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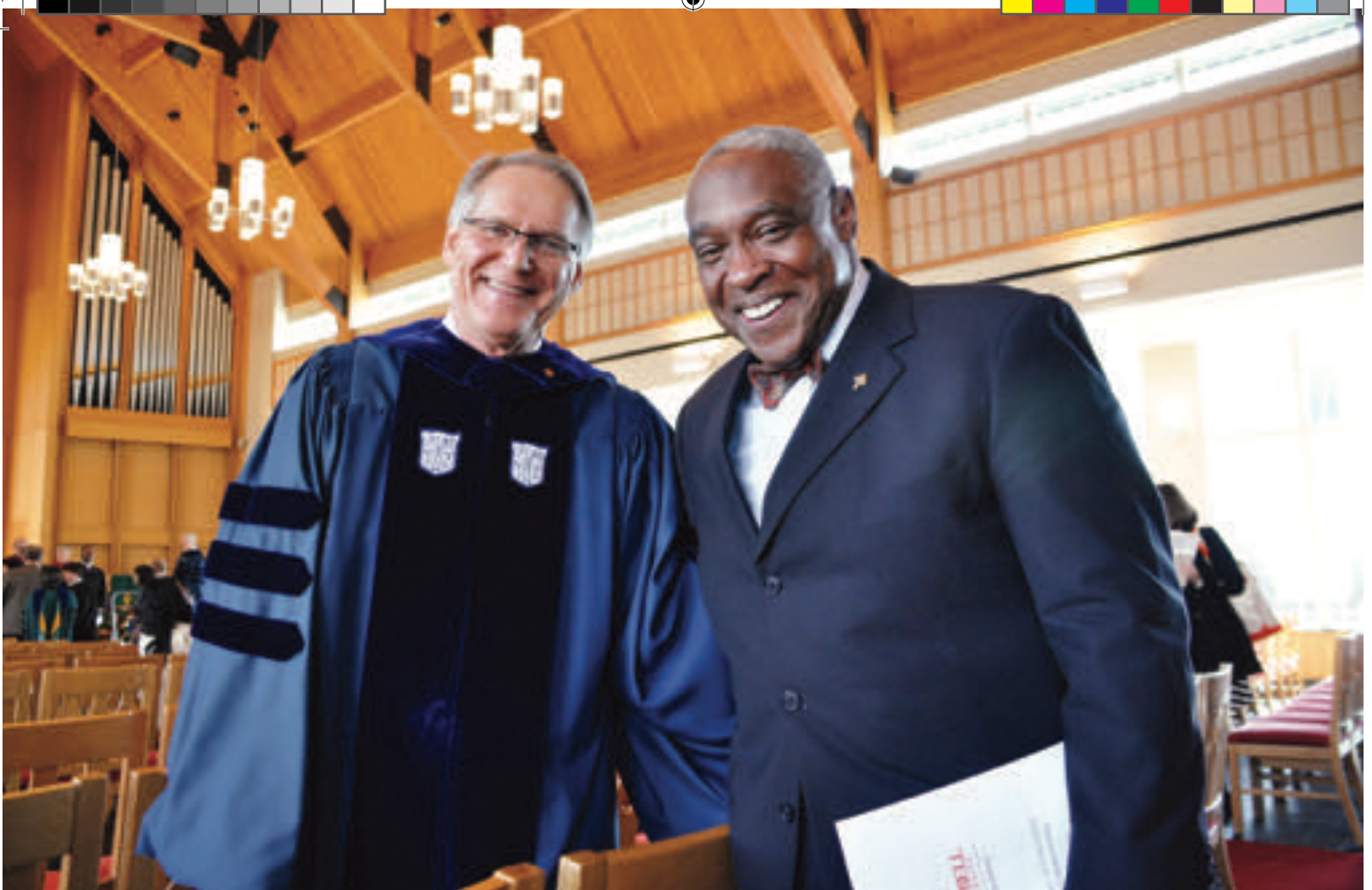
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Cover photo by John D. Pierce. Judge Albert Kirby lives out his mother's wisdom, that "God has given us the resources to think beyond where we are now." Story on page 4.

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Professor Tony Cartledge of Campbell University Divinity School (left) greets Judge Albert Kirby, who took a brief break from his theological studies when appointed to the bench. Photo by John D. Pierce.

God makes up the difference

Faith-lined path leads from abject poverty to historic judgeship

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Judge Albert Kirby grew up “down east” in Clinton, N.C. “We were poor, very poor,” he acknowledged.

His mother, Lu Ellen, “a good seamstress,” would get and repair old clothes from others and buy groceries on credit. She worked hard to provide life’s necessities for her family.

Albert recalled his younger brother Roosevelt asking their mother why she was not eating and hearing her respond, “I’m not hungry, sweetie.”

Albert said he and each of his four siblings kept their worn clothes wrapped in a sheet in case the rent came up short and they had to move quickly.

NO PITY

While Albert remembers seeing the ground through old wooden flooring and finding the water piped to the house frozen in the winter, he puts more emphasis on the lessons learned from hardship.

Such an upbringing “shapes who we are,” he said. “God has a way of teaching us from it.”

His mother, he said, ensured that they had the right perspective on life.

“There was never any pity or anger — no feeling sorry,” he recalled. “My mother would say, ‘You work as hard as you can and ask God to make up the difference.’”

Those instructive words motivated Albert through childhood and youth, and

onto Wake Forest University where he was a star football player and excellent student. Such discipline led him to law school at Campbell University and much later in life to the divinity school there.

After a stellar, 32-year legal career, serving many residents of his hometown, he was appointed late last year by North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper to serve as Senior Resident Superior Court Judge — the first African American to hold that post in District 4A.

INVESTITURE

On Jan. 22 of this year, Judge Kirby took the oath of office — with his ailing mother holding the Bible on which he was sworn in. It was an emotional moment, he confessed.

His mother had left the hospital in a wheelchair after telling her physician: “Fix me up! I’m going to my boy’s swearing in!”

The courthouse was filled with friends black and white, old and new. And Judge Kirby didn’t miss the chance to thank all who had invested in his life — especially his dear mother.

“This is your day, Mama,” he said. “This is your reward for all the times you did not eat so we could.”

Emotions were also stirred in that Judge Kirby was filling the unexpired term of a mentor, Doug Parsons, who had died unexpectedly.

Also in attendance were faculty and classmates from Campbell University Divinity School where Judge Kirby was enrolled. He had finished three semesters before taking a break this spring term to give fuller attention to his judgeship.

But he assured his Campbell friends that he’ll be back to complete his Master of Divinity degree — another gift for his mother, along with training for his growing role as a lay minister.

UPBRINGING

The challenges of childhood were compounded by his father’s addiction and abuse, said Judge Kirby, who was named for his dad, a World War II veteran.

“My dad dealt with alcoholism,” he said. “It was awful when he was in the clutches of it.”

Judge Kirby said that his father, Albert D. Kirby Sr., was delivered from that ailment 20 years before his death. But much damage was done to the family beforehand.

“We’d pick up and move because we couldn’t make rent,” said Albert who learned both his mother’s work ethic and her positive outlook.

“She’d say, ‘God has given us the resources to think beyond where we are now.’”

Albert took that advice, acknowledging: “I’d just pray, and somehow God would answer.” And he always looked, prayed and worked toward a hopeful future.

Faith was more than platitudes for the Kirbys. “We never missed church,” he said.

Such faithfulness often required a five-

mile walk each way to Red Hill Missionary Baptist Church — a rural congregation started by his great grandfather in an old mule stable.

FOOTBALL

In addition to being a good student and hard worker in his youth, Albert was an all-state running back who was highly recruited. “Football was my refuge,” he said.

He accepted a scholarship offer from Wake Forest University — thanks to the urging of two alumni: his high school coach, Bobby Robinson, and a local surgeon named Walter Kitchen.

“College athletics teaches you a great deal about life — such as determination,” said Judge Kirby.

Such determination pushed Albert to excel on the field of play and in his studies. He had to get permission to take a heavier class load than his teammates — in order to graduate in four years without taking summer classes.

Summers called for returning home to work in the tobacco fields or textile mill “to help my mom.”

Returning to Clinton during a break, Albert mentioned to Dr. Kitchen that a dorm at Wake Forest was named for Thurman D. Kitchen, and asked, “You know about him?”

“I know a lot about him,” said the doctor, adding that the elder Kitchen was a former Wake Forest president and his father.

Albert studied history and philosophy at Wake Forest, which “was challenging,” he said. And for the first three seasons of football, he admitted: “We were awful.”

During his senior season of 1979, however, under Coach John Mackovic, the Demon Deacons lost just two games — defeating North Carolina, Virginia Tech, Georgia and Auburn among others.

Albert’s success led him to spend two years seeking to make a career in football, but a knee injury in his final college game — the Tangerine Bowl — impeded his plans. So he enrolled in law school at Campbell University.

“I always had a feeling that I would be a lawyer, but didn’t think I was smart enough,” Judge Kirby recalled.

However, he excelled in the law school classroom as he’d done at Wake Forest while continuing to scrape up the money needed to stay enrolled. He recalled a time when funds didn’t match the cost and he decided to take a break.

But his mother said, “Go see that nice Mr. Wiggins first.”

When Albert explained his situation to then-president Norman Wiggins, also a lawyer, there was no question about continuing. President Wiggins, noting Albert’s excellent work, told him to finish law school and pay the college back for any remaining costs.

CALLING

While Judge Kirby’s successes would make any parent or grandparent proud, he sensed a calling late in life to pursue theological education — hearing both a sense of God’s urging as well as the voice of his late grandmother who used to say, “Junior is going to be a preacher.”

At first, Albert said he dismissed her comments. Yet his response that he was going to be a lawyer didn’t fully satisfy her — or, eventually, him.

“You can go to law school,” he recalled his grandmother saying. “But you’re going to preach.”

He asked his devout grandmother, who died just shy of age 100, to pray at the dedication of his new law office in 1991. She didn’t miss the public opportunity to utter unto God and in the hearing of others: “Lord, he can practice law, but he’s going to preach.”

His later-in-life preparation to dispense grace as well as law has some family roots as well.

“My great-grandmother was a preacher,” he said, “although they called her a ‘missionary.’”

This second calling surprised him, said Judge Kirby.

“I started getting these moments when I was overwhelmed by what I think now was the Holy Spirit,” he recalled. “I found myself in tears and just shouting, ‘Thank you, Jesus!’”

With a smile, he added: “And I could see my grandmother just as clear as day.”

NEW PATH

After following his pastor's advice to "feel out" what God might be calling him to do, Albert visited the divinity school, founded in 1995, at his law school alma mater.

"When I came here to visit, I knew I needed to be here," he said of Campbell University Divinity School.

He speaks highly of his professors and classmates, and assures them: "I'm coming back when I get my footing."

While Judge Kirby loves his divinity school classes and opportunities to preach in various churches on Sundays, his strongest weekly commitment is to Bible study time with his mother on Saturday evenings.

"If I'm not there by 6:30, she starts calling," he said with a laugh.

And he has to be careful about bringing too much of his seminary education with him. "One day I read from the NSRV and she wanted the KJV."

Albert said the Bible app on his phone allowed for a quick change in translations. However, he noted that his mother is a flexible person, willing to learn and change.

VOCATION

The dual callings to law and ministry have become a comfortable mix for Judge Kirby. While the two professions have distinctive

roles, they also have complementary ones, he said.

"I never sought to be rich and famous practicing law," he said, "but to solve a legal problem and get someone out of a mess."

When accomplished, "It's priceless," he said. "And I get the same feeling when someone says a sermon was meant for them."

Being a judge, he added, opens up opportunities for service to others. And, in both roles, he carries with him some good advice.

"My mother and others taught me to be nice to people even if you have to be stern," he said. "That's the kind of judge I am."

His first day on the bench was "surreal," he confessed. He began humbly by telling the clerks, "Please bear with me."

Arrogance has no place in law or ministry, he affirmed.

"I've never been conceited enough to think I'm all-powerful and can do whatever I want," he continued. "It's the people's court."

Following his appointment, a newspaper editor asked Judge Kirby about how American assurances of separation of church and state can co-exist with his calling to ministry. Judge Kirby responded with Jesus' words in Matt. 22:21 — "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

"I can follow the rules that are North Carolina laws and at the same time keep my basic Christian values," said Judge Kirby.

Since his job title assumes judgment, Judge Kirby noted "there is discretion when giving mercy and punishment."

He describes himself as a conservative judge when a repeated offender is unwilling to learn from his or her poor choices. In such cases, he said, "mercy is diminished."

"But, to be fair, people make mistakes," he added. "I do have a heart, and believe in giving people second chances."

Sometimes the judge's role is to give guidance to those who've run afoul of the law.

"I thought when I came back to Campbell for divinity school, God wanted me to do counseling," said Judge Kirby, reflectively. "I didn't think God would have me on the bench doing that."

He recalled his first day as a judge telling a young man that heroin had gotten him into this mess and that he needed to figure out how to make sure this never happens again.

Judge Kirby knows that words are often not enough. So he looks forward to creating programs for young offenders — some of whom excuse their behavior due to growing up poor.

The judge has a quick response: "Tell me about it!"

"I'm in a good position to do that," said Judge Kirby. "A lot of these young people are African Americans with similar backgrounds to mine."

"I can deal with them from a perspective of firsthand knowledge," he continued. "And I pray that my life will be an example that there are better alternatives to drugs and crime."

INFLUENCES

Judge Kirby points to the many positive influences on his life — from his mother and other family members, to coaches, ministers, mentors, classmates and colleagues.

"I consider myself the luckiest person on earth," said Judge Kirby. "God has put good people in my life of all races."

Now he senses being put in his current places of influence in order to serve as an example to others. **NFJ**



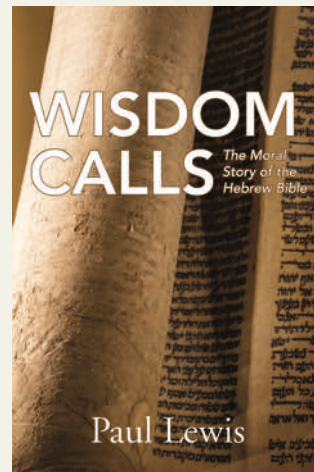
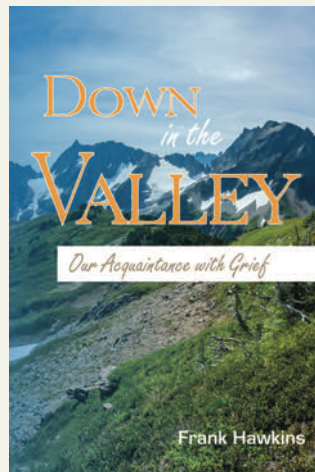
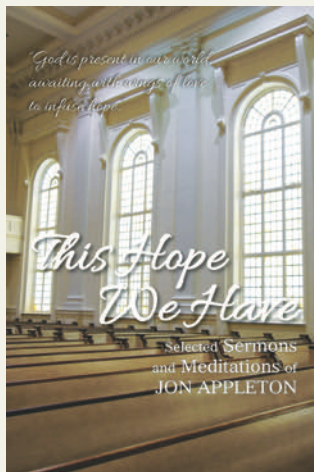
Albert Kirby is sworn in as Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, the first African American to hold that district post, with his hand on the Bible held by his mother Lu Ellen.

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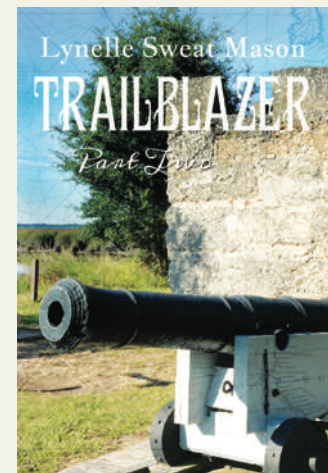
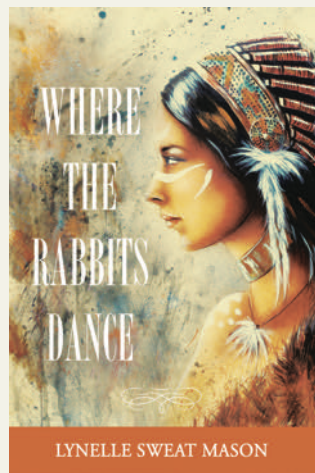
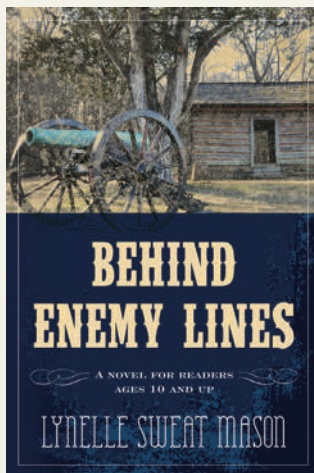
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Worth Repeating

“Much of Christianity over the centuries, perhaps especially in the United States, has been much too other-worldly and much too individualistic.”

Leroy Seat of Liberty, Mo., a blogger and retired missionary to Japan

“Thoughts and prayers’ has reached that full semantic satiation.”

CNN digital writer A.J. Willingham on the phenomenon in which an overused word or phrase loses its meaning

“Don’t ever be ashamed to ask for help.”

Veteran pastor Greg Rogers of Oakmont Baptist Church in Greenville, N.C., in his charge to students at Campbell University Divinity School

“If reading a verse of the Bible causes you to hate, judge, ostracize, demean or treat another human being as less than human, then you are reading the Bible wrong.”

Pastor Jim Dant in a sermon at First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C.

“If we’re not Good Samaritans yet, we’re at least a little better Samaritans.”

Suzii Paynter, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, on collaborative efforts to deal with clergy sexual abuse (*Baptist Standard*)

“It appears that Americans who see God as wrathful are quicker to support policies which seek an eye-for-an-eye outcome.”

Baylor sociology professor Paul Froese, reporting findings from the study “God, Party and the Poor,” published in *Sociological Forum* (EurekAlert!)

“What we are seeing is a hollow core in evangelical faith as practiced by its leaders.”

Juan Williams, political analyst for Fox News, writing an opinion piece for *The Hill*

“Whether it was connecting with my family in the Deep South or reaching the newly converted in sub-Saharan Africa, [Billy] Graham took his crusades wherever people had ears to hear. More than a few Cold War hawks complained when that mission carried him to the Soviet Union seeking spiritual detente with communist leaders. But Graham ignored his critics. He believed the unbelievers of Moscow needed the gospel just as much as any Baptist in Miami or Meridian.”

Joe Scarborough, former Republican congressman from Florida and host of “Morning Joe” on MSNBC (*Washington Post*)

“[Billy Graham] told me about one of the Bible’s most fundamental lessons: One should strive to be better, but we’re all sinners who earn God’s love not through our good deeds, but through [God’s] grace. It was a profound concept, one I did not fully grasp that day. But Billy had planted a seed. His thoughtful explanation made the soil less hard, the brambles less thick.”

President George W. Bush, paying tribute to the famed evangelist who died Feb. 21 at age 99 (*The Wall Street Journal*)

“American evangelicals might look to *Black Panther* as a starting point for dialogue and reflection as they increasingly address concerns about diversity, reconciliation, and representation in their churches and the church at large.”

Esau McCaulley, who teaches New Testament and early Christianity at Northeastern Seminary, on the blockbuster movie (*Christianity Today*)

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Reducing people to an issue adds to their abuse

By John D. Pierce

To alert observers of the swirling world of American evangelical Christianity, it comes as no surprise that we are witnessing or engaging in the ongoing debate over biblical understandings of homosexuality and gender identity.

The topic — after years of attempts to tamp it down to avoid division — keeps bubbling up like a well-pressured geyser that refuses to remain calm.

Even best attempts to address these disagreements in constructive ways don't provide a fully satisfying approach as strong emotions and opposing arguments continue to arise.

The fast-growing cultural (and legal) move toward full acceptance of LGBTQ persons ensures a continuing engagement with this matter. And, as with previous social change, it is likely that the church will trail several steps behind.

While individual Christians, congregations and other groups continue to address this controversial and often divisive matter, there is one specific concern that needs primary attention. It is simply that this debate is about more than an issue: it affects people.

To deny LGBTQ persons full inclusion in the church, and/or to portray them as being in a condemned state of sinfulness unlike the rest of us, is not a matter of simple disagreement as over theories of creation or end times.

To reduce people to an “issue” is to add to their abuse. It is the further oppression of real people who have long been abused in the name of God.

Let me be clear: There is room for doctrinal disagreement. There is no place, however, for not acknowledging and responding compassionately to LGBTQ persons as our friends, our relatives, our fellow church members and sometimes ourselves. To treat these persons as an

“issue” is to mistreat them.

Any doctrinal position (or personal opinion) that directly harms other people deserves a greater level of concern and re-evaluation. And indeed the long-term condemnation of persons with same-sex attraction is most harmful — leading to compounded depression, isolation, and much too often to suicide.

To say, “I'm just not there yet,” or “That's not how I read the Bible,” or more arrogantly, “The Bible is clear on this issue,” may convey one's honest feelings or convictions. But such affirmations are at odds with Christ-like sensitivities if devoid of clear acknowledgments that the resulting restrictions of such convictions tragically affect real people.

Real people! People who love Jesus, who want to live in loving relationships and in Christian community, who want to use their gifts and to follow their divine calling, as much as any of us who've felt the tug of God's Spirit within our lives.

American Christianity has not done well in relating to LGBTQ persons — including the many within our families and families of faith. Struggling young persons have been subjected to dangerous “conversion therapies,” based on the false notion that one's sexual orientation or identity could be changed through psychotherapy or prayer.

Hordes of preachers portray sexual orientation as a mere choice — although these heterosexual critics have yet to identify the moments in which they made such choices.

With the rise of the misnamed “Moral Majority” in the 1980s, the original Jerry Falwell produced vicious videos that stereotyped gay and lesbian persons as vulgar,

promiscuous and predatory — with a so-called “agenda” of wrecking families.

Then when gay and lesbian Christians began to come out, saying and showing that they were unlike those stereotypes, but rather devout followers of Christ who sought simply to engage fully in Christian community and have their committed, monogamous relationships blessed, the church's loud response — again and again — was, “No! You can't do that!”

Today, as we discover more of these persons in our families and churches and elsewhere, there is less stereotyping of LGBTQ persons as aggressive recruiters of some “lifestyle” or “agenda.” Yet softer condemnation and limited exclusion are painful enough.

“This might hurt less,” is not a very Christian response when relief of such pain is within our realm.

Whether one stands in support, opposition or indifference, Christian compassion requires attention to the impact on real people — and the resulting carnage that will be discovered when looking back at such a time. Any belief that results in exclusion is more than a simple issue of doctrinal diversity.

Putting people first may feel like a compromise of conviction to some. But it sure seemed to be the priority of Jesus.

Evidence is abundant that the church is moving on this issue — though at a slower pace than society at large, as has been the case with other issues of equality and acceptance. Critics push back on comparisons to biblically justified discrimination against African Americans and women. But there is one clear common thread:

Each case involved/involves people declared to be less worthy of the church's full embrace and the opportunity to follow the call of God's Spirit on their lives. Real people. Good people. Children of God. **NFJ**



Rain & change

A conversation with singer/songwriter Ken Medema

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

For decades musician Ken Medema has moved audiences toward meaningful worship, thoughtful reflection and a lived-out faith with a wide embrace. His music comforts the weary while challenging the self-satisfaction of a too-comfortable faith.

Year after year, Ken continues to create new musical vehicles to carry his message and mission with freshness and hope. Such is the case with his newest release, *Nothing Like the Rain*, now available as a CD or as a USB download at kenmedema.com.

This project was some 12 to 13 years in the making, said Ken. Demos of numerous songs were considered before settling on “the ones that work.”

Nurturing Faith Journal editor John Pierce talked with Ken about this new project. The following conversation is adapted from that interview.

NFJ: Well, I detected some reflections on aging — along with some nostalgia — in this CD. In the song “Ocean Beach,” for example, you have lines such as, “For these are my best days,” and “...to love and to learn what I could not yesterday.” How so? What do maturity and experience offer us?

KM: I’m now 74 years old. And I see people around me who are settling into retirement and narrowing their field of interest, sometimes settling into complacency. I don’t want to do that. I want new adventures. I’m always interested in new discoveries.

Actually, the song “Ocean Beach” was

occasioned by walking through the streets of San Francisco where I lived for about 30 of my California years.

I lived right in the Haight-Ashbury District where all the hippie action was happening in the late ’60s and ’70s. When I moved there it was still a very exciting place. I would walk those streets, and I loved the environment with all the music and the noise and the crazy people and the coffeehouses.

When we moved to the suburbs, now six years ago, I was restless for the city. I felt like something wonderful had come to an end. And I asked myself, “How will you deal with this new world — this new reality?”

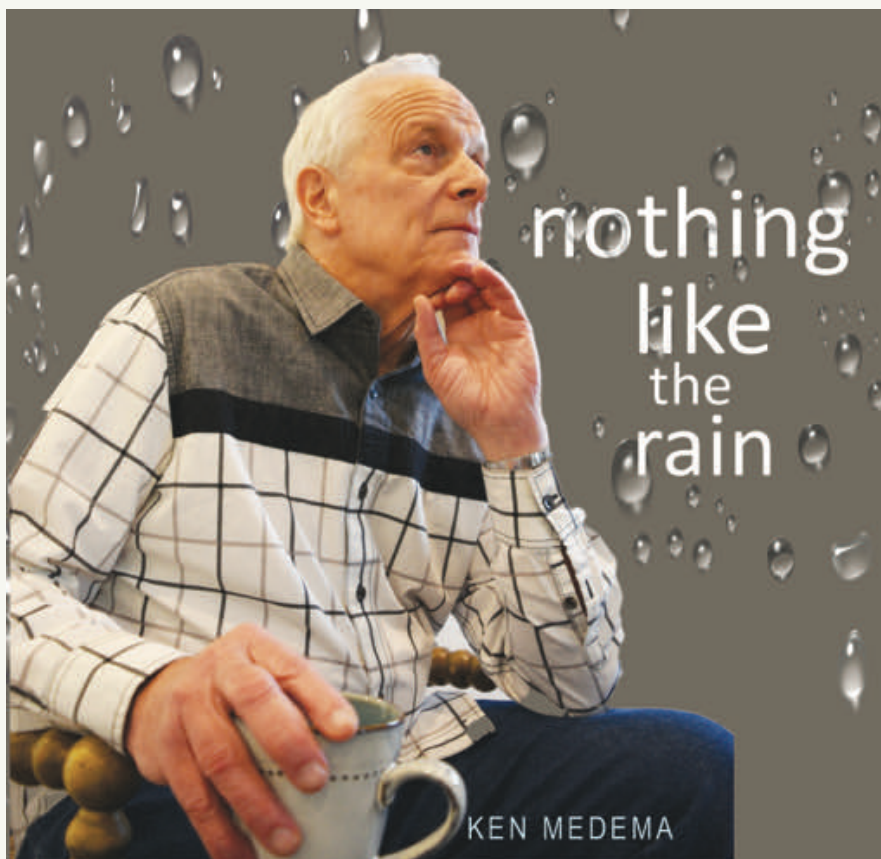
And the answer had to be, “You’ll find things about this life and this stage that are exciting to you — that give you joy and pleasure.” So I look for those things. I look for them every day.

I don’t always find them. I’m still restless in the suburbs. I wish I could simply walk down Haight Street into a coffeehouse where a bunch of young people carry on some crazy conversation. But I don’t live there. So I need to find the things that give me pleasure where I am.

And I hope that by the age of 74 I have gotten a bit of wisdom. I’m not the brash, angry young man that I was in my 30s and early 40s.

I hope, however, that my passion for justice, and my passion for doing right, and my passion for God have not faded. I hope I can say things a little more wisely and feel a little wiser about stuff.

NFJ: Picking up on what you just said about social justice, you’ve never let listeners get by with detaching faith from the biblical call to justice and equality. In “Have A Blessed Day,” for example, you connect that popular expression to Jesus’ Beatitudes. What are you hearing in the word “blessed” that goes beyond a mere greeting or “secret code,” as you noted in the song?



KM: When I hear people say, “Have a blessed day,” I think what they are saying without saying it directly is, “Hey, I’m a Christian,” and maybe, “Are you one too?”

I’ve never really ever asked anyone about that. I don’t think people necessarily do it consciously, but it’s sort of a way of identifying yourself as a religious person, as a Christian. “Have a blessed day!”

Or when you ask people how they are, and they say, “Oh, I’m blessed.” Well, they probably are. We all are. But it’s like a little secret code for saying I’m a certain kind of Christian person.

I think we toss that word “blessed” or “blessing” around so lightly. So when I thought about Jesus saying, “Blessed are those who are poor” and “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” I thought, Oh my!

It was like we toss the word “love” around. When you start thinking about what love is — what *agape* is — you realize: I must not be so trivial with language.

So I wanted to take a potshot at the easy way we use the “blessed” word — and also to use the song as a mini-Bible study.

I’ve gotten lots of interesting responses. The first time I played it for a group of friends, one of my pastor friends said, “OK, that’s it. That’s the theology.”

When I do it in concert I get my audience to sing, “Have a blessed day.” And sometimes I say, “OK. Sing it with a little snark in your voice.”

NFJ: In “Nothing Like the Rain” you address a long-standing theological concern: that much Christian teaching still conveys Old Testament concepts of retribution rather than Jesus’ assertion that the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Of course, rain is a good metaphor, for it is welcomed in times of drought and wildfires, yet is devastating during floods and mudslides. How do you see Jesus’ words relating to our reality that sometimes life’s experiences don’t live up to our hopeful expectations, yet at other times overwhelm us with goodness beyond our expectations?

KM: I don’t have any objection to people praying for rain or relief from the cold or for sunshine. I don’t mind that. What I do mind is the thought of praying for rain because *my* crops need rain — although

somebody else may be decimated by that rain and somebody’s house might fall into the bay because of a rockslide.

These natural things — rain, snow and sunshine — happen. I would rather pray with a sense of awe when I reflect on nature and what nature does. Also to have a sense of concern in trying to preserve whatever we can of the environment. Also praying with a sense of asking for courage and appreciation and wisdom to deal with whatever natural phenomenon I may face.

That’s why I told the three different stories in the song: about a woman who faced a minor irritation when caught in the rain, a guy whose house is decimated by the rain and an Australian worker on a cattle station who is thrilled when the rain comes. We all have different reactions.

I’m one of billions on this earth who need to deal with rain — some of whom will be glad and some of whom will be sad. So I think my best prayer is, “Give me a sense of appreciation of the human family, realizing some people are loving this rain and some people are weeping because of it.”

And the same thing with all of these natural phenomena, like cold. I may be glad that it’s not 20 below zero. There are other situations on this earth where cold is needed. So I want to have a sense of connection to all of God’s creation — so that I’m grateful for things like rain and sunshine and snow — even when I suffer.

Good things and bad things happen to all people. That’s just the way the world works. I don’t know that I believe God chooses somebody like, “You know, that’s one of my best players so I think I’ll give you the rain.” No, I think God is so much larger and so much more inclusive than that.

NFJ: It’s often said that if you have to explain a joke, then it is not a joke. I guess the same could be said of a song. However, sometimes context helps. So, where did the song “Space Between” come from — and why is such space needed?

KM: I’m a part of a group that leads a retreat in the summer for church musicians. One of the things we do is to try to help people find space to reflect and to contemplate, and to find time to be silent and to be alone — time away from the rush and rumble of life.

There is a poem we always read called “Fire” by Judy Brown. It begins, “What makes a fire burn is space between the logs, a breathing space.”

If you pile the logs on the fire too tightly, they can’t get air and the fire will be choked out. There has to be space between the logs — space to breathe.

Then she makes the point that if we pile too much of even good things on ourselves, we choke out life. There has to be empty space in between all these good things we do.

People have responded so emotionally to that poem every year. They just sigh and say, “Yes, I want to find that space.”

So, having reflected on that poem, and in realizing the way it has made me think about my life, I thought, “You’ve got to put this to music.”

NFJ: With all the convenient technology that connects us constantly, it is easy to just work and interact all the time unless we are intentional about creating such space.

KM: What we say at the retreat to these ministers of music is that you can’t change that, but you can get to work 10 minutes early, sit in your car and close your eyes and breathe deeply.

Turn your mind off just briefly. Take a few minutes to be silent and appreciate life before you go dashing into work. People react to that. They say taking such time changes the whole aspect of what they do. It’s a good lesson.

NFJ: Another theme I detected is the acknowledgement of ongoing change, and the choice of facing it with faith over fear. Is that accurate? If so, does resurrecting the song “There’s a Turning” from decades ago address that concern?

KM: Oh, yes. The first reason we brought back “There’s a Turning” has to do with what’s happening in the country.

There is great darkness when lying becomes an everyday occurrence, when all the social structures we thought we knew are being turned upside down, when Washington is more divided than before, when people in the country are more divided, and maliciousness springs forth and white supremacists march in cities and racial

tension is higher than it's been in years.

That's the kind of turning that makes me frightened in a way. Yet at the same time I hold hope in this craziness, this uncertainty, this disorder, this chaos, because people are doing good things.

I get word every day about people who are doing good, loving and caring things. So I have to hold to the hope that there's something beyond this. This is not the end of it all.

Martin Luther King Jr. said: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." I've got to believe that. I believe there is more than this chaos — that somehow we will come out of this with a new vision. The world has done it before.

So that's why I brought this song out. And the fact that I'm singing it as a duet with an African-American friend [Cynthia Wilson], for me, is significant. The notion that black folks and white folks can do things together, even if it's just a duet.

NFJ: In "The Real Thing," you are clearly calling for authentic Christian community at a time when many churches and organizations are creating litmus tests for inclusion or exclusion that Jesus would

not recognize. Any reflections or added background you might offer regarding that song?

KM: Communities of faith are tearing themselves apart over issues that for some people seem so drastically important — issues of theology and doctrine, and who's in and who's out.

In my experience over the last 10 to 15 years, the churches that seem most vital and are showing the most excitement and the obvious fruit of the Spirit — now, this is my observation only — are churches that are open to all people; that welcome people no matter who they are.

That's where I see the energy: people being joyful and not ridden with conflict, people who are living and loving their faith — living wide and living deep. When I see the Christian community tearing itself apart over these theological issues I just feel like there needs to be room for people to be together and to disagree.

I'll tell you this about Baptists. I remember when a Baptist association came together because the churches were united in mission. They didn't necessarily have the same doctrine. There were liberals, conservatives

and churches in the middle, but they came together because of a passion for mission. Now it seems that groups of churches come together because they have a particular, very specifically narrow theological orientation.

I find that regrettable, and I'd like to see it changed. I'd like to see there be room for disagreement, but passion about loving and caring for people and bringing the good news everywhere.

NFJ: Well, we didn't hit on everything on this CD. Anything else you'd like say about this project or your music overall?

KM: My favorite moment on the CD is on the last song, "The Song is Alive." The words are, "The song is alive everywhere, and blessed are the ones who get to give the pitch."

I think that's my perception of the Christian community. God's song is alive everywhere, and our delight — our task — is to recognize it, point it out and say, "Here's how we can start singing it!"

What a great sense of the task of the church: to recognize God's song and be able to say everywhere, "We can help you get the first note." That's my favorite moment. **NFJ**

New releases from Nurturing Faith

After 37 years as a neurologist, Bill Holmes attended divinity school and then served as a pastor and hospital chaplain. From his experiences in medicine and ministry, and from his own journey through cancers and heart surgery, he shares thoughts and essays "from the bedside — a metaphor for sitting down, leaning in, and listening to those affected by the unimaginable, no matter what the setting."

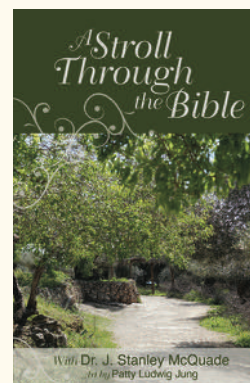
Writing from a pastoral viewpoint to those impacted by health and well-being concerns — and those who care for them — Holmes addresses issues such as faith, doubt, hope, prayer, miracles, major illness, disabilities, trauma, social injustices, etc.



Philosopher-physician-law professor-minister Stanley McQuade loves the Bible and wants to introduce some of his favorite stories and passages to a generation of adults and young people who, as he says, "have missed out on the ability to read the Bible for themselves."

He invites readers to join him on "a stroll through the Bible," believing that "sooner or later, if we are listening with our heart and seeking to order our lives by it, we are no longer getting into the Bible; the Bible is getting into us."

McQuade hopes that those on the "stroll" may come to love the Bible, live by it, and incorporate it into their lives.



Orders: books.nurturingfaith.net / (478) 301-5655

GREAT NEW TITLES!

PATRIARCHS, MATRIARCHS AND ANARCHS

Few parts of the Bible have occasioned as much interest and commentary as Genesis 12–50. Traditionally called the “Patriarchal History,” some scholars now refer to these accounts as “Stories of the Ancestors.”

In his newest addition to the Nurturing Faith Bible Study Series, Tony Cartledge considers the roles of both patriarchs and matriarchs as players in the story of the promise — and how both could also act as anarchs whose actions seemed to threaten the promise, but were ultimately woven into the complex tapestry of Israel’s many-layered story of origins.

In 13 studies designed for group or individual study, Cartledge digs into the purpose of the people who remembered them and the writers who compiled them, hoping to discover what they want us to learn.

Becoming Jestina

Sixteen-year-old Jessie Thompson reluctantly moves with her mother and sister to Savannah, Ga., to work as a welder on Liberty Ships during World War II.

Her main goal is to survive long enough to return to Alabama and finish high school. But will she be able to survive when tragedy strikes and she has to learn how to “weld” her life back together amid the uncertainties of war?

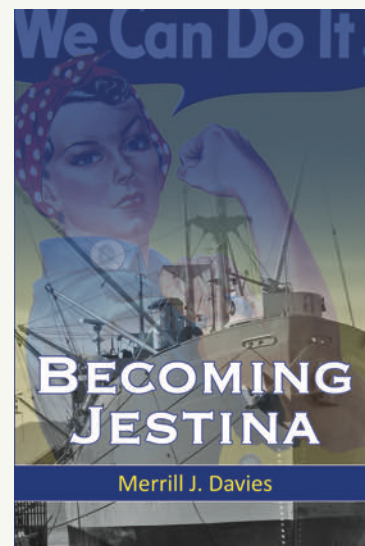
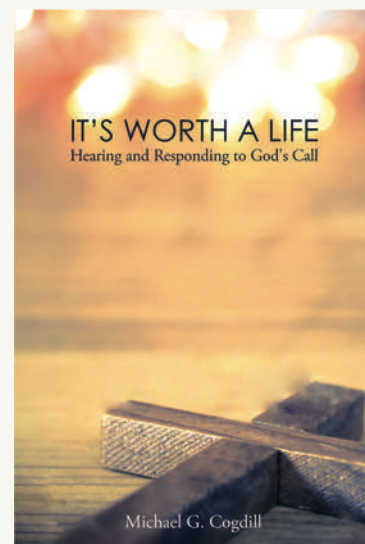
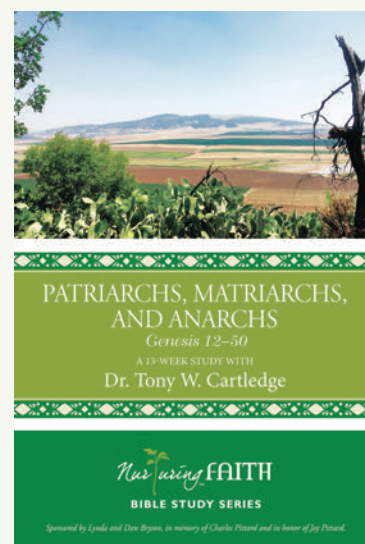
In this delightful read for both adults and teenagers, Merrill Davies explores the role of “Rosie the Riveter” through the journey of outspoken Jestina in her quest for equal employment opportunities and as she seeks to deserve the characteristics implied in her name (“just and upright”) and to prepare for a profession of helping others.

It’s Worth a Life

From his years as a preacher, pastor, and seminary dean, Michael Cogdill shares his personal conviction that “it is worth a life” to answer God’s call, whether to vocational or lay ministry. He invites readers to examine God’s call, including how and when God calls, and to discover differences and similarities in God’s call relative to his own call and that of others.

Cogdill’s work can provide a starting point for students beginning their theological education or preparing for church ministry and for lay readers who feel called to some form of non-ordained ministry or service.

Professors, pastors, ministers and mentors will also find it to be a valuable resource to share with persons seeking their wisdom and counsel relative to God’s call.



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Something good is always growing at Nurturing Faith!



DIG A LITTLE DEEPER IN 2018

Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge are scholarly yet applicable weekly lessons inside this journal with free teaching resources (video overview, lesson plans and more) online at nurturingfaith.net. Get your class started by calling (478) 301-5655.

Easter: Keeping Close

May 6
John 15:9-17
Real Love

May 13
John 17:6-19
Questions of Belonging

May 20
John 15:26-16:15
Goodbye, and Hello

Season After Pentecost

*The Perils of
Pauline ... Thinking*

May 27
Romans 8:12-17
In the Flesh, of the Spirit

June 3
2 Corinthians 4:5-12
Treasure Sharing

June 10
2 Corinthians 4:13-5:5
We Don't Lose Heart

June 17
2 Corinthians 5:6-17
By Faith, Not Sight

June 24
2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Living Oxymorons

July 1
2 Corinthians 8:1-15
Motivating Generosity

July 8
2 Corinthians 12:2-10
Heavenly Secrets and
Earthly Thorns

A Prophetic Interlude

July 15
Amos 7:7-15
Walking the Line

July 22
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Bad Shepherds and Good

Not Your Ordinary Rabbi

July 29
John 6:1-21
He Did *What?*

August 5
John 6:22-35
Straight Talk

August 12
John 6:35-51
Living Bread

August 19
John 6:51-58
Offensive Language

August 26
John 6:56-69
When It's Hard to Believe

Doing, and Being

September 2
Deuteronomy 4:1-15
Following Through

September 9
Psalm 146
Trusting God

September 16
Isaiah 50:4-9
Standing Firm

September 23
Psalm 1
Living Wisely

September 30
Psalm 124
Offering Praise

October 7
Genesis 2:18-24
Being Equal

October 14
Psalm 90
Gaining Perspective

October 21
Isaiah 53:4-12
Redeeming Love

October 28
Jeremiah 31:7-9
Saving Grace

November 4
Deuteronomy 6:1-9
Remembering Always

November 11
1 Kings 17:8-16
Doing Faith

November 18
1 Samuel 2:1-10
Singing Joy

November 25
Daniel 7:1-14
Dreaming Hope

Advent: Someone's Coming

December 2
Luke 21:25-36
Coming to Reign

December 9
Malachi 3:1-4
Coming to Judge

December 16
Isaiah 12:1-6
Coming to Save

December 23
Hebrews 10:1-10
Coming to Sanctify

Christmas

December 30
Colossians 3:12-17
All in the Name of Jesus



Ringling the bell for freedom

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

The shiny bell in my home study is beautiful in appearance and sound. But it is more than that: It is gift that reminds me to be bold in “ringing the bell for freedom” — as I was charged by the generous man who gave it to me.

David M. Smith of Houston, Texas, reminded me of no one I’ve ever known. He was as unique and enjoyable as they come.

He and his wife Charis lived on a tree-lined street beside Rice University — where he faithfully jogged mile after mile for years. My visits there always brought great stories, welcomed encouragement and generous support.

For several years David was a much-appreciated member of the Board of Directors of Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith, who understood the importance of free expression, and a free church in a free nation. And he was dependably eager to help.

His creative mind was always at work. A graduate of the University of Texas and an Army veteran, David’s broad entrepreneurship led to the founding of two petrochemical companies and other ventures.

He loved God, family, nation and his faith community — South Main Baptist Church in Houston. And he loved bells!

That love he traced to the time his father sent him on a mission to find a dinner bell for the ranch. David was intrigued by the craftsmanship involved — a curiosity that led him to collect and to cast many bells over his lifetime.

His love of freedom and love of bells came together in one ringing idea. He



David Smith was a graduate of the University of Texas and an Army veteran whose entrepreneurship led to several creative ventures. He loved God, family, nation and his faith community — South Main Baptist Church in Houston. And he loved bells!

would cast and mount beautiful bells to give on occasion to those he considered faithful in standing up and speaking out for liberty and justice for all.

It was an expression of his belief in American ideals — and the important contribution of early Baptists to full, unfettered religious liberty for all.

So the time he shipped that 30+-pound bell to a Board meeting in Birmingham and gave it to me was one of surprise and gratitude. But it was also a charge — a reminder to never cower in silence when a word of

hope, freedom, justice and truth needs to be spoken.

After a battle with Alzheimer’s, David died on Nov. 19, 2017 at age 85. My prayers for comfort, hope and peace continue for Charis and their sons David and Douglas, and other family members.

As I pass through my study each morning now, that beautiful bell has even more meaning. Even its silence causes me to thank God for the enriching life of David Smith and to recommit myself to sounding out freedom and justice for yet another day. **NFJ**

This I Know

Author/pastor Jim Dant offers brief, biblical defense for LGBTQ Christians

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

No issue impacts congregational and denominational life today more than how to include or exclude LGBTQ persons. Some churches and Christian organizations try to ignore the subject to avoid division — but it doesn't go away.

Highly conservative persons and groups solidly condemn same-sex relationships as sin and make no space for such persons or for any new light on the subject. Some liberal faith traditions are welcoming, affirming and inclusive of LGBTQ persons.

However, many Christians struggle to find a way to respond with a desire to be both biblically faithful and deeply compassionate — especially when a beloved family member expresses both same-sex orientation and deep devotion to Christ.

Fewer and less-direct Bible verses exist for addressing this issue than the numerous ones used to claim biblical justification for slavery and the subjugation of women. Yet these few so-called “clobber verses” used to condemn LGBTQ persons are often applied with little regard for the text or context.

In a pastoral response to LGBTQ Christians, and those seeking to affirm them compassionately, pastor Jim Dant of First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., has written a brief, but not shallow, “survival manual” that digs into the biblical case.

This I Know: A Simple Biblical Defense for LGBTQ Christians is now available — in print or digital download — from Nurturing Faith. Sales of the book have been swift through online orders (nurturingfaith.net), coast-to-coast book signings and events where Jim has spoken on this topic of great interest.

For pricing on bulk sales of 10 or more



books, please contact Julie Steele at jsteele@nurturingfaith.net.

The following conversation between the author and *Nurturing Faith Journal* editor John Pierce gives insights into the book's origin and purpose, and the author's approach.

NFJ: Even before the book was published, many people were saying: “This is really needed.” What void does it fill?

JD: There are a lot of good books out there that delve deeply into the theology and language of the biblical verses cited to condemn homosexuality. But most are relatively thick, necessarily scholarly and loaded with footnotes.

What I kept hearing from the average person in the pew, and in LGBTQ support groups and gatherings, was: “We need something short, pocket-sized and simple. Those who stand against us speak in bumper-sticker phrases that we need to be able to counter and combat.”

So I resisted the temptation to write for my seminary professors and chose to write for that 22-year-old lesbian in the pew who hasn't been to seminary, as well as for the lifetime Baptist grandmother who is trying to reconcile her love for her gay son with these select Bible verses. It is a short, simple, credible theology for the average person.

NFJ: How much did this book come out of your pastoral experiences?

JD: The whole book was birthed out of pastoral experience. On one level, the book is a pastoral response to LGBTQ persons who need to validate — with a credible understanding of scripture — their faith practice and experience.

It is also a response to friends and family of LGBTQ Christians who desire to defend the persons they love. And it is truly an attempt to help the faithful who oppose the inclusion of LGBTQ persons to understand the Bible differently. It is pastoral in that it addresses the needs of these audiences.

At another level, each brief chapter is divided into four sections: the challenge posed to LGBTQ persons, the “bumper-sticker” response to the challenge, a short theological explanation of the response, and finally a section I call “Just for Fun.”

This final section of each chapter is an anecdote from a real conversation I’ve had with regard to that chapter’s challenge. It was shaped in pastoral conversation.

NFJ: Your congregation hosted the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus last year. It was widely hailed as a significant spiritual experience for many. How so?

JD: Anytime we face and overcome our fears it is a significant moment. The San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus (SFGMC) and our congregation both had to acknowledge and overcome fears to make this event happen.

The church had fears around community reaction, and the SFGMC just feared Baptists in the South. At the core of all these fears — in my estimation — is the fear of rejection: by our communities, by each other — and perhaps by God?

Overcoming fear is exhilarating. It’s also a significant moment when reconciliation is achieved.

We had no idea how many would be in the congregation that evening. I met with the chorus in our fellowship hall about an hour before the concert. One member asked how many we expected to attend.

I was honest. I told them there may be only about 100 in the sanctuary or it could be filled to its capacity of 1,400. I was expecting something comfortably in between.

When we entered the sanctuary an hour later, it was filled to capacity. Chairs had been brought in, and people were standing at the walls. The congregation rose for a standing ovation as the SFGMC entered the room.

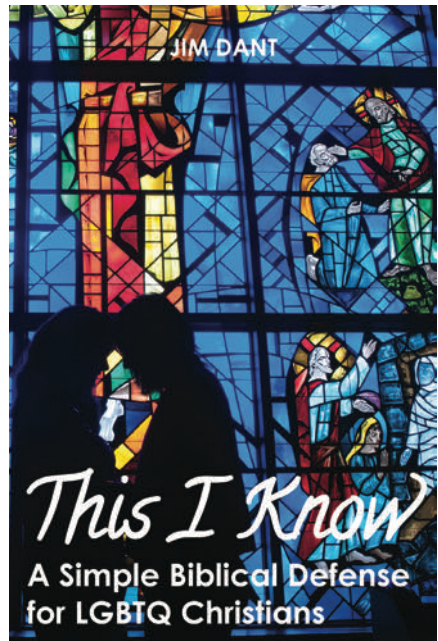
The chorus members began crying. The congregation cried too. And the concert hadn’t begun yet. It was a moment of unplanned, Holy Spirit reconciliation.

And finally, the concert itself was rich in content. No limit was put on the choir. They did pop tunes (like “Celebrate” and

“The Age of Aquarius”), sacred music (like “Amazing Grace” and “Nearer My God to Thee”), and a couple of drag/LGBTQ satire tunes (“Patsy Cline” and “Color Out of Colorado”).

A testimony was shared by Dr. Tim Seelig, artistic director for the chorus, who has written the foreword for the book based on that experience.

In essence, we cried and laughed and listened together. As one parishioner put it,



**GET A BOOK;
MEET THE AUTHOR**

FREE SIGNED COPIES of *This I Know: A Simple Biblical Defense for LGBTQ Christians* by Jim Dant will be given to the first 1,000 persons to stop by the Nurturing Faith exhibit in the Gathering Place during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, June 13-15, at the Hyatt Regency in Dallas, Texas. Designated times for meeting the author and receiving complementary, signed copies — thanks to generous donors — will be posted at the Nurturing Faith exhibit.

Please stop by!

it was the closest thing to a revival he had been to in decades.

NFJ: What approach do you take to the Bible in this book — and does Jesus, who often gets ignored in the Christian debate over LGBTQ persons, make an appearance?

JD: I truly believe I am more “conservative” in my interpretation of scripture than my so-called conservative critics. I take seriously the culture, language and theological context in which the text was written. I fight hard against the contemporary cultural influences that might taint my reading of texts.

The average reader takes great liberty with the text when they simply read a verse in its 21st-century translation and apply present political and social understandings to those words. Marriage in the 21st century is nothing like marital structures in earlier centuries.

Verses that most persons quote in opposition to homosexuality had nothing to do with consensual same-sex relationships between adults during biblical times. Even the present use of the word “abomination” (hear this with all the angry, red-faced preacher connotations you can put on it) is far from the meaning of the word in Levitical law.

I approach the Bible with an honest and serious eye toward a historically accurate interpretation. But, just as important, I approach the Bible with the need for theological consistency.

Put simply, I’ve never understood how some Christians align their self-righteous, judgmental, hate-filled rhetoric with the person of Jesus and the unconditional, unending, boundless reach of God’s love and grace.

Or how Christians who believe they are “saved by grace” suddenly impose “law” on other persons. It just isn’t a theologically consistent reading and application of the biblical text.

So, yes, Jesus appears in the book, and I hope readers begin to reshape and understand their views of God through the person of Jesus — and that we all deal with some very telling words of Jesus. **NFJ**

The Mission of the Church

By John R. Franke

In considering the mission of the church in relation to the mission of God (discussed in the March/April issue) we return to John 20:21-23: “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

Here the disciples, representing the church, are sent into the world by Jesus after the pattern by which the Father sent the Son. In short, they are called to continue his work. In the same way the church is called to continue the mission of the Son in the world.

The close and indissoluble link between the mission of the Son and the mission of the church is established here in two ways. First, by the gift of the promised Spirit who had anointed Jesus for his mission at his baptism in the Jordan, now this same Spirit will guide and empower the church as it continues the mission of Jesus.

Second, it is established by Jesus, entrusting to the church the authority that was central to his mission: the authority to forgive sins. The idea being communicated in this scene is not simply the commonplace idea that God forgives sin, though that is certainly true.

Rather, as the well-known missionary-theologian Lesslie Newbigin has stated, it is the specific commission to do something that needs to be done in the world and will otherwise not be done, namely “to bring the forgiveness of God to actual men and women in their concrete situations in the only way that it can be done so long as we are in the flesh — by the word and act and gesture of another human being.”

It is the particular and concrete forgiveness of sins that makes possible the gift

of God’s peace. The restoration of peace or *shalom*, the all-embracing blessing of the God of Israel and Jesus Christ, may be the most simple, compelling and comprehensive way of articulating the content of the commission given to the church here.

It is the focus of the initial word of Jesus to his disciples: “Peace be with you.” This peace that Jesus speaks to his disciples here is one of the most central elements of the presence of God’s kingdom in the created order and perhaps its most telling mark.

The church is a movement sent into the world by God through Jesus Christ to live out in its own life the gift of God’s peace the life of the world. The church is, therefore, not simply to proclaim the kingdom but to bear in its own life the reality and presence of the kingdom in the midst of the present world. Hence, the mission of the church encompasses both the character of its internal communal life as well as its external activities in the world.

This comprehensive vision of the mission of the church, the reason for which it was sent into the world, is captured in the earliest Christian writings by the apostle Paul who, according to New Testament scholar Michael Gorman, “wanted the communities he addressed not merely to *believe* the gospel but to *become* the gospel, and in so doing to participate in the very life and mission of God.”

From this perspective the gospel is both a message to be proclaimed — the good news that in Jesus Christ God is liberating the world from the powers of sin and death and reconciling human beings with

God, each other, and the whole of creation in order to establish *shalom* in the cosmos — and a way of life in the world that provisionally demonstrates this announced reality in the present even as it anticipates its coming eschatological fullness.

The church is the gathered community of the followers of Jesus Christ who believe in this good news and are prepared to live by it. In the words of South African missiologist David Bosch, mission is the participation of the church in the mission of God made known in Jesus Christ, “wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.”

This community is sent into the world by the triune God for the purpose of bearing witness to the gospel as a sign, an instrument, and a foretaste of the kingdom of God. In the next three issues, I will consider each of these aspects of the church’s mission. **NFJ**

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



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Making our moments count

As a mom, there have been moments when I truly wanted to stop time. Moments so special and so sacred, I didn't want them to end.

Moments where the slight weight of my newborn daughter was cradled in my arms and the moonlight drifted through the cracks in the blinds providing the softest glow on her baby skin. Moments where I tickled my rascal of a little boy until his eyes shone with pure joy and delight, as we both rolled on the floor, laughing uncontrollably.

During those moments I wanted to press a pause button, to hold time back, to stop it long enough to take the moment in, but in deference to my wishes, it ticked steadily forward.

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about time and how short life is.

Sometimes I look into the eyes of my grandmother and reflect on the fact that years ago she was a young girl riding her bike and playing in the dirt. I look at her and know she was once a teenager excited to be going on a date with a young man.

I see her and realize that there was a time as a young woman when she was getting married, having babies and chasing children. I look into her eyes and understand there were years spent throwing balls, helping with homework and cooking supper.

I look at her and wonder, did she ever think it would go by so fast?

You hear people say all the time, "Cherish every moment," but honestly, I'm not so sure that should be our primary goal. Certainly, we should cherish our moments, but perhaps an even greater aspiration is to make our moments count.

This sounds like a lofty pursuit doesn't it? Can we really make our moments count?

We can if our primary purpose in life is not our own pursuits, but rather God's mission. We've got to figure out what really matters along this journey, and I'm thinking it is probably not what we often imagine it to be.

Think about it. How often do we pursue one more purchase for our too-stuffed houses and our too-stuffed closets, all while there is one more child in need of food or clothes?

How often do we cram one more activity into our too-crammed schedules, while one more person sits alone in the nursing home, and one more sick friend silently waits alone in the waiting room?

How often do we pursue one more vacation, one more dollar and one more retirement account all in the quest for the abundant life, while one more soul, desperately in need of light and hope, sinks further down into darkness?

Perhaps an abundant life is exactly the opposite of what we often envision. What if abundance is a life of giving away rather than collecting more, a life of denying self

and accepting others, a life of loving God but even more importantly, sharing God's love with each person we meet?

The fourth chapter of the book of James reminds us that our life is "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." So why do we spend so much of our time chasing after stuff rather than chasing after God?

I want my life to count for something; something deeper than myself, my work and my stuff. I want it to count for something bigger than my small world. A life lived for God is truly the only way to an abundant life.

The time will fly. If we are blessed with a long life, we will look back and wonder how the time went by so quickly. And all of the "things" that seem so important now will be mere shadows in the distance slowly fading from view.

The questions will remain: What did we do with the time that was entrusted to us? Who did we serve along our way? Who did we help? Who did we love? Did we shine the light of Jesus into the darkness of this world?

I don't really think we need time to slow down. I don't think we need it to stop. I think we simply need to make what time we have count. **NFJ**

—Ginger Hughes is the wife of a pastor, a mother of two and an accountant living in the foothills of North Carolina. Her blogging for *Nurturing Faith* is sponsored by a gift from First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga. Additional writings may be found at nomamasperfect.com.



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Stop making sense

By Brett Younger

“I can listen to the news while I brush my teeth.”

“I can get the reading done on the way there.”

“I was going to eat lunch at my desk again, but this Lean Cuisine lasagna takes nine minutes! Nine minutes!”

Efficiency is ruining our lives, and we are always looking for more of it.

What will I do during my child's haircut? I could send texts that will get me out of conversations. I could use the new app that promises I will never have to speak to a bank teller again. I could listen to the first two minutes of the podcast I said I would listen to.

We are constantly figuring out the fastest way to get somewhere — Google Maps, Apple Maps, Waze. God forbid we spend three extra minutes getting somewhere.

If our phone counts the number of steps we take, then we feel like we have to carry our phone whenever we take a step. If we are going to spend more than \$50, we have to Google the best deal. Before we go to a movie, we have to check the score on *Rotten Tomatoes*. As we read bedtime stories to our child, we skip unnecessary paragraphs.

Every day is an exercise in logic. Efficiency is a way of life. We have found more efficient ways to do almost everything — electric toothbrushes, electric razors, driverless cars. Buying a Big Mac is simpler than cooking a hamburger on the grill. Permanent press makes all kinds of sense. We find one pair of shoes we like and order multiple pairs online. We may never go into a shoe store again.

Why spend an hour making dinner when we could microwave lasagna in nine minutes? Why vacuum when we can check

our email as the Rumba wanders around the living room?

What do we lose when we do only what is most efficient? What are we doing with the time we are saving? Do the Amish have a point?

How long will it be before we live like “The Jetsons” — calling for Rosie the robot maid to bring our coffee and Astro the robot dog to fetch our slippers? We just need more moving sidewalks.

Our commitment to convenience keeps us from thinking about what we really want. When we have a dishwasher, washing dishes by hand feels silly — even if we like washing dishes. We ignore what is best in favor of what is easiest, but the fastest way to get where we are going may not be the best way to get there. When we let efficiency decide what we do, we no longer decide what we do.

Sometimes, instead of reading *The Wall Street Journal*, we need to read poetry. Instead of telling our child to hurry up, we need to slow down. Instead of making a list of things to do, we need to make a list of things to see.



Sometimes we need to ignore what is efficient and do what is fun. Take the scenic route. Eat a Moon Pie. Grow flowers. Sit on the grass. Play the guitar. Write a letter.

Go to a school play. Tell someone that you love them. Listen to music — and not the music we play when we want people to think we have good taste — the music that makes us smile. Go to lunch with a friend. Read an extra story — even if it goes five minutes past bedtime.

My doctor looked at the scale and asked, “How much are you exercising?”

Lying to your doctor is like lying to your mother — she knows.

“I run a little, jog really, saunter.”

“Where do you run?”

“Down the street, across the bridge, to the park and back.”

“Your knees are getting older. You need to start running on a treadmill. It's more efficient.”

I think about my doctor as I jog across the Brooklyn Bridge. It has to be better for me to see the world at five miles an hour than to spend another hour running in place. I am confident that I will not come to the end of my life and say, “I wish I had been more efficient.” **NFJ**

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

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Nurturing FAITH™

LESSONS FOR
MAY / JUNE 2018

BIBLE STUDIES



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

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Adult teaching plans by **David Woody**, Minister of Faith Development at Providence Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C., are available at nurturingfaith.net



Youth teaching plans by **Jeremy Colliver**, Minister to Families with Youth at Smoke Rise Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, Ga., are available at nurturingfaith.net.

Scripture citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.

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Thanks, sponsors! These Bible studies for adults and youth are sponsored through generous gifts from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation. Thank you!



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*


May 6, 2018

John 15:9-17

Real Love

Sometimes we speak of “friends in high places,” and there are times when it is nice to have them. A little extra pull from a well-placed friend can help us get a job, or a promotion, or a free ticket to the ball game. Sometimes we may feel a little bit of the honor and recognition given to such friends spilling over onto us, and it boosts our own sense of self-worth.

Love abides (vv. 9-11)

Our text for the day reminds us that we have a friend in the highest place of all, for Jesus said to his followers, “I have called you friends” (v. 15). 

Can you imagine that? Jesus wants more from our relationship than lordship: he wants to think of us as friends. In Christ, we have a friend in the highest place of all, but life is not lived out on that high plane. We all, like country singer Garth Brooks, need friends in *low* places. We need friends in the same places we find ourselves. We need shining faces about us, with arms attached. We need someone to pat us on the back when we succeed, and to lift up our chin when we fail.

Some people may think they can go it alone, but Jesus knew that we

John 15:12 –

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

need friends. We need friends when we face change. We need friends when we fail. We need friends when we grow. But as much as we need to have friends, we need to *be* a friend to others – including those who are in low places. Indeed, that’s when they need us most.

Jesus understood that. After all, he had chosen disciples who were rather nondescript, rough characters. Several were fishermen. One was a tax collector who worked for the Romans. Another was a revolutionary from Galilee. The disciples were not the *crème de la crème* of first century Palestine.

But that wasn’t all. Jesus spent time with lepers, willing to touch the untouchables. He had at least one female friend with a shady reputation, and he went to dinner parties with people who drank too much.

The religious leaders didn’t care for Jesus’ taste in friends, but his mission was not about pleasing the pious: he was looking for people who needed God’s love. “As the father has loved me, so I have loved you,” Jesus said to his disciples: “abide in my love” (v. 9).

The word “abide” is a clue that this passage is an extension of Jesus’ talk about the vine and the branches in vv. 1-8. He calls disciples to a mutual relationship that results in good fruit.

Love is both a component and a result of abiding in Christ, who said


“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (v. 10).

Keeping close to Christ, holding tight to his love, also produces the fruit of joy. Jesus went on to remark, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (v. 11).

Has love ever brought you joy? Of course it has. When we’re in a low place, the loving care of another can lift us up. When we’re in a good place and extend a hand to someone in need, the experience brings joy to the both of us.

Love gives (vv. 12-14)

If the key to abiding in Christ is to keep his commandments, it would be helpful to know what those commandments are. Fortunately, Jesus did not keep the disciples in suspense: “This is my commandment,” he said: “that you love one another as I have loved you” (v. 12). Jesus was speaking of something far deeper than a mushy sentiment. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends,” he said (v. 13), and “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (v. 14).

Let’s get this straight: We become friends of Jesus by following his commands, and his main command is to love each other the way he loved us, and the measure of true love is the willingness to die for someone else? 

That sounds a bit extreme. Still, isn’t that what sacrificial love is all about? The author has Jesus consistently use cognates of the word *agapē*,


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which was used in Christian circles to mean unselfish, self-sacrificing, Jesus-kind-of love. To love is to be willing to put the needs and wants of others before our own – becoming “other” centered rather than “me” centered.

A true friend is willing to give of himself or herself for another. It’s true that we can stretch that to an unhealthy point, because if we don’t give attention to our own well-being, we won’t be much good to ourselves or to anyone else. But we don’t need all of our time and energy to nurture ourselves. Others need part of us, too.

One way to tell real friends is to know that when we need them, we can call them, and they will be there. They don’t ask a lot of questions. They don’t put us off. They don’t put a guilt trip on us for causing them trouble. They are there not just because we need them, but because they want to be there. 

**Love doesn’t hold back
(vv. 15-17)**

To be a friend is to be honest and to be open, to be unafraid to let someone else know who we really are. It means that we don’t hold things back in order to preserve some kind of power over the other person.

Jesus said “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you *friends*, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (v. 15). Jesus modeled what it meant to share of himself with the disciples, even when they were not good at returning his love.

This verse is even more jarring when we realize that the word translated as “servants” normally meant “slaves.” Jesus doesn’t want to think of us as servants or slaves who are

down on another level, left out of the loop: he wants us to be friends.

It is relatively easy to share our strengths with others, and to share the positive things that are taking place. It can be more difficult to share bad news, or to confess our weaknesses. On several occasions, Jesus told the disciples what would happen to him when they got to Jerusalem. They did not want to hear it or believe it. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to come be with him as he prayed. He poured out his fears and his weakness, but they could not stay awake to hear his pain or to share his burdens.

When we are transparent with our friends, they know that we trust them. This leaves us vulnerable. Some people may not keep our trust. That is a part of the risk of friendship. Jesus himself was betrayed, perhaps in part because he was open enough to share himself and his plans with the disciples. We know of that possibility, and that is one reason it is hard for us to be true friends. It is hard to trust, but it is a risk worth taking.

Perhaps you have heard what is often described as an old Arab saying (I can’t find the original source) that goes like this: “A friend is one to whom we may pour out all the contents of our hearts, chaff and grain together, knowing that the gentlest of hands will take and sift it, keep what is worth keeping, and with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.”

True friendships are mutual. Jesus reminded the disciples that he chose us first to be friends, friends who would go out and bear “fruit that will last” (v. 16). Sometimes we may take the initiative in building relationships. At other times, someone else takes the first step. It is especially gratifying – especially for shy people – to have someone else


reach out first. That is what Jesus did for us. “We love him,” the author of 1 John says, “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Jesus loved us first, whether we love him in return or not: but friendship is a two-way street. Whether we want to be friends with God or with others, we must choose to reciprocate. True friendships are not one-sided or lop-sided, but mutual.

It is not always easy to love one another, even when we are friends. Maybe that is why the author has Jesus repeat himself. He had already said “This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you” (v. 12). He went on to remind us that we express our friendship to him by obeying his commands (v. 14). Then, in v. 17 he closed the conversation with similar words: “I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

Whether we think of friends in high places or low, real friendship works in both directions. We love one another, and in so doing we fulfill the command of Christ.

The result of such friendship, according to Jesus, is that our lives will be more abundant and fruitful. Knowing Jesus and loving as he loved will not only change our lives, but also empower us to make a difference in others’ lives. When we practice more loving living, others are drawn to us like moths to a porch light. And when our love is based on Christ’s love, then others will be drawn to meet the One who has made all the difference in our lives.

It is mind-boggling to think of Jesus as our friend – a friend who reminds us that the great joy of life is found in discovering what it means to be friends together in the family of God, especially in the low places where life is lived.  NFJ



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

May 13, 2018

John 17:6-19

Questions of Belonging

Do you like it when others pray for you – in your presence – or does it make you uncomfortable? In 26 years as a pastor, visiting in both hospitals and homes, I learned that many parishioners long for prayer and find it comforting, especially in times of sickness or trial. Others accepted the offer of prayer with less enthusiasm, suggesting a level of discomfort. In such cases, my prayer would be short and to the point.

Can you imagine being in the physical presence of Jesus as he prayed for you in somber tones, combining both a request for God's blessing and a reminder of your mission as part of his last farewell? You may feel shivers at the thought – but that is what we find in today's text.

What's yours is mine ... (vv. 6-8)

Texts from the past two weeks have come from what is often called Jesus' "Farewell Discourse" to the disciples (chs. 13–17). Today's text is part of the concluding chapter. It is a lengthy intercession often described as Jesus' "high priestly prayer," which brings together themes from chapters 13–16. Though couching Jesus' words in the form of a prayer, the author has

John 17:10 -

"All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them."

Jesus praying with such confidence that it comes across as more of a proclamation than a petition.

A popular approach to understanding the prayer finds Jesus praying with regard to himself in vv. 1-5, for his present disciples in vv. 6-19, and for future followers in vv. 20-26. Our text comes from the middle and longest part, in which Jesus prayed for the disciples whom he had taught, nurtured, and encouraged for the previous three years.

The prayer is highly personal, yet deeply theological. Jesus began by speaking of himself in the third person (v. 3), but switched to first person in v. 4. Echoing v. 1, Jesus voiced a desire for his return to "glory" in the presence of the Father in v. 5, but then shifted his focus to the puzzled group of disciples who were gathered around him.

When Jesus prayed "I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do" (v. 4), the work he had in mind was not only the final hours to which he was committed, but also the past years of training the disciples: "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world," he said. "They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word" (v. 6).

To "make God's name known" implies a full revelation of God's character, which Jesus had delivered through both his actions and his

words. Earlier, Jesus had declared "I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (15:15b). Jesus didn't keep secrets from his friends: he let them know what God was about.

What did Jesus mean by "They were yours, and you gave them to me"? We should not read this as a reference to predestination or "the elect," as some might surmise, or even to all believers. This part of Jesus' prayer was focused on the disciples, whom God had chosen and "given" to Jesus to learn from him, serve with him, and support him as friends. They had proven faithful in receiving God's teachings through Christ, even to the point of accepting the mind-boggling premise that Jesus had been sent by God into the world (vv. 7-8).

The Gospels often portray the disciples as stubborn, hard-headed, and slow to learn, but they *were* learning, and would continue to grow in understanding. They had taken Jesus' teachings to heart, accepted him as Lord, and "kept his word," seeking to live as he had taught them.


We who call ourselves "Christian" claim to be modern-day disciples. The text challenges us to ask if we have taken Jesus' teachings as seriously. What evidence of that is apparent in the way we follow his word in the conduct of our lives? Does our living bring glory to God?

What's mine is yours ... (vv. 9-11)

With his friends on his mind, Jesus prayed not for the world in general, but for the disciples in particular,

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“asking on their behalf.” The disciples belonged to God, he said, but had been given to him (v. 9). As a result, “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them” (v. 10). 

These verses point to a unity of purpose between God the Father and God the Son. The disciples who followed Jesus “belonged” to one as well as the other. But how could Jesus have been glorified through them?

The claim sounds more prophetic than present. The disciples were still unsure of themselves, and they would appear even more uncertain and afraid in the coming days, but Jesus knew that Pentecost, as well as the crucifixion and resurrection, was coming. The Spirit would empower the disciples, and they would be faithful in taking what they had learned from Jesus and spreading that gospel message so others could come to experience God and to have eternal life. In this, Jesus’ direct prayer for the disciples was indirectly a prayer for all who would benefit from their ministry.

Although Jesus remained present with his disciples as he offered this prayer, he knew that their time together would soon come to an end. Having made a final commitment to his coming passion, Jesus spoke as if he had left already: “And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you” (v. 11a). The disciples would be left behind, so Jesus prayed for the Father to protect them – not only from danger or threats from the outside, but from potential divisiveness that might hinder their mission: “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (v. 11b).


If the church was to grow in health and number, the disciples would need to be unified in their message and their

mission. This is the heart of Jesus’ prayer: that his followers be one with each other, and one with him.

Set apart, and sent (vv. 12-19)

Jesus spoke of how he had protected the disciples while he was with them, preserving all but Judas, “the one destined to be lost” (v. 12). That he had done so “in your name” is yet another indication of the unity between the Father and the Son. Perhaps Jesus wanted the disciples to hear him praying for them: speaking these things “in the world” was to speak them in their presence, “so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves” (v. 13).

Jesus went on to acknowledge that the disciples would face opposition from the world – to the point of experiencing hatred – “because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (vv. 14, 16). How could that be?

Those who followed Jesus no longer had their identity and values determined or shaped by the world. Unlike Jesus, however, though they no longer belonged to the world, they would be in the world for some time yet. Jesus did not ask that the disciples be granted supernatural security from human opponents, but from evil influences that could disrupt their unity and impair their mission (v. 15). 

Following Jesus brings no guarantee of safety from harm: indeed, Jesus fully expected that many of his followers would suffer for his sake. He prayed for the Father to “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (v. 17).

What was that about? The word translated as “sanctify” could also be rendered “consecrate” or even “make holy,” but what it really means is “to set apart.” That’s what the concept of

holiness means in both the Old and New Testaments: to be set apart for God’s purposes.

The disciples were to be *in* the world, while also being set apart *from* the world – and what set them apart was that they had learned the truth of what Jesus taught them and they lived in it: recall Jesus’ earlier statement that “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (8:32).

The disciples may have been tempted to retreat from the world and celebrate their knowledge of the truth in a cloistered Christian community, but Jesus wanted them out in the world, threats and all. “As you have sent me into the world,” Jesus prayed, so “I have sent them into the world” (v. 18). Jesus’ followers, like Jesus himself (v. 19), were set apart, and sent.

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

Is it any wonder that Jesus’ primary prayer for the disciples was “that they may be one” as they recognized their role as set-apart believers, sent into the world? Surely believers could profit from praying for and actively working toward Christian unity, not only in our congregations, but also in our broader communities. Too many of us, for too long, have accepted racial lines, denominational divides, and ethnic exclusivism as par for the course, though they are bound to hinder Christ’s mission in the world.

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

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

May 20, 2018

John 15:26–16:15

Goodbye, and Hello

Have you ever moved away from friends that you really loved? Whether as parent or child, it can be hard. In earlier days, people promised to write letters to each other. When the telephone came along, they promised to call. Today we can stay in constant touch through text, email, or video applications on our digital devices.

Our text for today finds Jesus and his disciples in the process of saying goodbye at a time when none of our modern communications options were available.

The setting is their last supper together, and the mood is somber. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels devote only a few descriptive verses to this last meal shared by Jesus and his closest disciples, John devotes five lengthy chapters to it (13–17), focusing on Jesus' final words and instructions to his followers, and his compassionate prayer for them.

In 14:15-31, Jesus promised his heartbroken friends that he would not leave them comfortless and alone, but would send the Holy Spirit to live in their hearts and lives. He referred to the Spirit as the "Advocate" (NRSV, NEB, JB), though other translations use terms such as "Comforter" (KJV),

John 16:7 –

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

"Counselor" (NIV), or "Helper" (NASB, Williams).

These are all attempts to translate the Greek term *paraklētos* – sometimes transliterated as "Paraclete." The word could be used to describe a defense counselor or legal advocate, but more commonly referred to a helper or intercessor. Literally, the Greek term describes "one who is called alongside," with the assumption being that the purpose of calling is to provide assistance.

Jesus promised his friends that they would not be alone or out of communication with him. He did not promise to write them letters, or to call them on the phone, or to organize a Google Hangout. He promised them something better, but also something they could not begin to understand. He promised that his Spirit would come to dwell in them, help them, empower them, teach them, and guide them.

The Spirit's witness (15:26-16:4a)

Emphasizing Jesus' promise of the Spirit is appropriate for Pentecost Sunday. After introducing the Spirit (14:15-31), Jesus went on to describe his relationship with believers through the metaphor of the vine and the branches (15:1-17), and to discuss the world's mutual hatred for him and those who follow him (15:18-25). In

the light of this frightening prospect, Jesus returned to the subject of the Spirit. His disciples would be sent out to work in an unfriendly world, but they would not be alone.


"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning" (15:26-27). In both 14:17 and 15:26, the "Advocate" is also called the "Spirit of truth." The Spirit would speak God's truth to the disciples, and through them, to the world.

The Spirit would testify to the disciples on Jesus' behalf, but the disciples were then to testify to the world. They had a special role to play because only they had been with Jesus from the beginning. Their words would carry special power. Their testimony was irreplaceable. The Spirit could reveal truths to others, but only those first followers could say "I saw it with my own eyes," "I heard Jesus say this with my own ears," "I was with him from the start."

As they went forth to preach God's truth and build the church, they would encounter one danger after another. According to the author of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus predicted that they would be thrown out of synagogues that once welcomed them. Religious leaders, threatened by the change they were preaching, would seek to have them killed – and think they were doing God's work by purging the world of heresy (16:1-4a). Perhaps Jesus wanted them to know these things ahead of time, so they would never think that he had forsaken them.

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He did not promise to protect them from all suffering, but through the presence of his Spirit, Jesus promised to be with them in the midst of their coming ordeals. 

The Spirit's purpose (16:4b-7)

"I did not tell you these things at the beginning," Jesus said, "because I was with you." When Jesus was present in the flesh, the twelve were not in need of the Spirit. But now Jesus was leaving the physical world, and they would need to understand how he would continue to be present through the Spirit.

A curious line in 16:5 has Jesus saying: "But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" This seems odd because, earlier in the conversation, Peter had pointedly asked "Where are you going?" (13:36), and Thomas had implied the same question (14:5). Jesus had said he was going to the Father, but with little explanation. Now, however, the disciples were too overcome with sadness to ask any more (16:6). Jesus appeared concerned that they were too distressed to grasp the Spirit's promised role.

Jesus argued that it was actually to the disciples' advantage for him to go away. In the flesh, he could only be present in one place at a time, but the Spirit could be at work among all believers. Jesus had to depart physically before he could return spiritually: "... if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (16:7).

The Spirit's work (16:8-11)

One aspect of the Spirit's work would be focused on the world. "And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness

and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned" (16:8-11).

What this means is not self-evident, but here is one attempt to understand it. First of all, the people of the world who do not believe in Christ do not accept the seriousness of their wicked ways, but the Spirit would convict them of their sin.

Secondly, those who ridiculed Christ on the cross considered him to be a sinner, believing that no righteous man would be crucified like that. But, Jesus could not "go to the Father" unless he was indeed righteous, and his Spirit would convict the world of this truth. Thus, the world would come to know true righteousness.

Finally, many people in the world have no concern about eternal judgment. They either think it will not happen, or they feel confident that their good works outweigh the bad, so that they will pass muster. But Jesus insisted that judgment has already begun: "the ruler of this world has been condemned." In Jesus' death and resurrection, the power of evil was broken, and Jesus emerged victorious (12:31-32). The Spirit would demonstrate this truth to the world.

The Spirit's truth (16:12-15)

The Spirit would reveal many other truths, as well: "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..." (16:12-13a).

This is a powerful and important verse. The word and the teaching of Christ did not cease when Christ ascended. The work of the Spirit is not only external, in the world, but also


internal, in the believer.

One way to think of this is that we regard the New Testament writers as being inspired by the Spirit of God, and thus incorporating the teaching of Christ. But Christ's teaching goes beyond this. As long as the Spirit lives in the hearts and minds of God's people, Christ will continue to speak. Revelation is not static: God's last word has not been spoken.

Jesus had revealed much, but also acknowledged that there were things the disciples could not yet bear, or didn't need to know at that moment. They could be confident that the Spirit would reveal God's truth and guidance at the appropriate time. This teaching of the Spirit is at one with Jesus' own teaching and that of the Father:

"[F]or 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 take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (vv. 13b-15).

Trying to comprehend the concept of one God as Father, Son, and Spirit is difficult under any circumstances. Texts such as this emphasize the basic truth: even though God's nature is revealed to us as Creator, Christ, and Spirit, there is a basic unity. The Father's word is Christ's word, and Christ's word is the Spirit's word. God relates to us and speaks to us now through the Spirit who lives in us.

Jesus did not leave the disciples without comfort, and the same promises apply to us. The Spirit has come. We often teach children of faith that "Jesus lives in your heart," and they accept it without even trying to understand it. Adults can also believe that through the presence, the power, and the guiding force of the Spirit, Christ lives in us.  NFJ

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

May 27, 2018

Romans 8:12-17

In the Flesh, of the Spirit

Children often bear a physical likeness to their parents: “She looks just like her mother”; “He got his height from his grandfather.” We know that genetics play a role in physical similarities among family members, but adopted children may also take on noticeable characteristics of their parents. We can see the similarity in their politeness (or lack of it), and sometimes in their general approach to life in general, whether positive or negative.

None of that is surprising, but we also know that children may choose to rebel and try to be everything that their parents are not: they may look like their parents, but not act like them.

Today’s text is from Romans, but follows the theme of living in the Spirit that was introduced in last week’s Pentecost Sunday lesson, in which Jesus told his disciples about the Spirit/Advocate who would come to them. The first Sunday after Pentecost is traditionally observed as “Trinity Sunday,” so it’s not surprising that the chosen text includes references to God as Father, to Christ, and to the Spirit.

The purpose of the text, however, is not to explain the Trinity, but to talk about what it means to be children of God.

Romans 8:13 –

“... for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Children of flesh (vv. 12-13)

Paul’s language may seem strange to us. How often do we use the word “flesh”? The word we are translating here is *sarx*. In the most basic sense, it was the graphic Greek term to describe bodily flesh, though it could be used of the body in general. Paul gave the term a metaphorical sense by applying it to human nature, especially in its negative aspects.

In essence, Paul’s argument is fairly straightforward. He is calling on believers to live a righteous and holy life for the simple reason that they now belong to God, and not to the flesh, or to the world.

It’s easy for us to excuse all kinds of behavior by saying “it’s just human nature,” or “I can’t help myself.” Paul insisted that we are not obligated to follow the weaker or more salacious aspects of human nature: we are not “debtors” to our human condition, “to live according to the flesh” (v. 12). While we are by nature *in* the flesh, we are not obligated to be *of* the flesh by surrendering to every bodily temptation.

Instead, we have an option, and a much better one that we would be wise to choose: “for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (v. 13).

Note that Paul spoke to his readers as “brothers,” in a sense that clearly indicated both brothers and sisters (as in NRSV, NIV 11, NET). Paul recognized that he was in the same boat as other believers, using the pronoun “we” to include himself in the conversation.

Paul knew, as we do, that all of us who live in human skin are destined to die, but he clearly had in mind more than the physical death of the body. We may all succumb in a physical sense, but if we put our trust in God’s Spirit rather than human inclinations, we may live in other ways.

Paul does not spell out what he means by “live.” Our first thought is that he had in mind the promise of a spiritual, eternal life, as in a similar conversation with the Galatians: “If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit you will reap eternal life from the Spirit” (Gal. 6:8).

One could argue that the abundant life we can know in Christ is also qualitatively different than life that is limited to what the world has to offer, but Paul is probably looking toward eternity.

As a former rabbi, Paul may have intentionally called upon the rhetoric of Deuteronomy, where a sermon attributed to Moses includes a similar challenge for the Israelites to choose life and prosperity over death and destruction by loving God and obeying the commandments (Deut. 30:15-20).^U

The admonitions of both Paul and Moses move from life to the promise of an inheritance, but while Israel was promised (through obedience) a land

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to call their home, Christ-followers are promised (through the Spirit) that they will become “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (v. 18).

But what are these “deeds of the body” that Christians must overcome by the Spirit? The word *praxis* simply means “actions” – things that we do. Here Paul uses the word *sōma* for “body” rather than *sarx*, possibly for variety, since *sōma* doesn’t usually carry a negative connotation.

Eating, drinking, sleeping, and working could all qualify as “deeds of the body,” but what Paul has in mind are those actions that feed human desires without thought for whether they are right or cause harm to others.


Only with the Spirit’s help can we “put to death” selfish inclinations that threaten our very lives. We cannot fail to note that Paul was not directing these words as threats to unbelievers: he was writing to the church in Rome. Paul did not subscribe to the all-too-common notion that one could “accept Christ” as a fire insurance policy and then continue to behave as he or she wished. Following Jesus is serious business, and overcoming sin is a task that endures as long as we inhabit our bodies.

Children of God (vv. 14-17)

While those who follow only human desires are doomed to experience only human life, Christ has made possible a better option: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God,” Paul said (v. 14).


Let that soak in. *Children of God*. Paul’s readers would have been familiar with the concept. Greek royals and even renowned philosophers sometimes described themselves as favored sons of a patron god. Paul also used the masculine “sons,” but it is clear that he had in mind all people.

Sometimes, in reflecting a belief in God’s creative activity in the world, we speak of all people as “children of God,” and there is a sense in which that is true – especially for those who are still children! But Paul has a deeper relationship in mind, not determined by our generic humanity, but by our specific choice to follow God’s way, trusting in Jesus and being led by the Spirit.

The ancient mindset posited that the gods had created humans to be their servants, but Paul believed we have a higher calling: “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...” (vv. 15-16). 

Slaves are motivated by fear: the fear of punishment or starvation, the fear of being sold or separated from family, even the fear of death. Christian believers do not relate to God as slaves to their master, but as children to a loving parent.

The Jews of Paul’s day did not call God “Father,” even in prayer, considering such a term far too familiar. In fact, they avoided using God’s name altogether, preferring circumlocutions such as “the Holy One, blessed be he,” or even “the Name.”

It may be hard for us to imagine how radical-sounding it was for Paul to suggest that we can call God not only “Father,” but also “Abba” – an Aramaic term equivalent to “Daddy.” Paul wanted to emphasize how close a relationship we can have with God when we choose to be Spirit-led rather than self-led. 

If we are children of God, Paul went on, then we are also “heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (v. 17a). What does that even mean?

In one sense, it could mean that we experience the glory of God that was lost through sin. Christ knew and experienced God’s glory. In his farewell prayer with and for the disciples, Jesus prayed for the Father to restore to him the glory he had known before (John 17:1, 5).

Elsewhere, Paul often connected our “inheritance” with participation in the kingdom of God, as in 1 Cor. 15:50, where he insisted that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (see also 1 Cor. 6:9-11, Gal. 5:21, Eph. 5:5).

Sharing in Christ’s glory sounds amazing, but if we are to share Christ’s glory, we are also to share in his suffering. We are joint heirs, Paul said, “if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (v. 17b).

What? *Suffer*? If we are to live in Christ, we take the difficult along with the delightful. Suffering was and is an inevitable part of God’s purpose for Christ and the church. Paul told the Philippians “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death” (Phil. 3:10).

Suffering, then, does not indicate defeat, but takes on a positive theological meaning. Here Paul may have in mind more than the persecutions he and others would suffer. He has urged his readers to “put to death” their human desires. Giving up a life dedicated to pleasure may seem like suffering to some, but if one is not willing to resist temptation, how will he or she respond to real trouble?

We close with a reminder that Paul’s call to a family relationship with God offers at least a glimmer of the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **NFJ**



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

New password for online teaching resources is: insight.

June 3, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Treasure Sharing

Have you ever been involved in relationships that could only be described as “complicated”? Perhaps you are part of a blended family that involves two sets of children, four sets of grandparents, ex-spouses, and tension over visitation rights. Maybe your circle of friends or work environment includes people from a variety of ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. Sometimes getting through a week without unwittingly offending someone is difficult.

If you’ve known complicated relationships, perhaps you can have some appreciation for Paul’s predicament as he worked through the years with a church he had helped to found: it wasn’t all cotton candy and pony rides. The church was known to squabble, and Paul’s letters reveal his attempts to help church members keep their mission – and their relationships – on track. Paul believed that how the church related to him and to Christ were two sides of the same coin.

A strategic city

Given that our next six lessons will come from 2 Corinthians, we should develop a good mental picture of ancient Corinth. The city was located on a narrow isthmus connecting

2 Corinthians 4:7 –

“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”

mainland Greece with a large peninsula known as the Peloponnese. This made it an important commercial center, a bustling trade city that controlled two ports. ↓

The Corinth Paul knew was only 100 years old, a Roman metropolis built on the ruins of an ancient Greek city. ↓ The city’s population included present and former slaves, wealthy merchants, shrewd traders, government administrators, Roman soldiers, diaspora Jews, and veteran sailors, along with teachers, philosophers, and devotees of various religions worshiping at impressive temples. For a variety of reasons, Corinth was an important city.

The Apostle Paul had a long and uneven relationship with the people of Corinth. He first came to the city around 49 or 50 CE, accompanied by Timothy and Silas on his “second missionary journey.” Paul met and was aided by Prisca and Aquila, a Jewish Christian couple who had emigrated from Rome after the emperor Claudius expelled Christians from Italy (Acts 18:2). ↓ Paul may have lodged with Prisca and Aquila as they supported themselves in the leatherwork trade. ↓

Paul first preached in the synagogue, according to Acts 18, and a church was born. Since Jews were a minority group, it’s likely that the growing church soon included more Gentiles than Jews. The clash of

cultures between Jewish and formerly pagan believers contributed to conflicts between competing factions: Corinth was a troubled church.

After spending about 18 months in Corinth, Paul returned to Jerusalem for a short time, then traveled to Antioch before going overland to Ephesus, where he stayed for two years. While at Ephesus, Paul had several contacts with members of the Corinthian church, who either sought or resented his advice.

Paul’s letters to the church at Corinth mention more than two epistles, and what we call 1 Corinthians was not the first: 1 Cor. 5:9 speaks of a “previous letter” Paul had written. A few scholars think parts of that letter may have been retained in 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1, which seems out of place, though most think those verses were added later by someone other than Paul.


Individual members of the church (“Chloe’s people,” 1:11) contacted Paul, perhaps through personal visits, telling him of problems at Corinth. Paul also received at least one letter from the church requesting his advice (7:1).

In response, Paul wrote what we now call 1 Corinthians. Unfortunately, the letter was not well received, leading Paul to make a visit to the church that he called painful (2 Cor. 2:1). After returning to Ephesus, he wrote another letter that he described as tearful and difficult (2 Cor. 2:3-9, 7:12), and had Titus deliver it to the church. Some scholars think this “severe letter” may be partially preserved in 2 Corinthians 10–13, which is sterner in tone than the preceding chapters.

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Later, Titus met Paul in Macedonia and told him that church members had been reconciled to him (2 Cor. 7:5-16). Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in part to express his joy, but his constant appeals for them to accept both him and his gospel leads us to think he was not entirely convinced. 

Light from darkness (vv. 1-6)

The first nine chapters of 2 Corinthians center on the theme of apostolic ministry: what Paul believed it meant for him to serve Christ, even through difficulty, and how others should also minister in Christ's name. Today's text is from chapter 4, in which Paul declared that his ministry had grown in response to Christ's mercy, which gave him cause for hope (v. 1). He insisted that he practiced no ministerial shenanigans and remained true to God's teaching, having a good conscience before God and others (v. 2).

Paul knew that some did not accept his message, as if it were "veiled" to them. He was probably alluding to Moses having to wear a veil to keep from frightening the Israelites after his encounters with God caused his face to shine (v. 3, compare Exod. 34:29-35).

Whether Jews or Gentiles, Paul said, "the god of this world" (or "of this age") had blinded the minds of the unbelievers (v. 4). This raises the question of who Paul was talking about. Some assume that his reference is to Satan, though this would be uncharacteristic. Others believe he was speaking of God as the One who had the power to harden human hearts and prevent people from believing and experiencing God's glory. In other places, Paul suggested that God had intentionally made some Jews obtuse (2 Cor. 3:14, Rom. 11:8).

But Paul seems disappointed that

people didn't believe, and it's possible that he simply personified all worldly cares and temptations that keep people from Christ as the "god of this world."

In any case, Paul wanted to emphasize that he was about God's business, not his own: he and his fellow workers proclaimed Christ, not themselves (v. 5). Why? Because the same creative God who brought light out of darkness "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (v. 6).

Moses' meeting with God had caused his face to shine, but Paul believed his own encounter with Christ – who had appeared to him as a shining light (Acts 9:1-8) – caused the light of Christ to shine from his heart, so others could come to a knowledge of Christ through his witness.

Treasure from clay (vv. 7-12)

No treasure could be more rare or precious than the presence of Christ, yet Paul said "We have this treasure in clay jars ..." – or as the King James Version puts it more poetically: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (v. 7a).

As Paul had drawn on God's creation of light in Genesis 1, so he turned to God creating humans from the dust of the earth in Genesis 2. That the glory of Christ could inhabit a human was astounding to Paul: the idea that heavenly treasure could inhabit "earthen vessels" was further testimony of God's abilities (v. 7b).

Paul had suffered greatly for his faith, facing abuse from both Jews who opposed the Christian movement and Roman authorities who expected everyone to worship the emperor. "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed," he said; "perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but

not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (vv. 8-9).

The clay jar of Paul's humanity might suffer, but he recalled how Jesus had also suffered for others' sake, and was committed to following Jesus' example – even to the point of death – so that the light of Christ might shine through his own bodily life (vv. 10-11).

So it was, Paul said, that "death is at work in us, but life in you" (v. 12). Paul and his close companions were willing to face the possibility of death in order that others could witness the presence of Christ and come to have life.

Words like this may seem alien to us, because we have not experienced persecution. We occasionally read stories of Christians being targeted by oppressive regimes or by bands of religious fanatics in the global South or in various parts of the Eastern world, but few Western believers have experienced anything that resembles suffering for their faith. Despite protests from some particularly prejudiced believers, living under anti-discrimination laws does not count as persecution for those who want to discriminate for what they interpret as religious reasons.

Some may consider it suffering to deny ourselves the freedom to do as we please, or to feel obligated to contribute part of our income to ministry purposes, but faithful living is far more opportunity than oppression. When we think of Paul's completely selfless devotion to Christ and to others, any complaints on our part seem small and petty.

We live under vastly different circumstances than Paul and the believers in first-century Corinth, but oppression is not a requirement for witness. What are some ways in which we, through our own bodies of clay, can show others the life-giving light of Christ? **NFJ**



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

June 10, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:13–5:5

We Don't Lose Heart

Life can be hard, and that's a fact. Today's text is a reminder of that reality. Stress comes in many forms, and from many sources. There may be times when the pressures of work and marriage and the demands of children (or parents) may seem insurmountable. Financial pressures or an inability to sleep or the added stress of a family member with an addiction can push us to the very edge and leave us feeling ready to give up. ↓

Think for a moment about what causes the most stress in your life, and reflect briefly on times you may have been tempted to quit. What kept you going?

The struggles that imperiled Paul had more to do with his radical service to Christ than with the things that stress us today. More than once he found his life in danger: that can certainly produce high anxiety. Yet, Paul refused to give up or give in.

A spirit of faith (4:13-15)

If our text appears to start in the middle of something, that's because it does: Paul has been defending himself and his qualifications for leadership to the skeptical Corinthians. In 4:1-12, he insisted that he preached

2 Corinthians 4:16 –

“So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.”

the true gospel faithfully, serving Christ and others rather than himself. He claimed to have the precious light of Christ living within the “earthen vessel” of his own body, and declared that Christ's presence gave him the strength to overcome crushing blows and persevere. Even in his suffering and willingness to die, Paul wanted others to see the light of Christ living in him.

So, Paul claims to have the same sort of faith displayed in scripture, where it was written: “I believed, and so I spoke.” His partial quotation of Ps. 116:10 (115:1 in the Greek Septuagint) ignores the context, but illustrates the point he wants to make about living faithfully through adversity and testifying about it later. The psalmist had endured a trying period when he feared death, but survived. Afterward, he praised God with a psalm. Paul's life had also been in danger. The afflictions of prison punctuated his ministry, but his faith empowered him to speak with authority about remaining true amid struggles (4:13).

Paul found his strength in a firm belief that “the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence” (4:14). Paul often referred to this grounding belief that Jesus' resurrection was a promise that God would raise believers, too. ↓ Paul introduced the statement with “We

know that,” which may suggest that his readers would have recognized it as part of an early confession.

What keeps you going in hard times? In one way or another, hope must be involved. It was Paul's hope in the resurrection that kept him on track, and he wanted his readers to have the same assurance. For this reason, Paul insisted that Jesus would not only raise him, but “will bring us with you into his presence.” His readers would share the same experience.

The hope of resurrection was more than a comfort to Paul: it was at the heart of his mission. His goal was to see God's grace spread to more and more people, which would not only bring them life but also bring even greater glory to God (4:15).

A heart of hope (4:16-18)

Paul's hope of resurrection and his desire to spread the gospel kept him going through trials: “So we do not lose heart” (v. 16a). The word translated as “lose heart” could also mean “become discouraged” “lose one's motivation,” or “give up” – but Paul was not about to do any of those things.

“[T]hough our outer nature is wasting away,” he said, “our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (4:16b). ↓ What does Paul mean by this reference to an “outer man” (a literal translation) and an inner one?

A surface reading may lead us to think that Paul is simply reflecting a Greek dualism – too often assumed in our day – that thinks of humans as an immortal soul trapped in a human body. Paul would have known the concept and probably drew on it in his

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language, but with a twist.

Consistent with his Hebrew upbringing, Paul understood body and soul in a holistic way, not as two separate entities. Even so, he recognized that we have within us an “inner self” that we regard as the essence of our being, something we hope will endure when our physical bodies no longer operate. Paul clearly believed that some aspect of us – including some sort of bodily identity – would be preserved in the resurrection.

As we think of our inner self growing and maturing as we navigate the challenges of life, Paul could think of his inner spiritual core growing stronger and more refined as he trusted God and persevered through trials. This, in turn, increased his confidence in the future.

When we’re living through stressful situations, they may seem all-encompassing, but Paul insisted that earthly trials are but lightweight afflictions that prepare us for the heaviness of eternal glory in the presence of Christ (4:17). We may not ordinarily associate “heaviness” with “glory,” but Hebrew uses the same word for both concepts. The glory of God is a weighty matter, but one in which we can share.

Our natural tendency is to be weighed down by the various burdens we face, and some of us, like Paul, bear heavy loads. What matters most, Paul said, is not to focus on the temporary troubles we can see, but to set our sights on the lasting life with Christ who we cannot yet see or even imagine (4:18).

An eternal home (5:1-5)

Having introduced the thought of an “inner” and “outer” self, Paul expands the thought through a series of comparisons that an English teacher

would critique as mixed metaphors – but he gets his point across. Earlier, Paul had spoken of having spiritual treasure in “clay jars” (4:7), and of living in human bodies made of mortal flesh (4:10, 11).

Now he likens our “outer self” to a temporary tent that will one day be destroyed, but we need for fear, for “we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (5:1). Paul was not attempting to describe heaven in architectural terms, but was using a metaphor to emphasize the permanence of our promised home with God.

The metaphor gets mixed in the next verse, as Paul switches between images of buildings and clothing. None of us would normally think of “taking off” a tent or “putting on a house,” but we can still understand Paul’s intent.

“In this tent we groan,” he wrote, “longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (5:2). Paul seems to be drawing on the feeling of insecurity that comes from being physically unclothed, and applying it to what happens after death. He doesn’t look forward to being naked when he has to “take off” his earthly tent (5:3).

Commentators often suggest that Paul’s concern is that he doesn’t want to die before Christ’s return at the *parousia*, or “second coming.” Through the years this text has been cited in theological discussions about whether the dead enter some sort of “intermediate state” while awaiting the *parousia*, or whether believers find themselves immediately in the presence of Christ.

Ernest Best notes that time means different things to humans and to God. “From our temporal angle, if death precedes the *parousia* we are forced to ask what happens in the period between the two since we associate

resurrection with the *parousia*. The *parousia* and the general resurrection, however, are both eternal as well as temporal events. From the eternal perspective the time differential does not count, and the logic of Christian thought and experience indicates that we are immediately and fully with Christ. The fear of any state of nakedness should then disappear” (*Second Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987], 47-48).

While it’s easy to get sidetracked by such questions, Paul is mainly driving at the insecurity we all feel when thinking about death and what follows. We like “being clothed” with the physical life we have now, and we dread the thought of being naked without it. We want assurance that the heart of our being won’t be left cold in the ground, but that we will be “further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (5:4).

We need not be anxious, Paul said, because God has it under control: “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (5:5). In other words, the Spirit who lives in us now is the promise that when our body fails, we will be incorporated into the eternal life Christ has made possible.

Have you ever awakened from a disconcerting dream in which you found yourself naked in public? It’s a common occurrence, and likely an indicator of some deep-seated insecurity manifesting itself in our unconscious. Paul tapped into that fear with his imagery of being found “naked” after death: he wanted the believers at Corinth – and others who might read his letter – to have confidence that God will clothe us with life that continues.

We don’t have to worry about dying naked. NFJ

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

June 17, 2018

2 Corinthians 5:6-17

By Faith, Not Sight

Have you ever known someone whose behavior was clearly self-defeating, and you believed you had good advice to offer, but he or she didn't want to listen? Perhaps your acquaintance did not think you were either qualified to give advice, or close enough to have the right. Sometimes people are so set in their ways that they wall themselves off from the very people who love them most and are best able to help them.

Paul faced a similar situation when writing to the Corinthians. The church was torn by internal strife and weakened by misguided behavior. Some members did not accept Paul's right to advise the congregation, but the apostle was determined to have his say. In today's text, Paul continues his previous exhortations as one called by God to encourage others.

Why we persevere (vv. 6-10)

In the previous verses, Paul had spoken of his suffering as a result of Christian service. He persevered, however, because he considered earthly suffering to be of little importance compared to the hope of eternal life with Christ. He spoke of leaving

2 Corinthians 5:7 –

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”


the “earthly tent” of his body to enter God's heavenly home. Death might leave him “unclothed,” but he looked forward to being “swallowed up” in the life of God, made possible through Christ and guaranteed by the presence of the Spirit (vv. 1-5).

He pursued the thought in v. 6, saying “we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.” This is not to suggest that we cannot know God in this life, for he had just spoken of the Spirit as being at work in the believer, a present guarantee of our future life. Still, the way we know God while in the body cannot compare with the intensity of knowing God in eternity. In this world “we walk by faith, not by sight” (v. 7), but in God's heavenly house we will see God face to face.

What does it mean to walk by faith and not by sight?

Many years ago, while facing some troubling times, I found myself on a retreat at Ridgecrest Conference Center. One evening, although it was near dark, I decided to climb Rattlesnake Mountain. As I hiked up the unfamiliar trail, the light grew less and less. Soon I could see no more than one step ahead, but I discovered that was enough to keep me going. I couldn't see around the bend or even if there was a bend, but I could see enough for the next step. Eventually I reached an overlook where I could gaze upon a panoply of lights below that seemed to reflect the stars above.

It was an inspiring moment: at last, I could see clearly.

That's only a small hint of what Paul had in mind. We live in this world by faith. We can't see into the future, but we can always see well enough to take the next step. We walk in trust that God is with us while on this earth, and we walk in hope of wonders beyond imagining when this life is over. 

Thus Paul could say with confidence that “we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (v. 8). Paul was being expansive with his language: he was in no hurry to die and wasn't encouraging others to voluntarily depart this life for the glories of the next. At the same time, he did not fear death. This life can be good and meaningful and abundant. The next life, he believed, could be even better.

In either case, Paul added, “whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him” (v. 9). How we live matters. Paul believed that everyone would face a reckoning: “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil” (v. 10).

Believers should not read these words with fear, or think Paul is suggesting that we will be subject to public humiliation before God's throne. The difference to be judged is whether we have truly trusted in Christ and followed his way, or not. Like other apocalyptic-minded Jews and Christians of his day, Paul had no qualms about expecting all to be judged, with those who oppose God's reconciling work to face consequences. People

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who expect to live *with* God in eternity should make it their business to live *for* God now.


Why we persuade (vv. 11-15)


In the following verses, Paul described those things that motivated his ministry of persuasive evangelism, beginning with “the fear of the Lord.” The book of Proverbs insists that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7, 15:33), a “fountain of life” (14:7) that leads one to shun evil (8:13, 16:6), and experience a longer life (10:27, 19:23). Proverbial sayings are guidelines rather than guarantees, but worth pondering.

In Old Testament narratives, the fear of the Lord could also be identified with a blanket of dread that Yahweh caused to fall upon his enemies in battle, or with the awesome respect God inspired in those who witnessed God’s mighty works. Paul understood that his life was an open book before God. He never forgot the blinding light and powerful voice that had stopped him cold as he traveled toward Damascus with blood in his eyes. Paul knew enough about God to have a healthy respect for divine power. He did not wish to be stopped again.

“Therefore,” Paul said, “knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others” (v. 11a). Paul was not primarily interested in persuading others to accept him as a person and offer him hospitality (v. 11b). Paul insisted he was not fishing for praise. But, he was hopeful that those who had come to Christ through his ministry would have good things to say about it, recognizing that he did not serve to achieve public recognition, but from an humble and obedient heart (v. 12). 

Paul did, however, want the

Corinthians to believe that his motivations were both rational and unselfish: “For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you” (v. 13). Paul had said a number of outrageous things that could be criticized. 

He claimed that he had been caught up into the third heaven and visited paradise, for example, though he knew others might call him a fool because of it (2 Corinthians 12). Paul was also known to speak in tongues, apparently with some frequency (1 Cor. 13:1, 14:18; 2 Cor. 12:1-4). Thus, he could say that if he appeared out of his mind, it was for God – possibly in ecstatic conversation with God. Paul insisted that he might be accused of insanity (cf. Acts 26:24), but not of duplicity. What he did was for God and for others. 

Paul’s second motivation should come as no surprise: “For the love of Christ urges us on” (v.14a). Paul and his missionary companions had experienced the love of God poured out for them. They were convinced that Christ had died for them, as for all people (v. 14b).


As a result, Paul said, “therefore all have died.” What does that mean? Paul writes as if he is talking about all people, but he did not teach universal salvation. The text calls to mind Rom. 6:3-8, where Paul spoke of believers as being baptized into Christ’s death so they could be raised to new life.

Perhaps we find our explanation in the next verse: “And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (v. 15). It’s likely that Paul was using “all” in the context of “all believers,” as in Romans. As Christ died for all, all who trust in Christ die to themselves in order to live for Christ.

Is your daily walk characterized

by respectful awe and abiding love for Christ? What do you think Paul might recommend for someone who is short on motivation?

How we live (vv. 16-17)

A new life leads to a new perspective. Paul no longer saw life through a human point of view only. He had once considered Jesus to be just another man, and a dangerous one at that, but no longer. Paul had learned to see Jesus through spiritual eyes, and that experience had given him a spiritual perspective on others, too (v. 16). In Paul’s world – as in ours – many value the worth of other people by how much they have accomplished, how much wealth they have obtained, or how they are respected by others. Paul had learned to see others in a deeper way. 

Paul expressed this belief in memorable language: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (v. 17).

We get the impression that Paul had always been a driven man, a Type-A overachiever in every way. He had thought of himself as a man with a mission from God even when he was living as a Pharisee and working to purge Judaism of the heretical Christians. As he wrote to the Corinthians, Paul was still driven by a sense of mission, but his perspective had changed radically. Paul no longer persuaded people to *reform* – now he called them to be *reborn* into a new life.

Can you identify with Paul’s description of a life in which all things have become new? Can you describe specific ways in which life is different for you as a Christian than for others who do not claim Christ? If not, what’s wrong with that picture? **NFJ**



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

June 24, 2018

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Living Oxymorons

Have you ever felt that your life was a collection of paradoxes? Some days are a jumble of emotions ranging from joy to grief. In relative terms, we might be quite well off, yet still feel poor when an unexpected bill comes in. We can feel love from some people and disdain from others.

Everybody knows what it is to have good days and bad days, but not everybody knows how to experience suffering and still find joy. Everyone experiences frustration, but not everyone can emerge with a positive attitude. Paul was a man who could.

A compelling time (vv. 1-2)

Paul was also a man who had a high opinion of himself and of his teachings – to the extent that he believed those who rejected what he had taught them might be in danger of rejecting Christ himself.

Chapter 6 continues Paul's combination of admonitions and pleading from the previous chapter. The members of the Corinthian congregation had apparently devolved into factions along theological lines, and Paul was afraid some had diverged from the true gospel. Paul, of course,

2 Corinthians 6:10 –
“... as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

believed his understanding was the proper one.

Translating the first verse is a bit tricky, because it begins with a plural participle that means “working together,” but with no referent to just who is working together, or who they are working with. Paul has been referring to himself with the pronoun “we,” which may be a figure of speech akin to the “royal ‘we,’” or may be an indicator of companions such as Timothy and Luke who worked closely with him. A popular option is that Paul saw himself and the Corinthians as fellow workers with Christ. ↓

The word translated “urge” is *parakaleō*, which literally means “to call alongside,” but can be used with a range of meanings from “exhort” and “encourage” to “comfort” and “console.” It is the same verb that lies at the root of the Holy Spirit being called our “Paraclete,” or “Comforter/Encourager.” Here it clearly has the sense of “exhort” or “urge.”

And what is Paul urging? That the Corinthians should not “... accept the grace of God in vain.” Paul was convinced that his ministry of calling people to be reconciled with God (5:18-21) was the correct way of understanding the gospel and being properly related to God. In Paul's mind, to reject his teaching was to reject the gospel.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to confirm their proper understanding

of salvation, and without delay. To reinforce his point, he quoted from the Greek translation of Isa. 49:8: “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Isaiah had been reminding the Hebrew exiles of God's saving acts in the past to bring hope for the future. Paul believed Isaiah's prophecy had been fulfilled in Christ, and used his words as an appeal for people to accept God's salvation in the present: “See now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!” (v. 2).

Paul believed Christ was likely to return at any time, and he didn't want the Corinthian people to miss their chance or lose out on the opportunity to be reconciled to God and experience a new life.

A confident apostle (vv. 3-10)

Paul's appeal is followed by a rather lengthy defense of himself and his work. If the Corinthians didn't experience salvation in Christ, it wouldn't be for any lack of effort on his part: “We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry” (v. 3). Paul then launched into an appeal to his integrity as a faithful minister of the gospel by reciting an inventory of hardships he had faced, one of three times he does so in the letter. ↓

Perhaps Paul wanted to overwhelm any opposition by emphasizing how seriously he took the gospel and how much he had suffered for it. As a way of “commending ourselves in every way” (v. 4a), Paul began with a list of troublesome situations he had experienced:

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“through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger ...” (v. 4b-5).

The word for “endurance” has an active sense. Paul did not just passively suffer, but remained faithful in proclaiming the gospel and caring for the church even in the midst of afflictions that make us cringe if we dare imagine them. Beatings? Imprisonments? Would we endure through that?

Paul then described the attitude and actions he had exhibited despite his hardships: “by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God ...” (vv. 6-7a).

We wonder if even Paul had been quite as perfect as he claimed to be. He must have felt a need to defend himself against others who had besmirched his character. In any case, he believed that he had behaved with admirable integrity and persistent love for God and for the Corinthians, and he wanted them to know it.

In vv. 7b-8a, Paul continued to speak of how he had responded to adversity, but switched his rhetorical style to a series of pairs: “with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute.”

We can only guess what Paul meant by “weapons of righteousness,” though the reference to the right and left hands calls to mind a soldier with a sword in one hand and a shield in the other. Perhaps Paul was thinking along the lines of his appeal to the Ephesians to put on the “armor of God,” which included a “shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one,” and “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:16-17).

No matter what others thought of him, Paul insisted, he had remained

firmly faithful – but he wasn’t finished. In vv. 8b-10, he cited a series of paradoxical situations: “We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

One might think of these as Paul’s version of Jesus’ “Beatitudes” (Matthew 5), in which he spoke of mourners being comforted, the meek inheriting the earth, the hungry being filled, and the merciful receiving mercy.

This final part of Paul’s defense makes it clear that some people had accused him of being a fraud or an imposter; otherwise he wouldn’t have felt such a need to defend his upright character. He had known what it was like to be both obscure and popular, to be near death and yet live, to find joy even in sorrow, to be personally poor while blessing others with the riches of the gospel. Others who had observed his rather ascetic lifestyle or who knew he’d spent time in prison might have thought he had nothing, but Paul considered himself as “possessing everything.”

A passionate appeal (vv. 11-13)

But did Paul possess everything? What he did not possess was the assurance that the Corinthians still respected him and followed the gospel he had taught them. Paul may come across as egocentric in this matter, but he sincerely believed that his understanding of the gospel was the truth one needed to relate to Christ, and that rejecting him was tantamount to rejecting Christ.

Thus, it was with frank speech and a “wide open” heart (v. 11) that he closed his defense by insisting that he had not ceased in his love for the

Corinthians, though they had grown cool to him (v. 12).

Paul considered himself to be the Corinthians’ “father in the faith,” and so he spoke to them “as children.” With an overwhelming list of reminders pointing to his passionate love and care for them – despite their rejection – he begged: “open wide your hearts also” (v. 13).

Paul could be a paradox all by himself. Earlier in the letter, he had insisted that he was not commending himself, but rather was giving the Corinthians a chance to boast about him (2 Cor. 5:12). Yet, here he spends the better part of a chapter commending himself with boasts about his behavior, and speaks to his readers as children while appealing for them to be reconciled to him.

We don’t know precisely what led to Paul’s sketchy relationship with the Corinthians. Perhaps other preachers had come through, indicating that Paul had been in error. Perhaps strong-willed people in the congregation got tired of Paul assuming authority over them. Whatever the case, it had led to a precarious partnership.

If you had been a member of the church at Corinth, do you think Paul’s appeal would have worked with you? Would you have been inclined to once again “open wide your heart” to Paul as your spiritual leader?

Many congregations experience similar conflict. Sometimes the fault lies mainly with the congregation. Sometimes it lies with the pastor, sometimes with both. Reconciliation is never easy, and depending on the situation, sometimes it is both impossible and inadvisable.

Whatever the outcome, frank speech and open hearts are key to making decisions that are best for all concerned. How reconciled do you feel today? NFJ



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Rollin Armour died March 2. He was the former dean of the College of Liberal Arts and a Christianity professor at Mercer University. He also taught at Stetson and Auburn universities.

Phaedra Blocker is director of programs for the New Baptist Covenant. She previously served as affiliate professor in leadership and formation at Palmer Theological Seminary at Eastern University.

Lindsay Bergstrom is director of operations and communications for the New Baptist Covenant, coming from Baptist News Global where she was director of creative services.

Roy DeBrand of Henderson, N.C., died Feb. 6 at age 75. He was retired from Campbell University Divinity School and taught earlier at Southeastern and North American Baptist seminaries. His pastorates included Broadway Baptist in Fort Worth; First Baptist churches of Richmond, Texas, and Americus, Ga.; and Franklin Baptist in Virginia.

Robert Ellis is dean of the Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, where he has been a tenured professor of Old Testament and Hebrew since 1996.

John Anthony (Tony) Floyd becomes the 22nd president of Mars Hill University June 1 following the retirement of **Dan G. Lunsford**.

Ernest H. Jones died Jan. 30. He was executive minister for the American Baptist Churches of Ohio, a post held for two years.

Jaziah B. Masters is education and mobilization assistant for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

John Perkins received the Brooks Hays Award at Second Baptist Church of Little Rock, Ark., on Feb. 11. Perkins is a civil rights activist and founder of the Christian Community Development Association.

Kirk E. Peterson becomes the 23rd president of Chowan University in eastern North Carolina on June 1. He has served as superintendent for two private schools in

Ohio and as senior vice president and interim president of Urbana University. **M. Christopher White** will transition from Chowan's president to chancellor.

Oxford Smith died Feb. 15 at age 83. A member of First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala., he worked in campus ministry among Alabama Baptists for many years.

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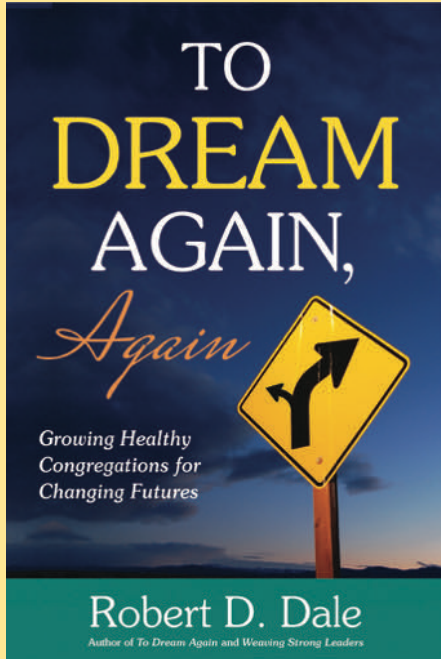
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Dreaming Again



Robert D. Dale's new book is now available at books.nurturingfaith.net

“Congregations, like their members, fall into habits that become traditions that become ruts that become norms. Most of the time, this happens so gradually that congregations don't see deadening routines until they've already become 'the way we do things around here.' It takes leadership to help the church step back and ask: 'Why are we here?' 'What is God calling us to be and do now?' 'Who are we in God's kingdom?'

“Also, our culture and generational tastes change fast. Ministry is always a moving target. If our churches don't take their calling to be 'contrast communities' seriously, we slide into becoming social clubs with music and forfeit our Gospel distinctives and prophetic edge.”

—Author Robert D. Dale on the need to “Dream Again, Again,” in an interview in Nurturing Faith Journal



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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 explore these opportunities, contact Bruce at bgourley@nurturingfaith.net.



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— and inviting YOU to join!

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The faithfulness of these donors is recognized at the annual award dinner — the latest being April 26 in Winston-Salem, N.C., honoring Melissa Rogers — and in *Nurturing Faith Journal*.

“All of our approximately 900 donors are needed and appreciated,” said Executive

Editor John Pierce. “We rely on many to help us carry out this mission.”

The Judson-Rice Society, however, “gives us a chance to say a separate word of thanks to those who make these generous gifts,” he added. “And there is room for more in 2018.”

Pierce noted that monthly giving has increased the number of donors included in the Judson-Rice Society.

“One easy way to be included in this group is to give \$100 each month — either when paying bills by check or setting

up a monthly credit card payment,” he added. “Giving monthly often enlarges the total annual gift and helps with ongoing operations.”

Such giving may be set up online at nurturingfaith.net or by calling (478) 301-5655. Those wanting to discuss the various ways to support this autonomous publishing ministry (through a pledge, estate planning or other means) may reach John Bridges, development director, at (704) 616-1725 or jbridges@nurturingfaith.net. **NFJ**

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BEING CHURCH IN CHANGING TIMES

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

The church needs more artists

By Brittany Riddle

A few minutes into a summer art class, I cried helplessly until the teacher called my mom to come get me. I remember being handed a piece of popped popcorn with the instructions to draw the three-dimensional shape on a large, two-dimensional sheet of paper. This was supposed to be a fun exercise.

Afraid of failure and aware, even at age 6, that my artistic and spatial abilities were limited, I panicked. I do not remember whether or not I picked up the pencil to give the drawing a try. I only remember the overwhelming sense that I needed to get out of that room.

Before I left, the teacher suggested that art might not be my thing. I left that art classroom and avoided anything resembling creativity for the next 25 years.

Left to my own devices, I am a worrier, over-planner, and lover of details. Something about ministry — about being present with people in the most ordinary and sacred moments — draws me out of my head, out of my need for order, and into the awareness that what I am called to do is more of an art than a science.

Craig Dykstra, writing in *Christian Century*, gives a name to this form of art: pastoral imagination. He suggests that in order for ministers to lead with wisdom, courage and integrity, they must develop a pastoral imagination that sees “in depth” and perceives “what is not yet and begins to create it.”

Embracing the unpredictable nature of working with people and developing the imagination necessary to fully live into this

calling sparked an accidental, coincidental and deeply purposeful journey to discovering my own creativity a few years ago.

A communal, experiential, mosaic art project emerged out of a worship service at the same time my soul was longing to imagine and create. I suddenly found myself breaking glass and creating mosaics in my free time as a restorative and meditative practice of Sabbath.

Breaking and re-imagining new life for each piece of glass used in a mosaic helps me envision the broken parts of my own story — the trauma, the disappoint-

ments, the pain — and allows me to visualize what it might look like to transform these parts of my life into something new, beautiful and whole, that can eventually become a lens for seeing “more deeply.”

When I can imagine this process of transformation in my own life,

I am able to share the hope that the same re-imagining is possible for those I serve alongside in ministry. The practice of ministry inspires my art. The practice of art enriches my ministry.

Some days I feel like an imposter in the creative world, but the more I create, the more fully I find myself living into this embodied faith and calling. I find myself sitting on the floor playing games (and doing cartwheels) with children.

I hold fragile, tired hands during prayers in nursing homes and hospital rooms. I embrace those who are celebrating and hold those who are grieving. I sing, pray, laugh and cry — often all in the same day.



I am currently exploring the intersection of theology and art as it relates to spiritual formation and congregational storytelling. My conversations with clergy about the deep needs of the church, and my conversations with people who are creating and innovating, convince me that the church needs more artists: Artists who help us see what is not yet and begin to create it. Artists who remind us that the process of creating is also a process of becoming a new creation.

The church needs more artists — and not just professional artists. The church needs clergy and laity who express their experiences of the sacred through writing poems and prayers, sculpting clay, cooking irresistible food, creating paths of new mountain trails, tending growing gardens, and practicing the hospitality of an open table.

The church needs people who sing, dance, move their bodies and get their hands messy. The form of creativity will differ from person to person, but the redemptive qualities of the creative process are the same.

When we (re)discover our creativity, we reconnect with our truest selves. We restore our connections with others through shared experiences. We reclaim our identity as people who are created in the image of a creative and creating God. Together, we see more deeply. We become more fully human. Thanks be to God that this is our work and our calling. **NFJ**

—Brittany Riddle is associate minister for Christian education and spiritual formation at Immanuel Baptist Church in Paducah, Ky. She is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree in art, theology and spiritual formation at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Pre-millennial dispensationalism

How heretical end-times teaching became evangelical orthodoxy

BY BRUCE GOURLEY

Amid many global upheavals last year, the White House's declaration of Jerusalem as the new capital of Israel elicited perhaps the greatest enthusiasm among a wide swath of white American Christians.

Such evangelical joy is based on a widespread belief among conservative to fundamentalist Christians that a re-emergence of the biblical city is the key to triggering an "end-times apocalypse."

Non-evangelical observers are rightfully alarmed that so many Christians are longing for a holy war of global destruction.

FIXATION

The extent of evangelical fixation on the earth's demise is hard to overstate. Southern Baptists, in many ways the epicenter of evangelicalism, illustrate the pervasive intensity of end-times theology, referred to by scholars as "eschatology."

In 2009 the Southern Baptist Convention's publicity arm, Baptist Press, published a series of articles delineating Southern Baptist beliefs about the end times, as explained by leading theologians from within the denomination.

Almost all Southern Baptist college and seminary professors, according to the series, believe in the peculiar theologies of "rapture" and "dispensationalism" — with variance on minor details.

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, declared that "The truth of the rapture is not up for debate, but its timing is something we can graciously disagree on."

Lamar Cooper, interim president of Criswell College in Dallas and echoing the convictions of the late and famous Southern Baptist preacher W. A. Criswell, insisted that "premillennial dispensationalism is a logical conclusion from the simple exegesis of the inerrant Word of God."



SABBATH IN JERUSALEM: Overwhelming political support for Israel by American evangelicals is rooted in an end-times theology not often acknowledged or even known. Photo by John D. Pierce.

If you have to ask what Akin and Cooper are talking about, you are probably not an evangelical, a large segment of conservative Christianity whose adherents overwhelmingly, according to surveys, identify with premillennial theology.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

Premillennial theology derives from a certain interpretation of Revelation 20, and teaches that Jesus will return to earth (or at least the sky) following seven distinct periods of human history (dispensations) and prior to (according to most adherents) a period of great troubles ("tribulation").

Upon his return Jesus will rescue his followers by calling them up to heaven with him, and eventually return yet again to "bind up" Satan (a literal being) and reign on earth for a thousand years (millennium) with loyal believers.

Afterward, there will be a final battle between God and Satan, referred to both as the "apocalypse" and "Armageddon." God will win the final battle, and then create a new and sinless earth, known as the "New Jerusalem."

To tell this complex story of the

evangelical end times in simpler fashion, Satan must be utterly defeated and the earth completely destroyed in order for God to re-create the planet in perfect, sinless form.

In order for the process of planetary destruction and rebirth to begin, the Jewish temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt. The restoration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital paves the way for the rebuilding of the temple, and hence the coming apocalypse.

MISCONSTRUCTION

Stranger yet, this evangelical narrative is based upon a false translation and appropriation of the book of Revelation, which in reality is figurative and mystical literature composed around the turn of the second century BCE and addressing the tribulations of Christians *at that time*.

Unwilling to accept Revelation in its historical context, many modern evangelicals misconstrue the biblical book in order to suit their own purposes. Even so, there is much more to this story, a fanciful if dangerous narrative that has neither a legitimate biblical nor historical basis.

Several key terms mentioned, and affirmed by most evangelicals — "rapture," "premillennial" and "dispensationalism" — don't appear in the Bible.

Neither is the word "inerrant" — a modern term incorrectly claiming that the biblical text is literally perfect in all respects. In other instances, certain words mentioned in the Bible are taken out of context and refashioned for new purposes, or are magnified to proportions alien to the Bible.

BATTLE CRIES

For example, the word "apocalypse" can be found in Greek New Testament texts, and means "uncovering," "unveiling" or "revelation." It is the word from whence the biblical book of Revelation is named in English.

Yet in Christian vernacular, "apocalypse" has evolved into shorthand for the



story of the final battle between good and evil in the book of Revelation.

Meanwhile, Armageddon is mentioned only once in the Bible (Rev. 16:16), as the figurative battle between good and evil that modern evangelicals interpret as a literal event. Hence, the misused “apocalypse” and once-mentioned “Armageddon” are essentially used to refer to the same future, literal event that is neither future nor literal.

Why take the Bible out of context to create an intricate, imaginary narrative wrapped in obscure terminology grounded in a joy-filled anticipation of a future, earth-destroying, religious war?

This formative story of “rapture,” “premillennial dispensationalism” and “apocalypse” (collectively, modern evangelical end-times theology) begins in the 1830s, an era marked by religious revivals and theological creativity on both sides of the Atlantic.

DARBY DOINGS

Within this early-19th-century world of religious fervor, one man devised the end-times theology to which most evangelicals are now committed.

Around 1830 John Nelson Darby, a renegade minister in the (Anglican) Church of Ireland, wove together an obscure and then-recent concept of a secret coming of Christ to earth to rescue the faithful (that is, a two-stage return of Christ: one in the sky and a second to defeat Satan, the latter return only a traditional Christian belief) with his own construct of historical “dispensations.”

The “father of premillennial dispensationalism,” as Darby became known, divided history into seven ages (dispensations), after which a supernatural removal, or “rapture,” of believers from earth would take place.

Seven years of great tribulation on earth would follow, culminating with yet another return of Christ to bring peace to the earth for a millennium and, ultimately, battle and defeat Satan.

Darby insisted that the Bible be taught in light of his personal premillennial dispen-

sational theories. Not surprisingly, very few Christians bought into his beliefs. In fact, John Nelson Darby for many decades was widely dismissed as a heretic.

But then a very strange thing happened: Darby’s heresy began a slow journey to orthodoxy.

Toward the end of his life his beliefs gained slow but steady traction within newly-formed fundamentalist Christianity at odds with modern science and increasingly disillusioned with the popular Christian eschatological construct of the world becoming ever more peaceful and prosperous prior to a singular return of Christ.

(The term for this alternative end-times belief is known as “Post-millennialism,” within which the “millennium” may or may not be a literal thousand years.)

ENTER SCOFIELD

At this point another key figure emerged. Cyrus I. Scofield, a disciple of Darby, in 1909 published, through Oxford University Press, an annotated King James Bible containing a variety of commentary reflecting his personal beliefs.

Among the extra-biblical content that Schofield incorporated into this Bible was John Nelson Darby’s premillennial dispensationalist theology. The Scofield Reference Bible soon attained popularity among ascendant fundamentalist Christians who paradoxically embraced Darby’s heresies as orthodoxy.

In the minds of fundamentalists, Darbyism served as a weapon for defeating the evils of modern science and religious, social, cultural and political liberalism.

Such evils, they wanted to believe, would one day be consumed by the authoritarian, angry and vengeful God they worshiped. Darby’s violent theology complemented fundamentalists’ dark image of a wrathful God.

Three decades later, the 1948 re-establishment of Israel as a nation catapulted premillennial dispensationalism into much greater prominence among conservative and evangelical Christians

broadly. The restoration of Israel, in short, signaled that the end times were near.

MUTUAL BENEFITS

Jewish politicians, meanwhile, in the 1960s began cashing in on American evangelicals’ growing love affair with Jerusalem. Privately scoffing at the naivety of evangelicals, Israel publicly embraced the religious fervor of American Christians who longed to see the Jerusalem temple restored, gladly receiving evangelical monies in the form of Holy Land tours and donations.

More substantially, the Israeli government welcomed a close alliance with conservative, evangelical-aligned politicians who deemed Israel an important military ally in a volatile Middle East.

American evangelicals, their conservative political allies, and Israeli leaders all shared the same goal — the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital — albeit for different reasons: an evangelical focus on a violent end to Planet Earth, and a Jewish focus on restoring control of the biblical land of Jerusalem (with or without a new temple) to full Jewish ownership, and hence a new golden age.

Prior to the current U.S. administration, however, American presidents, fearful of the delicate military balance of the nuclear-armed Middle East, refused evangelical entreaties to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

Now, almost a century after the transformation of Darby’s heresies into orthodoxy, many evangelicals have long forgotten that the self-serving story of the “end times” they tell themselves is not biblical.

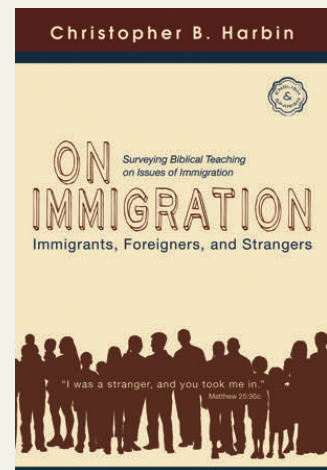
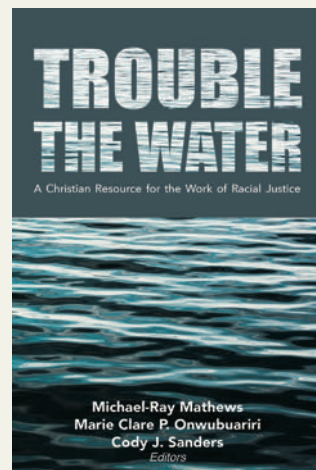
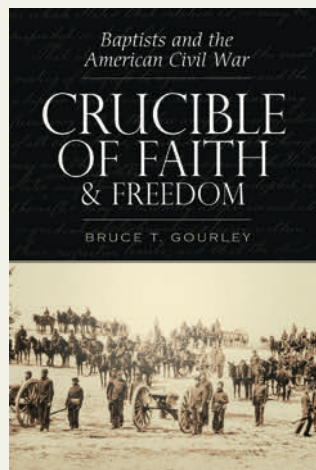
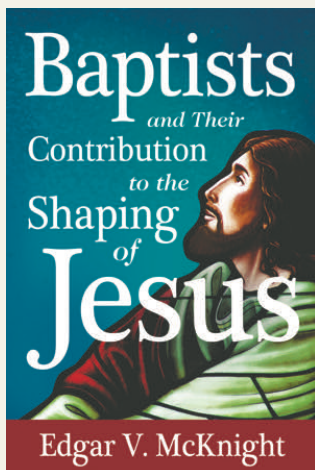
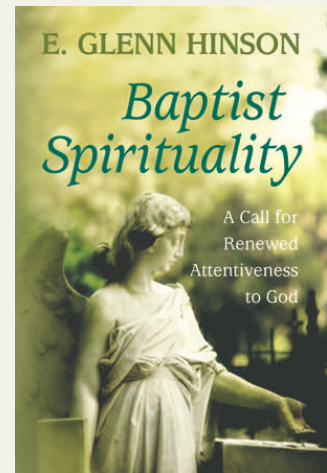
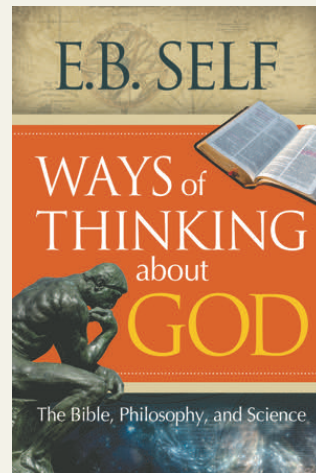
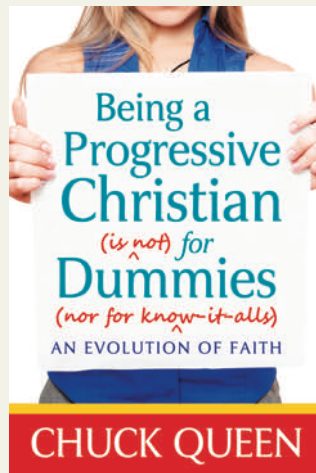
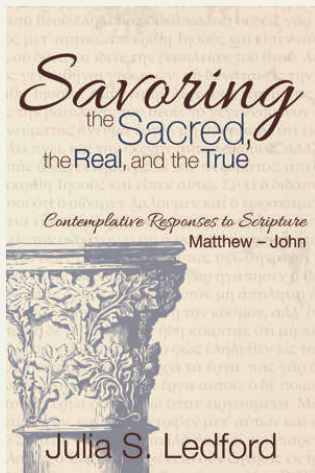
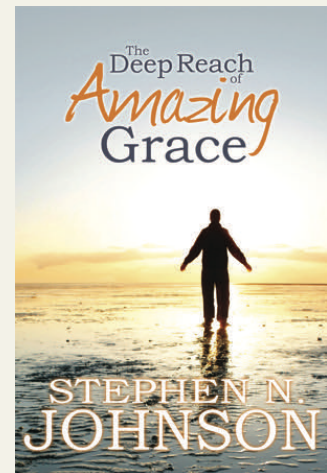
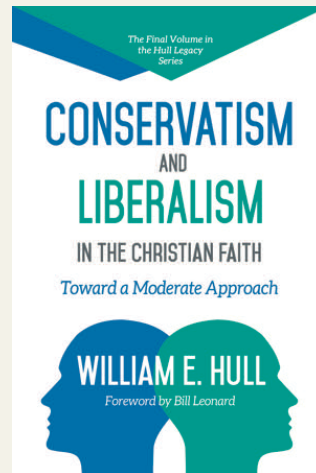
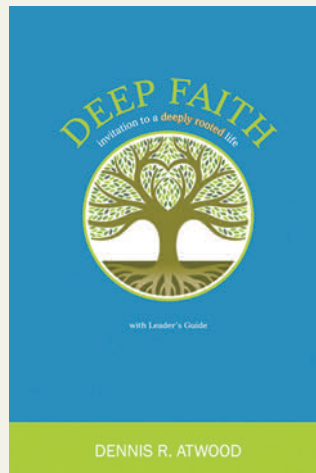
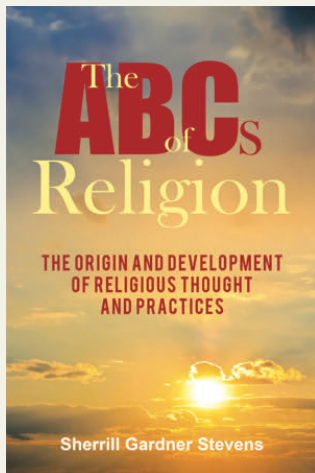
Having abandoned the historical basis of the book of Revelation and no longer remembering the name of John Nelson Darby, evangelicals are fixated on elevating the city of Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple in order to force God to initiate the literal destruction of Planet Earth.

Now, in 2018, Darby’s dark and fanciful teachings of the early 19th century, devoutly embraced by many evangelicals, cast an eerie shadow over increasingly dangerous, current world events. **NFJ**



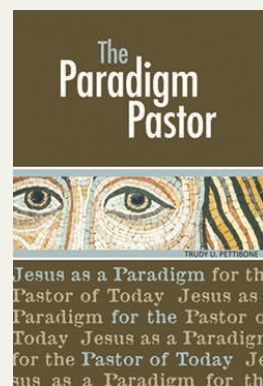
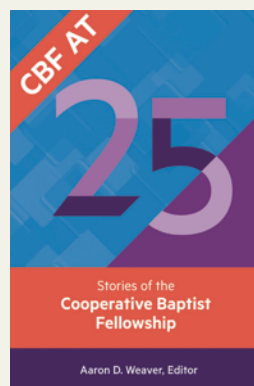
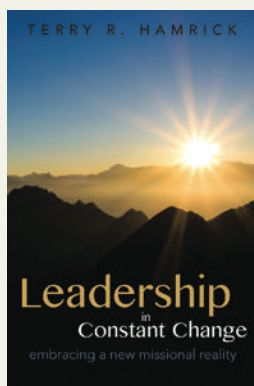
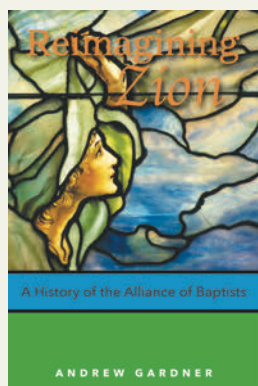
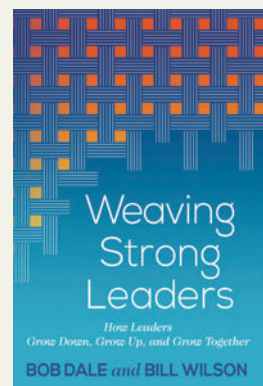
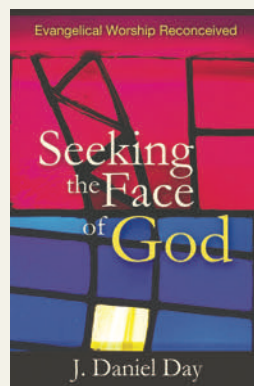
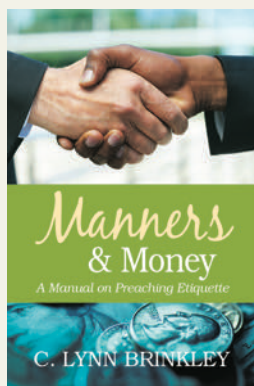
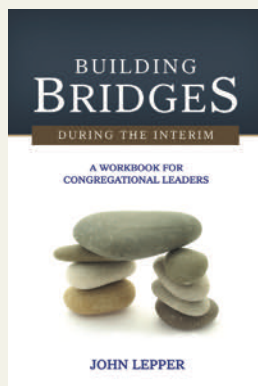
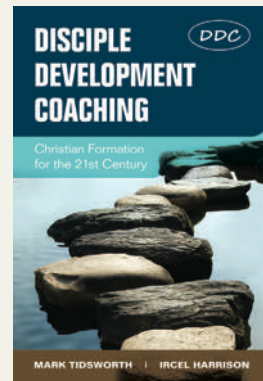
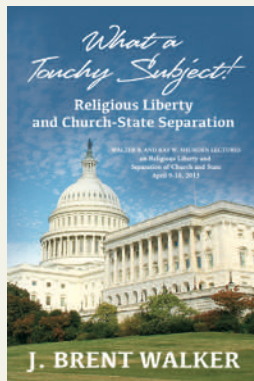
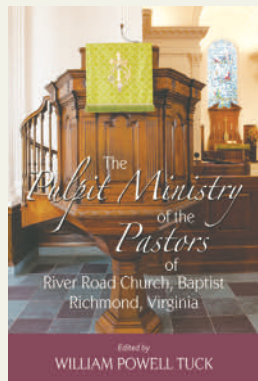
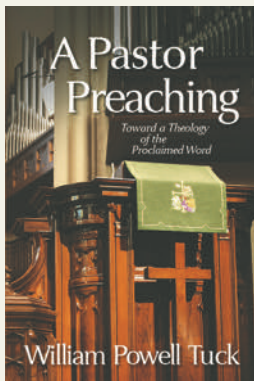
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William Howard Taft (1909–1913)

By Bruce Gourley

Theodore Roosevelt, president from 1901 to 1909, departed from office having effected an aggressively transformational legacy of socially progressive legislation, significant business reforms, and unparalleled conservation achievements.

At the same time, his accomplishments angered social and cultural conservatives. Into this conflicted political environment stepped William Howard Taft, Roosevelt's successor.

Taft, born in 1857 in Cincinnati, was the son of an influential lawyer of national renown. He attended Yale, became a Republican, and followed in his father's footsteps. Due to hard work and family connections, Taft's career soared.

In his 20s Taft was appointed by President Chester A. Arthur as Collector of Internal Revenue for Ohio's First District. At age 29 he took a seat on the Superior Court of Cincinnati. Three years later President Benjamin Harrison appointed Taft as Solicitor General of the United States. Two years later he resigned to become a judge of the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, a position he held until 1900.

Meanwhile, Taft in 1886 married Helen Herron. The couple raised three children and remained married for almost 44 years.

In 1901 yet another president, William McKinley, gave an appointment to the prominent Ohio lawyer and judge. This time Taft's service on behalf of a president took the form of the civilian governor of the Philippines.

Serving from 1901 to 1903, and with the long-term goal of Filipino independence in mind, Taft spearheaded economic development, built roads and schools, and

provided opportunities for local participation in government.

Ignoring American social conventions, Taft controversially treated locals as social equals and implemented racially inclusive policies at official events.

A fourth presidential appointment followed, this time by Theodore Roosevelt, as the U.S. Secretary of War. In a unique arrangement between the two men, the assertive and militant-minded Roosevelt personally administered the armed forces, while Taft served as his legal adviser and public advocate.

While serving under Roosevelt, Taft hoped to soon realize a long-held dream of appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. President Roosevelt, however, personally prodded and publicly promoted his Secretary of War as his chosen successor. Taft eventually acquiesced, and a determined Roosevelt cleared the way for the Ohioan to easily secure the Republican nomination in the summer of 1908.

A reluctant and uncomfortable campaigner, Taft relied heavily upon Roosevelt and other supporters in the framing of his political identity as a progressive among westerners and a conservative among easterners. Never a natural on the trail, Taft nonetheless handily won the Electoral College vote against three-time unsuccessful Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan.

Once in office, however, the non-

charismatic Taft fell victim to high but dueling Republican expectations from western and eastern constituents. A personal conviction that Roosevelt's muscular presidency had exceeded the legal powers of the executive office framed his response to the divided party machinery.

As a progressive, President Taft furthered his predecessor's antitrust legacy, established the U.S. Department of Labor, proposed and stewarded the enactment of the 16th Amendment establishing a federal income tax, supported the 17th Amendment mandating the direct election of U.S. senators, and regulated railroad rates.

As a conservative, Taft maintained high tariffs, held labor unions at arm's length, opposed the recall of judges by popular vote, and stepped back from Roosevelt's conservation commitments.

An increasingly frustrated Roosevelt came to view Taft as a Gilded Age throwback and enemy of reform. Fearful that progressivism was receding in American politics and declaring his successor as representing "the forces of reaction and political crookedness," Roosevelt challenged Taft for the Republican nomination of 1912.

Not shying from the confrontation, Taft denounced his former political ally Roosevelt as "the greatest menace to our institutions that we have had in a long time."

When Taft secured the Republican nomination amid controversial maneuvering, Roosevelt left the party and formed the aptly-named Progressive Party. His third-party candidacy weakened the Republican Party.

In the general election Democrat candidate Woodrow Wilson, running as



This is the 27th 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 Jesus Worldview Initiative.

a progressive, overwhelmingly won the electoral vote. Roosevelt garnered a sizable slice of the popular vote, but came in second. Taft landed a distant third.

In his post-presidential years, Taft remained politically involved and ideologically conflicted. He frequently voiced public approval of Democratic President Wilson's policies, yet in 1920 supported the presidential candidacy of Republican Warren G. Harding.

In turn, Harding in 1921 delivered to Taft the one position that the former president had desired all along: chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Taft remained in that office until his death in 1930, the only president ever to also serve on the Supreme Court.

Taft also distinguished himself among presidents in terms of his religious faith.

Most presidents prior to the 20th century were vaguely religious at best, rejected or did not embrace orthodox Christianity and/or key doctrines, attended church irregularly if at all, and upheld the separation of religion and state enshrined in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

A pattern of presidential personal ambivalence about religion and public embrace of a diverse religious citizenry, however, by the late 19th century gradually morphed into verbalized Protestant nationalism and, sometimes, personal religious fervency.

Grover Cleveland (1885–1889, 1893–1897), a nominally-religious president, more than any of his predecessors publicly embraced Protestant Christianity as an important component of patriotism. Benjamin Harrison (1889–1893) stood altogether apart from prior presidents in evidencing a fervent personal religious faith and embracing a resounding Protestant nationalism on the political stage.

Taft's predecessor, the non-devout but biblically-astute Theodore Roosevelt, forged a third way by personally embodying and politically inculcating a patriotic, muscular Christianity grounded in publicly-aggressive manliness and national military dominance, far overshadowing private religious devotion and church doctrine.

For his part, Taft's life included a commitment to an expressly unorthodox

religion — non-Trinitarian Unitarianism. Many conservative Christians during the 1908 presidential campaign dismissed Taft as unorthodox or an atheist.

Yet while addressing a December 1909 Methodist Missionary Mass Meeting, Taft spoke of America “as a great power for the spread of Christian civilization.” Even so, as president, Taft generally avoided overt public religious rhetoric.

An active Unitarian churchman, including attendance at All Souls Church in Washington, D.C. while president, Taft also served in national and international leadership positions for Unitarian laymen. Addressing the 1917 annual meeting of the National Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches in Montreal, a post-presidential Taft spoke of his denomination's faith as “a new religion and a new religious philosophy on the love of God for man, and of men for one another,” founded and taught by Christ “with such Heaven given sincerity, sweetness and simplicity” that it “became the basis for a civilization struggling toward the highest ideals.”

Unitarianism, the former president explained, offered “a broad Christian religious faith” that could be “reconciled with scientific freedom of thought and inquiry into the truth.”

Lofty language, however, did not always translate into reality. During the same Montreal conference and mere months after the U.S. entered World War I, Taft fervently opposed a pacifist-proposed denominational resolution advocating reconciliation, peace and social justice.

In its stead he introduced a pro-democracy, pro-war resolution, voicing the need “to stamp out militarism in the world.” Conference delegates overwhelmingly adopted Taft's counter resolution.

Taft's clearly unorthodox, aspirationally inclusive, scientifically informed, sometimes-humanitarian and periodically nationalistic faith most closely resembled that of earlier president John Quincy Adams (1825–1829). Also unorthodox, Unitarian and scientifically minded, Adams, despite his many religious doubts, was arguably the most personally religious president until the late 19th century.

But whereas Adam's personal religious devotion had been a rare exception among early presidents — more often skeptical, irreligious or ambivalent — Taft's Adams-like liberally-inclined and inconsistent religious sentiments marked him as *less* visibly Christian than other presidents of his era. **NFJ**



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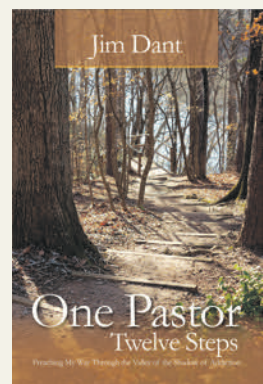
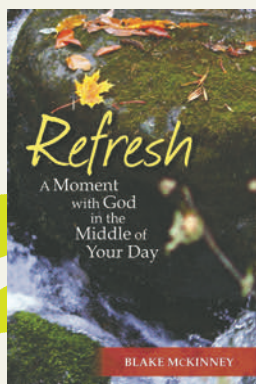
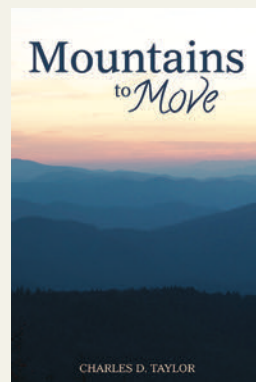
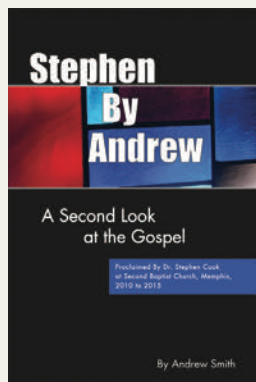
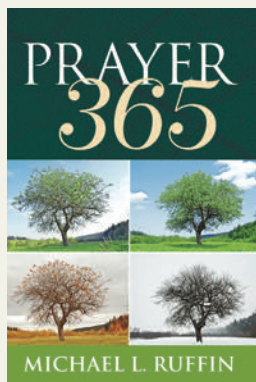
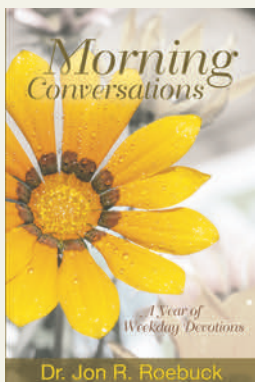
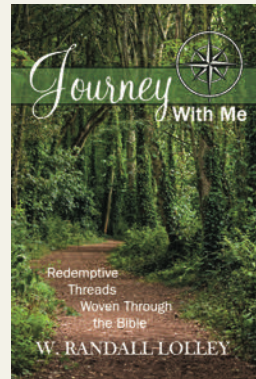
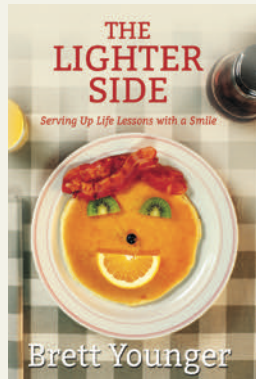
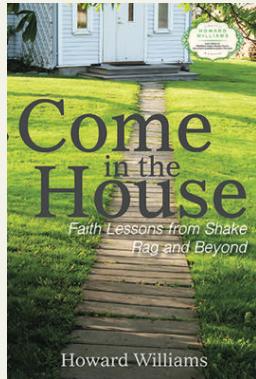
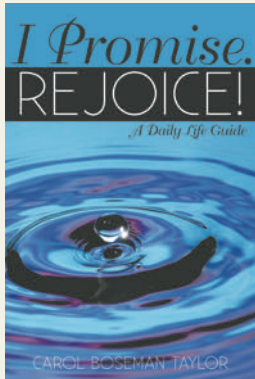
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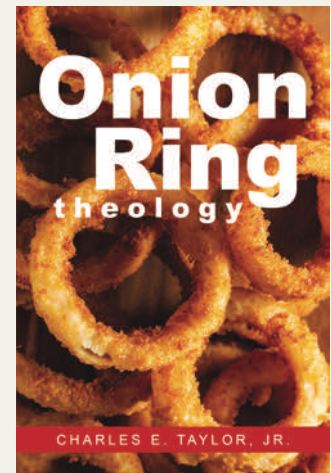
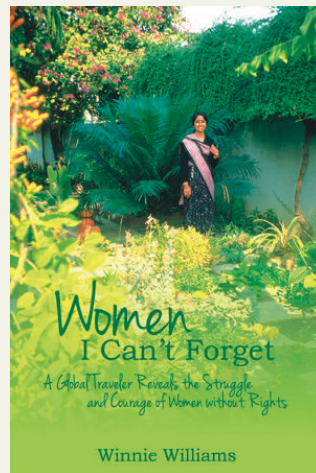
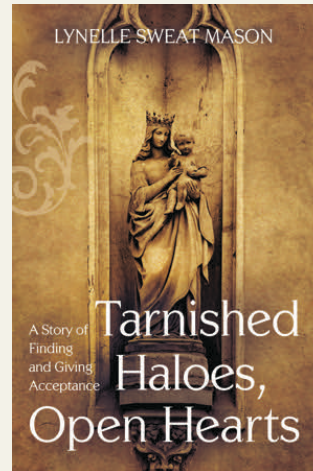
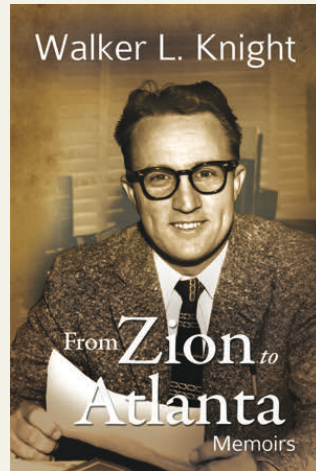
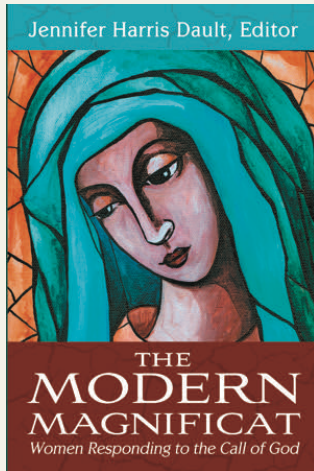
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Students on mission

Oh, the difference a summer makes!

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Decades later many adult Christian lay leaders, ministers and missionaries still point to a summer experience as a college student that changed their lives. While dates, locations and stories vary, the repeated common thread is that comfort zones were shattered, gifts were discovered, and that service to others became a way of life.

PAST/PRESENT

When Amy Mears steps into the pulpit of Glenwood Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., where she has served as pastor for 13 years, there is an unseen but sure trail back to the resort town of Gatlinburg where she spent the first of three summers beginning in 1982, following her sophomore year at Furman University.

As part of Smoky Mountain Resort Ministries, she and her teammates led day camps, assisted visiting youth mission teams, and performed concerts for tourists. Those experiences were the easy and familiar parts, she said.

“The magic happened on Sundays for me,” she added, explaining that her team of three was charged with sharing the various worship leadership roles while leading three morning services in area campgrounds.

“What I preached was hardly sermonic, but we called them ‘sermons’ and there was absolutely no qualm about my participation in proclamation,” said Amy.

Her developing call to ministry began to take a broader shape that has included resort ministry, hospital chaplaincy and finally the pastorate.

“Seated on a picnic table and accompanied by the chordles of Smoky Mountain rivers, I began to understand the gravity, the power and the fun of preaching.”



RETRACING STEPS – Scott and Dixie Ford of Birmingham, Ala., met in 1994 when both served as student summer missionaries in New England. Last summer they returned with their family of six to relive some memorable experiences.

Amy so cherished that first experience that she returned a second and third time to assume more responsibilities — including speaking to crowds, small and large.

After college graduation she created a resort ministry in Charleston, S.C., modeled after the one in Gatlinburg, and then went to seminary — staying beyond her intended master’s program to earn a Ph.D. in preaching. Her early laboratory, however, was in the hills of East Tennessee.

“It might have taken me a full decade to develop the leadership and speaking skills that those summers afforded me,” she said reflectively and gratefully. “...I am a pastor, a professor, a consultant and a speaker who traces her confidence, certainly, and a good portion of skill back to those summer mission opportunities.”

WHERE?

Michael Chance lives in Cherry Hill, N.J., and is retired after many years of ministry in New York City. He still serves part time with Graffiti Church on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. His trail of service began in the summer of 1971.

Upon entering Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, La., he headed for the Baptist Student Union (BSU), which became his “home away from home” for the next four years. There he learned about summer missions and thought it might be a good way to broaden his horizons.

“Selfishly, I wanted to go out west,” he said. “I wanted to get out of Louisiana and see the country.”

On April Fools’ Day 1971, a letter arrived from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board with his assignment. He would be spending the summer, following his sophomore year, in Buffalo, N.Y.

“I did not want to go to Buffalo,” said Michael, adding that he had to get a map of New York State to see where it was. “But, I was up for an adventure, so I decided to go with it.”

After working with six churches in the area and conducting a dozen Vacation Bible Schools, Michael said he “just couldn’t get New York out of my system.”

Two years later he returned to the state to serve as full-time youth pastor in Tonawanda, N.Y., where he met his wife-

to-be. Then, after sojourns to New Orleans and Virginia, he returned to western New York before accepting a mission assignment in NYC in 1986.

“Ironically, one of my assignments in that position was to assign and supervise the Baptist association’s student summer missionaries,” he noted.

He later served as pastor in Edison, N.J., outside the city. Yet his continued inner-city service today is marked by the priority of “Meet the need first.”

“I would not be doing this today,” Michael said, “were it not for summer missions.”

HALLMARK

Student mission experiences have long been a hallmark of Baptist student organizations and other campus ministry programs that seek to introduce students to unfamiliar surroundings in which their commitments and gifts can be sharpened.

Al Rahn, a retired longtime campus minister who served several campuses including a 20-year stint at Georgia Tech in Atlanta, encouraged countless students to engage in summer missions — and sometimes led mission teams himself.

“My role in student missions was helping students catch a glimpse of God’s mission for us on this earth,” he said. “I tried to help them not only see needs, but also how they could fill those needs.”

Like all experienced campus ministers, Al marveled at the difference a summer missions experience made in the lives of students.



Feature

“I tried to help them see that if they gave their time and talents, God could do wonders through them,” he said. “Indeed, over the years I saw tremendous changes in students’ lives because of missions.”

Such changes — while often having a long-term effect on a person’s life — could have an immediate impact as well.

Ken Evans, a teacher and coach in Atlanta with extensive experience in inner-city church community service and coffeehouse ministry, spent the summer of 1976 working with a Baptist church in Winter Park, Fla.

When he returned to Berry College near Rome, Ga., for the fall term, he brought back the idea of forming small groups for Bible study, prayer and companionship. One group led to another until various discipleship groups were meeting across campus.

“I’ve been committed to small groups ever since, and have taken advantage of them in almost every area of ministry where I’ve been involved.”

FLEXIBILITY

“Be flexible!” is the battle cry of summer missions. The fact that a student “has never done that before” is one of the reasons for committing to such a life-shaping experience.

Not only does flexibility apply to discovering and developing ministry gifts, but to broader life experiences.

“I fed a buffalo out of my hand, ate rocky mountain oysters, wrung a chicken’s neck, and lived 45 minutes away from the closest grocery store,” recalled Melissa Laseter, a learning specialist at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Top: Following his sophomore year at the University of Georgia, Tony Cartledge was appointed as a BSU summer missionary to Indonesia where students there found his striped, bell-bottom pants to be stylishly cool. **Left:** Rick Wilson, now the less-haired chair of the Christianity department at Mercer University, was a student at Mississippi College in 1974 when he was assigned to serve as a summer missionary working with churches in California.



Her “wild summer” came in 2003 following her sophomore year at UTC when she was assigned to the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota through YouthWorks!

She sought guidance from her campus minister about taking this 11-week assignment with a relatively unknown organization, admitting: “I was still on shaky ground about what a woman with a bossy personality and lots of ideas could do in the world of missions — and not be Lottie Moon!”

Melissa’s assignments were many and varied: planning and leading worship in addition to recreational and educational programs, while also running the kitchen. Soon she discovered that “four energetic college students” — pouring their lives into a different group of youth and leaders each week — could make a difference in the community they served.

The lessons from that one summer continue to reveal themselves, she said.

“I learned about what I was capable of that summer,” said Melissa. “I learned to speak up for myself. I learned what prejudice was like, even on a tiny scale. I learned about how much this group of people had been wronged and then forgotten over the years.”

She continued: “I learned about a rich culture and atmosphere that had been and has continued to be whitewashed and left out. I learned about hospitality from people who had no reason to be gracious and welcoming to four white college students and the masses of youth that descended on their tiny town.”



Connie Campbell, a University of Georgia student at the time, served as a BSU summer missionary to a Baptist church in Connecticut in the summer of 1987. Even the steps leading to the summer experience had its impact.

“Just the process of applying and then going through the interview weekend was life changing,” she said. “I’m still friends with people I met that weekend. Being in a place with so many people who were hearing the same call and were taking the same chance was amazing and faith building.”

Upon receiving her assignment, Connie said she was excited, scared, thrilled, and apprehensive about what the summer would bring. And her home church, First Baptist Church of Chatsworth, Ga., shared in the excitement.

Church members wrote letters placed in dated envelopes that Connie was to open each day while in Connecticut.

“It was a wonderful link to home,” she said. “I kept several of the letters and I treasure them even more now, as many of these people are no longer living.”

She and her partner, a male student from Mississippi, attended orientation weekend and heard whispers from those familiar with their assignment. “Has anyone told you about *your* church?” one asked.

The church, they were told, had Pentecostal leanings unfamiliar to most Baptists. So the student missionaries were leery when meeting the pastor for the first time and hearing, “Has anyone told you about *our* church?”

However, he shared that they would be doing eight weeks of Backyard Bible Clubs, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, in different areas around the city, plus two weeks of VBS at the end of the summer.

Additionally, they would teach youth and children, with Connie’s partner angling for the youth assignment. Connie then met her host family, and the first thing the mother asked was, “Has anyone told you about *our* church?”

“That night I called my parents and cried and cried, and I said, ‘If they bring out snakes, I’m coming home,’” Connie recalled. “There were no snakes, but they did do this odd thing where there was a live

band for music.”

“They didn’t use hymnals; instead words for the songs were up on a screen in the front of the room,” she added. “Ha! I guess they were ahead of their time!”

Connie said the more emotionally expressive worship was very different from what she had ever known — but that “the people were full of love for God, for each other, for the community and for me.”

“They didn’t care that I didn’t raise my hands, and they even found a hymnal for me to use.”

Connie said she grew a great deal that summer and learned she could do hard things as well as stand up for what she believed. The most difficult part, she noted, was that her male partner didn’t share ministry responsibilities fairly, only wanting to do those things that drew attention to himself.

“What I remember most about that summer is that prayer felt like breathing, in and out, all day long,” she said. “When I think about times in my life when I have felt closest to God and felt that I have grown the most in my faith, that summer stands out as one of the most important.”

That summer led to her decision to pursue an education degree and become a teacher — and later to go to seminary. Connie has spent six years in public education and 20 years as minister to children.

“I am very grateful for the many ways that BSU shaped my life and for my summer missions experience most of all.”

EXPANDING

David Roberts of Emporia, Va., spent 38 years in pastoral ministry and now serves as an intentional interim pastor. Yet he still recalls the summer of 1967 when, as a student at Carson-Newman College in East Tennessee, he served alongside Baptists in Utah.

“This exposure to a culture that was unlike what I had experienced growing up in small-town Appalachia and had found in the cities I had visited was an eye-opener to the wider world,” he said. “It also exposed me to religious diversity outside a Baptist or southern Protestant context.”

David said summer missions solidified his call to attend seminary following college graduation. “The experience was both

horizon-expanding and challenging, and it helped me begin a journey of what kind of Baptist I wanted to be.”

Robert Guffey, now pastor of Freemason Street Baptist Church in Norfolk, Va., spent summers while a student at Louisiana State University in “life-changing experiences” ranging from beach ministry in North Carolina to church ministries in Hawaii and Massachusetts.

“I came away seeing the family of God as grander and more diverse than I had known, grateful for the opportunity to work alongside ministers who took their callings seriously and joyously,” he said, “and being challenged to find what was real and true about my own faith experience as a young adult and not an inherited faith from parents and others.”

Elaine Quarles, currently a computer programmer living in Seneca, S.C., served as a summer missionary near Huntington, W.V., in 1984 after her freshman year at Clemson University.

“When I interviewed for summer missions I pictured myself on the Grand Strand Missions Team at Myrtle Beach,” she recalled. “Fortunately, God had a different plan.”

Her missions partner in West Virginia was Karen Carr, a University of South Carolina student. “We proved that Tigers and Gamecocks can work together in harmony!” said Elaine.

“Karen and I spent two days a week canvassing neighborhoods and inviting people to a fledgling church. That was challenging and humbling as we found people mostly uninterested and suspicious of us. It showed that was not the way to recruit church members!”

Three days a week the pair worked with children and youth in Backyard Bible Clubs, youth activities and choirs. Some weeks brought VBS or a stint as camp counselors.

“VBS was an eye-opener,” she said. “In a church that averaged maybe 40 in attendance on Sundays, we had over 100 children each evening!”

Fortunately, she said, the church members expected this big turnout, knowing many parents were glad to hand off their children for a while.



“But this allowed us to reach many children who were not churched, and share the love of Christ with them,” said Elaine.

Some of the most meaningful ministry, she said, took place quietly in the home of their host family who were experiencing loneliness after their son joined the Navy. It was the beginning of a friendship that lasted until that “precious couple” died a few years ago.

JAILTIME

Rodney Strong is an assistant district attorney in Chattanooga, Tenn., who during his second summer missions experience as a student at East Tennessee State University was assigned to be an assistant prison chaplain in Nashville.

“The most difficult moment of my summer missionary experience occurred at the state penitentiary when there was an escape from the prison farm,” he recalled. “One of the escapees tried to swim the Cumberland River and drowned. I was given the task of calling the inmate’s family to notify them of his passing.”

He added: “I will never forget that moment when I had to tell them the awful truth with as much compassion as I could.”

Rodney said that summer experience taught him lessons that impact his work today.

“My experience at the state penitentiary fundamentally altered my perception of the justice system, and the lack of any real rehabilitation without the person wanting to change.”

His mother, he said, got a kick out of being asked at church about what Rodney was doing for the summer, and responding, “Oh, he’s in prison.”

CALIFORNIA

Rick Wilson, chair of Mercer University’s religion department, wanted to spend the summer of 1974 away from Mississippi College — preferably in Israel. He marked his second choice on the summer missions application as “anywhere in the U.S.”

With long hair flowing, he headed to northern California to become part of a four-student team of “two conformists and



Nashville pastor Amy Mears traces her calling to preach to the campgrounds around Gatlinburg, Tenn., where she helped lead worship services as a student missionary.

two nonconformists.” He belonged to the latter, along with a young Hispanic woman.

“For the whole summer we went from village to village, working with poor churches, mostly Hispanic, in the fruit valley,” he recalled. “We did VBS and Backyard Bible Clubs — all the rage back then.”

The two weeks he lived with a family outside Sacramento provided learning experiences from recycling to using a push plow to a creative approach to financial stewardship. The treasurer of the church would remove the quarters from Sunday offerings and replace them with her own dollar bills, he said.

“Then she’d go to Reno on Monday to play the slots with ‘God’s money,’” Rick recalled. “And, she always put the positive returns back in the church budget.”

More applicable, Rick said he “learned to love the unfamiliar” and “was nourished by diversity of the Body of Christ.”

CALLINGS

Amy Stertz, minister with children and families at First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., spent three summers as a student at Mars Hill College working with children and youth in smaller churches. Those experiences formed a calling that led to

divinity school, to work in other churches, and to her current ministry position.

She marvels at how the overall experience “changed the path of my life.”

Leslie Limbaugh, an American Baptist pastor in Festus, Mo., spent three summers in the 1980s, as a student at Washington University in St. Louis, serving in churches near and far — including working with children and youth in Oahu, Hawaii.

“My home church raised me up to be a disciple and to ‘do what God calls you to do,’” said Leslie. “Campus ministry and summer missions gave me opportunities to discover and demonstrate skills, talents, interests and gifts.”

David Helms of Ringgold, Ga., who spent many years in music ministry, served a church in Eatonton, N.J., in the summer of 1973. He was transferring from a junior college in Enterprise, Ala., to Samford University.

David said he was greatly impacted by the musician Ken Medema (see related story on page 10), who participated in the summer orientation and gave a concert. “When my book is written, the summer of ‘73 will be a very important chapter.”

HARD LESSONS

Ken Sehested, longtime peace and justice organizer, pastor, stonemason and editor living in Asheville, N.C., recalls his summer missions experience in Long Island, N.Y., as “the hardest 10 weeks of my life.”

The former “traveling teenage youth evangelist” who went to Baylor University on a football scholarship was in the process of some “theological deconstruction” when he arrived in New York following his freshman year. That continued throughout the summer as he worked with a pastor who needed some deconstruction himself.

“I literally heard him answer a man who asked about Baptist beginnings by a reference to John the Baptist,” Ken recalled. “So there were Baptists before there were Christians?”

The summer experience “pushed me over the edge” of retooling theologically, he said, and led to his leaving Baylor — and football — a year later to transfer to New York University.



“That move accelerated a painful spiritual disorientation, which continued a few more years until I began getting my bearings — the reconstruction — during seminary, particularly in rediscovering the Jesus story as read through my Anabaptist heritage. The forging of that story continued with my participation in the life and mission of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga.

BIGGER WORLD

Tony Cartledge, who writes the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies in this journal and teaches at Campbell University Divinity School, applied to work in a coffeehouse in Boston during the summer of 1971, following his sophomore year at the University of Georgia.

So he was a bit surprised when someone with the selection committee called to see if he would consider going to Indonesia. He agreed — and spent most of the summer in Semarang, on the north coast of Java.

“Semarang had several universities, and Baptists had a *Balai Mahasiswa Baptis* — I think that’s the spelling for Baptist Student Center,” he said.

His primary job was to hang out with students there and to lead conversational English classes and other programs.

“I was pretty big into guitar at the time, and at the end of the summer I did a concert wearing my red-white-and-blue vertically striped pants — which the students thought was really cool.”

Tony would ride a bike from the missionary family’s home where he stayed on the seminary campus to the student center — as well as for exploration.

“I generally had afternoons off, and would ride out into the country, through rice paddies, tidal fishing spots, and into jungle areas, enjoying the scenery and often passing out gospel tracts — and fortunately, coming back alive,” he said. “I had several opportunities to speak or teach in churches or schools as well, and the people were always so gracious.”

He learned enough of the Bahasa Indonesia language to make pleasantries and bargain with bicycle taxi drivers.

“One of the more memorable parts of the summer was a two-week mission

meeting at a resort of sorts in Tretes, on an old volcanic mountain,” said Tony. “I was in charge of all the teenage missionary kids, and the first week had me pulling my hair out trying to keep them entertained and out of trouble.”

Tony said it was a notable year in Southern Baptist missions, when “a sort of ‘Holy Spirit revival’ swept through.”

“Near the end of the first week, the biggest troublemaker in the bunch interrupted whatever I was trying to do and told about how an adult missionary — Avery Willis, who later developed LifeWay’s *MasterLife* series — had apologized to him and asked forgiveness for having held a judgmental attitude toward him because he had long hair.”

The impromptu testimony time continued with several of the missionary kids sharing about the changes they had seen in their parents as a result of their sense of the Spirit sweeping through that week.

“One of them said, ‘We want to have what our parents have. How do we get it?’”

Tony said he was caught by surprise, and said: “All I know to do is to pray.”

“Before I knew it, the kids were all on their knees praying, and it was the closest thing to Pentecost I have ever experienced,” Tony recalled. “They all got happy and decided they needed to go tell their parents. I tried to keep them from interrupting the mission meeting, but they all ran ahead of me, burst into the meeting, and ran to their parents with tears and joy. The business session turned into a testimony meeting. It was amazing.”

Tony said that summer was particularly formative in several ways:

“First, because it introduced me to the bigger world, and showed me real poverty for the first time, as well as the beauty of another place and another culture — and Asian food!

“Second, because I was able to take initiatives and practice leadership, important for my development as a young minister.

“Third, because of that amazing spiritual experience at the mission meeting, even now when I get cynical, I look back on that time and remember that something remarkable happened.”

Tony also learned to take full advantage of an opportunity. So he boldly contacted missionaries in Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore, and arranged two- to three-day visits to those places en route to Indonesia. On his own dime, he returned to Georgia via Bangkok, Bombay, Israel, Greece, Rome, Zurich, Paris and London — thereby circumnavigating the world.

“For a 19-year-old who had never been on a plane, it was quite an adventure — one I’ve obviously never forgotten.”

THEN/NOW

Lisa Allred, a special education teacher in Youngsville, N.C., served as a missionary to the deaf community at a Baptist church in Apex, N.C., in the summer of 1984. A student at Brewton Parker College in southeast Georgia, she was raised in “a very protective family in Savannah” and attended small private schools.

“I lived in a very small world,” she confessed. “Although it was just the beginning of a very long faith journey for me, my experiences that summer opened my eyes to God’s providence as it relates to my life and the lives of those around me. I saw God at work in me as much or more than in those I ministered to that summer.”

Lisa struggled with an evolving calling to Christian service.

“As I worked with those children and adults in the deaf community, I came to understand that my gifts were in the area of education — and specifically to those who had challenges in learning,” she said. “That summer began a life of trust in God that has only deepened over the years — as I watched God show me how he could use my gifts in church but also in the world to better his kingdom.”

Scott Ford, chief operations officer for Passport, Inc., still echoes the summer missions mantra of “Be flexible!” As a student at Jacksonville State University in Alabama in the mid-’90s, he served two summers as a student missionary, first in Vermont and then in Hawaii.

“Serving as a summer missionary in college deeply impacted my faith journey and my life,” he said.

Scott recalled an early morning in the



summer of 1994 when he met a dozen other summer missionaries and their families at a gas station in Oxford, Ala., to begin that summer sojourn.

“Little did I know at the time that among that group was my future wife, Dixie, who also served as a summer missionary in New England,” he recalled.

The group of 13 traveled together from Alabama to Cambridge, Mass., for an orientation that included repeated calls for flexibility. “Our trainers were correct,” said Scott, who headed on to the small town of Woodstock, Vt., with his summer missions partner.

“I stayed in a different host home each week and served with the people of Woodstock Baptist Fellowship in reaching out to their community, ministering to their family of faith, welcoming guest church missions teams, and leading three- to five-day backpacking trips with teenagers.”

In Boston, as the summer drew to a close, Scott rejoined the other student missionaries — including his future wife — who had been assigned across six states of New England.

“I learned more lessons than I can count that summer,” he said. “I was formed and reformed daily through conversations, experiences, Bible study and prayer.”

So Scott applied the following year and was assigned to Puu Kahea Baptist Conference Center on the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

“My three summer missions partners and I volunteered with a local youth group, cooked and served meals at the conference center, visited the Big Island to help build a new church building, had amazing days off, and learned from the local Hawaiians on the ‘dry side’ of the island, away from where so many tourists visit,” he said.

“We learned to surf, to cook potato salad for 200 people, and how to cut and prepare picture-perfect pineapples,” he added. But not all was picture perfect.

“In my second week in Hawaii I broke my foot on a hike with the local youth group and could not swim or surf for the following six weeks,” he said. “As a result I read 14 books that summer, which may have been more books than I had read in my life leading up to that point.”

Among the books was one by Tom Sine, claiming: “We’ve been sold the North American dream with a little Jesus overlay.” That one line, said Scott, challenged his understanding of faith and changed the trajectory of his life.

“Developing the habit of reading also drastically affected and continues to guide my life,” he added. Remembering this brief, but life-changing experience, also impacted how Scott does his work today.

“It gives me hope to remember that two intense months during college can have such a profound impact on that person’s life,” he said. “I cling to this conviction as I interview potential Passport summer staffers.”

And Scott said that he and Dixie are passing along what grew out of their summer missions experiences to their four children. In fact, last summer they took a family tour of New England.

Times change, and the church where Scott served has been replaced by an apartment complex. But he and his family climbed Mount Washington, something he had done with a group of teenagers more than two decades ago.

They also visited the church in Peabody, Mass., where Dixie had served as a summer missionary.

“Finally, we spent three days in Boston, walking the Freedom Trail, visiting the Boston Public Library, eating good food, and celebrating our family which began to be formed during summer missions almost 24 years ago.”

SERVICE

Passport, Inc. offers summer camp leadership positions for college and seminary students to work with children and youth in varied locations. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship offers short-term missions and church experiences through Student.Go and Student.Church.

Opportunities for summer or semester service are available through various campus ministry programs and other Christian organizations. The best route to a good match is usually through conversations with a trusted person, in a church or on campus, who ministers with college students on a regular basis. **NFJ**

Student missions —still innovating

“Missions was an integral part of Baptist campus ministry from the beginning,” said Wanda Kidd, collegiate engagement coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina and a former Baptist campus minister at Western Carolina University.

“Each state with its own Baptist campus ministry began summer mission opportunities around 1950,” she added. “Backyard Bible clubs, house renovations and revivals were the major areas of student leadership.”

Kidd, who also serves as collegiate ministry consultant for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global, said state Baptist conventions often worked with Southern Baptist Convention mission agencies to create the summer student experiences.

The Fellowship, formed just a quarter century ago, created Student.Go to provide short-term service with CBF field personnel, “Together for Hope” poverty-focused initiatives, and other partnering ministries. A program to allow students to serve in churches, she added, was formed in 2009.

First called Collegiate Congregational Internships, the program was renamed Student.Church in 2015, said Kidd, “to bring some universality to the student mission initiative.” The latest program — the Pivot experience — offers young adults the chance to work in Fellowship-related churches in the Bahamas and Puerto Rico. **NFJ**

Mutual benefits

Church internships connect students and congregations

BY RICK JORDAN AND JOHN PIERCE

“I want to help students fall in love with the church and I want to help the church fall in love with young adults,” says Wanda Kidd, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF/CBFNC) college ministry coordinator.

To that end, what is now called Student.Church was born nine years ago to match students eager to serve in congregational settings with churches eager to welcome them. Some of the motivation came from the sad discovery that fewer students wanted to go into congregational ministry.

A brainstorming group of leaders working with young adults, said Wanda, wondered aloud: “Maybe if they had a positive experience in a local church leadership role, they would [consider congregational ministry].”

Since that time, more than 450 students have ministered in nearly 500 CBF-related churches. Most internships are in the southern U.S., but there are also opportunities in England, Puerto Rico and Canada.

WHY INVEST?

“The decision to work with student interns was easy because this partnership aligns with many of our church’s values,” said Heather Folliard, associate pastor of HillSong Church in Chapel Hill, N.C.

“First, we believe in nurturing the growing faith of all people in all aspects of life, including leadership,” she added. “Second, being situated on a college campus we recognize the necessity of healthy relationships between students and the church. And, third, we stand to learn a lot from the unique gifts of students — especially regarding ministry to students.”

First Baptist Church of Knoxville,

Tenn., is a “teaching church,” said minister with youth and families Ben Winder. “Our vision document says, ‘We value developing the next generation of women and men who sense God’s call to become ministers and missionaries. First Baptist stands committed to creating significant ways to help individuals further develop both their sense of calling and their skill sets for ministry.’”

The church sees these internships as a part of its God-given calling, said Ben, adding: “Personally, I benefited a great deal from internship experiences in congregations who loved me well, gave me a place to learn and serve, and helped prepare me for the life of vocational ministry.”

Pastor Exter Hardy III is the only staff minister at Pole Line Road Baptist Church in Davis, Calif., so having an intern was appealing, he said, along with providing an opportunity for a student to explore a

ministry calling in the West.

“We were clear from the beginning that this was to be a two-way relationship: the intern being a blessing and helping us in ministry and outreach, new ideas, freshness and ‘youth’ in leadership,” he said, “as well as our church loving and supporting a young person as they serve, maybe for their first time, in a church ministry position.”

The internship is adapted to the student’s gifts and calling, he noted.

“For instance, one intern was a music major, so we started a jazz band for people to just drop in and join in a jam session. This made contacts with people who would not have come to our church,” he said. “Another intern was a skate boarder, so he spent time at a local skate board park. Another intern was into gaming. He started video game nights at the church and built a relationship with a local storeowner who

rents/sells games and systems — a relationship we have been able to continue.”

WHAT IMPACT?

Members of HillSong Church are committed to the student interns, said Heather, and, in turn, are willing to learn from them.

“Interns have a better understanding of social media and equip our church to better communicate through that platform,” she said. “In addition, the students have fresh energy and a commitment to the people in the church who benefit most from one-on-one relationships.”

The first priority with interns in Knoxville, said Ben, is helping them explore and hone their call to ministry — while appreciating the benefit the congregation gains as well.

“There is the very practical truth that extra hands — and young, energetic ones at that — make lighter work,” he said.

Exter said interns have helped his northern California church to see that they have something to offer both the intern and the community. “It has helped us be open to new ideas as interns have led in worship and introduced new styles, new ways of doing things in worship and ministry” — and also to make connections in the community.

While interns come and go, Ben said his “greatest joy” is in seeing how these students “go on in their journey to ministries of impact.”

Exter said one former intern returned after graduation to serve for six months. “Then, after landing his ‘dream job’ and working in it for three years, he recently returned to our church and is on staff with us part time now. We are thrilled about that!” **NFJ**

—Rick Jordan is church resources coordinator for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, which collaborates with Nurturing Faith Journal to produce a state edition.



Jimmy Carter's latest book affirms his faith

A REIVEW BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Anyone who grew up in church where “testimony times” were frequent will feel at home reading Jimmy Carter’s latest book, *Faith: A Journey for All* (2018, Simon & Schuster).

Indeed the personal Christian testimony of the Baptist layman from rural southwest Georgia who became the 39th U.S. president reveals a life of growing faith and faithfulness over the past 93 years.

“Our faith should be a guide for us in deciding between the permanent and the transient, the important and the relatively insignificant, the gratifying and the troubling, the joyful and the depressing,” writes Carter.

Following the example of his Sunday school teaching father, the fresh-faced midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy taught Bible lessons to the children whose parents were stationed there. And he’s never stopped studying and teaching from the holy texts he’s come to know well — and engages deeply throughout this book.

Times have changed, but the calling to explore, share and live out biblical truths remains the former president’s high priority — whether teaching a current gathering of worldwide guests snuggled into the pews of Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., or in much earlier and different settings.

“I conducted religious services on special days, such as Christmas and Easter,” writes Carter of being a young Navy officer at sea. “A dozen or more of the submarine crew would sit on folding bunks between the torpedoes, and I would stand forward in the torpedo room close to the launching tubes to read the religious text, ask and answer questions, and say a prayer.”

From those more-youthful days to an elder statesman, Carter has lived out his Baptist-shaped Christian faith in ways that God-fearing mamas pray their children will

grow up to do.

The former president acknowledges theologians (the Niebuhrs, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, Brunner, Barth, Moltmann, Kierkegaard and others) who influenced his faith formation, along with friends and family.

He counters the public caricature of his late brother Billy who overcame alcohol addiction and assisted others with that challenge: “My brother was an inspiration to me.”

Carter recounted the time as governor of Georgia in the 1970s when Bob Dylan gave a concert in Atlanta, and afterward came to the governor’s mansion with his band.

“My three sons were very excited to spend time with the band, and I was pleased when Bob asked for a private discussion with me,” Carter recounted. “He and I went out into the garden, and for an hour or so I answered his questions about my Christian faith.”

Dylan, who was intently interested, noted Carter, announced later that he had embraced the Christian faith.

Carter’s long life as a faithful husband for more than

70 years and an active Christian layman who made church involvement and Bible teaching a high priority even during demanding times, a volunteer lay missionary who did door-to-door evangelism in Pennsylvania as part of Southern Baptists’ Bold Mission Thrust, one who continues serving the poor and suffering, and has shared his faith publicly and privately, again and again, is hailed by many.

Except, of course, by fundamentalist Christians who in the 1980s — after first rallying to defend racial discrimination at Bob Jones University — began to define their religion in terms of political opposition to equal rights for LGBTQ persons and equal access to medical abortion — issues unknown throughout most of Christian history.

Fundamentalism is characterized by

“rigidity, domination and exclusion,” notes Carter. “In sharp contrast, Jesus espoused humility, servanthood of leaders, and breaking down walls between people.”

Though theologically conservative within the larger framework of Christianity, Carter’s rejection of this narrowly-defined politicized faith has brought more condemnation from fundamentalists than directed toward other politicians with scant to no faith commitments and practices but who promise to deliver preferred political goods.

Yet Carter stands firm in his faith, noting the challenges and losses in life when he has been sustained: “God is not my personal valet. God does not ... keep me from trouble, fulfill my personal desires or guarantee my success. However, through prayer God offers me comfort, reassurance, satisfaction, courage, hope and peace.”

And it is clear that the examples from his upbringing — at home and church — greatly shaped such a firm foundation: “A commitment to my basic Christian faith was instilled in me in childhood,” he writes.

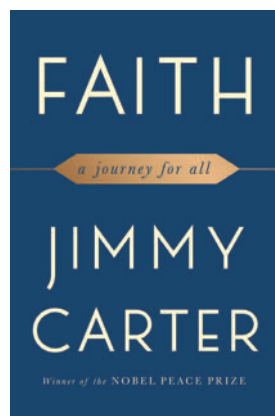
Well-bred Baptists will appreciate Carter’s telling about the sacredness of Sundays when his parents put away their playing cards, and any fishing required slipping down to the pond. And this story:

“At the age of 12, when I was deemed old enough to drive a car by myself, my sisters and I went back to the church on Sunday evenings for meetings of the Baptist Young People’s Union (BYPU).”

Carter’s Christocentric faith is conveyed throughout the book with such affirmations as: “For a Christian, the constant access to God and the life and teachings of Jesus offer a sound moral foundation that includes all the most basic ideals that should guide us.”

When asked to define Christianity, Carter notes: “My best explanation is that a Christian is a person professing Jesus Christ as personal savior, and striving to have the human qualities demonstrated by Jesus.”

If it’s been awhile since you sat through a good ol’ testimony time, pick up this book. And don’t be embarrassed if an “Amen” slips out now and then. **NFJ**





Deception & danger

Frederick Clarkson talks about Dominionism's threat to faith and freedom

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Dominionism is a theological/political ideology that has been infecting American Christianity and the nation at large for many decades. Yet few people recognize its appearance and negative impact when advanced under the guise of biblical fidelity.

Frederick Clarkson, senior research analyst for Political Research Associates, sounds the alarm loudly and clearly for those with ears to hear. Editor John Pierce asked Clarkson to unmask and explain Dominionism, and to describe its dangers to the church and nation. The following conversation is adapted from that interview.

NFJ: Few American Christians, it seems, have a clear understanding of Dominion theology. Can you offer a somewhat concise definition?

FC: Dominion theology has generally referred to the Christian Reconstructionist movement led by the late conservative Presbyterian theologian Rousas John ("R.J.") Rushdoony. Dominionism is a broader term that encompasses the Christian Reconstructionists, and others who seek a more theocratic society.

The definition some of my colleagues and I crafted for just this purpose is:

"Dominionism is the theocratic idea that regardless of theological view, means, or timetable, Christians are called by God

to exercise dominion over every aspect of society by taking control of political and cultural institutions."

NFJ: What are the roots of Dominionism, and how has it evolved?

FC: Like any modern movement, the sources go way back. But there are two main roots of contemporary Dominionism.

First, there are the theologians of Christian Reconstructionism. Twentieth-century theologian R.J. Rushdoony had taken an earlier notion of "presuppositionalism" — that reality can be viewed correctly only through the lens of the Bible — and then envisioned the elements of what a biblically-based society would look like, which he detailed in his tome, *Institutes of Biblical Law*.

No one had done that before. But whether or not one agrees with him, Rushdoony is the yardstick by which others measure their own visions.

The other main root of Dominionism is the Latter Rain movement of 20th-century Pentecostalism, which had its own approach to Dominionist thought, but has further developed in conversation with Christian Reconstructionism.

The leader of this contemporary movement of Pentecostal and Charismatic Dominionism was the late C. Peter Wagner, whose 2008 book *Dominion! How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* is a frank explanation of the contemporary manifesta-

tion called the New Apostolic Reformation.

One thing important is that Dominionism in all of its expressions is best seen as a movement of ideas distinct from denominational doctrine. Most of those whose views are decidedly Dominionist may not even use the term.

The ideas of Rushdoony, Gary North and later the likes of Peter Leithart; and the late C. Peter Wagner and Joseph Mattera, Wagner's successor as head of the United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders; and those working to implement their ideas like Jerry Boykin and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council can be quite different, even as they have many core elements in common.

NFJ: Is Dominionism a part or the whole of the so-called Religious Right agenda? Can it be distinguished from Christian nationalism, and does that matter?

FC: I think Dominionism is the driving ideology of the Christian Right. And there are both overlaps and differences between Dominionism and Christian nationalism.

Some Dominionists believe that America was founded as a Christian nation going all the way back to the original colonists and continuing through the Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution. Others such as theorist Gary North, who has a doctorate in early American history, understands that the Constitution was intended as a barrier to

Christian theocracy, noting that article 6 proscribes religious tests for public office.

But such differences aside, all Dominionists share the goal of transforming the country into their version of a Christian nation, governed under laws informed by their interpretation of biblical principles. Others more overtly call for biblical law.

Some people are patient revolutionaries, and others have a profound sense of urgency and a vision of violence to go with it. But I also think there are a lot of people who might not be on board with the whole agenda if the going gets tough. For example, if the movement were challenged more directly and fundamentally than is currently the case.

NFJ: Where and how does Dominionism show up in religious and public life today, and what are the present dangers?

FC: We see manifestations of Dominionism every day — in the pronouncements of major religious and political leaders. They are so ubiquitous that we barely notice, especially amidst the turmoil since Donald Trump took office.

We see it most dramatically, perhaps, among those who refuse to recognize marriage equality under the law for LGBTQ people — even those who are fellow Christians and married in Christian churches. Even more concerning are the public officials who refuse to do their jobs — or business people who want to be able as a matter of law to refuse to serve LGBTQ people in their place of business.

The effort to shape the law and the Constitution to make it conform to their particular religious viewpoint is often distinctly Dominionist and establishes an ominous tone for our society, regardless of the outcome of particular legal battles. There are visible signs of the potential volatility of this political and cultural moment.

One of the less-understood aspects of the infamous Alt Right march on Charlottesville, Va., last year was the overt Dominionism of one of the organizational leaders. Michael Hill, leader of the neo-Confederate, Alabama-based League of the South, has been building what he considers to be an army of young white men whose mission is the defense of Christendom.



He calls it the Southern Defense Force, and he believes it will eventually morph into the “Army of the True Living God” — destined to wage an end-times war with the forces of Satan. These were among those who held torches aloft and brawled in the racist march on Charlottesville.

The League of the South may be most overt in its threatening, but prominent Dominionist theorists and actors often speak of possible religious violence and warfare.

For example, recently there was a big prayer rally for the president held at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C., a few blocks from the White House. The weekend event called “The Turnaround” was organized by such leaders of the New Apostolic Reformation as Cindy Jacobs, Dutch Sheets, Chuck Pierce and Lou Engle.

Their advance publicity called for President Trump to issue “biblical decrees,” and they saw themselves as raising up an “Army of Special Forces” on his behalf. While this may just be hype, the threat was not only obvious, but intentionally ominous.

NFJ: How do Christian leaders get recruited to this religious/political agenda? How is it packaged and sold?

FC: One way is via the charismatic movement, including in the Baptist world. We saw it with Pat Robertson, for example, an ordained Baptist minister who became a charismatic, and taught the doctrines derived from both the Latter Rain movement and Christian Reconstructionism. Dominionist activist Gary DeMar called him an

“operational Christian Reconstructionist.”

Robertson also epitomized the heterogeneous nature of the Dominionist movement. He functioned as kind of a theological politician, in which he was doing his best, as a broadcaster, to appeal to a wide range of religious and political tendencies at the same time.

He featured interviews with R.J. Rushdoony himself on his signature *700 Club* cable show. What’s more, Rushdoony’s opus *Institutes of Biblical Law* has been taught in classes at Pat Robertson’s Regent University law school.

Dominionist ideas come in not just through the charismatic and Pentecostal world, however. Fundamentalist Baptist Jerry Falwell published essays by Rushdoony in the membership newsletter of his Moral Majority organization back in the day.

We have seen a whole subculture of Dominionist scholars, educators, political organizers and governmental leaders emerge over the past few decades, hidden in plain sight.

Other paths to Dominionism have been various issue movements, notably the anti-abortion movement. People who got involved because of the books, sermons and films of Francis Schaeffer, for example, were sometimes sucked into the Dominionist worldview.

Although Schaeffer publicly opposed theocracy and contemporary application of Old Testament biblical law, he shared Rushdoony’s concern about the rise of secular government and advocated militant resistance to what he hyperbolically termed governmental tyranny.

He never said what the result of his sometimes revolutionary rhetoric should be — which led many to turn to the works of Rushdoony and the Reconstructionists, who offered a concrete vision that followed from Schaeffer’s argument.

Still others find their way into Dominionism by taking seriously bogus claims that the United States was founded as a Christian nation — revisionist history that makes it sound like the Founding Fathers intended something an awful lot like contemporary Dominionist Christianity. The books, speeches, trainings and seminars promoted

by such figures as David Barton and Roy Moore advisor John Eidsmoe are excellent examples of this.

NFJ: To what degree does the success of this agenda depend on Christian leaders exchanging political support with politicians for access to power and friendly policies?

FC: The movement certainly is able to move its political agenda this way, but since Dominionism is about taking over every part of life, success can be gauged in many ways. But there has certainly been an emphasis on building a vast political capacity — voters, activists, candidates and public officials at all levels.

They have been able to employ the opportunities afforded by electoral democracy to gain seats at tables of power in order to bend society to their purposes. This has required developing political partnerships with elements in both major parties and the Catholic Church, as well as getting their own people into positions of power.

This has certainly been on vivid display since the Trump campaign for president and during the transition, and in his administration so far.

While Dominionist Protestants, the Catholic bishops and their frequent ally, the Mormon Church, would not seem to have identical interests, and each has different visions for the future of Christianity, the U.S., and many contemporary policies — they do have an important common enemy.

And that is the constitutional doctrine of separation of church and state, which preserves religious freedom of all, and seeks to prevent government from becoming the enforcement arm of religious doctrines. And they are having some success.

NFJ: How does this movement redefine religious liberty?

FC: I think religious liberty, as they see it, is intended specifically to advance particular forms of Christianity. This movement will often conflate religious freedom with religion or “faith” — understood to be synonymous with Christianity of only the right sort, of course.

In that spirit, we should note that the

more moderate stated views of Dominionist-influenced leaders should be carefully scrutinized, and even taken with a grain of salt, because what is tolerated now may be prosecuted as heresy or apostasy later.

If that sounds harsh, consider for example, in 2014, when marriage equality had not yet been decided by the Supreme Court, Tony Perkins, head of the Family Research Council, not only questioned the authenticity of the Christianity of those who support marriage equality, but questioned their right to religious freedom itself because, he claimed “true religious freedom” only applies to “orthodox religious viewpoints.”

It is our obligation as citizens to be able to clear the air on this: religious freedom is a right — not a religion.

In the wake of the *Hobby Lobby* decision of the Supreme Court, the Trump administration, fulfilling a campaign promise, has vastly redefined religious liberty to justify granting a variety of institutions, including government contractors and grantees, wide religious exemptions from civil rights laws particularly as they may sometimes involve conservative Christians who object to contraception, abortion and LGBTQ rights having to do their jobs in public facilities or using public funds.

Trump’s Department of Justice has gone so far as to create a section of the department’s historic Civil Rights Division as the legal enforcement arm of these religious exemptions. Religious liberty, then, becomes a pretext to refuse to recognize and respect the civil and religious rights of others, backed by the full legal clout of the federal government.

Religious liberty also further becomes a pretext for embedding religious doctrine into the legal code of the United States.

NFJ: What words, phrases and names should set off alarms for those resisting this perversion of the Christian faith and American democracy? Who is driving this effort?

FC: Words and phrases to be alert to certainly include “biblical principles,” “biblical law” and “Seven Mountains.”

Such political operatives as David

Barton of Wallbuilders, David Lane of the American Renewal Project, Cindy Jacobs of Generals International and Lou Engle of The Call are important. But there is no one group or individual that is driving the rise and influence of Dominionism.

It has been coming in an evolving, organized fashion since the middle of the last century; it has percolated throughout the Christian world; and it has influenced a wide variety of leaders and institutions.

Among the prominent politicians influenced by or who are Dominionists of one variety or another themselves, I would include Alabama’s Roy Moore and Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, former Gov. Mike Huckabee and Vice President Mike Pence. The Dominionist vision of religious liberty is also now being exported under the leadership of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, former Gov. Sam Brownback of Kansas.

NFJ: What is the mission of Political Research Associates, and what issues are drawing the most attention now?

FC: Political Research Associates (PRA) is an independent and non-partisan social justice think tank, based in Somerville, Mass. We are devoted to supporting movements that are building a more just and inclusive democratic society. We expose movements, institutions and ideologies that undermine human rights.

For more than three decades PRA has produced carefully documented investigative reports, articles and activist resource kits, and published the quarterly magazine *The Public Eye*. We also advise policy makers and social justice advocates, and offer expert commentary for media outlets.

My work has recently taken me to campaign for religious freedom as a value that must not be ceded to the Christian Right. I think it is a value that most Americans, both religious and non-religious, Christian and non-Christian, can agree on and that it is a matter of some national urgency that we figure out how to do it. I believe religious freedom is the glue that holds our experiment in pluralism together — and that the future of democracy depends on it. **NFJ**

What is a Christian's highest allegiance?

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Over the past year Nurturing Faith has been exploring creative and collaborative ways to restore the call to follow Jesus as the highest Christian priority above all other ideologies and allegiances — and in doing so to enhance congregational life and offer a positive public witness.

The Jesus Worldview Initiative (JWVI) — still in its early development — seeks broad engagement and adequate funding to provide needed resources and experiences around this important mission.

OVERVIEW

In recent decades so-called “biblical” and “Christian” worldviews have been used to redefine Christianity in narrow political and doctrinal terms often at odds with or absent from Jesus. Therefore, it's time to address the need to recover Jesus as the central figure and focus of our faith.

To that end, Nurturing Faith writers Bruce Gourley, John Franke and I have written articles and addressed this subject in congregations and other group settings. Also, we hosted a retreat with some key congregational leaders to help refine the direction of this initiative.

The rise of political allegiances and selective doctrinal affirmations under the guise of “biblical worldview” or “Christian worldview” — that downplay the call to follow Jesus and embrace his life and teachings as the example for Christian living — creates confusion and division in congregations and church-related organizations.

Often congregants expect the Sunday sermon to align with these “biblical” or “Christian” worldviews espoused through politicized media rather than to align with Jesus' purposes as revealed in Scripture.

Initial efforts by Nurturing Faith to engage ministers and congregations in evaluating these “biblical/Christian world-



views” and intentionally refocusing on a “Jesus worldview” that recovers the primary confession of Jesus as Lord have been illuminating and well received.

Interest from readers and participants have affirmed that this topic deserves more exploration and wider engagement. Here are some early responses to presentations/discussions about JWVI:

“What excites me most about this project is we ... are resurrecting Christ, whether that be the Christ we have largely ignored because his commands are too much for us or the Jesus that we let portions of the church hijack and use for misguided purposes.”

—Pastor Griff Martin, First Baptist Church of Austin, Texas

“This morning I read your piece on having a Jesus worldview and I felt a resounding, ‘Yes!’ Thanks for being one resource that keeps pointing the way.”

—Pastor Leslie Limbaugh, Selma American Baptist Church, Festus, Mo.

“The topic of our week together was how much of the current American conversation about Christianity actually factors in the life and teachings of Jesus... I expected stimulating conversation; I did not expect to come home with a disturbed sense of purpose and priority.”

—Pastor Dock Hollingsworth in a sermon to Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, Ga.

“Calling Christians to a higher and better-informed loyalty to the teachings of Jesus is the high ground we want to occupy. We don't want to inhabit the low ground of most of our current political, and even theological, debate.”

—Pastor Jack Glasgow of Zebulon Baptist Church in Zebulon, N.C., and chair of the Nurturing Faith Board of Directors

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Clearly, responding to politicized versions of American Christianity with political arguments is ineffective, and being disrespectful toward those who hold such positions is inconsistent with the calling of Jesus. Indeed a higher road is desired in this project.

Timidity, however, is not a good response. The Gospel cannot be soft-sold as affirming fear, discrimination and injustice — or we are as guilty as others in redefining “Christian” and “biblical” for our benefit. Yet it is the Gospel's offense, not our own, that creates the need for confession and conversion — for ourselves as well as others.

Anything planned or produced for advancing a Jesus worldview should be seen as a resource to be implemented by church leadership in ways that fit a particular congregational setting — not as a one-size-fits-all prescription. And, finally, others are voicing this concern and we want to collaborate wherever possible.

RESOURCES

Emerging ideas for the Jesus Worldview Initiative include a multi-week congregational resource to guide groups through an exploration of worldviews and ways to restore Jesus as the highest priority; retreats for pastoral leaders to explore this topic in a peer setting; and regional events to advance a Jesus worldview. Those interested in collaborating around this initiative may contact Bruce Gourley at bgourley@nurturingfaith.net. nurturingfaith.net. [NFJ](http://nurturingfaith.net)

“Calling Christians to a higher and better-informed loyalty to the teachings of Jesus is the high ground we want to occupy.” — Jack Glasgow



Questions Christians ask scientists

What are we to make of the two creation accounts in Genesis?

Science provides a stiff challenge to those who would read Genesis 1–3 in a literal, historical way. Such a reading is plainly incompatible with a 13.8-billion-year-old, evolving cosmos.

But the text itself provides its own difficulties for a historical interpretation, starting with the fact that there are two separate — and contradictory — creation stories contained in the first three chapters of the Bible.

The first begins, of course, at the beginning: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...”

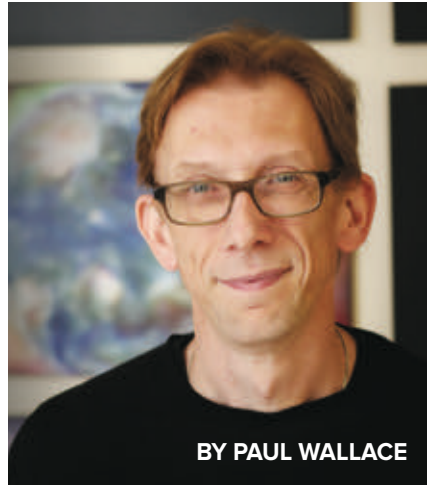
This is the six-day creation story in which God performs different acts of creation on different days: light and dark on the first day, sky on the second, and so on. It runs through God’s hallowing of the seventh day, the day of rest, in Gen. 2:3.

The second creation story begins with the very next verse: “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens...”

This account features the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam, the trees of life and of the knowledge of good and evil, the serpent, and the disobedience of the first couple. It continues through their expulsion from Eden at the end of chapter 3.

There are indeed contradictions to be found when the stories are compared. This becomes clear when one looks at the order in which things were made.

For example, the first story tells us that the animals were made before human beings. The fifth day is devoted to the creation of “swarms of living creatures” and birds that “fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” On the next day, God “made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind,



BY PAUL WALLACE

Paul Wallace is a Baptist minister with a doctorate in experimental nuclear physics from Duke University and post-doctoral work in gamma ray astronomy, along with a theology degree from Emory University. He teaches at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Ga. Faith-science questions for consideration may be submitted to editor@nurturingfaith.net.

and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind” before making humankind, both male and female, in the divine image.

In contrast, the second account states that Adam was the first creature to be made; Gen. 2:7 describes his creation from the dust of the earth. God breathes life into Adam, but the image of God is nowhere mentioned. It is not until Adam is in the garden, and in need of a companion, that God creates the animals and brings them to Adam.

After the man finds these creatures to be insufficient as mates, God responds by forming Eve out of his rib. So in the second account the order of creation is Adam-animals-Eve, whereas in the first it is animals-Adam/Eve (who are created simultaneously).

Other logical contradictions exist. In the first story plants arrive before Adam, but Gen. 2:4b-7 explicitly states that God formed Adam at a time “when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up.”

There are also clear stylistic differences between the two stories. While these do not present obvious logical problems of the kind described above, they do produce a profound contrast of atmospheres.

The first account is calm, stately, linear, liturgical, and highly ordered. Its scope is cosmic and heaven-centered, and it moves in a top-down way. The Creator is unnamed, transcendent, impersonal, distant and abstract, creating in the divine image and by the sheer power of the spoken word. In this account there is no messiness, no trial-and-error, no sense that anything is other than good or even very good.

By contrast, the second story of creation is a rather hit-and-miss affair. It has a nonlinear, messy, bottom-up quality. It is earthy and earth-centered. Here the Creator is given a name — Yahweh — and forms Adam from the dust of the ground. Yahweh then breathes life into Adam, but the divine image is not mentioned.

The Creator is imminent and personal and anthropomorphic to the point of walking and talking. Additionally, and surprisingly, there is an instance in which Yahweh claims that things are “not good” — when, after Adam is placed in the garden, he is left without a companion.

Given these logical contradictions and clear stylistic and thematic differences, virtually all biblical scholars agree that these stories originate not from a single author but from different literary traditions.

The first story is drawn from a later tradition than the second, and the two were eventually brought together. These sources and others are believed to be responsible for multiple tellings of other stories in the Old Testament, such as Noah’s flood and Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai.

There are those who disagree that these two creation stories are separate accounts. These folks say that the two are really one, penned by a single author. A popular version of this view says that the second





story is merely an up-close, zoomed-in look at the sixth day of creation.

Accordingly, it shows the earthbound drama only, overlooked by the large-scale, cosmic, impersonal tale told in the first chapter. Those who hold this view often point to Moses as the author of Genesis 1–3, and of the rest of the first five books of the Bible (known as the Pentateuch).

Of course, such a view demands that one attempt to reconcile these contradictions. For example, Answers in Genesis, an organization that promotes a literal-historical view of Genesis, claims that the animals actually were formed before humankind in accordance with the first story, and that God merely brought them to Adam to be named by him in the second.

But the text says otherwise. It reads, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ So out of the ground

the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them” (2:18-19a).

Clearly, God’s creation of the animals is a direct response to Adam’s need for companionship.

Answers in Genesis resolves the plant-Adam contradiction by suggesting that the plants referred to in the second story are found only in Eden. They claim that the phrase “plants and herbs of the field” refers to the original, barren fields of Eden, and does not refer to the world as a whole or to plants in general.

In this view, green things are already growing elsewhere, but not yet in the garden. Again, there is no evidence for this in the text. Therefore, such arguments have a forced, artificial quality about them.

Answers in Genesis and others who insist on a literal-historical interpretation

of scripture force the Bible to contain no logical contradictions. But logical consistency seems to have not been a primary consideration for those who put the Bible together, whoever they were.

They were certainly smart enough to have recognized these kinds of problems, but they were not terribly worried about them. The simplest explanation for these contradictions is that there was more than one source of the Genesis text.

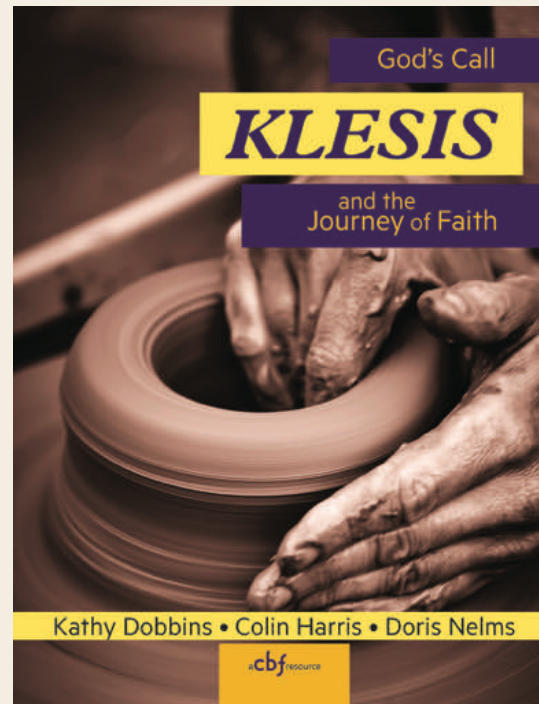
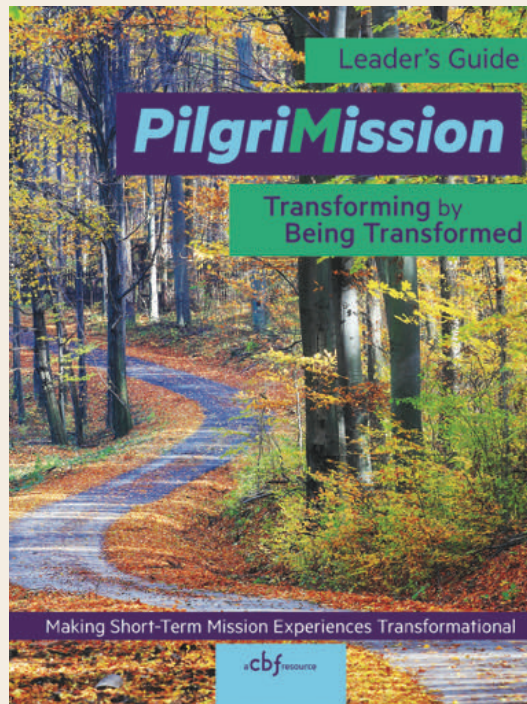
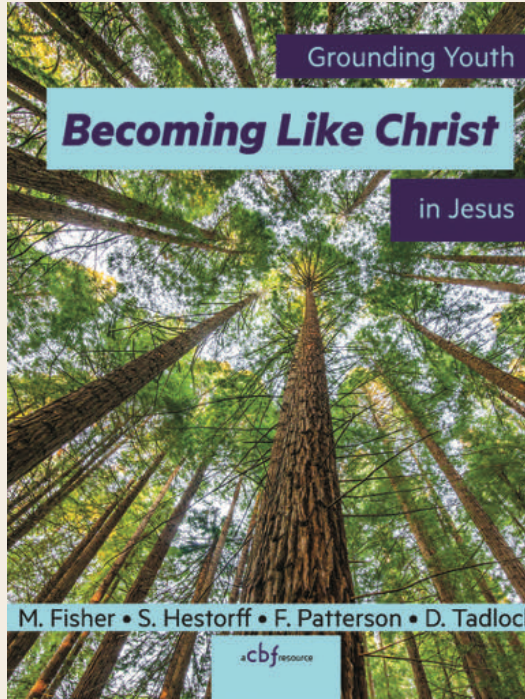
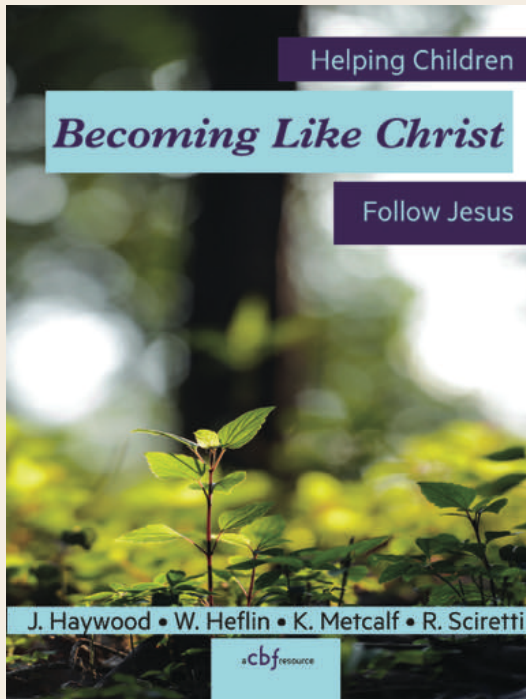
Those who put this book in its final form apparently felt that these logical contradictions were a necessary price to pay in order to achieve a fuller and more nuanced view of creation, of God’s nature, and of our relationship with God and the natural world.

We see, therefore, that there are reasons other than science to keep us from reading Genesis in a literal-historical way. Science merely reinforces this conclusion. **NFJ**

“Virtually all biblical scholars agree that these stories originate not from a single author but from different literary traditions.”



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