

A photograph of an archaeological dig site. Three workers are visible: one in a green shirt on the left, one in an orange shirt in the center, and one in a green shirt on the right. They are working in a trench filled with dirt and large grey stones. Various pieces of equipment like buckets, baskets, and tools are scattered around. In the background, there are some tents and supplies, suggesting a field camp.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2018

# NURTURING FAITH

Journal & Bible Studies

PERILS OF  
PREACHING IN  
POLITICIZED TIMES

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

## HOW GOOD ARE WE?

Christian Miller  
talks about our  
messy character

## FAITH AND SCIENCE

*What is Intelligent Design,  
and what do you think of it?*

## HOLY DIRT

Discovering academic  
and spiritual benefits in an  
archaeological dig

# Great Bible Study

## IS IN YOUR HANDS!



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

*See page 21 for more information.*

## FOR SHORT-TERM BIBLE STUDIES

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

*Revelation: All Things New*

*Ephesians: Upward Faith*

*Psalming the Blues: At the Intersection of Praise and Pain*

*A Place for Praise: Ancient Psalms for Modern Times*

*Five Scrolls for All Times: Song of Songs, Ruth,  
Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*



**PATRIARCHS, MATRIARCHS,  
AND ANARCHS**  
*Genesis 12-50*  
A 13-WEEK STUDY WITH  
Dr. Tony W. Cartledge



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

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

# OUR MISSION

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

## OUR TEAM

### EXECUTIVE EDITOR

John D. Pierce  
editor@nurturingfaith.net

### CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER

Julie Steele  
jsteele@nurturingfaith.net

### MANAGING EDITOR

Jackie B. Riley  
jriley@nurturingfaith.net

### CONTRIBUTING EDITOR / CURRICULUM WRITER

Tony W. Cartledge  
cartledge@nurturingfaith.net

### ONLINE EDITOR / CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Bruce T. Gourley  
bgourley@nurturingfaith.net

### CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Vickie Frayne  
vickie@nurturingfaith.net

### CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER

Jannie Lister  
jlister@nurturingfaith.net

### BOOK PUBLISHING MANAGER

Lex Horton  
lex@nurturingfaith.net

### CHURCH RESOURCES EDITOR

David Cassady  
sreditor@nurturingfaith.net

### DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE

John F. Bridges  
jbridges@nurturingfaith.net

\* \* \*

### PUBLISHER EMERITUS

Walker Knight

### EDITOR EMERITUS

Jack U. Harwell

## OUR COLUMNISTS

*The Lighter Side* – Brett Younger

*Theology in the Pews* – John R. Franke

*Questions Christians Ask Scientists* – Paul Wallace

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

*Diggin' It* – Tony W. Cartledge

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



### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jack Glasgow, Zebulon, N.C. (chairman)  
David Turner, Richmond, Va. (vice chair)  
Sheri Adams, Asheville, N.C.  
Nannette Avery, Signal Mountain, Tenn.  
Kelly L. Belcher, Asheville, N.C.  
Jack Buchanan, Kings Mountain, N.C.  
Doug Dortch, Birmingham, Ala.  
Wayne Glasgow, Macon, Ga.  
Frank Granger, Athens, Ga.  
Jake Hall, Macon, Ga.  
Cynthia Holmes, St. Louis, Mo.  
David Hull, Watkinsville, Ga.  
Bill Ireland, Ooltewah, Tenn.  
Becky Matheny, Athens, Ga.  
Bill McConnell, Knoxville, Tenn.  
Andrew McGill, Chattanooga, Tenn.  
Cynthia W. Mitchell, Alpine, Ala.  
Renée Lloyd Owen, Marietta, Ga.  
Ron Perritt, Baton Rouge, La.  
Jim Qualls, Peachtree City, Ga.  
Tamara Tillman Smathers, Rome, Ga.  
Charlotte Cook Smith, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
Carol Boseman Taylor, Rocky Mount, N.C.  
Jim Thomason, Anderson, S.C.  
Sarah Timmerman, Cairo, Ga.  
Monica Vaughan, Greensboro, N.C.  
Laurie Weatherford, Winter Park, Fla.  
Clem White, St. Petersburg, Fla.

### DIRECTORS EMERITI

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

*Nurturing Faith Journal* (ISSN 1072-7787) is published bimonthly by: Baptists Today, Inc.,  
988 1/2 Bond Street, Macon, GA  
31201-1902

Subscription rates: 1 year, \$24; 2 years, \$42;  
1 year groups of 25 or more, \$18; 1 year groups  
of less than 25, \$24; 1 year Canada, \$42;  
1 year foreign, \$100. Periodical postage paid  
at Macon, Ga. 31208 and additional mailing  
offices. POSTMASTER: Send address correc-  
tions to: P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318  
• (478) 301-5655 • © 2018 Nurturing Faith •  
All rights reserved.



**RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS**

Warren G. Harding  
(1921–1923)  
By Bruce Gourley

**52**

# INSIDE

VOL. 36, ISSUE 5  
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2018

## FEATURES

- 6 HOW GOOD ARE WE?**  
Christian Miller talks about our messy mix of virtues and vices  
*An interview by John D. Pierce*
- 15 WHAT COUNTS AS A TITHE?**  
Expectations, practices vary among churchgoers
- 44 NEW MODELS**  
Baptist churches are rethinking ordination  
*By Rick Jordan*
- 46 HOLY DIRT**  
Discovering academic and spiritual benefits in an archaeological dig  
*By Tony W. Cartledge*
- 60** Exploring what churches tell teens about science  
*By Emily McFarlan Miller*
- 62 FAITH/SCIENCE QUESTION**  
What is Intelligent Design, and what do you think of it?  
*By Paul Wallace*

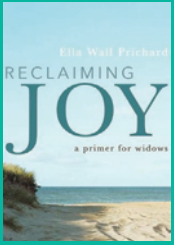


**LOSING THEIR RELIGION:** Younger adults are less religious, and not only in the United States | *By Yonat Shimron*

## THOUGHTS

- 5** Perils of preaching in highly politicized times  
*By John D. Pierce*
- 16** We need the church  
*By Michael Smith*
- 18** The church as an instrument of the Kingdom  
*By John R. Franke*
- 19** Increasing our intentional interaction  
*By Ginger Hughes*
- 20** Money can buy happiness, but you have to spend it right.  
*By Brett Younger*
- 41** Chase and the persistence of grace  
*By Tony Vincent*
- 42** When leaders fail us  
*By Andrew Garnett*
- 50** Questions and answers about advancing a Jesus Worldview  
*By John D. Pierce*
- 58** Why “But the Bible says...” rings so hollow  
*By John D. Pierce*
- 64** Doing more with more  
*By John D. Pierce*

“LIFE IS NOT OVER”  
Writer shares honest, insightful journey of widowhood  
*Review by John D. Pierce*



12

Cover photo by Tony W. Cartledge from an archaeological dig at Ein Jezreel, Israel. Participants (top to bottom) are: Karie Parkes, Larry Turlington, and John Robert Harris. Story on page 46.

Worth Repeating .....4	Reblog.....19, 58	Classifieds.....40
Editorial.....5	Lighter Side .....20	

# Worth Repeating

“The very meaning of the phrases ‘religious liberty’ and ‘religious freedom’— traditionally understood as referring to the right of Americans to practice whatever faith they wish or no faith at all — is being altered to mean that government should foster a closer relationship with those who want to mix their Christian faith with taxpayer dollars.”

Susan Jacoby, writing in *The New York Times*

“Jesus remains a troublemaker.”

Church historian Bill Leonard of Wake Forest University on a Baptist church in South Carolina removing from the building’s façade a statue of Jesus deemed “too Catholic” (BNG)

“The proper role of Christians in politics is not to Christianize America; it is to demonstrate Christian values in the public realm.”

Columnist Michael Gerson (WaPo)

“I believe that the label ‘evangelical’ has become toxic today, and I’m wondering how long before it will ever *not* be associated with hypocritical, self-righteous political power-grabbers. Today, if I even use the label on myself, I’ll add ‘progressive’ before ‘evangelical’— but I think the masses simply hear ‘evangelical’ and lump me in with the ones even I reject.”

American Baptist minister Ken Fong  
(*Forbes*)

“One could argue that the effective demise of evangelical leadership actually occurred sometime between 9/11 and the Iraq war. It was in those anxious moments that evangelical leaders had an opportunity to preach that true security lay in higher realms — yet they instead chose *en masse* to embrace and promote a sort of civil religion that begged for political relevance and glory rather than promoting core commitments of a classically orthodox worldview.”

Author and management consultant Rob Asghar, writing in *Forbes*

“When the heat is on and the pressure is high ... I want to trust the way of Jesus, which unflinchingly acknowledges, remarkably outlasts, and gradually transforms everything that threatens human flourishing.”

Minister/professor Guy Sayles of Asheville, N.C.  
(From the Intersection)

“The use of rap music is not allowed in preaching.”

Catholic Bishop Philip Anyolo on suspending Father Ogalo, a priest in Kenya, for his unconventional preaching style used “to bring youth closer to the church” (CNN)

“We need to decouple the identity of the church from particular political platforms about which there can be disagreement... What we need is not a change in label; what we need is a change of heart, a change in values.”

Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear  
on NPR’s *Morning Edition*

## Subscribe to Nurturing Faith E-Newsletter

Want to stay up to date on the latest Nurturing Faith news and happenings?  
Would you like to receive discounts on books and sneak peeks  
into upcoming stories and events?

Just email [socialmedia@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:socialmedia@nurturingfaith.net) and say, “Put me on the list.”

# Perils of preaching in politicized times

By John D. Pierce

**Hit-and-run sermons, as I call them, are risk free. This is mostly the type of preaching I do: being invited to fill in for a pastor on occasion.**

**T**here's no real relationship with the congregation beyond basic pleasantries and my speaking and their listening. A check from the church treasurer is the limited transaction. And whether they liked what they heard or not will determine any return engagements.

Sometimes longer pastoral vacancies provide a more meaningful opportunity to serve as an interim pastor — allowing for an enjoyable, extended relationship that goes deeper than “hit-and-run” preaching. Yet even an interim pastorate is a temporary relationship in which the congregation doesn't hold the livelihood of the messenger in its hands as with a full-time pastor.

Therefore, as one who fills the safer roles rather than the riskier one, I hold in high regard my many friends who face the perilous task of proclaiming a convicting, challenging and counter-cultural gospel to those who may not want to hear such.

Now seems to be a particularly perilous time to preach for those who believe the gospel should challenge rather than accommodate our cultural comforts. Deep political division makes the task more challenging now.

Too often influential members come to church expecting religious justification for their deeply held, religious-political ideologies forged throughout the week by boisterous commentators on radio and TV. Their expectation is that the sermon should

align with these often fear-driven beliefs force-fed via selective media rather than match up with the convicting and challenging gospel of Jesus Christ.

And if the preacher doesn't simply baptize these biases — even at the expense of Jesus' life and teachings — they can find a church where the preacher does so or, more troubling, seek to replace the proclaimer in this particular church with one who will.

Therefore, pastors — who already face the weekly demand of mining the biblical text for a relevant and applicable spiritual message — must also wonder if doing so faithfully will result in resistance or rejection from those wanting affirmation over conviction.



Of course, such times create no problem for some preachers — for example, Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church of Dallas, who dresses God in an Uncle Sam suit each Sunday and spews forth a politicized message that tickles the ears of his listeners who fill the pews.

For many other preachers, however, violating basic principles of religious freedom and digressing from the life and teachings of Jesus are a price too high to pay for public affirmation and access to power. What happens on Sunday has to be accounted for to God on Monday's bended knee.

While preaching sermons that go against the grain of cultural trends has long been challenging, this is a particular difficult time in that so many self-identified, white American evangelicals hold political perspectives greatly at odds with basic

concerns for human rights based on the conviction that God's image marks all humanity.

Pastors have told me of being chastised for simply affirming the values we all learned safely as children in Sunday school — such as honesty, justice and compassion. These have long been the kinds of attributes one might expect of devout Christians since Jesus so often called for such things.

So how does one mount the pulpit and proclaim a biblical call to honesty, compassion and the treatment of all persons as children of God — when so many listeners have been told to fear those unlike them?

And, for some odd reason, more moderate/progressive Christians often feel pressured to state that things aren't as bad as they really are — while more conservative/fundamentalist Christians can sit firmly on any perceived fire alarm.

Some offer the counsel to simply “keep politics out of the church,” and indeed overt partisanship is a present danger in congregations with any hint of diverse thought. However, the reality is that what one considers to be “political,” and therefore inappropriate, is often anything with which they disagree.

My appreciation runs deep for those preachers who are faithful to the gospel rather than simply affirming the prejudices of their listeners in order to keep perceived peace and personal security.

Likewise, I strongly affirm those vitally important lay leaders who protect the freedom of the pulpit so that from an imperfect but dedicated and called voice might come a divine word that nudges those with ears to hear toward greater faithfulness in following Jesus. **NFJ**

*“Too often ... [the] expectation is that the sermon should align with these often fear-driven beliefs ... rather than match up with the convicting and challenging gospel of Jesus Christ.”*



GOOD AND BAD — Each of us has a “character gap” that needs awareness and attention, says author/philosopher Christian Miller (left) whose interview was conducted by *Nurturing Faith Journal* editor John Pierce during the publishing ministry’s board meeting at Knollwood Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., last April. Photo by Tony W. Cartledge.

# How good are we?

*Christian Miller talks about our messy mix of virtues and vices*

**AN INTERVIEW BY JOHN D. PIERCE**

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Last year Oxford University Press released Christian Miller’s important book, *The Character Gap: How Good Are We?* The A.C. Reid Professor of Philosophy at Wake Forest University and director of the Character Project, Miller also has written two academic books on the subject of character.

This conversation is adapted from an interview with Miller as part of the spring meeting of the Nurturing Faith/Baptists Today board of directors.

**NFJ:** You started your book with that wonderful, annual, American event — not Thanksgiving, but the day after Thanksgiving. What does Black Friday tell us about our moral character?

**Miller:** Black Friday is not very conducive to the good sides of our character. Why? Because people get fixated on that new TV or new refrigerator which they know is going to be deeply discounted and, if they get there first, they can get it.

In the process, people’s vision often gets skewed. They lose sight of what really matters and get fixated on things that don’t matter as much. So I begin the book with a story to make that a little bit more concrete.

This is a really tragic story about somebody named Walter Vance in a small town in West Virginia about five years ago or so. Vance, age 61, was shopping for some

Christmas decorations for his store. He had a history of heart problems, and while in the crowded store had a heart attack and passed out.

There’s a question to ask at this point: If you saw someone in a Target store passed out on the floor, what would you do? I’m guessing you would say: I would stop my shopping and call someone or check on him or, whatever the case, I would help.

Well, not so much in the case of the shoppers on Black Friday. What they did was keep on shopping. They turned to look in the other direction. Somebody even stepped over his body to get to that TV or whatever it was they wanted so badly.

Long story short: Eventually, some nurses came along, administered CPR and called for an ambulance. Unfortunately, he died on the way to the hospital. Could he

have been saved if people had acted quickly? We don't know for sure, but it's more likely.

So what's the message from this story? It's not just that people in this small town in West Virginia were acting badly, as if they were some exception to the rule. I use this story as a springboard to reflect that our character is complicated and may have some good sides but also some bad sides that we should know about, learn more about, and that could be deeply troubling, too. So on that cheery note, let's dive into the book.

**NFJ: So we know what we're talking about here, what is character?**

**Miller:** I'm thinking primarily about moral character. What leads us to think, feel and act in morally relevant ways? I'm a philosopher, so that's where I want to start with an abstract definition. But to make it a little bit more concrete, let's think about how character comes in two forms: good character and bad character.

Good character has to do with moral virtues like honesty, kindness, courage, justice, temperance, fortitude, graciousness and gratitude. On the flip side there are vices like greed, envy, dishonesty, injustice and cowardice. I like to move quickly from an abstract definition to specific examples of good character and bad character that make it more concrete for people today.

**NFJ: You write that vices and virtues have the same features. Can you explain that?**

**Miller:** They are not identical, yet they share some crucial features. Let's start with virtues. Is helping one person, just one time, enough to be a compassionate person?

Let's say you pick up some dropped papers — a small, helping task. Is that enough to be a compassionate person? No, it needs to be frequent, over time, more than one occasion.

But is frequently picking up dropped papers enough to be [considered] a compassionate person — if the only thing in life you ever do to help other people is to pick up dropped papers? No, right?

So it has to be frequent over time and have some kind of diversity in a variety of different settings — such as when someone

has dropped papers, when someone collapses in the aisle of Target, when certain charities have special needs or whatever it might be with your church or voluntary organization.

But is that enough? Frequency over time and diversity of situations? What if you're motivated just to make yourself look good when you help other people or to get a good tax write-off when you donate or to get rewards in the afterlife or to alleviate your feelings of guilt or make your résumé look better?

Is that compassionate? No. Motivation matters.

Motivation is important to virtue, and behavior is important too. Both are essential elements: virtuous motivation and virtuous behavior. And if that's generalized to all virtues, then the same is true for vices, except they're oriented in the opposite direction.

Instead of wanting to help people, you might want to hurt people. So the cruel person — the opposite of compassion is cruelty — is motivated to hurt people, and, over time, exhibits a pattern of hurting behavior. Sadly, a cruel person hurts animals, children and adults across a variety of situations over time.

So the orientation is different. In one case it's toward good things in response to good considerations. In the other case it's trying to promote bad things to bad considerations, but they kind of work the same way motivationally and behaviorally.

**NFJ: You confess to being stumped, not by some great scholar or the brightest student in class, but by your 3-year-old son who asked, "Why be good?" Have you come up with an answer yet?**

**Miller:** After talking about what character is, there's a natural question: Well, who cares? Why does it matter? So there's this virtue thing and this vice thing, and people say virtue is great. But why should I care about it?

How do you explain that to a 3-year-old? I'm still wrestling with that. But when my students or other people ask me, "Why be good?" I have a couple of things I can say.

One thing, and I have mixed feelings

about saying this, is that it's in our self-interest to be good. If you become a good person, it's actually good for you. Lots of studies find a relationship between virtue and good things like life satisfaction, decreased stress, health and academic achievement. All these things we think are important are connected to virtue.

The more virtue goes up, the more these good things go up. Then there is the opposite: When vice goes up, these things go in that direction too. But I wouldn't want to just end there.

You might even think that's kind of a strange reason to give for being a virtuous person — because being virtuous is often not thinking about yourself but stepping outside of yourself and caring about others. I think that's true. So we want to go beyond that point.

Also, I would say there are religious reasons. There are all kinds of considerations we could appeal to depending on religion. But universally, in my experience, religions care about character, about being a good person, and they think that's very important. It's not enough just to be a mediocre character, and especially not bad character; good character is celebrated.

Also, it's good for society. Don't you want to live in a society where there's more honesty than dishonesty, more compassion than cruelty, more justice than injustice? So the more goodness — good character virtue — there is, the better it is for the society as a whole.

So those are the points I would make to my students. I'm still not sure about answering my son.

**NFJ: So how do you respond to the simple question, Are we good or bad?**

**Miller:** With a complicated answer. It's easy to divide people into two categories: good people and bad people, and to say that's everybody. And, on one hand there's Mother Teresa and Gandhi over here, and on the other hand there's Hitler and Stalin over here, and that's true for them.

But what I found is that most people are complicated and messy. And I found this not just from human history or the news or



religious text, which would be true too. My focus has been on psychological research. That's my starting point in thinking about character.

I've read hundreds of studies going back to the 1950s where people are put into different situations, and they have an opportunity to help or not help, lie or not lie, cheat or not cheat, steal or not steal, and, lo and behold, they do some very surprising things.

Sometimes they are willing to kill innocent people. In other situations they are willing to sacrifice their own self-interest to help complete strangers. In some situations they cheat with abandon. In other situations they don't cheat at all, even though they can get away with it.

The emerging picture I found is one of mixed character: where it's not black or white but very much gray; where we're not good enough, in general, to have the virtues, to be honest or compassionate and not bad enough, in general, to have the vices of dishonesty, cowardice and cruelty. So we're a messy blend of good and bad. That's my overall picture.

**NFJ: You made some reference to motive already, but what role does motive play in understanding and improving moral character? And, can someone start out doing something for a less noble reason and discover something more meaningful? I'm thinking about schools that require community service, for example. A student may begin with the singular motive to graduate, but using one's gifts in such a way might lead to a lifetime of volunteerism. What role does motive play in that?**

**Miller:** It really depends on the audience. If you have an audience of people whose character is really good to start with, then you might try and motivate them or inspire them in one way. If you have an audience whose character has lots of flaws or some challenges, that's a different story.

I think it's fine to start out by trying to inspire teenagers or younger people with self-interest as a kind of hook or way to get the ball rolling: "If you think more about character and work on becoming a better person, you might live longer or be healthier or graduate or do better in school or get better grades. Don't you want those things?"

They say, "Yes, we want those things." We respond: "OK, here's a means to help you get there."

That's crude and a little bit instrumental, but sometimes you've got to meet your audience where they are. Rather than talking about Plato or Aristotle, or how being virtuous makes society better, they might consider: "You know, this will actually help me graduate and do some other things." However, you don't want to stay at that level.

The hope, as you said, is that over time by doing things you would not ordinarily do, you come to see there's some deeper meaning and purpose and value to those activities. So you might initially go to the soup kitchen because that's required or because it might look good on your résumé, but then you start meeting people and caring for them and learning their stories and seeing how you're actually helping them.

And you think, "Forget those other reasons; this is just worthwhile to do in and of itself. And even after graduation when those other considerations aren't in play anymore, I want to keep doing this."

That's motivation that's evolved over time. There's no guarantee it's going to happen that way, but it can happen.

**NFJ: Here's a question I bet you've not been asked in an interview before. Some of us grew up with hymns that emphasized how bad we were. I remember singing repeatedly, "for such a worm as I." Then there are other times in our Christian experience when we're told what wonderful children of God we are. So how does our religious tradition, our religious experiences, shape our sense of goodness or badness?**

**Miller:** You're right: that's a new one. No questions about worms before. I'm a philosopher who's read a fair amount about religion, but I'm not a religious scholar. So let me speak specifically to Christianity and within that framework.

The way I think about character from a Christian perspective is that there are two strands or two thoughts. On one hand we're created in the image of God, and that's not lost today. So the image of God persists in human beings. That's a positive strain.

That's an emphasis on our potential to be good people.

Of course, there's another strand in the history of Christianity having to do with sin, both personal sin and original sin — the fall — which is the negative side that taints or stains our character. You have two opposing strands of thought: a positive and a negative, which, to my mind, actually fits the data and the psychology of my research perfectly.

Christianity doesn't say we're already virtuous or perfect or anything like that. But Christianity is not saying, in general, that we are hopelessly mired in sin and are vicious people. This is exactly what the psychological data says too. We're somewhere in between. So I actually find the psychological data to vindicate this aspect of the Christian worldview.

**NFJ: Well, that's good. It's not as humbling as "such a worm as I," but you do write that, "Our characters are piecemeal and fragmented." Therefore, is it unpredictable, depending upon variables, how we might respond when facing a certain moral test?**

**Miller:** I do think our character is fragmented and has some good sides to it and some bad sides. We might act in a good way in one situation, and then if you change that situation in slight ways, we act the complete opposite. That's the general point. Let me give you some illustrations.

Let's think about honesty and cheating, since that's relevant to me. I'm a professor and worry about this all the time with my students. There are studies in the last 10 years that are fascinating on the topic of cheating — where you give students a test with 20 problems. They are told that they'll get paid 50 cents per correct answer. The person in charge grades the tests and pays them according to the number of correct answers. On average, they get about eight out of 20 correct.

Now, let's change the situation. Take another group of students with the same test — so we're keeping that constant — same monetary incentive of 50 cents per correct answer.

But this time the students are going to grade their own tests, not the person in charge, and then shred all the materials and verbally report how many they got correct. You kind of expect what's going to happen. I've prepared you for some disappointing results here, and they are disappointing: about 14 problems "answered correctly."

So it was eight correct in the first group and 14 in the second group. Now, it could be this is a much smarter group, but I don't think so. I think it's pointing to the less fortunate side of our character.

Now a third group of students was given the same test with the same monetary setup and same opportunity to cheat except, before the test, they were asked to recall as many of the Ten Commandments as they could. There was no cheating at all.

Another group was tested, with the same setup, except instead of the Ten Commandments they signed their university's honor code. No cheating at all. It went back down to the seven or eight correct problems.

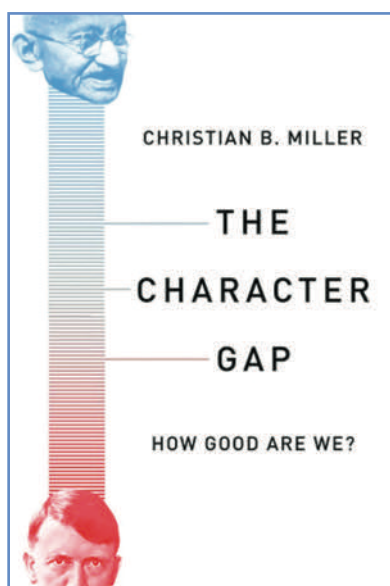
So here is an example of that fragmentation. You have one situation where people cheat a lot and another situation where they don't cheat at all. By changing one or two features, people behave very differently.

Does that mean it's all kind of chaotic and unpredictable? I would say not. Once we learn about the psychology, and we do enough of these tests, we should actually expect that.

We should expect when you give people an opportunity to cheat and they know they can get away with it and there's some reward, they're probably going to do it. But if you provide them with a moral reminder, help them re-orient their perspective back to what really matters like the honor code or the commandments, then you can predict not as much cheating.

**NFJ:** Then maybe offering "moral reminders" is an important part of what ministry, especially preaching, is about. Your book looks at many studies with all kinds of variables that impact moral decision-making. But how might even a Cinnabon or Mrs. Fields cookie impact virtue?

**Miller:** This has actually been tested. Imagine a shopping mall where no one



knows they're part of a study. You walk past a clothing store and are approached by a stranger who asks, "Can you help me with something?" It is a simple helping task. In that kind of situation about 20 percent of people helped and 80 percent did not.

Take the same day, same mall, same helping test, but target people who have just walked past Mrs. Fields Cookies or Cinnabon. The smell is the big difference. In this situation helping jumps up to over 60 percent. Think about that: 20 versus 60. That's striking.

What explains that? We could talk about that for an hour and come up with different theories. But the leading theory is that it has to do with mood. That smell puts people in a good mood, and then they want to maintain their good mood and keep it going, and they see the chance to help as a way to maintain a good mood.

Now, we don't know that's really the case. That's a hypothesis, but it's the leading one right now. And it's pretty clever, pretty interesting, and it also goes to the point about mixed character. And to make a nod to Winston-Salem here, Krispy Kreme doughnuts would probably work the same way too.

It's great that people helped. But is that a great motivation or reason to help, to maintain your good mood? No. It shows mixed character and how behavior is fragmented but also predictable. So, once you know this, you can actually predict that people behave differently when they're in a good mood than when in an average mood.

**NFJ:** So we are a mixed bag of good and evil that reveals a character gap. What can we do or become to get better?

**Miller:** That's the big question. It would be really a shame if we were left with nothing, no hope. This brings in the title of the book, *The Character Gap*. My idea was to visualize a gap between how we actually are — mixed character — and how we should be — a virtuous character.

That could be understood in a secular way of having virtues or in a Christian way of being the kind of persons God wants us to be or designed us to be. However you understand it, there is this gap. And one of the goals of the moral life is to reduce the gap, to become a better person — not to bring the standards down, but to bring the person up to the standards.

So how do you do that? In the last three chapters I give a fair amount of attention to that. I talk about things you don't want to do. These are unpromising strategies. Then I talk about some secular ideas and then some Christian ideas.

On the secular front I wanted the discussion to be accessible to everyone, not only for Christian readers. So I have a chapter about regardless of where you're coming from, here are some ideas.

Experimental evidence supports the already plausible thought that good role models can improve character. When you look to someone like Abraham Lincoln or Harriet Tubman, you often admire them but also want to become more like them. They have an emotional impact on us and inspire us to become more like them.

Not in every respect, however. I have no desire to become president, especially with all that comes with that, but when I look to Abraham Lincoln's honesty, I might be inspired to become more honest like he was honest. Or Harriet Tubman's courage causes me to become more courageous.

It doesn't matter much whether the role models are fictional or real, historical or contemporary, famous or local. It helps if they're close to you, like a family member, friend, coach, minister, colleague or neighbor, because then they can have a more direct impact and can inspire you on a continual basis. But all kinds of role models

will have an impact like that.

Another suggestion has to do with education — learning more about the psychological research. If you don't want to dive into the studies, at least learn some of the takeaway messages about obstacles to becoming a good person that you might not have realized are there all along.

We might not have realized the extent to which people are motivated to cheat if they think they can get away with it and benefit themselves. Psychological research gives us more evidence of how widespread is the motivation to cheat. How can we combat that or work against it?

This is something I didn't know before I read the psychology: Embarrassment can be a big hindrance to helping people.

Why was it that so many shoppers at Target didn't help Walter Vance? We don't know for sure, but on a leading model in psychology part of what is going on is fear of embarrassment. This was surprising to me.

Since no one else is helping, maybe there's something going on that I don't know. Maybe this is part of a movie or this is an act or part of a sales promotion or something like that. Since no one else is helping, I'm not going to help either because I don't want to embarrass myself.

Fear of embarrassment is a big hindrance to helping people, especially in a group context. So I better be on guard, especially when in a group, to make sure that's not holding me back.

**NFJ: Your last chapter is titled, "Improving Our Characters with Divine Assistance." We who are Christian seek to follow Jesus but admit we fail in doing that. How can our spiritual commitments and disciplines help us become more Christ-like?**

**Miller:** That's a huge topic. I'm not a theologian, so take what I say with a grain of salt. But I have really grown to love philosophy and religion and philosophical theology and learning more about religion and specifically Christianity. So on the topic of Christianity, I want to first stress a couple things.

I make it clear to readers that I'm not saying you have to be a Christian in order to be a good person. That could be a really misleading implication. I don't even think you have to be religious to be a good person. You could be an atheist and be a really good person. So I want to be up front about that. And other religions have lots of valuable things to say about character too.

What I do say, though, is that Christianity has lots of deep insights that could help us think about character and grow

in character. So I focus on three things in particular. One is Christian practices. The activities and rituals Christians engage in can be very character building — things like prayer, fasting, tithing, volunteering, reading scripture.

These things, if engaged in regularly over time, can be habit forming. So you think about tithing or fasting: these things can be something that increases your gratitude and generosity, while decreasing your pride and selfishness. There is some empirical evidence to support this.

Another idea is Christians being in community where they think about character. It's not like the individual Christian is left to his or her own devices thinking, "I've got to fix myself; there's no one to help me." That would be really discouraging, knowing my character flaws.

Christian community can have all kinds of significant impacts with role models, inspirations and examples. Other people can share their experiences, talk about where things went wrong and provide lessons for us. They can even point out some flaws or areas of weakness. That's really important to us.

And then the final point: I can work on my own character and have other Christians help me with that. But even that could be discouraging if the point is to eventually become a really good person. But that's not the end of the story in the Christian's picture because God is helping too.

Shifting to a Christian way of speaking for a moment, the work of the Holy Spirit is sanctification. So the idea is that the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity, is working in the life of the believer — helping the believer over time to become more like that person was designed to be in the first place. It's a mutual process, a cooperative process between human beings and God. And that's the most powerful idea of all, I think.

**NFJ: Thanks for raising our awareness of the character gap in our lives. That perspective is better than feeling like a worthless worm or pretending to be perfect. And thanks for helping us find constructive ways to improve our character. NFJ**

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

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

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

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

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

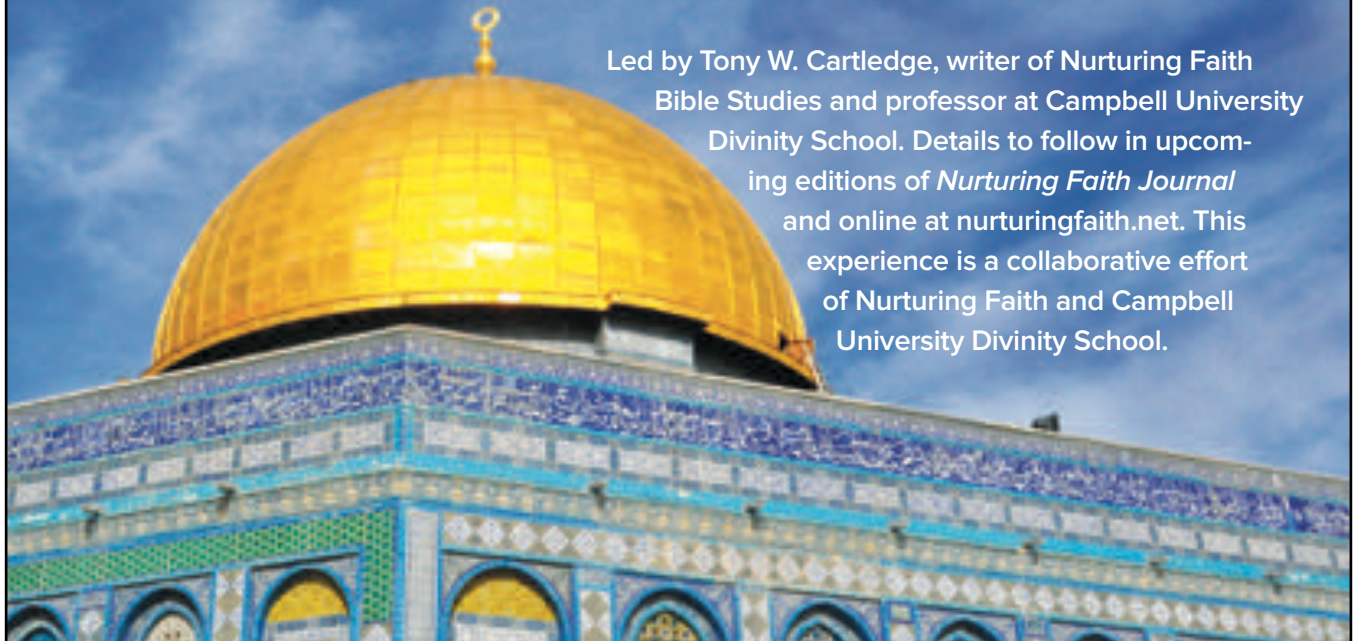
Visit [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) and click "Publish with us" under "Books" in the pull-down menu.



# NURTURING FAITH EXPERIENCE: ISRAEL/WEST BANK

MAY 11-23, 2019

Led by Tony W. Cartledge, writer of *Nurturing Faith Bible Studies* and professor at Campbell University Divinity School. Details to follow in upcoming editions of *Nurturing Faith Journal* and online at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net). This experience is a collaborative effort of Nurturing Faith and Campbell University Divinity School.



## Formed to Lead

### *Doctor of Ministry (DMin)*

**LEAD WITH PURPOSE. LEAD WITH PASSION.** At Truett Seminary, ministry leaders seeking a Doctor of Ministry degree experience a vibrant enrichment of their gifting. Students find their vision clarified and their skills sharpened through guided theological and practical reflections on the contemporary Christian life.

[baylor.edu/truett/dmin](http://baylor.edu/truett/dmin)



Visit Truett Seminary

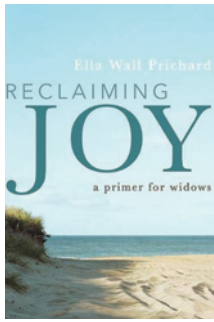
October 26, 2018 | March 22, 2019

[baylor.edu/truett/preview](http://baylor.edu/truett/preview)



**BAYLOR**  
TRUETT SEMINARY

Baylor University admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin, sex, age, disability, or veteran status.



# ‘Life is not over’

## Writer shares honest, insightful journey of widowhood

REVIEW BY JOHN D. PIERCE

**E**lla Wall Prichard didn't set out to someday write a book about navigating widowhood. In fact, she admits being quite unprepared for this stage of life thrust upon her when her husband Lev died in 2009.

“Nothing prepared me for widowhood,” she confesses in *Reclaiming Joy: A Primer for Widows*, newly released by Baylor University Press under its 1845 Books imprint.

Ella, who lives in Corpus Christi, Texas, acknowledges that some of her challenges differ from others following the loss of spouse. While overwhelmed with business and other financial decisions, she had an aspect of security many widows do not.

However, the emotional shock and ensuing journey of being suddenly alone have enough similarities that her empathetic heart, reflective mind and guiding hand will be well appreciated. Ella offers each of those in her honest sharing of the struggles, adjustments and points of peace over the past nine years.

Perhaps her most honest confession among many is this: “I never considered myself a needy person, but now I needed so much: to surround myself with advisors whom I trusted; to learn to ask for help; to lay aside my pride and admit that I did not understand; to extend and receive grace.”

A focused look at widowhood, this book is drenched in honesty and wise insights as Ella continues to move through stages of grief while adapting to new realities. These are experiences and discoveries worth sharing with fellow travelers who face such a reality now — or will in the near future.

Ella's deep faith is appealed to in this

honest rendering of facing loss and change. Yet it is a mature approach that doesn't pretend to offer easy answers or prescribe a simple plan to escape the pain of loss.

“In the months after Lev's death I found comfort reading the apostle Paul's Letter to the Philippians, along with the Psalms and the Gospel of John,” writes Ella, confessing earlier in the book that she turned to prayer and scripture in desperation. “In those quiet moments I found a peace that I could not find anywhere else.”



Ella is personal and practical in sharing ways she faced the early challenges of widowhood, along with the winding ways that followed. She doesn't shy away from terms such as “overwhelmed” and “bewildered” to describe honest feelings resulting from navigating this stage of life.

Yet she offers hope — not the shallow masking of feelings, but the reality of new life experiences even when facing them produced more anxiety. “Abundant living,” she notes, comes not from the accumulation of things but “from an abundance of good friends, meaningful relationships and purposeful life.”

Ella's story, while unique to her experiences, takes readers along familiar steps for many who travel the trail of this particular kind of loss. She concludes each chapter with a summarized “lesson learned.”

Amid the losses she also identifies gains that can be challenging yet freeing. Beyond the overwhelming sense of loss of companionship, she notes, comes an independence not of one's own making. Yet she wisely warns: “The danger is that the line between freedom and self-centeredness is a very fine one.”

Hence this lesson learned: “In being more concerned for the welfare of others than ourselves, we forget our own needs and pain and discover the joy of serving and giving.”

Astutely, Ella sheds needed light on finding the benefits of solitude over the devastation of loneliness. Whether attending church or social functions, traveling or being home alone in evenings — everything changes. The courage to face new ways of daily living including social interactions, Ella notes, will determine whether one remains mired in loss or moves constructively into a new and different future.

“Life is not over,” she concludes in a “Letter to My Fellow Widows” that opens the book. “Make the years ahead good ones.”

Ella notes that abundant advice is often offered freely to widows from those who know nothing of this particular experience. So, wisely, she suggests looking for trusted role models who have traveled or are traveling this newfound road of loss — then making the adjustments that can lead to peace and joy.

This book is a helpful resource in providing such guidance and companionship. **NFJ**



**A CREDIBLE CASE FOR INCLUSION** – Thanks to donors in Greenville, S.C., hundreds of copies of Jim Dant’s *This I Know: A Simple, Biblical Defense for LGBTQ Christians* were shared in Dallas. This small, insightful book may be purchased online or at a discounted bulk rate (for 10 or more) by calling (478) 301-5655.

# Publishing with Purpose

Visit [books.nurturingfaith.net](http://books.nurturingfaith.net) to shop for all Nurturing Faith titles and resources, and to learn more about this author-friendly, collaborative publishing ministry.

Nurturing Faith takes a unique approach to book publishing by:

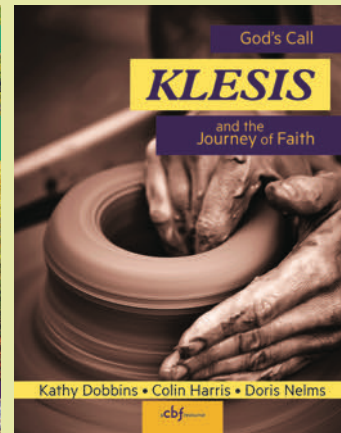
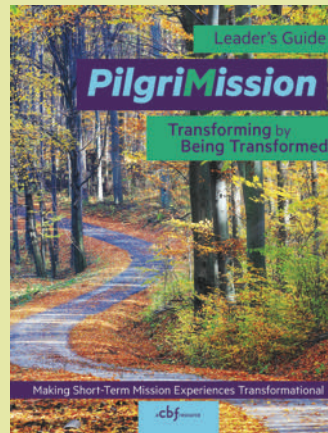
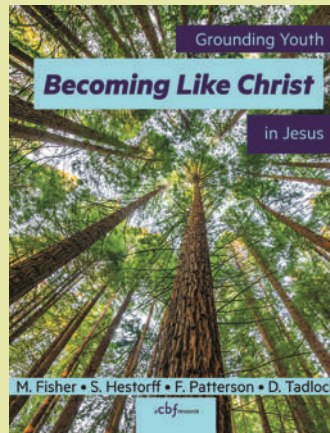
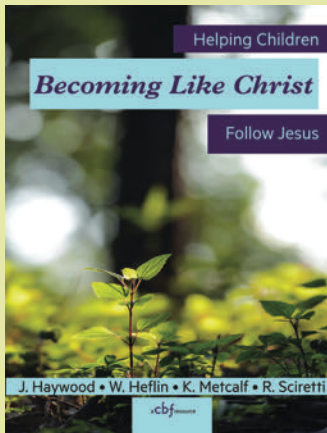
- Seeking collaboration
- Valuing authors
- Embracing latest publishing technology
- Providing and promoting relevant resources



**LESSONS FOR LIVING** — At the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship assembly in Dallas, Babs Baugh (center) signs a copy of a new book from Nurturing Faith, edited by Christian educator Bo Prosser, that honors her mother’s 60 years of faithful Bible teaching and provides insights for Christians today. Daniel Vestal, director of the Mercer University’s Baugh Center for Baptist Leadership that collaborated in the publishing of the book, looks on while Bruce Gourley of Nurturing Faith talks with Jackie Baugh Moore, granddaughter of Eula Mae Baugh.



# Have you checked out these **GREAT RESOURCES**



from the **COOPERATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP?**

Order now at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)  
or (478) 301-5655



# What counts as a tithe?

Opinions vary among churchgoers about giving practices, expectations

BY ADELLE M. BANKS

Religion News Service

**M**ost Protestant churchgoers believe that giving 10 percent of their income is a biblical requirement they should follow — but they define the practice of tithing in a variety of ways, a new survey shows.

About half say they can give their tithes to a Christian ministry instead of a church. One in 3 say tithes can go to help a person who is in need. And more than 1 in 6 say their funds can go to a secular charity.

“For many churchgoers, tithing is just another term for generosity,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research in Nashville, Tenn., on the findings released in May.

The evangelical research firm surveyed 1,010 Americans who attend a Protestant or nondenominational church at least monthly. It also queried 1,000 Protestant senior pastors.

Pastors are less likely than people in the pews to view tithing as a continuing biblical command. While 83 percent of churchgoers say tithing is a current requirement, 72 percent of pastors agree.

Pastors who affirm that tithing is a biblical command don't agree on how to define it. More than half (56 percent) say it should be one-tenth of an individual's gross income. Seventeen percent say it should be one-tenth of net income.

Eleven percent say it is “whatever amount a person regularly sets aside to give” and 7 percent say it is “whatever amount a person actually gives.”

Among churchgoers, large majorities in different regions and of different races said tithing should continue today: 85 percent of Southerners, 74 percent of Northerners,



*“For many churchgoers, tithing is just another term for generosity.”*

87 percent of African-Americans and 80 percent of whites.

Those with evangelical beliefs were more likely (86 percent) to view tithing as a current biblical demand than those without them (79 percent). Those attending church services at least weekly were more likely (85 percent) to have that view than those attending once or twice monthly (71 percent).

More than half of churchgoers (54 percent) give a tenth or more of their income to their church, while 1 in 5 said they give regularly but less than 10 percent and a similar number say they try to give but are not always consistent. Eight percent say their finances make it difficult to donate, and 2 percent reported not giving to their church.

“Even those who can't tithe believe that giving matters,” said McConnell. “Most

churchgoers say they give — even if it's a struggle.”

Of those who do give, most often do so in a personal way — contributing cash or a check at church. Eleven percent use their church website for giving, and smaller percentages use automatic payments or a church app, though some give using more than one method.

“Giving is considered an act of worship — and clicking on a mouse may not feel as holy as putting your offering in the collection plate,” McConnell said.

The overall sample of churchgoers, surveyed Aug. 22-30, 2017, had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points. The overall sample of clergy, surveyed Aug. 30-Sept. 18, 2017, had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points. [NFJ](#)



## We need the church

BY MICHAEL SMITH

Sixteen persons gathered at Fletcher’s Schoolhouse on June 9, 1843 and founded First Baptist Church of Murfreesboro, Tenn. The church came into being because 16 persons could see what was not yet there and brought their vision to life.

Such a pattern played out repeatedly over the course of the church’s history, as the church folk envisioned and brought into being new ways of being Baptist, ministering to displaced persons, and renewed the church in the face of significant challenges.

The founders and later shapers of the congregation had one advantage over us: They lived and ministered in times when most everyone assumed we need the church.

Kathleen Norris captures this reality in the story of the time she was invited by the English and religion faculties of a small college to give a poetry reading. The faculty members knew she had returned to the church after a long absence, and many of them seemed to feel a need to tell her in varied ways that they did not need the church to be a Christ follower, that in fact the church absolutely got in the way.

Their position is understandable. Who needs the church with its too frequent small-mindedness, bickering, bullies, investments of time and money, and the aggravations that inevitably come with walking, sitting, worshiping, and ministering alongside others in all their variety? Why not simply follow Christ as best one can without the burden of the church?

Who needs the church? Congregations in the U.S. had best have a good answer.

When I’m tempted to walk away and follow a solitary Christian life, Paul intrudes. I’ve pondered Paul’s letters and life choices for decades, and I’ve often wondered why Paul invested his life in the church. Think about it. Paul was one of the most gifted and skilled persons in all of Christian history. He was a master of the scriptures of his day, immersed in prayer, keenly aware of the Holy Spirit’s leadership, and capable of making his own living.



Why would Paul spend the better part of his life not only founding but also nurturing congregations? I think I know some of the answers.

Paul believed God instituted the church. That matters, since Christ followers assume God knows what God is doing. Apparently, God believes Christ followers need a community in which to discover and work on becoming God’s kind of people.

The church is where we learn to love others as God loves us. In Paul’s time, Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, the conquered and the conquerors bumped up against one another, as the church gathered almost daily. This presented logistical, relational and legal challenges.

Where most saw a problem, Paul saw an opportunity to learn to love as God loves.

The church is where we are weaned from our addiction to ourselves. Paul saw clearly that though we set out to follow Christ, we remain addicted to ourselves.

Left to ourselves, we work hard to shape our surroundings to service our self-addiction.

Early Christians fought over proper dress, when to meet, who could and could not speak in worship, theological theories about Jesus and salvation, baptism, money and the like.

Paul told them, “Turn loose of yourself and start to be freed of your self-addiction.”

Paul’s insight remains relevant. We live in a culture that fosters addiction to oneself. A congregation is a community instituted by God in which we might break the addiction.

Paul believed the church is where we practice worshiping and working alongside others in Christ-like ministry. He paired women and men, Jew and gentile, free and slave, rich and poor, educated and uneducated in worship and ministry, though such folk were sharply divided from one another in cultures of the day.

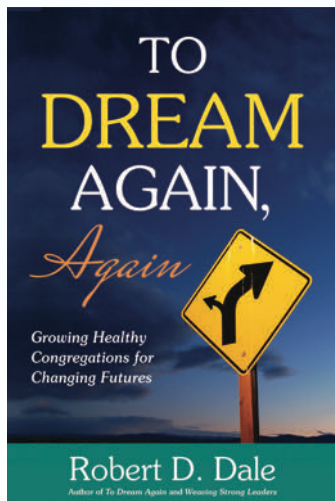
Why? Because they, as Christ followers, were now part of one body, and all parts of the one body must learn to work well together, if the body is to live as it is intended to live. What was true in Paul’s time is true in ours.

My hope is that a generation from now Christians will look back upon us and say, “They met the challenge of their time. They proved by word and deed why we need the church.” **NFJ**

—Michael Smith is pastor of Central Baptist Church, Fountain City in Knoxville, Tenn., and the former pastor of First Baptist Church of Murfreesboro, Tenn., that just celebrated its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



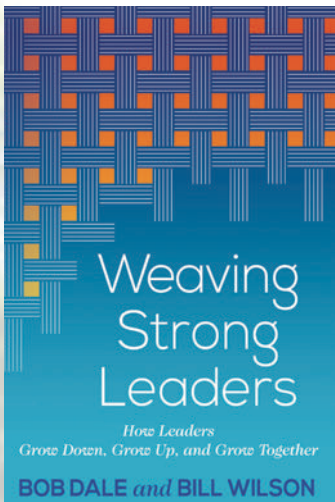
# HEALTHY CHURCH RESOURCES



A collaborative venture by the Center for Healthy Churches, the Baugh Foundation and Nurturing Faith to provide relevant and applicable resources for congregational visioning and vitality

“Bob Dale’s voice has guided generations of congregational leaders; here he does it again.”

—Amy K. Butler, Senior Minister,  
Riverside Church, New York City



“Bob Dale and Bill Wilson have given us the promising metaphor of the leadership loom that is helpfully based in strong theological threads that allow creative weaving for a lifetime in order to produce a beautiful tapestry of church life.”

—George Mason, Pastor  
Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas

Order today at [books.nurturingfaith.net](http://books.nurturingfaith.net)  
Print and digital books available.

# The church as an instrument of the Kingdom

By John R. Franke

The church is sent into the world by Jesus (John 20:21) in order to continue his work in the power of the Spirit. While it is certainly true that God is at work outside of the church, the New Testament characterization of the church as the body of Christ leads to the conclusion that it is intended to be a focal point of the mission of God in the world.

Therefore, the mission of the church should be shaped by the mission and ministry of Jesus. However, it is surprising that the ministry of Jesus described in the Gospels has generally not been the focal point for thinking about the mission of the church and has not been decisive in traditional theological and doctrinal conceptions of Jesus, referred to as Christology.

Such discussions have tended to focus on questions concerned with intra-trinitarian relationships, the relationship between the divine and human natures of Jesus, and the atonement. The shape of this conversation can seem to suggest that the details of Jesus' life are not of particular importance for theology. In general, theology has been developed more in line with the didactic structure of the Epistles than the story structure of the Gospels.

This tendency has had the effect of seeming to situate theological discussions in a more abstract context that can often seem to be removed from the day-to-day life of the witnessing community. Yet the depiction of the church as the body of Christ and the commands of Jesus to follow him and do the things he taught suggest that this is

fundamental to the mission of the church.

This emphasis throughout the Gospels is on the work of delivering people, particularly the poor and marginalized, from the forces of poverty and oppression. This emphasis suggests an understanding of the church as the community of Christ's followers who join with Jesus in his struggle for the emancipation of humanity from these forces of evil.

The mission of the church, in keeping with the mission of Jesus, is to proclaim and live out the meaning of God's liberating activity so that those who live under the oppressive powers of this world will see their deliverance from these circumstances as a central element of the gospel and the mission of God in the world.



Concern for the poor and marginalized is powerfully expressed in Matt. 25:31-40 which depicts those who inherit the Kingdom of God as people who feed the hungry, offer the thirsty something to drink, welcome the stranger, provide clothing for the naked, take care of the sick, and visit those in prison. Texts such as this, along with many others, demonstrate the calling of the church to participate in the temporal, here-and-now activity of social ministry as basic to the mission of the church as it follows Jesus.

The social concreteness of the gospel narratives points beyond common interpretations that construe the activity of deliverance and freedom from the power of sin in primarily, or only, a spiritual sense. Embedded in the Hebrew tradition, the vision of emancipatory change is to be enacted in the present in such a way that

the existing social order is actually altered.

Gospel-shaped liberation is holistic and encompasses not only the spiritual, but also the cultural and political. Together they are part of a single, all-encompassing process that takes root in temporal history and grows into the world intended by God. This is the notion of salvation envisioned in scripture. The church is sent into the world to participate in this historical process as it continues the work of the Kingdom initiated by Jesus.

Now the mention of social justice as a part of the mission of the church has often led to the charge that this detracts from evangelism, the proclamation of the good news. But this should not be the case. The two go together. The church has been sent into the world after the pattern of Jesus to seek the lost and to proclaim the good news of salvation in Christ. Evangelism is a central aspect of the reconciling mission of God to a lost and broken world.

Those who have separated evangelism from the pursuit of social justice need look no further than the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19. His response to Jesus includes repentance, reformation and restoration. This leads to the kind of individual transformation that has a direct effect on the social order.

Evangelism and social justice are inseparable elements of the good news that God is reconciling all things through the ministry of Jesus. The church, as the body of Christ, participates in this reconciling work as an instrument of the Kingdom. **NFJ**

—John R. Franke is theologian in residence at Second Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis and general coordinator of the Gospel and Our Culture Network. He is also helping shape the Jesus Worldview Initiative for Nurturing Faith.

# Increasing our intentional interaction

BY GINGER HUGHES

As Mom and I walked toward the door of the cancer center, a woman greeted us with the most beautiful smile and a warm “hello.” Her eyes radiated joy and, somehow, I felt her empathy and compassion extend through her words as she asked how we were doing.

After Mom’s appointment we went to lunch — something we don’t often do since a few hundred miles now separate us. We walked into the restaurant, the cool air a welcome respite from the Georgia heat blazing outside.

The young woman stepped from behind the hostess stand, took one look at mom, smiled warmly and asked, “May I give you a hug?”

Over the last few months I’ve seen this happen numerous times. Strangers will come up to Mom in the grocery store and tell her she’s beautiful, while a scarf adorns her head. Random people in random places will ask if they can hug her.

Compassion. Cheerfulness. Kindness. I have witnessed all of these and have begun to wonder if I’ve missed opportunities through the years to spread God’s light and

love in this way.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve arrived at the grocery store grumpy because the kids have been arguing in the backseat from the moment we left the house. At other times I’m in a hurry as I run multiple errands. I have places to be and feel as though I’m running 10 steps behind.

In my state of irritation and hurriedness I’ve missed opportunities to connect with people. I’ve missed the chance to look people in the eye — giving them a warm and genuine “hello.”

I’ve missed chances to connect with a heartfelt “How are you?” — prepared not just to hear, but to listen to their answer. In my rush I’ve raced past people, giving them a cursory glance or perhaps a quick smile but little more.

Jesus didn’t miss these opportunities. Jesus always took the time to connect with people. He stopped at the well and spoke with the woman there, asking questions, listening and extending grace. He stopped when he saw Zacchaeus up in that tree, asking him to come down and join him for a meal.

Jesus stopped on his way to heal Jairus’ daughter after a woman who had been bleeding for years touched the hem of his garment. He ministered to her by looking her in the eye and calling her “daughter.”

Jesus made time to connect with people and in those moments shared God’s love, mercy and grace. Do I do the same? Do you?



Something about that woman who greeted us at the cancer center warmed my heart immensely. Something about that young lady at the restaurant taking a moment to reach out in kindness, offering a hug, touched me. These were such simple acts, but they made a profound impact

on Mom and me.

What can we do this week to touch another’s heart? How can we show kindness, compassion or perhaps cheerfulness to others today? How can we live a little more like Jesus did, never missing an opportunity to look into the eyes of another and listen to that person’s story? [NFJ](#)

—Ginger Hughes is the wife of a pastor, a mother of two and an accountant. She is a Georgia native currently living in the foothills of North Carolina. Her passion for writing is fueled by the desire to offer encouragement, grace and a deeper understanding that we are all God’s children. 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](http://nomamasperfect.com).

“Jesus always took time to connect with people.”

Blogs, daily news, events, social media connections and more may be found at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)



# Money can buy happiness, but you have to spend it right

By Brett Younger

Groucho Marx said, “While money can’t buy happiness, it certainly lets you choose your own form of misery.”

One of your college roommates — not the one you like, the other one — the one whose job you would love to have, the one who makes three times as much as you, the one who speaks four languages, the one whose spouse looks like a model, the one whose children are so precocious, so photogenic, so constantly on Facebook, skiing in the Alps, running on a beach in Rio, invites you to dinner.

You go to a stunningly expensive steak house. Your rich friend picks up the check. You would like to pick up the check, but it is a big check. Your old roomie’s money does not make you happy.

Money will not buy happiness if we spend it badly. In the United States, luxury spending has been increasing at a rate four times greater than overall spending. In the 1950s, luxury objects had a hint of shame to them. People are no longer embarrassed to spend just for the pleasure of spending.

James Twitchell writes, “The defining characteristic of today’s society is the average person’s embrace of unnecessary consumption, superficial indulgence, wretched excess and endless status-seeking.”

James Twitchell is not much fun at Christmas.

Lottery winners are famous for wasting their newfound money. When they win the lottery, they think their lives are going to be amazing. Most of the time they spend all the money and go into debt. Everyone they have ever met asks for money. They end up



with worse friendships than they had before they won the lottery.

When we hear this news, we do not think, “I hope I never win the lottery.” We fantasize about what we will do when we win — buy a bigger house, a nicer car, or our own little island.

Will Rogers, Will Smith, the Weeknd and Ludacris have all been given credit for this line: “Too many people spend money they haven’t earned, to buy things they don’t want, to impress people they don’t like.”

It was Ludacris, don’t you think?

Michael Norton, a Harvard business school professor, conducted an experiment in which he gave money to people to spend on themselves. Researchers went to the University of British Columbia and handed students envelopes that contained the words: “By five p.m. today spend this money on yourself.”

That night they were asked, “What did you spend it on, and how happy do you feel right now?”

Apparently, if you give college students \$5 it looks like coffee. They run to Starbucks and spend it as fast as they can. Nothing happens in terms of their happiness. It does not make them less happy. It does not do



much of anything.

In the same experiment they gave money to people to give to others to see if that would make them happier. Along with the money came a slip of paper with the words, “By five p.m. today spend this money on somebody else.”

The results were completely different. One woman purchased a stuffed animal for her niece. Some gave money to homeless people. Some bought coffee for someone else. People who spend money on others get happier.

Gertrude Stein said, “Whoever said money can’t buy happiness didn’t know where to shop.”

Giving our money away — rather than doing what the world tells us to do with it — keeps us alive. Money can buy happiness if we are trying to buy something bigger than happiness.

One of the best reasons for churches to ask for money is to help people save their souls. This is not about getting a ticket to heaven in exchange for a big gift — though that might be an effective slogan. Our happiness is at stake in how we share what we have been given.

Al Yankovic is on the right track: “If money can’t buy happiness, then I guess I’ll have to rent it.”

Being generous is a way for us to experience happiness, to discover that deep down we are not selfish, that if we look deep enough we will find generosity. People who live from deep within share what they have been given. If we think money cannot buy happiness, we are not spending it right. **NFJ**

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



**The Bible Lessons that anchor the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies are written by Tony Cartledge** in a scholarly, yet applicable, style from the wide range of Christian scriptures. A

graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div) and Duke University (Ph.D.), and with years of experience as a pastor, writer, and professor at Campbell University, he provides deep insight for Christian living without “dumbing down” the richness of the biblical texts for honest learners.

## ATTENTION TEACHERS: HERE'S YOUR PASSWORD!

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



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



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

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

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### *Doing and Being*

Sept. 2, 2018

Deuteronomy 4:1-14  
Following Through

Sept. 9, 2018

Psalm 146  
Trusting God

Sept. 16, 2018

Isaiah 50:4-9  
Standing Firm

Sept. 23, 2018

Psalm 1  
Living Wisely

Sept. 30, 2018

Psalm 124  
Offering Praise

Oct. 7, 2018

Genesis 2:18-25  
Being Equal

Oct. 14, 2018

Psalm 90  
Gaining Perspective

Oct. 21, 2018

Isaiah 53:1-12  
Redeeming Love

Oct. 28, 2018

Jeremiah 31:7-9  
Saving Grace

### IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Nov. 4, 2018

Deuteronomy 6:1-9  
Remembering Always

Nov. 11, 2018

1 Kings 17:8-16  
Doing Faith

Nov. 18, 2018

1 Samuel 2:1-10  
Singing Joy

Nov. 25, 2018

Daniel 7:1-14  
Dreaming Hope

#### *Advent: Someone's Coming*

Dec. 2, 2018

Luke 21:25-36  
Coming to Reign

Dec. 9, 2018

Malachi 3:1-4  
Coming to Judge

Dec. 16, 2018

Isaiah 12:1-6  
Coming to Save

Dec. 23, 2018

Hebrews 10:1-10  
Coming to Sanctify

#### *Christmas*

Dec. 30, 2018

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

**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*

Sept. 2, 2018

## Deuteronomy 4:1-14

### Following Through

Labor Day weekend leads naturally to thoughts about work – and a day off from work – but also marks the season when some children and college students go back to school after summer vacations.

Parents often have parting words of advice for younger children when they drop them off at school or the bus stop. “Behave yourself” or “Listen to the teacher,” they say, along with hopeful encouragement to “Have fun!”

Older children going off to college for the first time may hear much longer speeches replete with warnings, encouragements, and often a few tears. They’re off on a great new adventure in which they will succeed or fail on their own.

Parents want children to remember and be true to the values they’ve been taught.

Today’s text, from Deuteronomy 4:1-14, is presented as Moses’ farewell speech to the Israelites as they prepared to leave the plains of Moab and enter the promised land – without Moses to lead them. ⚓

There were things he wanted them to remember.

### Take heed (vv. 1-4)

Although the book of Deuteronomy purports to be the very words of Moses,

#### Deuteronomy 4:9 –

*But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children ...*

it was probably composed many years later as Israel’s scribes cited Mosaic traditions to encourage the troubled people of their own day. ⚓ ⚓

As such, the book has multiple audiences. It was written as an address to Israelites who had survived the wilderness and stood on the edge of the promised land, but also spoke to those Israelites who were facing the possibility of exile, as well as a smaller group who had returned to Judah after the exile.

Finally, the book speaks to readers of every following generation, including us.

The first three chapters of Deuteronomy portray Moses as reciting a summary of the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt, their rocky time in the wilderness, and their arrival in the plains of Moab. They conclude with Moses announcing that he would not be allowed to enter the land of promise but would appoint Joshua to lead in his stead.

The reader expects the commissioning of Joshua to follow, but the narrative shifts abruptly to a sermon on the subject of faithfulness.

“So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe,” Moses reportedly said, “so that you may live to enter and

occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you” (v. 1). In Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, Moses mainly gave commands, but in Deuteronomy he speaks of “statutes and ordinances.”

The awkward placement of the sermon and the shift in vocabulary are literary indications that this material was a later development, as commands of the Decalogue give way to “statutes and ordinances” that have the ring of interpretive judgments and rules that developed in the priestly tradition.

The order to “give heed” to Moses’ commands is followed by a charge that nothing should be added or taken away from the covenant provisions (v. 2) ⚓ and a warning that failing to follow the commands would lead to serious trouble, as they should know well.

The warning concerns what would have been a fairly recent incident described more fully in Num. 25:1-15, reflected differently in Num. 31:13-16, and recalled in Hosea 9:10 as a detestable memory, though it does not appear in Moses’ historical summary of Deuteronomy 1–3.

The account in Numbers 25 relates that, after arriving in the plains of Moab, some of the people were drawn into having illicit sexual relations with Moabite women, joining them in offering sacrifices to their gods, including “Baal of Peor.” Yahweh reportedly grew angry and told Moses to execute the leaders of the affair. The story then shifts awkwardly to an Israelite man having sex with a Midianite woman. The priest Phinehas killed them both, possibly while in the act of intercourse, as the text says one thrust of his spear pierced them both through the belly.

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



Phinehas' act put an end to a plague, not previously mentioned, that had reportedly killed 24,000 Israelites.

Moses' speech in Deuteronomy 4 reminds the people that all who followed the Baal of Peor had died (v. 3), "while those of you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today" (v. 4). This reinforces the basic theme of Moses' speech: the purpose of following God's covenant commands was "that you may live," specifically, live to enter and occupy the land (v. 1).

Christian believers also seek life, not just life in a particular place, but the kind of life Jesus described as abundant and eternal. Such life comes through trusting in God's grace through Christ and following his teachings, notably the "new commandment" to love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34-35).

### **Be diligent (vv. 5-8)**

In vv. 5-8, not included in the lectionary, the writer has Moses offer a second and somewhat surprising rationale for why Israel should keep the "statutes and ordinances" he was teaching (v. 5).

Following them diligently, he said, "will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!'" (v. 6).

When these words were likely written, whether during the exile or on either side of it, the Israelites were far from being a great nation. The northern kingdom had fallen to Assyria and the southern kingdom to Babylonia. The people were scattered far and wide: they might claim to be an ethnic people but were no longer a nation.

The Deuteronomist, however, believed that if the remaining Israelites would fully trust in God and follow God's teaching, they would not only

endure, but also live among other peoples as a shining beacon of a people who lived close to God: "For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?" (v. 7).

Moses insisted that Yahweh was present in a way that no other peoples' gods could be. Yahweh was no idol shut up in a shrine, but living and active and present among the people, ready to hear and respond to their pleas.


The statutes and ordinances Moses commanded were not to be thought of as a burden, but as evidence of a God who cared enough to provide guidelines for living in respectful harmony with others and with God (v. 8).

### **Watch yourselves (vv. 9-14)**

Moses' purported speech is clearly intended to speak across the generations in a way that recognizes Israel's corporate identity with the ancestors as well as one another. Verse 9 warns the people to "take care and watch yourselves closely" lest they forget "the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life."

Moses was about to recite an example that the vast majority of his audience *had not* seen. If we take the narrative at face value, only Moses, Joshua, and Caleb remained alive from the generation that had witnessed the giving of the Ten Commandments and making of the covenant at Mount Horeb (an alternate name for Sinai) that he recounts in v. 10.

So, Moses' audience in Deuteronomy 4 would not have personally "approached and stood at the foot of the mountain while the mountain was blazing up to the very heavens, shrouded in dark clouds," (v. 11). They would not have heard Yahweh speaking out of the fire, when their ancestors

"heard the sound of words but saw no form" as Yahweh declared the covenant stipulations that came to be known as the Ten Commandments (vv. 12-13). 

Yet, the Israelites were to remember it and live as if they had been there, present in the DNA of their ancestors. Furthermore, they were to make the memories known to their children and their children's children, so none would forget (v. 9b).

The writer's audience might not have been at Sinai, but he wanted them to relive the experience of having assembled beneath the mountain so God could "let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me as long as they live on the earth, and may teach their children so" (v. 10).

People of a certain age will remember a "golden oldie" from 1969 by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. During the late 1960s, during the height of the Vietnam War, Graham Nash expressed his concern that children were learning more about war than peace when he wrote the song "Teach Your Children." The lyrics encouraged parents to "teach your children well," lest they experience "your father's hell."

Like Israel, we are called to teach our children what they need to experience life at its best. Moses taught words of the law in order that the people might live and inhabit the land (v. 1). John's gospel speaks of Christ as God's Word made flesh, sent that believers could live eternally (John 1:14).

As Israel was called to be an inspiration to other nations (vv. 5-8), John said of Christ that "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people" (John 1:4). Israel's identity and purpose were found in knowing and living out the words of the law. Christians find their identity and purpose in knowing Jesus and following his teachings – and in passing them on to their children.

Teach your children well. **NFJ**



# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Sept. 9, 2018

## Psalm 146

### Trusting God

It's not uncommon, especially in the comics, to see a depiction of someone who has sought out a guru living on a mountaintop in hopes of finding the meaning of life. A quick Google search turns up a page full of them.

One guru responds: "The meaning of life? Gee, that's kind of a toughie..." Another says, "I don't know: the computers are down." A Bizarro strip has the guru respond to the question by saying "Have you tried Googling it?" Another person asks the meaning of life, only to be told "You do the Hokie Pokie and you turn yourself about, that's what it's all about."

My current favorite has a shivering guru saying "If I knew the meaning of life, do you think I'd be sitting here on top of a mountain?"

As we study a series of Old Testament texts this fall, we come time and again to the theme of finding what it takes to live a meaningful and happy life. The author of Psalm 146 believed he knew the answer.

#### Invitation to praise (vv. 1-2)

Psalm 146 is the prayer of an individual who has experienced divine aid and who desires to give public testimony of God's help through corporate

#### Psalm 146:2 –

*I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.*

worship. We don't know what his or her problems were: the psalm itself gives us few clues as to the specific nature of God's assistance, and that's good: the generic nature of the psalm allows us to incorporate it more easily in our own praise and worship on troubled days. 🇺🇸

The poet's praise is unadulterated. In the first two verses, he skillfully uses repetition to intensify words of adulation. He begins by calling the congregation to praise the Lord, then immediately calls himself to offer praise, as well: "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!" (v. 1).

"O my soul" translates the Hebrew word *napshi*, from the noun *nephesh*. The Hebrews did not share the Greek concept of a soul that was separate from the body. The concept of a *nephesh* refers to one's innermost being or truest self. So, the psalmist challenges himself to offer praise from the deepest part of who he is.

The psalmist then moves to a declaration that he will not only praise God *with* all of his life, but also *for* all of his life: "I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long" (v. 2).

Having used the same word for "praise" (*halal*) in the first three lines of his invitation, he switches in the last line to a special word for singing praise (*zamar*). "I will sing praises to my God all my life long," he says – literally, "in all of my continuing."

The psalmist's personal praise serves as a public challenge for the worshiping congregation to join him in song.

The psalmist's invitation to praise calls us to recall the many things for which we can give praise to God – and it also reminds us how our own testimonies of praise may encourage others to trust in God and to sing hallelujahs of their own.

#### Invitation to trust (vv. 3-4)

Why should we worship God? The psalmist believes there is no other source of sure and lasting help – especially in other humans, even royal ones. A few "royal" psalms offer both praise and prayer for the king, but the poet advises against putting too much trust in royalty or in other mortal beings, "in whom there is no help" (v. 3). Humans may have great plans and good intentions, but they all have at least one failing in common: they die (v. 4).

Given the reference to "princes," we wonder if the psalmist was writing in the aftermath of a popular king's death. Many were doubtless dejected, for example, when young King Josiah, who had followed the teachings of Deuteronomy to institute many cultic reforms, was killed in an unwise conflict with Pharaoh Necco of Egypt. Prophets and others had hoped Josiah's reforms would lead to a national revival and encourage God to keep the nation safe despite the growing power of Babylon. With Josiah's death, hope faded.

The observation that everyone dies (v. 4) may provide a clue to the psalmist's personal experience. Perhaps someone he loved or leaned

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



on for support had died, and he had known the feeling of abandonment that comes when that happens. Grief-stricken persons often have a vague sense of anger at their loved ones for dying and leaving them. Human relationships can be wonderful and supportive. None of us could enjoy life without them. But, we must also remember that human support is always limited by human finitude. Those who are wise will also seek a connection with the one source of help whose being has no bounds.

Jeremiah knew this truth. He declared that those who trust in mortals alone would be like lonely shrubs in the desert, experiencing the curse of dry hearts and empty lives. On the other hand, he believed that people who put their ultimate trust in God would be like trees in the fruitful community of an eternal oasis (Jer. 17:5-8).

Most of us have experienced something like that. Maybe someone we loved and depended on has died, leaving this life on earth. Or maybe someone just left us, choosing another path and essentially becoming dead to us. We've known what it is like to love someone and to lose them. We've learned that we need the support of one who will never leave us or forsake us, even by death, and we can rejoice that God is present and willing to supply that need.

### Celebration of deliverance (vv. 5-9)

In vv. 5-9, the worshiper shows the contrast between finite humans and the infinite God. Those who put their trust in God experience happiness, he says: "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose help is in the LORD their God" (v. 5). 📖

And why does the psalmist believe Yahweh is so trustworthy as to bring

happiness? Because it is God who created the great triad of heaven, earth, and sea – and all that lives within them (v. 6). If God is the author of life, then God can be trusted to keep faith with the results of his creation.

Yahweh's credibility is seen not only in God's *creation*, but also in God's *relations* with humankind. In vv. 7-9, the poet reminds his hearers of God's continual kindness toward his people.

Yahweh gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry, sets prisoners free and gives sight to the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down by the burdens of life. Yahweh cares for those who cannot help themselves. In ancient society, the most helpless were those who had no family to support them: immigrants, orphans, and widows. God has the power to bless the way of the righteous and to ruin the plans of the wicked.

The themes mentioned here are echoed in Isa. 61:1, often interpreted as a description of the coming Messiah: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners ..." Jesus, apparently familiar with this text, took it as his own mission statement in his first sermon at the Capernaum synagogue (Luke 4:18). 📖

A problem with reading and interpreting vv. 7-9 is the reality that many people remain oppressed, needy, blind, or imprisoned, while wicked people may prosper and not face ruin.

Psalms 146 is no promise that everyone who looks to God will be delivered from trouble and restored to freedom, health, or financial security – or that every evildoer will get a comeuppance in this world.

Still, for persons who find themselves downtrodden or in need, the

psalm assures the ongoing presence and comfort of God. In addition, it is a reminder that those who worship God and understand God's call to love their neighbors may become the instrument of God's care to those in need (See "The Hardest Question" online for more on this).

### A doxology for eternity (v. 10)

The poet has offered praise to Yahweh as the only one who gives lasting help, as Israel's true and eternal king. While earthly rulers are temporary, "the LORD will reign forever" over countless generations of his people (v. 10).

Hebrews living during the Old Testament period did not have the same concept of eternal life in heaven that became popular by New Testament times. For them, "forever" implied an unending presence of God's special people on earth.

The psalmist concludes in the same way he began, "*halelu-yah* – Praise the LORD!" We can imagine that the congregation might have joined him in this final "Hallelujah!"

The depth of feeling in this psalm suggests that the psalmist had personal experience with the hard side of life. He knew what it was like to be pressed down by trials and abandoned by those who had promised help. Yet, the testimony of this psalm is that he found God to be present in the darkness, perhaps even in the valley of the shadow of death.

His words offer comfort to the hurting, assurance that Yahweh is personally concerned – *especially* concerned – for those who suffer – and that even in our suffering we can praise God as we discover that praise itself brings strength and courage to face another day.

Can you speak a little Hebrew? *Hallelujah!* NFJ

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Sept. 16, 2018

Isaiah 50:4-9

## Standing Firm

**H**ave you ever known some aged saint who possesses a steady faith in God, even in the face of hardship or loss? I have known people whose lives have been filled with suffering, who might have ample cause to accuse God of abandoning them or failing to care for them as they expected. Yet, they persevere in faith and devotion, pressing on with daily prayers and looking to God for strength.

Some might say that such steady faith is the key to survival for people facing hard times. Rather than blaming God for the trials that come their way, they trust in God for the strength to endure them. Instead of complaining that God has allowed them to suffer, they seek what lessons God might teach them through the painful experience.

This is precisely the picture we find in Isa. 50:4-9. The passage is commonly regarded as the third of four “Servant Songs” in Isaiah (the others are 42:2-4, 49:1-6, and 52:13-53:12), even though the word “servant” does not appear in the text. Like the second Servant Song (49:1-6), the prophet’s words are written in the first person, as if *he* is the servant. 📖

Isaiah 50:4a –

*The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.*

### A teacher who learns (vv. 4-5)

The words of Isa. 50:4-9 were probably written late in the exilic period by a prophet who wrote in the tradition of Isaiah. He is often called “Second Isaiah,” or “Isaiah of the Exile” (See “The Hardest Question” in the online resources for more on this).

The prophet’s audience consisted mainly of people who were born in Babylon and knew of life in and around Jerusalem only from stories told by their parents or grandparents. The lead-in to the third Servant Song follows the literary form of a lawsuit (50:1-3) which declares that the people’s “mother” (a corporate reference to their ancestors) was guilty of iniquities and transgressions, for which the time in exile was punishment.

The prophet speaks in the voice of the servant, as one who has also suffered. Rather than complaining, he said the experience had taught him something, and he sought to encourage others by passing on what he had gained. “The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher,” he wrote, “that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word” (v 4a). 📖

The servant had learned to make the most of his suffering – not letting his pain be wasted but transforming it into growth and greater maturity. And what the servant learned, he taught: “how to sustain the weary with a word.”

What the servant was called to do in these verses, God’s servants today may still do. We don’t have to let trouble turn us into victims but may learn from suffering and turn our pain into wisdom and share it. Have you faced hard times and learned from them? Have you ever passed on that wisdom to others? 📖

That kind of learning does not come easy: working through grief is a daily task. The prophet wrote that God “wakens my ear” morning by morning “to listen as those who are taught” (v. 4b) – to become a student of suffering.

Isaiah was not describing an angelic alarm clock, but a daily openness to God’s Spirit. Whether suffering or not, there is much God can teach us every day if only we pay attention, thinking theologically through all the activities of daily life.

If we don’t learn something about God’s care every day, we’re not paying attention. Our natural tendency is to be so caught up in ourselves and our needs (or wants) and our duties that we overlook the many ways in which God may be speaking.

For the servant, the key was seeking to be constantly faithful to God. The conjunction of “the Lord GOD has opened my ear” and “I was not rebellious” (v. 5) is not random: the two are intimately related. The servant “did not turn backward” from God, but faced forward, looking toward God, listening with open ears. 📖

The servant, however, was talking about more than hearing. The Hebrew Bible does not have a specific word for “obey,” but uses the word that also means “to hear.” We understand this.

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



When parents give children an instruction and don't get a quick response, they often ask "Did you *hear* me?" Theoretically, to hear is to obey. The implication is that if one truly hears God speak, he or she will obey, and not turn back.

Jesus would later suggest a similar thought, for many who were within the sound of his voice did not hear his words to the point of understanding or obedience. Thus, Jesus was prone to punctuate important teachings with "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9, 23; 11:16 and parallels). While the translation "let him hear" implies permission, Jesus' intent was imperative: "Whoever has ears to hear had better listen!" (NET).

#### **A sufferer who perseveres (vv. 6-8a)**

The servant of Isa. 50:4-9 said he awakened to learn from God each day. Apparently, on some of those days he awoke with a raw back and sore cheeks from being attacked by detractors. "I gave my back to those who struck me," he wrote, "and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting" (v. 6).

Apparently, the prophet's mixed condemnation and consolation were not always welcome. He described physical abuse at the hands of detractors: public beatings, pulling of the beard, spitting in the face (v. 6).

All of these actions suggest typical ways of shaming and humiliation in the ancient Near East. Cutting or pulling the beard, for example, was designed to call one's masculinity into question, leading to public embarrassment (2 Sam. 10:4; Isa. 7:20, 15:2; Jer. 48:37). Similarly, spitting in the face was a ritual means of insulting another person, causing public shame (Num. 12:14, Deut. 25:9). Even today, we think of it as an expression of gross

contempt: "He might as well have spit in my face!"

Despite persecution experienced at the hands of those he sought to help, the servant said he persevered because "the Lord GOD helps me."

The servant understood that what is shameful or disgraceful in human eyes may be honored in God's eyes. Thus, he was able to say "I have set my face like flint" (v. 7) despite the rain of blows or spit or painful tugs at his beard. Other people may have sought to humiliate him, but it was not their opinion he valued: it was God he sought to please. "Therefore," he said, "I have not been disgraced ... and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near" (v. 7-8a).

#### **A God who vindicates (vv. 8b-9)**

The final two verses turn the assurance of vv. 6-7 into a challenge for others. Like a boxer who beckons his opponent to aim another blow at his already-bloodied face, the servant challenged those who had beaten and insulted him. In a pair of corresponding poetic lines, he cried "Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me" (v. 8).

The servant may have been down, but not out. He was bloodied, but not beaten. Words, blows, and insulting spittle might come his way, but he was able to shake them off and feel no disgrace, because he knew something his tormentors did not understand. They did not know the God he knew. They did not comprehend true nobility.

The servant's persecutors could treat him as worthy of punishment, but he knew "It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?" (v. 9a). No man or woman can impose guilt on one who is upright in God's

eyes. They may sling mud or throw stones, but the mud doesn't stick and the stones bounce away. It was the servant's accusers who were guilty and deserving of punishment (vv. 1-3): he had remained faithful to God.

The servant was confident that his perseverance would lead to God's preservation. Trials would come, but he would endure. In contrast, a more tenuous fate awaited his opponents: "All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up" (v. 9b). His accusers might have felt right in their own eyes and powerful in their own strength, but they were no more permanent than a cloak that appears impressive today but is destined to become worn out and moth-eaten. 🇺🇸

And what does the servant have to do with us? Images from Isa. 50:4-9 are often applied to Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of what it means to be God's servant. The third Servant Song begins by describing the servant as a teacher who learns daily from God. "Teacher" was perhaps the most common title attributed to Jesus during his adult ministry, and he spoke of spending time in prayer and of what he had gained from the Father (Luke 10:22).

In Mark 10:34, Jesus predicted that he would be mocked, beaten, and spat upon. Accounts such as Mark 14:65 reflect the details of this prophecy in line with what the servant of 50:7-8 endured.

Although many Christians rightly see the fulfillment of Isa. 50:4-9 in the life and ministry of Christ, we must be careful not to limit the prophet's message to what happened in Jesus. Isaiah held forth an ideal for all who would find their sense of purpose and identity in the eyes of God rather than the world's view. That challenge remains: are we listening, following, and trusting God no matter what others do? **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Sept. 23, 2018

## Psalm 1

### Living Wisely

**D**o you like the notion of being wise? We spend years of our lives in school seeking an education in knowledge, and that's important. But we sometimes forget that knowledge and wisdom are not necessarily the same thing.

Knowledge deals with the realm of facts, concepts, or ideas garnered through study, observation, research, or experience. Wisdom, on the other hand, relates to what we do with the knowledge we have. It is the ability to make practical judgments based on available knowledge, to make good decisions, to choose wisely the proper course of life.

Wisdom was an important theme in the Hebrew Bible. 📖📖 The entire books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes were dedicated to the pursuit and dissemination of wisdom – as were several of the psalms. Our text is one of them. Others include Psalms 36, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, and 133. The fact that a wisdom poem appears first in the Psalter suggests that a scribe associated with the “wise” may have edited the canonical collection of psalms as we now have them.

#### Psalm 1:1 –

*Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread or sit in the seat of scoffers.*

#### The beginning of wisdom

Israel's wisdom teachers focused their teaching on men, and so does Psalm 1, though it is masked in the translation. The text routinely refers to “the man” or “he,” but the NRSV and other modern versions recognize that the advice does not apply to men only. Thus, they convert “man” and masculine pronouns to language that is not gender-specific. Thus, the literal “happy is the man” becomes “Happy are those” (NRSV) or “blessed is the one” (NIV 11, NET).

We don't know what kind of schooling was available in the ancient world, but such as it was, it was probably only for the elite, and only for boys. The book of Proverbs is filled with warnings for young men to follow “Lady Wisdom” and avoid “Dame Folly,” 📖 along with practical advice for a successful life.

The traditional wisdom found in Proverbs and Psalms was based on the common Old Testament belief that obedience to God's law promised prosperity and long life, while disobedience would earn one trouble of all kinds. As such, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” was a mantra of the wise (Prov. 1:7 and 9:10, among others). 📖

It comes as no surprise that Psalm 1 draws a sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked. It does not use terminology for “wise” or

“foolish,” but leaves no doubt that law-abiding righteous people are wise and destined for happiness, while the wicked are foolish and headed for judgment.

#### The walk of the wise (vv. 1-3)

The psalm begins its praise of the wise in reverse fashion, by focusing on what they *don't* do. “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers ...”

Like other psalms, this one is written as poetry, and Hebrew poetry is characterized by repetition rather than rhyme. While doublets (two lines echoing a similar theme) are most common, v. 1 is a triplet: those who would be happy reject the advice of the wicked, avoid the sinner's way, and shun the idea of scoffing at God's law.

All three phrases capture the same idea, but through different angles. Allowing sinful people to lead one astray and disrespect the law would be a sure road to misery, while one who avoids evil influences is on the highway to happiness.

We note that different translations describe the righteous as “happy” or “blessed,” because both are possible translations of the Hebrew word *'ashrē*. The same is true in Jesus' “Beatitudes,” where the Greek *makarios* can be translated as either “blessed” or “happy.” In English, we tend to think of happiness as the result of being blessed, but for the ancients the two concepts were more closely intertwined.

The wise are happily blessed because “their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they

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



meditate day and night” (v. 2). The blessed life begins with a mindset or an attitude: we intentionally orient ourselves toward behavior that puts God at the center of our lives. ♣

How could the blessed joy of such wise folk be described? They are like trees planted by plentiful waters, so that their foliage is verdant and their fruit is dependable (v. 3). “In all that they do,” the psalmist claims, “they prosper” (v. 3b).

Always?

Of course not. The psalmist, like other wisdom teachers, was aware that the righteous may suffer and the wicked may prosper: that’s why we have the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, which speculate on such matters.

Still, adherents of wisdom held that such instances were an aberration, and believed the principle remained true that wise people who faithfully follow God’s teaching would find both inner satisfaction and outward success, even when facing difficult days.

### The fall of the foolish (vv. 4-6)

Unlike obedient followers whose confidence in God is refreshed like a well-watered tree, “The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away” (v. 4). The contrast is sharp: a living and fruitful tree on the one hand, the dry husks of dead wheat on the other. The faithful are stable and deeply rooted, while the wicked are insubstantial and blown away by the slightest breeze.

As a result, the wicked cannot endure God’s judgment, nor can they find any comfort among the righteous (v. 5). Those who live only for self-enrichment and personal pleasure may indeed find happiness for a season, but in the long run, their hearts are bankrupt, their lives are empty, and they face the darkness of death alone.

The closing verse lays out the ultimate destiny facing those who choose wisdom or folly, God’s way or self’s way: “... for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (v. 6).

There are two ways, the psalmist says, with lasting consequences. Faithful people walk beneath the umbrella of God’s care, confident that whatever comes, God is with them always. Stubborn and unrepentant people walk alone, destined to perish, with no hope of divine succor beyond.

Though the world’s temptations are ever-present and highly persuasive, the choice should not be hard.

We close by noting that Christians must be very careful in reading texts such as Psalm 1, because “prosperity preachers” such as Joel Osteen, Jim Bakker, Creflo Dollar, and others have led thousands of people into the dangerous and faulty theology of believing that God wants everyone to be rich, and that the key to receiving riches is to donate to their ministries.

Prosperity preachers love to recite the first few verses of Deuteronomy 28 and texts such as Ps. 1:1-3 – along with an insistence that every word in the Bible must be literally true – in support of their bogus promises.

When gullible people trust their slick temporizing and send away their meager funds but do not receive healing or find a job or win the lottery, they may be tempted to give up on God altogether.

How do we trust the scriptures while also avoiding their abuse? We begin by recognizing that the texts we now call scripture were written by people who lived in particular contexts and often expressed their beliefs in exaggerated or hyperbolic fashion as a characteristic means of emphasis.

We also note that these texts were written for Hebrews who believed

they lived in a particular covenant relationship with God that promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

As Christian people, we live under a new covenant through Jesus Christ, and must be very careful not to assume that God’s covenant with Israel necessarily applies to us.

There is certainly truth in the claim that persons who avoid wicked ways and follow God’s teaching will be better people, and more content, to boot. They may or may not be financially prosperous, but they find joy in keeping close to God, even when times are hard and the road is rocky.

Consider Moses. Consider Jeremiah. Consider Jesus. Could anyone be more faithful? All of them suffered, and none of them were rich – but they also knew the presence and comfort of God in ways that wicked people, whether wealthy or not, cannot fathom.

Look again at v. 3: for a fruit tree, the value of being planted by a steady source of water is that the psalmist knows that dry years come. The very similar poem in Jer. 17:5-9 expands the description of the righteous: “They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit” (Jer. 17:8).

Jeremiah’s version of the psalm acknowledges the dry years yet promises both life and growth. Here is no promise that gypsy moths or killer bees will never bug us, that the weather will always be to our liking, or that every person we meet will be mature and responsible and loving. Rather, we find the promise that when trials do come, we can continue to live and to grow because we have a dependable source of nourishment and life. **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Sept. 30, 2018

Psalm 124

## Offering Praise

“I never would have made it without the Lord.” Perhaps you have heard someone speak like that while reflecting on a tragedy or difficult time in his or her life. Perhaps your own experience has led you to say something similar.

We find comfort and confidence in the belief that God not only cares about us but also is on our side. We shouldn’t carry this belief into prayers before sports events, as if God favors one team over another, and certainly not into prayers that we might win the lottery. Still, it’s a good feeling to know that, through all the vicissitudes of life, God is for us.

This is precisely the feeling expressed in Psalm 124, often labeled as a “community thanksgiving psalm” and one of 15 psalms denoted as a “Psalm of Ascent” (Psalms 120–134), possibly sung by pilgrims coming to worship at the temple in Jerusalem during the postexilic period. 📖

### A confession of deliverance (vv. 1-5)

An initial reading of vv. 1-5 seems to describe a time when Israel as a nation was attacked by enemies who could have swept over the people like a raging flood, drowning everyone in its

Psalm 124:8 –

*Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

path – if not for a miraculous deliverance wrought by God.

Such a description brings to mind Jerusalem’s survival in 701 BCE when the Assyrian king Sennacherib rampaged through the country of Judah and destroyed many cities, including Lachish, second only to Jerusalem in size. Both biblical and Assyrian accounts speak of this event. 📖

Most commentators believe the psalm dates from much later, during the postexilic period, possibly to celebrate the return from exile after Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon and allowed formerly disenfranchised peoples to return to their homelands.

While we might wish for a clearer picture of what happened, the psalm’s ambiguity serves a positive purpose by making it easier for us to find ourselves in the psalm – to relate it to our own life situations when we longed for divine aid or comfort.

“If it had not been the LORD who was on our side ...,” the poet begins, then pauses to invite others to join in: “– let Israel now say – if it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us ...” (vv. 1-2). 📖

Recall that “the LORD” translates the divine name Yahweh, first revealed to Moses in Exodus 3. The psalmist is confessing a belief that Yahweh came to the rescue in a time of dire need, “when our enemies attacked us.”

A closer look reveals that the word translated as “enemies” is actually

*’adam*, a Hebrew word that can mean “man,” “mankind,” or in a corporate sense, “people.” KJV and NET translate as “men,” and NIV 11 uses the word “people.”

The hostility demonstrated by these people is unclear. The Hebrew verb can carry the sense of an attack, but literally means “rose up.” Someone who must have been quite powerful rose up against the poet and his community, someone so strong that defeat was a foregone conclusion – “If it had not been the LORD who was on our side.”

The certainty of danger is expressed metaphorically through the imagery of a flash flood. The central part of Israel is dry for months at a time, and the landscape is scarred by large gullies that can be tens or hundreds of feet deep.

Most of the gullies, called “wadis,” are dry and dusty during the summer months, and may serve as common paths for travelers. When heavy rains come, however, flash floods can send raging cascades of water rushing through the wadis and overwhelm any unfortunate people or animals who aren’t smart enough or quick enough to get out of the way.

The psalmist speaks of how oppressors “would have swallowed us up alive when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood (literally, “waters”) would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters” (vv. 3-5).

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by some situation that was not of your own making? Pressures within families, work, or school can be so

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



intense that we may have the feeling of wading upstream, fighting the current, trying to keep our heads above water. Others involved may not necessarily be “enemies” who wish us harm: their individual expectations may indeed be reasonable, but the combination of them can leave us struggling to stay afloat.

In those times we can't expect God to do our work for us, or meet the demands of our families, or write our essays – but we can trust that God will be present with us and rejoice that we belong to a believing community of other people who can support us.

This community aspect reminds us of another important truth: while many people think of religion or seek God's help for selfish reasons alone, a more mature faith recognizes that God's love is not just for me, but for us. Sometimes others can be the answer to our prayer. Sometimes we can be the answer to others' prayers.

### A hymn of praise (vv. 6-7)

In v. 6, the poet turns from confession to praise combined with a further testimony of God's delivering power. Here the oppressors are no longer portrayed as an overwhelming flood, but as hungry hunters. The oppressed are no longer in danger of drowning, but of being caught in a trap and eaten.

“Blessed be the LORD,” the poet sings, “who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped” (vv. 6-7).

Modern hunters use shotguns to bring down birds of prey: the ancients could go after large birds with a bow or spear but had to rely on snares or nets for smaller birds such as quail or wild pigeons. The psalmist feels like a bird that had been caught in a snare

or net that broke, allowing its prey to escape. ♣

The imagery of escaping from a fowler's snare is what leads many readers to think of the poet as someone who had returned from the Babylonian exile. The metaphor is not precise, however. Though many Hebrews were forcefully deported from their homes and required to live in Babylon, few of them were either imprisoned or impoverished. They were given land on which to settle and allowed to have businesses. Cuneiform documents from that period speak of people with Hebrew names who lived in “Jehudtown” and carried on business like other residents of Babylonia.

By the end of the exile, few if any of the original captives survived. Virtually all of the Hebrews in Babylon had been born there. They had heard stories about Jerusalem, however, a once-splendid city that no doubt had grown more resplendent with the telling. As Palestinian refugees today long to return to land in Israel taken from them in 1948, so many of the exiles yearned for Jerusalem. When they were finally allowed to return, some may have imagined themselves as birds who had flown free from Babylon's captive net.

Have you ever experienced narrow escapes? You may have walked away from an automobile accident that could easily have killed you, or both survived and surprisingly thrived after a divorce that you once thought would have done you in. We can often move on from treacherous situations, not because of a miraculous deliverance, but because of our steady confidence that God and God's people are with us, and *for* us.

### An affirmation of confidence (v. 8)

The poet concludes his psalm with an affirmation of faith: “Our help is in the

name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (v. 8).

One aspect of this verse is clear: the psalmist stands before the congregation to affirm his own faith as an inspiration for others to believe that the same God “who made heaven and earth” is capable and caring enough to be “our help” in times of trouble. He believes that he and others have escaped grave danger for just one reason: because God has helped them.

But why doesn't he give credit directly to Yahweh (the LORD)? He says, “Our help is *in the name* of the LORD” (emphasis added).

The psalmist would probably be puzzled by the question. For the Hebrews, God and God's name were so closely intertwined that to invoke one was to invoke the other. To say our help is in the name of the LORD is to say that the LORD is our help, period. ♣

What, then, are we to take away from this psalm? On the one hand, we are assured that no matter what calamity threatens, we can hope in God, trusting that God is on our side. God does not have to deliver us from every peril in order to be present with us.

A second reminder from this psalm is the importance of giving thanks and public praise to God for seeing us through our trials. Like the psalmist, we can testify that “If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,” we wouldn't have come through our troubles as well as we have.

We live in a scary world, with threats of serious harm to the environment, economic uncertainties, and concerns about ideological terrorists or random shooters bearing grudges or mental illness along with their guns.

But despite it all, we can trust that God is for us. We need not lie awake at night or sweat through each day but can live in confidence that the LORD is on our side. **NFJ**



# Bible Study *with Tony W. Carledge*

New password for online teaching resources is: teach.

Oct. 7, 2018

Genesis 2:18-25

## Being Equal

Equality is a concept that's easier to love in theory than in practice, for there have always been those who consider themselves to be more "equal" than others. We are familiar with ongoing struggles for equality between racial and ethnic groups, or between the entrenched rich and the aspiring poor.

Nowhere has the issue of inequality been more pervasive than between men and women. With few exceptions, men dominate most societies. Even in countries that claim to believe in equality, men commonly have more power, make more money, and enjoy more freedom than women.

Sadly, many Christian leaders through the years (almost always men) have grounded and perpetuated inequality through claiming that Gen. 2:18-25 teaches the subservience of women as God's plan, when in fact the text is all about equality.

### An ancient text

Let's begin by looking at the broader context of our story. An early tradition among both Jews and Christians held that Moses wrote all of the Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy), inspired by God to write of things – such as creation – for which there were no witnesses.

### Genesis 2:18 –

*Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."*

That long-held tradition, which many people still believe, cannot possibly be accurate. A careful reading of the text, even in English, reveals that many hands played roles in the development, recording, and editing of these stories.

The most obvious example of multiple authors is right here before us, for Gen. 1:1–2:4a and Gen. 2:4b-25 are manifestly two entirely different stories of creation. Traditionalists have often sought to explain the obvious discrepancies by claiming that the second story is simply a more detailed version of the creation of humans, but even a cursory reading shows that they are very different.

In the first story, written in a very formal and repetitive style, God (always called "Elohim") is a distant deity who rules over a council of heavenly beings and creates all things by the spoken word alone. In the second story, written in a simple, earthy manner, God (called "Yahweh Elohim") appears on the earth in human form and kneels in the dirt to fashion the first man from clay.

The first story follows a seven-day format, while the second account portrays as taking place in a single day.

The two stories cannot be reconciled, and they don't need to be: like other biblical meditations on creation in Job 38-42 and Psalms 8, 19, and 139, they are imaginative ways of

expressing the belief that God created all things, but with different emphases. ▾

### An unsatisfactory situation (vv. 18-20)

The Yahwist's account of creation begins "In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (v. 4b), before rain had fallen or any plants had grown, with a statement that "the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (v. 7).

The word used for "man" here is 'adam, which reflects the use of the word "ground" ('admah) in vv. 5, 6, and 7. Throughout the story, he is referred to as "the man" (ha'adam). Only in 4:25, in the account of Seth's birth, is the generic 'adam first used as a proper name, "Adam."

From the same ground that had formed the man, "the LORD God planted a garden in Eden" as a habitation for him (vv. 8-9).

The next few verses, which probably represent a separate tradition incorporated into the story, are an imaginative attempt to locate Eden by listing four rivers that emerged from it, though no place on earth matches that description. ▾

With v. 15 we return to the narrative, in which "the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (v. 15). The many trees there included a "tree of life" and a "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God instructed the man to enjoy the tree of life but to avoid fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." ▾ This is a symbolic way of

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



confessing that humans had the option to obey or disobey from the beginning.

The picture of Eden appears to represent a true paradise except for one thing: the man was alone. No matter how beautiful the landscape or how abundant and delicious the fruit, life can feel empty when there is no one to share it with.


### A creative resolution (vv. 20-25)

God recognized this, the writer said, acknowledging that “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (v. 20).

Let’s examine some of these words more carefully. First, the word “helper” is not intended to suggest that the man needed an aide or a maid. The word is *‘ezer*. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, it is used only of God – which should come as a surprise to many readers.

The word most commonly describes God acting as a deliverer or protector or sustainer, the one who does what man alone cannot do. The “helper” God has in mind is not to be below the man, but to correspond to him. The word translated as “partner” in the NRSV, *kenegdo*, is a combination of a preposition, a noun, and a masculine pronoun – and used only here. Literally, it means something like “as across from him.” The sense, then, is “corresponding to,” or “suitable for.” The “helper” is not to be a servant, but a partner; not a subordinate, but an equal – the “helper” is needed so the man will not be alone, but whole.

The man’s need for a partner is followed by a fanciful description of God’s creation of all animals and birds – also from “out of the ground,” allowing the man to view each one and to give it a name. Of all the living creatures, however, “there was not found a helper

as his partner” (vv. 19-20). 

On the surface, the narrative seems to imply that God was so inept as to think that an animal could possibly serve as the man’s life companion, but the author has a different intent. By showing that every other living creature was inadequate, the narrator builds suspense and sets the stage for the arrival of what the man really needs.

Now we find the familiar account of the first anesthesia and the first surgery: “So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh” (v. 21). The word “rib” is not in v. 21, which literally says that God “took one from his side,” probably to be taken as “a part of his side.” The following verse says God used “the side he had taken from the man” and used it to “build” the woman before bringing her to the man, who had presumably awakened.

Details of how God “built” the woman are not given, any more than the process by which Adam was made from dirt. The point is that God is the creative force.

After a fruitless inventory of animals, the man is overjoyed to meet his true mate, saying “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken” (v. 23). Hebrew readers will note a careful wordplay between the words for woman (*‘ishah*) and man (*‘ish*). The two terms are not etymologically related, but sound alike, fitting the man’s excited and poetic announcement.

The following verse makes it clear that the author’s purpose is not just to express his beliefs about the creation of men and women, but about the ideal of marriage, as well. In this marriage, God is at work, bringing the man and the woman together. The

man expresses his belief that they are intimately related as having shared bone and flesh.

The statement in v. 24 is not from the man – who would have no knowledge of fathers, mothers, or marriage customs – but a comment by the narrator: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

This may seem a bit odd, because Israelite society was “patrilocal,” meaning that married men generally stayed near their families in an adjoining house or tent, while women left their families to live with their new husbands. The point is that the man’s first responsibility and closest relationship is no longer to or with his parents, but his wife: they have become “one flesh,” at least symbolically, in the same sense that the first man and woman were made of the same flesh and bone.

The narrator’s descriptive commentary continues in v. 25, adding that “the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”

On the one hand, this is a setup for the next chapter, in which the man and woman disobey God and their resulting shame is symbolized by an awareness that they are naked. On the other hand, it is a reminder that human sexuality is part of God’s good creation and something to be celebrated, an important aspect of intimacy between committed partners.

Only with the creation of both male and female could humankind be complete. More conservative interpreters who lean on the apostle Paul for a more male-dominant view may argue that this text puts the woman in a secondary position because the story has the man created first. If anything, however, the woman’s creation from a part of the man suggests a model that is new and improved. **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Oct. 14, 2018

## Psalm 90

### Gaining Perspective

**W**e know what it is like to have good days, and we've all experienced bad days. When you look back at your life, would you say you have had more good days than bad, or bad days than good? Whatever the answer, to what do you attribute your sad or happy days?

The author of Psalm 90 was convinced that his days had been few and hard. As he prayed, it seemed, the most he could hope for was that his good and bad days would come out even. 📖

In modern times, portions of Psalm 90, with its reference to typical human lifespans and to "counting our days," is often read at funerals, and for good reason. It reminds us of both our mortality and our hope. 📖

### Eternity and mortality (vv. 1-6)

Psalm 90 has a superscription associating it with "Moses, the man of God." Like other ascriptions in the psalms, it is probably a scribal notation rather than original. It is highly unlikely that Moses would have written the psalm, which probably originated in the postexilic period, a thousand years after Moses would have lived.

The prayer probably came to be associated with Moses because it has

### Psalm 90:12 –

*So teach us to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart.*

some loose similarities to the "Song of Moses" in Deut. 31:30–32:47, or because of its apparent references to Genesis 3, which early Jews believed to have been written by Moses. Portraying the psalm as having more ancient roots would also suggest greater authority. 📖

The psalm begins with a familiar reflection of praise for God's goodness. "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (vv. 1-2).

One might think this is going to be a song of praise.

One would be wrong, for the tenor of the psalm goes downhill from there. The attribution of God's supremacy over creation and everlasting nature is a setup, designed as a marked contrast to human frailty and mortality.

"You turn us back to dust," the psalmist says (v. 3), perhaps intentionally reflecting Gen. 3:19, the story of God's judgment on Adam and Eve for disobedience in the garden: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

From God's perspective, even 1,000 years "are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night" (v. 4), the psalmist claims. The language is, of course, poetic. There is no specific correlation of time so that God

perceives the passing of a millennium in precisely the same way we experience a single day.

The psalmist's point is the belief that for God, life and time are eternal, while for humans the experience is ephemeral, hardly more than a dream, as short-lived as grass that springs up in the morning but withers away by evening (v. 6).

### Respect and perspective (vv. 7-12)

And why is human life so short? For the psalmist, it is due to God's anger: "For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance" (vv. 7-8).


Why would the psalmist attribute human mortality to God's anger? The theology underlying most (but not all) of the Old Testament is the belief, portrayed most clearly in passages such as Deuteronomy 28, that God and Israel lived in a covenant relationship. If the people of Israel were faithful and obedient to God, they could expect material blessings and happy lives. If they proved disobedient, all manners of curses and diseases would fall on their heads.

While the psalmist would have been informed by this belief, it seems more likely that his reference here also goes back to Genesis 3, where we find the story of Adam and Eve choosing to eat forbidden fruit in hopes of gaining knowledge known only to God. In response, God expelled them from the garden and ordained that they should die and return to the dust from which they were created.

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



From this perspective, the psalmist appears to believe that humans from that time forward lived and died under the penalty of God's wrath over human presumptuousness. "For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh" (v. 9).

How does the psalmist come up with the numbers in v. 10? "The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty if we are strong ..." (v. 10b). The Bible contains no divine injunction that humans can live only 80 or 90 years. Indeed, the genealogies of Genesis 5 attribute to early generations exaggerated lifespans extending for centuries, with the famous Methuselah topping them all at 969 years. 


An introduction to the story of the flood does seem to suggest a new limit to human lifespans: "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years" (Gen. 6:3). Many individuals are credited with much longer lives after that: Noah reportedly lived 950 years (Gen. 9:29), Eber 464 (Gen. 11:16-17), Peleg 239 (Gen. 11:18-19), Abraham 175 (Gen. 25:7), Jacob 147 (Gen. 47:28), and Eli 98 (1 Sam. 4:15).

Note that the ages trend downward. Even the great Moses was accorded only 120 years (Deut. 34:7). Most kings of Israel and Judah died between 40 and 70 years of age.

The psalmist's reference to lifespans of 70 or 80 years is drawn from personal experience. Average life expectancy in the ancient world was quite short, because many children (and mothers) died young. Those who survived childhood were unlikely to live more than eight decades. Even with today's medical advances, living into one's 90s is considered an accomplishment.

The psalmist was not concerned with length of life alone, however:

he took a decidedly negative attitude toward the days allotted to him. Even for those who live to an old age, he said, "their span is only toil and trouble, they are soon gone, and we fly away" (v. 10b).

Again, the psalmist is being poetic. He does not expect to take wings at the moment of death but sees the brevity of life as being like a bird that is here one moment, then quickly flies away. Hymn-writer Albert E. Brumley gave a more positive spin to the theme in 1929 with "I'll Fly Away," a catchy and optimistic gospel hymn that has been frequently recorded. 

Despite his apparently negative view, the psalmist finds something valuable in associating short and troubled lives with God's anger: he believes connecting the two can become a source of wisdom.

Israel's sages taught that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10, Prov. 9:10), and the author of Psalm 90 put two and two together: "Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you" (v. 11b). He concludes, "So teach us to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart" (v. 12). All of our lives are limited: perspective is a valuable thing.

### Prayer and prosperity? (vv. 13-17)

Having bemoaned the shortness of life and the wrath of God – while trying to gain wisdom from meditating on it – the psalmist shifts to a plea that God would relent and look to his particular situation of suffering with compassion rather than wrath (v. 13).

"Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love," he prays, "so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (v. 14).

The psalmist does not expect all joy in life but seems to believe he has already experienced his share of

trouble and is due a balancing quota of better days: "Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil" (v. 15).

This could be a clue to the psalmist's life setting: his prayer, offered corporately, would have been appropriate if offered for a people who had spent many years in exile, but longed for release. It could be just as apropos, however, for any time of prolonged suffering and trial.

The psalmist's lack of specificity is to our benefit: we can imagine our own times of suffering and trial and utilize this psalm in our own prayers for better days. Like the ancient poet, we may also pray "Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children" (v. 16).

Such a prayer does not assume that God owes a quota of good times to all people but comes from the standpoint of people who think of themselves as God's servants, as people who are devoted to God and trusting in divine mercy to bless their efforts: "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and prosper for us the work of our hands – O prosper the work of our hands!" (v. 17).

In the classic movie *Star Wars*, the robot R2D2 carries a video message from the rebel Princess Leia to a famed-but-reclusive Jedi knight: "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi," she says. "You're my only hope."

Humans – in life as in science fiction – often focus our hopes on other people, but there are things even the most loving and capable humans cannot do for us. Our true hope for joyful living is in the one who created life: "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and prosper the work of our hands – O prosper the work of our hands!" **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Oct. 21, 2018

Isaiah 53:1-12

## Redeeming Love

To live up today's lesson, let's invite Isaiah of the Exile to tell us about his life and the events leading to one of his most famous prophecies, while leaving some of our more traditional commentary for the online resources. This prophet who preached in Isaiah's name lived in the latter stages of the exile and may have joined others in returning home. 📖

We can't know exactly what was in Isaiah's mind, but we can imagine that if the old prophet could stand in one of our pulpits and speak today, it might sound something like this ...

### Trouble, past and present

Isaiah's my name, and preaching's my game, and sometimes I prophesy, too. I am not the first preacher who became a prophet, nor am I the first to be called Isaiah, and I do not expect to be the last of either. I am what I am, what God called me to be.

The first contributor to the book you know as "Isaiah" lived back in the old days, preaching in Jerusalem during the eighth century, when Israel was strong and free, made great by God and the envy of other nations.

But then too many people turned too strongly to their own ways. The rich oppressed the poor to make themselves

Isaiah 53:4 –

*Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.*

even richer, and people of every stripe began to follow the idolatrous ways of our pagan neighbors.

Isaiah of Jerusalem was called by God to tell the truth, and the truth was trouble: the people had lost their fear of God, had lost their focus for living, had lost their future in the land.

He charged that their faithfulness had turned to harlotry and justice to murder, and the only way to purify the nation was through more trouble, like silver or gold going through a fire to be refined (Isa. 1:21-26).

Isaiah predicted that Assyria would become the instrument of God's judgment on Israel, and he was right. In the year you call 722 BCE, the northern kingdom was conquered, and the people were scattered.

The Babylonians overpowered the Assyrians some years later, and then decimated Judah in 597, sending thousands into exile to flounder around between the Tigris and the Euphrates, wondering what was next. We were pitiful: when I came of age we had been in bondage for over a generation. 📖

The future looked dark when the LORD gave me a message to proclaim, a vision for the future. God called me to comfort the exiles, to announce that their sentence was up and their penalty paid. I was to declare that a way would be made through the wilderness and Yahweh's glory would be revealed. Humans might be as fickle and fading

as grass, I was told, but God's promises endure forever (Isa. 40:1-8).

It was hard to imagine, and harder to believe. God had not forgotten us! I was hesitant, but when God gives you a message, it comes with a tickle on your tongue that nothing will scratch other than proclaiming the word.

As I began to preach God's message of comfort and hope, a strange thing occurred to me. King Cyrus of Persia was threatening Babylon. Could Cyrus be the instrument of God's deliverance? If God had used a pagan king to judge Israel, couldn't a pagan king also deliver God's people?

I began to proclaim that Cyrus was God's anointed deliverer (cf. Isa. 45:1; 48:14-15, 28). People laughed at me, but not for long. Cyrus did indeed conquer Babylon in 539, and one of his first acts was to make a decree that we could return to Jerusalem. He even offered us a military escort and money to help rebuild the temple. Can you believe it?

I thought God was probably through with me as a prophet then, but I continued to listen. I often walked out beyond the barley fields to the edge of the desert to ponder the old wind-bitten trees out there – they reminded me that the present age of suffering was about to pass, and that a new age was coming.

### A root from dry ground (vv. 1-3)

I was wrong about my prophetic days being over, for God spoke to me again. I was walking in the desert's edge one day, leaving a small cloud of dust with every step, when I tripped over a root sticking out of the ground. It hurt, too, and it was bleeding – sandals don't

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



provide much protection for a busted toe.

I sat on a stump to nurse my toe and to curse the root when this thought occurred to me – *a root out of dry ground*. That was all, at first – a phrase that stuck in my head and wouldn't go away. "A root out of dry ground." And then I noticed that a new shoot had sprung up and was well on its way to becoming a tree. It was ugly and misshapen, and there was nothing to commend it except that it had grown from old roots in dry ground and had survived despite the hot desert winds. I hated that the brave tree would probably be cut down to serve the needs of men.

And there it was: a thought that had to be from God. There was more that people needed to hear. God's plan was bigger than Cyrus and bigger than a simple return to the promised land. There is a bondage that goes deeper than handcuffs or shackles. There is a prison of the soul, and our problem through the years had been our inability to overcome the sinful nature that had imprisoned us.

I saw a root out of dry ground, a twisted tree standing strong in the wind, a tree cut down for the sake of the people, a faithful servant of God who would overcome adversity and sacrifice himself to redeem God's people from their sins. 🇺

As quickly as the message came to me, I realized that few would believe it. But God would not let me keep it in, and so I began to proclaim to all who would listen that God would send forth a servant who would appear marred and disfigured, and yet he would be raised up and highly exalted. "Kings will shut their mouths because of him," I said, when they come to understand what has happened (Isa. 52:13-15).

What could silence a politician? Nothing but a vision of power that has

its roots in suffering and not in glory, and that's hard to believe.

So I went on to ask "Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account" (vv. 1-3).

### A servant who suffers (vv. 4-12)

Now, here is the amazing part, and I assure you it's nothing I would have ever made up. The LORD told me to say:

"Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (vv. 4-6).

Can you imagine such a thing? That a faithful servant would arise to suffer our pain and take our punishment? To turn our perversity into peace?

God gave me even more to say: I spoke of the servant as being oppressed and afflicted, like an uncomplaining lamb led to the slaughter, an undeserved death for the transgressions of others (vv. 7-9).

Could such a thing be God's plan? And yet it was (v. 11). A righteous man would die for the unrighteous but not

be lost, and his death would lead to victory. This is what God told me:

"Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.

"The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

"Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors" (vv. 11-12).

Did you catch this new thing? There is something greater than justice: there is love. There is grace. And it brings peace.

I admit this was not a popular message when I began to proclaim it. It was only later, after the servant actually came, after he suffered, died, and won the victory – only then did they put my words together with his life: "But God proves his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Now, I do not know what keeps you in bondage. I do not know what sins so easily beset you. But I do know that the servant has come. Like a root out of dry ground he grew up. Like a bent tree in the desert wind he suffered. Like a tree that is needed for a greater purpose he was cut down. And he did that for you.

And just as that stump quickly sprouted and broke out into new life, just so he can give you a new life. He has lived and died to take away your iniquities, to cleanse your transgressions, to forgive your sins and bring hope to your life, to send you out with a determination to love others even as he loves, even when it hurts.

Who has believed our report? I hope *you* have! **NFJ**

# Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Oct. 28, 2018

Jeremiah 31:7-9

## Saving Grace

**H**ave you ever felt like giving up hope? All of us may have felt beyond hope at some point, but we didn't give up. Even in the worst of times, as long as we wish for a good future, or pray – or even complain – we are expressing hope for better days.

The prophet Jeremiah had a lot to say about judgment, believing that God had already exiled the northern kingdom of Israel, and would soon bring the Babylonians to defeat the southern kingdom of Judah and send them into exile, too. He had no patience with people who violated their covenant with Yahweh and turned to other gods, or who failed to keep the law by mistreating one another.

Jeremiah lived to see Jerusalem destroyed and several waves of leading Hebrew citizens forced to leave their homes and take up residence in Babylon. The prophet Ezekiel, who was also a priest, had been carried away among the exiles, and did not begin his prophetic career until he arrived in Babylon.

Jeremiah had counseled submission to the Babylonians as God's will, and possibly for that reason the Babylonian "captain of the guard" allowed him to choose whether he would stay or go. Jeremiah remained in the land

### Jeremiah 31:7 –

*For thus says the LORD: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'Save, O LORD, your people the remnant of Israel.'"*

with the new governor Gedaliah for some time, but a rebellious cabal assassinated the governor and made plans to lead many remaining Judeans to Egypt. Jeremiah encouraged them to stay and submit to the Babylonians, predicting trouble if they went to Egypt. The rebels would not listen, however: they migrated to Egypt and forced Jeremiah to go with them, where he continued to prophesy (Jeremiah 40–44).

### A prayer (v. 7)

Today's text is only three verses long, but they are fairly lengthy verses, and they constitute a self-contained oracle. In context, it is found in a hopeful section of Jeremiah sometimes called the "Book of Consolation" (Jeremiah 30–31, 33). The text is sandwiched between two other oracles promising that God would not forget those who remained from Israel and Judah but would look past their former rebellion and return them to the land of promise.

The oracle begins in typical fashion: "For thus says the LORD ..." One of the marks of a true prophet was the belief that they heard from God directly and related God's word without altering it. There is no indication as to how Jeremiah received such revelations, but the prophet clearly believed his message had come straight from God.

And what was that message? It began with a call to "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob and raise shouts for the chief of the nations" (v. 7a). Jacob was remembered as the one whose name was changed to "Israel," and whose sons gave rise to the 12 tribes.

"Chief of the nations" seems an odd way to describe Israel, which at that time was no nation at all, at least from a political standpoint. Still, there was a bond that held the people together, an ethnic heritage with one another despite being scattered across the known world, and a covenant connection with the God they believed ruled over all. From a theological or covenant perspective, then, Jeremiah could speak of the dispersed Israelites as the "chief of the nations."

The point was that God had promised to return them from exile and bring them back together as a people: Jeremiah called the scattered exiles to "proclaim, give praise, and say, 'Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel'" (v. 7b).

His oracle, then, begins with a call for hope and trust that God would reverse their fate and redeem them from captivity, instructing the people to pray for that very thing to happen. The prayer, which calls upon God by the covenant name Yahweh, is a reminder that the remnant had been exiled, but not excommunicated: they were still Yahweh's people, and Yahweh was still a God of steadfast love.

In the previous oracle, Jeremiah declared that Yahweh had appeared to Israel, saying "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (v. 3). Jeremiah's oracle is a plea that

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



the people should cry out in repentance and hope in a God who would not let them go.

### A promise (v. 8)

Have you ever longed for good news, and rejoiced when it came? Have you ever imagined what it would be like to be held captive, but finally told that you would be freed? Verse 8 is the good news the exiles had been waiting for. Speaking for Yahweh, Jeremiah declared “See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.”<sup>U</sup>

Babylon was slightly north, but mostly east of Jerusalem. One could not journey from one to the other in a straight line, however, because the great stretch of the Arabian desert could not be crossed, even with camels. Travelers from Babylon to Palestine used roads that followed the “Fertile Crescent” north along the Euphrates River, and east toward Phoenicia before turning south to the narrow land bridge that Israel had occupied.

Since both armies and peaceful travelers from the east arrived from the north, Jeremiah sometimes referred to Babylon as the “land of the north” – but he did not stop there. While exiles from Judah had been relocated to Babylon in the early sixth century, and some (including Jeremiah) had migrated to Egypt, they were not the only Hebrews.

The northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, with its people scattered across a wide area: the Assyrian practice was to shuffle conquered peoples among other defeated territories, not just bringing them all to Nineveh.

Jeremiah believed God cared

about all descendants of the Hebrews and would “gather them from the farthest parts of the earth.”

God’s promise did not extend to the strong alone: those who returned would include the blind and the lame, women who were pregnant and even in labor – people one would not expect to set out on a long and arduous journey by foot.

Jeremiah’s promise offers hope to anyone who feels distant from God. We may sometimes think of ourselves as spiritually blind or crippled, or so burdened by other things that we can’t see through the fog to find God. This verse assures us that no one is so far from God or so handicapped by circumstances that God cannot find us when we cry out with Israel, “Save, O LORD, your people ...”

### A return (v. 9)

Jeremiah believed that God’s promised deliverance would take place in connection with the repentance of God’s people. “With weeping they shall come,” Jeremiah said in Yahweh’s behalf, “and with consolations I will lead them back” (v. 9a).

While one might imagine joyful tears at the prospect of returning home, Jeremiah had in mind the sorrowful weeping of people who had realized the gravity of their sins and grieved over them. Later, he spoke of Ephraim (the largest of the tribes) pleading with God, admitting past wrongs, and repenting in shame (vv. 18-19).

Thus, the prophet saw God offering consolation to the sorrowful, penitent people, assuring them of forgiveness and hope for a new day.

Indeed, God would ease their journey, Jeremiah said: “I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and

Ephraim is my firstborn” (v. 9b).

There is no straight path along brooks of water between Babylon and Jerusalem, so we must read Jeremiah’s promise as a metaphorical vision of God leading the people directly home, providing for them and encouraging them along the way.

The NRSV’s “for I have become a father to Israel” may appear misleading, as it seems to imply that God has only recently adopted the people. A more literal translation is “because I am Israel’s father” (NIV 11, NET, HCSB, KJV, and NASB 95 have variations on this).

It was God who had called Abraham to begin a new nation, and God who had entered into a covenant relationship with Israel. Stories in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers describe how God had brought Israel through the desert wilderness and into the promised land: now Jeremiah saw God bringing the exiles through another desert and back to their homeland.

The reference to Ephraim as “my firstborn” is metaphorical: Ephraim was one of Joseph’s two sons. A tradition in Gen. 49:22-26 has Jacob giving a special blessing to Joseph’s sons. Ephraim became the most populous and influential tribe in the northern kingdom, and its territory encompassed the capital city of Samaria.

Jeremiah does not suggest that the descendants of Ephraim will get special treatment over others, or that the northern kingdom of Israel will dominate the southerners from Judah. Here, as in vv. 18-19, Ephraim is a metaphorical stand-in for all of the Hebrew children that God would bring back home.

For all who feel isolated from God, exiled by sinful choices or overwhelmed by circumstances, today’s text offers hope for forgiveness and a renewed fellowship with God, whose steadfast love never changes. **NFJ**



## CLASSIFIEDS

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

#### **In memory of ...**

Robert Cates  
From Willis and Glenda Potts

Mrs. H.C. (Ruth) Conner  
From Martha Brook

Omega Wood  
From Donna and Eddie Wood



*Baptists Today / Nurturing Faith  
welcomes gifts of tribute at P.O. Box  
6318, Macon, GA 31208. Please  
designate "in memory" or "in honor"  
and the honoree's name.*

**Minister to Children and Families:** First Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala., is seeking a full-time minister to children and families. This ministerial staff position is responsible for the spiritual development of children in grades 1-6. Located in North Alabama, we are geographically situated in the heart of downtown Huntsville and have a heart for ministry to this city we call home. A full job description and more information about our church are available at [fbchsv.org/employment](http://fbchsv.org/employment). Résumés and inquiries may be sent to [search@fbchsv.org](mailto:search@fbchsv.org).

**Associate Pastor to Youth and Families:** Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga., is seeking a full-time associate pastor to youth and families who will be responsible for planning and implementing ministry programs and activities for 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders and their families. See the full job description at <https://spdl.org/jobs>. Submit resumes to [dholingsworth@spdl.org](mailto:dholingsworth@spdl.org) before August 31.

#### **Associate Pastor of Leadership Development**

Calvary Baptist Church  
Newark, Del.  
Contact:  
[search@calvarybaptistnewark.org](mailto:search@calvarybaptistnewark.org)

**Do you need a church pianist?** Try piano accompaniment CDs for congregational singing from Worship Service Resources. CDs include hymns, choruses, DVDs, and lyrics. To receive a free demo, call 1-877-977-6800 or visit [wsrpianocds.com](http://wsrpianocds.com).

## NURTURING FAITH™

is an innovative publishing venture that engages gifted authors with an experienced team of editors, designers and marketers to provide excellent books in both print and digital forms. To submit a book proposal, visit <http://books.nurturingfaith.net/publish-with-us/>.

### NEW LOW PRICES FOR CLASSIFIEDS

\$2.00 per word  
one print issue of  
Nurturing Faith Journal  
plus one month  
at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)  
or

\$1.00 per month  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) only

To advertise job openings,  
events, institutions, vacation  
rentals, products, etc.,  
contact  
[jriley@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:jriley@nurturingfaith.net)

\*Display ad space also available,  
ranging from \$425-\$2,825.

Tell Your  
Church's  
**Story**

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

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

We also offer logo, newsletter and worship bulletin redesign.

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

**faithlab**  
Inspired Creativity

# Chase and the persistence of grace

BY TONY VINCENT

Like many churches, Trinity Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C., often selects one Sunday a year for a “youth-led service.” Students plan the service, read scripture, sing songs, lead prayers, all that normally happens in a worship setting. Our tradition for the past few years is to give the seniors of the bunch an opportunity to speak, preach or reflect in some way on their experience at Trinity and their own faith journey.

This year was no different. It was a beautiful, energizing day, with many proclaiming their hope in the future of the church based on the church’s future (and present) so wonderfully on display. But what stood out to me the most were the words of one of our seniors, 17-year-old Chase, as he stood before us to speak.

Chase is a young man who has grown by leaps and bounds in his 10-12 years at Trinity. Elementary school aged Chase was, quite honestly, a handful, full of energy, often erupting in destructive and sometimes quite aggressive ways.

He was brought most often to church by his grandfather, and would frequently be found roaming the church property rather than taking part in the group activities or studies of the day. More than once things got out of hand and volunteers (and ministers) would frustratingly have to intervene and have difficult conversations with him and his family. But Chase kept coming, and folks at church kept encouraging him to come.

As Chase entered the youth group in middle school, his role as an outsider slowly changed. Yes, slowly. There were still issues and damaged relationships (and occasionally property), but Chase began to find himself and his place within a group of other awkward, often emotional, and occasionally irrational young people.

When Chase got to high school, he seemingly found his “place” within his school’s outstanding choral program. This sense of “place” in music impacted his time



RECOGNITION AND REFLECTION — (Left to right) Recent graduates Chase Duncan, Ryan Nation, Samantha Faires and Zoe Patton of Trinity Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C.

at church also, and his destructive personality changed into something else. It became edifying.

Chase was (and is) still quirky, but in ways that add to, not take from, the group. Even after his grandfather chose to attend a different church, for Chase, Trinity remained his home, his place to be himself. He sings with our youth choir and occasionally helps out our sanctuary choir with his beautiful baritone voice.

So on Youth Sunday, when it came time for Chase to reflect on his life and relationship with God through Trinity Baptist Church, this young man who for years couldn’t look anyone in the eye, let alone speak to a group of adults, stood at the pulpit with confidence and deep emotional connection, and said “I need to say two things to my church today: ‘I’m sorry,’ and ‘Thank you.’”

As many of us choked back tears, Chase noted his difficult journey as a youngster in the halls of the church, and yet, he noted,

the church didn’t give up on him or push him away. The persistence of grace had an impact on him. Wrapped up in his apologetic words was a deep appreciation that was both recognizable and authentic.

Speaking to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship gathered in Atlanta in 2017, author Brian McLaren, addressing what church should offer people, suggested we say this when inviting people to be a part of our fellowship: “Come join us and we’ll help you to become a more loving version of yourself.”

Chase’s “I’m sorry” and “Thank you” epitomize that journey. Chase is most definitely still “Chase”— that interesting, quirky guy. However, through his time at Trinity he’s been shaped and formed into a more loving version of himself.

That’s what the persistence of grace does. Let’s all try to do more of that. **NFJ**

—Tony Vincent is associate minister at Trinity Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C.

# When leaders fail

BY ANDREW GARNETT

People of faith need trusted relationships with mature Christians. Mentoring and modeling have been a key aspect of spiritual formation from the earliest days, with even Paul encouraging the Corinthian Christians to “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

Biblical principles remain abstract unless we see them incarnated in the life of a leader. Yet we are more cognizant than ever of leaders who fail to uphold those principles.

It seems each day brings news of a priest who has abused a child, a minister accused of sexual harassment, or a trusted lay leader who has misused church funds. We seem to be working at cross purposes: We want Christians to have spiritual role models, yet we are wary of encouraging too much trust in any one leader lest that leader disappoint us.

How can we teach Christians to trust, while also preparing them for the disappointment that inevitably comes in human relationships? We can do it by encouraging them to trust their leaders, while simultaneously teaching them how to cope when leaders fall.

Psalm 13 is a useful guide for responding when a trusted leader lets us down. In this psalm of lament the author prays for deliverance from a dark situation. Along the way we see several key principles for helping believers navigate their disappointment when a leader exhibits a serious moral failure.

## NATURAL FEELINGS

Psalm 13 gives voice to negative feelings of grief, frustration, abandonment and anger. All of these are natural in the wake of a serious moral failure by a leader.

This psalm also carries a theme of resentment directed toward enemies: “My enemy will say, ‘I have prevailed;’ my foes

will rejoice because I am shaken” (13:4).

Themes of resentment or vindication over enemies appear in many psalms. Ordinarily these are some of the verses to which Christians — who have been constantly encouraged to love their enemies — have the most difficulty relating.

In the aftermath of a leadership scandal, however, Christians may begin to connect with these verses. When a leader is caught in sin, the talking heads pontificate and the online message boards light up — often suggesting faith is part of the problem. We can empathize with the psalmist that our enemies not be vindicated in their critical opinion of us.

Psalm 13 demonstrates that the full range of human emotions is normal. Sometimes we make wrong choices about what we do with our feelings, but the feelings themselves are never wrong. God is always big enough to handle our feelings.

## PERMISSION

The exact crisis faced by the psalmist is not clear. But whatever the problem, this psalm does not sugarcoat it. It offers no simple answers to a difficult situation.

There is some hope at the end, but mostly this psalm just sits with the pain. Weathering long periods of pain is necessary in times of grief and deep disappointment.

Indeed, it is helpful to think of a moral failure by a leader as a form of grief. When a leader does something either criminal or exceptionally immoral, Christians must accept that the person they knew is, on some level, gone. The mental image of the leader must pass away, and a more realistic one must emerge. It is a long and painful process to grieve the loss of the leader they thought they knew.

Christians do not need to worry if they are upset or angry. They should worry, however, if they have those feelings one day and the next day everything seems back to normal. That is not how grief works.

## LOOK FOR GOD

This psalm reminds believers to look for God in every situation of life. God is found in moments of happiness and joy. In horrific moments God is there too.

Even though the psalmist feels broken and forgotten, he still talks to God. Although the psalmist feels like God is absent, he cries out to God anyway. It is key for disappointed Christians to remember that God is always there, even if it feels that their prayers are directed toward an empty heaven. We can learn from the psalmist’s example and continue talking to a God who feels absent.

## FINDING HOPE

This scripture reminds disappointed believers that they will see and experience God’s love and comfort again — even if they can’t imagine it at the moment. It seems that the author of psalm 13 has not seen hope yet (v. 5: “my heart will rejoice in your salvation”). But because God has been bountifully good to him in the past (13:6), he knows that he can trust God’s love for the future.

If you have ever experienced a deep grief or a loss, you probably know of what the psalmist is speaking. After the loss of someone very close, it seems that the world is hopeless. All of life is a pale shadow, and it seems that the grief will never lift. But eventually, it does; in time you find meaning and purpose again.

This is a truth that believers need to remember when a leader disappoints them. Though it may seem hard to imagine in the aftermath, there will come a day when they experience God’s bountiful goodness again.

## BIGGER STORY

When walking with Christians who are disappointed in a leader, it is important to remind them that the church has always considered the Christian message to be independent of the Christian messengers.

One moment when the church most dramatically affirmed this was in the aftermath of the Diocletianic Persecution. The early fourth century saw the most severe persecution that Christians ever faced in the Roman Empire. Even many church leaders surrendered to the Roman authorities. Bishops and priests renounced their faith, handed over copies of the Scripture to be burned, and even betrayed lay Christians in order to save their own lives.

Eventually the persecution ended. Christians — and former Christians — came out of hiding. The church faced a difficult choice: what to do with those who had given in and done terrible things during the persecution. Could Christians who abandoned the faith really come back to the church?

On a deeper level the church was troubled by what the failings of priests and bishops meant. If a priest had baptized a Christian but later betrayed that Christian to save his own life, was that baptism still valid? Had it even been a real baptism if performed by a leader who had fallen so short?

If a bishop had served a congregation

with the body and blood of the Lord, and then betrayed them, had that bishop really celebrated communion at all? Was everything done by an unworthy leader really false?

Eventually the church decided in the negative. Baptism, communion or worship performed by a fallen leader was authentic and holy. It was holy not because the failings of the church leaders were unimportant; on the contrary, the sin of those church leaders was incredibly serious. But, the church said, the sins of leaders simply did not have anything to do with the larger message of the church.

The church's saving activity did not depend on any one person. The church's life depended on God. The church recognized that the Christian story was true, regardless of the flaws of the leader who told the story.

That was true for the church 1,700 years ago, and it is still true for us today. Christians can be comforted with the knowledge that our faith ultimately rests not on any one leader, but on God. **NFJ**

—Andrew Garnett is a minister at Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., who previously served at a Christian peace and reconciliation center in Northern Ireland.

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

## NURTURINGFAITH.NET

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



# GO WEST

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

## SABBATICALS

Want to spend time in the Rockies being refreshed? Bruce can plan just the experience you want — for as few as one person. Options are endless.

## CHURCH GROUPS

Want to bring a group out West? Bruce can plan and host a unique and memorable experience for various age groups.

*Bruce Gourley is the online editor and contributing writer for Nurturing Faith, an award-winning photographer and owner of the popular web site [yellowstone.net](http://yellowstone.net).*

**To explore these opportunities, contact Bruce at [bgourley@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:bgourley@nurturingfaith.net).**



# New models

## *Baptist churches are rethinking ordination*

BY RICK JORDAN

**B**eing ordained for ministry is now a simple, free, five-minute process at [getordained.org](http://getordained.org). Its website notes: “The Universal Life Church offers the world a convenient, nondiscriminatory process that allows anyone to utilize the Get Ordained™ online tools to receive his or her certification, bypassing the traditional ‘brick and mortar’ religious education establishments.”

Most of us hope to have a minister with more training, spiritual depth and experience than offered by the ULC. Three North Carolina Baptist churches have been experimenting with different processes.

“I was ordained in the traditional Baptist way with an association’s ordination council,” said Scott Hagaman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Marion. When he joined the ministerial staff, however, the church had a completely in-house process.

“I was uncomfortable with that model,” he noted. “I felt we should include the larger Baptist community.”

When Matt Roberts, newly called to the Marion church, was ordained, the council included leaders within the church along with other persons influential in Matt’s faith journey, a prior interim pastor, a pastoral counselor, two local pastors and a convener — Ka’thy Chappell, at that time Leadership Development Coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

“Ordination should not be taken lightly,” said Hagaman. What we are doing represents the best practices as they have been passed down to us, although we are in a new landscape. So there may be changes from the traditional associational council. For example, we want women to serve on our councils.”

Knollwood and Peace Haven churches

in Winston-Salem have many Wake Forest divinity school students as members and interns. Because of this, these churches have more opportunities to ordain persons for ministry.

Shortly after Bob Setzer became Knollwood’s pastor, the church implemented a new ordination process. “The church’s leadership wanted to craft an ordination policy that had real meaning and integrity, both for the candidates and the church,” he said.

“Under the new policy, there can be no ‘drive-by’ ordinations,” Setzer continued. “The policy requires active participation in the life of the congregation where a candidate’s gifts and calling can be observed, stretched and tested.”

An applicant for ordination must be a member of Knollwood for a minimum of one year before applying. The applicant meets first with a staff member, then makes a written request to the staff and deacons. A three- to five-person mentoring committee is then appointed, which certifies prerequisites (including completion of a divinity degree) to be met before becoming a candidate. Once a candidate, there is a long period of discernment facilitated by the mentoring committee.

During this phase the candidate will be introduced to a variety of ministerial roles and tasks along with supervision and feedback. At the end of this period the mentoring committee may advise the deacons that the candidate is now ready for the examination stage.

“In the last few years we have done seven ordinations under this new policy,” said Setzer. “Without exception, the candidates and the mentoring committees have found their engagement with one another a rich and rewarding experience.”

Candidates usually emerge from the process with a clearer sense of their gifts and

calling to ordained ministry before proceeding with an ordination council, he said.

“That council always involves Baptist and Christian leaders from beyond Knollwood because we recognize this is an ordination not just to our church, but to the larger church of Christ,” he said. “In a couple of cases, the candidates decided they were not called to the ordained ministry of the church. We and they considered that a success of our ordination process because it is in large measure a discernment process and not a de facto path to ordination.”

Nathan Parish, pastor of Peace Haven, leads a part-time staff made up of divinity students. In the 10 years he has been pastor there, 11 persons have been ordained and continue to serve in ministry.

“I will talk with students about their ministry aspirations and how licensing as well as ordination are matters for their consideration,” he said. “Licensing changes the way the congregation sees the student. They aren’t just part-time employees. They are candidates for ministry, and the congregation has the opportunity and responsibility to shape a person’s ministerial formation.”

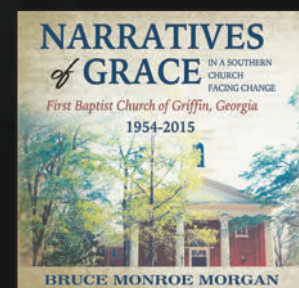
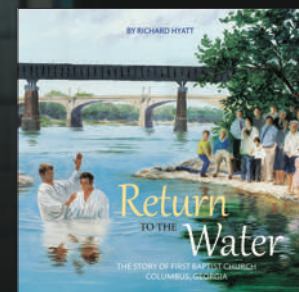
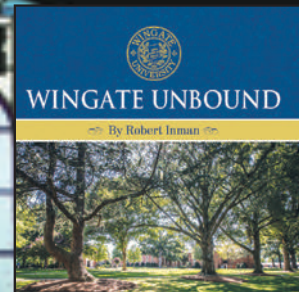
Parish said this process reframes the evaluation to give a more informed process in the ordination council later. The diaconate is the recommending body in both licensing and ordination cases, and candidates are asked to meet with the deacons for conversations about call, ministry and related matters.

Then the diaconate recommends to the church and the church votes to support the recommendation (majority votes for licensing and 2/3 for ordination). Candidates approved for ordination meet before a council that ratifies the action of the church and upon approval an ordination service is scheduled. Throughout the year Peace Haven keeps up with those ordained. **NFJ**



# Preserve your **church's memories**

Let Nurturing Faith be your partner  
in publishing an **excellent history** of  
your church or organization.



Whether you've just started thinking about the concept, or have already written a manuscript, Nurturing Faith is here to provide the level and detail of service you need. Contact our managing editor Jackie Riley today to begin a conversation: [jriley@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:jriley@nurturingfaith.net).

# Holy Dirt

Divinity students discover academic and spiritual benefits in archaeological dig

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE

**KIBBUTZ YIZRE'EL, ISRAEL —**  
Students preparing for ministry often long to visit the land of the Bible, and find it to be a meaningful, inspiring, and sometimes life-changing experience.

**W**alking where Jesus walked, naming mountains known to the patriarchs, standing in the Sea of Galilee and the River Jordan, or viewing the lush Jezreel Valley from Megiddo can inspire a rush of imagination that will long fuel both devotion and proclamation.

But what about getting even closer to the land — indeed, getting *into* the land and its history? That's where archaeology comes in.

## HELPING HANDS

For some it may come as a surprise to learn that physically able students and lay persons are welcome to join most archaeological digs. Many of those digs, in fact, could not operate without volunteers willing to pay their own way to spend from two to six weeks as members of an expedition team.

While professional archaeologists strategize and supervise, volunteers are trained on site and do most of the actual digging.

Such is the case with the Jezreel Expedition, which benefitted this summer from the efforts of 13 participants associated with Campbell University Divinity School

(CUDS) and Nurturing Faith Experiences (NFE).

When the CUDS/NFE team arrived midway through the four-week dig, expedition leaders were pessimistic of reaching their goals for the year. Eight team members had left after planning to dig the first two weeks only. So our team, plus two additional volunteers, brought much-needed reinforcements to a larger group that ultimately numbered about 40.

## BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Six members of the team had taken an archaeology course at CUDS during the spring semester, and the others had been prepared through advance orientation and the reading of the Jezreel Expedition Field Manual. They knew the workday started at 5 a.m., and were prepared to give it their best.

Supervisors were amazed at how well team members took instruction, how skillful they became, and how hard they worked. Field Director Ian Cipin, an Englishman and research associate at the University of Evansville, said that after the first week, he thought working two shifts would be needed to get the job done. After the second week, he thought the season's goals were out of reach.

"Then you guys came," he said, "and really shifted some dirt. You pulled us out of the poop."

Co-directors Norma Franklin of Haifa University and Jennie Ebeling of Evansville University were equally effusive. Franklin described the team as "phenomenal," noting how members learned to dig both quickly and carefully, keeping a level surface

rather than digging random holes.

## SKILLS AND SWEAT

Larry Turlington, who is bi-vocational pastor of Fort Run Freewill Baptist Church in Snow Hill, N.C., also works as a general contractor. With his contracting skills and strong work ethic, Turlington quickly emerged as a leader, articulating walls with care and then removing the large stones when instructed to see what was beneath.

He was often soaked with sweat before 6 a.m. but would say, "I'm just keeping up."

"Larry," said area supervisor Noga Blockman of Haifa University, "is in a class by himself."

Other team members weren't far behind. Whether clearing an ancient pavement; uncovering a workshop for basalt implements; articulating mudbrick; lowering a surface; identifying and preserving pottery, flint, and bones; or washing and reading ceramic finds, the team worked efficiently and cooperatively with supervisors and other students, mostly from the University of Evansville and the University College of London.

Even when assigned to the less glamorous and physically demanding work of backfilling squares that had been fully excavated with dirt from the spoil pile, team members worked without complaint.

The excavation reached a level that had been settled by people living in the Early Bronze Age (about 3600–2600 BCE), a thousand years before Abraham's time. "Robber trenches," where later peoples had repurposed stones from earlier building



Campbell University Divinity School and Nurturing Faith Experiences will sponsor a study tour of Israel May 11-22, 2019 — which will include a half-day dig experience at Tel Mareshah. Details will be forthcoming in *Nurturing Faith Journal and Bible Studies*, and on the CUDS and Nurturing Faith websites. To receive direct updates, please notify Tony Cartledge of your interest at [cartledge@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:cartledge@nurturingfaith.net).



EIN YIZRAEL — The archaeology team pauses and poses after breakfast before heading back up the tel for several more hours of digging. Left to right (back row): Rick Hollings, Victor Knight, Ryan Craddock, David Brantley, Tony Cartledge, John Robert Harris, Dale Belvin. Front row: David Helms, Larry Turlington, Karie Parkes, Muriel Lasater, Susan Cartledge, Steve “Woody” Woodall.

foundations and filled in the gaps with dirt and refuse, produced broken pottery from the Middle and Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, Persian and Hellenistic periods, as well as Roman and Mamluk times.

“Even though archaeological digging can be strenuous and exhausting, it can also be very enlightening,” said Muriel Lasater, who will graduate in December and also works as financial aid assistant for CUDS.

“I love how this process connects us to humanity at large and allows us to gain insight into their lives by studying pottery, artifacts and figurines. It’s amazing how this connects us to people who lived thousands and thousands of years ago.”

### CONNECTIONS

Digging through the Bronze Age reminded participants that the Israelites controlled the land for only a few hundred years during the

Iron Age. Other peoples were there before them, with them, and after them.

David Helms, pastor of First Baptist Church of Southern Pines, N.C., and an adjunct professor at CUDS, joined the team while on a brief sabbatical.

“The experience of digging in the dirt, separating stones, and placing pottery shards aside brings me closer to those ancient people the Bible calls ‘the people of the earth,’” said Helms, “reminding me that we are all simply ‘people of the earth.’”

David Brantley of Raleigh, who left the world of business to study at CUDS, believes the dig will prove helpful in his future ministry. He had previously come to Israel on a study tour but said “the practical experience of participating in an actual dig has not only been an experience of a lifetime, but has provided insights into Canaanite, Israelite and even Roman history that will



BREAKING GROUND — Steve “Woody” Woodall, a retired hydrologist and a Quaker from Atlanta, who learned of the dig through *Nurturing Faith Journal*, helps begin a new square.



surely assist my ministry in the future.”

Participants engaged in a three-day “mini-tour” of southern Israel, Jerusalem, Qumran and Samaria prior to the dig. John Robert Harris, a CUDS student and associate pastor of Faith Fellowship Church in Kinston, N.C., found visiting those sites to be a memorable prelude to the dig experience, both of which brought him closer to the biblical narratives.

“Stepping into an ongoing archaeological dig in Jezreel has furthered my connection with the Bible as well as scratched my itch for discovery,” he said. Like several other participants, Harris kept a journal of his experiences. “My time here will forever stay with me,” he said, “and I pray will continue to teach me years from now.”

### SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

For Victor Knight, the spiritual benefit of the dig came as a surprise. After taking divinity school courses during his last semester as an undergraduate at Campbell University, Knight began work on a master’s degree at Yale University in late summer.

“For me, coming here was an academic affair,” he said, noting that his academic side was indeed challenged through lectures and the field experience. “Nevertheless, in a much more unexpected way, the trip has affected me spiritually. From standing on the Mt. of Olives to watching pilgrims driven to tears, I have come to have a more complete picture of the Bible.”

Dale Belvin, a CUDS graduate and pastor of the Rose of Sharon Freewill Baptist Church in Bear Grass, N.C., also appreciated that “This has been both an academic experience and a spiritual experience.”

“It is academic because I have learned so much; I have learned about Israel and Jerusalem in biblical times as well as modern-day Israel,” said Belvin. “I have learned some of the finer details about some of my favorite biblical stories like David fighting Goliath and some of the traditions around the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. I have learned a great deal about Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age living.”

Yet Belvin discovered more than fresh knowledge.

“It is a spiritual experience because this

is the land of the Bible,” he reflected. “Nearly every city, town, village, landmark, mountain or other area has significance. I have found the work of excavating to be very spiritual as we have gotten into the dirt and put in a good day’s work.”

### REALITIES, INSIGHTS

For Ryan Craddock, a CUDS student who works as a counselor in a halfway house, getting to Israel was the primary goal, “and I would have washed camels to reach it.”

“My main desire was to step into the scenery of the stories I love, that formed my faith, ancient tales that have shaped the world,” he said. “I was quickly immersed in a place where the past meets the present, and where people from all nations, faith traditions and ideologies converge to experience and discover something uniquely human and deeply personal.”

Craddock found that the experience went even deeper: “For me, the whole trip is like an excavation of the soul. With some work, guidance and gracious assistance from others, stone and soil are cleared away to reveal ancient realities and bring new insight.”

Karie Parkes, a CUDS graduate and current director of student activities for Campbell’s undergraduates, found the community aspect of living in a kibbutz and getting to know other people to be gratifying. Her favorite part was washing pottery late each morning, rinsing and scrubbing hundreds of shards while talking with people who were working in other parts of the dig.

The community aspect became particularly helpful when Karie’s grandmother unexpectedly died four days before our scheduled return. She did not have to grieve alone.

Rick Hollings, a retired psychologist and CUDS graduate who took the archaeology course for fun, also appreciated the community aspect of working with people from other places and other countries, as well as the CUDS/NFE team.

“I particularly appreciate the chance to get to know members of our group,” said Hollings, “to hear their stories, and to make friendships that will go beyond the two weeks we have together in this amazing country.”

An amazing country it is: from the ground up — and down. **NFJ**

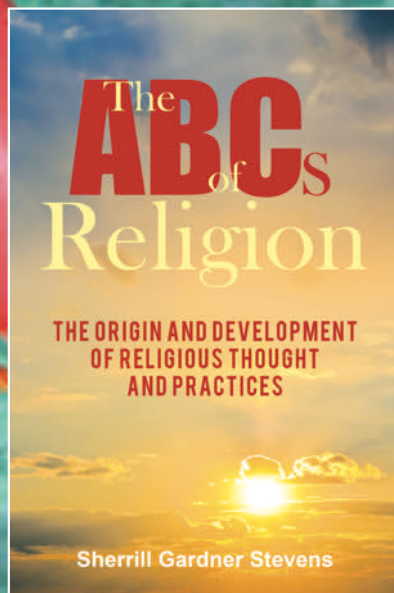
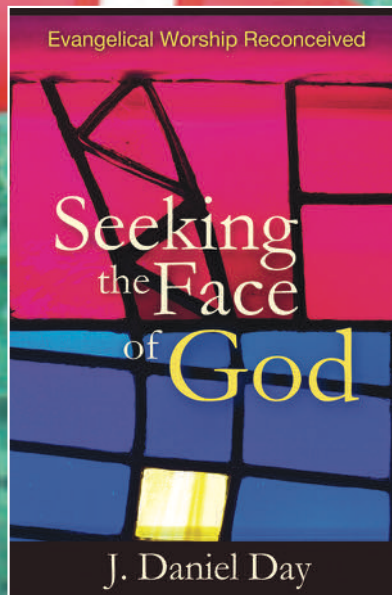
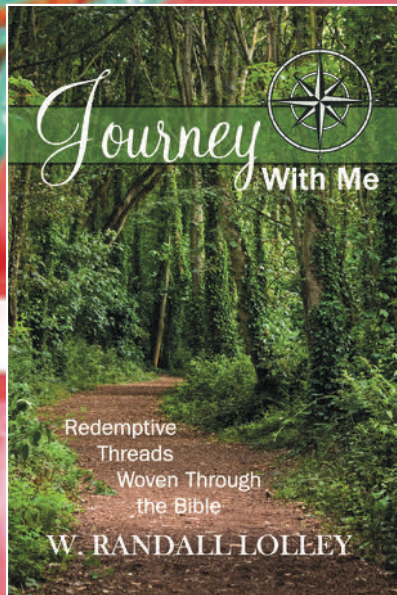


FINDS — Left to right: Karie Parkes, Rick Hollings and John Robert Harris wash pottery in the Ein Jezreel spring.



CHECKING — Muriel Lasater, both student and Assistant for Financial Aid at CUDS, using a “Dumpy” to measure the level of a find inside the square.

# Helpful



Available in print or as digital downloads — along with many other good titles — at [books.nurturingfaith.net](http://books.nurturingfaith.net) / (478) 301-5655



# Why? What? When?

Questions and answers about advancing a Jesus Worldview

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

The evolving Jesus Worldview Initiative, guided by Nurturing Faith in collaboration with others, was not the result of long-range, strategic planning. Rather it resulted from a rude awakening to the stark reality that the life and teachings of Jesus are largely absent from American evangelicalism.

For more than a year this important matter has been explored in writings in this journal, casual conversations, engaging retreats and workshop presentations. More of those are in the works as we seek to widen the engagement, clarify the mission and find the support needed to provide resources for addressing this crucial need.

One way to get a sense of this mission is to speak of the Jesus Worldview Initiative in response to these three basic, one-word questions:

## WHY?

On the surface it seemed like just another press release with more information about shifting religious belief and practice in America. The headline blasted the startling news that only a small percentage of “practicing Christians” hold a “biblical worldview.”

My closer look at the report from Barna revealed some major problems with that conclusion. Primarily, both the definition of a “practicing Christian” and the defining criteria for “holding a biblical worldview” were completely void of the basic call to follow Jesus. In fact, Jesus was



hardly mentioned at all.

The question was not with Barna’s research methods but with its clearly faulty premise. So I wrote an editorial early in 2017 titled, “How about a Jesus worldview?”

Then online editor and contributing writer Bruce Gourley and I dug more deeply into this troubling reality of how the term “worldview” is being used to intentionally redefine the Christian faith as a political agenda apart from Jesus. The evidence mounted quickly, and we began expressing alarm in the various forums available through and beyond Nurturing Faith.

## WHAT?

The overwhelming response was that we have to do something about this. Of course, we are not the only ones to make this troubling discovery. Other voices are expressing concern too.

Recently, various Christian leaders signed a public statement on “Reclaiming Jesus.” That indeed is what needs to be done. But how?

In exploring the possibilities for the Jesus Worldview Initiative we have concluded that developing and providing thoughtful, helpful resources for congregations and individual Christians is the best approach.

These will take various forms in terms of publishing and experiences — things Nurturing Faith is well positioned to do and

can do so more effectively in collaboration with those who share this important and timely mission.

## WHEN?

In many ways the Jesus Worldview Initiative is already making an impact. Bruce and I have made presentations at churches and organizational gatherings across the country and have more on our calendars.

We also held a retreat with some key church leaders to gain insight and additional advocates. Two other retreats are in the works. Also, we held a planning retreat with participants across denominational lines since this mission is broader than any one Christian expression.

Two books are in the works — one as an overview of the Jesus Worldview and the other that advocates for Jesus as the “lens” through which the Bible is to be read and interpreted.

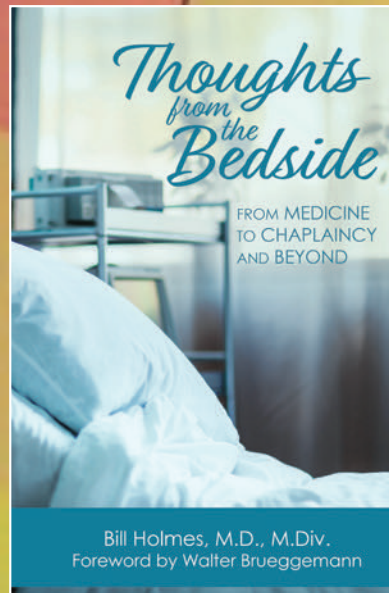
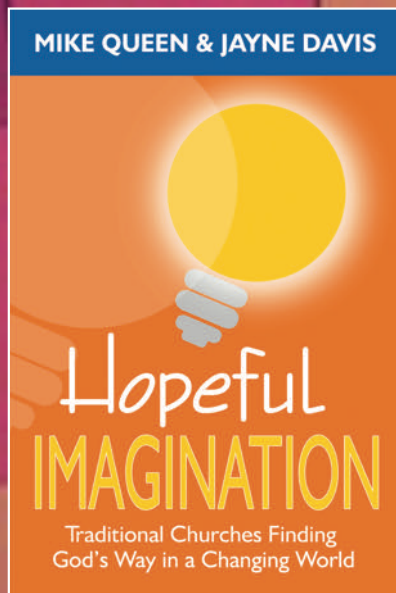
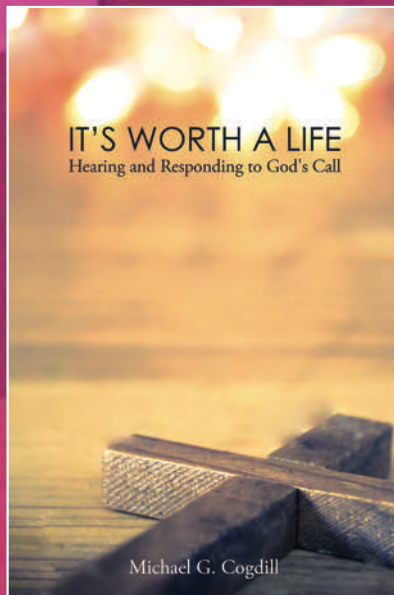
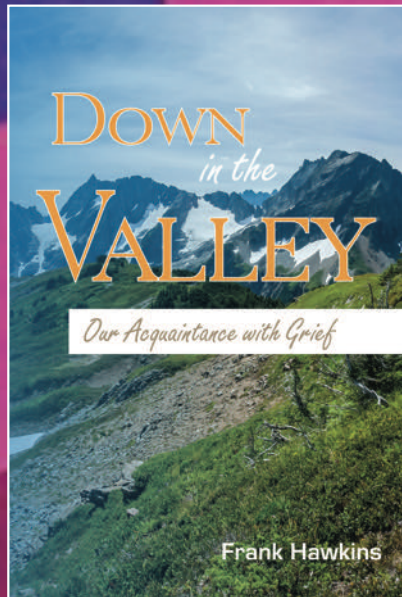
We are seeking sponsorships, grants and other funding sources that will allow for the fullest possible impact of this timely initiative. The timing and size of such support is the primary determining factor in what is done and when.

Those interested in engaging in and advancing the Jesus Worldview Initiative are encouraged to let us know — whether inviting us to give a presentation, exploring a partnership with your church or other organization, or providing resources that allow us to move boldly ahead with this mission.

Please let me know of your interest at [editor@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:editor@nurturingfaith.net). Any gifts for the Jesus Worldview Initiative should be noted as such and sent to Baptists Today, Inc., P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318 or made online with the JWVI designation.

This is a big, timely and important mission that needs as much engagement and support as possible. **NFJ**

# Hopeful



Available in print or as digital downloads — along with many other good titles — at [books.nurturingfaith.net](http://books.nurturingfaith.net) / (478) 301-5655



## Warren G. Harding (1921–1923)

By Bruce Gourley

**L**abor unrest. Xenophobia. Ethnic hatred. Fears of Russian conspiracies. One year following U.S. leadership in the 1918 defeat of Germany during World War I, Americans turned upon one another.

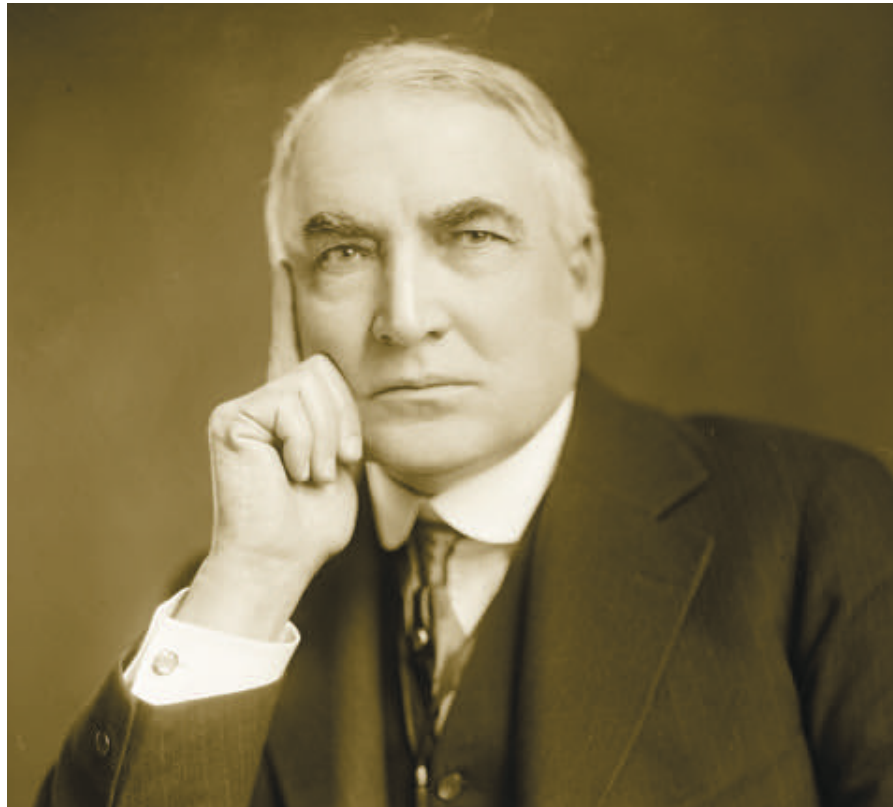
The year 1919 evolved into what labor historian Eric Foner refers to as “one of the most militant in United States labor history.” More than 3,600 strikes involving some four million American workers led one publication to note: “One strike is scarcely over when another one begins.”

Labor unrest reached back into the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Gilded Age, a period of massive income inequality and widespread poverty that revealed the weakness of American capitalism. In response, worker-oriented socialist movements, parties and labor organizations dotted the landscape in the decades following, especially in the American West.

A massive labor strike in Seattle in December 1919 capped off a tumultuous year. As many as 100,000 workers went on strike, paralyzing the city for five days. Peaceful throughout, the strike ended without incident. Yet the protest of oppressive capitalistic policies, influenced by socialism and the workers-led, communist Russian Revolution of 1917, frightened many Americans and generated a “Red Scare.”

A federal crackdown on dissident political parties quickly resulted. Tensions soared; labor strikes continued. Fear and hatred of immigrants mounted.

Internationally, the U.S. took an isolationist stance in refusing to participate in the League of Nations, an organization



long championed by Democratic President Woodrow Wilson and designed to facilitate the spread of world peace. The stiff headwinds of conservative retrenchment thus stalled two decades of advances in workers’ rights and social policies.

Meanwhile, President Wilson celebrated the achievement of national women’s voting rights through the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the summer of 1920. This landmark milestone marked a last gasp of progressive advances.

Exhausted from post-war ideological battles, Wilson chose not to seek a third term in the White House. Adding to the gravity of the times, former Republican

president Theodore Roosevelt, the greatest progressive of all and a national hero, had tragically died the previous year at a young age.

Venturing upon the barren and foreboding national political landscape, a large field of dark horse candidates jockeyed for position in the 1920 presidential season. Sensing opportunity, a U.S. senator and Baptist layman, largely unknown outside his home state of Ohio, denounced the heroics, revolution and drama of the progressive past in favor of national healing, restoration and normalcy.

Born to an abolitionist family in 1865, months after the end of the American Civil

---

*This is the 29th 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.*

War, Warren G. Harding was the son of a small town but successful doctor-turned-journalist. His father was a nominal Baptist, his mother a devout Methodist.

Following in his father's footsteps as a Baptist and a newspaper editor, Harding at a young age in Marion, Ohio, joined a Baptist church, became a deacon, achieved local renown as a journalist, and obtained financial security. A marriage of convenience to an older woman, socialite Florence King, furthered Harding's ambitions.

Harding's mother had chosen his middle name, Gamaliel, from the Bible (Acts 5:34). Rejecting her religious fervor, however, the worldly son became a hard drinker, high-rolling gambler and womanizer, acquiring the nickname "Wobbly Warren."

Francis Russell, Harding's biographer, said of the future president: "After his first college encounter with the doctrine of evolution, he imagined himself a free thinker, even an atheist, although he would soon relapse into a mild Baptist conformity untouched by his mother's zeal."

Political advances followed. Harding's oratorical skills increasingly garnered state-wide attention and led to his election as a Republican Ohio state senator from 1900 to 1904. A two-year stint as the state's lieutenant governor came next. In both offices he embodied a steady conservatism against the backdrop of the ascendant progressive movement, grounded in an allegiance to old-guard political machines.

Although well connected and ambitious, Harding in the years following failed in a quest to become governor of Ohio. Success finally arrived in his 1914 election as a U.S. senator from Ohio. His victory took place the first year in which U.S. senators were chosen by popular vote.

Reflecting his unsensational, non-confrontational and insider politics style, Harding, according to biographer Richard Downes, ran "a campaign of such sweetness and light as would have won the plaudits of the angels. It was calculated to offend nobody except Democrats."

Reliably Republican but savvy, Senator Harding followed the prevailing political winds on two big issues of the time: women's

suffrage and prohibition of alcohol. Tacking first to the right on women's suffrage, he shifted left when Ohioans moved left.

In similar calculated fashion, the alcohol-loving senator initially opposed Prohibition, but then threw his support behind the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, believing it would fail to achieve ratification. Upon ratification of the amendment and recognizing its popularity with the public, he voted to override President Wilson's veto of a congressional measure to carry out the intent of the amendment.

The ideological flexibility continued as Senator Harding largely supported Wilson's war-era legislation yet stopped short of voting for bills deemed anti-business. After the war he initially supported the Treaty of Versailles and League of Nations during a period of widespread approval, then opposed both as public favor waned.

Harding's pattern of careful calibration amid changing political winds thus earned him the respect of Republican and Democratic colleagues alike.

Ambitious for more, Harding in late 1919 declared his candidacy for the presidency, one of seven Republican hopefuls. In a wide-open Republican Convention, delegates, seeking a centrist candidate, coalesced around the moderately conservative Ohio senator.

During the general election Harding used nationalist language to connect with fearful and restless voters. Adopting the slogans of "America First" and "Americanism," he called for "absolute control of the United States by the United States."

Throughout the entire campaign season the former newspaper editor garnered good publicity by maintaining a friendly relationship with the press. In November 1920 Harding easily and ironically defeated Democrat James Cox, governor of Ohio, an office Harding had earlier coveted but never attained.

His landslide triumph marked the first time women had the right to vote for president. Harding's presidency both sealed the death of the first progressive era and portended the arrival of a later progressive era.

Eugene Debs, five-time Socialist Party

presidential candidate, from prison lost for the last time. A young political up-and-comer named Franklin Delano Roosevelt, cousin of former president Theodore Roosevelt, rounded out the defeated Democratic ticket as the vice-presidential candidate. He would later point to the 1920 presidential campaign as laying the groundwork for his successful presidential run as a progressive in 1932.

For his part, newly-elected President Harding concluded his inaugural speech on a seemingly progressive note encapsulated within a biblical quote: "I have taken the solemn oath of office," he declared, "on that passage of Holy Writ wherein it is asked: 'What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' This I plight to God and country."

Despite evoking visions of justice and mercy, and joining Calvary Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., Harding, working hand-in-hand with a solid Republican congressional majority, set about abolishing achievements of the previous progressive era and combating a postwar economic depression.

Together, Harding and Congress enacted pro-business policies, passed large tax cuts for wealthy Americans, reduced corporate taxes, passed protective tariffs, and legislated harsh immigration policies. Using religious imagery, the president insisted that business owners were more humane than social welfare programs.

"We must awaken the conscience of the ignorant and misguided to the fact that the best social welfare worker in the world is the man or a woman who does an honest day's work," Harding had declared during his senatorial career. "We must awaken their conscience to recognize that American business is not a monster, but an expression of God-given impulse to create, and the savior and guardian of our happiness, of our homes and of equal opportunity for all in America. Whatever we do for honest, humane American business, we do in the name of social welfare."

Harding also pointed to God's will to explain his belief in inherent economic inequality.

“We cannot get on all alike. God Almighty never intended it to be so, else He had made us all alike. But we may get on according to our talent, our capacity, and our industry, and out of the advancement of those who lead, must come higher standards for all.”

In order to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, Harding and the Republican Congress dramatically reduced federal spending by ending most of the nation’s military outlays. Messaging fiscal responsibility, they established annual federal budgets.

Tax cuts alone, however, did not alleviate a national depression or eradicate high unemployment. To stimulate the economy, the president and Congress lurched left by boosting federal spending. Responding to the rapid ascendance of the automobile industry, the Federal Highway Act of 1921 pumped massive federal money throughout the U.S. to generate jobs and build a national highway system.

Other federal outlays took the form of foreign loans to assist European nations in buying American products and goods. Newly developing commercial technologies also merited Harding’s attention and elicited a leftward response. The president, for example, called for federal regulation of nascent radio broadcasting and aviation.

Nonetheless, the largely right-leaning policies of Harding and Congress ensured that the progressive era was but a distant memory by 1923. Business interests reigned. Labor unions were in retreat. Immigration plunged. Tax cuts exacerbated economic inequality. The wealth gap between rich and poor stood poised to skyrocket throughout the remainder of the decade.

Even so, President Harding and Republican legislators tacked left on certain social issues. Supportive of the women’s rights movement, they passed legislation desired by women’s rights activists. Vocal on racial issues, Harding and the Republican Congress supported an anti-lynching bill that Southern Democrats subsequently thwarted with a filibuster.

Undaunted, the son of an abolitionist went out of his way to publicly address

racial injustices. Traveling to the heart of the Old South in Birmingham, Ala., in October 1921, he delivered a speech to an audience of black and white citizens in which he praised the patriotism and valor of black troops who had served in uniform during World War I.

Abroad, Harding noted of black soldiers: “Their color raised less of antagonism than it does here. Many of them aspire to go to Europe to live.” In military service many experienced “their first real conception of citizenship — the first full realization that the flag was their flag, to fight for, to be protected by them, and also to protect them.”

One can now hope, he continued, “that we shall find an adjustment of relations between the two races, in which both can enjoy full citizenship.” Black attendees cheered. Whites in the audience, stone-faced and stunned, remained silent.

Then the deft politician tacked back to the right. The time for social “equality” remained in the distant future and should not be discussed at the present, the socially conservative president insisted.

Social equality aside, and discounting the possibility of integrated schools, Harding nonetheless declared he “would insist upon equal educational opportunity for [blacks and whites].” It might take “a generation or two generations or ten generations” to achieve segregated but equal educational opportunities for black citizens. Remaining cautious, the president stated that “Providence” had “endowed men with widely unequal capacities and capabilities and energies.”

Harding’s vocal opposition to lynching and openness to improving the lives of black citizens disturbed much of white America. In apparent retribution the Ku Klux Klan in 1922 spread the false claim that the president secretly was a Klansman. Harding’s denial notwithstanding, the smear campaign served the purpose of boosting Klan enrollment.

Taken together, by 1923 Harding’s calculated and collective policies, achievements and positions produced greater prosperity for many Americans. Then the unexpected happened. While touring the

West Coast in the summer of 1923, the popular president developed pneumonia, a serious illness in an early era of largely ineffective antibiotics.

Seemingly on the mend, Harding died suddenly on August 2, shocking the nation. Millions of people stood alongside the railroad tracks as the casket bearing his body made the long journey to Washington, D.C., for funeral services and then on to Marion, Ohio, for burial.

With death, however, came infamy. Salacious sex scandals, previously covered up, burst into the public conscious. One consisted of a steamy affair with a 20-year-old woman involving regular intercourse in the White House office and the birth of a love child.

Administrative scandals also emerged. The president had granted federal appointments to many of his friends and acquaintances, some of whom served incompetently. As their ill deeds came to light, posthumous blame fell upon Harding for having knowingly allowed corruption within his administration.

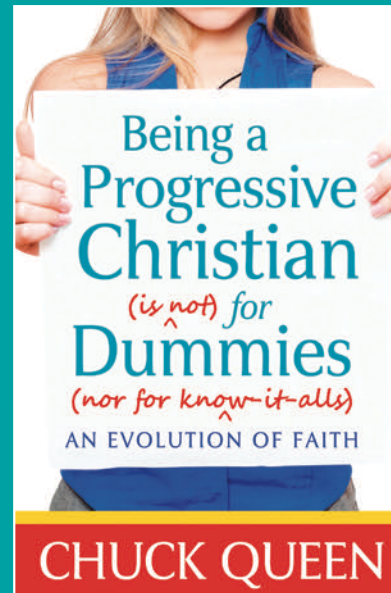
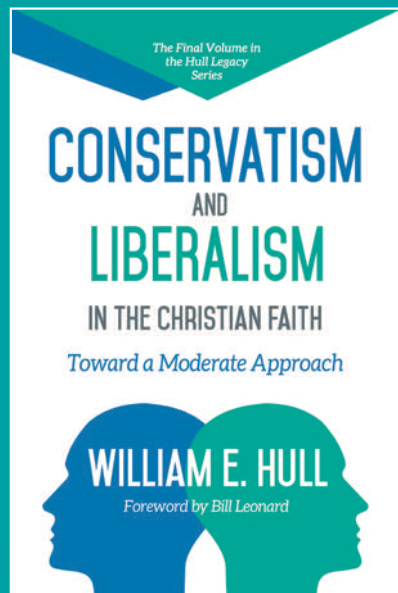
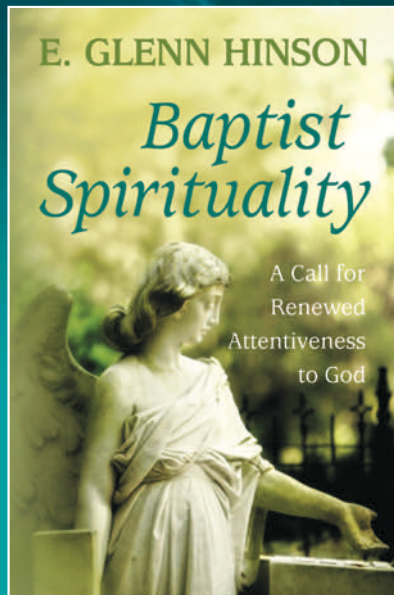
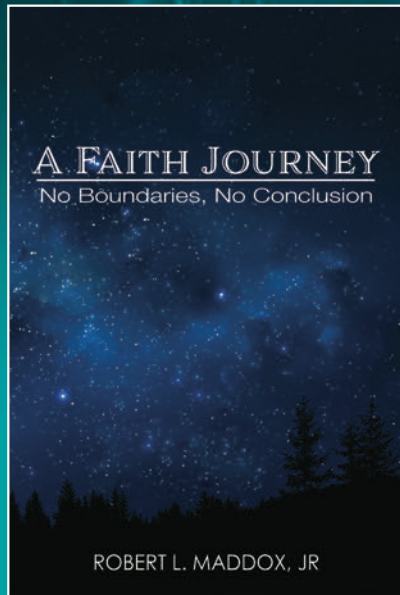
“After his death,” wrote Harding biographer Russell, “his reputation plummeted so quickly that only with the greatest reluctance could a Republican successor be persuaded to dedicate his tomb.”

Shortly before his death Harding, an opportunistic man of complexities, contradictions and few ethical qualms, penned a greeting to the 1923 gathering of the Baptist World Alliance in Stockholm.

In words detached from the reality of his own ambivalent faith, refusal to attend church communion services, and unbridled sexuality, the president expressed hope that Baptists would “be able to continue in the Christian devotion and the conscious working for God. I believe with all my heart that nothing is more needed in the world today than the practical application of the spirit of Christ.”

Rarely one to write or speak of his own religious beliefs, Warren Gamaliel Harding lived a life far more reflective of his own worldly desires and ambitions than of the “spirit of Christ.” **NFJ**

# Insightful



Available in print or as digital downloads — along with many other good titles — at [books.nurturingfaith.net](http://books.nurturingfaith.net) / (478) 301-5655





# Losing their religion

*Younger adults are less religious, and not only in the US*

BY YONAT SHIMRON

*Religion News Service*

There are few spots around the world where parents don't have to drag their young adult children to worship: Ghana, a predominantly Christian country is one; Chad, a predominantly Muslim country, is another.

In both African nations, younger adults are 3 percentage points more likely to identify with their faith than their elders, according to a new study by the Pew Research Center of religious feelings among older and younger adults.

The study, which finds that younger people the world over are generally less religious than their elders, determined that the pattern is generally reversed where prosperity and life expectancy lag. Life expectancy in Chad and Ghana is among the lowest in the world.

The survey of 106 nations, drawn from 13 studies undertaken over the past decade, shows that nearly everywhere else, young adults are drifting away from the faith commitments of their elders. The gap appeared to be widest in most economically developed countries.

"We're not able to say, 'This is the law of religious change that we can deduce from this evidence,'" Conrad Hackett, the lead researcher for the Pew study, said. "It's rather, 'These are the general patterns we see.' There are exceptions for sure."

Canada leads all countries with a 28 percentage-point difference between younger and older people on the question of whether they affiliate with a particular religion. Denmark, South Korea, Australia and Norway follow. In the United States, younger adults aged 18 to 39 years are 17 percent less likely to claim a religion than adults aged 40 and over.

The study, which examined three additional measures of religiosity — the

importance of religion to people's lives, daily prayer and weekly worship attendance — found some surprises.

While it is generally true that in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Latin America the gap in religiosity between young and old is narrower, it's not true for every measure. In Lebanon, when younger and older adults were asked if religion was "very important" in their lives, there was a 20 percentage-point difference; in Iran it was 9 points and in Nigeria 6 points.

The survey offered a number of intriguing theories, besides economic well-being, for why young people so often lag in religion. Education also plays a role. Rising educational opportunities usually — but not always — are associated with lower levels of religious adherence.

To some extent, life changes may be a reason for the change. As people age, begin rearing children and start facing their mortality, they become more religious. The survey suggests that even if today's younger adults become more religious over time, they will likely be less religious than previous generations.

One noteworthy theory was the impact of war, natural disasters and large-scale catastrophes. The survey cites a study that showed that after the 2011 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, researchers found a net gain in religious affiliation of 3.4 percent in the region where the quake hit, compared with a 1.6 percent net drop in religious affiliation across the rest of New Zealand during that same period.

Then there's the example of the United States: In the post-World War II years, younger Americans reported attending at least as often as their elders, as battle-weary veterans married and started their own families. That trend peaked in the late 1950s, when people ages 30 to 39 attended church as frequently as people age 60 and over. But church attendance among young

people has fallen ever since.

Another intriguing finding is the difference between Christians and Muslims when asked about the importance of religion in their lives. The survey found that the gap between younger and older Christians is far wider than the gap among younger and older Muslims.

One reason may be that when Christians disaffiliate they typically become "nones" — people who answer "none of the above" when asked about their religion. In contrast, in Muslim-majority countries, it's harder to publically reject the Muslim faith; those who do typically designate another faith.

Philip Schwadel, a professor of sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, suggested an additional reason. The smaller faith gap in Muslim-majority countries may be due to the fact that Islam — despite its Sunni and Shiite divisions — is more homogeneous than Christianity.

"We're a predominantly Christian nation but there are many different Christian denominations," he said. "But there's a lot of variation. When you have less diversity, there's more uniformity of expectations and that might lead to less changes across the life course or generations."

Does this mean the world is becoming more secular? Not necessarily, according to the survey, since the most religious areas of the world are experiencing the fastest population growth because they have high fertility rates and relatively young populations.

But the persistence of an age gap does deserve further study. One area the survey doesn't touch on is the effect of technology, the Internet and social media on religion, or more generally, the effect of secularization.

"We're not suggesting religious change is unidirectional," Hackett said. "But it seems that in many countries there is a pattern of lower religiosity among younger generations that may be the unfolding of secularization." **NFJ**

# Why millennials are really leaving religion

AN ANALYSIS BY JANA RIESS

*Religion News Service*

A couple of decades ago, when young adults began showing their dissatisfaction with organized religion by voting with their feet, it was fashionable for pundits to say this was happening because those religions weren't conservative or demanding enough.

**B**ecause the exodus was initially most pronounced among liberal, mainline Protestants like Episcopalians and Presbyterians, it was easy to point at liberalism as the root of the problem.

If churches just held fast to their standards, the thinking went, they would be fine, because strictness was what the masses secretly wanted. But now the “strict churches” theory is crumbling because some strict denominations are now charting losses, or at least slower growth. Southern Baptists have lost more than a million members over the last decade, according to LifeWay, while giving and attendance are down.

Meanwhile, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has seen its once-enviable U.S. growth rate slow to under 1 percent in each of the last two years. Mormonism is barely keeping pace with the growth of the U.S. population.

Now liberal pundits are quick to point the finger. A HuffPost headline last year screeched that “Evangelical Christianity’s Big Turn-Off” was its relentless pursuit of a conservative political agenda. Millennials want nothing to do with them.

There’s evidence to support the political alienation theory, to a point. Millennials *are* leaving religion in droves, and some of it *is* related to politics. People who vote or lean Democratic are more likely to be “nones,” defined as people who have no religious affiliation. But that’s the key: no religious affiliation.



Congregation members talk during a service at Grace Lutheran Church in Apple Valley, Minn. Photo courtesy of Grace Lutheran Church/Creative Commons

If the political alienation theory fully explained what’s going on in American religion, millennials would be leaving conservative religions in favor of ones that are liberal and LGBT-affirming. Plenty of churches like that exist, where those on the political left would feel welcome and comfortable. But they are not growing.

Instead, folks are just leaving religion, full stop, especially if they’re young.

So if the “strict churches” theory doesn’t explain why many conservative denominations are experiencing losses, and the “political alienation” theory doesn’t account for why people are exiting religion entirely rather than merely switching to a faith that’s more suitable, what does?

Four in 10 younger millennials (18-29) are nones, which is four times what it was in the 1980s. In fact, the fastest-growing religion in America is no religion at all.

The problem is that the real explanation for this is complicated. But here are three factors that all play a role:

## Delayed marriage and more single adults

One of the biggest demographic trends of our time is that millennials are delaying marriage or not getting married at all. And since there’s a strong correlation between being married and being involved

in religion, the fact that fewer Americans are getting married is worrisome news to clergy.

## Fertility changes

The number of children a family has is related to the couple’s religious involvement — couples without kids are a bit less likely to be religious. So the fact that fertility is on the decline is, again, worrisome news for organized religion. (To say nothing of the long-term implications for things like Social Security.)

## Growth of the nones

This seems like a circular argument: The nones are growing because the nones are growing! But sociologically, it makes a kind of sense.

Some nonbelievers might have stayed in organized religion in previous generations just because it was socially expected, and there were consequences for not joining the religious crowd. The numeric growth of the nones has removed some of those barriers, so that other closeted nones feel more comfortable leaving religion too. There is an infrastructure and support system for them.

So while political frustration *is* a factor, the reality of millennials leaving organized religion is more complicated. **NFJ**

# Why ‘But the Bible says . . .’ can ring so hollow

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

It doesn't mean much to say one believes the Bible. Just consider all the conflicting and often awful stuff said over the centuries, and even recently, by those claiming biblical authority.

Not surprising, there are many people who reject the Bible without ever reading it because of its widespread misrepresentation by those seeking some divine cover for their misguided thinking and self-serving misdeeds.

In fact, no widespread act of injustice and discrimination throughout the history of this nation has lacked the backing of those with a firm finger wedged somewhere in the Bible.

But here's the real truth about the Bible: One tends to come out where one goes in.

That truth is easy to test: When is the last time someone changed his or her mind about a passionately held opinion concerning a contemporary issue as a result of actually reading the Bible?

Such entrenched perspectives are rarely changed and, when so, usually grow out of relational experiences that then lead to revisiting the Bible in order to align newly selected texts with the newfound conclusions.

Often the Bible gets abused in order to justify abuse. Attorney General Jeff Sessions — appealing to Romans 13 to justify family separation — provided a prime example recently.

Nothing rings more hollow than “But the Bible says...” The Bible says a lot of things and can be manipulated for just about any cause one desires.

And cocksure believers who manipulate it the most for their own purposes are those who claim the highest allegiance

to the Bible and often misrepresent their interpretations of holy texts as being clear, perfect and beyond questioning.

However, the Bible is not clear about much other than the big stuff that those who claim the highest allegiance tend to diminish: God is love. Everyone is made in the image of God. Jesus is lord. Grace is wide, but following Jesus is hard. The greatest commandment is to love God with all one's being and others as oneself.

The Bible is no catalog or rulebook that can be read thematically and followed succinctly. To treat it as such is to use the Bible for a personal purpose rather than to seek divine direction.

Rather the Bible is an odd assemblage of varied ancient literature with inspiring and often surprising accounts of God's revelation that culminates in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, as the fullest revelation of God, Jesus is rightly the lens through which all truth is to be interpreted and measured.

It is wise to use great caution before claiming (or accepting the claims of others) a distinctively biblical position on social issues not specifically addressed in the Bible. Too often we seek justification for our opinions rather than fresh revelation.

And, honestly, those on opposing sides of a hot topic tend to take the same approach: that is, to embrace a position with which one feels comfortable, and then construct an often shaky biblical case for the predetermined conclusion as if that provides some godly legitimacy.

That's why the term “biblical” has little meaning within modern discourse. It usually refers to the opinion of someone who claims allegiance to the Bible whether such a conclusion resembles the actual life and teachings of Jesus or not.

Therefore, it's amazing how often proclaimed “biblical truth” is completely at odds with Jesus who somewhere along the way got pushed aside.

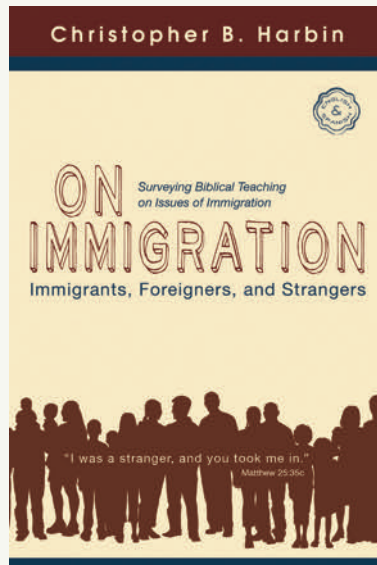
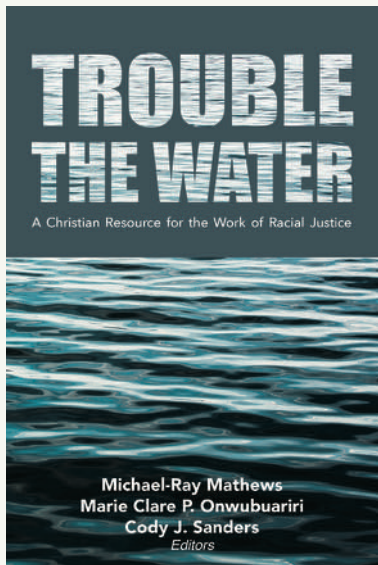
And let's face it: Most so-called group Bible study is primarily ideology sharing — that begins with reading a few Bible verses and quickly asking, “What do you think?” An honest search for fresh biblical insights — with mind- and heart-changing capabilities — is much rarer than quick proof-texting of one's predetermined perspectives and values.

Little serious exploration is given to what a biblical text meant at the time of its occurrence and how its truth might rightly transport to one's contemporary Christian living in a very different time and place.

However, with a good dose of humility and the guidance of God's Spirit, the Bible can indeed be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths — but not if we treat it like a steppingstone to the divine justification of our personal predetermined preferences.

And how might we know the difference? Perhaps by noting if we ever come out of the Bible at a different place than where we went in. **NFJ**

**Reminder:** Superb scholarly, yet applicable, Bible studies by Tony Cartledge are included within this journal and as his small volumes of short-term series (including *Patriarchs, Matriarchs and Anarchs*, a new 13-week study in Genesis). Check these out online at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) or call (478) 301-5655 for great bulk pricing for even small groups.



While others may dodge or dismiss the most challenging issues facing churches and individual Christians today, Nurturing Faith publishes credible and thoughtful resources for exploring them.

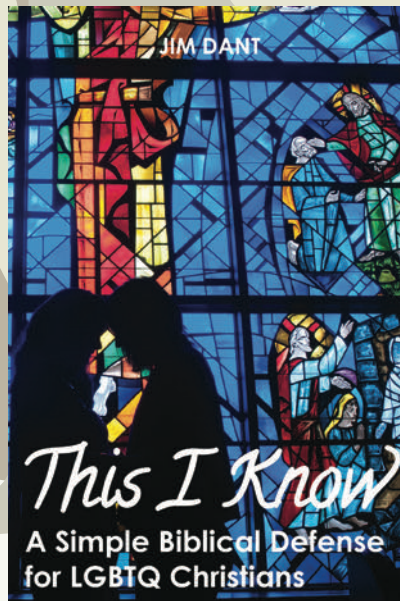
# REAL ISSUES

## Reliable resources

Immigration, Race, Gender Identity,  
Sexual Orientation

Available as PRINT  
or DIGITAL books at  
[books.nurturingfaith.net](http://books.nurturingfaith.net).

Call (478) 301-5655  
for special bulk  
pricing for classes or  
discussion groups.



# ‘Jesus Rode A Dinosaur’

*Exploring what churches tell teens about science*

BY EMILY MCFARLAN MILLER

*Religion News Service*

**E**DINA, Minn. — Growing up a conservative Southern Baptist, Mike McHargue loved science. He would drive his youth pastor and Sunday school teachers “insane,” he said, with difficult questions in his quest to reconcile his faith with science.

Eventually, his youth pastor handed him a book, said McHargue, whose questions led him to embrace atheism before he returned to a more progressive Christianity.

But what he needed, said McHargue — host of “The Liturgists” and “Ask Science Mike” podcasts — weren’t necessarily answers but a listening ear and an ability to assume a less defensive crouch: “I needed someone to help me lower my guard.”

Getting comfortable with questions was a theme shared by many speakers at “Jesus Rode a Dinosaur and Other Silly Tales,” a youth ministry conference aimed at talking to teenagers about science held at Colonial Church of Edina outside Minneapolis.

About 200 people attended the May conference, the capstone of a four-year Templeton Foundation grant for Science for Youth Ministry, administered by Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., to get Christian youth leaders to take science more seriously.

It started with a hunch — that youth pastors in America weren’t ready to talk about faith and science with the students in their churches, said Tony Jones of Science for Youth Ministry. Focus groups and a nationwide survey of students and youth leaders from a number of Christian denominations — evangelical, mainline and Catholic — backed that up.

Science raises some big issues for students, he said, “and youth pastors aren’t great at talking about it.

“They’ll talk about the Bible, they’ll talk about sex, they’ll talk about eating



disorders, but they won’t talk about science, even though kids are learning about it in school and carrying \$700 computers in their pockets,” said Jones, who teaches theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.

More than half (56 percent) of youth surveyed by Science for Youth Ministry said they “have a lot of questions” about God and science.

Meanwhile, the survey of 761 youth leaders, conducted online and in person in 2014, showed 32 percent don’t address science at all in their youth groups, and just over half teach one to three lessons about it over the course of a year.

Nearly 82 percent said when they do talk about science, they have to prepare their own lessons; about 7 percent said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the resources that have been published.

The youth surveys were sent home with and administered to more than 1,400 students by the youth leaders who took part in Science for Youth Ministry’s focus groups.

It’s important for youth pastors to be able to talk about science, Jones said, because the students are — at school, at the kitchen table, online. If they’re hearing about it everywhere except at church, they’ll get the message those two things don’t go together.

The grant also supported the work

of the Science for Youth Ministry team, which included creating a video curriculum for youth groups, speaking at conferences, teaching classes, and writing books on subjects related to religion and science.

What Science for Youth Ministry did not want to do was rehash the debate over the theory of evolution and creationism, a belief that the seven days of creation in Genesis are a literal account — which is where the discussion about Christianity and science too often defaults, according to Jones.

Even the most conservative of speakers at the conference believed evolution was in no way opposed to Scripture, he said. Topics at “Jesus Rode a Dinosaur” included climate change and the environment, technology, astrophysics and helping teens pursue scientific careers.

Several speakers also explained how they view the relationship between science and religion: They’re not enemies or strangers or even friends, according to Paul Wallace, who teaches physics and astronomy at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Ga. That assumes they’re equals.

Instead, Wallace said, faith is large enough to “completely contain” science. “Science simply does not stand on its own. It requires, it demands us to do what human beings always do, which is to interpret those facts and to put them into a larger context,” he said.

Krista Tippett, host of the popular NPR show “On Being,” shared her experience of growing up Southern Baptist and attending youth group three times a week.

In a conversation with Jones, she spoke about millennials looking for mentors who are “walking with them in wisdom rather than telling them what to do” and asking questions they don’t always feel they have permission to ask in church settings.

Addressing technology, Tippett acknowledged computers are better at finding answers than humans are. What

makes humans unique, she said, is the ability to ask good questions, and Christianity has not stressed the quality of its questions.

“If God is God and made us the way we are — the askers of questions — God can’t be scared of your questions, whatever they are,” she said.

That was the theme, too, of a workshop about using the scientific method as a tool for faith formation led by public theologian and life and leadership coach Rozella Haydee White.

“Our God is big enough to hold the curiosity, to hold the questions, to hold the critique, to hold the anger. Our God is big enough for all of that,” she said.

White encouraged participants to start from a place of asking questions to engage their own faith and the faith of their students, to construct a hypothesis and to test it, mimicking the steps of the scientific method.

After that workshop, Melissa Ackermann, the youth ministry coordinator at First Lutheran Church, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation in Lake City, Minn., said, “I’m really imagining this shifting my whole ministry and how I deal with high schoolers in particular.”

With a background in science, Ackermann said, she realized her default is to rush to answer students’ questions.

Douglas Kersten, who works in student ministry at Community Fellowship Church in Lancaster, Pa., said students definitely have questions about science. Kersten has been at the church since October 2017, but in that time it has solicited anonymous questions from students, and a lot of them “tended toward a science-faith conflict,” he said.

What’s at stake in those conversations, said podcaster McHargue, is Thanksgiving.

“Faith transitions, of which 44 percent of Americans will go through at least once in their life, are tearing families apart and, along with it, dialogue, discourse, civic institutions,” he said. “Unless we can have informed, civil conversations about faith and science, we can’t hold society together anymore.” **NFJ**

—This story was written as part of a grant supported by the Templeton Foundation.

## King of Jordan honored with Templeton Prize for fostering Muslim cooperation

BY CHRIS HERLINGER  
*Religion News Service*

**K**ing Abdullah II of Jordan has won the 2018 Templeton Prize for promoting dialogue and cooperation between Muslims of differing traditions.

Abdullah, king of Jordan since 1999, “has led a reclamation of Islam’s moderate theological narrative from the distortions of radicalism,” the John Templeton Foundation said June 27.

The annual prize honors “a person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works,” the foundation said in a statement.

Among Abdullah’s contributions to religious understanding is his 2004 “Amman Message,” which “articulated a clear understanding of the central elements of Islam, and affirmed that terrorism and violence have no place in the religion,” said the foundation.

That message, developed when the Iraq War worsened relations between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, was expanded the next year when the king invited 200 Islamic scholars from 50 countries to Jordan. From those consultations emerged “Three Points of the Amman Message,” which recognized the validity of all eight of Islam’s legal schools and explicitly forbade declarations of apostasy, the foundation said.

In 2007, the king funded an initiative called “A Common Word Between Us and You,” in which Muslim leaders addressed their Christian counterparts, calling for cooperation between the two religions based on the shared traditions of love of God and love of neighbor. From that initiative came a 2010 proposal at the United Nations: World Interfaith Harmony Week, which the U.N. now



King Abdullah II of Jordan addresses the European Parliament on March 10, 2015. Photo by Pietro Naj-Oleari/© European Union 2015 - European Parliament/Creative Commons

marks during the first week of February “to stress the moral imperative of promoting and understanding the values of peace inherent in all religions,” the foundation said.

These and other efforts have “come with great personal cost including condemnation and death threats from radical terrorist groups,” the foundation said. Abdullah is the second Muslim to win the Templeton Prize. Inamullah Khan, founder of the Modern World Muslim Congress, was the first, in 1988.

The king is a member of the Hashemites, Jordan’s royal family, and a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Abdullah was also praised for making Jordan a place of welcome for refugees fleeing war and conflict in the Middle East and for taking a lead role in Jordan’s protection of Christian and Islamic holy sites.

The Templeton Prize is valued at 1.1 million British pounds, or about \$1.4 million, one of the largest individual prizes in the world. Previous Templeton laureates include Mother Teresa, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Billy Graham, Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. Abdullah will formally receive the prize in a public ceremony in November in Washington, D.C. **NFJ**

# Questions Christians ask scientists

## *What is Intelligent Design, and what do you think of it?*

—Douglas Rawls, Atlanta, Ga.

I am opposed to Intelligent Design. To explain why, I'd like to introduce my favorite scientist.

Johannes Kepler was born in 1571 in Weil-der-Stat, a small village in modern-day Germany. He was brilliant, brave, self-assured, honest, creative and ever hopeful. The following quote from James Connor's popular biography sums it up nicely:

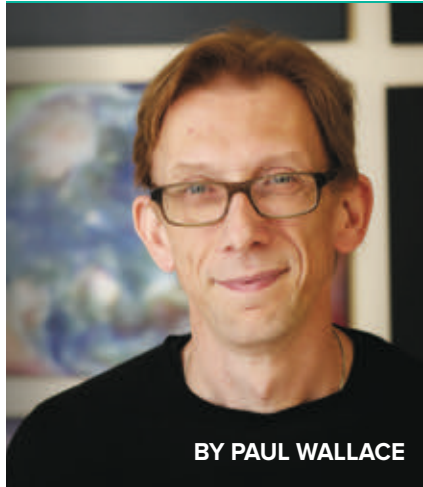
"In 1620 Kepler's mother was being tried for witchcraft. Germany was well into the Thirty Years' War. Kepler had already lost his first wife and little boy to disease, and in the years following he lost three more children. In his adult life he was chased out of one town after another by the Counter-Reformation. He was excommunicated by his own church. And yet, throughout most of these years he was writing a book called *The Harmony of the World*. This is a man worth knowing."

Kepler was open and fair. He shared his discoveries with anyone who would listen (few did, not even Galileo), asked for help when he needed it (he never got it), confessed when he was wrong (he was wrong a lot), and admitted ignorance when he didn't know. This open attitude and lack of hubris led him to scientific greatness.

He was the first to combine astronomy and physics into what we today call astrophysics. He wrote the first science-fiction story. He insisted that scientific theories match data with unprecedented accuracy and precision.

Kepler was the first to seriously consider that the planets' orbits may not be circular, and was therefore the one who discovered that they are not. His *Astronomia Nova*, published before Galileo ever picked up a telescope, was sufficient to convince the world that the earth moved around the sun. And he refused to ascribe miracle status to scientifically unexplainable events.

In October 1604 Kepler was living in Prague and was deeply into work on Mars that would later reveal the planets' elliptical



BY PAUL WALLACE

Paul Wallace is a Baptist minister with a doctorate in experimental nuclear physics from Duke University and post-doctoral work in gamma ray astronomy, along with a theology degree from Emory University. He teaches at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Ga. Faith-science questions for consideration may be submitted to [editor@nurturingfaith.net](mailto:editor@nurturingfaith.net).

orbits. He was sidetracked from this study to comment on a new star, or nova, which appeared that month in the southern sky.

In his short work, *De Stella Nova*, published in 1606, he wondered what could have caused such an event. He considered a number of possibilities, but he didn't know.

Kepler began to consider that it may have been special creation, meaning a deliberate, separate act of God unconnected with any other natural event — what we today would call a miracle. But in the end he withdrew from that conclusion, writing, "Before we come to [special] creation, which puts an end to all discussion, I think we should try everything else."

At the beginning of the scientific revolution Kepler understood that to claim a miracle (special creation) is to put an end to scientific inquiry. He did not reject special creation because he put limits on

God. He understood that God will do what God will do. But he also understood that science is a rule-bound enterprise, that it is a search for physical explanations for physical phenomena.

Kepler's science was pledged to an unorthodox and deeply-held, religious faith that undergirded his belief in hidden order. His Christian inheritance informed him that the universe is not accidental. For him creation was not only good; it had been blessed by the Incarnation, raised up and made worthy of a life's study.

Moreover, just as God had laid out the orbits of the planets, God also had marked the human soul with the imprint of divine intelligence. Therefore human beings had the capacity to discover and share in the joyful harmony of creation.

These were Kepler's fundamental beliefs. He had intended to be a Lutheran minister, but when his scientific work began to show promise, he wrote an elated letter to his former professor, saying, "Just as I pledged myself to God, so my intention remains. I wished to be a theologian, and for a while I was anguished. But behold, now God — who wants to be known from the Book of Nature — is glorified also in astronomy through my work."

Kepler's refusal to call the new star a miracle did not flow from a desire to push God out of science but from an insistence that God's creation is not founded in confusion. We may here state Kepler's fundamental axiom: "The universe has been designed; therefore it must be comprehensible."

Over the last 20 years or so a group of people has tried to play the special-creation card that Kepler refused. Their unifying idea (and the movement itself) is called Intelligent Design (ID). The organization most directly responsible for ID and its promotion is the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank.

On their web site they post their central thesis: "The theory of Intelligent Design

holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection.”

Many ID supporters are bewildered by the complexity of certain cellular mechanisms or by the sheer unlikelihood of certain events that had to happen for life to be possible. They claim that they cannot explain these phenomena by natural selection — the dominant mechanism by which creatures evolve — or by any other natural processes.

But the large majority of biologists disagree, saying natural selection does a perfectly fine job with these problems. As a non-biologist, I do not know who is right (although as a scientist I tend to side with the biologists).

But it doesn't matter, because disproving “theory A” doesn't prove “theory B,” as there may also be theories “C” and “D” to deal with. Therefore, disproving Darwin does not, indeed cannot, prove ID.

But ID proponents think that it does. Biochemist Michael Behe, author of *Darwin's Black Box* and a prominent ID supporter,

wrote: “It is a shock to us ... to discover, from observations science has made, that the fundamental mechanisms of life cannot be ascribed to natural selection, and therefore were designed. But we must deal with our shock as best we can and go on.”

Behe may “deal with his shock and go on” all he likes, but he has jumped the rails of science. In sharp contrast to Kepler, Behe has led us to the fundamental axiom of ID: The universe is incomprehensible; therefore, it must have been designed.

Here's what is happening: In the face of a difficult scientific problem ID proponents, mostly Christians, are taking the path that Kepler refused; they are following the path of special creation, declaring divine intervention.

That Kepler refused that road out of reverence for God's creation is ironic.

For a person of faith, ID is an unnecessary choice. Religious people do not need to shrink from science and its naturalistic methods, because they more than others have a rich tradition in which to locate these things, a context that allows them to take

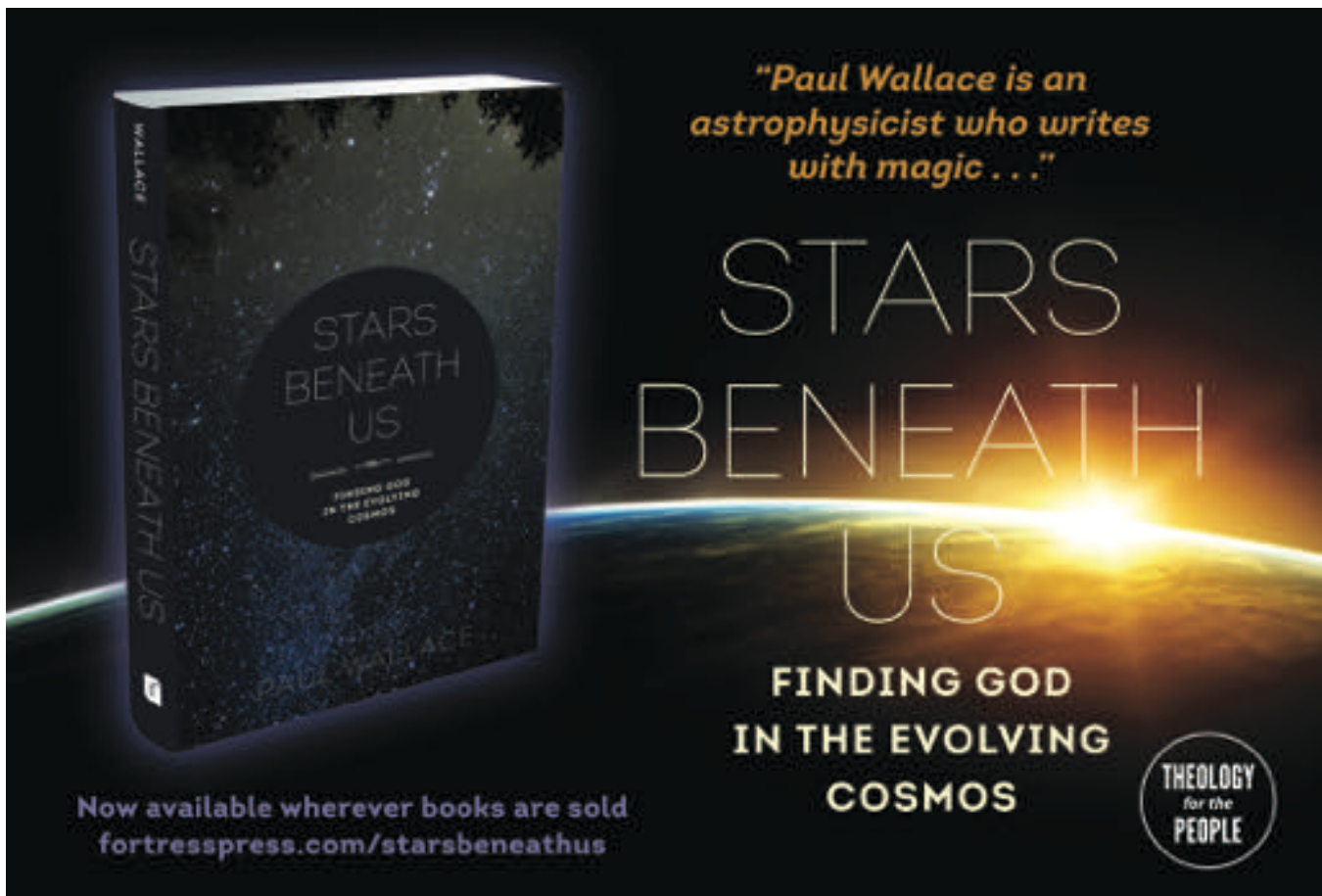
science seriously but not too seriously, and a strong bulwark against the lull of materialism.

Looking upon the new star in September 1604, could Kepler have envisioned Type 1 supernovas, mass-transfer binary stars, stellar evolution, and explosive carbon fusion — the processes, we have found, that power novae? No.

But his belief in the richness of creation and his expansive faith allowed him to admit ignorance while freely leaving the door of science wide open. ID denies its proponents that freedom.

Having opted to close the door on science, they steal from themselves the opportunity to see nature more deeply. In so doing they dig in their heels, refusing to be drawn, Kepler-style, closer to the creator God they all believe in.

This is a fundamental irony about ID, and it is an irony, I believe, that would have been perceived by Johannes Kepler, whose faith made him unafraid to chase, every day of his life, after the thoughts of his creator. **NFJ**





# Together, we can do *more* with **more**

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

**T**here is value in doing “more with less” as the old saying goes. We know that firsthand at Nurturing Faith — the now well-branded and expanded publishing ministry of Baptists Today, Inc.

Fast-changing technology and cultural shifts in recent years have afforded new opportunities to be grasped. On those rare occasions when I reflect rather simply face the next deadline or other item on my to-do list, I marvel at the many changes.

In just a brief time we have moved from publishing a monthly tabloid-format news journal to an expanded bi-monthly, magazine-quality journal with a superb Bible study curriculum within. This signature publication is complemented by a daily-updated website with timely news, blogs, teaching materials and other resources.

Speaking of resources, Nurturing Faith has published more than 75 books within a brief span — many in collaboration with organizations or with the support of individuals who share our values and mission. Each year we host a variety of in-person events including the Judson-Rice Award Dinner and Nurturing Faith Experiences.

To the journal we’ve added popular columns on congregational health and faith/science matters. Through these multiple publications and events we address the real issues facing thoughtful Christians and congregations today.

Reflecting on all that has occurred during my 18 years as editor, I feel deep appreciation for those who’ve made it possible: a talented staff willing to continually take on new responsibilities; a board of directors that gives wise counsel and encouragement; a growing number of trusting, collaborating organizations; and a broader



family of supporters who make our ministry possible.

Often I am asked how we do so much with so little. These friends are the answer.

However, more wonderful opportunities are coming our way than we have the human and financial resources to fulfill. We are looking for ways to better use the gifts of our staff and to add services we need to be even more effective.

While doing more with less is good, the reality is **WE CAN DO MORE WITH MORE!**

Therefore, I am asking for your support — or an increase in support — of Nurturing Faith through charitable giving to Baptists Today, Inc., a 35-year-old non-profit with a future as bright as our resources allow.

We need these gifts in both the short term and long term, and included here are some good ways to help. And, by scale, what is considered a small gift to some large organization is considered a very impactful gift to our ministry.

I am asking you to make that kind of impact through Nurturing Faith — where I assure you of the highest level of stewardship and a commitment to using your gift to address the real issues facing Christian living today. **NFJ**

## WAYS TO MAKE AN IMPACT:

- Give now! Make a gift and, if possible, make it part of a multi-year pledge so we know what to expect.
- Set up or increase your monthly gift — by credit card or by check when paying your bills.
- Give more when you get more! When money comes your way through the sale of property or inheritance or another source, think of how directing some of those funds to Nurturing Faith can make a huge difference.
- Include Baptists Today, Inc. in your estate plans. This generous act ensures your influence and this ministry’s extension beyond the needs of today.
- Of course, there are other financial tools for supporting this ministry that your advisor can suggest. Or contact us and we’ll arrange for someone to discuss the options that best serve your purposes and provide the kind of generous support you wish to share.

Most of all, THANKS! Thanks for sharing this journey thus far and for being so faithful. And thanks for sharing in the dreams, hopes and reality that will enable us to continue to embrace new opportunities and make a greater impact in all that we do.

## CONTACTS:

Baptists Today, Inc.  
P.O. Box 6318  
Macon, GA 31208-6318  
(478) 301-5655  
office@nurturingfaith.net  
editor@nurturingfaith.net



**MARK YOUR CALENDAR!  
ANNOUNCING . . .**

# **PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

**JULY 20-27, 2019  
OREGON / WASHINGTON**

**F**eaturing the remarkable beauty of Washington's Olympic National Park — with its diverse coastline, rainforest and mountains — and Oregon's scenic Cannon Beach.

Much to see and do, including: whale watching, exploring lighthouses, hiking, kayaking, and visiting Fort Clatsop where the Lewis & Clark Expedition ended.

This Nurturing Faith Experience, hosted by editors Bruce Gourley and John Pierce, will begin and end in Portland, Oregon.  
Details to follow in future issues and online at

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

