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Cover photo by John Pierce of the levee along the Mississippi River at Helena, Ark., home of the annual King Biscuit Blues Festival and where hope is spread all year. **Story on page 8**

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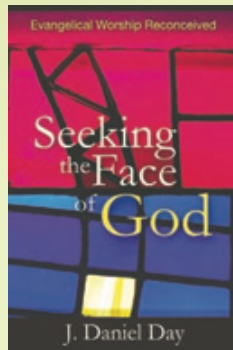
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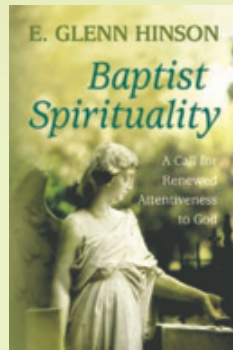
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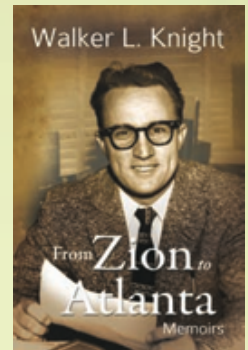
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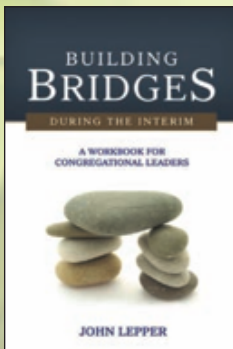
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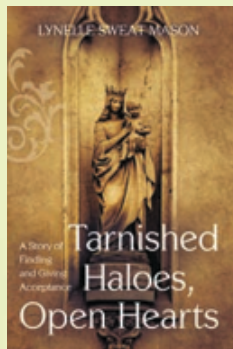
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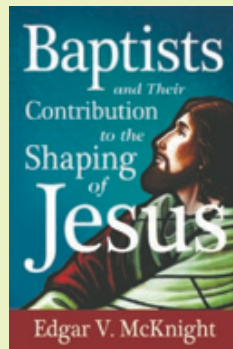
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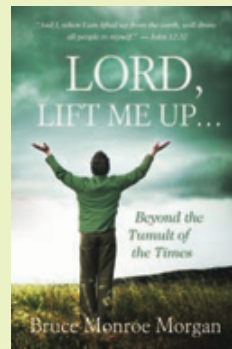
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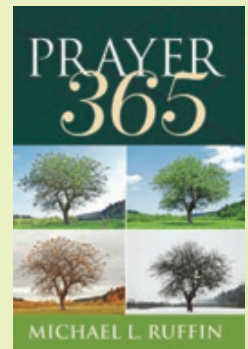
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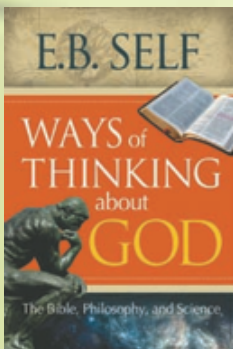
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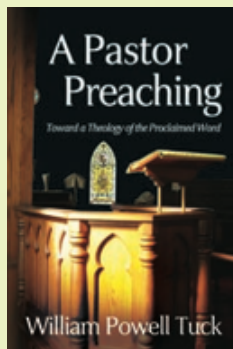
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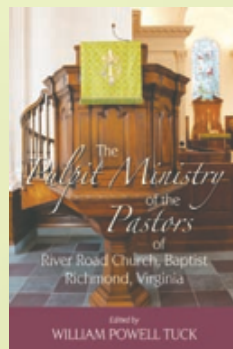
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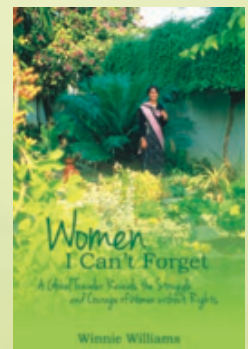
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A TRIBUTE

Remembering Gary Eubanks: Friend, former Board chairman

“Before we had Google, we had granddad,” Catherine Eubanks-Carter said she once told her son.

Speaking at a memorial service for her father, Gary F. Eubanks, Aug. 30 at First Baptist Church of Marietta, Ga., Catherine described him as “an independent thinker” who “knew a little something about everything” and was “not only knowledgeable, but wise.”

Gary was a successful attorney and businessman who put family above personal ambition, she said. He was always at the dinner table and whatever activities involved his family.

Gary’s death on Aug. 27, at the young age of 68, followed a 17-month struggle with brain cancer. He and his loving and caring wife, Virginia, were remarkably faithful and hopeful through this painful journey.

Their son, James, assumed fuller leadership of the family property management business a bit sooner due to his father’s illness. However, the transition was already in process and, like everything Gary did, was well planned and executed.

James said the best of many lessons he learned from his father came last summer



when Gary faced his illness with courage.

“I learned the depth of his faith,” said James, “... and found such an inspirational figure in my father.”

Jim Fleming, a longtime friend and retired president of Kennesaw State University Foundation, spoke of Gary’s personal integrity and respect throughout the community. Whether in Rotary Club, business circles or any other sector, Gary was held in high regard, he said.

My own reflections honoring Gary’s memory focused on his effectiveness as an exemplary Christian lay leader.

Many times, when Gary was chairman of the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors, I would request his wise counsel. He always made time and would introduce me to the latest good food on or near the Marietta Square.

A quiet and unassuming person, he listened while I did most of the talking about a challenging situation or an emerging

opportunity. Then he would always ask: “What do you want from me?”

Usually, it was his wisdom and support — and the assurance that I was not headed in the wrong direction or even reaching the right decision alone. He was helpful in practical and philosophical ways.

Our friendship grew with each visit, and many times I drove away from Marietta with a much lighter load because of my time with Gary.

During more recent visits, words didn’t come easily for Gary. But he wanted me to share about what was happening in our publishing ministry — although he had greater personal concerns. His quiet assurance always showed through.

Gary, as did his family, faced this challenging journey with such strength and grace. He never complained about unfairness, but only said of his illness: “It is what it is.”

I reminded those gathered to honor his memory that the illness that took Gary too soon, however, “is not all that is.” The compassion, trust, deeper relationships and stronger faith forged over the last year and a half stand as lasting testimonies and sources of hope for the days ahead.

Pastor Bill Ross, my seminary classmate, assured those drawn by love and appreciation for Gary that the separation we feel from him is real and worthy of our grief. However, the promise of God is that nothing at all — not even death — can ever separate us from God’s love because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done (Rom. 8:38-39).

Prayers continue for Virginia, Catherine, James, and the many family members and friends who experience that separation — yet celebrate the good life of Gary Franklin Eubanks, a child of God and faithful servant. **BT**

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IN MEMORY OF GARY EUBANKS

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Gary, as did his family, faced this challenging journey with such strength and grace. He never complained about unfairness, but only said of his illness: “It is what it is.”

quotation remarks

“If you allow your church to be a gathering of special interest groups, then your ministry will be built around keeping them happy. Or, keeping them apart. And, promising them attention that you then spend your life trying to fulfill.”

—Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research and founding pastor of Grace Church in Hendersonville, Tenn. (Christianity Today)

“We are islands in a world full of increasingly adrift people. We are places of solace and hope, community and hospitality for people who are too smart to believe in God and pretty convinced they don’t need the church — until they do.”

—Pastor Amy Butler of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., on today’s congregations (ABP)

“When I first saw this, I thought it was a headline from *The Onion*.”

—Tony Jones, former coordinator of *The Emergent Village*, after learning that a Values Voter Summit breakout session named the Emergent Church movement as one of three channels, along with Communism and Islam, that Satan is using to bring down America (RNS)

“If I went back to college today, I think I would probably major in comparative religion, because that’s how integrated it is in everything that we are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today.”

—Secretary of State John Kerry at the department’s launch of the Office for Engagement with Faith-Based Communities (White House Communications)

“This is a classic example of how measles is being reintroduced.”

—William Schaffner, an infectious disease expert at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, after a visitor who had traveled abroad brought the virus to Eagle Mountain International Church in Newark, Texas, led by televangelist Kenneth Copeland’s daughter Terri Pearsons, who has previously been critical of measles vaccinations (RNS)

“We have a mission not only to educate but also to love and care for the poor and neglected.”

—Jesus Romero, Spanish professor at Baptist University of the Americas, on the new on-campus Immigration Service And Aid Center (ISSAC) that he’ll direct with support from the Baptist General Convention of Texas (mysantonia.com)

“Both my parents always modeled a very authentic faith for me.”

—Leah Anderson Reed, recently ordained to ministry by First Baptist Church of Ahoskie, N.C., where she serves as chaplain and minister with youth, on following her parents, Anna and LaCount Anderson, into vocational ministry despite seeing the ups and downs of the calling throughout her life (ABP)

“As a Muslim, I refuse to give up Islam to the Islamists. So should others who believe in a deeply pluralistic Islam of the sort my Indian-born grandparents taught. It is the only path to peaceful resolution of inevitable religious differences, within Islam and with other faiths.”

—Qanta Ahmed, author of *In the Land of Invisible Women: A Female Doctor’s Journey in the Saudi Kingdom* and a Templeton-Cambridge Journalism Fellow in Science and Religion (RNS)

“I have had two stints at Mercer in 22 years, and I have never seen anything animate our alumni base and our community like football has. It’s exceeded our expectations by volumes.”

—Larry Brumley, senior vice president for marketing communications, on Mercer University’s return to intercollegiate football after a 72-year hiatus (ABP)

“Every day is a gift, with no promise of tomorrow. The challenge is for us to discover meaning and purpose early on, and to spend our lives investing ourselves in consequential and influential acts of service rather than trivial pursuits. We have the opportunity to grow in faith, to build relationships, to explore the beauty of creation, to engage in a meaningful work, and to contribute to the well-being of others along the way.”

—Pastor Barry Howard of First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla. (ABP)



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By John Pierce

Figuring out God

For many conservative Christians the theory of substitutionary atonement is more than just one way of explaining salvation based on Christ's death and resurrection. It is no less than the Gospel.

Any other way of interpreting the cross than the death of Jesus as payment for the debt of sin is considered heretical. Sacrifice is the only valid explanation — which explains why several Southern Baptist leaders responded so forcefully to one editor's suggestion that God is more loving than vindictive.

Editor Bob Terry of *The Alabama Baptist*, referencing a Presbyterian hymnal debate, wrote that while he loves the hymn "In Christ Alone," he doesn't sing the line "the wrath of God was satisfied."

"Some popular theologies do hold that Jesus' sufferings appeased God's wrath," wrote Terry. "That is not how I understand the Bible..."

Accusations flew and clarifications followed. Most were staunch defenses of



substitutionary atonement — with some SBC leaders using the issue to justify the fundamentalist siege of the convention three decades ago and the need for them to keep guarding the doctrinal gates.

The whole episode brought to mind some well-crafted words by my favorite writer. One scene in Pat Conroy's novel *South of Broad* has his characters driving high into the Appalachian Mountains and passing little white churches "where they worship a fiercer Christ."

Culture, education and personal experiences impact a person's understanding of the nature of God. And even those who insist most strongly that their particular view of God is the one valid, biblically-based version have formed their perspectives with great selectivity and through particular lenses.

The Bible paints many pictures of God — from meek to mean, active to absent. It depends on where you look — and what you're looking for.

Both God's judgment and lavish love show up in various literary forms throughout

the Bible. God is portrayed in a variety of ways from one who destroys disobedient masses to a most-gracious and loving father who runs to meet a disobedient child at the curb.

And yet, a great deal of mystery remains. In fact, acknowledging the mystery of God may be one of the most important things we can learn about God.

So is God revealed? Yes, and most clearly in the life and teachings of Jesus — through whom the mystery of salvation comes.

Yet this revealed God is not a fully figured-out God — regardless of how strongly one might defend a particular way of explaining Christ's death.

For me, excusing those whose religious and political hostilities (and ours) put Jesus on the cross in favor of a wrathful and trapped God with no recourse but execution is not my best understanding. Enduring the cross out of incomparable love seems to be the clearer message.

Such love is mystery and grace beyond our understanding but within our experience. But then, a grace too wide and a love too deep can make some Christians very defensive.

A figured-out God is so much more manageable and easier to defend. And it sure beats trying to live with the radical love and acceptance exhibited by Jesus. **BT**



Culture, education and **personal experiences** impact a person's understanding of the **nature of God.**

Beauty & SOUL

Arkansas town along the Mississippi calls for **hope**



(Top) Mollie Palmer spends time with some girls during a literacy camp this summer in Lakeview, Ark. Photo by Catherine Bahn. **(Above)** The city pool in Helena-West Helena, Ark., was brought back to life by volunteers and a generous gift from First Baptist Church of El Dorado, Ark. Photo by John Pierce.

HELENA-WEST HELENA, Ark. —Mollie Palmer spent the summer of 2008 in Helena, Ark., serving through Student.Go, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s missions program for students.

“I left the Delta at the end of that summer but I just couldn’t stay away,” said Mollie. “I just didn’t find anything that felt as right as being here did.”

So after leaving for work elsewhere, the Arkansas State University journalism grad returned to Helena for a longer investment of her life.

Catherine Bahn felt the pull of the Delta as well.

“The beauty and soul of the place capture you, but relationships anchor you here,” said Catherine, who also holds a journalism degree from Arkansas State. “Like all places, Helena isn’t always easy to call home. We have the same joys and sorrows as the next town. This place possesses a mysterious grit about it.”

Catherine and Mollie direct Together for Hope Arkansas, a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship initiative and long-term commitment to work with people in the nation’s poorest counties in order to affect change and break the cycle of economic disparity.

UNDENIABLE BEAUTY

Phillips County, Ark., is “undeniably beautiful,” said Catherine. She notes that Mark Twain once called Helena, “one of the prettiest situations on the Mississippi River.”

The area is rich in Civil War history (as a Union town), civil rights history (where the Elaine Race Riot by sharecroppers occurred in 1919), and music history. Helena has been called “The Main Street of the Blues.” Natural beauty also abounds.

“We talk a lot about how unique Helena is, and how many assets are present,” Mollie added.

Unlike most flat Delta towns, Helena sits at the southernmost tip of Crowley’s Ridge, giving it hills and turns that are rare, she noted. It also sits right on the Mighty Mississippi.

“There is so much to take in,” said

Mollie. “The things that make it our ministry setting aren’t necessarily unique — high poverty and unemployment, failing schools, all the other ‘on paper’ things that people know about a place — but the people I’ve met here, their gifts, and the way God chooses to use them are unique and really beautiful.”

RECIPROCITY

One of Together for Hope’s guiding principles is reciprocity, said Catherine.

“We focus on mutual exchange and mutually beneficial relationships where both local and outside partners have gifts, skills and abilities to teach,” she explained. “Not only do our outside volunteers teach in our community, they have opportunities to learn from our local community.”

As an example, Catherine points to the annual swim camp that ends each year with a celebration that includes a choreographed dance by local youth.

“For the first time our local youth taught our outside volunteers the dance this summer,” she said. “Every afternoon our youth would gather our most willing volunteers to teach and reteach motions, encourage them, and connect in ways we’d never witnessed.”

Catherine said she can close her eyes and see the youth standing in front of the volunteers and teaching each movement with confidence and patience.

“Witnessing our youth, who many only see as a poverty statistic, share their knowledge and gifts with others filled my soul and affirmed scripture,” she said. “We are all part of one body, we all have a role, and we are all essential to the body of believers.”

IT’S PERSONAL

Catherine was born and raised in Jonesboro, Ark. She first visited Helena about 10 years ago and “started falling in love — with the place, its people, its beauty.”

“Folks here often talk about how Helena gets under your skin; you can’t shake it,” she said. “And they’re right.”

Despite the many social challenges, said Catherine, the people of the merged town of Helena-West Helena are the greatest attraction.

“Along my journey I’ve met countless souls who continually reshape my world,” she said. “When people ask why I’m here, why I decided to transplant myself in the Delta, I simply give them a list of names — Solomon, Zay, Nikki, Ms. Mary, Will. That’s it. Nothing

FIRM FOUNDATION

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel Ben and Leonora Newell moved to Helena, Ark., in late 2001. They served for 10 years, while raising their children, Lucas, Nate and Gabriela there, and shaping the Together for Hope engagement.

Ray Higgins, coordinator for CBF of Arkansas, pointed to some major footprints the Newells left on Helena and Phillips County:

- A community garden was created in downtown Helena.
- Volunteers were enlisted to renovate the burned-out Helena Community Center to provide programming for children, youth and families. Leonora started an “Imagination Station” and a library there.
- With the help of Charles Ray of CBF of Arkansas and a generous gift from First Baptist Church of El Dorado, Ark., along with support from the city, the new Helena City Park Swimming Pool House came to life. Volunteers refurbished the old pool house into a pavilion and renovated the pump house.
- The two-week All Church Challenge, that brings volunteers from CBF partner churches into Helena during the summers, was launched. Hayes Barton Baptist Church in Raleigh N.C., has participated all 11 years with Kate Hall leading the swim camp.
- Harold Duncan, a trustee at Helena’s New Light Baptist Church, was introduced to Russell Miller, a deacon at First Baptist Church of Mountain Home, Ark., who led the construction of a new 14,000-square-foot church facility in downtown Helena.

Miller’s leadership during the three-year process resulted in more than \$500,000 in donated materials and labor.

- Eden Market, a farmhouse-type facility, was built on the bypass around Helena. It has a community garden around it and is designed to accommodate various vendors.
- A literacy ministry called “Stories on Wheels” was formed using a bus donated by First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala.
- Delta Jewels was created as a youth development initiative to inspire the creativity and empowerment of women. The jewelry-making co-op (deltajewels.com) returns half of each sale to the artist — and has expanded into other creative expressions.

“Ben and Leonora built wonderful relationships across racial lines, connected with leaders in the city, worked with churches and brought churches into the All Church Challenge, and created construction-type projects in the area for people’s homes,” said Higgins appreciatively. “They also brought an outgoing, faith-sharing, evangelistic presence to their work.”

Many student interns have served effectively through the years as well, along with numerous volunteers who assist Together for Hope staff. Helena is impacted by these many and varied investments of lives and love.

“Now Mollie and Catherine are building on the Newells’ work and creating new community development projects of their own,” said Higgins.

Those efforts include literacy training for children and youth development activities for teens — along with serving as excellent Christian influences and examples. **BT**

Catherine Bahn enjoys time with Jaylon during a summer camp program. Photo by J.V. McKinney.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Joseph Whitfield, a Helena-West Helena native and student at Colby College in Maine, is a popular swimming instructor during the annual All Church Challenge. Photo by J.V. McKinney.



FROM PAGE 9

more, nothing less. God made the introductions and continues to show me enough grace to sustain me along the way.”

Mollie said it didn't take long for her to fall in love with Helena during her summer internship five years ago. “God sent me people who changed my life.”

And God continues to send people to Helena, said the co-directors of Together for Hope Arkansas. Both local and short-term volunteers contribute heavily to making a positive impact on this unique and hopeful Delta community.

SWIM & MORE

Together for Hope hosts a two-week missions experience each summer involving congregations from outside of Helena called the All Church Challenge. Programming includes a swim camp for 200 kids, a literacy camp for another 50 kids, various construction projects and other volunteer tasks.

In 2011 there was a shortage of volunteers for the second week of swim camp, Mollie recalled.

“We had a great first week, but we were concerned about being able to serve as many kids as we had planned to,” she said. “Instead of taking that as our only option, we recruited volunteers from our local youth camp.”

The 15 teenagers from Helena, who served alongside our outside volunteers, weren't particularly helpful initially, she confessed.

“Frankly, they made a bit of a mess the

first day,” she said. “We had more lost-and-found items than ever before, and volunteers were more engaged with each other and their cell phones than their kids.”

Mollie said they realized that the local youth volunteers lacked the training they needed to be successful camp volunteers. So longtime volunteers and staff rallied together to support them.

“By the end of the day, we'd seen a drastic difference and by the end of the week, the way I saw the All Church Challenge had totally changed,” said Mollie. “While most of our ACC volunteers are committed to Helena long-term and have relationships with the children they see each year, they still go home at the end of their week and are gone for 51 weeks before they return.”

But the newly trained, young local volunteers could make a positive impact all year.

“Our local youth are a part of the community; they are people that our swim camp kids see in school, at the grocery store, at church,” said Mollie. “They are there as role models and mentors year round for the kids in their own community, which is a great thing for those kids, but also changes the way that the youth volunteers see themselves, their community, and their ability to contribute.”

LARGER PURPOSE

While teaching the lifesaving skill of swimming is important, the annual summer experience has taken on a larger purpose.

“Suddenly the All Church Challenge was

no longer just about teaching kids to swim; it was about creating a space where teenagers could serve and grow in leadership skills through the mentorship of outside leaders,” said Mollie. “We now offer volunteer opportunities for many of these teens year-round and have been blown away by the way service has changed them.”

Also investing heavily in the daily lives of Helena's people — and future leaders — are these two young women with a strong and clear calling to serve.

Mollie, who grew up in the Little Rock area and previously worked for the Girl Scouts, enjoys cooking and entertaining — as well as “taking the Helena kids out on the town.”

Catherine previously worked as community outreach coordinator at Our House Shelter in Little Rock and interned as a reporter with the Roma Press Agency in Kosice, Slovakia.

She has done a good bit of writing about community development in Phillips County, Ark., but is better known locally for teaching children how to throw a Frisbee.

“Mollie and Catherine's calling to Helena and leadership with Together for Hope Arkansas has been one of the clearest and most amazing answers to prayer in my life and ministry,” said Ray Higgins, CBF of Arkansas coordinator.

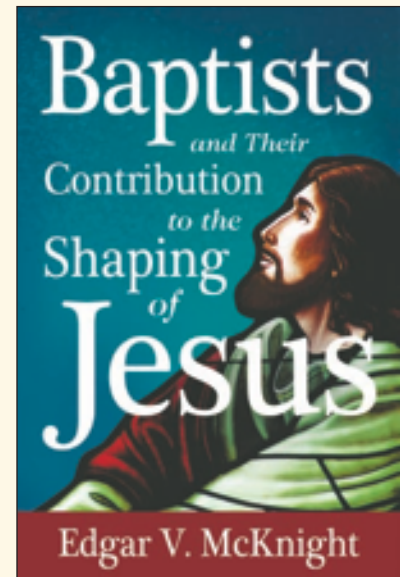
“They have the passion, vision, talents and skills, and the sensitivity to God's Spirit and people's hopes and needs, to make this a presence-of-Christ experience, physically and spiritually, in the community.” **BT**

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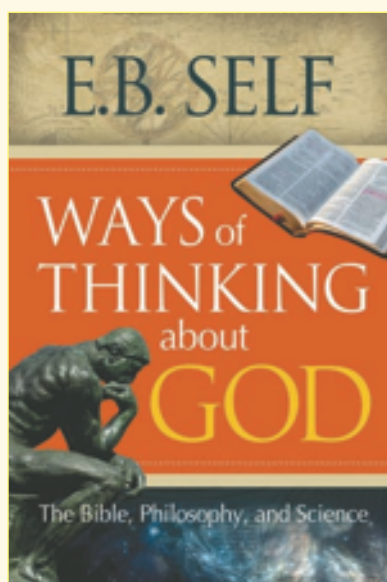
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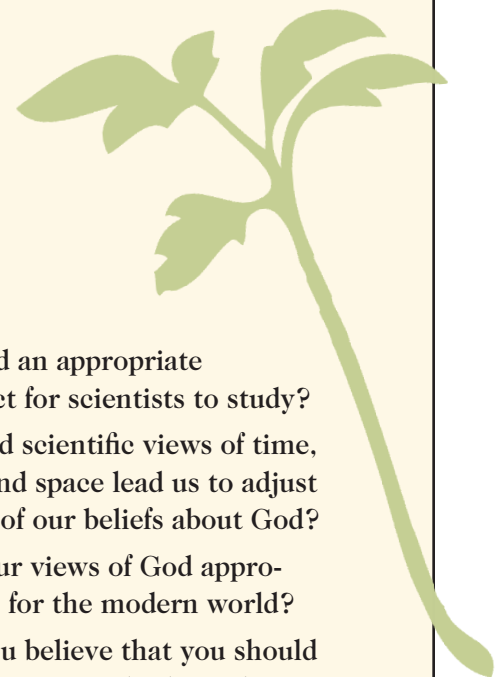


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By Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service

FAITH & DUCKS

TV show's success may thrive on Southern Christian stereotypes

A show capitalizing on Southern Christian stereotypes has snowballed into success, with faith and duck hunting creating a recipe for a ratings sensation on *Duck Dynasty*.

The A&E show drew nationwide attention after its season premiere attracted 11.8 million viewers, becoming the most-watched reality premiere in history by topping series such as *Jersey Shore* and *Jon & Kate Plus 8*. The show drew more viewers than the highest viewed episodes of *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men* combined, and would be the most-watched show if it aired on NBC.

The show, which follows the extended Robertson clan that runs the Duck Commander Company in Louisiana, is best known for the gun-toting family's Southern drawls, unruly beards, camouflage wardrobe and religious faith.

"There's a risk that someone could watch the show and think all Christians are like that, but that would come from a place of ignorance," said Jennifer Wishon, a correspondent for the Christian Broadcasting Network.

"They're just guys from Louisiana who like to make duck calls and hunt, and that doesn't represent the interests of all Christians."

CBN invited members of the Robertson family to this year's White House Correspondents' Dinner, where comedian Conan O'Brien briefly poked fun, saying they were invited because the guys from *Storage Wars* weren't available.

Wishon said that Willie and Korie Robertson were also invited to President Obama's private reception at the dinner, and the president told them he watches the show on Air Force One.

"Our faith is the main part of our lives, but it's better to be subtle," said Alan Robertson, the beardless fourth brother of the clan. "We don't want to make it like 'The 700 Club for Rednecks.'"

The Robertsons have taken their message on the road; Alan and Phil Robertson filled in for Rick Warren at Saddleback Church, sharing about the patriarch's alcoholic past and marital



troubles.

The Robertsons attend White's Ferry Road Church of Christ in West Monroe, La., part of a "Restoration Movement" fellowship of 13,000 U.S. congregations that generally teach that baptism by immersion at the "age of accountability" is integral to salvation.

Phil Robertson told *The Christian Chronicle* that he and his sons Alan and Jase preach the same message of faith, repentance and baptism wherever they're invited.

Hundreds of people have shown up at the family's church, said pastor Mike Kellett. "I tell people, 'If you want to put your eyes on them, come to church!'" he said.

Alan Robertson co-ministered with Kellett for seven years before deciding to join the show for its fourth season. He and his father, Phil, still serve as elders. Friends and relatives estimate that Phil Robertson, who had a following for his revivalist-style gospel preaching, has baptized more than 300 people.

"We're kind of the John the Baptists of the 21st century," Alan Robertson said. "It's how you imagine, with the wild hair and the locusts."

At the end of each show, the Robertsons join in prayer together, something visitors note as they come through the church.

"I think there are a lot of families that wish they would gather around the table and pray like that," Kellett said. "I think it hits a nerve."

While *Breaking Bad* has gotten most of the press attention, *Duck Dynasty* has won the ratings race, said Craig Detweiler,

a communications professor at Pepperdine University, a school associated with Churches of Christ.

"There hasn't been such a beloved depicting of Southern charm since *The Andy Griffith Show*," said Detweiler, who grew up in Charlotte, N.C.

The show finds a smart way to combine family, food, faith and really long beards, he said.

"There are a lot of complaints about the reality TV genre, but there are far more Christians portrayed on America as a result," Detweiler said. "The beard gets longer and the ratings keep going up. They're laughing all the way to the bank."

The Robertsons can also be found on an array of merchandise, including bobbleheads, T-shirts, and Uncle Si's plastic tea cup.

"For years, Hollywood missed a lot," Alan Robertson said. "It looks like they're taking advantage of us, but we're taking advantage of them to get the gospel preached."

The show likely strikes a chord because the Robertsons can control their image within the reality TV genre, said Larry Eskridge, associate director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals.

"The *Duck Dynasty* fan is laughing and praying with the Robertsons instead of laughing at and gawking at them," Eskridge said. "I think that scores nicely with the audience to see folks from that subculture poking fun at themselves as opposed to outsiders doing it." **BT**

By Adele Banks, Religion News Service

Real 'Butler' was quiet man of steady faith

WASHINGTON — Eugene Allen served eight presidents as a White House butler, and his legendary career is the inspiration for Lee Daniels' *The Butler*, a film starring Oprah Winfrey, Jane Fonda and a host of A-list Hollywood talent.

But members of The Greater First Baptist Church knew the man who died in 2010 by other titles: usher, trustee, and a humble man of quiet faith.

"The attributes that made him a great butler made him a great usher," said Denise Johnson, an usher at the predominantly black D.C. church where Allen was a member for six decades.

Those qualities were both external — black suits and white gloves — and internal — a dignified, soft-spoken manner.

Parishioners recalled Allen as a peacemaker, someone who never raised his voice. His devotion to service extended far beyond the public and private rooms of the White House to the doorways and kitchen of his church.

In African-American churches, the usher is a special role bestowed on highly regarded members. Allen joined others to open doors to visitors and pass out fans and offering plates. He also would roll up his sleeves and help prepare fish and chicken at church fundraising dinners.

"He was not only a servant there," said Robert Hood, an associate minister, of Allen's White House work. "But he was also a servant doing the work of the Lord."

The movie hit theaters in August with Allen portrayed as the fictional Cecil Gaines (Forest Whitaker), married to Gloria (Winfrey). The movie spans his personal journey from segregation to integration, during which he tended

to keep his mouth shut about the goings-on inside the White House as well as the civil rights struggles roiling the nation.

Church members recalled that Allen, like the fictional Cecil Gaines, was fairly reticent.

"He loved that job, was committed to it," said fellow trustee Dolores Causer of his White House job serving eight presidents. "But he never really would discuss anything other than to say he loved his work and he enjoyed each and every one of them."

The writer of the four-page obituary in Allen's funeral program, however, gained some insights into his thoughts about working with U.S. presidents:

- Harry S. Truman was "hands down, the best dressed President."
- He considered Dwight Eisenhower's decision to send troops to enforce school desegregation in Little Rock, Ark., "an especially admirable act."
- He said Lyndon Johnson's action on civil rights "would be the jewel in his crown."
- "He was much grieved by (Richard) Nixon's demise and ultimate resignation."
- He "failed to see the pratfall ... humor in the *Saturday Night Live* impersonations of (Gerald) Ford, calling him the best athlete in the White House in his time."

• "In the last year of his life, Eugene admitted that another young couple (the Obamas) had indeed entered the White House who possessed the Kennedy magic."

Allen acknowledged that he was especially fond of the Reagans, who invited him — in real life and in the movie — to a state dinner before he retired in 1986.

"He often talked about how nice they were to him," recalled church member Marion Washington, who knew Allen when he was promoted to maitre d'.

In the movie, Cecil and Gloria Gaines are portrayed as a Christian couple, with a crucifix over their bed and a devotion to the Bible.

Director Lee Daniels, a Philadelphia native who grew up in the oldest black Episcopal church in the country, said it was important for the movie to include religious elements. He fought to include a scene depicting a church fundraiser for the Freedom Riders in which a choir sings "Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom."

"You can't tell a story about the civil rights movement without the gospel and gospel music," he said. "You just simply can't. It's impossible."

Wil Haygood, who wrote the 2008 *Washington Post* story that first brought Allen's story to light, said it was more than chance that allowed him to bring public attention to Allen's otherwise private career.

"There was a higher force that led me to Mr. Allen's front door," said Haygood, who made dozens of calls before tracking down Allen. "He had a landline. If he would have had a cell phone, I would have never found him."

Now, he said, after Allen worked quietly behind the scenes while presidents from Truman to Reagan were in the limelight, the roles are reversed.

"To me, in a way, it's almost biblical: The last shall be first," said Haygood. "He's not working in the White House theater, serving popcorn. He's the star on the big screen." **BT**



Eugene Allen, the man who inspired Lee Daniels' *The Butler*, is pictured in this 2006 photo from the 126th anniversary program of his church's usher board. He is the farthest left person in the third row from the front. Photo courtesy of Greater First Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

Baylor Alumni Association votes down proposal

Baptist Standard

WACO, Texas — Approval of an agreement that would have disbanded the Baylor Alumni Association fell short of the two-thirds vote required.

At a Sept. 7 called meeting in Waco Hall on the Baylor campus, 55 percent of the alumni association members present voted to approve an agreement that would have disbanded the 154-year-old organization, allowed Baylor University to assume all alumni-engagement activities and created the Baylor Line Corporation to preserve what proponents called “an independent alumni voice.”

Alumni association members voted 830 to 669 to approve a transition agreement Baylor’s board of regents and the Baylor Alumni Association officers agreed upon May

31 and that the alumni association board of directors endorsed Sept. 3. However, that fell 170 votes short of the two-thirds required.

Under the terms of the agreement, the 17,000-member Baylor Alumni Association — which operated 35 years outside university control — would have dissolved, and the university-sponsored Baylor Alumni Network would have assumed all activities related to alumni. Last year, the Baylor Alumni Network held about 850 events in 150 locations worldwide that involved more than 35,000 alumni and supporters, the university reported.

Baylor University gave notice May 31 it unilaterally would terminate contracts and license agreements with the Baylor Alumni Association on Sept. 8. However, the letter from Charles Beckenbauer, Baylor general counsel, said, if the association voted to implement the transition agreement, the university

and the alumni association would terminate the agreements by mutual consent.

In addressing the group, BAA President Collin Cox framed the vote in terms of three choices—approve the transition agreement and maintain an independent alumni voice through the Baylor Line Corporation, enter into costly litigation over use of the “Baylor” name or surrender and retain nothing.

In both an open forum and the 30 minutes dedicated to debate during the alumni association’s business session, numerous speakers retraced a long history of escalating tension between the group and the university’s administration and board of regents.

More than 10 years ago, the university developed its own alumni services office—the Baylor Alumni Network—and began publishing its own magazine for alumni and donors. **BT**

Southern Baptist military chaplains told to avoid gay weddings

(RNS) — The agency that commissions Southern Baptist military chaplains says no Baptist chaplain will be allowed to perform, attend or support a same-sex wedding either on or off base.

The Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board released guidelines on Aug. 29 stating that endorsed chaplains will not “offer any kind of relationship training or retreat, on or off of a military installation, that would give the appearance of accepting the homosexual lifestyle or sexual wrongdoing.”

The updated guidelines were issued in

response to the military’s repeal of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy and the Supreme Court’s decision this summer to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act.

“A lot of our chaplains were asking for clarification,” said Mike Ebert, spokesman for the NAMB, which is based outside Atlanta. “We wanted to clearly articulate in writing for the Department of Defense that these are our expectations.”

Last year, an Associated Press article included mention of a 20-year Southern Baptist Air Force chaplain who attended a

same-sex wedding on his base. Col. Timothy Wagoner initially assured his NAMB superiors that his quotes were misunderstood. He later resigned his Southern Baptist Convention endorsement and was re-endorsed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Ebert said that Wagoner’s case was the only one he knew of where a Southern Baptist-endorsed chaplain had left the chaplaincy over a gay wedding. Southern Baptists have nearly 1,500 endorsed chaplains serving in the U.S. military, more than any other denomination or faith group. **BT**

Study claims religion can harm economy

(RNS) — Too much religion can harm a society’s economy by undermining the drive for financial success, according to a study in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

The study of almost 190,000 people from 11 religiously diverse cultures is raising eyebrows among some of England’s religious leaders for suggesting Judaism and Christianity have anti-wealth norms.

Written by academics at University of Southampton in England and the Humboldt University of Berlin, the study found that religious people in religious cultures reported better psychological adjustment when their income was low.

The study cites the Bible to show how Judaism and Christianity turn upside down the belief that the highest possible income leads to the highest possible happiness and psychological adjustment.

It quotes biblical examples such as Jesus’ teaching, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” from Matthew 5:3.

The academics conducted their interviews in 11 countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands and Turkey.

“What the great faiths condemn is the irresponsible use of wealth, not wealth itself,”



said Michael Nazir-Ali, the former bishop of Rochester in the Church of England. “The worship of money is the root of all evil and not money on its own.”

The authors said they received no financial support for the research authorship and/or publication of the article.

Seminary debt saddles ministers

(ABP) — When Congress overwhelmingly approved a measure recently to relieve spiraling student debt, churches probably didn't realize the problem hits closer to home than expected — many pastors are leaving seminary and divinity school with tens of thousands of dollars in loans.

"It's becoming a huge issue," said Bill Wilson, president of the Center for Congregational Health. "I've heard of totals approaching \$60,000. I had one resident who showed up with \$40,000 in debt between school and credit cards."

Theological educators characterize the trend as troubling. A 2005 paper by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education — grimly titled "The Gathering Storm" — found more than half of master of divinity students in 1991 had not borrowed for their seminary education. By 2001, only 37 percent could make that claim.

About 1 percent of master of divinity graduates had borrowed \$30,000 or more to fund their theological education in 1991; 10 years later 21 percent had borrowed at that level.

It no longer is unusual for seminary graduates to leave school with \$70,000 to \$80,000 in debt, Sharon Miller, associate director of the



Auburn center told the *Huffington Post* in 2012.

An official at one Baptist seminary, who asked not to be identified, said a recent graduating class revealed the depth of the issue. Of 57 graduates, 21 had no debt, six owed less than \$20,000, another six between \$20,000 and \$50,000, eight between \$50,000 and \$90,000 and 11 more than \$100,000 — all acquired while at the seminary. **BT**

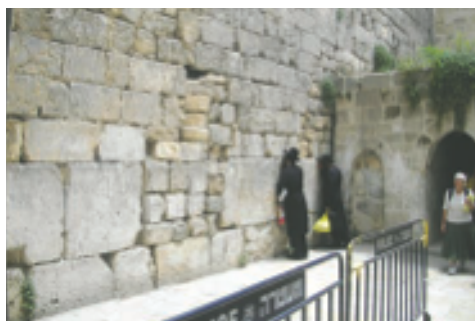
Feminists call Western Wall prayer platform a 'sun deck'

(RNS) — Israel's Minister of Religious Affairs reached out to Reform and Conservative Jews after unveiling an expanded prayer platform near the Western Wall in late August.

But while the non-Orthodox leaders welcomed the new platform that can accommodate up to 450 worshippers, a group of Jewish feminists called it nothing more than "a sun deck" designed to marginalize anyone who is not Ultra-Orthodox from praying at the Wall.

Naftali Bennett, the religious affairs minister, called for "a new page in the Israeli-Diaspora relationship" in his letter to leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements, whose institutions and clergy have no official status and receive virtually no government funding.

The temporary prayer platform at Robinson's Arch, near the southern part of the Western Wall, serves as a government-designated place for mixed gender, non-Orthodox prayer. The government permits only Orthodox prayer at the northern part of the Wall, called the Kotel, a remnant of the Jewish Temple.



A recent court ruling said the feminist group, Women of the Wall, should be allowed to pray in prayer shawls and phylacteries in the main women's section, which is separated from the men's section by a partition. Women at the Wall staged a sit-in at the Kotel when the platform was announced. It would like women to pray in the women's section at the Kotel.

The Reform and Conservative movements sought reassurances that the government would implement the so-called Sharansky Plan, which, if approved, would create a permanent prayer space accommodating thousands of worshippers, as opposed to the temporary platform that accommodates hundreds. **BT**

Persecuted Coptic Christians still hoping for peace

(RNS) — Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams took Britain's Christian community to task recently when he said that Western Christians need to "grow up" and stop claiming they are persecuted just because they are sometimes made to feel uncomfortable about their faith.

"When you have any contact with real persecuted minorities you learn to use the word persecuted very chastely," he said.

Persecution has undeniably become the plight of Christians in Egypt, where, the same week that Williams made his comments, more than 30 churches were attacked — many of them burned to the ground — and the Coptic patriarch, Pope Tawadros II, suspended weekly public events due to safety concerns. Since then, the toll of churches that have been ransacked or worse has risen to more than 90.

And yet, many of Egypt's Christians have refrained from claiming they are persecuted in recent days.

As the largest and one of the oldest in the Middle East, Egypt's Christian community has significance far beyond the country's borders. It is a bellwether for other religious minorities, not just Christian, in both Egypt and the greater region.

Tradition holds that Christianity came to Egypt around 42 A.D. when the Apostle Mark founded a church in Alexandria, now officially known as the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria; its line of patriarchs has been unbroken since. By the fifth century, the majority of Egyptians were Christians. It wasn't until several centuries after the Arab conquest of 641 that Islam became the country's predominant religion.

To get a sense of what an integral part of the Egyptian national fabric Copts are, one need only look at the name itself; the word Copt is based on the ancient Greek word for Egyptian. Today, this homegrown minority, which traces its roots back to the Pharaohs, makes up an estimated 10 percent of the population in Egypt.

For the most part, Copts and Muslims say they live together peacefully. And yet, the fault lines revealed in recent days have been present since the beginning of Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. **BT**

One less character

By Tony W. Cartledge

My cousin Rae Stribling died recently, and one of God's most unique people has made the transition from corporality to memory.

Rae was my grandmother's sister's daughter and a favorite of her Aunt Van (short for Savannah), who bequeathed to Rae the gift of removing warts. Rae got such a kick out of people believing she had the power of dewarification that she cultivated a reputation as a "voodoo woman" who could cure various ailments or make an unwanted husband disappear like an ugly wart.

I've always been skeptical about the warts, but scores of people in Lincoln County, Ga., swear that Rae charmed their unwanted protrusions away.

And I was never sure whether Rae believed her own voodoo business or just enjoyed the attention. Alas, no amount of voodoo could counteract the brain cancer that finally did her

in at age 81.

Rae went back to church a few times after her diagnosis, but decided that she didn't want a funeral. She talked her son-in-law into building her a pine box coffin of reclaimed wood from an old cotton gin, and was specific that she wanted the word "cotton" stamped on it as a reminder of how hard she had worked in the cotton fields as a young woman.

She gave her children instructions to hold a "viewing" at which she'll be laid out in one of her favorite party dresses with full makeup. She told them to "clean up and wear your dancing shoes," wanting the occasion to be more celebratory than mournful. A large crowd attended, but I don't think the party materialized.

She was cremated afterward, so there's no grave to visit. But if Rae gets a chance to be the one making visitations as a ghost, she certainly will.

I once published a book of sermons (*Telling Stories*) that consisted of original short stories to set the mood for getting into particular biblical



Rae, as a girl, with Tony's father (top) and uncle Tom

texts. Only one of the stories was true, and that was a mini-biography titled "How Rae Got the Voodoo."

It was told with her encouragement, and was perhaps one of the more unbelievable stories in the book. I used it to introduce a meditation on the so-called "witch of Endor" who called up the spirit of Samuel for King Saul in 1 Samuel 28. Both Rae and the ghostwife who assisted Saul used approaches that many would consider sketchy, but their intentions were good.

I don't know if there will be more warts in Lincoln County now, but there will be one less colorful character. I suspect tales about Rae will grow taller, however, and it's unlikely that she'll be forgotten.

I, for one, will often recall one of God's most singular gifts to the world, and am grateful to have known her. **BT**

How to destroy the Bible

By John Pierce

A fellow church member came into the coffee shop this morning.

"Didn't see you yesterday," she said.

"I was in Jasper, Ga.," I replied.

"What were you doing up there?"

"Preaching at First Baptist Church. The pastor retired recently."

We chatted a bit more, but I had outed myself to the larger caffeinated gathering. It was too late to vaguely say, "I'm in publishing." Or to outright lie — "I sell Volvos" — as I've done on long flights.

As I approached the door to leave, a man who overheard the conversation stopped me.

"Are you a minister? I have a question."

My Monday morning mind raced to retrieve long-stored information in order to address whatever theological issue would follow — from the problem of evil to the validity

of other world religions to whether the latest despised political leader is the anti-Christ referenced in Revelation (or Revelations, as it's often called when such questions arise).

But none of that was needed. He wanted to know the proper way to dispose of a mostly destroyed Bible.

His late wife loved old copies of the Bible and was often given them as gifts. His new dog thought one of the old Bibles made a good chew toy. So rather than hiding its words in his heart, he hid some of its pages in his stomach.

Not having a good answer at hand, I suggested he check with the American Bible Society or just search online for "How to properly dispose of a Bible."

Curiosity led me to my own search. Some sources suggest burial of a severely tattered Bible. Others recommend recycling, noting that the pages of paper and ink

themselves are not what make a Bible holy.

"It would be a good thing to make it useful, and one way to do that is to recycle it," Jacquelyn Sapiie, library services supervisor for the American Bible Society, told *The Newton Kansan*, according to ehow.com. "Recycling is an honorable act, and that is fitting for a book such as a Bible."

Respecting a damaged copy of the Bible is a good thing. I'm glad this man was concerned enough to ask rather than simply throwing the well-gnawed pages into the trash.

But, of course, there are other less literal ways to destroy or dispose of the Bible — by ignoring its clear message of love and grace or by cherry-picking isolated, out-of-context verses to weave into a defense of one's personal agenda that reflects nothing of the life and teachings of Jesus.

The Bible, in all of its literary diversity, really addresses just two subjects: how we are to relate to God and to one another. Those two matters deserve our primary attention — and daily recycling. **BT**

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November lessons in this issue

Latter Prophets, Future Dreams

Habakkuk 1:1-2:4 – When Things Look Bad ...
NOV. 3, 2013

Haggai 1:15b-2:9 – I Will Fill This House with Splendor
NOV. 10, 2013

Malachi 3:13-4:3 – With Healing on His Wings
NOV. 17, 2013

Jeremiah 23:1-8 – Poor Shepherds and Grand Hopes
NOV. 24, 2013

Youth Lessons are on pages 22–23.



Adult teaching plans by **Rick Jordan** of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina are available at nurturingfaith.net

Thanks, sponsors!

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

Bible Study

Habakkuk 1:1-2:4

with Tony W. Cartledge

Nov. 3, 2013

When Things Look Bad ...

Do you ever get depressed while watching or reading the news? Whether it's gridlock in Washington, bankruptcy in Detroit, violence in Chicago or poverty on your street, trouble abounds.

Are you ever inclined to complain that God has left humans to our own devices and refused to step in to rescue us from ourselves?

Today's lesson is the first of four texts involving national despair and prophetic hope. Three lessons come from the relatively obscure books of Habakkuk, Haggai and Malachi — all members of the “Book of the Twelve” (Hosea – Malachi), better known as the “Minor Prophets.”

Habakkuk's prophecy is undated, but appears to fit best in the context of the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE, a time when the resurgent Babylonians had conquered the ruling Assyrians and extended their reach to the smaller nations of the Levant, including Judah. ⚓ ⚓

Complaint #1 (1:1-11)

We know nothing about Habakkuk except for the superscriptions of 1:1 and 3:1, both of which describe him as a prophet. His references to temple matters and the inclusion of a hymn suitable for temple use have led many scholars to suggest that he may also have been a priest. ⚓ ⚓

Habakkuk's opening words are a lament: “How long, O Lord?” (v. 2). Similar complaints are found in the



Hab. 2:4 –
“Look at the proud!
Their spirit is not
right in them,
but the righteous
live by their faith.”

Psalms (13:1-2, 74:10-11, 79:5, 89:46). Queries such as “Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble?” suggest that Habakkuk fully felt the burden of his prophetic office. ⚓ The prophet seems afraid that God has abandoned the people, allowing violence, strife and contention to dominate the land (v. 3). The end result is that “the law becomes slack and justice never prevails” (v. 4a).

Habakkuk appears to be describing the unhappy conditions in Judah. There had been great hope among the prophets that reforms following the (re)discovery of the book of the law during Josiah's reign would have lasting effect, but Josiah was killed in an ill-devised battle with Pharaoh Neco in 609 BCE, and the reforms had lapsed. ⚓

Central to the law was the importance of showing compassion and care to one another – especially to other Hebrews – but when the law became numb or paralyzed (the literal meaning of the word translated as “slack”), the wealthy and powerful were free to run roughshod over the poor, exploiting them and taking their land, a common concern of the prophets.

Habakkuk wasn't necessarily looking for a timetable, but he wondered if God had any plans to address the current situation in which “judgment comes forth perverted.”

God's initial answer is found in vv. 5-11, verses not included in the lectionary text but essential for our understanding. In essence, God challenged Habakkuk to look beyond Judah and see what was happening in other nations, how the Chaldeans were wreaking destruction across the landscape and trusting their military might as if it were a god.

Like the lawless people of Habakkuk's own country, the Babylonians had become their own law: “their justice and dignity proceed from themselves” (v. 7).

The Babylonians believed in their innate power and self-direction, but God declared “I am rousing the Chaldeans” (v. 6), clearly for God's own purposes. The clear implication is that the fierce Chaldean army would become the instrument of divine discipline; that those who rejected the law of God would fall victim to the remorseless “justice” of the Babylonians.

Additional background information
online where you see the “Digging
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Complaint #2 (1:12-2:1)

Habakkuk's second complaint begins in 1:12-17 and concludes with 2:1. The prophet cannot understand why God has not yet judged the Babylonians, since "your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing" (v. 13a). Note Habakkuk's boldness in implying that God's actions are contradictory to the divine nature. Do you ever pray that way?

Though well aware of the Hebrews' shortcomings, Habakkuk still regarded his countrymen as more righteous than the violent Babylonians. Brashly, he asked "Why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?" (v. 13b).

With language reminiscent of the creation story in Genesis 1 – and perhaps as an intentional plea for God to take better care of Israel's human creations – Habakkuk complained that the Babylonian armies collected victims like fishermen using hooks and nets, trusting in their implements of war as if they were gods.

Like Job, who persistently questioned the lack of justice in his misfortune, Habakkuk was plagued with the question of theodicy, wondering if God was truly just after all. As Job dared to challenge God with words such as "Answer me!" (Job 31:35), Habakkuk announced he would "stand at my watchpost and station myself on the rampart" while waiting for God to answer his complaints.

The "watchpost" located "on the ramparts" was probably a designated place on the outer wall of the temple complex. It may have been an observation point for keeping track of goings-on in the city or beyond, or it may have been more like a special prayer room where people went in hopes of receiving a divine vision.

Waiting for an answer (2:2-4)

Suspense builds for the reader. As Habakkuk stubbornly waited, God gave

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instructions before delivering the actual response.

God put Habakkuk on alert that he would in fact receive a vision, and that he was to "write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it" (v. 2, NRSV).

This verse is subject to multiple translations and thus exceedingly difficult to interpret. The NRSV follows a "billboard" approach, assuming that Habakkuk was to write the vision on large tablets, perhaps of wood, in such plain fashion that even someone running by would be able to read the message easily. It is likely that few of Habakkuk's contemporaries could read, but if a large sign had been posted beside the road, its meaning would quickly become known.

"Make it plain" does not require the sense of writing in large letters. When the word is used elsewhere in scripture, it deals with explaining or writing a clear message that people can understand (Deut. 1:5 and 27:8).

Some translations assume that the engraved tablets would be of a more normal size, but written so clearly that a reader's eyes could quickly "run" across the text: "so one may easily read it" (HCSB).

A few interpreters have regarded "run" as a metaphor for life, just as one's "walk" is used to indicate daily behavior. "That the one who reads it may run" (NAS95, similar to the KJV) might be understood as "that one who reads it may live" according to God's way.

A final approach is to regard the verb "run" as a reference to a messenger or runner who is sent to proclaim a message through the land. Understanding the verse this way, God would be instructing Habakkuk to write the vision plainly so a messenger could easily read it, then run off to deliver the message. The NIV, for example, has "make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it."

Whatever nuance we apply to

the verse, the main intent is clear: Habakkuk is to write what he sees in such a clear way that others can read it, understand it, and respond to it.

Habakkuk is kept waiting through v. 3, which speaks of the revelation as something yet to come. Habakkuk wanted God to judge the evil Babylonians and to do it *now*. God insisted that judgment on evil would be sure, but could not be rushed or demanded by humans, even prophets. It would happen in God's own time.

The vision, when it finally arrives, is short and simple. One can look at the proud (the word could mean something like "swelled up") and see that "their spirit is not right within them" (v. 4a). Wrong-spirited people will eventually fall, as v. 5 indicates: "the arrogant will not endure."

In contrast, the righteous are called to live in faithfulness to God's way, which makes for a right spirit. These few words are the most remembered piece of Habakkuk's prophecy, as Paul picked up the Greek translation of the verse and made it a cornerstone of his doctrine of salvation by faith.

In Habakkuk's prophecy, however, the emphasis is not on faith as a system of belief, and the word should be translated as "faithfulness" rather than "faith." 📖 God's call is not for the Hebrews "to have faith" in the sense of believing that God exists or agreeing that God's way is best. The call is for the righteous (who already believe) to live faithfully, believing that God is also faithful.

"To live," then, is both a command and a promise. The righteous are called to live with faithful integrity that honors God despite the negative circumstances that surround them. Arrogant folk who oppress others are bound to fall, but those who live faithfully are on the path to enduring life.

As we bemoan the state of the world or suffer painful days, are we able to trust in God and remain faithful through it all, trusting that justice will be done, albeit in God's own time? 📖

Habakkuk would hope so. **BT**

Bible Study

Haggai 1:15b-2:9

with Tony W. Cartledge

Nov. 10, 2013

I Will Fill This House with Splendor

Have you ever been involved in a church when there was a building program going on? Whether it's the construction of a new building or the renovation of an old one, capital improvement projects tend to consume a lot of time, energy and money.

Both buildings and renovations can also spark opposition. Some people don't like change, others argue that it's not a good time, and there are always those who quibble with design elements from interior molding to the style of the steeple.

Building projects can be discouraging – but also terrific times of cooperation, camaraderie and community growth.

If Haggai were living today, he could find work as a motivational speaker or church building consultant. He knew how to read the needs of his congregation, and speak to the heart of the matter in a straightforward way.

A discouraging time (1:15b-2:3)

The book of Haggai is unique among the prophets because, rather than being a disjointed series of undated oracles, it is a straightforward third-person account of Haggai's preaching, with each sermon or speech precisely dated. All of Haggai's sermons are related to the second year of the reign of Darius I, which would have been 520 BCE, though we have no way of knowing if his preaching was limited to that year. ⚓

Haggai's earliest preaching (1:1-11) related to the importance of rebuilding



the temple, a task that had begun more than 15 years earlier, but had not been completed. In his first sermon, Haggai castigated the people for building paneled houses for themselves while allowing the temple to remain in ruins. Economic struggles and opposition from neighboring provinces had halted all progress on rebuilding the temple, and as the people focused on their own needs, the state of the temple grew to seem less important.

Haggai declared that rebuilding the temple was a necessary indicator of faithfulness to God and thus a doorway to future hope and blessing. For once, a sermon was an unqualified success: we learn that “The LORD stirred up the spirit” of Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and “the remnant of the people,” so that “they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God” (1:14).

About a month later, however, as the hard work of clearing the site and laying a new foundation was underway, the people became discouraged. Furthermore, some of the elderly folk

who remembered the former temple complained that the new building would be too small or less grand than its predecessor. ⚓

As the complaining became infectious, Haggai addressed the situation with his second sermon (2:1-9), this time offering words of encouragement and hope.

Speaking to the king, the high priest, and the people, Haggai asked “Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?” (2:3).

At first glance, it may appear that Haggai was being critical of the building efforts, complaining that the project was too small. More likely, however, he was reminding the people that they were doing good and important work, and should not be dismayed by naysayers who acted as if the project was worthless.

We should keep in mind that Haggai's sermon would have taken place 66 years after the former temple had been destroyed, and very few

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people in that day lived to be 70 years old. Even those who had seen the temple would probably have been children when they saw it, and may have remembered it as being far grander than it actually was.

An encouraging word (2:4-5)

Haggai encouraged the people with allusions to the Exodus and with direct speech. Addressing the governor, the high priest, and “the remnant of the people,” Haggai encouraged each one to “take courage” (NRSV), literally, to “be strong” (2:4).

The words are reminiscent of God’s commands to Joshua after Moses died. Three times in the space of five verses, God told Joshua to “be strong and courageous” (Josh. 1:5-9). The third of those has close parallels to Haggai’s speech. “Be strong and courageous,” God commanded Joshua. “Do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

After calling on the people to “be strong” and to “work, for I am with you,” Haggai added “My spirit abides among you; do not fear” (2:5b). In both texts, the antidote to fear is the presence of God’s spirit, which was not dependent on the presence of a temple.

Prior to the exile, the people of Jerusalem had often pointed to the temple as the symbol of God’s presence with them, but Haggai wanted the people to know that God’s Spirit was present and working, even though the temple remained unfinished.

Christian believers also have assurance that God’s Spirit has come to live in the hearts and minds of believers. Jesus’ many promises concerning the Holy Spirit, along with the stories of Pentecost (Acts 2) and of God’s Spirit being poured out on Gentiles believers (Acts 10), are two important reminders that we are never alone.

No matter how discouraged we may feel or how dire our circumstances may seem, God’s Spirit is present with us and enables us to press ahead.

An amazing promise (2:6-9)

As Haggai sought to inspire confidence and to spur the people on in the task of rebuilding the temple, he proclaimed a God-given vision of hope. One day soon, he said, God would “shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land” (2:6) – cosmic upheavals pointing to a new age God would bring.

But the created order would not be the only thing shaken. Haggai declared that God had told him “I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts” (2:7).

As Jerry Lee Lewis would say, there’d be “a whole lotta shakin’ goin’ on”!

All of the world’s treasures, whether silver or gold, ultimately belong to God. Haggai saw a time when all such treasures would be returned to their rightful owner, as if the lands surrounding Jerusalem were to be rolled into a cone and shaken so that all the world’s riches would fall upon the temple complex (2:8).

As a result, the “latter splendor” of the temple would be greater than the former glory remembered by the old hands who had seen the first edition (2:9a). What is more important, however, is the closing promise of the oracle: “and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts” (2:9b).

There is no guarantee that faithfulness leads to wealth, and this verse should not be used as a proof text for the “prosperity gospel.” The word translated as “prosperity” by the NRSV is *shalôm*, a rich word that describes a state of wholeness or well-being, and is often translated as “peace”.

The coming magnificence of the temple could be a testimony of the people’s love for God, but the promise of peace and well-being was a testimony of God’s love for the people.

Haggai’s prediction that the glory of the second temple would exceed that of the first came to pass, in a sense, more than 500 years later. Herod the Great, known for his impressive building projects, undertook a decades-long renovation of the temple that expanded its courts, raised its height, paved the courts with marble, and covered the exterior with white marble and gold.

This was not really the fulfillment of Haggai’s promise, however. Like the eschatological promises of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Jesus (Mark 13, Matthew 24, Luke 21) and the Revelations of John, this promise looks to a future age when God brings history to a close and brings heaven to earth.

Haggai’s hope of peace also reflects the words of Isa. 2:2-4 and Mic. 4:1-4, both of which anticipate the nations streaming to Jerusalem in a harmonious new age when weapons of war will be converted to tools for farming.

Although the last age has yet to arrive, some would argue that Haggai’s promise has been fulfilled in a metaphorical sense, as the crucifixion of Christ (accompanied by a shaking of the earth, according to Matt. 27:51) opened the doors of salvation to people of all nations.

In this view, the literal flow of silver and gold into a physical temple becomes an even more valuable stream of people from all nations coming into the church, enriching the community of faith to the glory of God in a way that goes beyond any edifice of human construction.

Haggai’s pep talk to the people of Israel may speak to modern believers, as well. As Haggai’s audience stood surrounded by the fallen stones of their ruined temple, it is easy for us to be discouraged by the disarray we see in the world, the nation or the church. We can be dismayed by the state of our homes, our families or our finances.

If Haggai were here, he would call us by name and tell us to be strong, to keep working, and to not be afraid. We can do that because God’s Spirit is with us, leading always forward toward the day when all is at peace. **BT**

YOUTH

November 3 — November 24, 2013

Youth lessons are made possible through the generous support of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation.

Seriously?!

Habakkuk 1:1-2:1-4

Do you ever hear news and think, "There is no way! I can't believe this is happening." And the longer you look, the more you think about it, the more you Google to find information, the more flustered you are by the situation.

It's nothing new to have a feeling of shock and awe about what is going on in the world around us. Habakkuk felt the same way, and as a priest had no qualms speaking out to God.

After the book of the law was rediscovered, Habakkuk had hope that needed changes would come to the land — bringing fairness and justice. But these hopes were lost when King Josiah was killed, and thoughts of compassion evaporated. The rich and powerful went back to their old ways — taking advantage of others.

Habakkuk pleads to God for answers. He doesn't necessarily want to know when they will come, but that God will do something to restore justice and make things right. Habakkuk raises his voice for those who, because of their position in life, fear to raise their voices.

God answers the cry from Habakkuk and tells him to look beyond his country to notice what is happening in nearby lands; the Chaldeans are conquering and will come after those who continue to commit these injustices.

But Habakkuk is not a patient man and continues to complain. God instructs him to write about the coming conquerors so that the entire nation can see. Habakkuk is to call the people back to faithfulness in this time that seems hopeless, because God is indeed faithful.

NOVEMBER 3

Think About It:

When times are tough, do you rely on your own strength or do you continue to have faith in God's strength?

Make a Choice:

Hope or despair? These are two choices when life becomes difficult. As followers of Christ we know God brings newness and life. How will you choose to be hopeful when life becomes difficult?

Pray:

God of hope, help us to remember your care for us when times are difficult. Forgive us when we forget you are at work for justice in our world.

Motivation Matters

Haggai 1:15b-2:9

Motivational speakers usually fall into one of two categories: 1) really bad or 2) really good. The really bad motivational speakers seem to be stuck in the past, try too hard to be funny, and try to pull on your heartstrings. The really good motivational speakers seem genuine and focused, and they seem to be talking only to you when you are in a room full of people. When they are done, you would run through a brick wall for them. Haggai was one of the really good speakers, and his pep talk to the people of Israel can still motivate us today.

Like any motivational speaker, Haggai is brought in when the crowd needs a little push to get them going again. The rebuilding of the temple had begun 15 years ago

but is moving at a snail's pace. Haggai reminds the people of the good and important work they are doing and encourages them to forge ahead.

He quiets the naysayers by reminding them that the work is not too small because they are working out of their faithfulness to God. He builds up his people by comparing them to those who had been part of the Exodus, giving them the same charge that was heard then: "Be strong and courageous."

Haggai's speech reminds the people that there is no need to fear, since God's spirit is among them. He describes a God-given vision of what is to come: a wonderful day when God will restore their land and riches. There should be no surprise that the temple turns out to be miraculous!

NOVEMBER 10

Think About It:

How is your world a mess? Do you dwell in the problems, or do you look ahead and work forward with expectation that God will help you to make things better?

Make a Choice:

What is the driving force in your life? Is it a search for success or a hope for wealth, or is it the spirit of God that is within you? One of these will fail you, while the other is never ceasing.

Pray:

God, we come to you tired and troubled. Renew our energy and empower us to bring your hope and change to the world.



Youth Lessons by **David Cassady** and online youth teaching resources (at nurturingfaith.net) by **Jeremy Colliver** build off of the Bible lessons by Tony Cartledge.

Good Things!

Malachi 3:13-4:3

How many times have you heard the saying, "Cheaters never win"? Sometimes we hear it when we feel like we've been wronged; when we've done the right thing and still not come out on top. We may laugh at this phrase because it is overused, but also because it seems like cheaters actually do win. They seem to get the trophies, the money, the fame and the ease of life that comes with winning. Malachi says something similar to his listeners, but then he follows it up with "... and here is how you win as well."

Malachi is the last book of the Christian Old Testament. It is the last voice we hear before we read the story of Jesus. It seems appropriate to be the last book as Malachi preaches of God's work preparing

for the future. When you turn the page and begin to read the story of Jesus, Malachi's prophecy seems fulfilled.

For those hearing Malachi, it may not have been so easy to see the hope in his prophecies. They were a mixture of judgment and hope, with the judgment seeming nearby while the hope seemed far away. Malachi claimed hope's certainty for those who would remain faithful and honor God.

Malachi also didn't shy away from highlighting those who would receive judgment. He spoke out against those who spoke against God. He spoke out against those who challenged God. He spoke out against those who questioned the wisdom of obedience. Malachi understood that these were natural responses, but he saw the danger in these attitudes.

NOVEMBER 17

Think About It:

How does the hope for God setting things right help people to make it through tough times? Can you think of someone who lives this way?

Make a Choice:

Malachi speaks to an issue we face today: What do we expect from God? Do we follow God for what we can get from God? Or, do we follow God because we know it will lead to a better world for everyone?

Pray:

Offer to God the tough places in your life, and give thanks for the hope God provides. Ask to be useful in bringing God's hope to others.

Shepherds that Lead

Jeremiah 23:1-8

The only time most of us think about shepherds is during the Christmas season – perhaps when we see the porcelain figurines of a nativity set or the live shepherds in a play. We just don't have a reason to think a lot about shepherds in modern life. We do, however, think about those who are our leaders.

Certain names and faces automatically pop into our minds when we hear the word "leaders." There probably wouldn't be many shepherds on our lists, but "shepherding" might be a characteristic we would use to describe great leaders. When Jeremiah spoke to the leaders of his day, the kings, he reminded them of this sort of leadership and what it meant for their kingdom.

Jeremiah doesn't waste any time

letting the kings know what he thinks about them or what God thinks about them. Instead, Jeremiah accuses the kings of scattering their flock because of their poor leadership. He informs the kings that God will remember their inaction and that there will be consequences for their choices.

Jeremiah also brings a message for the people that had been forgotten. He lets them know that they will be gathered back together and that their future will be brighter. When they are gathered, there will be a shepherd king who will lead them and care for them. This king will rule with justice and righteousness and be from the line of David. God will restore the promised line to the throne and with him the salvation of Israel.

NOVEMBER 24

Think About It:

We all will have the opportunity to lead others at some point in our life. What type of leader will you be? Toward what will you lead others?

Make a Choice:

Whether or not you see yourself as a leader, you can still be like a shepherd to others, offering care, support and protection. How will you choose to live?

Pray:

O God, we thank you for those in our life who have shepherded us, and we seek your will as we shepherd others.

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Malachi 3:13-4:3

Nov. 17, 2013

With Healing on His Wings

Do you ever get frustrated because you work hard and try to do what is right, but see others who are less ethical but more prosperous? Malachi confronted a people like that, and others who had gone a step further: they concluded that there was no point in following God if their religious practice did not also bring tangible rewards.

It's not uncommon for people to approach faith with the attitude of "What's in it for me?" Truth be known, many of us became Christians or joined the church precisely for that purpose, wanting to gain heaven and avoid hell.

When tragedy strikes or hard times come, we may think God is treating us unfairly and lose faith because we expected divine protection or material wealth. Many believers lean toward the "prosperity gospel" that is particularly prominent among charismatic television preachers, believing that God has promised material wealth in this world if only we are faithful enough.

A surface reading of Malachi – especially the famous passage about tithing in 3:10 – has contributed to this, but Malachi has much more to say about what we should expect from God.

Charge and response (3:13-15)

Malachi is not the latest book in the Old Testament to be written, but its canonical position puts it as the last book in the "Book of the Twelve," the last of the prophets and the last word in the Old Testament. ⬇️⬇️

Malachi stands as a lone messenger

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



Malachi 4:2a –
"But for you who revere my name
the sun of righteousness shall rise,
with healing in its wings."

during a time of spiritual drought, calling on the largely secular and skeptical residents of Judah to be faithful to God. His favorite way of doing this is through "disputations" that challenge the people with both judgment and hope. ⬇️⬇️

Although God's promises may have seemed slow in coming, Malachi argued that they were certain – but intended only for those who remained faithful and honored God properly. In his short book, Malachi puts particular emphasis on showing faithfulness to God through worship and support of the temple, through respecting marriage vows, and through practicing social justice.

In today's text, Malachi speaks directly to people whose murmuring revealed a bad attitude toward God. He called them out, warned them of impending judgment, and urged them to be more like the steadfast few who continued to worship God faithfully.

Malachi charged that the people had "spoken harsh words" against the LORD. Though it appears as an adverb in translation, the word "harsh"

is part of the verb in Hebrew (3:13). Literally, it reads: "they are strong (or hard, harsh) against me, your words." The TEV and the NLT try to catch the meaning by paraphrasing it as "you have said terrible things about me."

Malachi mimicked the people's challenging response: "Yet you say, 'How have we spoken against you?'" (3:13).

The heart of the issue is found in this charge: "You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command ...?'" (v. 14a). ⬇️

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah had predicted that times of great blessing would result from rebuilding the temple, but the temple had been rebuilt and the anticipated age of prosperity had not come. ⬇️

Meanwhile, the people had seen arrogant aristocrats prosper and even "put God to the test" with no ill effects (v. 16). The implication is that some were brash enough to openly challenge God to punish them for their bad behavior – but weren't zapped by lightning or stricken by disease.

So, the people wondered: "What's

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the point of being so obedient? It's vain to serve God!" Those were harsh words indeed – the word translated "vain" is precisely the same term used to warn against taking God's name in vain in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:7, Deut. 5:11).

Maybe they had kicked the dry ground at harvest time or taken stock of their dwindling supplies and wondered whether it was worth taking yet another sacrifice and more tithes to Jerusalem when they hadn't seen any payoff for their faithfulness.

Maybe we have done the same thing. Most of us don't expect God to make us rich, but we do tend to have unwritten expectations that God will provide some modicum of care for us. When we face an unexpected tragedy, lose a job, face divorce, get really sick or have trouble paying the bills, we also may think that God has let us down and wonder what's the point of praying, attending worship or supporting the church financially.

While such a response is understandable – even natural – Malachi considered it to be dangerous.

Fortunately, it wasn't the only response.

Revering and remembering (3:16-18)

A word of hope enters with the next verse. Not everyone had given up on God. There were still some "who revered the LORD." The word "revered" is the common word for "fear" (as in the KJV), but it can also carry the meaning of respect or honor.

"Those who revered the LORD spoke with one another," Malachi said (3:16a). We'd like to know what they talked about, but Malachi does not tell us. Perhaps they spoke to encourage each other, or to plan some strategy for keeping faith alive or encouraging others to repent.

Whatever they said, it was pleasing to God, who listened in on their conversation and had a "book of remembrance" written to record those who honored and thought upon God's name. This may refer to a divine judgment book bearing

the names of the righteous, though some think it refers to a book of instruction, recording the words and deeds of the righteous from which others could read and learn. ⚡

To those who remained faithful, Yahweh renewed the covenant promises of old, declaring that they would be God's "special possession" and would be spared at the time of judgment, "on the day when I act" (3:17).

The word for "special possession" is covenant language. It appears first in Exod. 19:5, where God told Moses that Israel could enter into a covenant that would make them God's "treasured possession out of all the peoples," a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation." ⚡

When the author of 1 Peter claimed that God's covenant extended in a new way to Christian believers, he reflected both Exod. 19:5-6 and Mal. 3:17 in saying "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9, NET).

To people who were frustrated by a state of affairs in which evil men prospered while the faithful saw no reward, Malachi promised that a day of judgment would come in which the wicked would be destroyed and the righteous preserved. "Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked," he said, "between one who serves God and one who does not serve him" (3:18).

Judgment and healing (4:1-3)

Malachi called up metaphorical language to describe the impending judgment, when "all the arrogant and all evildoers" would be like stubble burned in an oven, leaving "neither root nor branch" (4:1). ⚡

The reference to fire may have

contributed to the concept of hell that developed later on, but here it describes an immediate obliteration, not an eternal flame in which souls continue to suffer.

While the wicked are slated for destruction, those "who revere my name" have much brighter prospects. For the faithful, Malachi said, "the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings," bringing such joy that the God-fearers would skip about like young calves released from a stall to stretch their legs (4:2). ⚡

Malachi's depiction of God is surprising: Israel's neighbors all worshipped the sun, and in Egyptian art the sun god was typically portrayed as a winged disk. Biblical writers typically avoided solar imagery for God in order to avoid any confusion, but Malachi boldly adapted the image to his own purposes in his promise of a better day.

The image of the wicked turning to ash and the righteous leaping like calves maintains the metaphor but takes on a more human aspect in the closing verse, which promises that the righteous would tread on the wicked who had once walked all over the poor, for they would "be ashes under the soles of your feet" (4:3).

Like several other biblical writers, Malachi extends the notion of blessing and cursing from this age to the next. If things seem topsy-turvy in the present, with the wicked prospering while the righteous see no reward, one has only to wait until the judgment, when God will set all things right.

Believers who cling to the prosperity gospel will not find this promise to be very satisfying. Those who serve God for higher purposes, however, may be more willing to accept trials and tribulations. They expect no special favors in this life, but trust in God for a brighter future.

A text like this should leave readers thinking about their own faith and what they expect from God. Do we worship God for what we can get out of it, or do we follow Jesus because we believe it is right and will help to make the world a better place?

What are you thinking? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Jeremiah 23:1-8

Nov. 24, 2013

Poor Shepherds and Grand Hopes

Political leaders can have a huge influence on the health and well-being of the people in their countries. The news is replete with examples of heartless dictators who think nothing of killing their own citizens, or elected leaders who cater to lobbyists or special interest groups who line their campaign coffers with cash. On the other hand, some leaders truly care for all their constituents and work toward a just and prosperous society.

For good or bad, political leaders are the shepherds of society.

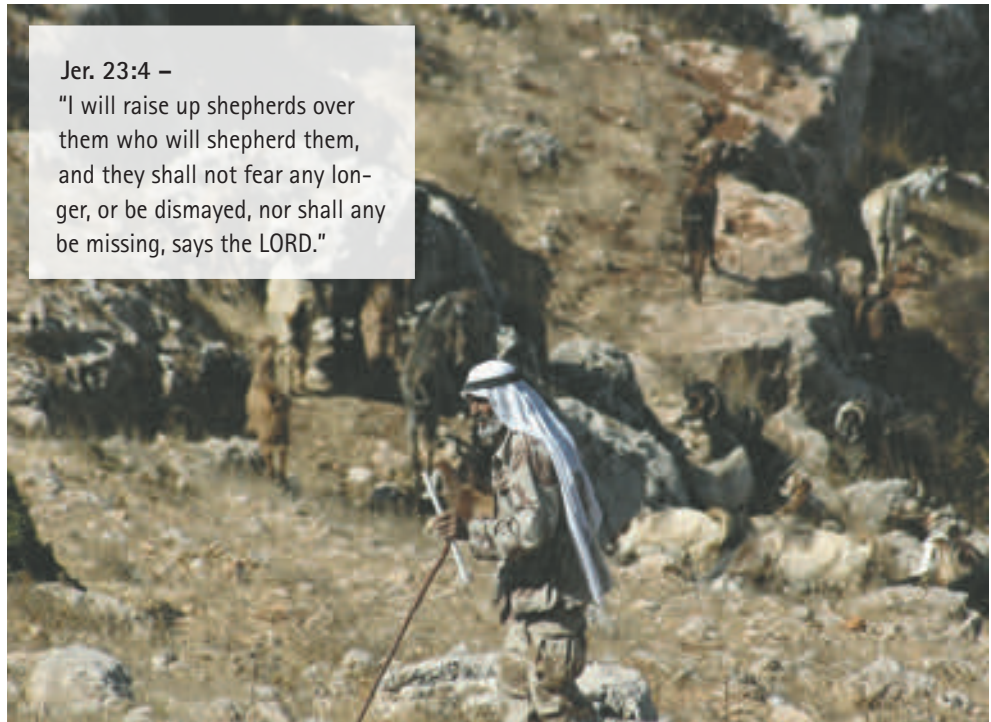
On a hot day in the rocky hills of Gilead several years ago, I watched a local shepherd go about his work with a flock of shaggy goats. It was a bit disconcerting, given that the man was wearing desert camouflage army fatigues along with sandals and a flowing white headdress that set off his dark face and bushy beard. He carried a shepherd's crook no taller than a walking stick, and when he wanted to draw an outlier closer to the herd, he would throw a rock to the other side of the wandering goat, chasing it back.

I don't know if he was a good shepherd or a bad shepherd, but he appeared to be doing an effective job.

That was not the case with a string of kings over the ancient nation of Judah, and the prophet Jeremiah called them to task for it, describing them as shepherds who scattered the flock rather than uniting them.

Jer. 23:4 –

"I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD."



Shepherds both bad and good (vv. 1-4)

Today's text begins with a summary statement about the country's run of ineffective kings. Jeremiah pronounces woe upon them, describing the kings as shepherds "who destroy and scatter the sheep" of God's pasture (v. 1). 🇺🇸 🇺🇸

Jeremiah's words drip with sarcasm. If he had spoken them today, he would probably use his fingers to make "air quotes" while speaking of "the 'shepherds' who 'shepherd' my people Israel" (v. 2).

The oracle of judgment against the derelict rulers whose "shepherding" had not only scattered the sheep but also driven them away is found in a pointed wordplay: the shepherds had failed to "attend" to their flock with care, and so God would "attend" to them with a suitable punishment. 🇺🇸

But God would also attend to the people as the kings had not. Jeremiah promised that God would gather the scattered remnants of the flock and bring them home, where they would be fruitful and multiply (v. 3).

Notice an interesting switch in language: While v. 2 charges the reckless shepherd-kings with scattering and driving the people away, in v. 3 Yahweh speaks of bringing them back "out of all the lands where I have driven them." 🇺🇸 🇺🇸

Jeremiah's terminology suggests that, while God had driven the people into exile, it was done in part because the kings had inspired them to grow increasingly corrupt, setting an example of injustice or irreligion that the people had followed, to their ruin.

Even when things looked bleak, the prophets typically held to the hope that a "remnant" of faithful people would remain, and would be restored to their homeland in Israel. Thus, the oracle of judgment gives way to three oracles of salvation.

In the first (vv. 4-5), Jeremiah proclaimed a day when God would gather the scattered children of Abraham, described as "my flock." 🇺🇸 They would be free not only to return home, but also to "be fruitful and multiply," an apparent reference to both creation (Gen. 1:28) and to earlier promises made to the patriarchs Abraham

Additional background information online where you see the "Digging Deeper" icon



Resources to teach adult and youth classes

are available at
nurturingfaith.net

and Jacob (Gen. 17:1-8, 20; 28:3; 48:4). This gives to the promise a significance bordering on the cosmic: a day when God's fondest hopes for both Israel and for creation would be realized.

At that time, Jeremiah promised, God would raise up shepherd kings who would care for the people in such a way that they would no longer be afraid, be dismayed or go missing (v. 4).

A righteous branch (vv. 5-6)

With v. 5 we come to a separate oracle, one that does not speak of multiple kings, but of one coming king who will rule with justice and righteousness. The metaphor also shifts from that of a shepherd to the sprouting of a new branch. ♣

The same oracle appears again in 33:14-16, with minor differences, and the prophecy is portrayed as a direct word from God: "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch" (v. 5). ♣ ♣

What does David have to do with it? In 2 Samuel 7:1-14, God had pledged to David that one of his descendants would always sit on the throne. The promise was to last "forever," but it included a provision that those who led Israel wrongly would be subject to discipline.

Thus, when the nation went into exile and no king ruled over Israel, the prophets were not disheartened, interpreting defeat and exile as the fulfillment of the stipulation that sinful rulers could be punished "with blows inflicted by human beings" (2 Sam. 7:14). They assumed that the men administering the beating were the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

Israel's theologians, including the prophets, saw the exile as God's discipline for their errant ways, but they held onto hope that a day would come when God would raise up a descendant of David – a shoot from the stump of Jesse (David's father) who would "reign as king and deal wisely," and who would "execute justice and righteousness in the land" (v. 5b).

As a result, both Judah and Israel

would "be saved" and "live in safety" (v. 6a).

The new king, Jeremiah said, would be named "Yahweh is our righteousness" ("the LORD is our righteousness," NRSV). ♣ The name, *tsidqēnu* in Hebrew, may have been intended as a wordplay on Judah's last king, whose throne name was Zedekiah ("Yahweh is righteous").

Jeremiah may have been implying that the coming righteous Branch would be a righteous or legitimate king in a way that Zedekiah never was.

Haggai and Zechariah would later have high hopes that Zerubbabel, a descendant of David who was serving as governor when the temple was rebuilt, would prove to be the "righteous Branch." He never became king, however, and earned no notable distinction even as governor.

From a Hebrew perspective, the messianic "righteous Branch" has yet to arrive, but for Christians, the promise was fulfilled in Jesus, a descendant of David through whom all people – not just Israel and Judah – can be saved and learn from his wise and righteous rule how to practice true justice.

A new exodus (vv. 7-8)

A third oracle of salvation builds on the previous two, declaring that the gathering of the peoples from their diaspora would go down in history as an event even more memorable than the exodus from Egypt.

In Israel's corporate consciousness, no memory was more indelible than the oft-told story of the exodus, when God sent Moses to lead the descendants of Jacob from their captivity in Egypt (Exodus 3-12). The event so identified Israel with Yahweh that it could be used as the first part of a common oath formula: "As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt ..."

Something like "may God do so and so to me if I don't do such and such" would have followed. The oath calls the deity to witness a firm promise, with the understanding that the oath-taker expected divine punishment if he or she failed to fulfill his or her promise.

Instead of swearing by the God of the exodus, however, Jeremiah saw a day when people would begin their oaths with "As the LORD lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them ..." (v. 8).

Some Jewish and dispensationalist interpreters see the re-establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 as a fulfillment of the concluding promise "Then they shall live in their own land."

We should be careful in making such an assumption, however. Only a small fraction of the world's Jews live in Israel, and one is hard pressed to identify the secular State of Israel with the covenant people of Yahweh. Such security as the residents of that fractious land enjoy is bought largely with the aid of many billions of dollars in American military aid, not the leadership of a messianic king.

The promises found in today's text look toward a day that has not yet arrived, and that may not arrive in precisely the form that the prophets envisioned.

From a Christian perspective, we still look forward to a day when the promises will be fulfilled in the hope of John's Revelation that the present heaven and earth will pass away and a "new Jerusalem" will replace them, a place in which God and all of God's people will dwell in eternal peace and security.

That day is not yet. In the meantime, on whatever level we "shepherd" others, we are called to practice justice and attend compassionately to the needs of God's people. As we trust God to deal with the wicked in God's own way and God's own time, our calling is to give attention to the "righteous Branch" we believe has come, choosing to live as Jesus lived and love as Jesus loved, bringing the hope of heaven to earth. **BT**

Classifieds

Senior Pastor: Temple Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., seeks a pastor with a church-planter mindset desiring to help revitalize the congregation and expand its reach into the community and beyond in accordance with the Great Commission. We conduct primarily traditional services with some contemporary elements. Temple is mission-minded; supports missions locally and globally; and is active in the Raleigh Baptist Association, North Carolina Baptist State and Southern Baptist conventions, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and Woman's Missionary Union. We have a strong commitment to the priesthood of the believer, autonomy of the local congregation, separation of church and state, and soul competency. Our church ordains men and women as deacons, and both men and women hold leadership positions. We average 100 in Sunday school attendance and 150 in worship. The congregation desires a pastor especially gifted in preaching, teaching and pastoral care, with a passion for reaching the lost. Also, the successful candidate should relate well to all age groups. A seminary degree is required, with a minimum of five years in a successful pastorate preferred. Send letters of interest and résumés to Pastor Search Committee, Temple Baptist Church, 1417 Clifton St., Raleigh, NC 27604. Deadline for submission is Nov. 1.

Youth Pastor: Trinity Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas is interviewing candidates for the position of youth pastor. We are prayerfully seeking a talented, mature, and passionate minister who loves middle and high school students and their families. For more information, see trinitybaptist.org. Please send résumés to lhollon@trinitybaptist.org or to Les Hollon, senior pastor, Trinity Baptist Church, 319 E. Mulberry Ave., San Antonio, TX 78212.

Associate Minister to Chowan University: Candidates should possess a Master of Divinity or equivalent degree and have at least two years ministry experience with university-age students. The successful candidate will demonstrate a heart for ministry, excellent interpersonal skills (both written and oral), counseling abilities, and the ability to plan and implement ministry programs and lead small groups effectively. Multicultural experience is a plus. Send letter of application (including salary requirements) and current résumé to Human Resources, Attention: Campus Minister Search, Chowan University, Murfreesboro, NC 27855 or to hintoj@chowan.edu. Application review begins immediately and continues until the position is filled. Interested candidates are urged to visit our website, chowan.edu. Inquiries will be kept in strictest confidence. Chowan University, an EOC, encourages women and minorities to apply.

Gwen Brown died Aug. 27 at age 59. She was founding pastor of Cornerstone Church in Snellville, Ga., a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship congregation she began as a home Bible study in 2005. She was a graduate of Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology, where she taught spiritual formation as an adjunct professor, and president of Baptist Women in Ministry of Georgia.

Dock Hollingsworth is pastor of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, coming from Mercer's McAfee School of Theology where he was assistant dean, assistant professor of leadership and supervised ministry, and executive director of the Center for Teaching Churches.

David Hughes has retired as pastor of First Baptist Church of Winston-Salem, N.C., after 22 years. On Oct. 1, he will become executive director of the Transforming Center.

Tripp Martin is pastor of First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala., coming from Vineville Baptist Church in Macon, Ga.

Claude McBride died Aug. 23 in Athens, Ga., at age 81. He was pastor emeritus of Athens' Milledge Avenue Baptist Church where he served for 20 years beginning in 1964. A University of Georgia alumnus, he worked in alumni relations and, at the request of football coach Vince Dooley, served as the team's chaplain for decades. Early in his career he was a journalist with

Minister of Music and Worship: Shades Crest Baptist Church, a 1200-member CBF/SBC congregation in Birmingham, Ala., is seeking an experienced minister to lead a multi-faceted music and worship ministry. SCBC values traditional worship that is blended with contemporary elements in order to honor God and meet the needs of people. The successful candidate should have a graduate degree in music, experience in leading a music program including fully graded choirs and orchestra, and a commitment to serve on a pastoral team. If interested, send résumé and cover letter by Nov. 15 to scbcmusicsearch@gmail.com or to Search Committee, Shades Crest Baptist Church, 452 Park Ave., Birmingham, AL 35226.

In the Know

his hometown newspaper, the *Columbus (Ga.) Ledger*, and was part of a team whose coverage earned a Pulitzer Prize in 1955.

Paul Mullen is minister of congregation care at Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Jeff Summers will end an eight-year pastorate of Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., the end of October to become pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Daytona, Fla.

Sandra Talton retired after 19 years as minister of worship, music and arts at Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, NC.

John D. W. Watts died July 21 in Penny Farms, Fla. He and his wife, Lee, were Southern Baptist missionaries for 25 years. He taught Old Testament at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, where he was also president (1963-1969). He also served on the faculties of Serampore College in India, Fuller Seminary in California and Southern Baptist Seminary in Kentucky. His extensive work as a biblical scholar included publishing several books and contributing to others. He also served as Old Testament editor for the *Word Biblical Commentary*.

Melissa Willis is minister with children and families at Central Baptist Church of Bearden in Knoxville, Tenn., coming from Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., where she served for 12 years. **BT**

Gifts to Baptists Today

HAVE BEEN RECEIVED

In honor of
E. Leon and Martha T. Smith
from Dr. and Mrs. M.G. Delbridge

In memory of
Katherine Elizabeth Tisdale Pittard
from Roger B. Pittard

In honor of
Baptists Today staff
from Ruth T. Andrew

BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Chattanooga is the major focus of the war this month as the Union solidifies control of the city and environs against the backdrop of infighting among opposing Confederate officers.

Meanwhile, Southern Baptist news editors and pastors sing the praises of the revivals taking place within the Confederate Army. The Central Baptist Association of Alabama's Coosa County meets and, like many other Baptist associations of the South this fall, affirms army missionary work:

.... great good has been, and is now being accomplished through the labors of our missionaries and colporteurs in the armies of the Confederate States in awakening our noble soldiers to their great spiritual interests, and enabling them to enlist in the service of the King Emmanuel ...

Special prayer meetings also take place in some churches. Local church delegates to the Mississippi Baptist Association resolve:

That this Association do most earnestly recommend the churches to meet on the first Lord's day in every month at ten o'clock to offer up special prayer for the success of our cause and the spiritual welfare of our armies.

The United Baptist Association of North Carolina expresses other sentiments shared by many Confederate Baptists:

Resolved, That we as an Association fully endorse the cause of the Southern Confederacy; and we advise all our brethren to discountenance desertion and to inculcate the principle that resistance to a tyrant is loyalty to God.

God is also on the minds of the public and Baptists of the North. U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issues a Thanksgiving Proclamation to be observed on Nov. 26:

150 YEARS AGO

October 1863

I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.

This proclamation is the beginning of an annual national Thanksgiving observance.

Many Baptist congregations of the North embrace Lincoln's call. The Pennsylvania Baptist Convention passes the following resolution, invoking Baptist principles and Christian duty:

Whereas, Our national Government grew out of Baptist polity, exemplified by men of whom Roger Williams was the type at the North, and a little Baptist church near the residence of Thomas Jefferson, from whom he declared he obtained his first ideas of Republican Government, was the type at the South:

Resolved, That we should be derelict to our principles as Baptists, and

unworthy sons of worthy sires, if, in this crisis in our existence, we withheld our support, influence, and sympathy from our Government.

2. That it is our duty, both as citizens and Christians, to speak boldly our sentiments with regard to the causes of the existing rebellion, that ministers should speak boldly on the subject, and that those who take offence at such utterances are unworthy of a place in the Christian church.

3. That we, the members of this Convention, as patriots, as Baptists, and as Christians, do express our unqualified support of our National and State Governments, in their efforts to suppress the present rebellion.

4. That we have occasion for gratitude, that not only the full apostolic proportion of eleven-twelfths of the Christian ministry among us are truly loyal Government supporters, but that the mass of the piety of our churches and the intelligence of our country occupy the same position.

5. That the recent victories at the ballot-box should be accepted with thanksgiving to God, as exhibiting the loyalty of the people, and as an evidence of the continued blessing of God on us as a nation.

6. That in the President's Proclamation of Emancipation, made valid by the exigency which called it forth, and in his recent declaration to abide by it, we see the progress of Christ's kingdom, which will proclaim liberty to all the earth.

7. That we urge the churches throughout the Commonwealth to observe the last Thursday In November next, according to the recommendation of the President, as a day of public Thanksgiving to God.

The appeals to God South and North will only grow in the coming months of war. **BT**

—For a daily log of “This Day in Civil War History,” see civilwarbaptists.com.

By Emily Hull McGee

Does **your church** need Millennials?

National news media outlets have been peppered recently with reports and opinions on the churchgoing habits of Millennials.

Bloggers have rightly identified why this 18- to 35-year-old demographic is leaving churches of all stripes, citing a need to change the substance of churches instead of their style.

Buying Macs for the church office and creating a clever hashtag to use about your church on social media sites will show young people that you're trying, which is good. Your church might even go through a strategic process, identifying that unless you do something about the "black hole" of people in your pews between the high school seniors and the 40-somethings with stable family lives, your church's future is endangered.

Props to you for noticing!

However, before you buy better church coffee or even hire someone to create a ministry with young adults, know this: Your church must be ready and willing to be transformed and forever changed by the passions of 20- and 30-somethings if you intentionally invite them in.

If you believe you need Millennials in your church, prepare for them to ask probing questions about your systems and organizational structures, advocate for the marginalized, demand inclusion for all of God's children, and compel the congregation out the door and toward those who need what Jesus came to give.

If you believe you need Millennials in your church, know that they will ask why you do what you do, and you must have an answer better than "because we've always done it that way."

If you believe you need Millennials in your church, expect them to want a place at the decision-making table in all levels of church life. Make it possible for them to bring their critiques of the church into the church's

systems to lead real and needed change from within. Nominate them to be deacons and committee chairs, but be prepared when they challenge your church's sacred cows.

If you believe you need Millennials in your church, get ready to have hard conversations that will make you uncomfortable about injustices they experience. Marriage equality, the plight of the economically or physically disadvantaged, racial inequities, the stigma of mental health, sexual abuse and issues of sustainability will become regular topics



brought up in Bible studies and asked for during Wednesday night adult-education planning.

If you believe you need Millennials in your church, familiarize yourselves with the realities they're grappling with, such as soaring student loan debts, a crippled economy that directly impacts capacity for independence, a tenuous work/life balance in this demanding 24/7 job market, a rocky path through the life-stage changes into adulthood and faith questions, doubts and raw experiences of suffering that keep them up at night.

If you believe you need Millennials in your church, equip yourselves to risk boldly for the gospel and delight in the Jesus they know and love. Let them inspire you as they become change agents of God's transforming love in the world and in your church.

In the nearly four-and-a-half years I have served as minister to young adults at Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., our young adults have sparked our congregation to revise our membership policy to make room for members coming from other Christian faith traditions, to create an ongoing presence in the impoverished and underserved neighborhood a mile down the street, and to consider actively

how we might engage with marriage equality.

They have even asked that we restructure our organizational architecture to more effectively carry out our church's mission.

In the midst of this change and inevitable church conflict that followed, Highland has welcomed five young adults as deacons, 50 who serve on ministry groups, dozens who become members each year, and hundreds more who connect to our community of faith — all from this 18- to 35-year-old demographic.

And just as much as they've challenged our church, our young adults love it even more. They are teaching our children the songs of faith and our youth the stories of Jesus. They are following the gospel to the ends of the earth, serving the most neglected in our inner cities and in Morocco, Romania, Peru and India.

They're hearing the call of Christ to a life of ministry and bringing their imperfect, hopeful selves to the task. They are giving sacrificially to the church, even if they don't always agree with how the money is spent.

They are listening carefully amidst dissent to the voices of those who have been here for decades. They actually show up at church business meetings — imagine that! — and speak emphatically about our bylaws.

It certainly hasn't been a smooth road, and I trust that our path ahead will continue to ruffle feathers and challenge our church's identity. However, this journey is one that Highland dreamed about, prepared for, committed to and intentionally invited.

If you believe you need Millennials in your church, you are right. And they need your church just as much. **BT**

—Emily Hull McGee is minister to young adults at Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. This column is distributed by Associated Baptist Press.

If you **believe you need Millennials** in your church, equip yourselves to **risk boldly** for the gospel and delight in the Jesus they know and love.

Healthy congregations value evaluation

By Larry L. McSwain

There was a kind of quiet desparation in the voice of the pastor on the telephone call.

“I need some help,” he said softly. “We have been working every way we know how to stem the slow decline of our congregation. How do we decide staff realignments that make sense for our resources?”

Evaluating a congregation or its leaders poses a dilemma for all involved. On the one hand, how are we to improve if we do not know how well we are doing? The other side of the dilemma is determining how much time the evaluation process detracts from other agendas.

Let's be honest. Few of us like evaluation. The same groups of the church who want to evaluate employees may go into overdrive anger at the suggestion someone should evaluate their work as church members or leaders.

None of this resistance, however, eliminates the need for evaluating what we are doing. There can be only one real reason for refusing to invest the time, expertise and expense of evaluation: no accomplishments!

Evaluate the congregation first.

Meaningful evaluation of any individual is rooted in the culture of the seedbed of the Spirit. Imagine a gardener who never examines her plants. Gardens need weeding, cultivating, watering and fertilizing. So do churches. Therefore, both informal and formal evaluation processes are in order.

Numbers are not sacred. Most of the evaluations within a congregation are feelings, reactions and intuitions. These *informal evaluations* may never be recorded as a statistic.

Healthy congregations find ways to bring to the surface informal evaluations. The inclusion of an open-ended questionnaire in a worship folder or a response card can provide feedback to worship planners.

When have you ever evaluated a team or committee meeting? The same process works

in educational classes, forums or special events. If the people attending such gatherings have no suggestions for improvement, it is unlikely much energy will be present.

If pastoral leaders can affirm this kind of feedback from all aspects of church life, a culture of openness will grow. The perception that leaders can “hear” informal evaluations will move informal evaluations into a more direct arena of conversation with pastoral leaders.

A brief week-by-week journal of reaction by leaders of each of the events of the week can



be helpful in reflection on needed changes. It can also provide a review of the cumulative changes made.

Formal evaluations are quantitative. They are easier, too. Any congregation that keeps a record of weekly worship

attendance; counts participants in education, fellowship or mission events; and tracks income each week is engaging in “bottom line” evaluation. How one interprets the trends of such numbers is crucial.

I recommend two forms of congregation-wide evaluations. The first is what I would call a “benchmark” evaluation.

The best instrument I know for benchmark analysis is the U.S. Congregational Life survey, available at uscongregations.org.

Its value is the numerical summary of responses generated on the characteristics of those responding. A computer-generated summary of responses is provided that can be compared to similar congregations in a national sample.

The second form of congregation-wide evaluation is more difficult. Congregations that have developed priorities from strategic thinking can design their own processes of measuring effectiveness.

Those designs might include a survey of the congregation, a collection of responses to open-ended questions gathered from small

groups of the congregation, brief computer-generated surveys individuals can complete online, or an e-mail response design.

Evaluate the staff team.

Formal staff evaluations abound. A helpful bibliography of resources for personnel committee evaluations of staff is available in the book I have written, *The Calling to Congregational Leadership*.

If the staff is organized as a team, with coaching as a primary approach to growth, evaluations should be designed to fit that model. The coaching process could focus on each staff member identifying his or her goals for spiritual growth, plans for leading in areas of responsibility, and commitments to church goals for the coming year.

One model of coaching is more directive than the typical approach to coaching: performance-based coaching. An outcome in a workplace provides the content of the coaching relationship.

Accountability is a part of employment. Effective leading includes effective accountability. This kind of coaching allows the most personal process for the employee, shaping the accountability each will give to the lay leadership of the church.

A summary evaluation of progress for each employee will be provided to a personnel team for feedback and encouragement. The personnel team should affirm major strengths and growth. If problems are identified, they should be communicated clearly, along with requests for a plan for improvement within a stated time frame.

Missional congregations know where they are going. They communicate not only their mission with clarity, but also demonstrate effectiveness in fulfilling it. What an exciting kind of congregation to serve! **BT**

—Larry L. McSwain is retired professor of leadership at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology and a congregational consultant/coach with the Center for Congregational Health.

“**WE YEARN FOR A COMMON SENSE** OF MISSION AND PURPOSE —
THE KIND THAT WELLS UP FROM THE INSIDE AND SPILLS OUT INTO OUR MINISTRY.”

—*Connie Jones*



Deacons from across Georgia, including (front row, left to right) Robin Briggs and Kenza Gumbs of Cornerstone Church in Snellville and Carey Russell of First Baptist Church of Forsyth, participate in a summit that led to the formation of a Baptist Deacon Network to foster relationships and to provide resources. CBF of Georgia photos by ElizaBeth Ruff.

Deacon ministry

Lay leaders talking, networking, seeking spiritual renewal

What comes to mind when one thinks of a Baptist deacon?

Is it that longtime church member who belongs to an exclusive group of men whose approval is required for every idea or expenditure to survive? The caring lay representative who shows up to minister in a time of need?

A layperson who uses his or her spiritual gifts effectively to serve the congregation and beyond? A member's most frequent and direct contact with the church family?

Depending on the Baptist church, it could be any of the above.

The roles and effectiveness of Baptist

deacons are getting some well-deserved attention. In Georgia, events are being held for conversations among and training for deacons, and a Baptist Deacon Network is emerging — in hopes of enhancing the spiritual leadership that deacons provide.

“The shape or form the deacon body uses is less important than the issue of leadership,” said Frank Broome, CBF of Georgia coordinator. “What matters is leadership. If the deacon chair is a good leader, then the deacon body is likely to do well no matter the form.”

Broome said deacons are concerned about two major issues: the spiritual well-being of

the congregation and the institutional health of the church.

“Deacons voice a good bit of concern about numerical decline and spiritual apathy within their congregations,” he said. “There is a desire on the part of deacons to work with their pastors to address these concerns.”

CONVERSATIONS

Daniel Vestal, director of Mercer University's Baugh Center for Baptist Leadership, led a session for deacons as part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia assembly in November 2012. Interest was so strong that a

two-day summit for deacons was planned for April 2013.

“There was incredible energy at the summit among those present,” said Vestal. “They wanted to talk to each other and learn from each other. They came early and left late because they experienced meaningful conversation.”

Vestal expressed a deep conviction that the future of Baptists will be shaped by a spiritual awakening among laity.

“Some of my best friends in ministry have been lay leaders...,” he said. “My hope and prayer is that God would work among us in ways that result in spiritual, theological, ethical and vocational formation among Baptist laity.”

Vestal said it became clear that the Deacons Summit was not to be the end of these discussions.

“They were clear that they wanted more conversation,” he said. “And they showed they were willing to make serious commitments to continue the conversation.”

To that end, CBF of Georgia (cbfga.org) will host sessions for deacons at its upcoming assembly in Augusta, Nov. 3-4. An open meeting for deacons will be held at 4 p.m. on Sunday afternoon with workshop sessions specifically for deacons on Monday.

Interest in these sessions and the ongoing networking is spilling over state lines with those from beyond Georgia planning to attend.

NETWORKING

The Deacons Summit, according to Vestal, revealed a hunger for the spiritual formation of laity and the need for leadership training. While “everybody is busy and congregational life is changing,” there is a desire for conversation and learning among deacon leaders, he said.

As a result, a Baptist Deacon Network was formed. With guidance from Vestal, the network is led by deacons from various churches in Georgia. This model may be adapted by others in the future, he said.

“I believe the Deacon Network can play a leading role in cultivating a heightened awareness of the need for spiritual development among deacon bodies,” said Connie Jones, a deacon at First Baptist Church of Christ in

Macon, Ga., “and offer creative ways to help that happen.”

Jones said that while the “how-to” of lay ministry is important, faith development and relationship building among deacon groups deserve time and attention.

“When it comes to deacon ministry, I think those of us who feel called get excited about serving, but we also harbor the hope, if not the expectation, that serving will deepen and grow our personal faith,” she said. “We yearn for a common sense of mission and purpose — the kind that wells up from the inside and spills out into our ministry.”

The purpose of the network, said Vestal, is to foster and encourage relationships among Baptist deacons and to provide resources that will help them be more fruitful in their church and community.

DEACONS AS MINISTERS

Susan Broome, also a deacon at Macon’s First Baptist Church and a member of the Baptist Deacon Network steering committee, said some deacons have a deep desire to be involved in ministry but question their adequacy for the task.

“Clearly they understand that being an effective minister takes time, maturity, flexibility, and tenacity...,” she said. “We must plan our deacons’ service around their strengths so that they are energized and not burdened by what we ask of them.”

Reasonable expectations are also important, she said.

“We must assure them that we do not expect miracles and that we are not keeping scorecards on them,” she explained. “We must listen to each other and be grateful that others have gifts we do not, and we must tell our own stories so that others can see deacon service as a puzzle that needs each piece to be whole.”

Jones suggested that personal testimony remains a good avenue for spiritual nourishment and community building.

“We need to hear from each other what it means to us personally to serve,” said Jones. “We need to hear stories from our church history that will ground us in the congregation we represent. And we need to hear the larger, biblical story of which we are a part and how

the personal, the congregational and biblical stories are all entwined.”

David Keel, a deacon in First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., and member of the Baptist Deacon Network steering committee, said his discussions with deacons from other churches revealed a shift from administrative functions to “more of a servant role — which is really how the first deacons functioned.”

Some churches, he said, have formed an administrative committee to handle day-to-day operational decisions that free deacons to focus more on ministry. However, that ministry role varies according to how the deacon group is organized, he said.

“Although organized in various ways, the Deacon Family Ministry is still very active in many churches,” said Keel. “Some churches have the deacons responsible for keeping in touch with all members, some with just the resident or ‘active’ members, and others just include the home-bound members.”

Giving ministry attention to these persons is important, he said.

“This can be a valuable and effective ministry, particularly in larger churches where it is very difficult for the pastor and ministerial staff to keep up with all of the members,” he said. “This is just one area where I see an increase in emphasis and deacon involvement.”

Foremost, Keel said, the effective service of a deacon is tied to the person’s personal spiritual commitment and growth.

“Although the exact method of service will differ from church to church, we can be assured that the most successful service will be that which we accomplish while being led by the Holy Spirit,” he said. “We need to remember that being elected a deacon is not an office we hold but a role we need to perform — a role of service for God’s glory, not our own. Keeping our focus on Christ, and desiring to serve him as best we can, will make us all better deacons.”

Keel, too, believes the church’s renewal might come through its laity.

“I feel that today’s deacons, with a renewed commitment of service and obedience, can be the catalyst God can use to start a great spiritual renewal in our churches,” said Keel. “That is how I want to serve as a deacon. That is how I want to be used by God.”

“THE SHAPE OR FORM THE DEACON BODY USES IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP.”

—Frank Broome

“ **THIS CAN BE A VALUABLE AND EFFECTIVE MINISTRY,** PARTICULARLY IN LARGER CHURCHES WHERE IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THE PASTOR AND MINISTERIAL STAFF TO KEEP UP WITH ALL OF THE MEMBERS. ”

—David Keel

PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Bob Patterson, longtime pastor of First Baptist Church of Warm Springs, Ga., who spoke to the Deacons' Summit from his perspective, sees two new trends in deacon ministry. One is related to structure and the other to criteria.

As the issues facing congregations change, so must church leadership, he said. And the challenges are evolving quickly.

“Mark Twain reportedly said in response to a question about history repeating itself, ‘No, but sometimes it does rhyme,’” said Patterson. “Every church in America faces a changing frame of reference. So the ongoing questions about church life have new perspectives.”

In the current “hinge point of history,” Patterson said, some church leaders see change as essential while others are “proudly reactionary and are deeply committed that any change is bad.”

Most churches, he added, are simply paralyzed by change and uncertainty. The careful and competent leadership of both clergy and laity is needed to navigate the current challenges, he said, regardless of how deacon ministry is carried out. And healthy relationships between church staff and lay leaders are essential.

“The role of deacons has long been a disputable part of Baptist church life,” said Patterson. “Relationships in the local church may be the single most important key in being a healthy Christ-like church. Deacon-pastor jokes are only funny in the abstract. In the real world of the local church, conflict between deacons and the pastor and/or staff produces heartache and pain and becomes a major roadblock to healthy church life.”

Concerning deacons, two basic questions arise whenever a new generation moves into leadership, said Patterson: What is the role of deacons? And who should be a deacon?

“Some deacons function just like the Presbyterian Session,” he said. “They ‘run’ the church. This elect-from-below and rule-from-above model is gaining popularity. Any



Bob Patterson, longtime pastor of First Baptist Church of Warm Springs, Ga., talks with deacons about providing pastoral care. He told *Baptists Today* that a decision 14 years ago to elect women as deacons was one of the wisest the congregation has ever made.

decision made outside of the deacons meeting requires their approval to implement or take to the church for the final decision.”

Patterson added that a small but growing number of churches takes the Presbyterian model further by electing “elders” to rule and disbanding deacons or assigning them a caregiving role.

“Many people, bruised and disillusioned by the inner workings of most churches, don’t want anything to do with leadership,” he said. “This model suits them fine until an unwanted direction is taken and they realize they have ceded their voice.”

Other Baptist churches have assigned deacons the role of helping the pastor, he said. They provide care for members of the church and community, partner with the pastor and other leaders in providing servant leadership, and demonstrate the gospel through their lifestyle.

“This is the minority approach,” said Patterson, “but I think the most practical and the most biblical.”

Patterson said he hears an excitement

among younger pastors about empowering the laity.

“Since almost every Baptist church has deacons, talking about empowerment has to be deacon related,” he said. “If the pastor and deacons are committed to a shared servant leadership, that will focus on three basic tasks: caring for members, serving the community and sharing the gospel.”

As to who will serve as deacon, Patterson said two changes are rolling over the church landscape. One opens the ministry for more Christians to serve while the other narrows the field.

“At a recent deacon-training event, many of the attendees were women,” he noted. “The face of deacon ministry is changing with the addition of women. This is a defining decision for most congregations.”

His congregation’s decision 14 years ago to elect women to serve as deacons came from a closer examination of the Scriptures, he said.

“Women brought new energy and a fresh perspective to the deacon body,” he said. “It was one of the best decisions the church has ever made.”

Beyond gender, the other issue is whether the position of deacon is one of honor or service. Is the title of deacon reserved for those with longtime church membership, business experience and prominence in the community?

Patterson noted that a popular 1950s book on deacon ministry warned that churches should use spirituality instead of community prominence and business acumen in selecting deacons.

“Are we starting to expect spiritual maturity from those who serve as deacons?” Patterson asked hopefully.

He was encouraged that a session on developing your personal prayer life was well attended during a recent deacon-training event.

“The personal relationship with Jesus that is nurtured only through spiritual disciplines is being recognized as vital,” said Patterson. “...If this interest among deacons and church members can translate into electing people who are spiritually mature, it would revolutionize church life.” **BT**

Taking a *team* approach

A conversation with **Tom Stocks**, field strategist and deacon team ministry specialist with the Virginia Baptist Mission Board

BT: Many of us have known the “board of deacons” as that small, all-powerful group of men who “run the church.” Not a dollar is spent nor a program planned without the vote of this group. How has that model changed in recent decades in many Baptist churches?

TS: Historically, churches instituted the Board of Deacons approach centered around the concept of “running” the church. A softer translation of this historical model would be to describe it as a group who “administrated the management of the church.”

Whatever description one may use to describe this approach, the image is constant: a group of individuals sitting around a table making decisions regarding the administrating of the church and often under the guise of spiritual leadership.

In the 1960s an approach called the Family Ministry Plan was developed and released to churches that really was an intentional foray into a truer biblical servanthood model of ministry. This concept of ministry called for a deacon to be assigned to care for a number of families as ministry.

The Family Ministry Plan approach was great in theory, but in reality many have discovered it was a set-up for failure. Many veterans of this method have given voice to its apparent, inherent weaknesses: Visits to families in their homes are unwanted. Many church members call the pastor or church secretary when a need arises, not their deacon. Some deacons lack the skill/passion/spiritual giftedness needed in a vast array of ministry opportunities (celebration, bereavement, nursing home and hospital visitation, small jobs requests, casserole ministry, transportation, prayer, fellowship, etc.).

This plan seemingly ends in frustration for many deacons and a lack of consistency across the deacon fellowship.

Most recently the Team Ministry Plan has arrived to offer deacons an opportunity to match their spiritual gifts and passion to leading teams of laity to meet the priority ministry needs of a church.

BT: You’ve advocated for and assisted congregations in moving to a ministry-team model. Why is this a good approach for deacons, ministers and the congregation as a whole?

TS: The strengths of the Team Ministry Approach are evident quickly when instituted with laser focus.

ONE TASK: Instead of being responsible for “everything,” this approach calls for the deacon to find his or her passion and spiritual gift and lean into it. It allows deacons to do what they do and do it well.

FOCUSED TASK: It recognizes that one cannot be everything to everybody and that expectations are realistic and reachable.

TEAM APPROACH: Together, everyone achieves more. It allows room for the team to make sure the goal of ministry is reached and all responsibility does not fall on the shoulders of one person.

USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS OR PASSION: It institutes the biblical reality of God gifting servant leaders with divinely endowed gifts and passions.

LAY INVOLVEMENT: This approach calls for the solicitation of gifted laity to join teams led by deacons to allow for more and far reaching ministry, thereby erasing the old adage that “20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work.”



Tom Stocks

NO FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS:

Ministry needs are met by a team, not by an individual who may be tied up with his or her own life needs.

EQUALITY OF SERVICE: In traditional models, often the well-known and popular folks get the “best” ministry. The team approach meets the need without concern as to “who” has the need.

OWNERSHIP: The team writes its own job description built upon the passion of team members and with excellence as a goal.

BIBLICAL BASIS: Numerous scriptures point to the team approach and use of individual spiritual gifts.

BT: How has the expansion of women deacons impacted congregational life and ministry?

TS: In a nutshell it seems that more ministry is being accomplished and there’s less administration.

BT: What are some of the newer questions or concepts emerging in deacon ministry?

TS: I am beginning to hear some noise regarding the necessity of having a diaconate at all. In light of scripture that calls for all believers to be ministers, what exactly is the role of deacons?

BT: If a church asks for your help in defining the congregation’s deacon ministry, what are the most important things you say to the members or ask them?

TS: What is the goal of your diaconate: administrative or servant leadership or something else? What is your focus? Who will receive the ministry of the deacons? What is your message? What are you trying to say through your deacon ministry? **BT**

This approach calls for the deacon to find his or her passion and spiritual gifts **and to lean into it.**

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is excerpted from a paper written by Carol Younger, writer/editor for the Center for Teaching Churches at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.

God's mission takes deacons

Over the course of church history the role and form of deacon ministry changes, but the purpose for which God created deacons — to extend Christ's ministry into the world while giving the world a picture of Christ as it does so — remains essential for the church.

In Acts 6, when the early church grew restless and tensions rose among the growing congregation, God created deacons to help the church experience the Christ life. God reminded this young body that Christ and Christ's servant ministry are the source and future of its life together.

David Pao, in his article "Waiters or Preachers" in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, writes that it was not until Cornelius' conversion account "that the connection between table fellowship and the proclamation of the Word can be understood ... It is their status as 'waiters' that allows the Seven to continue the mission of Jesus in becoming 'preachers' to the outcasts and the oppressed."

The basic meaning of *diakonos* in secular Greek was "servant," meaning one engaged in menial tasks, particularly food service. While *diakonos* and other related terms that refer to the church office of deacon occur five times in the

New Testament, Jesus often used these words in the Gospels to describe a way of acting — and illustrated their meaning through his own servanthood. The Epistles picked up on the word *diakonia* and applied it to a wide range of church activities.

By using the word *diakonos* in Acts 6, the writer links the office of serving those who were neglected to the act of serving Christ by continuing the ministry that was Jesus' focus.

According to T.F. Torrance, "Only in Jesus (do) we learn what *diakonia* really is ... For this reason the early church saw delineated in the deacon's office more than anywhere else the likeness of Jesus, the servant of the Lord."

What today's church needs, writes Torrance in his essay "Service in Christ," is "a massive recovery of authentic *diakonia* if it is to hold forth the image of Christ before (human) kind and is to minister the mercy of God to the needs of (people) in the deep root of their evil and in the real sting of their misery."

Deacons in the Catholic Church

When the first deacons served the Hellenist widows in Acts 6, they were not simply easing tensions and saving time for the apostles.

From its beginnings the Church understood that *diakonia*, according to C.E.B. Cranfield in *Service in Christ*, is "the Church's service of its Lord in person — the most intimate and personal service of Him that it is permitted to render."

In the third and early fourth centuries, deacons had greater influence in the Catholic Church. Because of Acts 6 there were only

seven deacons in each parish, regardless of its size. Each Roman deacon had a sub-deacon. By the fourth century the number of deacons grew and they became apprentice priests, a low rung in the clerical hierarchy that became a sphere of training for the priesthood.

Women shared forms of deacon ministry. In the East they were ordained in services that used prayers referencing Old Testament prophetesses. In the West they were not ordained, but were part of an order that involved prayer and caring for widows.

By the Middle Ages, deacons were worship leaders and the role became a step toward ordination for the priesthood. Catholics currently maintain the historic form of this office while also opening the role to married men who may serve parishes as worship leaders, but have no authority to preside over the mass.

Deacons after the Reformation

Deacons in Protestant churches became lay leaders rather than clergy members after the Reformation. Luther and Calvin emphasized the biblical role of deacons as servants, with a focus on delivering assistance and support to the poor and needy.

By the 18th and 19th centuries, many Protestant churches shifted the responsibilities of their deacons to include more administrative and supervisory duties, including overseeing the work of the pastor. Deacons often served as a board of directors, sometimes screening recommendations for the congregation.

"Controversies surrounding that shift are long-standing," writes Marvin McMickle in *Deacons in Today's Black Baptist Churches* (2010, Judson Press). "Our understanding of the role and responsibilities of the deacon in the Baptist church in general and in the black Baptist church in particular has come to a critical crossroad."

Growing congregations, complex ministries, and the ownership of church buildings are a few reasons for this shift in role. What started with a table of Hellenist widows now includes facilities that may even contain a trendy coffee shop.

While the shift may seem reasonable, Howard Foshee laments the fact that the term "board of deacons" was ever coined and



Carol Younger

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suggests this is “foreign to how Baptists should work together.”

According to McMickle, “The historic tension between deacon as servant leader and deacon as boss of both church and pastor is alive and at work in black Baptist churches.”

Such tension in the church could provide an opportunity and context for spiritual growth and re-centering. If deacon ministries shift from their biblical model, where will this essential witness to Christ now be located in the church? What spiritual opportunities do deacons lose with this shift?

Many churches create new trustee boards to manage consuming financial matters, freeing deacons to focus on the important work of *diakonia*.

Deacon Renewal

Episcopalian Susanne Watson Epting, director of the North American Association for the Diaconate, describes how deacon renewal in her denomination was part of a church-wide transformation in which Anglicans revised their Prayer Book, rooted their theology in baptism and raised the bar of their spiritual formation programs.

This renewal led to a new kind of deacon, but “new in an old way — more like those of the early church who served to extend the bishop’s office, who served the poor, who brought the needs of the community before the bishop and the larger church, who aided in distribution — of money, of food, of other goods, and even of communion, as well as proclaiming, witnessing and interpreting.”

Epting, writing in the *Anglican Theological Review*, affirmed a “renewed understanding of the place of deacon in the midst of the larger body of Christ, as leader but companion, as ordained to an order and not a rank.”

Her hope is that deacons will be trained to provide leadership in relation to God’s mission, and says that the revision of the Prayer Book called the church to new forms of leadership. Acts of service alone were helpful, but not enough.

Deacons stand at the intersection between service and spirituality, she said, which means making connections between being in love with God and sharing that love in concrete ways. “Making those connections requires a deep and abiding love for God and for all of God’s people.”

When churches seek to understand the role and responsibilities of the deacon, McMickle added, and “begin with ‘the office,’ then they may quickly end up with people seeking to fill a position that has become associated with a certain degree of authority and influence. If, on the other hand, we start the discussion as Acts 6 does — with the need that existed and ‘the service’ to be offered to the community — then the discussion moves to an entirely different direction. ‘What can I do for you?’ takes the place of ‘This is what I expect you to do.’”

What would happen if every deacon meeting in every church began with someone persistently asking the kind of question that Christ would ask us, or have us ask each other?

How would the conversation change the agenda of our meetings and the work that we plan and do? **BT**

Baptist Identity Resources: \$5 each

A Capsule History of Baptist Principles (Brackney)

A Capsule History of Baptists (Gourley)

A Festschrift in Honor of H. Leon McBeth

A How-to Manual for Your Church’s History (Deweese, et. al.)

Henry Clay Vedder (Honeycutt)

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Religious diversity increasing at the office; so are pitfalls

Faith

The American workplace, like the rest of U.S. society, is becoming more religiously diverse and that is raising concerns about employer accommodations for believers — and increasing the odds for uncomfortable moments around the water cooler.

Yet one potential flashpoint among workers does not involve new immigrant faiths but rather two indigenous communities: white evangelicals and unaffiliated Americans who constitute one of the fastest-growing segments of the population.

A major factor contributing to workplace conflict, according to a survey released on Aug. 30, is that evangelicals — whose religious identity is tied to sharing their beliefs — are much more likely to talk about their faith at work than other religious and nonreligious groups.

In fact, half of white evangelical Protestants said they share their beliefs with co-workers, compared to 22 percent of workers overall, according to the 2013 Survey of American Workers and Religion, sponsored by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.

And one-third of evangelicals said they discuss religion frequently, compared to 14 percent of non-Christian believers, 10 percent of Catholics and 7 percent of white mainline Protestants. Moreover, nearly 9-in-10 white evangelical employees say they are somewhat or very comfortable when the issue of religion comes up in the workplace.

Conversely, the research found that nonbelievers are reticent to discuss religion and 43 percent of them say they feel somewhat or very uncomfortable when the topic comes up.

“This suggests the potential for workplace clashes between atheists and evangelical Protestants,” the report says.

The survey, released for Labor Day, was conducted in March and April by the Public Religion Research Institute, which questioned more than 2,000 American adults in both English and Spanish. The poll has a margin of error of 2.8 percentage points.

Given the findings, it is perhaps not

surprising that both nonbelievers and evangelicals shared a heightened sense of bias: Nearly 6 in 10 atheists said they think people look down on their beliefs, and nearly 6 in 10 of white evangelicals agreed that discrimination against Christians has become as big a problem as discrimination against other religious minorities.

“There’s a clear sense in the data, especially among white evangelicals, that other workers’ needs are being taken care of and theirs are not,” said Robert P. Jones, head of the Public Religion Research Institute.

Jones added that along with their growing numbers, the “nones” are also increasingly confident in proclaiming their lack of religious affiliation, which in turn contributes to the potential for workplace interactions — and conflicts — over religion.

David Sikkink, a sociologist of religion at the University of Notre Dame who reviewed the report, also noted that while most believers — as well as nonbelievers — don’t look to the office as a place to find meaning and direction in their lives, evangelicals often take the opposite view and see the workplace as a venue for living out their religious identity.

“Evangelicals want to be different somehow, to take a stand, and to show that God is working in their lives through them,” Sikkink said.

He said that does not always mean sharing the specifics of their faith, but can instead be demonstrated by the way evangelicals deal with workplace problems, or simply in their focus on developing friendships with their co-workers. Still, the endpoint of such relationships is a conversation about faith, “and eventually that may rub the nonreligious the wrong way.”

Overall, the incidence of workplace conflicts and discrimination over religion seems to be a fairly significant issue, according to the survey, with one-third of respondents reporting that they have seen or experienced incidents of religious bias in the workplace.

The most frequently cited problems were not interactions with co-workers but instead



related to a failure of companies to provide sufficient accommodations for believers, especially non-Christians. Half of those respondents said that their employers are ignoring their religious needs. Among the other findings:

- Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of the respondents reported being required to work on the Sabbath or a religious holiday and 13 percent said they attended company-sponsored events that did not include kosher, halal, or vegetarian options;
- Less than half (44 percent) of workers said their employers had flexible work hours to permit religious observances or prayer and 21 percent said their company had a policy allowing employees to swap holidays to accommodate religious observances;
- Four in 10 workers said their company had materials explaining their policy on religious discrimination, and 14 percent said their employer had programs to teach workers about religious diversity.

On the other hand, while the Tanenbaum report says that American companies need to do more to accommodate religious believers, it also found strong incentives for businesses to adapt: The survey showed that employees at companies that were sensitive to religious needs reported better morale and were much less likely to look for another job. **BT**

Dear Kate and William:

Carol and I know exactly what it's like to have a much anticipated baby. You cannot imagine the fuss our church made when Graham was born. Everyone showed up to take pictures, queued to hold our little bundle of trouble, and hung around way too long.

People gave us so much stuff. If you are like us, then you have more onesies, blankies and booties than any one child could ever wear. Save it for the next one.

The first days are exciting, but then the grandparents go home. That's why I waited a couple of months to write, until the cameras have been put away. The hubbub is over. George is just another baby. The three of you are on your own.

You are a young couple suddenly responsible for a child. You have that in common with commoners everywhere. The feeling you had when you held George for the first time is the same feeling that the mother who is a nursing student and the father who may be the manager at Buffalo Wild Wings in a couple of years have when they hold their child for the first time.

I don't know much about being a duke or duchess, but I've been a parent for a while and our two are turning out okay. I don't want to seem cheeky or offer dodgy advice (I Googled "goofy British terms"), but here are a few unsolicited thoughts.

You did well with his name. "George" is a fine choice. I'm sure people think you named him after George Washington or George Bush, but my money is on George Clooney. If it's George Foreman, keep that to yourself. You might tell your friends it's George Harrison. He's from England.

George will soon be the child formerly known as Prince. He's going to get a nickname other than "Your Majesty." Hope it's not Boy George, George Michael or Georgie Porgie (which sounds British but not in a good way). You might want to pre-emptively start calling him G-Man.



Photo illustration by Lesley-Ann Hix

You've discovered by now that rocking your baby is good for your soul. Everything else seems less important. If you don't feel delighted, frightened and hopeful, you're not paying attention. Don't pass Baby G off to a nanny when he cries. You need to be the one to dry the tears.

By now you've had moments when George makes you crazy. Don't feel bad when you aren't getting along. Glare at him, mutter under your breath, change his nappy, share some Gerber's and sing an Adele song like it's a lullaby.

The most brilliant recommendation I can give is to take George to church. I never felt more like royalty than when we took Graham to church for the first time.

Lil' G needs to be in Sunday school. Where else will he drink apple juice (something other than tea) in tiny Dixie cups? Do you know all the words to "Jesus' Love Is Bubblin' Over"? What would look better on your refrigerator than your son's crayon interpretations of biblical events?

Take G-Money to Vacation Bible School so he can become adept with construction paper, Elmer's glue and Popsicle sticks. Young couples need a break, and it's free babysitting. (Church is, by the way, a great place to find babysitters and bloody good hand-me-downs.)

George of the Palace needs to play kickball with children who don't care who his parents are. I'm sure he will be a fine athlete, but if he's not great at soccer, cricket or whatever un-American sport he'll have to play,

church is a good place to be un-athletic.

Your child needs to be around those who don't eat crumpets. Churches are filled with regular people who will make sure "Your Highness" is not spoiled.

PG needs to go to church because he needs grandmothers other than Camilla and great-grandmothers who aren't the Queen. (I'm sure Elizabeth is nice, but she didn't come across as particularly warm in that Helen Mirren movie.)

George needs to be around people who believe in something bigger than the British Empire, who pray to the Prince of Peace and worship the King of Kings. Someday your son will have to decide whether to share his tremendous wealth. The church will help him love those who do not have his advantages.

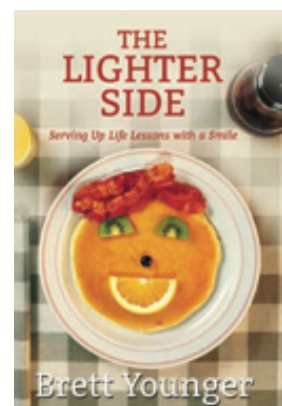
The church will help you remember that rather than trying to raise a monarch, you should raise a child who cares for the needy. Someday you may be king and queen, but if you are not attentive parents you will have failed in your most important job.

Be assured that God is on your side. God helps every mother and father love their child. **BT**

Cheerio and best wishes,

Brett

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>> QUESTION:

Why do Baptists consider missions a high priority?

The 404-year-old Baptist story can be told within the context of two broad periods of time: the first 182 years (1609-1791) in which Baptists focused on securing freedom of conscience and religious liberty for everyone, including church-state separation, and the following 222 years and counting during which the missionary enterprise has been an overriding priority of many Baptist groups.

The historical dividing line between these two periods of Baptist life is revealing. In 1791, Baptists in America secured their long and arduous quest — on behalf of all citizens — for freedom of conscience, religious liberty and church-state separation. The fulfillment of the quest in America took the form of the First Amendment to the U.S. Bill of Rights, championed earnestly by Baptists, that granted religious liberty to all and separated church from state.

The following year, a British Baptist shoemaker and preacher by the name of William Carey (1761-1834) shook the theological foundations of Western Christianity and pointed Baptists (and other Protestant Christians) toward another grand quest: the “conversion of the heathens.” Carey had been influenced by Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), a British Baptist minister who in 1785 had published a pamphlet (*The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*) refuting hyper-Calvinism and calling for the preaching of the Gospel to all people. Prior to this time, Protestant missionary activity had been minimal

due to influence of Calvinism.

Carey in 1792 expanded upon Fuller’s call in the form of a short book whose title was both long and provocative: *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens. In Which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are Considered*. Therein Carey pointed to Matthew 28:18-20 as the theological justification of missions, surveyed missionary efforts of the early church, listed statistical information for the nations of the world, answered objections to missionary activity, and outlined plans for a Baptist missionary society.

Controversial yet timely, many Baptists soon embraced Carey’s call to action. Months after the publication of his book, Carey formed the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen (a.k.a. Baptist Missionary Society), of which Fuller served as the first secretary. In 1793, Carey and his family became missionaries in Calcutta. Within less than a quarter-century thereafter, Baptist missionary societies flourished on both sides of the ocean.

On the American side of the Atlantic, in 1813 newlyweds Adoniram (1788-1850) and Ann Judson (1789-1826) became the first Protestant missionaries from North America to preach in Burma. They had embarked from America as Congregationalists, but during their voyage became convinced of the believer’s baptism. Soon after their arrival on the mission field they were baptized as Baptists by an associate of William Carey.

The story of the Judson family became

one of remarkable perseverance and (eventually) amazing successes in the face of prolonged isolation, hardship, suffering and untimely death. For many years, converts were rare. While Adoniram focused on preaching and on translating the written Word, Ann quickly learned the spoken language of the Burmese and ministered among Burmese women. When Adoniram was later imprisoned for a period of time in the midst of political upheavals, a fevered and isolated Ann worked tirelessly to free her husband, even as she cared for the couple’s infant child. Ann, long suffering from disease, stress and loneliness, died in 1826. Yet her sacrifice was not in vain. Within less than a decade, Baptists were rapidly growing in Burma, evidencing the great legacy that Adoniram and Ann would gift to the world.

While the methodology and philosophy of missions has evolved in the ensuing centuries, Baptists worldwide of the 21st century place great emphasis on missionary work due to the convictions, courage, work and sacrifices of Fuller, Carey and the Judsons. **BT**

—This series is provided in partnership with the Baptist History & Heritage Society. Bruce Gourley serves as executive director of the society and as online editor for Baptists Today.

The contributions of the Judsons to Baptist missions

will be the focus of a conference on the Mercer Atlanta campus

NOVEMBER 14-16

“The Judsons: Celebrating 200 Years of Baptist Missions” is a collaboration of McAfee School of Theology, the American Baptist Historical Society, the Baptist History & Heritage Society, Baptist Women in Ministry and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Conference speakers will provide historical perspective on the contributions of Adoniram Judson, Ann Judson, Sarah Boardman Judson and Emily Chubbuck Judson to Baptist mission work, including education, women’s work and congregational involvement in missions.

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Children's *Sabbath*

October observance offers meaningful experiences

Pediatric chaplains Paul Byrd and Joe Genau of Children's of Alabama sat in a tent on a hot July afternoon at Haley Farm in Tennessee as part of the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry.

Haley Farm, once owned by Pulitzer Prize winning author Alex Haley, is a beautiful 157-acre estate acquired in 1994 by the Children's Defense Fund. The farm provides a retreat-like atmosphere for education, advocacy training, spiritual renewal and worship.

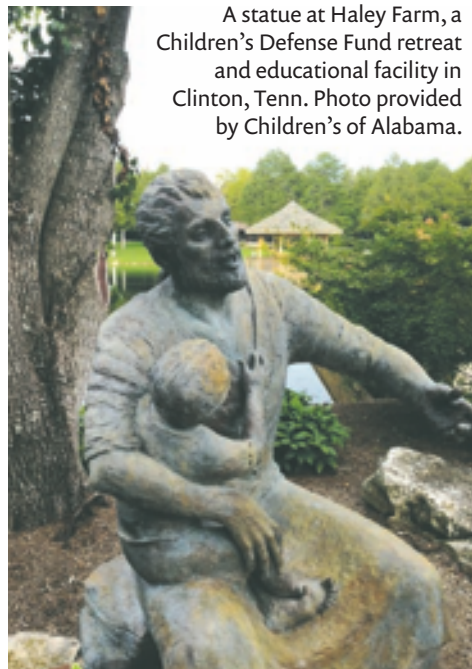
While at the Institute, Christians from multiple denominations explored how faith calls them into ministries that protect and nurture children while shaping, guiding and sustaining the ministers who work with and for children.

Byrd and Genau were attending a session on Children's Sabbath in hopes of learning more so they could dream of a way to further recognize the National Observance of Children's Sabbath at their pediatric hospital in Birmingham.

"We were there to hear the director of the national program for Children's Sabbath, Shannon Daley-Harris, the religious affairs advisor for the Children's Defense Fund," told Byrd. "And we were so surprised when she turned the majority of her time over to a woman from Auburn, Ala., to tell her story."

Ethel White is the director of the Auburn Day Care Center, a non-profit center for the care of children in low-income families. A couple of years ago the center received a grant to increase the infant care facilities at the center.

As they expanded into the new space, Ethel had the idea that she should make a list of the items her center so desperately needed. So she listed everything she could think of — from



A statue at Haley Farm, a Children's Defense Fund retreat and educational facility in Clinton, Tenn. Photo provided by Children's of Alabama.

rocking chairs to toys and diapers.

In the meantime, Alica Kirkpatrick, then a minister at Auburn's First Baptist Church, was involved with a program she helped start called Partnership for Children. The organization raises funds to help provide childcare for low-income workers.

"We decided to surprise [Ethel] by throwing a baby shower," said Kirkpatrick. "As a part of Children's Sabbath, we like to not only celebrate the worship service but also put some feet to it."

Alica asked Ethel if she would be willing to come to their Children's Sabbath worship service that October to share about the Auburn Day Care Center and the families served. During the service, Ethel told of children who were nurtured and cared for at the center and about their parents who really needed affordable childcare in order to work and provide for their families.

At the end of the service, some young

adults brought in a rocking chair and placed it at the front of the sanctuary. Alica asked Ethel to sit in the chair.

Then the doors to the sanctuary flew open and lines of children with arms full of books, toys and diapers filed down the aisles to lay the gifts around the rocking chair.

Adults followed, carrying more rocking chairs and other larger items. By the end of the service, the sanctuary was filled with items for the Auburn Day Care Center.

"There were so many items," said Ethel, "that I had to call my son to bring a truck and we had to take more than one trip to get it all back to the center!"

Two years later, Children's of Alabama was the recipient of the same Children's Sabbath focus in Auburn.

"As I sat there listening, I nearly wept because I had experienced the same abundant grace, gifts, prayers and encouragement from the hands of the same people," said Byrd. "This church and many others like them have truly taken the spirit of Children's Sabbath to heart. They incorporate the experience into their worship service, but they also follow the call to live it out in their communities."

The observance of Children's Sabbath can go beyond a local congregation, however, said Genau.

"When our new building opened last year, we held an interfaith blessing, which provided us with a great number of people who might be interested in our initiatives for the Children's Sabbath," said Genau. "When Rev. Daley-Harris mentioned a children's hospital having a service in their atrium, we began to dream of such a service in our beautiful new facility."

A "small, but hearty" observance of Children's Sabbath at the hospital is set for this month, said Genau, with plans for an expanded celebration next year. **BT**

The 2013 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths

and Child Poverty." Designated to be observed October 18-20, the theme comes from Micah 4:1-5. The Children's Defense Fund offers a downloadable resource, *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths Manual: A Multi-faith Resource for Year Round Child Advocacy*, that includes activities and worship guides, at childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/faith-based-action/childrens-sabbaths.

Emphasis is "Beating Swords Into Plowshares: Ending the Violence of Guns

YOU ARE there

A conversation with winning
songwriter Giles Blakenship

Worship leader Giles Blakenship won a contest with his song “You Are There” that led to a recording opportunity in England. Photo by Jeku Arce.



A native of Martinsville, Va., **Giles Blakenship** graduated from Campbell University in 1995 with a degree in **religion and a minor in music**. He returned a few years later to attend divinity school.

For 10 years he has served as minister of worship at Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville, N.C. This past summer his song “You Are There” topped Integrity Music Europe’s “Search for a Song” competition.

Giles was swooped away to England to record the worship song that is getting worldwide exposure. *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce asked him about the song, the contest and the trip.

BT: How did you learn about the contest, and when did you start to see winning as a real possibility?

GB: I learned about the contest on the day it started, July 1. I followed a Facebook link to weareworship.com to check out a song by Aaron Keyes, whose songs I have used in worship.

There I noticed a post about a song contest. Two things attracted me: One, I really appreciated their desire to find and lift up worship songs bubbling up from within local church communities and, two, the contest was sponsored by the European division of Integrity Music, a publisher of worship music whose name and reach around the world is significant.

Some of the worship leaders they partner with are my mentors (albeit from a distance) because they are leading worship regularly in their own local churches.

Regardless of my song’s place at the judges’ table, God was using the journey beyond anything I had anticipated and in all the ways I had ever hoped that God might use “You Are There.” There were opportunities for spiritual conversations, stories from folks hearing the song for the first time, and worship leaders saying they were going to use “You Are There” in worship “this Sunday.”

At the end of the contest on July 31 the winning song would be selected by a panel of Integrity Music representatives from the top five songs with the most Facebook likes. I started to see winning as a real possibility when “You Are There” was one of the top two songs on the leader board for most of July.

Then I started to see that possibility slip away when my song fell to the number six spot in the final two days. When the contest closed, I didn’t know where I stood but I wasn’t holding out much hope. They would announce the winner on Aug. 6 via email and on weareworship.com. It was a long six days!

BT: What were your reactions when notified that you had won?

GB: The UK is five hours ahead of us. But when I awoke at 7 a.m. and checked my email and the website, there was nothing.

The hours crawled by. I was constantly refreshing my email and the website. About 1:30 that afternoon a volunteer assistant in the church office rang my desk and asked if I could take a call. I noticed right away the British accent on the other end.

I had won the contest. I was shocked, excited, elated, humbled, honored and grateful. And there began the whirlwind that would see me landing in London that following Friday night, recording on Monday, and flying back to join my family vacationing in Myrtle Beach on Wednesday.

BT: What were the recording session and other experiences like in England?

GB: Les Moir, an A&R director for Integrity who has been producing and playing worship music for years in the UK, oversaw all production. He also met me at my hotel on Saturday morning to grab a cup of coffee, take me to the studio and show me around the town of Eastbourne.

On Sunday he picked me up to go to church and took me out to lunch afterwards. That evening I went with Les and his wife to see his friend’s band and then to a birthday gathering.

The time he spent building our relationship put us so much further ahead when we got in the

studio. The guys in the band were so talented. We started tracking the drums, bass and acoustic guitar parts at 11 a.m. By 9:30 p.m. we had a great recording. I can't wait for folks to hear it.

I was most nervous about the interview at Premier Christian Radio in London. I like to process my thoughts before speaking, but know there's no room for "dead air" on the radio. It was pretty exciting, though, because I knew folks back home were listening to the interview online.

The search for fish-and-chips was a great success. Rhubarb Crumble at the birthday party made a lasting impression. I've been meaning to write back and get the recipe.

Riding the train across the English countryside into London for the interview and taking a London Black Cab from there made me feel very — well — English.

BT: How have your congregation and others responded?

GB: The response of friends, family and the folks at Snyder Memorial Baptist Church has been amazing. The support has been overwhelming.

My song would not have gone before the judges if not for the late nights of "liking" and "sharing" on Facebook. A diverse community

came together online and in real time to accomplish this, and actual friendships — not just virtual ones — were formed.

I play on Tuesday mornings at Fayetteville Area Operation InAsMuch, an organization that, among other things, feeds breakfast to our homeless community five days a week. When I got back from my trip they had all signed a big poster board that said "We Love Giles!" — and greeted me with enthusiastic applause.

There was (and still is) a feeling of, "We're all in this together!" And I'm so glad we are.

BT: How did the song come about, and why did you choose it for the contest?

GB: In 2008, Lars Gordon was a high school student living just up the road from Snyder Memorial Baptist Church, where I serve. He was learning to play the guitar and would frequently stop by the church to show me the latest "lick" he was discovering.

One time when he wanted to show me his newest riff on the guitar, I met him at his home. We sat on a brick wall in front of his house as Lars played that melodic hook. I told him to keep on playing while I chorded beneath it on my guitar.

I began to mumble a melody that

eventually coalesced into something reminiscent of the themes and text from Psalm 139, on which I had been meditating. Immediately, I went back to my office to record those ideas and, with Psalm 139 in front of me, began to let it inform the verses and chorus from there.

"You Are There" reminds us of God's constant and abiding presence in all seasons of our journey.

This contest was designed to see what worship songs are breathing life into the church at the local level. Of the worship songs I have written, there are a few that the church has affirmed again and again. After an informal poll on my Facebook page about which of two songs I should submit, "You Are There" was the clear favorite.

BT: When and how can people hear that song and other music of yours?

GB: The new recording of "You Are There" is featured on weareworship.com. The original recording is the opening track on my album, *Planted Here*, which, along with my most recent release, *The Day Is Dawning*, and previous CD's can be found at gilesblankenship.com. Those two albums also can be previewed and downloaded at facebook.com/gilesblankenship. **BT**

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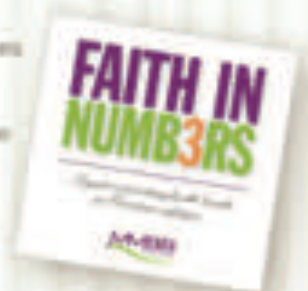
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