the light. They live by the truth with God's help. They come into the light so that it will be easy to see their good deeds" (John 3:21).

"Love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you. Then you will be children of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44-45a).

"Be careful not to do good deeds in front of other people. Don't do those deeds to be seen by others. If you do, your Father in heaven will not reward you" (Matt. 6:1).

And on and on, the biblical revelation reveals God in Jesus Christ whose call is not easy but provides the most meaningful way of living beyond any oddly-devised checklist.

Barna concludes that American Christians are sacrificing this so-called "biblical worldview" for Marxism, postmodernism and secularism. Certainly, growing diversity across the nation brings a variety of ideas that shape how one views the world. But the answer is not to hunker down in some narrowly defined concept of biblical faith that has no connection to following Jesus.

The greater threat than these swirling philosophies is the extent to which so many American Christians have now abandoned the priority of Jesus for social and political ideologies that placate their fears and provide religious cover for less-than-loving attitudes and actions toward those who suffer.

While making for dramatic headlines, Barna's conclusions, sadly, contribute to this redefinition of Christianity that is making American evangelicalism a weak doctrinal construction and, much worse, an ideological embrace that generally ignores the life and teachings of Jesus — who supposedly is the one that Christians affirm as Savior and Lord, and claim to follow.

If the relegation of Jesus to a status well below isolated and even obscure points of doctrine, as well as the embrace of modern political ideologies, are required to be counted among those holding a "biblical worldview," then I am pleased to be in the large percentage of Christians who receive a failing grade.

I'm more concerned about my daily failures to live up to the high, radical call of Jesus that pushes me to be less selfish and more loving than I find comfortable. And it remains baffling to me why anyone who professes Jesus as Lord would seek a worldview that deemphasizes, even ignores, this central focus of the gospel.

Such a disconnection spells greater trouble for American Christianity than what this study suggests. Imagine how confusing and unattractive it must be for those who examine the Christian faith based on those who downplay Jesus and redefine "biblical" or "Christian" worldviews in such narrow and often politicized ways.

Those of us who consider Jesus to be the culmination of the biblical revelation — and the one we claim as Savior and Lord — might think a "biblical" or "Christian" worldview would have its clearest focus on the life and teachings of Jesus. I hope so; I really hope so. NFJ

Perhaps we're onto something

This longer-than-usual editorial, along with some earlier ones, challenge the growing use of "biblical worldview" and "Christian worldview" that define faithfulness as narrow doctrinal constructions and/or political ideologies.

Contributing writer Bruce Gourley noted in the July/August issue (page 50) how Google searches of those terms ("biblical worldview" and "Christian worldview") confirm these widespread redefinitions of Christianity while the idea of a Jesus worldview has no traction.

We believe this matter needs greater attention. The question becomes this: How do we refocus attention on following Jesus so that the worldview we seek and share is clearly centered on his life and teachings rather than those lesser and often contrasting perspectives that get cast as "biblical" or "Christian"?

It's a big question that deserves more than a quick response. So we are engaging with others in discovering effective and collaborative ways of doing this.

As a starting point, Bruce is writing more on this subject (see page 44) as part of his expanding work with Nurturing Faith. We began by calling this effort the Truth & Justice Project. However, that name has not resonated in the way that "Jesus worldview" has. So we'll call it what it is: Nurturing Faith's Jesus Worldview Initiative.

Already we are in wider conversations about how our resources and those of others can come together to help redirect the focus of the faithful on following Jesus. We are certainly not the only ones with this concern or mission.

At the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship assembly in Atlanta this summer, author Brian McLaren addressed "(Re)introducing the Way of Christ in America." Others have sounded the alarm too, especially pastoral leaders who've seen the shifting emphasis within their congregations.

We're just getting started with this new initiative that calls for engagement with others, expanded funding and producing helpful resources that will grow out of this initiative. If this strikes a chord with you, please let Bruce or me hear from you. Our email addresses are listed on page 2. NFJ

Anything but ordinary

Church members share 'pieces of their lives' to enhance worship

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JEN FOSTER

RALEIGH, N.C. — "Ack! I just stitched that chicken in upside down!"

Laughter echoed through the room as half a dozen women stopped their sewing and ironing to inspect a row of green fabric strips. The bands of fabric, each only an inch or so wide, were pieced together in a growing row.

"Gives it character and makes it unique. Leave it there."

"I think it will stand out. I'd redo it."

"You won't see it, even from the deacons' pew."

This group of creative women from First Baptist Church on Salisbury Street in Raleigh had gathered for a day of sewing and ironing as part of the Ordinary Time Green Stole Project. The fabric pieces had been donated by members of the congregation, cut into strips by project volunteers, and were just beginning to take shape as additional stoles for ministers to wear during Ordinary Time.

STITCHING COMMUNITY

From its conception, the Ordinary Time Green Stole Project has been a group effort. The idea was hatched as church member Mary Hauser and music minister Mary Alice Seals shared lunch at a worship and music conference at Montreat, N.C.

Art pieces used in worship there got Mary thinking about ways to make the formality of the liturgical worship experience at First Baptist less intimidating. Mary recruited Holly Ivel, a talented quilter and fellow church member, to join her in organizing the effort to create new stoles.

Together they identified ways that the entire church could be involved in the art project, from donating fabric to cutting the pieces to sewing and ironing. It took a little while for the congregation to get invested in donating fabric to the project.

The bin for collecting fabric stayed empty just long enough for Mary and Holly to get nervous about whether they would get enough. Mary fielded a lot of questions in the church hallway.

Is it really okay to put in a knit t-shirt? What about fabric that's a very light shade of green? Are you sure you can use upholstery fabric? What if there are other colors on a green background?

Yes, she answered, over and over. The beauty is in the mix, the color range and the varied textures. Bring anything green.

To encourage those who didn't ask, Mary seeded the collection bin. "I intentionally put in a t-shirt, and I intentionally put in something shiny and weird. I wanted people not to be afraid."

GREEN STOLE PROJECT — Holly Ivel (left) and Mary Hauser model stoles-in-progress that are building community and bringing new meaning to worship at Raleigh's First Baptist Church.

Soon, the box began to fill: Susan contributed a piece of emerald green satin, the sash from a dress her bridesmaid wore at her wedding in 1982. Lila, age 2, added green fleece her mom used to make a turtle costume for Halloween.

Green t-shirts appeared from youth choir festivals; widows added neckties to honor their late husbands. Men brought worn-out athletic shirts and camouflage print shorts. Church members from every demographic pilfered through closets and craft project stashes to share pieces of green fabric, pieces of their lives.

Eventually, fabric arrived in every shade of green, from muted sage to bright lime, deep hunter to a soft pastel mint. The donations were more than enough and in a perfectly beautiful mix of tones, shades and textures of green fabric.

With the scraps collected, it was time to begin cutting. A well-timed churchwide retreat brought the first opportunity for a group of people to sit together and work. One participant remarked that she nearly backed out of the first cutting session because she didn't know anyone else who was participating. But shared work broke the ice, and soon the scissors were snipping away while conversation and laughter flowed.

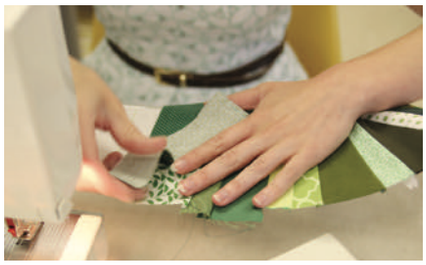
Sewing days soon followed, and participants welcomed the opportunity to gather outside of the Sunday morning routine. Many remarked how much they enjoyed seeing a different, more creative side of fellow congregants.

Some compared it to the quilting bees that their grandmothers had loved in generations past. All agreed that the friendships forged over narrow strips of green fabric became cherished relationships within the church.

ORDINARY TIME

Many First Baptist members didn't grow up in a liturgical tradition. Baptists typically miss out on the explicit worship instruction that Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and others learn during Confirmation classes. Therefore, for some congregants, the meanings behind symbols used in worship can be a mystery.

So, about a year ago, First Baptist began including a paragraph in each week's worship bulletin explaining various elements of worship. While these written explanations help worshipers understand where a given week falls within the Church Year, a paragraph might not be enough to explain the symbolism of color or provide a larger overview.



STITCHED TOGETHER — When sewn together as stoles, the donated fabric pieces represent the diversity and unity of the congregation, and the importance of growing in faith throughout the year.

The Green Stole Project offers another avenue for conversation about what it means to follow the liturgical calendar and why ministers wear green stoles for much of the year. While ironing freshly stitched seams at the first of two sewing days, Mary Alice Seals described the significance of Ordinary Time.

She explained that the liturgical calendar includes two periods of Ordinary Time. The first, from Epiphany to the beginning of Lent, provides a time to focus on the life and ministry of Jesus. After Easter and Pentecost follows a second, and much longer, period of Ordinary Time that extends until Advent.

In this second period of Ordinary Time, the emphasis is often focused upon the spiritual growth of the believer and the spiritual growth of the Church, the community of believers.

Faith, in light of Christ's resurrection, is lived out in ordinary time. In both periods, green signifies new growth: the growth of Jesus and the individual spiritual growth of the faith community.

When Mary Hauser had the idea to make a second set of green stoles, she planned for them to be less formal, and having another option during the longest season of the church year made sense. But creating stoles for Ordinary Time came to mean much more to participants.

In the season of worship when we emphasize the growth of the church community, the stoles will be a visual reminder that community relies on the contributions of each individual. And the symbolism of using ordinary, everyday fabrics for Ordinary Time is not lost on those who assisted in creating them.

Every piece of fabric represents a piece of an individual's ordinary life: clothing, curtains, napkins. Out of these very ordinary, utilitarian objects comes something beautiful and meaningful.

Faith is shaped by the awe-inspiring moments of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. But finding God in the ordinary, daily experiences of life makes Ordinary Time foundational to faithful Christian living. These stoles use a collection of ordinary objects to create something beautiful and magnificent.

REFLECTING COMMUNITY

When asked why they wanted to be part of this effort, participants repeated over and over that the Green Stole Project both reflected the diversity of this community of faith while also strengthening the community in their creation.

The stoles are beautiful pieces of art, but the stories they tell and the connections made as they were sewn together will make them treasured pieces of First Baptist history for years to come.

One participant remarked: "Our church community is represented so beautifully in these stoles — the fabric representing the diversity within our church family; the stitches holding it all together just as our love of God, our church, and each other holds us together. They represent who we are and who we can be as we come together to be the hands and feet of Christ."

In the end, the tiny chicken stayed upside down on his green background, nestled among old t-shirts and scraps of upholstery fabric in a gorgeous array of slices of everyday life. There is such beauty to be found in the imperfection and the ordinary. And when the ministers of Raleigh's First Baptist Church wear the new stoles, they serve as a reminder of how beautiful an imperfect community can be. NFJ

Worth Repeating

"When you introduce me as your pastor, … it's an opportunity for me to reaffirm those sacred duties to which I am called. It's like my own 'hymn of invitation' — a chance to rededicate myself to God's call on my life; and I hope it's a chance for you to engage folks in dialogue about church and Jesus."

—Katie McKown, pastor of Scottsville Baptist Church in Virginia, who blogs at Hermeneutics in High Heels

"It helps me remember the forgiveness and grace that the families showed as a natural reaction after the tragedy."

—Rayna Kneuper Hall of Mount Pleasant, S.C., on the Charleston airport exhibit paying tribute to the 2015 Emanuel AME Church shooting victims *(Post and Courier)*

"The Christian church is not a debating society. We may disagree about what radical forgiveness, love, generosity, hospitality and inclusion look like, but these fundamental commitments are not negotiable. In the church, Jesus calls the shots."

—Alan Bean, executive director of Friends of Justice in Arlington, Texas. (BNG)

"If we heed the Baptists' historic stance for the clear separation between church and state, we allow the church to be 'unbought' and 'unbossed' by politics."

—F. Romall Smalls, associate minister at Grace Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, N.Y., and chaplain at New York University (RNS)

"The mere existence of a song like 'Make America Great Again' in a database of so-called 'worship' songs highlights the degree to which American Christianity has sold its soul to a gospel of power and self-interest."

—Blogger Jonathan Aigner (patheos.com)

"Neither the Declaration of Independence nor the U.S. Constitution, the country's charter documents, are partial to Christianity… These omissions present today's Christian nationalists with a real awkwardness."

—Historian Sam Haselby, author of *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, writing in *The Washington Post*

"We need to find ways of putting financial and vocational reality in relatable perspective for young people."

—Chris Cocca, "the food truck pastor," on his approach to paying down his student debts from Yale Divinity School (*Christianity Today*)

Stemming the tide of hatred with kindness

BY ADELLE M. BANKS
Religion News Service

John Fuller made a month-long effort to never utter a negative word to or about his wife, a busy mom he sometimes took for granted.

For a similar period, Katie Phillips found something positive to say about her 7-year-old son, with whom she had a "prickly relationship." And Christine King performed acts of kindness for an irritating co-worker.

Kindness — a virtue embraced by both the religious and the nonreligious — requires intentional behavior and can have beneficial results for both the giver and recipient of a benevolent act, experts say.

But, don't we know that already? Aren't most of us already kind?

We'd like to think so, said Phillips, an Atlanta-area mother of five, who took a "30-Day Kindness Challenge" earlier this year. But she added, "You're really humbled because you think, 'Oh my gosh, I don't do this nearly as often as I thought I did.'"

Though organizations such as the World Kindness Movement and the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation have encouraged altruism since the 1990s, more recent studies by scientists back up its benefits.

"People are longing for kindness," said relationship researcher Shaunti Feldhahn, author of *The Kindness Challenge: Thirty Days to Improve Any Relationship*. "Everybody likes living with a kind home, with a kind church, with a kind school and with kind neighbors."

So she created daily goals for how to treat others: Say nothing negative, say something affirming and be generous to them in some small way. Feldhahn found that 89 percent of relationships improved when people took those steps for a month.

"They had trained themselves in purposeful kindness," she said. NFJ

"But, don't we know that already? Aren't most of us already kind?"

What Is Going On Here?

Studies show attending church is good for your health

BY YONAT SHIMRON
Religion News Service

Participants attend a service during the World Communion of Reformed Churches General Council in Wittenberg, Germany. Photo courtesy of WCRC/Anna Siggelkow

The latest in a long line of studies, now numbering in the hundreds, if not thousands, shows that church attendance is good for your health.

Published by researchers from Vanderbilt University earlier this year, the study found that middle-aged adults who attended religious services at least once in the past year were half as likely to die prematurely as those who didn't.

Using data from a National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the study's researchers examined 10 biological stress markers among 5,449 men and women aged 46 to 65.

They then compared those markers with respondents' self-reported religious service attendance and found a correlation between religious service attendance, lower stress and longevity.

The study adds to mounting scientific findings on the subject. A far larger study, of 74,534 women, published last year found that attending a religious service more than once per week was associated with 33 percent lower mortality compared with women who never attended religious services.

A documentary probing recent findings similar to these aired on many PBS stations in July — another sign of growing awareness of these studies' significance, especially for older adults.

But even as the studies pile up and the literature appears close to conclusive, many questions about the association between religious service attendance and health have yet to be answered.

For one, people attend religious services for all kinds of reasons. What is it about services that might impart better health?

The prayers? The social connections? The coffee and cookies?

And does religious attendance account for longevity, or something else?

Could it be that people who attend church, synagogue or mosque happen to lead healthier lifestyles? Maybe they are on the whole predisposed to eat well, exercise regularly, engage in safe sex and drink alcohol in moderation?

How about people who bond over shared interests — say, knitting or poker, or devoted volunteers in literacy centers, or animal rescues? Has anyone studied whether these group members have lower mortality rates?

And finally, if, as so much evidence suggests, religious attendance is correlated with positive health outcomes, does that mean doctors should prescribe a weekly service to their patients?

"Religion is incredibly complex," said Neal Krause, a retired professor of public health at the University of Michigan who is the lead investigator in a Landmark Spirituality and Health Survey. "To say 'Church attendance is good for your health' does everything and nothing at the same time. The question is, 'What exactly is going on here?'"

Krause points out that not all religion is good. Religious devotion can also lead to negative health outcomes if people are motivated to attend church out of guilt, for example, or feel God is punishing them through their illness.

Indeed, studies have shown that negative religious coping can cause spiritual distress that may lead to depression or early death.

But overall, researchers say the field of spirituality and health — spanning numerous academic disciplines, including public health, nursing, social work, sociology, psychology and medicine — is improving as investigators dig deeper and try to ferret out causal relationships and eliminate other factors that may account for improved health outcomes.

One thing many researchers agree on: Studies analyzing whether prayer can heal illness have been shown to be methodologi-

cally, ethically and theologically flawed. Besides the question of whether prayer is an appropriate subject for scientific study and the fact that it's impossible to quantify the amount of prayer offered at a set time, there were a host of ethical considerations (Is it ethical not to pray for someone, and does God heal some but not others?).

The best of these studies showed that prayers offered by strangers — sometimes called intercessory prayer — had no effect on the recovery of people undergoing surgery.

Religious attendance, however, is a subject researchers keep returning to. The question remains: What practical implications can be gleaned from these studies?

Many researchers agree that even if religious attendance does promote better health, it's not appropriate for a physician to tell patients to go to church if they want to live longer — just as it wouldn't be appropriate to tell patients they should get married because research shows married couples live longer.

But that doesn't mean doctors shouldn't inquire about patients' spiritual needs.

"Physicians should know everything that has the potential to impact a patient's well-being, whether it's diet, social engagement, gun ownership or texting while driving," said Richard Sloan, a biomedical researcher at Columbia University Medical Center. "My objection is when physicians try to persuade patients to engage in religious practices that are potentially coercive."

For example, he said, it would unethical for a doctor to try to convert patients to a particular faith or to initiate prayer with a patient.

Likewise, it's not clear that going to church to improve the odds of survival is a good idea.

"I wouldn't want a congregation of people there for health benefits," said Daniel Sulmasy, a general internist and ethicist at Georgetown University and a former Franciscan friar. "In fact, we don't know if people did it for that reason, rather than intrinsic reasons, that there would be a correlation."

But some studies at the intersection of religion and health might help clinicians do a better job of caring for patients.

For example, studies have shown that chaplain visits in hospital settings are associated with better health outcomes. This stands to reason, say researchers; when patients' spiritual needs are met, they are more satisfied with their overall care.

Another study suggested patients who take advantage of chaplain visits are more peaceful and feel more in control of their health.

More such research examining the efficacy of chaplaincy interventions are needed, said Christina Puchalski, professor of medicine and director of the George Washington University's Institute for Spirituality and Health.

"What can we do for the person that's suffering?" Puchalski asked. "What are we doing so they aren't alone? I try to accompany people in their suffering. That's where we can all come together."

And while researchers work to tease out the mediating factors in religious services that may hold the secret ingredient to health, there's little question that religious groups have a lot going for them.

"Name a human institution that gives you a sense of community, hope, teaches you how to meditate, has all these kinds of disciplines associated with it," said Sulmasy. "If it's not a religion, it's going to be close to a religion." NFJ

7 suggestions for addressing toxicity

By Mike Smith

As a pastor, I often interact with Christians struggling to discern how to address the current toxicity in American politics and culture. Many of my conversation partners feel helpless in the face of this challenge.

They want to make a positive contribution, but feel uncertain how to begin to do so. Most of the time, I offer the following seven suggestions.

1. Decide now to detox yourself with regard to emotions, social media, interaction with folk who agree or disagree with you on a given matter, and how you perceive those with whom you disagree.

Treat toxicity like an addiction. Step away from the habit. Doing so may require taking a sabbatical from social media, intentionally waiting 24 hours before responding to a given matter, finding someone to coach you through the change, becoming part of an accountability group, or learning to see matters through the eyes of others. Detoxing is hard work, but it's doable.

2. Refrain from taking pot shots at others. Pot shots may feel satisfying in the moment, but they seldom change anyone's mind. In fact, they usually inflame the situation and/or dismiss others and their viewpoints as somehow silly.

Identify the phrases you currently use when irked, and consciously discard them. Later, you may become able to fashion fresh language that encourages meaningful conversations. Language matters. Use it carefully.

3. Treat no one with contempt. Instead, choose to treat all others as fully human. That's not easy to do in a world filled with propaganda designed to portray others as less than human. Frankly, we find it a difficult discipline to follow when we're hurt or outraged with an individual, interest group or political party.

I have found a silent prayer helpful to remind me to do so. The prayer goes like this: "Lord, help me remember and act as if he, she or they are among your children." It's harder to treat others with contempt when you come to perceive them as a child of God.

4. Invest yourself in groups and entities working to find or implement solutions to challenges that matter to you. You'll find you can make a difference for the good, most often in your local community but sometimes on larger stages.

Personally, I take inspiration from Abraham Lincoln who linked his life to an imperfect organization and imperfect persons (not least because he recognized his own imperfections). Few political leaders have worked harder or under more difficult conditions.

He eventually ended slavery and preserved the nation. He did not end prejudice, segregation or sectionalism. Still, he made a profound difference for the good. Let's do the same in accordance with our opportunities.

5. Never settle for passing on anything as a fact until you've done lots of homework to verify its accuracy. There's more than enough confusion out there. Let's not add to it. The good news is that numerous resources exist to help us fact check. Doing so undercuts the power of misinformed or malicious rumors posing as fact.

6. Turn loose of the need for revenge and settling scores. There is little future in getting caught up in the game whose refrain is, "But she, he or they started it."

Break the pattern of vengeance for yourself, and do what you can to help others do the same. When we do so, we follow in the steps of God, who chose to deal with human sin not by force but instead through self-sacrifice and love.

7. For those of us who follow Christ, a combination of prayer and doing unto others as we would have them do unto us is always apt. This approach is the oldest form of Christian activism.

In prayer, we place society in God's hands. In doing good unto others, we not only aid individuals but also non-violently challenge those who ignore or abuse them.

I am not naïve. These seven suggestions do not provide a comprehensive solution to the problem of political and cultural toxicity. Large-scale, structural changes are needed.

For most of us, though, the place to start to make a positive difference is with ourselves and the small portions of society we touch directly. These seven suggestions may help us start to find our way. NFJ

—Mike Smith is pastor of Central Baptist Church of Fountain City in Knoxville, Tenn.

Meeting the critical needs of identity, community and ecclesiology

By Larry Hovis

It is not exactly a news flash that these are challenging days for denominational organizations and many of the churches that comprise them. Diminishing resources, conflicts over sexuality and other controversial issues, and decreasing denominational loyalty are just a few of the issues that plague us.

I employ the pronoun "us" because I am an unabashedly committed denominationalist, even though my current denominational tribe, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, has resisted that label.

My commitment to a denominational expression of the Christian faith began before I knew what that was. My mother was a lifelong Baptist, my parents were married in a Baptist church, and I have been a Baptist as long as I can remember. As a young person, I participated in denominational programs and attended Baptist camps.

As a college student, I participated in a denominational campus ministry and met denominational employees (one of whom was my Sunday school teacher). I attended a denominational seminary and have served in many denominational capacities as a Baptist minister. Though I have been a member of several local Baptist congregations, "church" for me has always been greater than my local church.

We Baptists have used many terms throughout the years and around the world to refer to the denominational organizations we have formed beyond the local church, for example: association, convention, alliance, union and conference. I'm grateful that when we founded Cooperative Baptist Fellowship 25 years ago, we decided to use a Bible word, *fellowship,* for our name. There's nothing wrong with those earlier Baptist organizational names, but as far as I can tell, ours is the only one found in the Scriptures.

Some say we live in a "post-denominational age." In spite of our struggles, I believe denominations still have some life left in them. If denominations were to go away, we would miss them and would probably invent something very much like them within a few years — though perhaps for different reasons than in the past.

Why do we need a denomination? Traditionally, denominations have done many things, with the "big three" being missions, theological education and church resources.

But nowadays, churches have countless opportunities to participate in missions outside of their denomination. Many ministers are educated in theological schools not affiliated with their denomination, and single-purpose parachurch organizations can provide resources beyond the reach of many denominational groups.

Today, while denominations may still do a good job with some aspects of the "big three," they may be better poised to meet three other critical needs: identity, community and ecclesiology.

Let's start with identity. Yes, we find our identity in Christ. But just as we don't experience our humanity in a vacuum, so is our Christian faith rooted in a particular context.

Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals and others "speak Jesus" with a particular accent. Each has something unique to contribute to one other and the world.

Denying our uniqueness betrays the Creator who made us and the Savior who calls us to follow him with our distinct experiences, capacities and perspectives. We need denominations to nurture people in a particular way of following Jesus, as an ongoing expression of the incarnation.

Cultivating identity requires community. No church is an island. Being the church in our time is challenging enough with the support of others; it's almost impossible without a larger community and a larger story to nurture it. Denominations are particularly good at providing community for churches and their leaders, especially clergy leaders who feel lonely and discouraged in these times when the pace of change is relentless and the demands are unending.

Acknowledging the need for community is a theological affirmation. It professes a particular ecclesiology. That's perfectly natural for many denominational families. It requires work for Baptists. Some Baptists don't recognize any church beyond the local church. They proudly call themselves "Independent Baptists."

The Baptist tradition I'm part of believes strongly in the idea of church that transcends time and space. But our default position is to retreat into our "autonomous" local congregations. It takes effort to nurture our connections and to cooperate with one another. It's vital that we make that effort as it allows us to live out our ecclesiology.

Practically speaking, we can't relate to every Christian in all times and places. We can, however, relate to the Christians and churches who share our identity and who desire to engage in some aspects of God's mission together that we would have great difficulty engaging in alone. Fellowship matters. NFJ

—Larry Hovis is executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

The goodness and importance of unity

By John R. Franke

As mentioned in the July-August issue of *Nurturing Faith*, the manifestation of the Spirit at Pentecost found in Acts reminds us that the one faith is expressed in many voices. It is in the context of making this claim that the concept of unity becomes so important.

A commitment to plurality and difference allows for a healthy freedom of expression that is important for true harmony. But one of the great dangers of the freedom engendered by plurality is that it easily becomes the basis for discord and hostility as each asserts their freedom over against others.

Paul warns about this in his letter to the churches in Galatia: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:13-15)

In response to the danger of plurality and freedom turning into strife and violence, the Bible reminds us of the goodness and importance of unity. Perhaps the classic expression of unity in the Old Testament is found in Psalm 133: "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!"

This assertion is illustrated in two ways: through the anointing of Aaron and the dew of Mount Hermon. Both of these illustrations feature liquids: anointing oil and dew.

First, unity is "like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes." The reference to Aaron makes it clear that the oil referred to here is the fragrant and refreshing oil used to consecrate a Hebrew priest.

This mixture consists of olive oil, liquid myrrh and cinnamon among other spices, and fills the air with a sweet, pleasing aroma that signifies the goodness of pleasantness of life as it is intended by God. That is what unity is like: a pleasing sweet aroma that fills the air.

Second, unity is "like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion." Mount Hermon is well to the north of Jerusalem (aka Zion) and is the highest mountain in Israel. Its moisture runs into steams and rivulets that flow into the Jordan River, irrigating and giving life to arid lands where infrequent rains lead to dry riverbeds and a lack of water.

It is this scarcity of water in a dry land that makes the dews of Mount Hermon so precious. That is what unity is like: it travels far beyond its point of origin and gives life even to those far away.

The ancient readers of this psalm would not have missed allusion to the flowing of oil and dew down from Aaron's beard and the slopes of Mount Hermon to bring sweetness and life-giving abundance to those around them. This is "A Song of Ascents," a title given to 15 psalms (120-134) starting with that ascription.

Many scholars believe the title indicates that these particular psalms were sung by worshippers as they ascended the road to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Ancient readers would not have missed the significance of unity in worship flowing down from the Jerusalem Temple to bring goodness and life to the surrounding lands, and indeed all the earth.

Think of the similarity with the promise of Jesus to his disciples at the beginning of Acts: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." As the message of the gospel proclaimed by the followers of Jesus produces unity and peace, it will bring goodness and life to all the earth.

This is consistent with the covenant God made with Abraham that his people would be a blessing to the nations. In the midst of a world torn asunder by discord, God calls a people to tell a different story and live an alternative life: a life in which the social conventions that divide people from each other — race, ethnicity, gender, social/economic class, sexual orientation, political preferences, ideologies and any other construction that human beings can invent to suggest that some people are inferior and unworthy of God's blessing — are set aside for a vision of unity in the midst of diversity and difference.

One faith expressed in many voices committed to unity for the sake of the world: This is God's vision for creation — a peaceful and harmonious community in which everyone has enough and no one needs to be afraid. NFJ

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

BEING CHURCH IN CHANGING TIMES

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

Going through the wilderness

By Becky Galli

As a PK (preacher's kid) I had a front row seat listening to my father (R.F. Smith Jr.) every time the church doors opened for the first 18 years of my life and electronically afterward. More importantly, I watched him go through one of life's most difficult losses: the death of my 17-year-old brother, Forest, from a water-skiing accident.

I was 20, and didn't know how I'd would use those lessons later to face my own challenges: three children with special needs that included autism, epilepsy, and a rare blood disorder; the death of my oldest son; my divorce; and nine days later, my paralysis from transverse myelitis, an inflammation of the spinal cord affecting one in a million that began as the flu.

What did I learn from my father about finding God when life gets tough? These are five of the principles that have sustained me:

• It is OK to be angry at God.

When tragedy strikes, we are shocked and then angry. The profound anger can be surprising and even guilt-producing. Often our deepest pain is rooted in a seething anger at the injustice of the situation, especially when tragedy affects young, innocent lives.

"It's OK to feel anger," Dad taught and showed me. In fact, we are in good company. Jesus felt forsaken. So can we. God can handle it.

Don't suppress those feelings. Find a friend, counselor, pastor or professional who will listen. Or, as Dad did, pull anger down by its tail, rip it apart, and write about it.

• Look for God not at the point of cause, but as the point of cure.

We like for life to make sense. We like cause-and-effect predictability. We like answers. However, "why" can be tormenting. After talking through those questions, at some point we may have to mark them as "unanswered," or as Dad used to say, "Put it on a shelf."

Often we have to accept what we don't understand and begin to live despite unanswered questions. Dad and I started a list of what questions we were going to ask God someday. But in the meantime, God can help us heal. You can count on it.

• God did not bring us this far to leave us alone.

We may be angry with God, feel forsaken and forgotten, but God is still there. Sometimes pain strips us of all our communication and all we can do is "be" as we try to absorb a new reality.

After my son's seizures began, I couldn't pray. Dad told me: "We will pray for you until you can pray for yourself." I rested in that thought, and eventually I could pray again. We can ask others to pray for us until we can pray for ourselves. God knows what is on our minds and in our hearts. We don't have to speak it for God's benefit. When spoken, it is for our own benefit.

• We must keep moving, even in the darkest valleys.

Daily life after significant loss can be overwhelming. Often we are shocked into an emotional numbness that suspends us in time. Inertia can sideline us and even separate us from reality if we let it overtake our lives.

One of my favorite sermons Dad preached was titled, "What do you do with a wilderness?" The answer, based on the Psalm 23, is: You go through it.

God is with us in the valleys and will help us get through them. When too angry or numb to feel God's presence, we need to find others to journey with us in the interim. Structure and companionship are vital to getting through the valleys. We must keep moving.

"What's planned is possible," Dad said and lived. Plans helped keep me moving forward through the valleys — along with the steadfast support of family and friends and the faith that God is patient, loving, and always there, even when I couldn't feel God's presence.

• Nothing in God's world is broken beyond some use.

We can still live fully and purposefully despite life-changing loss. Dad liked to point out the wording in Rom. 8:28 that God is working in all things for *good* — not the best.

The best would have been for my brother to survive and fully recover. But he didn't. Out of that loss we learned, coped and grew spiritually. My faith was challenged and deepened then, as it has been each time loss has touched my life.

When we finally accept our circumstances, we can rethink what is possible and get on with the business of finding God's purpose in the life we have yet to live.

"No experience is wasted unless you let it be," Dad said at the beginning of every service. Amen. NFJ

—Becky Galli of Lutherville, Md., is a columnist and the author of *Rethinking Possible: A Memoir of Resilience* (2017).

The Committee on Missing Millennials

By Brett Younger

Walter could talk about Alabama football all day, but he wants to get home before dark:

"Gentlemen and lady, it's time to start. We know why we're here, but just in case someone has slept since we were chosen for this job, here's a recap.

"At the last deacons' meeting, Gerald pointed out that on Sunday morning First Baptist Church has lots of gray-haired people, and several of us who are no longer encumbered by hair, but we don't have many — and by many I mean any — of what college professors call millennials. I looked this up. These are people born after Kristin shot J.R. but before *American Idol.*

"Dennis, our venerable deacon chairman, appointed this august body because, apparently, the four of us have our fingers on the pulse of the youth culture.

"Gary, who knows how to use the old bean, noted that there should be someone on this task force who does not wear a hearing aid.

"Dennis asked his daughter Lauren who has a master's degree in sociology from the University of Alabama — Roll Tide! — and is now a member of First Methodist, which is fine, to meet with us. I remember when Lauren was knee high to a grasshopper. We appreciate you meeting with us geezers.

"Our church used to have lots of people in their 20s — including a softball team that won the association three years in a row — but our grandchildren aren't at church, and we're not going to be here forever. We need the young people who are going to serve on committees like this one 40 years from now. Let's go around the table and have everyone share one idea on how to get these young people back to church."

Arthur has been waiting patiently: "I love the hymns of the church — 'Blessed

Assurance,' 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' 'My Country 'Tis of Thee' — but we should sing a song every now and then for the young people, like one of Amy Grant's songs. Nothing crazy. Maybe 'Pass It On.'"

Kenneth does not care for "Pass It On": "Barbara's cousin's church has a special service before Sunday school just for the young people. They have drums and guitars so they can sing whatever they want, and we don't have to hear it."

Lauren jumps in: "8:30 on Sunday morning may not be the best time to get us to come hear drums and guitars."

Gary thinks of himself as a radical: "My nephew's kids say they don't come to church because they don't like dressing up. We need to let the young people know that some of us don't wear ties any more. Tennis shoes are fine, but no flip flops. They make Sandra crazy."

Arthur brought more than one great idea: "The drive-through at the Starbucks always has a line. What if we put a coffee pot and some fancy creamers like hazelnut in the fellowship hall? We could put a note reminding people not to take coffee into the sanctuary."

The ideas are starting to pop.

"We could invite young adults to take up the offering."

"Or sing in the choir."

"What about a party? They could have pizza and watch a picture."

"Or a cookout at the lake."

"Do they eat barbecue? Are they vegetarians?"

"If they go to Applebee's, they can order whatever they want."

"We should get one of those Facebook pages, so they can show pictures from their parties."

"We could get a Coke machine."

"Is the skating rink still open?"

"Bowling!"

Lauren is feeling good about her decision to become a Methodist: "Hang on, fellows. You have interesting ideas, but you'll do better if you don't try to be quite so cool. People my age want friendships, and not just with people our age. We want to be around 70-year-olds and 10-year-olds. We don't want to take over worship, but we want to be a part. We're not interested in numbers. We want you to know our names. We want the church to be more diverse. We need to be in conversation with other religious groups. We want to do things rather than just talk about them. We want authentic faith."

This is not the conversation the committee expected: "What if we got a ping pong table?" NFJ

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LESSONS FOR
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2017

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.

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Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 3, 2017

Exodus 3:1-15

Meeting Mr. Is

Have you ever had an experience in which you believed that God was at work, trying to get your attention? What does it take for you? A bright shooting star trailing across the sky? An illness that leaves you meditating upon the dust patterns around your ceiling? A heavy dream that won't go away when you wake up?

God got Moses' attention through the medium of a burning bush on life support. It's unlikely that God will speak to us in the same way, but we believe that God still speaks. When God speaks, there is always a message. Where there is a message, there is always a mission. Moses discovered his mission through asking some very normal questions. Perhaps you have asked similar questions when God laid a mission before you.

What is this? (vv. 1-6)

Conjure up your mental motion picture screen and envision the star of the story, Moses. He is an interesting mix of a man, born to Hebrew parents but raised as an Egyptian. He was fully grown when his Hebrew sympathies prompted him to kill an Egyptian taskmaster who was abusing a Hebrew worker. He hid the man's body in a sandy grave, but soon learned that his fellow Hebrews remained suspicious, and he feared that they might report him. Moses fled for his life to the desert land of Midian, usually thought of as in southwestern Arabia, on the eastern side of the Gulf of Aqaba. There he met a man named Jethro (known elsewhere as Hobab and Reuel), described as a priest of Midian.

Exodus 3:14 –
"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you."'"

Moses married Jethro's daughter Zipporah, whose name means something like "Birdie," and when she gave birth to a son, Moses expressed his lack of roots by naming him Gershom, meaning "Stranger," or "Alien."

Moses settled in with his new family and learned the work of a shepherd. As we come to Exodus 3, we discover a man who had already lived a full life and could have been pondering retirement. After fleeing Egypt as an adult, Moses had spent forty years leading his flocks through the desert in search of seasonal grass and scattered oases. God had been preparing Moses to lead a different kind of flock through the desert, but he didn't know that yet.

While Moses leaned on his staff and watched the mindless sheep through those years, God was watching Moses' kindred as they suffered in Egypt. As Moses listened for the night calls of desert carnivores who might threaten his flock, God listened to the moans of a discouraged and despairing people who suffered the predations of Egyptian taskmasters.

We cannot be sure that Moses even knew Yahweh by name at this point. Had he learned about Yahweh on his mother's knee as she nursed him for Pharaoh's daughter? Did he hear Yahweh's name from his father-in-law Jethro, possibly a lateral descendant of Abraham, and known as the "priest of Midian?" Whether Moses knew much about Yahweh is not important: the point is that Yahweh knew Moses, and had a job for him.

God attracted Moses' attention through a theophany, a self-revelation of God through a burning flame within a desert thornbush. (See the online "Hardest Question" for more.) Could you pass by such a sight without checking it out? Certainly not, and Moses couldn't, either.

On a day when Moses had "led his flock beyond the wilderness," far from home, he came to a mountain called Horeb (v. 1), identified by the author as "the mountain of God." Seeing a bush burning brightly against the hillside – but not being consumed – Moses turned aside "to look at this great sight" (vv. 2-3).

As Moses approached the bush, God spoke: *"Moses! Moses!"* Can you imagine Moses' response? Some of us would probably have turned tail and run, but Moses stood his ground and responded: "Here I am" (v. 4).

God instructed Moses to come no closer but to remove his sandals while on holy ground (v. 5) as he stood before "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (v. 6). Recognizing that the bush was no natural anomaly but a sacred theophany, Moses hid his face,

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"for he was afraid to look at God." Do you blame him?

Thoughtful readers may note that Moses did not hear God speak until he took the time to "turn aside" from his normal path. Do you think it is possible to miss God's call by getting so caught up in daily busy-ness that we fail to "turn aside" and pay attention?

Who am I? (vv. 7-12)

God reminded Moses of his kindred in Egypt, and how they were suffering. It had been 40 years. Did Moses still think of them? We don't know, but God revealed to Moses a plan to deliver the Hebrews from their enslavement and lead them to "a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" – one currently occupied by a variety of other ethnic groups, including Canaanites, Hittities, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (vv. 7-9).

How do you suppose Moses would respond in learning what God had in mind? "Now, come here, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (v. 10, my translation).

Here was a chance for Moses to help his people in a way far more significant than killing a single cruel Egyptian. Would Moses jump at the opportunity to go back and make a real difference? Would he refuse? Or would he look around and say "Who, me?"

Moses chose the latter option: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (v. 11). We have no reason to think Moses' modesty was less than genuine. After all, he had been out of touch with Egypt for forty years. By now, he probably understood the bleating of sheep better than spoken Egyptian, and he did not consider himself a good speaker under the best of circumstances. Why would God choose him to do verbal battle with Pharaoh?

Moses responded as he did because he was focused on his own abilities, which were clearly not sufficient. But God did not intend to send Moses alone. "I will be with you," said Yahweh, "and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain" (v. 12).

In this encounter, Moses learned that the most important thing about following God was not about who he was, but about who was with him.

Who are you? (vv. 13-15)

God's promised presence did little to comfort Moses, because he apparently didn't know much about Yawheh, and he wasn't sure that the Hebrews in Egypt would know any more than he did. For all he knew, they might have begun worshiping Ra or Isis or other gods of the Egyptian pantheon.

So, Moses' second question had to do with who God was. "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (v. 13).

What follows is the Old Testament's only attempt to explain the meaning of the divine name.

Yahweh's answer to Moses' question has spawned debates and inspired those who have studied it for many centuries. Here is the answer: *"'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh"* (v. 14a). God's name was more than a convenient label; it also expressed the divine essence: "I am that I am," or "I will be what I will be." *'Ehyeh* is a rarely used form of the Hebrew verb "to be," though it previously appeared in v. 12, when God declared "I am with you."

The verb is in the imperfect tense, which generally indicates continuity. The word implies *active* being, not just static existence: God *is*. My favorite explanation is an extended paraphrase with which professor John I Durham used to regale his classes at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary: "I am the am-ing one. I am the is-ing one. I am the one who *really* is. I am the one with no past tense. I am the was is, the is is, and the will be is. I am *Mister Is*!"

This is the closest thing we have to a biblical explanation of God's name. The word *yahweh*, which follows four occurrences of *'ehyeh* (one in v. 12 and three in v. 14), may be a causative form of that same verb, meaning something like "The one who always is" or "The one who causes to be." Yahweh is not only the *essence* of all existence, but the One who brings all things into existence. God alone is the ultimate reality.

In Yahweh's enigmatic response, Moses found the answer to his question, and a rebuttal to his excuse. He would have to teach Israel something about the nature of God before he could bring Israel out of Egypt by the power of God. "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations." (v. 15).

As Yahweh had faithfully kept promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so God would now be faithful to their descendants. Yahweh would lead them out of Egypt and into the promised land (vv. 16-23). Moses' job was not only to deliver the message, but also to become their guide.

Have you ever become aware of a situation or need that led you to think "Someone should do something about that" – only to realize that someone was you? NFJ

Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 10, 2017

Exodus 12:1-14

Blood in the Doorway

Can you think of certain dates in the year that are particularly important to you? Everyone observes New Year's Day in some way, Americans remember the Fourth of July, and Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter. But are there days that are special to *you*?

We remember our birthdays, of course, and some of us mark "death days" of loved ones. Married folks (if they are wise) remember to observe wedding anniversaries. Are there other days you commemorate each year?

Today's lesson is about a day the Israelites would never forget, because they believed God had ordered them to remember it, and had prescribed the precise way they were to celebrate it year by year.

A month for beginnings (vv. 1-2)

The exodus from Egypt marked a new beginning for the Israelites, who had long ago outgrown their status as an extended family, and were well on their way to becoming an ethnic people with national aspirations. According to the Priestly authors responsible for this text, Yahweh instructed both Moses and Aaron to announce that their calendar was about to be turned around with the current month, called *Abib* at the time, to become "the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you" (v. 2).

Exodus 12:13 –
"The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."

The people would not have changed their awareness of the traditional calendar, which was based on agriculture, but the historical significance of the Passover and the coming exodus was such that they were also to adopt a new ritual-based calendar, with *Abib* (later called *Nisan*) as the "head of the year," not just first in order, but first in importance.

In Jewish worship today, Passover is considered the first festival of the liturgical year, and Purim is the last (the 14th of *Adar*), but *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year, occurs in September, on the first day of *Tishri* – the seventh month of the liturgical calendar.

The feast of Passover remains the most significant Jewish festival of the year, precisely because it commemorates the Israelites' deliverance from slavery and the beginning of a new life as free people. Similarly, many Christians count Easter as the preeminent day of the ecclesiastical calendar, as it reminds us that Christ set believers free from their bondage to sin. Can you imagine *not* celebrating Easter each year?

A lamb for protection (vv. 3-7)

The instructions for the Passover feast are both familiar and alien to modern readers: most of us remember that it involved a lamb, but little else. The people were instructed to choose a lamb or kid from their flocks on the 10th day of the month, separate it from the flocks, and keep it up until the 14th, when it was to be slaughtered at twilight.

The animal's death would serve two purposes. First, its blood was to be smeared on the doorposts and lintels of the Hebrews' homes as an identifying mark. Secondly, it was to become the centerpiece of a symbolic "Passover" meal destined to become an annual observance.

The few verses are chock full of details. The animal could be a young sheep or goat. It had to be male, one year old, and healthy. The word translated "without blemishes" (NRSV), "without defect" (NIV11), or "perfect" (NET) is *tammīm*, meaning "complete" or "whole." It meant the animal should be sound of body and pleasing in appearance (v. 5).

Because the meal was to be eaten hurriedly, special attention was given to making sure that none was wasted. Therefore, if a whole lamb was too much for one family – a likely occurrence since yearling lambs typically weigh 100 pounds or more – neighboring families should calculate how much each family would need and go in together on a single lamb (v. 4), so there would be no leftovers.

On the appointed day, "the whole assembled congregation" was to slaughter the lambs at twilight. The

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people could hardly gather together for the ceremony, which was to take place in each household, but the terminology emphasizes that all the families were to slaughter the animals – presumably by slitting their throats – at the same time. After the animal's blood was collected in a pan for daubing on the doorframes, it was to be prepared for the Passover meal (vv. 6-7).

A meal to remember (vv. 8-14)

Having covered the choice, preparation, and slaughtering of the animal, God's instructions to Moses and Aaron went on to describe how the lamb or kid was to be cooked and eaten. Special emphasis was given to the idea that the meal should be prepared and consumed expectantly and hurriedly, with bags packed and ready to travel.

First, the animal was to be spit-roasted over a fire. We are not told if it was to be skinned, but there was to be no further butchering or even gutting. With typical sacrifices, portions of the animal offered to God were burned on the altar, but most of the meat was boiled and made into stews.

With their cooking pots packed away, this animal was not to be eaten raw or boiled, but roasted over a fire, with the head, legs, and internal organs intact – and all of it was to be eaten (vv. 8-9). Anything left over was to be burned.

This may explain why the animal had to be kept apart for four days prior to slaughter. We normally think of putting an animal in the stall to fatten it up or at least control its diet, but given the cooking instructions, the Hebrews may not have fed the animal at all, hoping four days of water alone would provide ample time for its bowels to be cleaned out naturally.

As another nod to the traveling theme, the animal was to be eaten with "unleavened bread and bitter herbs" (v. 8). The bread was to be unleavened as a reminder that they had no time for it to rise. The bitter herbs were likely represented by dandelions, chickory, or other edible plants gathered in the wild. These were far less tasty than cultivated vegetables, and an appropriate reminder of the bitter labor the Israelites had endured during their time in Egypt.

Mealtime is often an opportunity for relaxing and reclining about the table, but this meal was to be different. They were to be fully dressed, with sandals on their feet, the skirts of their robes tucked into their belts, and their heavy walking sticks in hand (v. 11). In other words, they were to eat hurriedly, prepared to leave at a moment's notice with a minimum of mess.

The latter part of verses 11 and 12 explains the name "Passover of Yahweh." The word translated as "Passover" is *pesach*, from which we get the term "pascal lamb." Normally, the word means something like "limp," or "hop." Elijah used it when he charged Israel with "limping (or 'hopping') between two opinions" (1 Kgs. 18:21), after which the priests of Baal unsuccessfully sought their god while hopping or dancing around the altar (1 Kgs. 18:26).

In this case, Israel was warned that Yahweh intended to pass through the land that night, striking down the firstborn of both people and animals as a way of judging the Egyptians for their treatment of the Hebrews. But, the blood on the doorposts would serve as a sign to Yahweh that obedient Hebrews lived inside, so "I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt" (v. 13). While bringing death to an unmarked house, God would skip over houses marked with the blood: thus a word that can mean "hop" became "Passover."

Verse 14, though included in the lectionary reading, is a transitional statement that introduces a new section devoted to explaining the seven-day festival of unleavened bread, which came to follow Passover (vv. 14-20). These instructions clearly come from a later time, for they could not have been carried out in the same context as the first Passover. The instructions, for example, call for a full day of removing leaven from one's home, followed by "solemn assemblies" on the first and seventh day – something the Israelites could hardly do while on a hard march with Pharaoh's army in hot pursuit.

In a similar way, subsequent Passovers were not celebrated in precisely the same way as the first: there is no further call for blood to be sprinkled on the doorframes of Hebrew homes, for example, and the meals, while still symbolic, became more elaborate.

The point, however, is that the Passover should become "a day of remembrance" to be observed as "a perpetual ordinance," so the Hebrew people would never forget God's mighty work in choosing a special people and delivering them from their captors' hands.

To this day, Jews who celebrate the Passover do so with a sense of corporate identity that stretches back to the original Exodus. The traditional words of the celebration (called the *Haggadah*) speak of how "*We* were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord, our God, took *us* out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm."

When Christians gather to celebrate the "Last Supper" (which may or may not have been a Seder meal), we likewise do so "in remembrance," and "as often as we keep it," remembering how Christ willingly shed his blood for our deliverance.

Some things should never be forgotten. NFJ

Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 17, 2017

Exodus 14:1-31

The Day That Never Died

Exodus 14:31 –
"Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses."

If you go to the movies or read books, especially of the action / adventure type, you've seen it happen: nearing the end of the story, the heroes are trapped or in desperate straits. All seems lost. Tension builds. The enemy is poised for the final blow, but deliverance arrives.

In old Westerns, the cavalry or the Lone Ranger arrives to save the settlers. In *Lord of the Rings*, the eagles arrive before the gates of Mordor and the tide of battle turns. In *Star Wars*, hope seems lost until the "force" guides Luke Skywalker to fire a photon torpedo in just the right place to blow up the Death Star, and victory is snatched from the metaphorical jaws of defeat.

Such stories are not new. Last minute rescues are as essential to good storytelling as salt and butter are to a decent bowl of grits. Today's lesson recalls a story from Israel's past that could have been written for the movies – and indeed, more than one film has sought to portray it.

A hard-hearted pharaoh (vv. 1-9)

After the final plague against Egypt, in which God reportedly struck down every firstborn male of both humans and animals, Egypt's Pharaoh was temporarily broken. The narrator insists that he not only allowed the Israelites to leave and carry their belongings, but also asked Moses to pray for him (12:30-31). Later, however, the king learned that Israel was wandering about the wilderness as if lost, and "the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people" (v. 5). Perhaps the sequence of plagues and the loss of the firstborn began to seem more like coincidence, and the Egyptian leaders began to wonder why they had allowed such a valuable labor source to get away with all their possessions while the plagues had left the Egyptians impoverished.

As the king of Egypt gathered a contingent of his crack charioteers to pursue Israel (vv. 6-7), the text explains that Yahweh had "hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (v. 8). The motif of Pharaoh's heart being hardened — sometimes with divine assistance — appears frequently in association with the account of the plagues (Exod. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10).

Does this suggest that the Lord might purposely lead someone to sin? The implication of these verses is that Pharaoh's personal desire was always to oppress Israel and to keep them captive. When his heart wavered in fear following the mighty acts that plagued his country, Yahweh simply strengthened Pharaoh's resolve to do what he wanted. Thus, the ancient authors had no problem in asserting that Yahweh intentionally hardened Pharaoh's heart against Israel, for it was done with purpose: so the demonstration of Yahweh's power might be more and more convincing, resulting in greater glory to God.

A chicken-hearted people (vv. 10-14)

As Pharaoh's impressive army drew near to the encamped Israelites (vv. 8-9), the fugitives' hearts quailed in fear (v. 10). A literal reading is "they were frightened muchly" – and with good reason. According to vv. 6-7, Pharaoh had gathered a select group of 600 chariots to accompany him in the vanguard, under his direct command. These were followed by a larger corps of chariots, in addition to a large infantry division of foot-soldiers (v. 9).

The Israelites had reason to be frightened, except for one thing: it wasn't their responsibility to fight Pharaoh's army. It was Yahweh who had brought the plagues that convinced Pharaoh to send Israel away from Egypt, and it was Yahweh who would come to their rescue now.

The people, unfortunately, had apparently forgotten God's previous acts of power. In the face of Pharaoh's withering force, they thought only of their own smallness and inability. Without any hope of deliverance, they blamed Moses for leading them out of Egypt only to be slaughtered in the wilderness (v. 11), wishing that

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they could return safely to slavery in Egypt (v. 12).

Moses, however, spoke with great confidence, reminding the people to trust in God: "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today . . . the LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still" (vv. 13-14).

A big-hearted God (vv. 15-25)

The text suggests that Moses followed his impassioned speech to Israel with an equally fervent prayer to God. Yahweh replied that he should stop talking and start acting, to get the Israelites pointing forward to the future instead of backward toward Pharaoh's army (v. 15).

The familiar story of the crossing of the sea follows. Moses was to stand on the shore, holding out his staff like a divine lightning rod, as Yahweh stepped forward to protect and deliver Israel. He would split the sea so that Israel could cross on dry ground, make the Egyptians obstinate enough to pursue them, and then return the sea to its place, drowning the pursuing army and gaining greater glory in the process (vv. 17-18).

But what was to keep the Egyptians from overrunning Israel's camp in the meantime? An intriguing movement takes place in vv. 19-20. The "angel of God" (literally, "the messenger of God"), who led Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, suddenly enters the narrative.

The description may seem confusing because the story is a composite of different textual strands. One portrays Yahweh as present in the pillar of cloud and fire, but another prefers to speak of an angel of God as the force driving or standing before the cloud.

The divine manifestation moved from the front to Israel's rear, between the two camps. Although the deific attendant normally appeared as a pillar of fire during the night, on that evening it maintained the shape of a cloud, obscuring the Egyptians' view and preventing them from attacking Israel's camp.

"It lit up the night" may suggest that the darkness of the cloud was the only light of the night. It effectively blinded the Egyptians to what was happening on the other side. When Yahweh's deliverance took place, it would be in the full light of day, where all could see.

During the night, however, the Lord caused a strong east wind to blow (v. 21), creating a miraculous wedge of dry ground in the middle of what had been an impassable body of water. Naturalistic explanations such as earthquakes or tornadoes have been suggested for the amazing phenomenon, but none of them are convincing, and all are beside the point. The point is, by whatever means or in whatever location, God did something miraculous: Yahweh created a path for Israel through the midst of the sea. This is the language of confession, not history or science. Its clear intent is to glorify God and move Israel to faith.

At first light, Israel began to cross the sea (v. 22), so that they were nearly done when Pharaoh and his army could see well enough to realize what had happened. Without stopping to think that they might be riding into a trap, the army drove headlong after the Israelites, only to find that Yahweh was indeed fighting for Israel: "At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty" (vv. 24-25a). The Hebrew text does not suggest that the wheels were clogged with mud, but that God caused them to go awry and turn slowly. The narrator attributes to them a remarkable confession: "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt" (v. 25b).

A new, heartfelt faith (vv. 26-31)

With the Egyptians halted mid-sea, Yahweh instructed Moses to stretch out his staff again, and the waters returned, crushing and drowning the Egyptian army (vv. 26-28). God's stated plan had been to gain glory so that the *Egyptians* would "know that I am Yahweh" (14:4, 17-18), and v. 25 testifies that it was so. More important, however, is what Israel learned.

As they contemplated how the dead-end sea had turned into a trap for their pursuers, as they watched the broken remains of the mighty Egyptian army wash up on the restored seashore, "Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians," with the result being that "the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses" (v. 31).

The story of Israel's deliverance at the sea was so inspiring that it has remained at the heart of Israel's faith. Such mighty acts don't have to be repeated with every generation: Jewish prayers to this day identify with the ancient Israelites, speaking of the exodus event as if they were present with their ancestors.

Christian believers may also find inspiration and encouragement from stories of the exodus. Fortunately, that is not the end of the story. We can also imagine that we were present with the women in the garden who first heard the gospel news that Jesus had defeated, not just an army, but death itself. NFJ

Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 24, 2017

Exodus 16:1-36

What Is It?

Have you ever enjoyed a time of success or particular happiness, only to find yourself disappointed soon after? Imagine a group of hikers who labor long to reach the top of a mountain, and who celebrate when reaching a summit, only to discover that they've crested a ridge, and the trail will lead back down for a bit before another steep ascent to the actual peak.

Today's lesson finds Israel dropping like a rock from the mountaintop experience of being delivered from Egypt (Exodus 14) to the ugly depths of running out of food in the wilderness. Exodus 15 is a memorable song of praise: the following chapter is a turncoat cry of complaint.

A short-lived celebration (vv. 1-3)

Yahweh's sea-shaking act of deliverance over Egypt was so impressive that Israel must have walked on air as they sang and danced their way from the Egyptians and watched their pursuers drown (Exodus 14-15). As time went on, however, food ran short and feet got tired. Both sandals and tempers began to wear thin. In the space of six weeks (16:1), the people of Israel were ripe for rebellion against Moses.

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Exodus 16:12 –
"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

Careful readers may note some discrepancies or *non sequiturs* in the text, but the significance of the theological point supersedes the logical sequence of events. Even the apparently artless repetition serves an important function, making the story's truths more emphatic and memorable.

Israel had camped for a time at an oasis called Elim (15:27), probably somewhere along the western side of the Sinai Peninsula. That was not their destination, however, so Moses led them on, into the "Wilderness of Sin," a word probably related to "Sinai."

Little is said of the six weeks between Israel's dramatic deliverance at the sea and their arrival in the wilderness of Sin. By then, however, the excitement surrounding Yahweh's act of deliverance and the allegiance that it inculcated had begun to fade. Israel again began to complain, resurfacing themes that had appeared in 14:11-12, where they had argued that Egypt had an abundance of graves, and they preferred to die there as slaves than to be killed in the wilderness.

In the present text, it is not the Egyptian tombs they miss, but the food. With the exaggeration born of distorted memories, they fondly recalled pots of meat and piles of bread in Egypt, where they claimed to have eaten their fill, as if slavery had been a holiday (vv. 2-3). The people complained to Moses (and suddenly, to Aaron, too) that they would have preferred to die as well-fed slaves than to starve as liberated beggars.

Neither Moses nor Aaron had asked for their job as leaders of Israel. Moses had tried to avoid the heavy responsibility. Yet, they were accused of guiding Israel into the wilderness for their own perverse pleasure in watching the people famish.

The phrase "grumble against" occurs no less than seven times in five verses (vv. 2, 7, 8, 9, 12). Careful studies have shown that in the Pentateuch, this murmuring motif usually precedes some clearly defined and usually miraculous event, and this text is no exception.

Can you identify with Israel's complaining? The people seemed slow to learn, unconvinced that Yahweh had their best interests at heart. Can you remember times when a parent, teacher, or mentor led you in some difficult experience of personal growth that you could not appreciate or understand until later?

A long-running complaint (vv. 4-8)

The people complained to Moses and Aaron, but *Yahweh* heard, and responded to Moses, who apparently relayed everything to Aaron. God promised to rain bread from heaven (vv. 4-5) and give the Israelites their fill.

The people were instructed to gather one day's supply for five days, and a two-day supply on the sixth day, so that it would last them through the Sabbath. Official laws about Sabbath do not appear until chapter 20, but this

chapter assumes that Sabbath-keeping was already practiced among the Israelites. If there is a discrepancy, it did not bother the narrator.

Although only bread (which came in the morning) was included in Yahweh's promise of vv. 4-5, Moses and Aaron declared to Israel that they would be given meat in the evening as well as bread in the morning. A second account of Yahweh making the promise does include meat (vv. 11-12).

The narrator believed this method of providing food was done with divine purpose, having Yahweh explain to Moses that it was designed as a test, to see if Israel could (or would) obey the simple instructions regarding the amount of food they should gather. This would require a daily exercise of trust. Gathering one day's worth for five days implied a trust that Yahweh would provide more manna on the following day. Gathering a double provision on the sixth day, when leftovers had putrefied on previous days, required trust that Yahweh would not allow the leftovers to rot before the second day.

In one way or another, it seems, every story in Exodus is about trust in God. Yahweh's mighty acts of deliverance made a great impression on Israel, but the people also needed a faith sufficient for every day, not just in times of crisis. The gift of manna on the first six days of every week, along with the specific instructions for handling it, were a daily lesson in dependence upon God's beneficent provision. Vocabulary related to God's delivering and sustaining presence is found in six of the seven verses from v. 6-12.

Though the people complained to Moses and Aaron, who they could see, the issue was between them and Yahweh. Moses and Aaron responded: "For what are we, that you complain against us? … Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD" (vv. 7-8).

Have you ever been uncertain where your next meal was coming from? Most of us have little worry about whether we can find and afford food for today or the near future. On the other hand, some persons are so poor that sustenance is a daily concern. Which group do you think will feel more of a need to trust in God?

Do you think Jesus' model prayer, which includes "give us this day our daily bread," might have some connection with the lesson that Yahweh wanted to teach Israel?

A daily provision (vv. 9-36)

The remainder of Exodus 16 may derive from a different source, but in context it appears as a more detailed account of how the promised provisions came to pass. First, Yahweh called out to the people from the cloud, instructing them in much the same manner as Moses and Aaron (vv. 9-12). A specific reference to a visitation of quails as the source of evening meat appears in v. 13 (a similar story in Num. 11:31-32 is more extensive), followed by a detailed account of the manna's first appearance (vv. 14-15).

The people initially responded to the manna with a question: "What is it?" The question in Hebrew is *man-hu*, an apparent attempt to explain the source of the name given to the stuff, first given in v. 31: "The house of Israel called it manna" (Hebrew *mân*). The typical Hebrew word for "what" is *mâ*, but some related languages use *mân* as a contraction meaning "what then?" Our word "manna" is a rough transliteration of the Hebrew term.

The next verse provides instructions for gathering the divinely provided foodstuff (v. 16), which appeared with or in the dew each morning, drying to a flaky substance that appears to have been more like grain than bread, for it could be ground, baked, or boiled. Each person was to gather an "omer," just enough for one person to have enough, but no more.

This is followed by an account of Israel's experience with harvesting and cooking the manna (vv. 17-30). Once harvested, whether cooked or not, the manna would become infested with maggots and foul-smelling if kept overnight – except on the sixth day. Here, the consequence for failing to follow instructions was built in: those who tried storing it up were unlikely to do it a second time. Likewise, the uselessness of going out to gather on the seventh day reinforced the command to observe Sabbath rest (v. 23).

Knowing that readers who had no experience with manna would be curious, the narrator attempts to describe its appearance and taste: it was the size and shape of coriander seeds (which are small, round, and brown to gray), but white in color, tasting like crisp flatbread made with honey.

The theological significance of manna is seen in the need for daily trust in God, and in the instruction that a representative omer should be kept as a tangible reminder to future generations of how Yahweh had provided for their ancestors in the wilderness.

We no longer anticipate manna in the morning or quail in the evening, but the story reminds us to remember that such daily blessings as we have – including our ability to work and earn a living – are gifts of God that should not be forgotten or accumulated in a greedy fashion. As the memorial pot of manna spoke to Israel, symbols such as the cross remind Christians that both deliverance and provision remain available to those who put their trust in God. NFJ

Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

New password for online teaching resources is: Faith.

Oct. 1, 2017

Exodus 17:1-7

Unbottled Water

If you have children, or if you have ever been a child (any exceptions?), you know that childhood is fraught with insecurities. Small children like to be close to a parent and may struggle to sleep alone, fearing that if mom and dad leave the room, they won't come back.

That is a natural stage of life for children, but also something we learn to grow beyond. Children who are properly cared for soon learn that their parents will not desert them, and that their loving care is no less real in those times when they cannot be seen.

A thirsty people (vv. 1-4)

Today's text pictures an emerging nation that had a difficult time learning that lesson from a spiritual perspective. Despite a series of mighty works that should have left the people brimming with confidence and filled with the assurance of God's powerful presence, they persistently doubted God's care.

Yahweh had brought the Hebrews out of Egypt, delivered them from Pharaoh's army, and provided both water and food in times of need: yet the narrator says their doubts persisted and they insisted on putting God to the test.

Additional information at nurturingfaith.net

Exodus 17:6 –
"I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."

The account describing Yahweh's gift of water in 17:1-7 has both similarities and differences with a story in Num. 20:1-13, which also results in a place being named Meribah (quarreling).

Readers may find the narrator's theme to be a bit tedious or repetitive by now: Yahweh delivers Israel in an impressive way, but the people quickly forget. As soon as times get hard, they complain to Moses and question God's motives. Moses takes the complaint to God, who responds with yet another mighty work as a proof of the divine presence. Israel's consistent lack of trust in God is front and center.

The recurrent theme may seem monotonous, but also bears a message: this is not only how Israel was, but how we can be. God's gifts are many and mighty, but easily overlooked and taken for granted. Many believers spend more time complaining about what God has not done than giving praise for the blessings they enjoy every day.

Rephidim seemed an unusual place to stop, for it had no water (v. 1). No self-respecting leader of a wilderness expedition would order an extended camp in a locale that had no water supply, no matter how level the ground might be. Moses had lived in the desert. He knew it was not feasible to camp in a waterless place. Yet, he insisted that Yahweh wanted Israel to make camp at Rephidim. From the people's perspective, the only reasonable conclusion was that Moses had lost his mind and was probably delusional when he claimed to speak for Yahweh.

Following a familiar pattern, the Hebrews sent envoys to lodge an official complaint with Moses, insisting that he lead them to water. Do you blame them?

Moses responded that their quarrel was not with him, but with Yahweh. He asked, "Why do you test the Lord?" (v. 2). In the previous chapter, the story of miraculous manna and quail, the narrator said God's purpose was to test the people (16:4). Now the people, who seem to have forgotten all that God had done for them, feel presumptuous enough to test God. Moses seemed to fear that the Lord would soon lose patience with the stubborn people.

A key word appears twice in v. 2: the verbal root *rîb* means "to dispute," "to quarrel," or even "to bring a lawsuit." In the prophetic books, Yahweh is often described as bringing a suit against the faithless people of Israel. In this case, however, the people are making a claim that Moses (and hence, Yahweh) has defrauded them. Because of Israel's dispute (*rîb*) with God, Moses would later give the place a new name: "Meribah" (notice the *rîb* in the middle), meaning "disputation" or "testing."

The people of Israel, like many persons today, were blinded by need. They could not see beyond their own hunger or thirst, holding on to distorted memories of Egypt as "the good old days." We can appreciate their concern that freedom would be of little use if they died of thirst in its pursuit, but they

appear to have forgotten that God could and would provide for them. As in the previous chapter, when food was scarce, they accused Moses of being some sort of sadistic mass murderer, leading them out of Egypt so he could watch them die – along with their valuable livestock – in the wilderness (v. 3).

Thirst, like hunger, is a powerful motivator that tends to grasp all our attention. The Psalmist once described his spiritual thirst for God as being like a panting deer in search of a stream (Ps. 42:1).

What do we thirst for most? For water? For excitement? For financial security? For God? As we seek fulfillment in life, which thirst claims the largest amount of our time, effort, and attention?

As he had done before, Moses took the people's complaint to God. He carried a complaint of his own as well, insisting that the disgruntled populace was on the verge of stoning him (v. 4). We must give Moses credit: when he didn't know the answers, at least he knew where to look. When he was powerless to deal with a given situation, he routinely turned to God.

A benevolent God (vv. 5-6)

Having been challenged, Yahweh set about to answer the need while also vindicating Moses' leadership. God instructed Moses to take witnesses from among the elders of Israel and have them follow him to Horeb (an alternate name for Mt. Sinai). He was to take his shepherd's staff, the same staff with which he had demonstrated Yahweh's power by converting it to a serpent (7:9-10), striking the Nile to call forth the first of Yahweh's mighty acts in Egypt (7:17, 20), summoning plagues of frogs and gnats (8:5-6; 16-17), and by holding it over the sea to create a dry path for Israel to cross (14:16).

According to the instructions, Moses would see Yahweh standing by a certain rock, which he was to strike with the staff in view of the elders who accompanied him, so there would be witnesses to the power of God at work in providing needed water for the people. The text gives no clue as to how Moses was to recognize Yahweh's presence, but presumes that he could do so.

Many have posed naturalistic explanations for the miracle, proposing that there was water beneath a thin layer of shale, which Moses broke with his staff. Such musings are reasonable, but also beside the point, which is that Yahweh provided water where there was no water – and from the rocky face of a mountainside, an unlikely source.

A frustrated leader (v. 7)

Previously, the narrator has emphasized how a time of deep need followed by a delivering miracle led the people to respond with greater faith. After the deliverance at the sea, for example, "Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses" (14:31).

In this account, however, Israel's response is wholly absent: there's not so much as a "thank you." While the people showed no gratitude for Yahweh's act of deliverance, Moses responded by giving the site a name designed to memorialize their obstinate unfaithfulness.

Moses called the place by two names: Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling). These would serve as a perpetual reminder of the people's lack of faith that led them to put Yahweh to the test.

As we approach this text, the hardest thing to believe is not that God could bring water from a rock, but that a people who had been so recently delivered from Egypt by God's mighty acts and fed in the desert by God's caring provision could have the audacity to ask "Is the LORD among us or not?" (v. 7).

Renaming the places would serve to remind later generations of Israel's propensity for faithlessness contrasted with God's steadfast love and provision. And future generations did remember. Psalm 95:7b–9 recalls this story while warning the Hebrews against being hard-hearted: "O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work."

Even later, the writer of Hebrews extended the same caution to Christian believers: "As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion'" (Heb. 3:15).

The people's failure to trust in God foreshadowed the even more serious debacle of Exodus 32, when the people lost patience during Moses' absence and constructed a golden calf to worship – even as Moses was receiving the law from God.

"Is the Lord among us or not?" We may also be tempted to ask this question when times of trouble lead to uncertainty and doubt. We may ask "Where are you, God?" or "Are you really there, Lord?" Often we live as if we presume the answer is "No."

Our sense of need, like Israel's thirst, is very real, but God's pervasive presence is even more real, if we are willing to recognize it and to embrace it.

Think about your life. Can you name ways that God's presence and provision have blessed your life? Will the lessons of God's faithfulness be lost on us, as well? NFJ

Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

Oct. 8, 2017

Matthew 21:33-46

Stony Hearts

Alfred never knew what hit him until his ship had sunk. He and Gloria were out for a rare evening alone, sitting at a quiet table in a nice restaurant while waiting for their orders to arrive.

Gloria tapped Alfred's toe to get his attention, then inclined her head to a nearby table where another couple was sitting. The woman appeared stony-faced, as if either resigned to a bad situation or frustrated with it but refusing to let the tears flow.

"What's wrong with that picture?" Gloria asked.

Alfred watched for a few moments, and said, "Well, she looks unhappy, for one thing."

"And why do you think she might be so unhappy?"

"Um, maybe because the guy seems really absorbed with his cell phone and she's feeling ignored?"

"Very observant, Alfred. Now, may I ask, what is that you are holding?"

Alfred's goose was cooked – but it was a teachable moment. He put the phone in his pocket, reached out for Gloria's hand, and looked her in the eyes. It was the beginning of a much better evening – at least for them.

Additional information at nurturingfaith.net

Matthew 21:42 –
"Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?'"

A story with a question (vv. 33-40)

Sometimes, when we're in need of personal insight, we get the point most clearly when we are led to judge ourselves.

Recall how the prophet Nathan confronted David with a story of a heartless rich man who stole and ate a poor man's only lamb (2 Samuel 12). When David condemned the rich man as a "son of death" who should pay a price, Nathan replied "You are the man!" – and David recognized his sin in having his faithful soldier Uriah killed so he could take his wife, Bathsheba.

The prophet Isaiah famously sang to a group of Hebrews about a friend who had planted a vineyard, going to great lengths to choose a fertile hill, remove the stones, plant choice vines, build a wall and watchtower to protect them, then carve a wine press into the stone – only to see the vineyard produce worthless fruit. He asked the crowd what he should do with the vineyard, and the people agreed that it should be destroyed. Only then did Isaiah declare: "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!" (Isa. 5:7). The people had condemned themselves.

Today's text finds Jesus employing the same strategy and a similar story in his efforts to help the leading religious officials recognize that they were too inwardly focused to recognize what God was doing.

The location is the temple, and the audience consists of "the chief priests and elders of the people," who had come to challenge Jesus' claims to teach with authority (21:23). Jesus responded to them with a tricky question about the source of John the baptizer's authority, knowing that they would be afraid to criticize John, who was popular with the people (21:24-27).

Jesus followed that with a parable about a man who told his two sons to go work in the fields. One said he would not, but later changed his mind and went to work. The other said "I'll go," but never showed up. Jesus used the story to criticize the religious leaders for claiming righteousness but failing to serve as they should, while sinners were turning from their wrong-doing to follow Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God (21:28-32).

Our text finds Jesus pressing the point by calling the Jewish elites to "Listen to another parable," whereupon he sketched a situation not unlike Isaiah's story of the vineyard, with one key difference. The protagonist of this story, as in Isaiah's parable, put much effort into planting and protecting a new vineyard, complete with a wine press. The main difference is that he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers before traveling out of the country (v. 33).

This was a common arrangement, in which tenants who owned no land could cultivate and harvest a crop on someone else's property, keeping a

portion of the harvest for themselves while reserving a set portion of it for the landowner. According to Jewish law, if the landowner went several seasons without attesting his ownership of the land and requesting his share, or if he died without an heir, the tenants could claim the land for themselves.

In Jesus' story, neither of these situations applied. The landowner followed protocol. When harvest time came, he sent servants to collect his portion, but the tenants had other ideas. They beat and mistreated the servants, killing one of them (vv. 34-35). The landowner tried again, sending more servants, but with similar results (v. 36).

With surprising patience, the owner chose to send his son, assuming that the tenants would show him due respect and pay the landowner's share. Instead, they conspired to kill the son, perhaps thinking that he had come because the landowner had died. If they could arrange the son's death, they could claim the land for themselves (vv. 37-38) – so they threw the heir out of the vineyard and killed him (v. 39).

Having told the troubling story, Jesus challenged the Jewish authorities with a pointed question: "Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" (v. 40).

An answer without reflection (v. 41)

The snare was set and baited: Jesus had only to wait for the Jewish leaders to bite, and they did. As David had done, and as Isaiah's hearers had done, the chief priests and elders fell headlong into Jesus' trap: "They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time'" (v. 41).

The leaders' response not only recognized the wickedness of the tenants, but also judged them worthy of a severe penalty: "He will put those wretches to a miserable death" (NRSV), they said, or "He will utterly destroy those wicked men!" (NET).

The temple leaders proved themselves capable of seeing wickedness and unfaithfulness in others, as well as the need for judgment. Would they be capable of seeing their own shortcomings?

A pointed explanation (vv. 42-46)

Having sprung the metaphorical trap, Jesus asked a further question: "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?" (v. 42).

The scripture in question is Ps. 118:22-23, quoted verbatim from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In context, it appears to have referred to a stone cut for the temple that was rejected from use in one place, but later chosen to become the keystone in an archway, or perhaps a strategic stone used to join two walls together. In either case, it would not have been at the base of the building, but in a more visible place. The psalmist celebrated how his fortunes had been reversed: though rejected by people, God had raised him up.

How does that relate to the current parable? Now we start filling in the blanks. The stone represents Jesus, rejected by the religious authorities but chosen by God as the keystone in establishing the kingdom of God. Looking back to the parable, we recognize God as the owner of the vineyard, while religious leaders of Israel through the years are in the role of tenants who had rejected and even killed God's past messengers (the prophets), and had now set their sights on eliminating God's son (Jesus).

"Therefore I tell you," Jesus said, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls" (v. 43).

Christian believers have long interpreted the statement above to mean that God's primary way of working on earth would shift from Israel to the church, with Christ as its head.

Verse 44 insists that those who reject Christ would be subject to judgment. The image of those who stumble over the stone appears to be drawn from Isa. 8:14-15, in which Isaiah speaks of God as both a sanctuary and a stone over which Israel and Judah could stumble. The picture of judgment falling like a crushing stone may have been inspired by Daniel 2, which describes a symbolic statue that crumbles when struck by a divinely cut stone.

The "chief priests and Pharisees" had fallen into Jesus' parabolic trap, but they were no dummies. They recognized that Jesus' parable had condemned their leadership and promised judgment. Unwilling to accept the accuracy of his criticism, they wanted to arrest him, but given Jesus' popularity, they were afraid to do so (vv. 45-46).

This is a harsh story: a parable of violence and judgment. How might it speak to Christian believers? We are not in the position of the Jewish authorities who Jesus accused of failing to lead Israel rightly, wanting to own or control the faith, and rejecting the Messiah God had sent. We are, however, responsible for what we do: Will we accept Jesus as the Messiah and the keystone of our faith, or reject him and stumble our way into judgment?

The choice is ours. NFJ

Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

Oct. 15, 2017

Matthew 22:1-14

Wait. What?

Does the Bible ever trouble you? If it doesn't, you haven't been paying attention. Some stories are inherently disturbing.

I remember the first time I read the story about David having the Ark of the Covenant loaded onto an oxcart to bring it to Jerusalem. When the cart seemed in danger of tipping over on the rocky road, a priest named Uzzah put his hand on the Ark to steady it, and God struck him dead (2 Sam. 6:1-8).

But he was only trying to help! Why would God zap a man with a bolt from the blue when he was trying to keep the sacred symbol of the divine presence from falling over? God's response seemed extreme.

With age and further study, I've come to appreciate the narrator's desire to portray the Ark as too holy for human handling. Uzzah's sudden death was his way of emphasizing a belief that God could take care of the Ark and humans should not become too familiar with the sacred. I find some comfort in thinking the narrator's interpretation may not necessarily reflect the character of God.

But it still bothers me – and so does today's text, which portrays God as an angry king who slays those who reject his invitation to a banquet. Is this the way God is, or is it Matthew's exaggerated way of making a point?

Matthew 22:2 –
"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son."

Rejection story #1 (vv. 1-6)

The primary subject of the text is rejection, and the central point of vv. 1-10 is that those who reject God will be rejected in turn, while a brief episode tagged to the end comments on what is required for acceptance.

Matthew's story of the wedding banquet appears to be a more intense variant of a parable also found in Luke 14:15-24. Both center around a generous host who invites people to a banquet, but they decline the invitation and the host responds by inviting others.

Let's focus on Matthew's version, which has the marks of an allegory. In context, Matthew has Jesus in conversation with the chief priests and other leaders of the Jewish establishment. The encounter began in Matt. 21:23, when Jesus entered the temple on the day after his "Triumphal Entry," and the priests began to question his authority to teach. Through a series of parables and questions, Jesus argued that the Jewish leaders had become self-focused and unwilling to accept what God was doing through him.

That theme continues with today's text: "Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying …" (v. 1). Matthew has put these parables together in a way that pounds home a belief that the Jews who rejected Jesus were no longer the favored people but subject to judgment, while people of all stripes who accepted God's invitation could find a home in the kingdom.

As noted, the parable is allegorical: "the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son" (v. 2). We read God as king, Jesus as the son, and the kingdom of heaven as the wedding banquet. Servants were sent out to fetch the invited guests, but they refused to come (v. 3). The king sent another round of servants to emphasize the urgent need for response, since the oxen had already been slaughtered and everything was ready (v. 4).

Again, the invitees refused to come. Some made light of the invitation and went about their business, while others responded with surprising irritation, mistreating and even killing the messengers (vv. 5-6).

As in the previous parable of the greedy tenants, Matthew apparently intends for us to think of those receiving the wedding invitation as the Hebrew people, and those who carried the message as the prophets. The two sequential sets of messengers probably represent both Old Testament prophets and latter messengers including John the baptizer and Jesus – both subject to mistreatment and murder.

Rejection story #2 (vv. 7-10)

So far, so good: the story observes that the "chosen people" who rejected God's invitation to kingdom living through Christ were in danger of losing their favored status. There's nothing

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especially troubling about that. Luke's parable (Luke 14:15-24) leaves those who rejected Jesus on the outside looking in at those who were invited to replace them, but that's all.

Matthew's version of the story – which many scholars believe was amplified by developing traditions in the early church – takes a different approach. Here, the king does not only reject those who rejected him, but also becomes so enraged that "He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city" (v. 7).

How are we to understand this? Is God so petulant that those who reject divine favor are subject to sudden death and destruction?

We observe, first, that the king's intense response seems not so much directed at those who ignored the invitation, but provoked by those who mistreated and killed the messengers: the troops "destroyed those murderers."

A second thing to note is the surprising assertion that the king's army "burned their city," a comment that makes the parable seem more localized than generic. Most New Testament scholars believe the book of Matthew was probably written during the 80s CE, at least 10 years after a Jewish rebellion prompted the Romans to sack Jerusalem, burn the temple, and ban Jews from living in the city.

As the early church became increasingly dominated by Gentiles, some saw the destruction of Jerusalem as a sign of God's judgment on the Jews who rejected Jesus. We cannot be sure if this is reflected in Matthew's version of the parable, but it seems a good possibility.

As Matthew tells it, those who rejected the wedding invitation were attacked and killed, but the banquet was still prepared; the food needed to be eaten. So, new messengers were sent "into the main streets" to "invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet" (vv. 8-9).

The servants did so, "gathering all they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests" (v. 10). The reference here is probably not to Gentiles alone, but to the various categories of people who the Jewish authorities rejected but Jesus accepted.

The Pharisees famously criticized Jesus for eating "with tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 9:11, Mark 2:16, Luke 5:30), embracing people they considered to be "bad." The new guests seem to reflect Jesus' approach, including people "both bad and good."

Rejection story #3 (vv. 11-14)

The final verses of today's text have no parallel in the Lukan account, and probably derive from a separate parable that Matthew has appended, somewhat awkwardly, to the story of the king's wedding banquet.

One aspect of the context fits, as it concerns a king and a wedding banquet, but the main thrust takes a different tack. "When the king came in to see the guests," Matthew says, "he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe" (v. 11). When confronted with his disrespectful lack of proper attire, the man offered no explanation (v. 12). The king took such offense that he ordered the man bound and thrown "into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 13).

To a modern reader, this seems inconsistent: if unsuspecting people had been gathered up on the street and brought to the banquet, how could any of them be faulted for failing to obtain a special wedding robe on the way?

What troubles us did not bother Matthew, who probably drew this from a story with a different setting. He seems to have been concerned that the reference to "bad and good" might be misconstrued as suggesting that one could behave any old way and still get into the kingdom.

Wearing proper apparel was sometimes used as a symbol of righteous living: In Rev. 19:8, the bride of the lamb is "clothed with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints." In the early church, persons were often baptized in the nude, then given a clean new robe to symbolize their right standing with God.

This suggests two things: one, that Matthew wanted to balance the "bad and good" of v. 12 with another story emphasizing the need for personal righteousness, and two, that the entire parable has taken on an eschatological cast, pointing to a day of judgment when the righteous are at home in God's kingdom while the unrighteous are consigned to "the outer darkness."

So, while the two parts of the text have differences, they both address the theme of judgment: the first deals with those who reject Christ, and the second with those who reject Christ's way.

Matthew concludes by drawing the conjoined parables together with a saying attributed to Jesus: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (v. 14). His intent is not to promote the idea of predestination, but of choice. In context, "Many are called" could carry a universal sense: "All are called." And, in this setting, the few who "are chosen" are those who have themselves chosen to heed and respond to God's invitation: their choosing puts them among the chosen.

Troubling parables such as this may leave us with many questions, but the most important one is this: What choices are we making? NFJ

Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

Oct. 22, 2017

Matthew 22:15-22

A Taxing Question

"Dadgum guv'ment!" So sang Huck Finn's "Pap" in Roger Miller's score for the rousing Broadway play, *Big River*. We're often tempted to say similar things, and in similarly coarse language, not exactly fit for typical Bible studies.

Surveys measuring citizen satisfaction with the performance of both the president and congress are consistently dismal. One would be hard pressed to find anyone who is completely pleased with the government.

We recognize that government is a human institution, subject to all the fallibilities of humankind, then multiplied by its mammoth size, the scale of possible corruption, and the immense influence of moneyed lobbyists. Still, some form of government is necessary, or anarchy would reign.

For all its shortcomings, government can be regarded as a positive entity that is worthy of respect. How are people who respect God to relate to their government? How does one live as a "Christian citizen?" At least some aspects of this question are addressed in today's text.

Additional information at nurturingfaith.net

Matthew 22:21b –
"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

A trap baited with flattery (vv. 15-17)

The first story depicts strange bedfellows – Pharisees and Herodians – who join forces in attempting to trick Jesus into saying something that would get him in trouble. Pharisees (from a word meaning "separate") were close adherents of the law, upholders of traditional Judaism. While the Gospels display a typically negative attitude toward the Pharisees, their movement grew from a real desire to be righteous. Like ultraorthodox Jews of today, the Pharisees could be inflexible and troublesome to others, but they believed they were doing the right thing.

Since Jesus took a much looser approach to the law – especially the strict and often peculiar rabbinic laws that sought to "build a hedge" about the Torah – the Pharisees naturally saw Jesus as a major threat to their religious heritage.

Little is known about the Herodians, who are mentioned only in Mark 3:6 and in the parallel texts of Mark 12:13 and Matt. 22:16. What we know about them must be inferred from context. Both their name and their actions suggest that the "Herodians" were supporters of the Herod family, who were technically Jewish and who ruled by Roman authority. The two groups were not natural allies, but both saw Jesus as a danger to their way of life. The Pharisees sought to undercut Jesus' popularity with the people, while the Herodians hoped Jesus would say something incriminating enough to have him arrested.

The improbable partners came to Jesus with a question designed to "entrap him in what he said." Trying to throw Jesus off guard, they addressed him as "teacher," using profuse flattery to describe him as one who taught God's truth with integrity and without partiality (vv. 15-16). By feigning belief that Jesus spoke truth without respect to persons, they hoped to goad him into an answer that would either upset his followers or get him in trouble with the government.

The question was this: "Tell us, then, what you think: is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" (v. 17). Many readers are most familiar with the King James rendering of this story (followed by NET, NIV11, KJV, HCSB), which asks if it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, rather than "the emperor."

Why the difference? "Caesar" was not a personal name, but a title. As the Egyptian word "Pharaoh" indicated the current king of Egypt, the Greek word "*Kaisar*" (used in the text) was a title used by the various Roman emperors, so either translation is correct.

The question "Is it lawful?" was not about the Roman law, but the Mosaic law. Jewish legalists such as the Pharisees held that it was unlawful for Jews to possess or use Roman coins, for they contained images of human faces on them. The first commandment had warned against "carved images" that could be perceived as idols.

The question put Jesus between a rock and a hard place. If he answered

"Yes," the Pharisees would have grounds to stir up the people against him. If he said "No," the Herodians would have cause to claim sedition and seek his arrest by the Romans.

While clever on its face, the question proposed a false dichotomy not unlike the old comedian's trick question: "Yes or no: have you stopped beating your wife?" Jesus refused to fall into their trap.

A response based on wisdom (vv. 18-22)

The cunning query was designed to leave Jesus with no feasible escape, but his opponents underestimated him. Recognizing the sneaky and malicious intentions of the Pharisees and Herodians, Jesus called them out, naming them for the hypocrites that they were.

Jesus then asked to see the special coin typically used to pay the tax, and someone – probably a Herodian, since the Pharisees despised Roman coinage – came up with one. Jesus challenged his accusers to describe it: "Whose head is this, and whose title?" (v. 20).

The coin, a silver denarius, would have been engraved with an image of the current emperor and an inscription bearing his name. The coin brought to Jesus almost certainly bore the face of Tiberius, who ruled from 14 to 37 CE. The front of the coin was inscribed with an abbreviated version of "Tiberius Caesar, son of divine Augustus." The reverse bore the inscription "Pontifex maximus," meaning "the highest priest," designating him as the empire's highest religious authority.

Such coins were minted by the Roman government, and technically belonged to the ruler. To accept and use the emperor's currency, then, was to acknowledge his sovereignty. Jesus' answer was disarming in its simplicity.

"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's," Jesus said (v. 21). The word used for "give" carries the sense of giving back to someone what is due to them. If the Roman currency technically belonged to the emperor who authorized its minting and managed its use, then giving some of it back to him should not be an issue.

The heart of Jesus' response was not his allowance of taxes to Caesar, but his insistence that people should give to God what is God's – namely, everything. The small head tax owed to Caesar was irrelevant compared to the challenge to surrender one's life along with one's goods to God. Jesus' response seems to imply that his inquisitors were more concerned with themselves, their positions, and their power than with serving God.

Thus, Jesus' response was not the either/or answer his critics were looking for, but a surprising both/and demand that left them flatfooted. As the late Frank Stagg once wrote, Jesus did not straddle the fence as they had hoped, but demolished it ("Matthew," in the *Broadman Bible Commentary* [Broadman Press, 1969], 206).

As on other occasions, Jesus' opponents were amazed at his teaching and left so speechless that their only resort was to leave, no doubt muttering among themselves (v. 22).

A question for our time

Does Jesus' response have implications regarding church/state issues today? In this encounter, Jesus taught the legitimacy of human government and its place in our lives. Later New Testament writers probably drew on this teaching in recognizing that Christians have obligations to the government (Rom. 13:1-4, 1 Pet. 2:13). Jesus did not argue that the sacred and the secular exist in isolation, nor that they should be conjoined, but that the relative authority of each should be recognized within its proper sphere.

Government has legitimate claims upon its citizens. Even when we do not agree with all that the government does, we should pay our taxes. However, government is not supreme. Christians are ultimately subjects of a higher kingdom, and when there is clear conflict, must be obedient to the higher authority of God.

This passage could be used to support a belief in the separation of church and state, but that was not the main point of Jesus' response. His teaching recognized that the kingdom/country in which we live has a limited claim on us, but our primary allegiance to God, for all of life is lived within the sphere of the kingdom of God.

With the late Malcolm Tolbert, "The point is this: the believer is always under the rule of God in all his actions. When he acts in the political or social realm, he acts as a Christian. The first and most important question for him is never about the will of the state. It is always about the will of God" (*Good News from Matthew* [Broadman Press, 1975], 183).

This does not imply that Christians should work to impose their beliefs on others through governmental action, that they should expect special favors from the government, or that they should seek a theocratic rule designed to create their idea of a "Christian nation."

More than anything, perhaps, Jesus' teaching shows the folly of acting as modern-day Herodians and attempting to put a Christian veneer on support for candidates, parties, or movements that are motivated by greed, prejudice, or attitudes far removed from the principles Jesus taught.

We wouldn't want to be hypocrites.

NFJ

Bible Study with Tony W. Cartledge

Oct. 29, 2017

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

Being Holy

How often do you think about holiness? It comes up at church when we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy," or "Take Time To Be Holy," or "We Are Standing on Holy Ground." It may show up in a sermon from time to time, or in one's daily Bible reading – but I suspect few of us begin each day with the thought "I'm going to be holy today."

That may be in part because many people assign a negative connotation to the idea of people seeking to be holy, possibly because we've known someone who carried around a "holier than thou" attitude.

For those who read the book of Leviticus, the theme of holiness is pervasive: an entire block of the text, Leviticus 17-26, is commonly known as "The Holiness Code." Today's text is drawn from that section.

Holy being (vv. 1-4)

The Holiness Code is marked by a repeated refrain: "You shall be holy, for I am holy," as in Lev. 19:2. The Hebrew concept of holiness was not just about purity, piety, or the absence of sin: to be holy was to be set apart as a distinct people. Thus, rules about letting sideburns grow, eating scaly fish but not catfish, or not weaving two kinds of thread together may have no practical purpose other than as marks of religious or ethnic identity: "This is how we do it."

Leviticus 19:18 –
"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

In that sense, the Holiness Code spells out what "being holy" meant for the Hebrews in daily life – how it set them apart from the Canaanites, Philistines, Romans, or whoever else was living around them.

The code includes rules about what foods are kosher, when nakedness is allowed, how sacrifices should be made, and how people should relate to one another. Further rules govern the breeding of animals (no hybrids allowed), avoiding witchcraft, respecting elders, sexual partners permitted or forbidden, qualifications for priests, rules for the observance of religious festivals including the Sabbath, and further directives about debts, slavery, and the Jubilee year.

The Holiness Code closes with a section (26:3-46) that sounds like it comes straight from Deuteronomy, promising blessings on those who obey and curses upon those who do not.

Leviticus 19 begins with rules that recall several of the Ten Commandments, instructing the Hebrews to honor their parents, keep the Sabbath, and eschew the making of idolatrous images (vv. 2-4). They are to do this because Yahweh said so: "I am the LORD your God" or "I am the LORD" is repeated in vv. 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 18, reinforcing the belief that these behaviors identified Israel as God's special people, called to be holy.

Holy worship (vv. 5-8)

Although the first seven chapters of Leviticus set out details for various sacrifices, vv. 5-8 repeat previous instructions from 7:16-18 insisting that meat offered as a sacrifice must be eaten within two days.

Such a rule makes perfect sense, for without refrigeration even cooked meat is subject to spoilage by the third day. For the Hebrews, however, the issue was not that the food had "gone bad," but that it was considered "an abomination."

Rules about animal sacrifice are of little concern to Christians, who believe that Christ's sacrifice is all sufficient, and no further sacrifices are necessary. Most Jews also believe the age of sacrifice is past. Only the most orthodox show any interest in returning to a sacrificial system, but there is no longer a temple in Jerusalem where sacrifices could be legitimately offered. This is one of the reasons other distinctive Jewish practices, such as kosher eating and highly ritualized Sabbath keeping, came to be more prevalent.

Holy behavior (vv. 9-18)

Beginning with v. 9, the regulations shift from the sacramental to the personal, offering guidelines for how humans in community can thrive by practic-

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ing social justice. The first requirement may surprise, for the rules do not begin with family members or neighbors, but with poor strangers. When harvest time came, the Hebrews were to intentionally leave some of their grain in the field and grapes in the vineyard, allowing "the poor and the alien" free access to come and glean from what was left (vv. 9-10).

Few of us depend on grain fields or grape vines for sustenance – but "the poor and the alien" are still among us. What might the principle behind this commandment suggest about our responsibility to the poor and homeless people we often seek to avoid, or to the immigrants who find a wall instead of a welcome? What might it say about industry leaders who seek to eke out every possible penny of profit with little concern for those who do the actual work?

The text returns to themes from the Ten Commandments with v. 11, which insists that God's holy people are not to steal from others or to deceive others by swearing falsely or lying to each other. While speaking of oaths, the text enjoins the Hebrews to remember that oaths sworn in God's name are sacred, so God's name should not be used in vain (v. 12).

In the ancient Near East, persons wanting to reinforce promises with an oath commonly swore in the name of their patron god. The Hebrews followed the same practice, using a typical formula that began "May God do so and so to me if I do not do …" One should do that only with the greatest respect, not to hide deceit behind a religious façade.

The following verses address other aspects of life together. "You shall not defraud your neighbor" (v. 13) includes a rather weak translation of a word that commonly means "to oppress" someone, treating them badly or taking advantage of them. The act is paired with "you shall not steal," using a more forceful verb for theft or robbery than in v. 11.

Refusing to pay a laborer at the end of the day was considered as offensive as outright theft, for it oppressed and shamed those who lived hand-to-mouth as poor day laborers who needed to be paid every evening so they could buy food for that day (v. 13b).

A concern for the powerless continues in v. 14, which demands that the Hebrews show respect to deaf or blind people, whether by shortchanging persons who can't see or saying cruel things to those who can't hear. We demonstrate respect for God in the way we treat others.

The heart of this section is a concern for justice, and v. 15 exemplifies that with a call for right judgment that is not partial to the poor or the wealthy. Likewise, holy people do not slander others, put them down, or profit from their misfortune (v. 16).

Justice was a special concern of prophets such as Isaiah, who saw wealthy Hebrews finagle and scheme to get their neighbors indebted to them, and then foreclosed on their property to expand their own estates. Addressing those who were called to do justice but who oppressed their neighbors instead, Isaiah pronounced woes on those "who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you" (Isa. 5:8).

Do these commands have something to say to an increasingly stratified society in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, or to government leaders who want to further increase the wealth disparity by cutting taxes for the wealthy while reducing needed services for those who face old age, disabilities, illness, or poverty?

Verse 17 is a direct challenge to those who exhibit animosity toward certain races or groups as well as for those who deny their disregard but act with disgrace toward disfavored people: "You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin" (NRSV), or "You shall not hate your brother in hour heart" (NET). The reference to kinship does not limit the command to blood relatives. All Hebrews considered themselves to be related. Sharing a common humanity, we all owe respect and care to one another. There is no place for hatred among God's people.

Caring for our neighbors includes holding them accountable for their own role in the community. Those who fail to reprove their neighbors when needed are also guilty of falling short in their responsibilities (v. 17b).

The opposite of hatred or uncaring attitudes is love, and our text concludes with the familiar challenge to "love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 18b). Though we often cite this verse, and remember that Jesus endorsed the call to love others as second only to loving God, many are unaware that the challenge is the second part of a verse that beings "Do not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people" (v. 18a).

One cannot hold vindictive feelings or bear a grudge against someone and truly love them at the same time. The word "forgive" is not used, but that is what the verse is about. To love someone in the present, we must first be willing to forgive them of wrongs from the past.

In this context, the word "love" does not suggest the presence of sentimental feelings, but a genuine and loyal commitment to the well-being of others, whether they belong to our family, live in our community, or have come from a far country. This is what sets God's people apart – what makes them "holy."

Perhaps we should think about holiness more often. NFJ

RECOGNITION & REMEMBRANCE

Sarah Frances Anders died June 8 in Alexandria, La., at age 90. She retired as professor emeritus of sociology from Louisiana College in 1993. An active member of First Baptist Church of Pineville, La., she served as moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in 1999-2000, and long tracked the ordination to ministry of Baptist women.

Fred Anderson retired July 31 after 38 years as executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society. In 2000 his work expanded to include directing the new Center for Baptist Heritage & Studies at the University of Richmond. **Nathan Taylor** has assumed those positions, coming from Central Baptist Church in Richmond where he was associate pastor. Earlier he was a teacher of U.S. history.

Gene Garrison died June 9 in Pittsboro, N.C., at age 85. He served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City from 1973-1996 and helped formed the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Ellen Holden Di Giosia is pastor of First Baptist Church of Jefferson City, Tenn., coming from Woodland Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, where she was associate pastor for faith formation.

Seth Hix is Ministerial Transitions and Church Relations Coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina. In this newly-created, part-time role he will focus on reference and referral ministry along with lay leadership. He served as an intern with CBFNC while a student at Wake Forest School of Divinity.

Barry Howard retired in August after serving as senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Pensacola, Fla., for 12 years.

Amanda Jean Lewis was ordained to ministry by First Baptist Church of Athens, Ga., where she served for three years as college minister. She has begun a one-year residency in Clinical Pastoral Education in Charlotte, N.C.

Elijah Brown will become general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance following the retirement of Neville Callam in December. Brown, 36, is a Texas native who currently serves as BWA regional secretary for North America and general secretary for the North American Baptist Fellowship. He is executive vice president of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative. Earlier he was associate professor of religion at East Texas Baptist University.

CLASSIFIEDS

Associate Pastor: First Baptist Church of Griffin, Ga., is an avowedly moderate Baptist congregation affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. We are searching for an associate pastor with strong people skills as well as gifts in preaching and management of ministry areas. This pastor must work well as a team with other ministers and focus upon the entire congregation. However, he/she will also need to lead and preach weekly in the Connexion worship ministry, our contemporary worship service that meets at the same time as our traditional worship service. There will also be recurring moments throughout the church year where preaching in the traditional service will be expected. Preference will be given to candidates with the equivalent of an M.Div. degree from an accredited seminary and a minimum of four years of preaching/church ministry experience. Résumés and cover letters will be received at searchcommittee@fbcgriffin.org until Sept. 15.

Associate Pastor/Youth Minister: First Baptist Church of Eatonton, Ga., is a moderate congregation affiliated with CBF. We are seeking an associate pastor/youth minister with strong people skills and management of ministry areas. This individual must work well as a team player and focus on the entire congregation. This position is of great importance, and it is our hope that the individual will help carry us forward into our next decade of service. Eatonton is a small town in central Georgia in the middle of lake country. Our community is the anchor for two recreational lakes, Lake Sinclair and Lake Oconee. Our church has a deep historical heritage and will be celebrating our 200th anniversary in 2018. Direct questions to the church at (706) 485-3331. Submit résumés to etrice@firstbaptisteatonton.org.

Director of Children's Music

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http://www.davidsonumc.org/files/2114/9861/8832/Associate_Music_Director_Children_2017.pdf

Cover letter and résumé:
kturner@davidsonumc.org

Don't shoot the teacher

By Bill Leonard

In 1838 Ralph Waldo Emerson — part Plato, part Ichabod Crane — attacked the "corpse cold rationalism" of conservative and liberal alike in his classic Harvard Divinity School address, declaring, as any good Transcendentalist would, that: "Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but *provocation*, that I can receive from another soul. What he announces, I must find true in me, or reject..."

For Emerson, truth was not true until perceived from deep within. "Not instruction, but provocation" is a phrase that lies at the heart of genuine education.

After some 42 years of making a run at that, I still believe that the classroom is sacred space where opinions collide, interpretations vary, and, pray God, learning prevails. From Socrates holding forth in the Agora to today's PowerPoint-assisted seminars, when such intellectual provocation prevails, there is nothing like it in this world.

Unless, of course, students and/or faculty are packing a piece — utilizing "campus carry" laws. When guns show up for class, provocation takes on a whole new meaning. Campus carry scares the Holy Socrates out of me; it really does.

When this century began (the year of our Lord 2000), there were no laws that permitted firearms on university/college campuses. Now, at least 11 states offer such legal possibilities. Tennessee lets faculty, but not students, arm themselves. (Hopefully faculty meetings are firearm free!)

Sixteen states have banned concealed weapons at universities. The North Carolina legislature has worked hard to arm college students, but can't get beyond court-rejected, racial-discriminating voting and gerrymandering laws. Twenty-two states leave the decision of on-campus weapons to the discretion of specific educational institutions.

The increase in campus carry options was impacted by the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre in which a senior student gunned down 32 students and wounded 17 in a horrendous killing spree. Many insisted that the gunman might have been stopped had students and faculty been sufficiently armed. The shooting prompted schools to tighten lockdown policies, increasing campus police, and expanding electronic alert warnings. Campus lockdowns are no longer uncommon in schools across the country.

In spite of cloistered quads and ivy-covered surroundings, American schools of higher education have never been immune from the social realities of their national and regional cultures. Alcohol excesses and burgeoning opioid epidemics continue to wreak havoc, often with violent implications. Sexual abuses take heavy tolls on state, private and, yes, Christian schools alike.

Hostile ideological and political divides all too often lead to physical threats and attacks against faculty or students at institutions left and right of center. Will concealed weapons save us or merely deepen the danger to life and limb?

Advocates insist that society is so violence-laden that citizens must arm themselves in every setting. Some suggest that increasing sexual violence is sufficient reason for females to take up arms. Others demand that Second Amendment rights be applied in every segment of society, colleges included.

I fret over implied threats and symbolic implications. Does the syllabus declare: "Don't shoot! You're all getting A's"?

What if campus carry is simply the most dangerous of an unceasing set of classroom distractions, existing alongside tweets, texts, Google, Wikipedia and Facebook; diversions that thwart both instruction and provocation, disengaging students from ideas that might form or re-form them?

Whatever else the vulnerability of learning means, perhaps it is this: Try as we might to protect ourselves externally and internally, we can never insulate ourselves enough to escape the insolent idea, the banal diatribe, the suicidal bomber or the AK-47 crazy.

For years I've thought — but never said aloud — that teaching means getting intellectually naked in front of a group of people for the sake of ideas, and hoping they gasp at the ideas and not the teacher's conceptual vulnerability. Firearms that protect may also become weapons that sidetrack from what learning can and should be — the great mystery of vulnerability to ideas and each other.

In *Telling the Truth, the Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, & Fairy Tale,* Frederick Buechner tells about a high school class that "had gone better than usual" the day they studied *King Lear.* Buechner concludes:

"The word out of the play strips them for a moment naked and strips their teacher with them and to that extent Shakespeare turns preacher because stripping us naked is part of what preaching is all about, the tragic part."

In my academic experience, provocation and spirituality are intricately related.

So please don't come to my classes, lectures or workshops armed for anything but learning. Go ahead, make my day. NFJ

—Bill Leonard is the James and Marilyn Dunn professor of Baptist studies and church history at Wake Forest University.
This column was first distributed by Baptist News Global.

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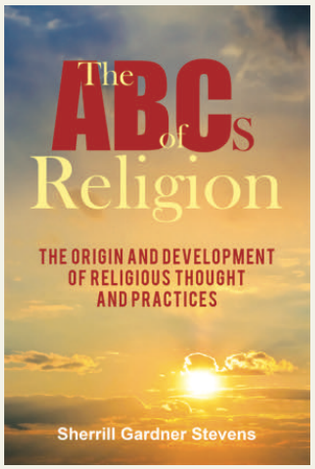

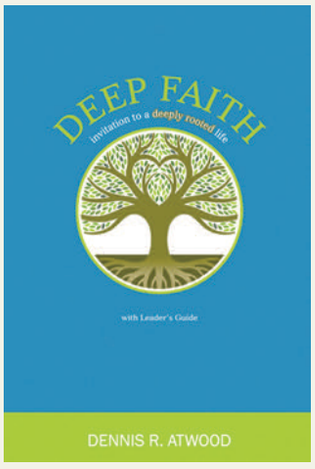

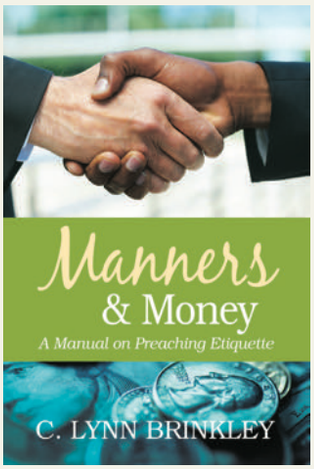

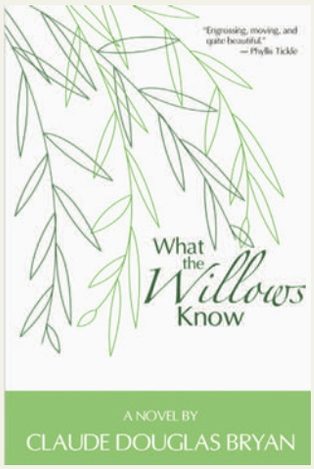

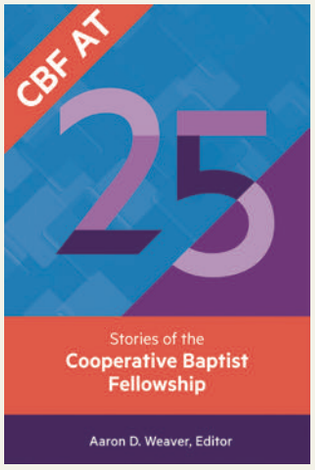

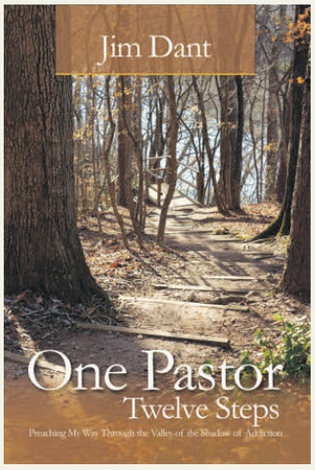

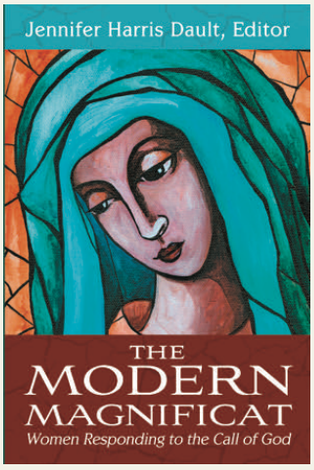

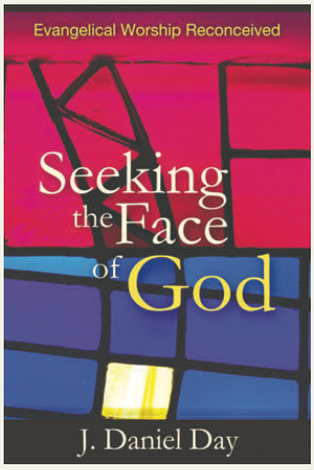

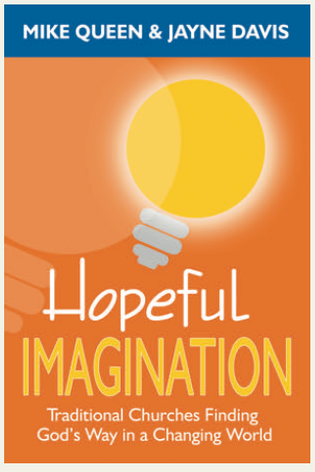

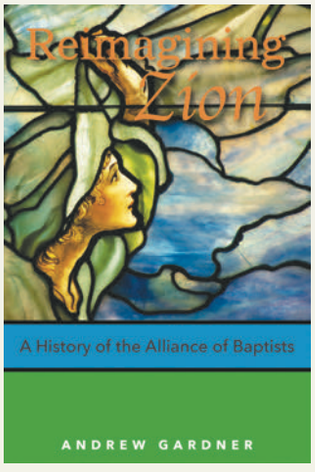

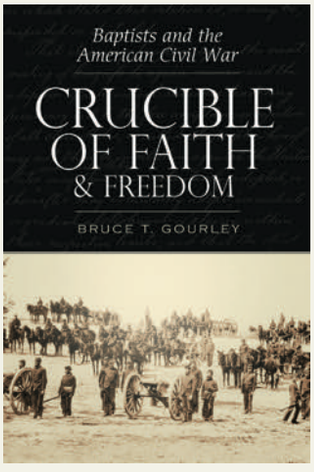

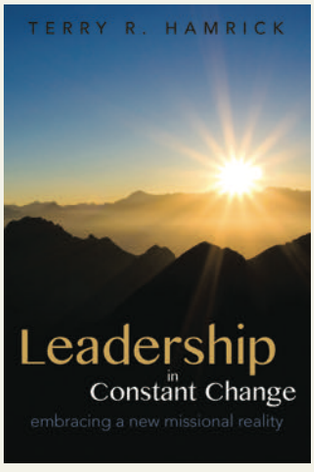

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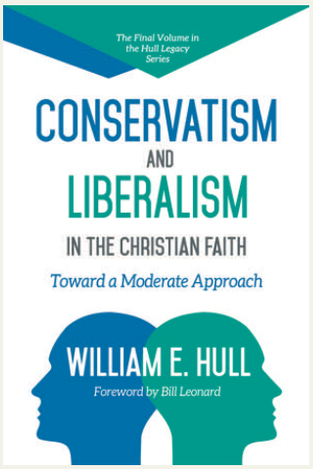
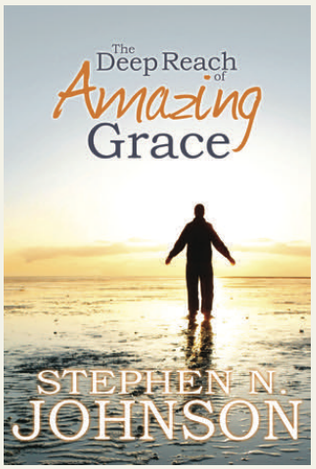
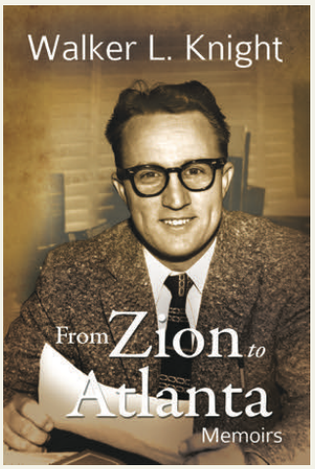
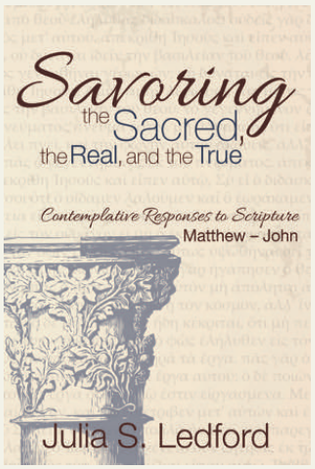
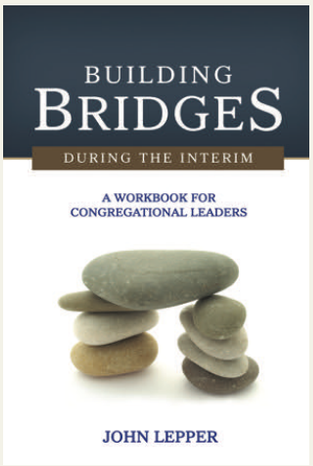
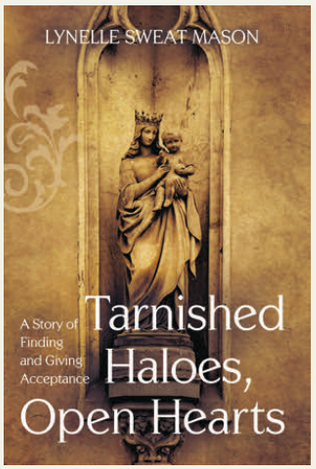


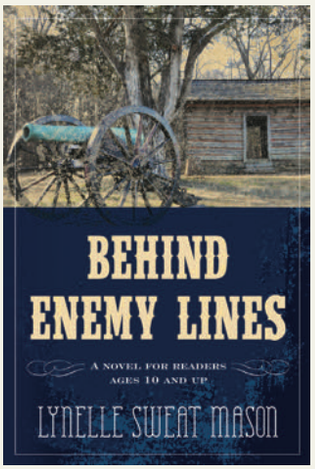


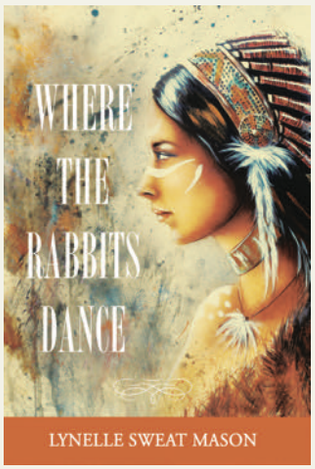


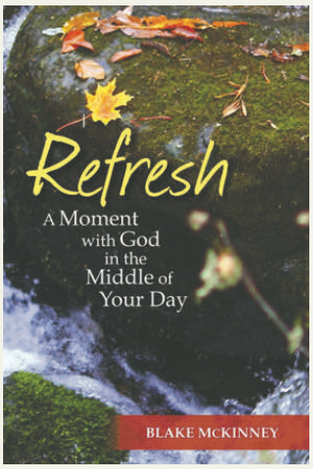


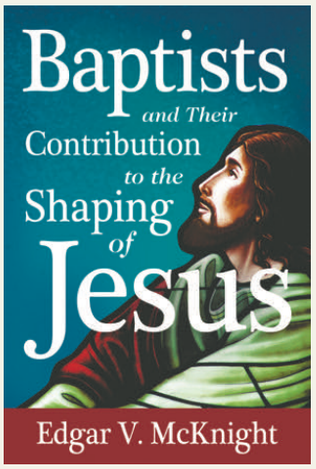


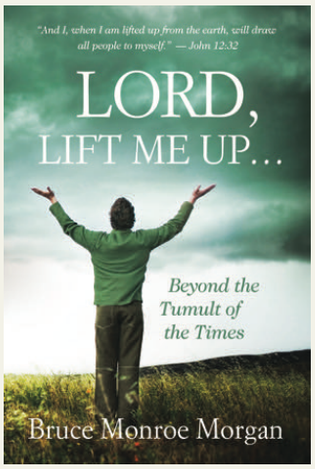












Did Jesus have a worldview, and does it matter today?

BY BRUCE GOURLEY

One might wonder about the problem some Christians seem to have with Jesus. An affirmation that Jesus is the "criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted" was removed from a Southern Baptist doctrinal statement with the ascent of Fundamentalist leadership.

Why is Jesus not a suitable lens through which to interpret scripture? Too inclusive? Too demanding? Too hard to follow?

To some American evangelicals Jesus appears to be too weak and meek to carry out their political agenda of domination and discrimination. Pastor Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, said so in the context of politics.

When asked last year if he would "want a candidate who embodies the teaching of Jesus and would govern this country according to the principles found in the Sermon on the Mount," Jeffress replied. "Heck no."

He added: I would run from that candidate as far as possible, because the Sermon on the Mount was not given as a governing principle for this nation." Jeffress demanded a "strongman" rather than one so weak as Jesus.

Perhaps then, it is no surprise that many Americans, and particularly young persons, disengage from or never engage in church life in America.

THE RESULTS

A Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) survey revealed that the one-fourth of U.S. adults who no longer affiliate with any religion in 2016 outnumbered any one religious denomination. Among young people, the number of unaffiliated has risen 300 percent since 1986, and now comprises almost 40 percent of all young people. Only about one-fourth of American young people attend church on a regular basis.

Consistently, surveys indicate that large majorities of unchurched young people say Christianity is too judgmental, discriminatory against the LGBT community, and lacks empathy for others. Many point out how those claiming to be Christians don't reflect Jesus.

To those with children or grandchildren ages 18 to 35, this is not breaking news. If yours is like most families, most of the adult-aged children and grandchildren are not involved in church.

In short, this all points toward a conclusion that Jesus appears largely absent from a wide swath of American Christianity. To understand why so many American Christians have forsaken Jesus, we might consider the political temptation that Jesus himself faced some 2,000 years ago.

SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Standing upon a tall mountain peak, Jesus of Nazareth gazed upon the kingdoms of the earth (Matt. 4:8-10). Largely unknown at the time, this obscure son of a carpenter was caught up in a vision about what the world might become. He was not alone in this respect, for many other Jews of the first century also contemplated the future.

Restless and uneasy, the kingdom of Israel, a small, occupied nation on the periphery of the Roman Empire, struggled with its very identity. For an elite upper class allied with the Empire, the times were good.

Living in the best of both worlds, Jewish religious leaders received financial rewards from the Empire and commanded authority over the people. In turn they served their Roman masters by carefully listening and watching for anything that might hint of insurrection.

Many common Jews quietly hoped for just such trouble. In a land of inequality, poverty and sickness abounded. Resentful of Jewish elites and Roman soldiers alike, the people yearned for relief from personal travails and national freedom from the Empire.

The center of Jewish faith, the temple in Jerusalem, did but little to quell the simmering discontent. Herod the Great, the Empire's appointed king of Israel and a practicing Jew, had built the magnificent artifice in hopes of appeasing his subjects. Yet while faithfully carrying out the centuries-old familiar rituals of the Jewish faith, the temple magnified social and economic inequalities in Jewish life.

Apart from the city and in the countryside, people coped as best as they could. Some kept their heads down and, when encountering soldiers of the Empire, did as they were told, all the while seething inside. Others left home in search of a better future. Some joined ascetic desert sects that held out hope of purpose for those who lived disciplined and righteous lives. Still others followed rumors of messiahs, self-proclaimed or anointed ones offering to restore Israel to independence and dominance.

In his vision Jesus of Nazareth, understanding himself as chosen of God to redeem Israel and the world, searched the past for a better way forward.

TWO CONCEPTS

For the Jewish people, the past revolved around two central concepts: word and land.

The Torah, Prophets and Writings comprised the story of God's chosen people. Of the three sections of scripture, the Torah — the first five books of today's Old Testament — stood as fundamental. Containing the laws of God, the Torah provided detailed instructions for how the people of God were to live in community and interact with other people groups.

In short, the laws within the Torah encapsulated the ancient Jewish view of the world, defining personal and corporate behavior. Jewish scholars count 613 commandments in the Torah, laws that collectively portray two distinct identities of the divine being: either authoritarian or nurturing.

Some authoritarian commands, for example, approve the enslavement of humans (Exodus 21) and mandate death for adulterers (Lev. 20:10) and blasphemers (Lev. 24:16). A small sampling of Torah verses conveying nurturing commands include loving others as oneself (Lev. 19:18), being kind and merciful to the poor (Deut. 15:7-11), and freeing slaves (Deut. 15:12-18).

In the Prophets and Writings, proponents of the Torah's authoritarian concept often pronounce God's wrath and judgment upon those perceived as enemies or unrighteous. A few examples are 2 Chronicles 15, 2 Kings 17 and Psalm 78.

Also in the Prophets and Writings, advocates of the Torah's nurturing God expound upon themes of love, justice and mercy toward Jews and non-Jews alike. A few examples include the story of Jonah and social justice elements of Amos and Micah.

Concept one: Authoritarian, exclusive, vengeful and oppressive to the point of death. Concept two: Nurturing, inclusive, just and loving toward the poor and oppressed, often including enemies.

Crucial to both scriptural views of the world was the actual land of Israel. Followers of an authoritarian understanding of God viewed the Jewish home as holy land zealously guarded by a vengeful deity. Advocates of a nurturing God understood the land as an inclusive gift to the Hebrews for the blessing of all people.

Around the first century and following, as Israel seethed under Roman rule, the authoritarian concept of God appealed to would-be messiahs bent on militarily overthrowing the Roman Empire and restoring control of the land of Israel. Nurturing God adherents typically did not apply for the role.

Simon of Peraea (who died in 4 BCE), a former slave of Herod, raised an army, destroyed the king's winter palace at Jericho, and achieved numerous other victories before the Romans quelled his rebellion. According to Jewish historian Josephus, Athronges (first century BCE), a shepherd, and his brothers raised an army that "much grieved" the Romans for about two years, at which time the Empire crushed the uprising.

The army of Simon bar Kokhba (second century BCE) exacted heavy casualties upon the Romans and for three years established and maintained an independent Jewish state, before the Empire obliterated them.

For his part, Jesus of Nazareth in his mountaintop vision faced a choice: Should he follow the path expected of messiahs, or was there another way?

In Jesus' compassionate, redemptive, life-giving worldview, everyone is equally a child of God. A loving and merciful God equally extends forgiveness and life to all people. Faith is voluntary, not forced. Governments do not mandate religious laws. Discrimination is no more.

JESUS' VIEW

The kingdoms of the world beckoned. Vast riches, massive armies and supreme power were within reach. This was what messiahs dreamed of, and the people hoped for, in their occupied nation: the restoration of religious, political and military dominance.

Imagine what could be achieved for one's people through possession of the world's wealth, armies and political power.

For those of us some 2,000 years later reading of Jesus' greatest temptation in Matt. 4:8-10, we might see this as an easy choice. What decent person, especially Jesus, would choose evil to transform the world?

Yet this is the very temptation each of us faces: Do we embrace an authoritarian concept of God, and thus submit to the sin of domination over others? Or do we choose another way?

Here's a clue: Jesus chose another way.

Reaching into the past he remembered a nurturing God; a God of love, justice, mercy and freedom. Rejecting the authoritarian figure for whom his people yearned, Jesus pushed aside the evil illusion of unprecedented wealth, military might, and power over the nations of the earth.

He rejected the power to force the world to follow biblical laws. He refused the power to discriminate against others in the name of God.

From the pivotal vision on the mountaintop, Jesus (in Matthew's account) set about teaching and proclaiming that the Kingdom of God — "a great light" shining in the world's "darkness" (4:16) — had arrived amid the people of the earth. Selecting 12 disciples (Matt. 4:18-22), he soon became a popular speaker and gained renown as a healer of illnesses (4:23-25).

As larger and larger crowds flocked to be healed by Jesus, at one point he retreated to a hillside with his disciples and fleshed out the substance of his worldview.

Having rejected the temptation of seizing authoritarian power over the world, Jesus warned his followers against the evils of greed, vengeance, warmongering and narcissism by identifying persons who best reflected the God of his understanding: the poor, mournful and meek; those hungering and thirsting for righteousness; the merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers; and persons persecuted for these very characteristics (Matt. 5:1-12).

This would remain the central message of Jesus' entire ministry, embodied in his greatest commandment to love all other persons as oneself (Matthew 22, Mark 12, Luke 10), and his warning that ultimately the first would be last, and last first (Matt. 19:30, 20:16).

Responding to claims that his teachings abolished Jewish religious law, Jesus in Matt. 5:17ff and throughout the Gospels taught all who would listen that the true fulfillment of scriptural law would take place through a nurturing God.

In Jesus' worldview, anger is as equally sinful as murder (Matt. 5:21-25), vengeance in the form of "an eye for an eye" is replaced with going the extra mile to love an enemy (Matt. 5:38-42), the command to kill or otherwise punish adulterers is subsumed by the higher command of love (John 8:1-11), ritualistic Old Testament religious laws that hinder one from helping other people must be reinterpreted (Luke 13:10-17), and on and on.

In short, the law of love, justice and mercy, embodied by Jesus himself as the self-proclaimed "way, truth and life," became the filter through which scripture and faith itself must be reimagined and lived out.

In Jesus' compassionate, redemptive, life-giving worldview, everyone is equally a child of God. A loving and merciful God equally extends forgiveness and life to all people. Faith is voluntary, not forced. Governments do not mandate religious laws. Discrimination is no more.

Still today, however, some choose the authoritarian kingdom that Jesus rejected. They plant evil in the world (Matthew 13). They ignore the poor, the needy and the oppressed (Matthew 25). They refuse to extend life and forgiveness to their fellow humans, selfishly condemning persons created in the image of God, while in reality heaping punishment upon themselves (Matt. 7:1-6).

LOST SIGHT

The story of Jesus does not end in the pages of the New Testament. Many of the earliest followers of Christ, a minority and often-persecuted people, remained true to Jesus' worldview of a nurturing God.

Yet upon obtaining in the fourth century the very riches, armies and power that Jesus rejected as evil, newly-dominant Christianity often marched in lockstep with the authoritarian concept of God. For centuries the authoritarian biblical worldview ruled within Christendom, persecuting dissenters within and battling enemies without.

The Roman Catholic Church for much its history used church-state alliances, creeds, crusades and inquisitions to enforce religious conformity, often at the point of death. Such messages had nothing in common with Jesus' worldview.

Rejecting Jesus' redemptive embrace of all of humanity, many early Protestants placed their faith in a God far quicker to condemn than to love. Their doctrine of exclusivism had nothing in common with Jesus' worldview.

In the early 17th century the authoritarian biblical worldview arrived in the New World in the form of Puritans and Anglicans, dominant Christian groups who intentionally structured their colonies as biblical commonwealths governed by particularly brutal Old Testament laws.

In these theocratic colonies the state mandated prescribed worship of God, punishing those who refused. Blasphemy and adultery were punishable by death. Religious dissenters, of which Baptists were perceived the worst, were subject to punishments including whipping, incarceration, confiscation of property, torture and more. The persecution of dissenters, Christian or otherwise, continued into the Revolutionary War era.

Yet to the disappointment of advocates of an authoritarian biblical worldview, upon its founding the United States embraced a Constitution that established a secular government and, in the First Amendment to the Constitution, separated religion from state.

Almost immediately some Christians criticized America's secular government and set about the task of forcing the restoration of an Old Testament, authoritarian biblical worldview upon the government. Initial efforts took the form of a movement demanding that the government recognize Sunday as a holy day. Resisted by Baptists and non-Christians, the effort failed.

The story of Christianity in America since that time includes unceasing efforts on the part of many dominant Christians to discriminate against and legislate over persons of other faiths, no faith, and inappropriate beliefs otherwise.

In the name of a biblical worldview far too many Christians discriminate against women and immigrants, defend historical black slavery, support racially discriminatory laws, express hatred of persons deemed inferior, oppose civil rights, scoff at human equality, prefer white-only or white-dominant schools, lobby for war, and in many other ways live enthusiastically opposed to Jesus' worldview. And when other, nurturing Christians demand human equality and rights in the name of Jesus, authoritarian Christians often dismiss them as liberals or heretics.

IN THE NOW

Today, an authoritarian biblical worldview that Jesus rejected two millennia ago remains a guiding principle of culturally captive, American Christianity, expressed in dominance and discrimination. As it has been for much of American Christian history, Jesus' nurturing worldview is often an afterthought, if not altogether dismissed to the point that one is left to wonder if Jesus matters anymore.

Yet if we look about, we will see glimpses of Jesus' worldview within and without the Church. A Jesus worldview looks something like this: It rejects authoritarian concepts of God; values people above doctrine; expresses love of others and rejects fear of others; opposes hatred of and discrimination against others; does not legislate religious morality but advocates for widespread human rights and equality; feeds the hungry, heals the sick and provides for the poor; strives for economic justice; seeks peace; embraces truth and is not selfish.

Jesus' worldview matters because it is born from the conviction that all persons are equally God's children, from which all share in a common humanity.

Jesus' worldview matters because it is focused on redeeming the world from the evil grip of greed, racism, hatred, discrimination, sickness and inequality that too often result from authoritarian structures. Despite vocal opposition from many within Christendom, Jesus' worldview remains strong among many Christians in America and around the world.

Nurturing Faith — through its Jesus Worldview Initiative (first called Truth & Justice Project) — is starting conversations and joining others to more effectively and assuredly advance the Jesus worldview for such a needed time. NFJ

Becoming the prophets of the Resistance

A review by Eileen R. Campbell-Reed

Are you a chaplain to the empire or a prophet of the resistance? Every pastor and person of faith in America needs to hear this question when it comes to racial justice. People of all racial-ethnic identities must wrestle with it too. White Christians more than any group need to face the question.

That very question confronts readers in the opening pages of *Trouble the Water: A Christian Resource for the Work of Racial Justice* (Nurturing Faith, 2017). And its vitality animates all 200 pages and 23 chapters of stories and strategies, curated by three editors and written by 28 ministers, scholars and community organizers.

The book grew out of Baptist conversations and highlights Baptist congregations, yet it is a contribution for the whole people of God and their leaders.

Prophetic Resistance

In chapter one, seasoned community organizer and African-American Baptist pastor Michael-Ray Matthews describes his own wake-up call in the midst of clergy protests in Ferguson, Mo. The story began on an August day in 2014 when 18-year-old Michael Brown was fatally shot by a white Ferguson police officer and left lying on the pavement for four and a half hours.

In the months that followed, Matthews and hundreds of other ministers gathered to stand in solidarity with the community. They also stood as witnesses to the racial injustice woven into the fabric of Ferguson and all of America.

One rainy night in front of the Ferguson police station Matthews and other clergy prayed and sang the spiritual: "Wade in the water, children. God's gonna trouble the water."

They sang while facing a militarized police force, tear gas and harassment. Torrents of rain fell that night on peaceful protesters and police officers alike.

As rain soaked right through his umbrella, Matthews says, he saw the ways "white supremacy and middle class respectability" had infiltrated his own values and thinking. In that moment, he adds, he was "literally baptized" into seeing anew the urgency of showing up for African-American men, women, youth, and children in Ferguson and all across America.

Resourcing the Beloved Community

Matthews and co-editors Cody Sanders, a pastor and campus chaplain, and Marie Onwubuariri, an American Baptist regional executive minister, gathered a group of contributors to address the human failures of racial injustice. They also collaborated with authors to voice the ways racism erodes our experience of God's presence and undermines Christ's call to beloved community.

Trouble the Water is both a confessional book of sin and redemption, and a playbook for justice. Its pages are nearly all provocative and occasionally irreverent. None of the remedies for injustice are simple, but the ideas are compelling, practical, and grounded in years of work and wisdom. Every chapter concludes with questions for reflection.

Contributing authors write from a number of different social locations. They address the ways that racism intersects with other injustices such as sexism, homophobia and ecological destruction. Collectively they disrupt the narrative of racism as only a Black and White issue, epitomized in ethics professor Miguel De La Torre's "Being Brown When Black Lives Matter."

Central to the book's purpose is a call to conversion. White pastors and congregations are significantly behind in understanding and embracing the work of racial justice. Several contributors including Jennifer Harvey, author of *Dear White Christians*, and Marlu Fairly, chaplain and pastor, demonstrate just how much white folks still stand in need of conversion.

The book's early chapters seek to reframe the problems and questions of racial justice by exploring theology and history. The large middle section of the book offers practical approaches to racial justice work, including chapters on worship, Bible study, preaching, conflict transformation and mission/immersion trips. The last five chapters tell congregational stories of how God is calling white Christians away from their oblivion and guilt and into joining resistance movements for racial justice.

Courage to Change

Are you wondering if racial justice really deserves your time, attention or deliberate action? Do you feel overwhelmed, guilty or hopeless at the sheer size of the problems? Or do you feel ready to give up your role as a chaplain to the empire of white privilege and power?

Wherever you are, *Trouble the Water* invites you to consider God's call to racial justice work. It offers a pathway from paralysis to partnership in the beloved community. It inspires courage to resist personal and social systems of pain and violence. For those engaged in decades of racial justice work, the book offers encouragement and potential new partners to trouble the waters for healing's sake. NFJ

—Eileen R. Campbell-Reed is associate professor of practical theology at Central Seminary's Nashville, Tenn., campus.

Exhibit showcases the earliest stirrings of American religious diversity

BY ADELLE M. BANKS
Religion News Service

The Mid-Atlantic region display of the "Religion in Early America" exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History/Jaclyn Nash

WASHINGTON — Enter the "Religion in Early America" exhibit and there are objects you expect to find: Bibles, a hymnal and christening items.

But on closer inspection, a broader picture of faith in the Colonial era emerges: a Bible translated into the language of the Wampanoag people, the Torah scroll of the first synagogue in North America and a text written by a slave who wanted to pass on the essentials of his Muslim heritage.

"Religion in early America was not just Puritans and the Pilgrims, and then the Anglicans and the negotiation of Christian diversity," said Peter Manseau, curator of the exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

"It was a much bigger picture. It was a story of many different communities with conflicting, competing beliefs, coexisting over time with greater and lesser degrees of engagement with each other."

The yearlong exhibit open until June 3, 2018 is part of the museum's "The Nation We Build Together" series of exhibitions. It demonstrates mostly through material objects the range of religious expression from Colonial times through the 1840s.

The gallery that recounts religious freedom, diversity and growth is bookended by two large physical depictions of religious life.

On one end is an 800-pound church bell crafted by revolutionary rider Paul Revere in 1802 that hung for three decades in a Unitarian Universalist church in Maine and later was used to call factory workers to a textile mill in North Andover, Mass.

"Ministers would say, 'I know that I can find a better sounding bell if I import one from Europe but because I'm a patriot, I'm going to buy a Paul Revere bell,'" said Manseau, author of the exhibit-related book *Objects of Devotion: Religion in Early America.*

At the other end of the exhibition space is a foldable pulpit used in the fields of the English Colonies by evangelist George Whitefield in the First Great Awakening of the 1700s.

"It's a representation of the changing forms of worship in America that then transformed the nation," Manseau said of the growth in denominations such as Methodism, which had more than 18,000 churches by 1860. "This was a new way of experiencing religious devotion, a very emotionally driven way, sort of a carnival atmosphere — religion as spectacle rather than something endured through long Puritan sermons."

Also on view: a Boston-based evangelist's translation of the Bible into the Algonquian language of the Wampanoag people, creating what became the first published Bible in the U.S., with hopes of converting Native Americans. Manseau said it was used mostly so colonists could say to people back in England "look what's possible for converting native America if you continue to fund our missions."

Harvard Divinity School scholar Catherine Brekus, an expert on the history of religion in America, said it's appropriate for the exhibit to reflect the range of religions that existed in early America.

"We tend to think much more about the Pilgrims but in fact the original 13 Colonies were really very religiously diverse," including "lots of different Native American religions," as well as Catholics, Jews and Muslims. "The middle colonies — Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Maryland — were the most religiously diverse in early America and most linguistically diverse too."

Beyond traditional Protestant life, the exhibit depicts what it calls the "flowerings of religious devotion," along with objects influencing faith found already existing when the Pilgrims arrived.

On display are a 1654 Torah scroll from New York's Congregation Shearith Israel, a page from the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon and the iron cross believed to be fashioned from the ships that brought the

first English Catholics to Maryland.

Some scholars estimate that 20 percent of African-born men and women were followers of Islam before they were transported as captives.

A 13-page Arabic document written by Bilali Muhammad in the early 19th century reveals the efforts of a man who lived on Sapelo Island, Ga., to leave a legacy of his Muslim faith. Considered the only known religious text written by a Muslim slave in the U.S., it includes passages from the Quran and details on the basics of Islamic practice — from the times of prayer to explanations for washing hands and feet before praying.

"What it seems to be is a document written by someone who is in the process of forgetting a language and trying to remember it," said Manseau. "It seems that, on this remote island plantation where he lived, he was making an effort to pass along his beliefs and practices to the following generation."

In contrast, just a step or two away from that small volume is a portrait of Omar ibn Said, a slave jailed in Fayetteville, N.C., after an escape attempt who wrote Arabic verses on his cell with a piece of coal. He converted to Christianity after being sold to a prominent Presbyterian family.

"He becomes, in a minor way, kind of a media figure in the 19th century," said Manseau of a time when stories of his conversion in the Southern Christian press placated fears sparked by a recent Muslim slave revolt in Brazil. "They point to him as basically the good Muslim who abandoned Islam for Christianity."

The exhibit also includes numerous examples of how faith was lived outside of houses of worship and within homes.

There is an 1820s play set of 45 Noah's Ark figures and a children's book from the mid-1800s that begins with "A is for Adam." And there's a silver bowl from the home of Virginia patriot George Mason.

"George Mason might throw a party and chill his wine glasses in this bowl but then the next day, or the next Sunday, would christen his children in this bowl," said Manseau. "There was no separation. There was no sense that one was profane and one was sacred."

About half of the objects, such as Thomas Jefferson's 1820 unorthodox version of the Bible and George Washington's christening robe from 1732, are part of the Smithsonian's collection, and some have appeared in past exhibitions. The rest — such as African Methodist Episcopal Church founder Richard Allen's candlesticks and hymnal and Rhode Island founder Roger Williams' compass and sundial — are on loan.

The exhibit is part of a larger initiative by the museum to feature religion in a variety of dimensions, including theater and musical presentations. Manseau, who wrote the book *One Nation, Under Gods*, said future exhibits are planned that will focus on how religion intersects with other aspects of evolving American culture.

"Religious liberty was not immediate," he said. "It was not inevitable. It was born of very practical concerns by practical people trying to create a new nation and a new way of thinking." NFJ

Parenting a new college student

By Wanda Kidd

Having sent a son and daughter off to college — and as a campus minister who receives many other people's children — there are some parenting tips for that stage of life I would like to share.

Our culture says the role of parents is to make sure our children are safe and happy, so many of these suggestions may be challenging to hear and harder to enact.

Regardless of our hyper-vigilant parenting ideals, however, it is important to remember that parenting young adults is very different from parenting children or even adolescents.

To be a parent to young adults requires a shift in the role between parent and child. As challenging as it is, there must be a belief and trust that you have done enough to allow them to thrive on their own.

You need to trust your daughters and sons to use the vast resources you have invested in them. In addition, as Christians, we have the power to lean into our faith in Christ because we have graciously been entrusted with the rearing of these children of God.

So here is my advice for parents whose young adults are headed to college:

- Covenant to talk on the phone just once a day (at most) for the first month. They need time and space to find their place on campus and in their new community.
- Send care packages, notes and letters, and sign them up for the church newsletter.
- Have a frank conversation about money. Work out a budget for disposable income and, except for emergencies, stick to the amount of money you agreed on.
- Teach them basic life skills such as how to do laundry and prepare food.
- Have a conversation about the necessity and the value of going to class and turning in assignments in a timely fashion. (They do not get a second chance for a first semester.)

- Give them permission to explore their new world, the opportunities to both fail and succeed, and provide a soft place to land if absolutely needed.
- Without projecting your own fears or failures, have a conversation with your son or daughter about the things you wish you had done differently as a freshman.
- Ask your pastor or student minister to talk with students about what to look for in healthy relationships and how to practice conflict resolution.

Give them permission to:

- Make new friends and have challenging experiences.
- Go to the mental health center if they feel a need to talk to someone about issues that are troubling them.
- Seek help through student support services if they have learning concerns.
- Go to a variety of churches, engage in campus ministries and claim their own faith journey.
- Speak directly to their professors about questions they have in a class before it becomes a crisis.
- Tell you if they need your help, but do not intrude into their life unnecessarily.

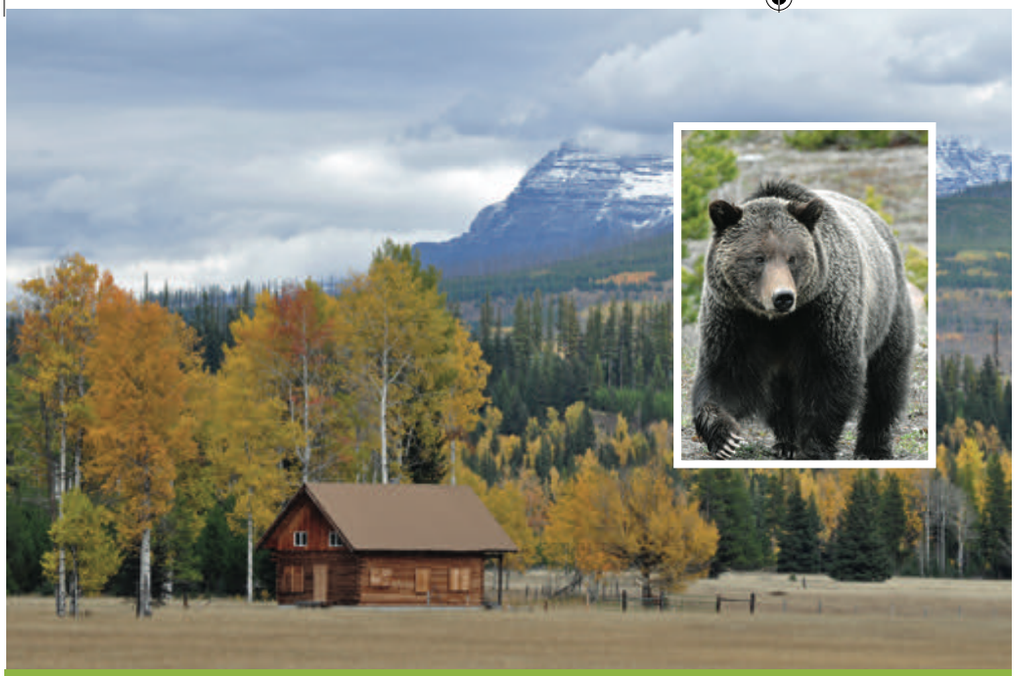
Taking a son or daughter off to campus is often an exercise in faith and grace. Just ask the manager of the local steakhouse who was traumatized years ago when we stopped for lunch after dropping off our son at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

His innocent question of "Is it just the two of you?" triggered a sobbing, "Yes, it is" from me.

As embarrassing as it was, I did not tell my son the story for a long time. It was important not to burden him with my separation grief.

While the university staff will give you advice and help you understand how the collegiate system works, what will sustain you in the days that follow will be prayer, a community of faith and a new relationship with an amazing young adult. NFJ

—Wanda Kidd is an experienced campus minister and the collegiate engagement coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.



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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. To begin exploring any of these opportunities, contact Bruce at bgourley@nurturingfaith.net.

Grover Cleveland (1885-1889, 1893-1897)

By Bruce Gourley

Like his immediate predecessor in the nation's highest office, the 22nd president of the United States was the son of a northern clergyman and denominational leader.

Amid an emerging golden age of Protestantism equating God with white American patriotism, Chester A. Arthur, a Republican and the 21st president (1881-1885), and Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, both publicly embraced a Supreme Being in service to the nation while personally drifting away from any religious fervor of their early years.

Cleveland's father, Richard Falley, a Harvard graduate, served as a Congregational and Presbyterian minister. Richard was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Caldwell, N.J., at the time of the birth of Stephen Grover Cleveland in 1837. Grover's mother, Ann Neal, was the daughter of a Baltimore publisher.

From Caldwell the family moved to Oneida County, N.Y., in 1850, where Richard worked for the American Home Missionary Society. The Clevelands lived in near poverty, and for two years Grover was taken out of school in order to apprentice in the mercantile business.

Grover's father died prematurely in 1853 from poor health, and the young boy left school yet again to support his family. A church elder offered to finance Grover's college education if he would pursue a ministerial career. The young man, knowing only too well the financial hardships often associated with the pastoral profession, declined.

The future president moved to Buffalo in 1855, where a politically-involved uncle,

Lewis F. Allen, secured a clerical job for Grover and introduced him to influential men. There the young man studied law, was admitted to the bar, became a clerk with the law firm of Rogers, Bowen and Rogers, and identified politically as a Democrat.

Opening his own law firm in 1862, one year later Cleveland received appointment as assistant district attorney of Eerie County. While the Conscription Act of 1863 mandated that all able-bodied men of suitable age serve with the Union Army if called upon, Grover avoided military service by hiring a substitute, a legal and common practice of persons with financial means.

A prominent and successful lawyer by the second half of the decade, Cleveland opted to live a simple life, rather than move within high society like his uncle. Unmarried, he financially supported his mother and two sisters.

At the age of 33, Cleveland was elected sheriff of Eerie County in 1871, his first elected political position. Following two years of adequate but unremarkable service he returned to his law practice.

In 1882, at a time of local government corruption in Buffalo, Cleveland, by then known for his honesty, was elected mayor of the city. Although in office for less than a year, he won accolades for opposing party machines and safeguarding public funds.

Later the same year, Cleveland emerged as a dark horse candidate for governor of New York. Against a divided Republican electorate he easily won the top state office by the largest vote margin in New York gubernatorial history. Taking office on Jan. 1, 1883, Governor Cleveland in the months following received praise for his successful opposition to party machine politics and wasteful government spending.

Cleveland's history of honest politics in an era of widespread corruption carried over onto the national scene as, again a dark horse, the New Yorker came from behind to claim the 1884 Democratic presidential nomination.

Countering Cleveland's squeaky-clean image, Republican operatives dug up dirt on the Democrat candidate in the form of allegations of an illegitimate child. The charges, gleaned from sermons of a Buffalo pastor, led to anti-Cleveland chants of "Ma, Ma, where's my Pa?"

His illicit past uncovered, Cleveland admitted he was paying child support and told his supporters not to suppress the truth.

Although the scandal dented Cleveland's prospects, an anti-Catholic bias evident in the

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This is the 22nd 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 director of Nurturing Faith's Truth & Justice Project.*

Republican Party led many Roman Catholics to support the more tolerant Democrat. On election day Cleveland narrowly won the popular and electoral votes.

Cleveland's inaugural presidential address ended with a now-customary, symbolic invocation of a tolerant and inclusive God's blessings upon the nation.

Upon taking office in 1885, Cleveland set about purging the government of appointees who were not adequately fulfilling their responsibilities. During his term he became the first president to regulate railroads. He also modernized the Navy.

A Republican-controlled Senate led Cleveland to veto many bills that the president deemed fiscally imprudent, including subsidies for farmers, businesses and veterans. In addition he opposed high protective tariffs, unsuccessfully sought to reduce the amount of silver that the government required for the production of coinage, and fought inflationary measures.

On issues of civil rights and immigration, Cleveland viewed Reconstruction as a failed experiment, demonstrated little inclination to enforce the 15th Amendment guarantee of voting rights to African Americans, and, believing Chinese immigrants to be uninterested in assimilating into white society, further advanced the anti-Chinese immigration policies of his predecessor.

Other than reappointing Frederick Douglass as recorder of deeds in Washington D.C., and naming James Campbell Matthews, another African American, as Douglass' successor, Cleveland chose not to appoint blacks to patronage jobs. So hostile was the climate against civil rights that the singular appointment of Matthews was met with great anger among many politicians of both parties.

Meanwhile, in 1886 the aged bachelor became the first president to marry while in office. His bride, Frances Folsom, at the age of 21 was 27 years Cleveland's junior.

Grover Cleveland's stance on tariffs contributed to his failure to win a second presidential term in 1888, in which he garnered a majority of the popular vote but lost the Electoral College. Undeterred, he ran again in 1892 and won, the only president ever to serve two non-consecutive presidential terms.

The president's second inaugural address reaffirmed the existence of "a Supreme Being" who served America, ruling "the affairs of men and whose goodness and mercy have always followed the American people." Surely, Cleveland proclaimed, "He will not turn from us now if we humbly and reverently seek His powerful aid."

Yet despite the pleas of many Christians, the American God did not rescue the nation from the depths of a national economic depression. While the president's fiscal policies shored up the nation's gold reserve and curbed inflation somewhat, they did little to address widespread business failures, mounting farm mortgage foreclosures, and soaring unemployment.

Although his enforcement of an injunction against railroad strikers in Chicago garnered widespread praise, Cleveland's failure to successfully address the depression led to public dissatisfaction. Amid an unemployment rate of approximately 12 percent, the two-term president failed to secure his party's presidential nomination in 1896.

A Presbyterian but only casually observant, Cleveland's religious upbringing played little if any discernible role in shaping his political views or private life. While president, however, he sometimes attended the First Presbyterian Church of Washington, where his wedding to Frances took place.

Like his predecessors, President Cleveland expressed religious toleration and supported lawful religious diversity. Leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Days Saints, or Mormons, hoped he would exempt the LDS Church from federal anti-polygamy laws. To their disappointment Cleveland followed recent presidential policies of suppressing polygamy, a stance he defended in his first State of the Union address.

Cleveland's opposition to the LDS Church's illegal practices contributed to Mormon leaders' official renouncement of plural marriage in 1890, leading the way to Utah statehood in 1896, during Cleveland's second presidential term.

On a few occasions Cleveland spoke of Christianity, albeit in the service of patriotism. Addressing the Evangelical Alliance in Washington in 1887, he declared: "All must admit that reception of the teachings of Christianity results in the purest patriotism, in the most scrupulous fidelity to public trust, and in the best type of citizenship."

President Cleveland, on the other hand, did not consider Christianity, or religious faith at large, as an avenue for the advancement of racial equality.

At the same time, the president readily acknowledged his personal lack of religious interest. Speaking to a joint gathering of Northern and Southern Presbyterians assembled in Philadelphia in 1888, Cleveland spoke glowingly of the teachings of the Presbyterian Church, but acknowledged that he had to "recall the days now long past, to find my closest relation to the grand and noble denomination which you represent."

In his latter years, however, the ex-president's thoughts turned to God following the untimely passing of his youngest child, 12-year-old Ruth, who died from diphtheria in 1904. Having "great trouble" deciding whether Ruth was "in the cold, cheerless grave" or "in the arms of her Saviour," the grieving father wrote that "God has come to my help and I am able to adjust my thought to dear Ruth's death with as much comfort as selfish humanity will permit."

The former president also reflected upon his public career. According to his friend Richard Watson Gilder, who wrote a book titled *Grover Cleveland: A Record of Friendship*, an aged Cleveland in 1906 wrote to Gilder that "God has never failed to clearly make known to me the path of duty."

Two years later, nearing death, the ex-president uttered his last known words: "I have tried so hard to do right." Stephen Grover Cleveland died on June 24, 1908, a civilly-religious president committed to good and honest public service as enabled by America's white, patriotic deity. NFJ

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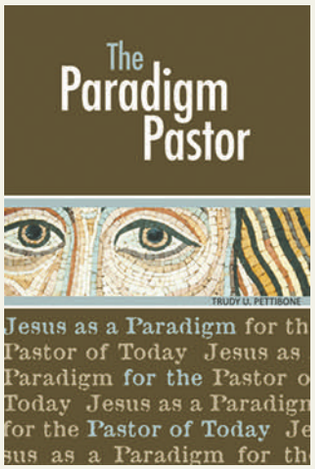

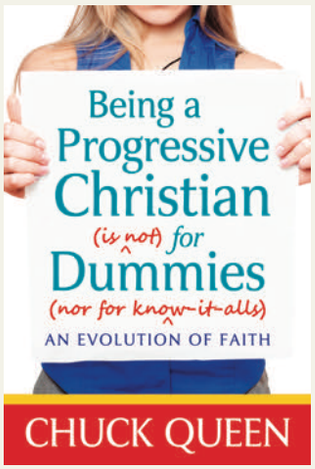

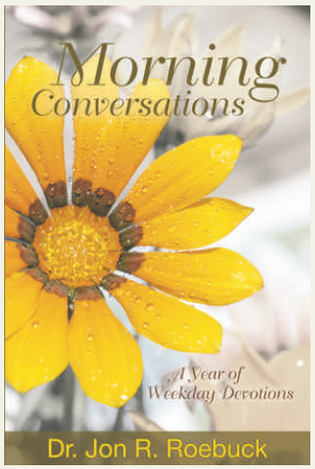

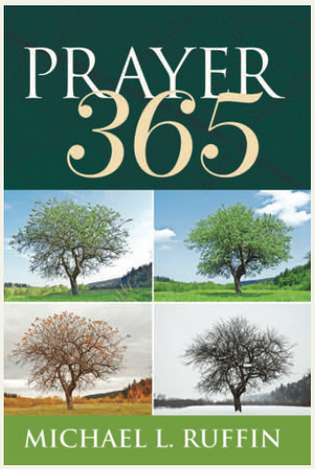

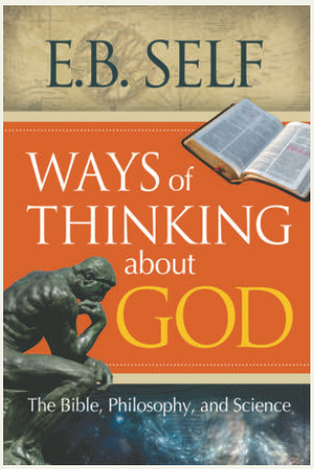

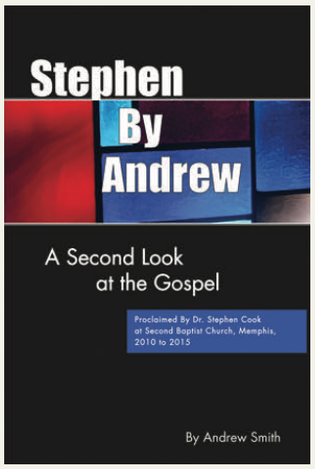

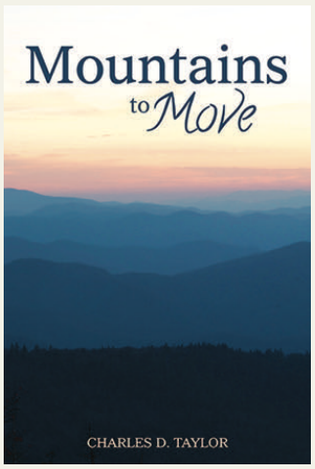

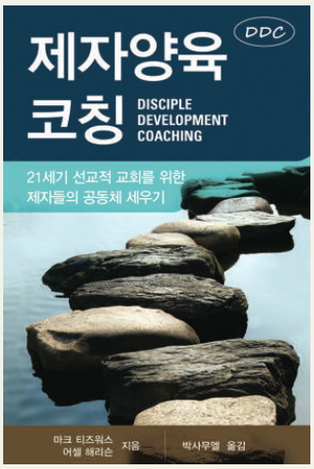

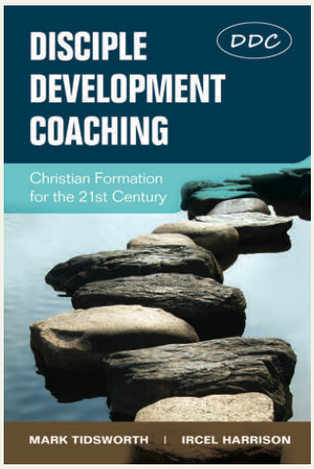

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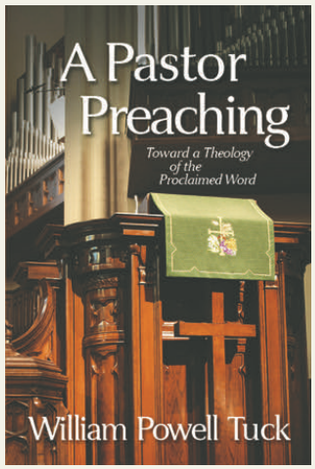
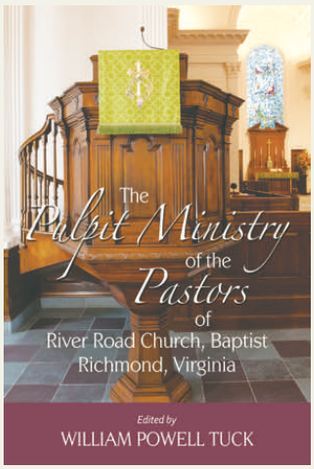
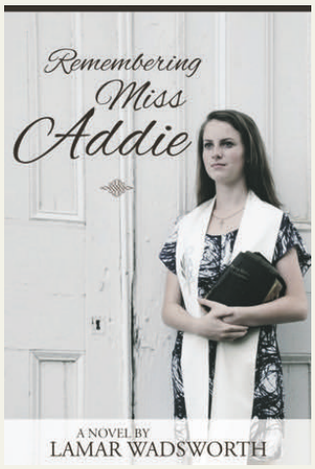
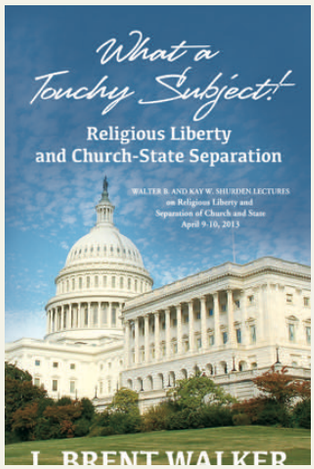
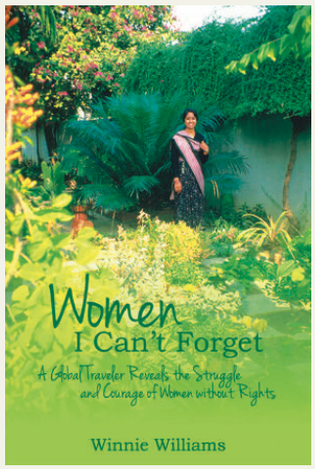
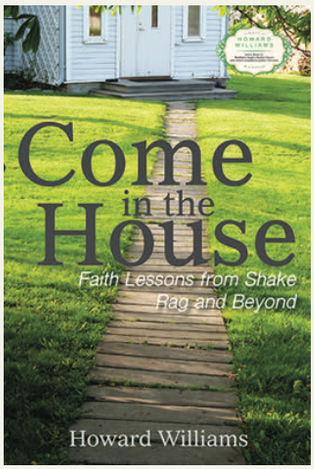


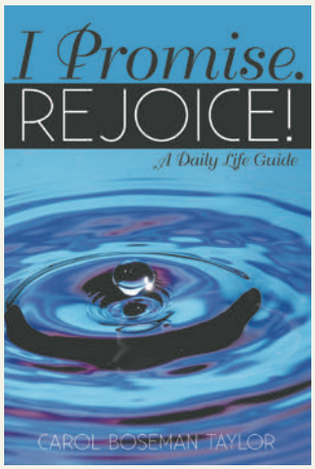


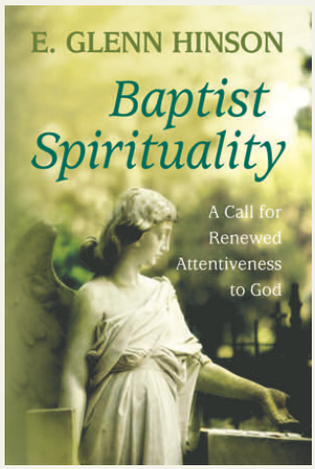


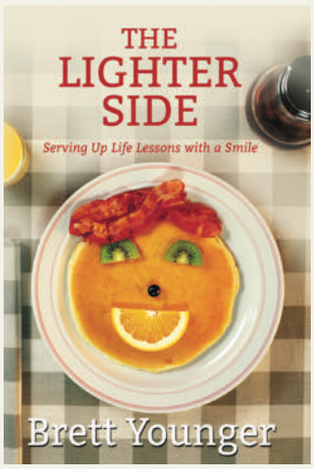


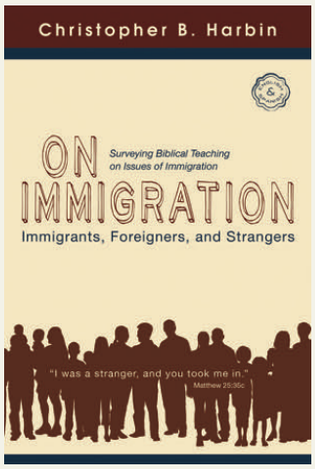


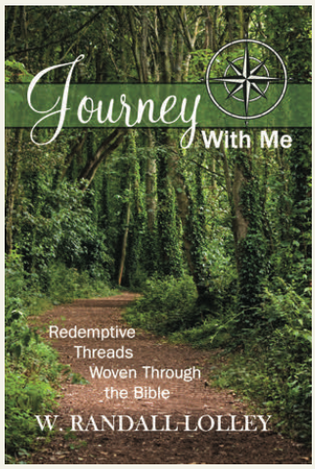












What did you find?

By Tony W. Cartledge

Talk to anybody about your participation in an archaeological dig, and at least one question is inevitable: "What did you find?" Or, its variation: "Did you find anything good?"

No one would dig if they didn't hope to find something, but what archaeologists look for is often quite different from popular opinion. Professional archaeologists are not out to find buried treasure or valuable objects they can sell to the highest bidder.

For one thing, anything found in most countries belongs to the country, not to the expedition. For another, things that no one would give you a dollar for can be invaluable to archaeologists.

Why do we dig, especially in Palestine? We don't dig in search of sensational finds, and we don't dig to prove the Bible true (often the opposite happens). We dig because we want to know more about the past history of the land.

We want to know more about the people who have lived in the land, when they were present, and what their lives were like. What did they eat? When were cities built and destroyed and rebuilt? When was a particular area deserted?

These things add to our understanding of biblical stories, even if the main thing they show us is that biblical accounts were often more idealistic or agenda-laden than historically accurate in the modern Western sense of the word.

One of the main things archaeologists look for is stratigraphy: levels of occupation that can be dated through the types of pottery, artifacts, methods of construction, or Carbon 14 dating of organic materials such as seeds or charcoal.

The foundation of a single corner of a wall may not excite the casual observer, but can be incredibly significant in tracing the remains of a building and helping to locate

the floor (usually packed dirt), where the most reliably datable artifacts are located.

Susan and I were privileged to dig for two weeks with the Jezreel Expedition, co-directed by Norma Franklin of the University of Haifa and Jennie Ebeling of the University of Evansville. The ancient site of Jezreel has both an upper and a lower tel. This year we focused on two sites in the lower tel.

So, what did we find? We found hundreds of pounds of pottery sherds, some of which showed potential for restoration. We found thousands of pieces of flint: shaped blades, scrapers or choppers along with cores and chips.

We found animal bones, oven materials and blackened pieces of cooking pots. And we found lots of basalt stones clearly shaped for grinding, pounding or other purposes; the fertile Jezreel Valley produced abundant grain.

We also found standing stones made of basalt that may have had a cultic purpose. We found walls, though most of them are in very poor shape because of past earthquakes and the site's long history of occupation, in which new residents typically rob stones from older buildings in order to build new ones.

The current Jezreel Expedition has been at work since 2012, and has found evidence of human occupation near Ein Yizre'el (the Spring of Jezreel) stretching from Neolithic and Chalcolithic times, through the Bronze and Iron Ages, the Persian Period, the Roman Period, and on up through Byzantine, Crusader, Ottoman and modern times.

It would be lovely to say that we uncovered conclusive remains of Jezebel's upstairs window or a road sign pointing to Naboth's vineyard, but such things are highly unlikely. There is one certain finding, however: we still have much to learn. NFJ

Thanks, Tony, for 10 great years!

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Though both Georgia boys who attended seminary at the same time and place, Tony Cartledge and I didn't get acquainted until we both backed into second or third careers. (Tony taught school briefly becoming a pastor.)

Though latecomers to the news business we discovered new gifts and many colleagues willing to teach us the ropes. But after a few years of settling into these new careers it was obvious that the continuing rise of fundamentalism would mean neither of us would retire from the Baptist states conventions that employed us.

That reality hit Georgia Baptists ahead of North Carolina Baptists. So my move to *Baptists Today* (now *Nurturing Faith*) kept me doing similar work but with the independence needed for honest journalism.

Once, while sharing a hotel room in Washington, D.C., at a meeting we both attended, I casually mentioned to Tony that if/when he makes another career move we should talk about his writing future. Ink gets in a writer's veins.

He replied that he probably had a couple of more years before restrictions on editorial freedom would reach his desk. With more than two decades of pastoral ministry and a Ph.D. in Hebrew Scriptures from Duke University, I knew he had plenty of vocational options.

His two-year prediction of departure moved up to two months when offered a teaching position at Campbell University Divinity School, a reasonable rural drive from Tony's home in Apex, N.C. He called to see if I still wanted to talk about doing some work together.

When I said, "Yes, definitely," Tony had already identified a spot in Columbia, S.C., that was mid-point between his home and mine in Macon, Ga. Within days we settled into a Fuddruckers there to explore the possibilities.

We explored the idea of Tony writing North Carolina-based stories for *Baptists Today* — and possibly even creating a state edition.

As usual, my vision preceded the needed funding. Yet we left that scene where hamburgers were consumed and envisioning had occurred with a plan that was warmly received by our Board of Directors and the others needed to make it happen.

Executive Coordinator Larry Hovis and other leaders of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina embraced the idea and have been a valued collaborator ever since. Churches throughout North Carolina increased their subscriptions to the point that approximately 30 percent of the publication's circulation receives the state edition.

But there was more shifting to come in a time of changing denominational life amid a changing culture. The biggest change came as result of a redesign of the news journal late in 2010.

While serving as interim pastor of First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., that year, I would greet members as they arrived for Sunday school. I noticed that each class seemed to be using a different curriculum.

One of our *Baptists Today* directors, Kathy Richardson, a journalism professor turned provost and now a college president, was conducting a reader's survey at the time. She included questions regarding Bible study curriculum used and who makes the decision.

A resulting idea arose: What if we put a Bible study within the news journal that is scholarly but applicable, follows lectionary texts to treat a larger swath of the Bible and connect with worship, and is written by Tony — the best Bible study writer I've known. To my great joy, Tony agreed to take on this task and shift (and enlarge) his work.

On the paper where I was sketching out the new design, I penciled in: "Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge." The words "Nurturing Faith" came out of nowhere, but seemed to fit well — and were later trademarked and eventually became the brand of all that Baptists Today, Inc., does including books and experiences.

It would be impossible to overstate all that Tony does and has done over the past 10 years to enhance the ministry of Nurturing Faith, or to express the deep appreciation I, and so many others, have for him.

Tony does far more than he is assigned. In addition to the superb weekly Bible studies and online teaching resources, he blogs regularly, writes other articles and compiles previous studies (along with newly-written lessons) into the short-term *Nurturing Faith Bible Study Series* books. He also leads experiences to Israel and the West Bank along with other places.

An editor could not ask for anything more in a colleague who is so competent, so willing and such a good friend. And one who never, ever, ever misses a deadline!

So thanks for all you do, Tony. Here's to another decade of informing and inspiring so many of us. NFJ

Shaping Factors

A brief history of indigenous Hawaiian religion

BY BRUCE GOURLEY

The Hawaiian-Emperor Seamount Chain of the North Pacific Ocean, some 3,600 miles in length, consists of an archipelago of eight major islands, various atolls and other protruding land, more than 80 major volcanoes, and scores of underwater volcanoes.

The Hawaiian Islands alone are approximately 1,500 miles long, or more than half the width of the 48 contiguous states.

Some five million years old, the islands of Kauai and Niihau emerged from the ocean first. The five volcanoes of the youngest island, Hawaii Island (the Big Island), less than 450,000 years old, are Kohala, Mauna Kea, Hualalai, Mauna Loa, and Kilauea.

The 13,796-foot summit of Mauna Kea, featuring some of the darkest and clearest skies in the world and home to some of the world's most powerful telescopes, is the best place on planet earth for stargazing,

Around 300-700 C.E. Polynesians from the Marquesas Islands of the South Pacific Ocean became the first humans to reach the Hawaiian Islands. They brought plants and livestock with them and settled in coastal areas and valleys.

Perhaps around 1100 C.E., Tahitians of Polynesian descent arrived from the South Pacific. The two groups clashed, resulting in centuries of tribal warfare.

From the first landing to about 1300 C.E. the Polynesian settlers built homes and lived off the land. Fishing sustained the coastal communities, while farming consisted of bananas, coconut, apples, breadfruit, sweet potatoes, chickens, pigs and other food sources.

A caste society, ancient Hawaiian classes were distinctive. The royal class, *Alii,* governed with divine power, followed in rank by the *Kahuna*, or priestly, class.

Commoners, known as *Makaainana,* represented most Hawaiians and included farmers, fishermen and craftsman, and their families. *Kauwa*, a relatively small slave class, consisted in part of persons captured in times of war and their descendants.

Ancient Hawaiian customs and religious beliefs are rooted in the traditional Polynesian cultures of Marquesas and Tahiti.

Collectively, early Hawaiians refined many traditional aspects of Polynesian culture, from elaborate dress to complex recreational activities in the form of physical games and competitions, along with arts and crafts.

Perhaps the most recognized ancient expression of Hawaiian art and culture is the *hula*, a Polynesian dance form that includes chants or songs evoking ancient traditions, myths, history, philosophical thought and religious rites.

Early Hawaiian peoples constructed numerous temples (*heiau*) reflective of their polytheistic and animistic beliefs in numerous deities and spirits and focused on the forces of nature, including tides, the sky, and volcanic activity.

Each village included a temple, ranging from a simple structure to a massive complex complete with terraces and carved idols, and variously devoted to peace, war, health or agricultural prosperity. Members of the *Kahuna* class maintained the temples and led villages' religious activities.

Life in ancient Hawaii revolved around appeasing the gods. The four most prominent Hawaiian deities were *K'* (the god of war), *K'ne* (the god of sky and creation, or light and life), *Lono* (the god of peace, rain, fertility, harvest and rebirth), and *Kanaloa* (the god of the ocean and of healing).

Hawaiians also worshiped many minor gods. Offerings to the gods sometimes included human sacrifices.

In ancient times religion served as the glue of Hawaiian society, woven throughout all aspects of life, including daily living, worship practices and eating. Based on *kapu*, or religious taboos, the legal system dictated gender relations, sexual activity, the fishing season and much more.

One *kapu* prohibited the touching of the shadows of the *alii* class. Violating a *kapu* could be punishable by death.

Other aspects of spirituality were positive, including *aloha*, a term derived from various ancient Polynesian root words for love, compassion, sympathy and kindness. In earliest usage *aloha* apparently emphasized "love of kin."

As some spiritualists note, *aloha* is also a rearrangement of the word *haloa*, the first human in ancient Hawaiian mythology, and a term referring to the everlasting cycle of nature in plant life. *Aloha* is thus an embodiment of the life and wisdom that is nature and infers the presence of divinity within humanity, commonly expressed as love, peace and compassion.

The first Europeans arrived on the Hawaiian Islands in the person of British Captain James Cook and his crew in 1778. The native islanders initially welcomed them as gods.

Yet when one of the sailors grew ill and died, exposing the white-skinned foreigners as mortals, the indignant natives killed Cook during his third visit to the islands in 1779.

Within a decade, however, native Hawaiians once again welcomed Euro-Americans, who introduced cattle to the island in the 1790s.

With the coming of Western civilization, polytheism and *kapu* and human sacrifice fell out of favor in 1819, leading to the destruction of many temples and idols, a development furthered by the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1820.

Many of the *alii* converted to Christianity. The missionaries soon embraced *aloha* as a term for displaying hospitality and warmth in the form of a greeting, and as a way of communicating the Christian deity as a God of love.

Nonetheless, ancient religions experienced some periods of limited resurgence during the remainder of the century. In addition many islanders quietly maintained the old practices, while others integrated polytheism with monotheistic Christianity.

Although about 60 percent of modern Hawaiians identify as Christians, ancient religious traditions, such as the worship of family ancestral gods, or *aumakua*, are yet observed by some natives.

In addition, dozens of ancient religious and cultural sites are preserved as state or federal-protected historic places, including Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, believed by early natives to be the home of *Pele*, the fire goddess.

Today, *aloha*, typically perceived by visitors as a warm greeting on the part of islanders, is to many native Hawaiians a way of life rooted in ancient principles of love, wisdom, goodness, humanity and beauty. NFJ

EXPERIENCE IT YOURSELF!

Nurturing Faith will provide a unique opportunity to explore the history, culture and amazing natural beauty on the Island of Hawaii, March 10-16, 2018. Hosted by editors/writers John Pierce and Bruce Gourley, this small-group experience will feature the insights of astrophysicist Paul Wallace, who writes the "Questions Christians Ask Scientists" in *Nurturing Faith Journal*.

This experience will include the rare opportunity to view space through one of the world's greatest telescopes, to experience Paul's personal tour of the sky, and to explore scenic and historic parts of the spectacular island.

For more information, see the inside-back cover of this issue.

Questions Christians ask scientists

Did Galileo start the war between science and religion?

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.

BY PAUL WALLACE

Yes, but no, not really. Years ago I had the privilege of leading a group of students across Europe on a history of astronomy tour. We visited Krakow, Poland, where Nicholas Copernicus first considered his sun-centered model of the universe.

This theory said that the sun resides in the middle of the cosmos while all the planets, including Earth, move around it. This radical notion was opposed to the traditional earth-centered theory held in favor by universities and the church.

We also spent time in Prague, Czech Republic, where Johannes Kepler and Tycho Brahe fought over control of astronomical data that laid the foundation for the complete overthrow of the old earth-centered theory. But the high point of the trip was Italy, where we visited several locations relevant to the life and work of the most famous astronomer of the time, Galileo Galilei.

In Padua we walked through the room in which Galileo taught and saw the rostrum from which he lectured. We strolled through the courtyard where he visited with fellow faculty members and saw the house from which he made his first telescopic observations of the moon's mountains, the stars of the Milky Way, the strange "ears" of Saturn (later determined to be rings) and four moons of Jupiter.

These observations made him a superstar in 1610. But it was not just his observations that brought him fame.

Galileo's personality, his formidable rhetorical skills, his knack for self-promotion, and his political tone-deafness had at least as much to do with his fame as his scientific aptitude. In Galileo we find a singular mix of patient and dogged observer, crystal-clear scientific thinker, razor-sharp debater, salesman and marketer.

His marketing genius is reflected in the fact that his first book — *The Starry Messenger*, in which his earliest observations were revealed — was published in Italian. This went against the tradition of the day, which dictated that works of science and philosophy be published in Latin, the language of the learned.

Opting for Italian meant that the book was available to non-experts. Galileo knew that the simple facts of lunar mountains and moons of Jupiter — outlandish ideas at the time — could be grasped by nearly anyone, even if his detailed arguments eluded many. The point is: he was a popularizer, and the science he popularized pushed against orthodox thinking in both the academy and the church.

Later, after he had publicized his observations of the phases of Venus, Galileo began to advocate actively in favor of a sun-centered universe. This concept did more than push against orthodoxy; it openly challenged it.

University professors, followers of Aristotle and his ancient earth-centered model, were scandalized by Galileo's pronouncements about the earth being in motion around the sun. But Galileo could not be bested or outmaneuvered.

With barbed wit and flourish, he easily and soundly demolished his opponents' arguments, one after another, in a series of heavily attended public debates. This was a sure way to entertain his audience and a quick way to make lifelong enemies.

The academy and the church overlapped considerably at the time, and a few years after Galileo started warring with professors, the church got involved. It began in the lower ecclesial ranks.

In 1614 a Dominican friar named Caccini preached a sermon against Galileo in Florence, the astronomer's home since late 1610. For this, Caccini was reprimanded by his superiors. But a few months later another Dominican penned a letter to the Inquisition, which, thanks to the Protestant Reformation, was operating at maximum force.

The letter pointed to Galileo's view on the arrangement of the planets and suggested that it might be heretical.

The Inquisition did not put Galileo on trial or condemn him at this point, and eventually he was assured by a supportive Pope Urban VIII that he could discuss the Copernican system, but only as a mathematical theory and not as an actuality (Urban had

long been one of Galileo's patrons).

Galileo was free to treat the sun-centered model as a working hypothesis, but, as it had not been proven to the church's satisfaction, he could not claim it to be a fact. This was 1624.

Galileo was thus released to throw himself into a book on the subject. Known simply as the *Dialogue*, this treatise is in essence a conversation between three fictional characters: Salviati, who argues for the Copernican model; Simplicio, a dull-witted traditionalist who favors the old earth-centered system; and Sagredo, an intelligent and neutral layman who acts as a moderator between Salviati and Simplicio.

Permission was granted for the book to be published, so long as Urban's (and thus the church's) own view was represented.

But Galileo could not resist the opportunity to score points for himself. Although the *Dialogue* was purportedly a fair and balanced presentation of both sides, even a casual reader could see that the Copernican system came out looking very good while the earth-centered view was not so subtly ridiculed.

And if this were not enough to draw the ire of the church, Galileo made the grave mistake of putting Urban's very words on the subject in the mouth of the inept and ponderous Simplicio.

This turned many of his defenders in Rome against him and enraged the pope, who brought the full machinery of the Inquisition down on Galileo in 1633. In the end the great scientist was declared "vehemently suspect of heresy" and was sentenced to imprisonment.

Soon thereafter the sentence was commuted to house arrest and Galileo lived out most of the final decade of his life at his villa in Arcetri, near Florence, working on a hugely influential treatise on physics, entertaining distinguished visitors, and tending his vineyards. He died in 1642.

This story, greatly simplified above, came to be known as the "Galileo affair." Like many historical accounts, it contains no true heroes and no true villains, although Galileo was without question a singular genius among a cast ranging from outright fools to mere luminaries.

It was not until the 19th century that the Galileo affair was spun in such a way that the church was presented as an unthinking and monolithic force of anti-intellectualism bent on extinguishing the lights of science and general progress.

Two books in particular, *A History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* by John William Draper and *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* by Andrew Dickson White, relied on a selective reading of history (and not a few outright falsehoods) to promote the idea that science and Christianity are natural enemies.

Both works are avoided by serious historians today, but were initially highly influential among specialists and laypeople alike, and on both sides of the science/religion conversation. Their influence is still seen today, particularly among the so-called New Atheists who maintain that Christianity (and, indeed, all religion) is hopelessly retrogressive and opposed to science.

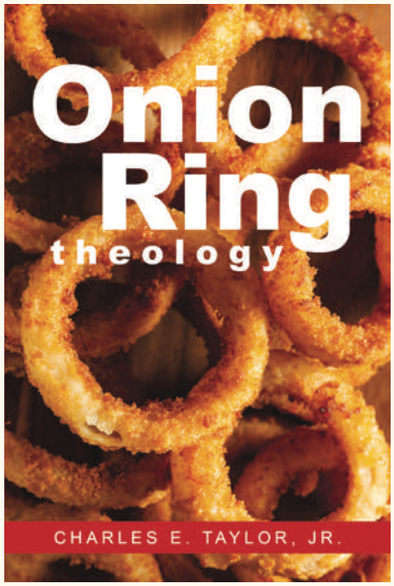
The reality is so much more interesting than that: At Museo Galileo in Florence, my students and I saw, among other artifacts, the only two existing telescopes known to have been made and used by Galileo. The use of these devices for scientific study was encouraged by church officials early in Galileo's career, before things became difficult for all involved.

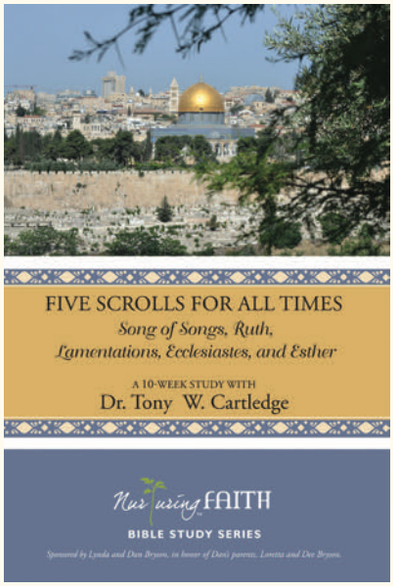
The last place we visited on our tour was Galileo's villa in Arcetri. Today it is fully restored and used for scientific workshops by the University of Florence, but when we took our walkthrough it was in some disarray, but mostly just dark and empty.

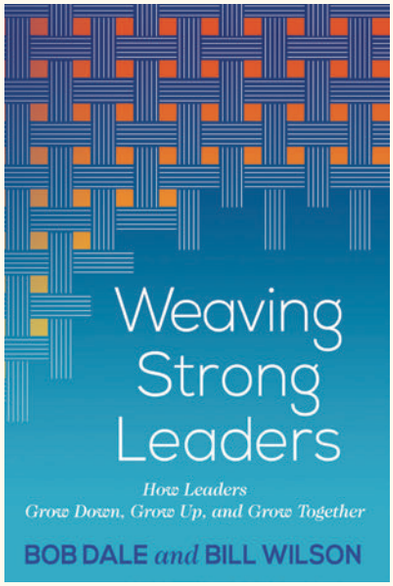
It was easy to fill the spaces in my imagination. It was the first time I felt, palpably, the closeness and humanity of history.

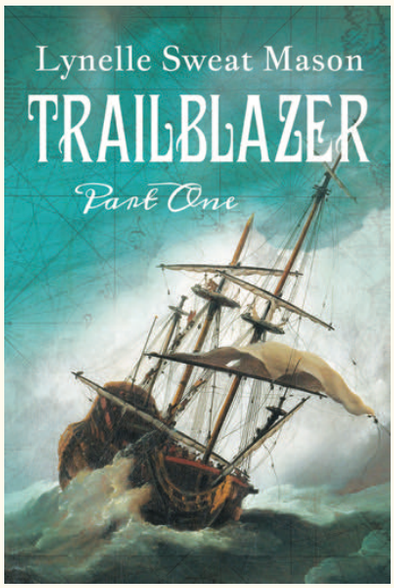
Galileo never fought against Christianity; he remained a devoted Christian his whole life. But he fathered a new way of thinking and knowing, a way that has forever changed the world. NFJ

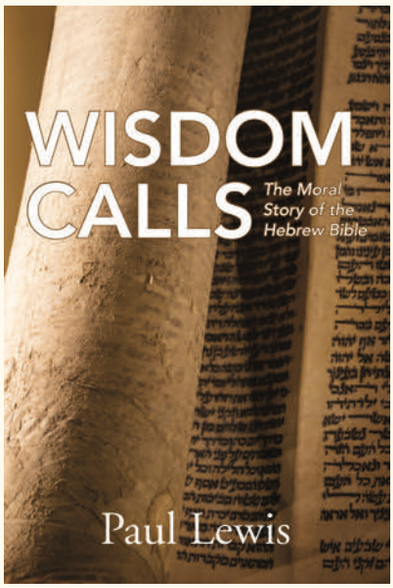
NEW FROM NURTURING FAITH

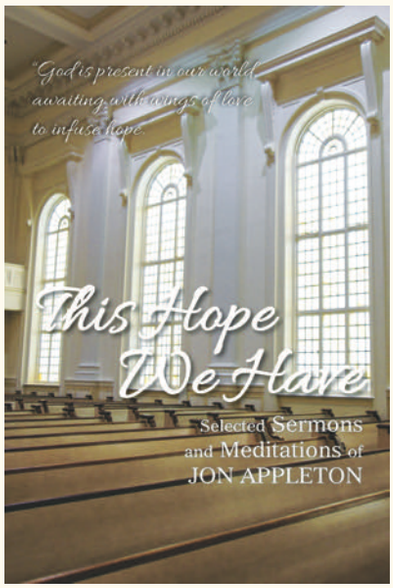












AVAILABLE IN PRINT OR DIGITAL DOWNLOAD AT NURTURINGFAITH.NET/BOOKSTORE

Capital and Generosity

BY JOHN F. BRIDGES
Director of Development

One of the first lessons I learned in my 10th grade civics class was that we live in a culture of capital. As a young adult called into ministry, I learned that money is not the central engine that drives ministry but that financial responsibility is essential to advancing ministry.

When my now-adult children were going through their much-younger stages of, "Why, Daddy, why?" I often found myself answering, "It has something to do with money."

It is true that we live in a culture of capital — defined as wealth in the form of money or assets, taken as a sign of the financial strength of an individual or organization.

Therefore, generous giving is essential to the strength and health of ministries such as Nurturing Faith. Core Christian values of freedom, truth, justice and discipleship drive our important work. Yet generous giving is what propels this ongoing, collaborative and effective mission.

To be crystal clear, Nurturing Faith — the expanding publishing ministry of Baptists Today, Inc. — needs your generous capital to secure, expand and deepen its ministry in a time of shifting cultural landscapes. There are few places where your gifts can make a bigger and more direct impact.

So, I invite you to contribute as generously as you can and in the ways that suit you best: monthly, semi-annual or annual gifts, or through other creative means. Gifts may be made online at nurturingfaith.net/give-now or by mail to Baptists Today, Inc., P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31210.

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We greatly appreciate your faithfulness and generosity. Please know that I would love to talk with you about ways your giving can make an impact through Nurturing Faith. You can reach me directly at (704) 616-1725 or *jbridges@nurturingfaith.net.*

Let's talk! NFJ

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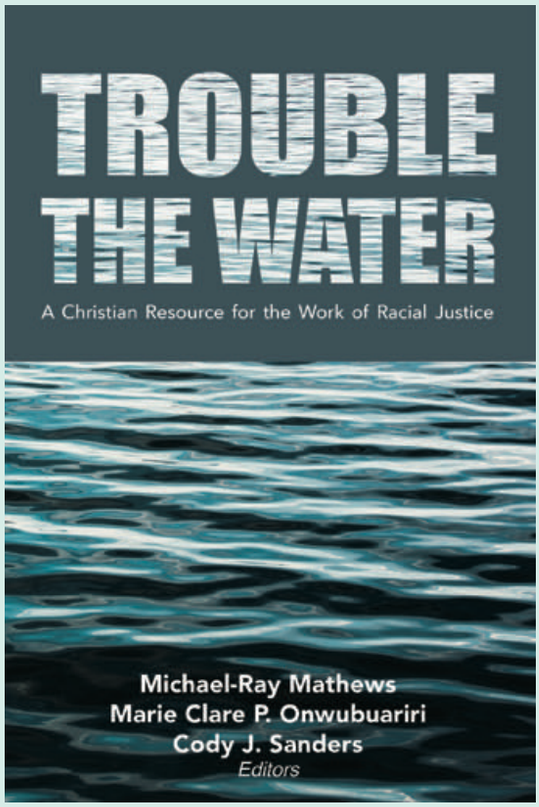

Trouble the Water: A Christian Resource for the Work of Racial Justice is the comprehensive work of three editors and 25 experienced contributors addressing the thinking and doing of racial justice.

Available now at nurturingfaith.net