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# Baptists ODAY

NEWS JOURNAL


NOVEMBER 2012

## RIGHTING *a wrong*

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Left to right: Roger Paynter of Austin, Texas, Don Brewer of Gainesville, Ga., and Cynthia Wise of Birmingham, Ala., visit during the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors meeting held in September at First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla.

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# Righting a wrong

*Youthful quest led to justice for WWII ship captain*

**P**ENSACOLA, Fla. — In 1997, when 11-year-old Hunter Scott asked if the story of the USS *Indianapolis* sinking in shark-infested waters was true, his father suggested that he move from in front of the TV. After all, *Jaws* was Alan Scott's favorite movie.

Being an educator, however, Alan then suggested that his son find the answer in the library. Surprisingly, little was there about the events surrounding the torpedoed ship — that had secretly delivered components of the first atomic bomb — and the court-martialed captain.

But what began as a simple question from a curious, determined middle-school student eventually led to the exoneration of Captain Charles B. McVay III and the emotional liberation of the remaining ship survivors who had long believed that a great injustice had been done.

Hunter, who grew up in the First Baptist Church of Pensacola and became the youngest person ever to testify before the Senate Armed Services Committee, righted a wrong. Now Robert Downey Jr. is making this remarkable story into a movie.

## DISASTER AT SEA

While the 1975 movie *Jaws* was fictitious, the reference to the sinking of the *Indianapolis* was historical. In fact, it was the greatest sea disaster in U.S. naval history.

Headed from Guam to Leyte, in the Philippines, the ship's captain had not received warnings that submarine activity had been spotted in the area. So he moved the ship along at a higher speed than using a defensive zigzag maneuver.

Two torpedoes from a Japanese submarine struck the ship just after midnight on July 30, 1945, near the end of World War II. Due to the heat and humidity, air ducts and many of the watertight doors had been left open according to Pete Nelson, author of *Left for Dead: A Young Man's Search for Justice for the USS Indianapolis*.

It sank in 12 minutes.

About 300 of the 1,197 sailors and Marines onboard died immediately. Some 880 men were dumped into the salty, fuel oil-infused,



Hunter Scott speaks at a Capitol Hill press conference in 1998 about efforts that led to the exoneration of Capt. Charles B. McVay III, whose ship was sunk by Japanese torpedoes near the end of World War II. Scott is surrounded and supported by Reps. Julia Carson (D-IN) and Joe Scarborough (R-FL), and survivors of the USS *Indianapolis*. Photos contributed by Alan Scott.

shark-infested water — hundreds of miles from the nearest land.

Distress signals sent just before the massive ship rolled over and sunk were — as was later discovered — ignored as errors or possible pranks by the Japanese. Only 317 men would survive the ordeal of being widely scattered in the Pacific Ocean for more than four days. Other would-be survivors succumbed to injuries, exposure, mental anguish that sometimes turned crewmates into deadly enemies and, of course, sharks.

The scene was so gruesome that most survivors would not talk about their experience in any detail for decades — until a middle-school boy sought them out. Even then, his father would not let Hunter read some of the accounts that included extreme violence, vicious shark attacks and even cannibalism.

Only after Hunter began to seriously consider his own military career did Alan give him access to all the survivors revealed.

## HISTORY FAIR

The year following his initial question and research, then-12-year-old Hunter prepared to compete in a history fair with a project about the sinking of the *Indianapolis*. Since Pensacola

is a Navy town and home to the heralded Blue Angels, his mother Leslie suggested he place an ad in the local air station's newspaper.

His effort to find survivors of the *Indianapolis* was successful. In fact, one survivor who responded, Maurice Bell, was in nearby Mobile, Ala. Alan videotaped the lengthy interview his son conducted.

“Mr. Bell was thoroughly convinced that his captain had been dealt an injustice,” Alan said in an interview with *Baptists Today* during the news journal's Board of Directors meeting in Pensacola in September. “This is when it actually turned from a history fair project into a mission.”

Alan said Hunter was especially impressed by Bell's confession that “what helped me survive in the water was my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” A second survivor to convey his story to Hunter, Morgan Moseley, also credited his faith for enabling him to make it through the ordeal.

Hunter became so convinced that an injustice had been done when Captain McVay was found guilty that he wrote to the Navy and the President asking that the case be reconsidered. When both offices said it couldn't be done, Hunter shrugged and declared: “We'll find another way.”



## CHANGING GOALS

Hunter believed that winning the state history fair would bring the needed attention to get the case before influential people. But he was disqualified on a technicality: displaying notebooks filled with first-person testimonies and other significant evidence.

“You learn more about somebody’s character after a defeat,” his father told him. So Hunter pushed on.

Joe Scarborough, who also grew up in Pensacola’s First Baptist Church and was representing that district in the U.S. Congress at the time, invited Hunter to display his history project in the representative’s local office.

“People flocked to see it,” said Alan. “Some stayed for six hours.”

Local interest in the display about the sinking of the *Indianapolis* along with reams of evidence that the captain has been wrongly blamed grew. Finally Rep. Scarborough said: “Hunter, you’ve got to explain to me what this is all about.”

After hearing the details and seeing the evidence, Scarborough said that legislation should be drafted to bring this matter before Congress.

## TRAGEDY UPON TRAGEDY

Sadly, Captain McVay was not around to see a youth and the once-youthful men aboard his ship come to his defense. The disgraced captain had received hate mail from some family members of those who perished — asking why he had not sent out distress signals (which he had done) or taken some other action to save their loved ones.

In 1968, McVay, who had been found guilty in a December 1945 court martial, took his own life at his Connecticut home. He used his Navy-issued pistol.

It would take nearly 55 years after the trial and 32 years after his death — and the gritty determination of a Pensacola youth — for his name to be cleared.

Media attention about Hunter’s quest for justice spread widely — including a high-profile piece by Tom Brokaw. He began receiving materials related to the *Indianapolis* from around the world — some delivered to his school simply marked: “Hunter Scott, Pensacola, Florida.”

Kimo McVay, one of the late captain’s two sons, saw Hunter on the TV show *Prime Time Country*. A well-known figure in Hawaii, Kimo was a promoter for several celebrities including singer Don Ho. He made contact and invited the Scott family to Hawaii.

“He fell in love with Hunter,” said Alan. “He couldn’t believe what he was doing for his father.”

Kimo was so moved by the effort that he

gave Hunter the captain’s dog tags and cigarette lighter. He also arranged for Hunter to tour the nuclear submarine that had been named in honor of the *Indianapolis*.

Aboard the submarine was the liberty clock that had once hung on the old ship. Someone had stolen it from the ship, and Kimo had surprisingly found it at a yard sale.

Kimo had gone to high school in Washington, D.C., with Mike Monroney, a retired influential lobbyist who would play a major role in Hunter’s efforts.

## ON THE HILL

In April 1998, 12-year-old Hunter went to Washington where he found bipartisan support for his cause including Rep. Julia Carson, a Democrat from Indiana. The next month, Hunter held a press conference outside the Capitol that drew significant media attention. Reps. Scarborough and Carson invited Hunter to drop House Resolution 3710 into the hopper.

When a security guard stopped Hunter from going onto the House floor, Carson sternly told him: “He is my son.” Alan said that when someone asked the African-American congresswoman why she did that, she replied: “Well, he is my son in Christ.”

Like all legislation, there were bumps along the way. An attempt to get a companion bill on the Senate side failed when the parliamentarian ruled that Congress could not alter military records. But setbacks didn’t deter Hunter and those who believed in his cause. They regrouped and reworded the proposed legislation — as joint resolutions — that would be introduced the following spring.

Sen. Bob Smith (R-NH) became committed to clearing McVay’s name. Alan recalled the senator asking young Hunter: “How solid is your research?” To which Hunter replied: “Like a rock, sir.”

Indeed he had assembled impressive testimonies from most of the remaining 154 survivors at the time. And declassified documents showed that the captain had acted



David Letterman provided one of many places for Hunter Scott to tell of his pursuit of justice in the case of the USS *Indianapolis*.

properly while the Navy had made mistakes and seemed to have found a convenient scapegoat.

Sen. Smith convinced Sen. John Warner (R-VA), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a former Secretary of the Navy, to hold a hearing. Hunter, a ninth-grader at the time, would testify along with several survivors.

Alan said that the Navy had refused to consider the voluminous evidence Hunter had compiled — including testimony from the Japanese submarine commander Mochitsura Hashimoto, who said that his original statements following the war had been misinterpreted. At Hunter’s request, Hashimoto, then an aging Shinto priest, wrote to Sen. Warner.

Hunter had also uncovered evidence — not included in the court martial — that McVay had requested an escort ship for the final voyage, but had been denied.

## IN THE NAVY

The mid-September hearing of 1999 was something of a David-versus-Goliath scene — with Hunter having garnered some powerful support. But on the opposing side were the Navy’s vice chief of operations, judge advocate general and chief historian.

When the evidence was considered and questions were posed to Navy officials, Alan recalled: “They could not answer the questions.”

What started out as a simple question about a movie scene, and then grew from a history fair project to a mission, would end up as a congressional joint resolution placed on President Clinton’s desk in 2000. He affixed his signature.

Captain McVay had been exonerated. Aging survivors of the doomed ship expressed relief and vindication.

“Only in the United States of America could a kid take on the United States Navy, petition the U.S. Congress, get a bill signed into law, and overturn an injustice that occurred over 50 years ago,” said Alan. “There was some sense of urgency because every year that passed, more of these men died.”

Hunter, who had become both a hero and something like a grandson to these survivors, would finish Pensacola High School and attend the University of North Carolina on a Navy ROTC scholarship.

While he took on the Navy in order to bring justice to a ship captain he had not known, he would bring that same determination to his service as a Navy officer — inspired by the veterans of World War II who had found enough faith to survive the unimaginable terror of being stranded for days in dangerous waters and enough conscience to want the truth to come out about their captain. **BT**



# Q & A with **Hunter Scott**

**N**avy helicopter pilot Hunter Scott, 27, is stationed in San Diego. He responded by email to questions from *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce about successful efforts during his youth to help clear the name of Captain Charles B. McVay III and restore honor to the men who served on USS *Indianapolis*, the World War II ship sunk by Japanese torpedoes. The larger story is told on pages 4-5.

**BT: What attracted you to the story of the USS *Indianapolis*?**

HS: Initially, the sharks! Then, as I researched, it was the survivors' stories. There were so many unbelievable events that culminated in the loss of the ship.

Even more unbelievable was the resilience of the 317 who survived. The men of the *Indy* have been very much my extended family and the driving force behind the efforts of so many to clear McVay's name.

I have been fishing with survivor Maurice Bell and hunting with L. D. Cox. I've lobbied Congress with other men and shared stories with all. They are an incredible group of men who inspired me to serve as they have served.

**BT: What first alerted you to the possibility that an injustice might have been done?**

HS: The book *Fatal Voyage* by Dan Kurzman. This was the first thing I read on the *Indy*. After reading it, I knew that the captain was court-martialed unjustly. After speaking with Maurice Bell, the first survivor I interviewed, I knew the crew had been wronged and the captain railroaded.

**BT: How have the church and community in Pensacola supported you through all of this?**

HS: First Baptist Church of Pensacola has been my backbone. I grew up in the church and have been able to find strength and solace in the friends whom I grew up with there.

[Former pastor] Dr. Robert Mills would send me a postcard that said, "I see you're in the news," every time a story came out that he heard about. It eventually became a bit of a running joke. But joking aside, the church and my friends and their families were my biggest encouragers.

First Baptist Church of Pensacola was a dream builder.

**BT: Who are some of the key people who have helped you along the way?**

HS: I could write pages here. My mom and dad [Alan and Leslie Scott] are first and



Hunter Scott (left) was a cheerleader at the University of North Carolina. He attended on a Navy ROTC scholarship and graduated with a degree in economics in 2007. Today he flies helicopters for the Navy, based in San Diego. Photos contributed by Alan Scott.

foremost. There is no way any of this would be possible without them.

Along the way: my sister Whitney, Mike Monroney, Congressman Joe Scarborough, Sen. Bob Smith, Kimo McVay, Congresswoman Julia Carson, the survivors organization and so many of the survivors, plus many other congressmen and senators.

It was a team effort, and everyone I've mentioned played a pivotal role.

**BT: What are the lessons you have learned — and others can learn — from this experience?**

HS: Here are a few lessons learned:

**We are more effective in groups.** The success of the legislative efforts would not have been possible without so many people. As my dad likely mentioned, it was important for me to recognize and surround myself with dream builders and keep my distance from dream destroyers.

**Success requires sacrifice.** I missed out on lots of middle and high school social events, football games, basketball games, etc. But I had a goal in mind: exoneration for the captain and justice for the crew.

The men of the USS *Indy* didn't quit in their effort ... and I decided that I wouldn't quit until the captain was exonerated.

**Make goals and intentions clear.** I didn't realize it at the time, but I've since learned about the BLUF principle: "Bottom Line Up Front."

Everyone I met with in Congress was much busier than I was. I had to be friendly and direct, as not to waste their time. I was confident in my knowledge of the *Indy* and would tell them what I hoped to accomplish and let them start asking questions. **BT**



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# quotation *remarks*

“Stop saying, ‘This is the most important election in the history of our nation.’ It’s not. The most important election in the history of our nation was when Abraham Lincoln was elected president. Before that, we thought it was okay to own people. Every generation thinks it’s living in the most important moment in history.”

—*Minister and writer Bryan Roberts*  
(Relevant Magazine)

“Across mainline Protestant traditions, giving has sagged to 2 percent of household income — one-fifth of the biblical tithe. Even conservative traditions that teach the tithe give at only the 3 percent level... As wealth has soared, especially for the few, gratitude has been replaced by arrogance.”

—*Religion News Service columnist and Episcopal priest Tom Ebrich*

“One thing I’ve learned in 12 years of doing this is that you have to take one day at a time. No two storms are alike. You have to learn to act but not react to everything going on around you.”

—*Gibbie McMillan, disaster relief director for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, during the Hurricane Isaac response* (Baptist Press)

“All that stuff I was taught about evolution and embryology and Big Bang theory, all that is lies straight from the pit of hell. And it’s lies to try to keep me and all the folks who are taught that from understanding that they need a savior.”

—*U.S. Rep. Paul Broun of Georgia, who sits on the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, speaking at a Sept. 27 sportsman’s banquet at Liberty Baptist Church in Hartwell, Ga.* (Washington Post)

“I always say always have a prenuptial agreement — but I won’t say that because you people don’t get divorced, right? Nobody gets divorced, so I will not say ‘have a prenuptial agreement’ to anybody in this room.”

—*Donald Trump, speaking Sept. 24 to a large gathering of Liberty University students that he also advised to “get even” with adversaries* (Associated Press)

“This isn’t a history lesson or a Sunday school sermon. What interested me was their relationship. They had these indomitable spirits but very disparate personalities.”

—*Actor Harrison Ford who plays Dodgers general manager Branch Rickey in the upcoming movie 42 about the life of Jackie Robinson* (USA Today)

“Given the power of faith in our lives, and the passions that religious differences can inflame, the strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression; it is more speech.”

—*President Obama in a Sept. 25 speech to the United Nations* (RNS)

“In our tradition, you get to be wrong.”

—*Anthony David, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta, a small but growing denomination that is skeptical of doctrine* (RNS)

“As children of God, we are not slaves and will not fall back into fear. We will not be afraid of anything, much less changes that lead us into the future. We will not fear the unknown or unpredictable.”

—*Patrick Anderson, interim executive coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship* (fellowship!)

“[Jesus] doesn’t appear to have had a paranoid bone in his body. Instead, he had a vision, a vision of what the kingdom could be, present in a rough-and-tumble and ever-changing world.”

—*Randy Hyde, pastor of Pulaski Heights Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark.* (ethicsdaily.com)

“Spiritual gifts are not possessions; they are grace gifts to assist the common good — both within and without the congregation.”

—*President Molly Marshall of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kan.* (ABP)

“There’s been a lot of fussing and feuding and fighting over the years, including over that cemetery, but we are still here after all these years, still serving the Lord.”

—*Historian Nell Moore of 200-year-old Big Creek Baptist Church near Memphis, where Merle Haggard, Mother Maybelle and the Carter Family showed up one Sunday in 1969 to record gospel songs* (Commercial Appeal)

“I know the Baptists. You have been fighting for these principles for a long time.”

—*Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, commending the work of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty at an Oct. 1 reception revealing the organization’s expanded and renovated facilities on Capitol Hill* (ABP)



By John Pierce

# Letting out an age-old secret

Some people are more willing to accept change than others. They readily acknowledge modern-day realities that impact church, family life and society at large.

Now here is the surprise for some: Often those most open to fresh thinking, continuous learning and flexible ways of doing things are older persons. They, unlike many of their peers and some persons of varying ages, do not view all of life in the rearview mirror.

Sure, our churches have plenty of those who yearn for yesteryear and fear anything that doesn't look familiar. But inflexibility is not the sole possession of one generation. And narrow-mindedness has no birth certificate.

Retired persons, or those old enough to be, are often very helpful resources — offering their wise counsel, valuable time and needed financial gifts to advance innovative, emerging opportunities for ministry.

Today so much of congregational life — as is common in other aspects of society — is segregated along generational lines. As a result, the engagement among various age groups is limited or missing.

That is to our communal peril. Intergenerational interaction is an important dynamic that should be fostered rather than

structurally restricted.

It is of extreme importance that younger perspectives are sought when decisions about the future courses of churches and related organizations rest only in the hands of those who have many years on them. Likewise, it is important to seek the perspectives of those who have been around awhile — if they have shown an openness to charting a new course rather than simply repeating the past.

The varied combinations of experience, insight, fresh ideas and energy that come from such intergenerational interaction make for a healthier, more productive community.

It is easy and wrong to stereotype all older adults as out-of-touch obstacles to needed change. (Now that can describe particular older persons — as well as others who are not very old.)

My own work is greatly enhanced by those whose counsel and support I seek. Some are young, bright leaders who bring a fresh perspective I need and do not have. Listening intently to how they view faith and life is of great benefit.

However, I spend much time with those who are older as well. The time, energy and resources they invest in good causes

amaze me.

Stereotypes never serve us well. And one of the worst is to assume that all older persons are bitter and inflexible. (Of course, some are that way; that's how stereotyping is birthed.)

But older adults often bring a blunt honesty (free of naïveté) that we need to hear and a caring heart for those who are captive to pain, disappointment or ignorance. They often have more time and resources, and volunteer in ways younger people with work and family obligations cannot.

Condescending comments about the “gray-haired” crowd that shows up at events and activities should be as offensive and unacceptable as ridiculing persons because of race or gender. While always seeking to include persons of diverse ages, backgrounds and experience, we do not need fewer experienced persons to bring their unique gifts and resources to the mix. We need more.

Some of the most open-minded, hopeful and helpful people I know are long past three-score years. They continually explore deeper truth, and desire that their remaining years be productive for matters more than personal gain. I state that both emphatically and with gratitude.

We enrich our personal lives and our congregations when we build relationships across generational lines — and seek out those who are eager to grow, learn and serve regardless of age. **BT**



*Some of the most open-minded, hopeful and helpful people I know are long past three-score years.*

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This book is a gold mine of spiritual wisdom, practical astuteness, and systemic understanding.... a call for spiritual renewal through congregational self-assessment and faith formation. — G. Wade Rowatt

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Poll finds most Americans don't think Scientology is a religion

By Jeanie Groh  
*Religion News Service*

**W**ASHINGTON — Most Americans do not believe Scientology is a real religion, according to a recent poll by *60 Minutes* and *Vanity Fair*.

The survey, conducted by CBS News, found that 70 percent of Americans say that Scientology is not a true religion; 13 percent believe it is; and 18 percent either don't know or don't care.

Out of the more than 1,000 people polled, Christian Americans were even more likely to question Scientology's status as a religion — 79 percent of evangelicals, 74 percent of Protestants and 72 percent of Catholics surveyed responded that they did not think Scientology is a religion.

L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction author, established Scientology in 1952, and the Church of Scientology has been acknowledged as a religion in the United States since 1993. Scientology is known for its celebrity followers, such as actors Tom Cruise and John Travolta.

It's hard to say exactly how many people practice Scientology in the U.S. Many critics suggest that there are between 25,000 and 55,000 active Scientologists, but the church's website claims growth of more than 4.4 million adherents each year.

Calls for comment from the church's Washington, D.C., office were not returned.

Each month, *60 Minutes* and *Vanity Fair* conduct a survey of a random sample of Americans by telephone. The questions touch on a variety of topics from religion to politics to celebrities.

September's poll asked, "What line of work would Jesus be in today?" Half of those surveyed said that Jesus would be a teacher, while 18 percent said he'd be a carpenter. **BT**

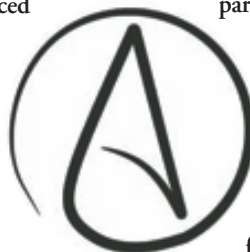
## Christians have crosses, Jews have stars, atheists have ...?

By Kimberly Winston  
*Religion News Service*

**H**ester Prynne would be so proud. The red letter "A" that Nathaniel Hawthorne's heroine was forced to wear as a badge of shame in the classic novel *The Scarlet Letter* is now proudly chosen by atheists to wear on jewelry made from ceramic, silver, gold and wood.

Christians have their crosses and crucifixes, Jews their Stars of David, Hindus their om's and Buddhists their lotuses. Atheists ask, why shouldn't they and other nonbelievers have their own symbols as well?

"It is the most recognized symbol in our community right now," said Amy Roth, a Los Angeles atheist who makes ceramic "A" pendants for her "Surlyramics" jewelry line that she sells at atheist conventions and meetings, as well as online.



"It's nice to have a small amulet of sorts that one can carry with them that represents who they are and makes them feel part of a larger rational community."

The scarlet "A" first appeared in 2007 as part of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science's "Out Campaign," aimed at getting atheists to be public about their beliefs — or lack thereof. It was designed by Josh Timonen, a multimedia designer, and was originally intended for a T-shirt.

It wasn't long before enterprising artisans — most of them atheists — started reproducing the symbol on rings, necklaces, pendants and earrings.

Atheists are not the only nonbelievers with their own symbols. Humanists have a "happy humanist," a boxy kind of stick figure with arms raised high. Skeptics have adopted a variety of symbols including an atom, a DNA strand and a tree of life. **BT**

## For-profit Christian college wins free campus

(RNS) — A for-profit, Christian university in Arizona has won one of the education world's most sought-after prizes: a free, historic, freshly renovated campus in the rolling hills of western Massachusetts.

**P**hoenix-based Grand Canyon University plans to open an extension campus in Northfield, Mass., on a 217-acre site formerly owned by Northfield Mount Hermon School. The private secondary school sold the campus in 2009 to Hobby Lobby, a craft store chain owned by the billionaire Green family of Oklahoma. The Greens invested \$5 million in upgrades with the intent to give it to a Christian institution.

Grand Canyon University, whose president and CEO Brian Mueller built the for-profit University of Phoenix into a giant with 340,000 online students, is part of a movement to reinvigorate Christian higher education. Key to the effort is a for-profit model that relies heavily on tuitions from online students.

GCU has 7,000 traditional students on campus in Phoenix, plus another 40,000 online. The vision for Northfield is to host 4,800 residential students and 1,200 commuters. Mueller also envisions thousands of online students in the Northeast visiting the campus for concerts, sporting events and learning programs that last a few days or weeks.

Founded in 1879 by legendary evangelist D.L. Moody, the Northfield campus attracted the Greens to the prospect of reviving Moody's evangelical legacy in a region known for secular views and liberal politics. But giving away 43 buildings in bucolic New England proved surprisingly challenging.

Late last year, plans fell through to launch a new C.S. Lewis College in Northfield after fundraising efforts came up short. Owners solicited new proposals, first from handpicked institutions, then a broader pool.

In choosing a recipient, the Greens sought an institution with an orthodox Christian mission and the financial wherewithal to pull it off. The Southern Baptist North American Mission Board was the runner-up.

Grand Canyon University was founded by Arizona Baptists in 1949 and sold in 2004. **BT**



# U.S. Protestants reach minority status for first time

By Tony W. Cartledge  
*Contributing Editor*

Protestants in America made big news recently by officially becoming a minority.

A major study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2007 showed that Protestants represented 51.3 percent of the population, putting the U.S. “on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country.”

A smaller Pew Forum study carried out this past summer revealed that Protestants have clearly crossed the line: only 48 percent of Americans now identify themselves as Protestant, down from 62 percent in 1972.

Other denominational preferences reported in the latest study included: Catholics (22 percent), Mormons (2 percent), Orthodox (1 percent) and those who reported belonging to “other faiths” (6 percent).

The biggest factor in the shrinking Protestant numbers is the rise of the “nones” — those persons who identify with no religion.

“Nones” now represent 20 percent of the U.S. population. This group includes those



who identify as atheists and agnostics (totaling about 2 percent), those claiming “nothing in particular” (14 percent) and those checking “don’t know” (2 percent) for their religious preference.

Younger adults are more likely to be unaffiliated. More than one-third of “younger Millennials” (ages 18-22) indicated no religious preference, closely followed by “older Millennials” (ages 23-31), at 30 percent. In contrast, just 5 percent of those age 80 and older and 9 percent of Americans ages 67-79 stated no religious affiliation.

The large middle generations are also seeing steady erosion in religious involvement. In 2012, 21 percent of those belonging to “Generation X” (ages 32-47) and 15 percent of Baby Boomers (ages 48-66) described themselves as religiously unaffiliated, according to the Pew report, both up three percentage points (from 18 percent and 12 percent in 2007).

Experts who study trends in church growth cite various factors for the decline. These include a variety of cultural changes in an increasingly postmodern and post-denominational world, a growing negative perception of some outspoken Protestant groups, and the lessening of any stigma associated with a lack of religious involvement. **BT**

## Restrictions on religious freedom increasing worldwide

By Lauren Markoe  
*Religion News Service*

Religious believers throughout the world face a rising tide of restrictions, according to a study released in September

In the one-year period ending in mid-2010, 75 percent of the world’s population lived in a nation with high or very high restrictions on religious beliefs or practices, according to the study conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. Pew tracked religious freedoms denied by government and cultural authorities.

A previous Pew study on the subject found that 70 percent of the world lived under religious restrictions.

The increasingly hostile climate doesn’t come as a surprise to John Pinna, director of government relations for the American Islamic Congress.

“As countries, particularly developing

nations, search for stability, religious persecution is a tool for consolidation of authority,” Pinna said. “Furthermore, in the developing world, governments lack the capacity to protect vulnerable populations from non-state actors who have their own political agendas.”

The Pew researchers found increasing intolerance in every region of the world. Government and social restrictions on religious freedom particularly tightened in the Middle East-North Africa region, Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, according to the study.

The Middle East and North Africa showed the highest levels of social and government hostility involving religion well before the beginning of the tumultuous period known as Arab Spring swept across the region.

Globally, restrictions increased not only in countries that already afforded few protections for religious freedom, such as Nigeria and Indonesia, but also in countries where citizens have generally enjoyed a high degree of religious liberty, such as Switzerland and

the U.S., the study found.

Among incidents cited in the U.S.: the intense opposition to the building of a mosque in Murfreesboro, Tenn., and a spike in the number of religion-related workplace discrimination complaints.

The study covered 197 countries and relied on 19 sources of information, including the U.S. State Department’s annual reports on religious freedom. **BT**



# The fire below

By Bill Wilson

As I met with a congregation's leaders to prepare a presentation to their congregation about the state of the church in American culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I mentioned that a primary issue we face in creating awareness is "the burning platform syndrome." One congregational leader asked with genuine curiosity: "What is a burning platform, and why should we care?"

Two good questions.

Question one: What is the burning platform syndrome?

The burning platform syndrome was coined by Daryl Conner in his 1993 book, *Managing at the Speed of Change*. He tells how, on July 6, 1988, a nighttime explosion and fire on the Piper Alpha Platform in the North Sea off the coast of Scotland became the worst catastrophe on the North Sea in 25 years.

The crew gathered on the platform, not certain of the severity of the fires burning below them. Finally, one of the few survivors, Andy Mochan, leapt 150 feet into a burning sea of oil and debris, knowing he would only survive for 20 minutes in the frigid sea.

Why did Andy jump? When interviewed in the hospital, he said that he chose uncertain death over certain death — he knew that if he stayed in the inferno on the platform, he would surely die. The pain of his current reality was too great. He jumped because he had to, not because he wanted to.

Conner used the "burning platform syndrome" to describe what people and organizations go through as they consider change. Personal and organizational change is often precipitated by a real or perceived "burning platform."

Change is usually pushed by discomfort with the status quo or unease about what is predicted if change is not made. We only jump/change when the pain or danger of staying where we are exceeds the pain or danger of making a change.

Question two: Why should we care?

To put it bluntly, there is a smoldering fire beneath the platform of congregational life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Sooner, rather than later,

it is going to become apparent that significant shifts and changes are necessary for survival. The sooner we recognize the severity of the situation, the more likely we will be to survive.

The congregational leader was interested enough to listen to the rest of the presentation, and later pulled me aside to say something like: "Thank you for naming something I've sensed for several years, but have not known how to put into words. Now that we know there is a problem, I believe we will respond with needed attention and urgency."

Thus far, she has proven prophetic, as the congregation is undergoing a significant shift in the way it sees and does its ministry.

The facts are frightening. Any number of sources can provide us with data that points to the local congregation facing significant headwind to remain vibrant and alive.

Research any of the familiar names who do statistical analysis of modern American congregational life: David Olson, George Barna, Mark Chaves, David Kinnamon, Ed Stetzer.

Read the FACTS (Faith Communities Today) 2010 survey and *The American Church in Crisis*.

Pay attention to voices such as Tom Ehrich, Dianna Butler Bass, Phyllis Tickle, George Bullard, Chris Gambill and Jim Wind. Study the metrics of your local congregation and other congregations like yours.

An honest look at our culture and our congregational life will lead to some sobering conclusions. The "churched culture" that helped create the golden era of congregational life in the United States is past. Institutional support for local churches is ebbing.

Participation in congregational life in most communities is receding in frequency and perceived importance. Most congregations face a looming crisis of funding the facilities, staff and programs that have defined them. Increasingly, we do our work in a hostile

mission setting, not a church-friendly cocoon of support.

What will we do when we realize the fire is real and deadly?

One response is to scapegoat. Too often, the one who points out the fire below is blamed for its existence. Clergy know the trepidation of acknowledging declining metrics, knowing that an initial response is to blame the staff for the bad news. Better to keep quiet and let it be.

Some will panic, reacting out of fear to exacerbate an already dangerous situation. Quick fixes and magic solutions seldom work long-term.

There is, however, the possibility that we will respond as God's people have across the centuries when confronted with long odds and huge obstacles. Rather than lose faith, we can acknowledge our plight and take the leap of faith to live in the courage and strength of God's provisions. When we do, we may find that the current crisis spawns a new day of vitality and life for the American church.

There is a fire beneath our platform. God bless you as you decide whether or not to leap. **BT**

—Bill Wilson is president of the Center for Congregational Health.



*Baptists Today* gratefully acknowledges gifts from the estates of

**Mr. W. Reeves McCall,  
Hartsville, S.C.**

**Dr. Carolyn Ward,  
Marietta, Ga.**

*Their thoughtful planning and generosity greatly support this important mission. For information on including Baptists Today in your plans, please call 1-877-752-5658.*



# Why?

*Answers to  
Baptist questions  
from a historical  
perspective*



## **QUESTION:** Why do Baptists observe ordinances rather than sacraments?

Since the time of Christ, believers have debated the basis and scope of salvation. In the early centuries, baptism and Eucharist (now often known as Communion or the Lord's Supper) came to be understood by many church leaders as actions that conveyed the grace of God, and thereby salvation, to recipients.

Salvation thus resided in the waters of baptism as well as in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, the latter of which were mysteriously transformed into the very body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation). Apart from baptism and Eucharist, human salvation was not possible.

Over time, the total number of salvific-conveying sacraments in Roman Catholic theology reached seven (the other five being Confirmation, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders and Matrimony).

As the Protestant Reformation unfolded in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Martin Luther reduced the Catholic construct to the original two sacraments (baptism and Eucharist), essentially retaining the broad belief of sacraments as conveying saving grace while, at the same time, positioning the witness of the Word (scripture, only recently wrested from the control of Catholic authorities and made available to common people) as partner in effecting salvation by grace alone through faith.

In response, the Roman Catholic Church, through the Council of Trent (1545-1563), repudiated Protestantism by formalizing the authoritativeness of all seven sacraments and decreeing that anyone denying the salvific nature of the full complement of seven sacraments was a heretic.

By the time Baptists were birthed in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the ongoing fracturing of Protestants pointed to a further disintegration of Catholic hegemony concerning the nature of sacraments.

Anglicans remained within the Roman sphere concerning the necessity of baptism and Eucharist for salvation, while relegating the five remaining sacraments to a lesser stature. Presbyterians retained a lesser level of mystery in the observance of baptism and Eucharist (considering baptism, for example, as a “seal” of “redemption”).

Baptists, in turn, emerged on the left of Lutheran, Anglican and Presbyterian thought by focusing squarely on the salvific power of heard scripture and positioning baptism and the Lord's Supper as outward signs or symbols following, and testifying to, salvation previously effected.

Baptists further departed from the historically mysterious nature of both practices by positioning the acts as available only to confessing believers, a radical development that resulted in much persecution of Baptists by theocratic governing bodies in Europe and the American colonies.

An early Baptist confessional statement, the Second London Confession (1677/1689), summarized the common Baptist belief of baptism as “a sign of fellowship” with God and testimony of the “remission of sins.”

As for the Eucharist, the Second London statement referred to the “Lord's Supper” as a “remembrance” and “only a memorial” of Christ's sacrifice for humanity, as well as a “confirmation” of faith. Both acts are referred to as “ordinance,” rather than sacrament, reflecting the nature of the acts as symbolic rather than salvific.

This delineation of baptism and Lord's Supper as symbols remains the standard Baptist view. Observed within the context of local congregations and typically administered by ordained clergy or deacons, baptism and Lord's Supper are yet commonly referred to as ordinances and are offered following a

believer's confession of faith.

By way of contrast, some Christians today yet hold to sacraments as conveying salvation: Roman Catholicism (and Orthodox) holds fast to the full complement of seven sacraments (and teaches salvation as only available through the Roman Catholic Church).

Anglicans maintain a two-sacrament (baptism and Eucharist) system; Lutherans posit baptism and Eucharist in tandem with scripture; Churches of Christ confine salvific powers to baptism; and Mormons (who in the last two decades have publicly positioned themselves as Christians, while yet teaching salvation as only available through Mormonism) hold aloft five sacraments as conveying salvation: baptism, ordination to the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods (in the case of men), temple endowment, and celestial marriage.

Finally, within the past decade, a new movement originating among British Baptist theologians — and echoed by some American theologians on both the right and left — seeks to re-position early Baptists as proponents of a sacramental (rather than symbolic) understanding of baptism and Eucharist. As such, “Baptist Sacramentalism” is a movement toward Anglican thought and, in some instances, Roman Catholic teachings.

In an increasing ecumenical-oriented, 21<sup>st</sup> century global Christian world, some Baptist churches of the future may trend toward adopting sacramental language and function. Most Baptist churches, however, will likely retain the early Baptist language and understanding of baptism and Lord's Supper as symbol and sign of salvation and redemption. **BT**

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

# Priorities & Processes

*Baptists Today* directors, staff focus on expanding publishing mission

PENSACOLA, Fla. — Twenty cake boxes were stacked in pyramidal form at the beginning of the *Baptists Today* Board of Directors meeting Sept. 20-21 at First Baptist Church of Pensacola. The boxes represented varied projects the news journal and its new publishing subsidiary, Nurturing Faith, Inc., are undertaking.

In June 2011, *Baptists Today* launched a Bible study curriculum for adults and youth. Contributing editor Tony Cartledge, who also teaches at Campbell University Divinity School, writes the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies that appear in the center spread of the news journal with free online teaching resources available at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net).

These Bible studies, used by many Sunday school classes and other weekly study groups, are provided in partnership with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation.

Also last year, *Baptists Today* leadership formed Nurturing Faith, Inc., to publish books and future church resources. The first Nurturing Faith titles were released in June. Using the latest publishing technology, Nurturing Faith books are produced in collaboration with Faith Lab, a creative services firm, and are available as downloads or in print at [nurturingfaith.info](http://nurturingfaith.info).

Director Toni Clevenger hosted the two-day meeting that included a fish fry and an interview with Alan Scott, whose son Hunter's research and persistence led to the exoneration of a World War II ship captain. (See stories on pages 4-6.)

## LEADERSHIP

Walter Shurden of Macon, Ga., who was elected to a second one-year term as chairman, reminded fellow directors and staff that it is the "ministry" of *Baptists Today*, not the expanding business that is most compelling. "If we were publishing a journal about agriculture, for example, most of us wouldn't be here," he said.

Other officers elected to second terms were Robert Cates of Rome, Ga., as vice chair, and Charles Schaible of Macon, Ga., as chair of the Budget/Finance Committee.

Executive Editor John Pierce recognized longtime directors Winnie Williams of Clemson, S.C., Mary Etta Sanders of Dalton, Ga., Jimmy Allen of Big Canoe, Ga., Tommy Boland of Alpharetta, Ga., and Gary Eubanks of Marietta, Ga., for their service.

New directors attending their first meeting were Cynthia Holmes of St. Louis, Vickie Willis of Murfreesboro, Tenn., Frank Granger of Athens, Ga., and Roger Paynter of Austin, Texas. Jack Glasgow of Zebulon, N.C., was also elected to the Board.

In addition to the officers, the Board approved Kelly Belcher of Asheville, N.C., Don Brewer of Gainesville, Ga., Nannette Avery of Signal Mountain, Tenn., Kathy Richardson of Rome, Ga., Cathy Turner of Clemson, S.C., and Tom Waller of Alpharetta, Ga., for one-year terms on the Executive Committee that also serves as the Nurturing Faith, Inc. Board.

Along with Schaible and Waller, Kenny Crump of Ruston, La., and Huey Bridgman of The Villages, Fla., serve on the Budget/Finance Committee.

Chairman Shurden commended directors for their vision, commitment and financial generosity through the Moving Forward Together initiative that allowed for filling a



*Baptists Today* Director Leo Thorne, associate general secretary of American Baptist Churches USA, ladles cheese grits to go with the fish that was caught, cooked and served by members of Pensacola's First Baptist Church.

crucial staff need. He urged continued support for the organization as it grows in circulation and expands its resources.

Executive Vice President Ben McDade, who joined the staff in July, shared with the Board about why he was attracted to the work of *Baptists Today* and how "authentic relationships" and integrity will guide and grow support for the news journal and other projects.

## PROJECTS

In addition to the national news journal that contains the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies for adults and youth, and the new book publishing initiative, directors and staff discussed other church resources in various stages of development

Rights have been acquired to a biblically comprehensive curriculum for students in grades one through six. Plans to test and develop the church-based children's curriculum are underway.

Much discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities that come from taking advantage of the latest publishing technologies while still providing users with familiar resources.

Pierce told directors that the growing publishing efforts of Nurturing Faith are designed



to enhance the effectiveness of *Baptists Today* news journal, not diminish it.

“The Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge have given the circulation of *Baptists Today* a big boost, and we have only touched the surface,” he said.

He added that book publishing and future church resources will provide needed support for the news journal and raise the visibility of the organization’s primary publication.

Also he updated directors on a major celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Baptists Today* set for April 25, 2013, at First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga., A 30-year history of the news journal, written by online editor and historian Bruce Gourley, will be presented to attendees at the dinner event.

The anniversary will also be marked by a special series in the news journal, a Baptist heritage tour in the fall of 2013 and other activities scattered throughout the year.

## PERSPECTIVES

Charlotte Cook Smith of Winston-Salem, N.C., and David Turner of Richmond, Va., gave testimonies about why they support the expanding mission of *Baptists Today*. Both emphasized the reliability of information and the eagerness to work in collaboration with other organizations.

Smith said she carries copies of *Baptists Today* to various churches, where her husband,



Though scattered from Montana to North Carolina, the *Baptists Today* staff held a planning retreat in September at Lake Burton in Northeast Georgia to prioritize projects and streamline processes. Pictured left to right are: front row, David Cassady and Bruce Gourley; second row, Ben McDade, Kim Hovis, Julie Steele and John Pierce; back row, Jackie Riley and Tony Cartledge. Not pictured: Jannie Lister.

Roy Smith, a former Baptist State Convention of North Carolina executive, speaks, in order to introduce them to the news journal and the Bible studies.

“Many of them don’t know about it,” she said.

Turner, pastor of Richmond’s Central Baptist Church and a member of the first class to graduate from Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology, said he discovered *Baptists Today* when a donor provided gift subscriptions to students. The news journal, he said, helped him to understand the broader Baptist world.

“I also support the mission of *Baptists*

*Today* because it doesn’t try to be sensational in an effort to gain readers,” said Turner. “But the main reason I personally support and believe in the mission of *Baptists Today* is because of relationships; and because its leadership and its Board are made up of people I trust.”

## PRIORITIES

Pierce reported that a staff retreat held Sept. 11-13 at Lake Burton in Northeast Georgia provided an opportunity to prioritize the multiple projects and to streamline processes. He commended the staff, spread from Montana to North Carolina, for their giftedness, commitment and hard work.

He also thanked directors for their representation (“showing up”), encouragement and support. *Baptists Today* has been able to “seize the moment” when opportunities arise, said Pierce, because the organization is “nimble” enough to move quickly and is supported by faithful Board members, cooperative partners and generous contributors.

“While we followed no long-term, strategic plan for *Baptists Today* to evolve as it has, we are now strategically placing *Baptists Today*/Nurturing Faith to be a trusted publisher of news, Bible study curriculum and other resources for churches that value honest inquiry and serious study,” said Pierce.

He added that the model of collaboration that has emerged from *Baptists Today* is consistent with the recent report of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s 2012 Task Force.

“Churches are better served when we work with others to provide what they need,” he said. “We are eager to partner with others where there is trust, competence and mutual benefits — that ultimately benefit congregations.” **BT**



Left to right: Directors Kelly Belcher of Asheville, N.C., Cynthia Holmes of St. Louis and Mary Jane Cardwell of Waycross, Ga., share a laugh and some shrimp during a dinner event as part of the *Baptists Today* Board meeting.

## Classifieds

**Minister of Music and Worship:** First Baptist Church in Spruce Pine, N.C., is seeking either one full-time or two part-time persons to fill the position of minister of music. We are seeking someone who has a heart to serve the Lord, desires to reach people through music, and will lead worship in traditional and/or contemporary formats. This position involves working with and leading the worship choir, praise team, youth choir, handbells and instrumental ensemble. A musical background with appropriate experience and training is preferred but not required. Interested candidates should submit résumés to Music Director Search Team, First Baptist Church, 125 Tappan St., Spruce Pine, NC 28777, or to [beasley\\_spfbc@bellsouth.net](mailto:beasley_spfbc@bellsouth.net). Contact information also may be left with the church secretary at (828) 765-9411.

**Minister of Students:** First Baptist Church of Laurinburg, N.C., seeks a full-time minister of students. This staff person will lead and coordinate the ministry to students (18 years and under) and their families in a 375-member church, ministering directly and working with adult volunteers. A minimum of a four-year degree from an accredited school is required

with some experience working on a church staff. The position will include salary and benefits with a requirement of relocating to Laurinburg. First Baptist Church is affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (state and national) and the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Send a letter of interest and résumé with references to [cfmcdowell@bellsouth.net](mailto:cfmcdowell@bellsouth.net), or to Rev. C. F. McDowell III, Minister of Students Search, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 883, Laurinburg, NC 28353.

**Minister to Youth and Children:** First Baptist Church Laurens, located in upstate South Carolina, is seeking a minister to youth and children. This person will join three other full-time ministerial staff members in serving our congregation of 800-plus active members. The candidate should be a graduate of an accredited seminary and have a minimum of two years experience in working with both students and children. FBC Laurens is dually aligned with the SBC and CBF, and offers a competitive salary and benefits package. Résumés will be received until Nov. 15 at First Baptist Church, 300 W. Main St., Laurens, SC 29360, or at [rletson@prtcnet.com](mailto:rletson@prtcnet.com).

## In the Know

**Bill Crouch** will retire in June from Georgetown College in Georgetown, Ky., where he has served as president for 21 years.

**Sumner M. Grant** will retire as executive director of the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB) upon the appointment of his successor.

**Shaun M. King** is pastor of Johns Creek Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Ga., coming from College Park Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla.

**Howard R. Moody** died Sept. 12 at age 91. He was minister emeritus of Judson Memorial Church in New York City's Greenwich Village, where he was pastor for 35 years.

**Dale Tadlock** is coordinator for Passport Media. He has been minister to young adults and students at First Baptist Church of Waynesboro, Va., since 2007. **BT**

### LOOKING FOR A GREAT PLACE TO PUBLISH A BOOK?

Check out Nurturing Faith — a new publishing venture from *Baptists Today* and Faithlab

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

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Cooperative Baptist Fellowship



# Nurturing FAITH™ BIBLE STUDIES

The Bible Lessons that anchor the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies are written by **Tony Cartledge** in a scholarly, yet applicable, style from the wide range of Christian scriptures. A graduate of the University of Georgia, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Duke University (Ph.D.) as well as an experienced pastor and writer, he provides deep insight for Christian living without "dumbing down" the richness of the biblical texts for honest learners.



Teaching resources at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)

## HOW TO USE THESE BIBLE STUDIES

1. Order a copy of *Baptists Today* news journal for EACH MEMBER of the class. The Bible Lessons are found only here.
2. Teachers can go to [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) to access all of the free resources needed for presentation. Simply click on "Adult" or "Youth."

### Teaching the Lessons

After reading The Bible Lessons by Tony Cartledge starting on page 18, teachers can access helpful teaching resources (at no charge) at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net). These include:

- \* Tony's video overviews
- \* Adult teaching plans by Rick Jordan
- \* Youth teaching plans by Jeremy Colliver
- \* Tony's "Digging Deeper" notes and "The Hardest Question"
- \* Links to commentaries, multimedia resources and more

### How to Order

The Bible Lessons in *Baptists Today* are copyrighted and not to be photocopied.

- \* Orders may be placed at [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org) or 1-877-752-5658.
- \* The price is just \$18 each for groups of 25 or more — for a full year — with no additional costs.
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For **adults** and **youth**

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Adult teaching plans by **Rick Jordan** of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina are available at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)

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# Bible Study

Jeremiah 33:14-16

with Tony W. Cartledge

Dec. 2, 2012

## New Things Coming

**W**ith the season of Advent, Christians celebrate the coming of something new that is far more important than the impending new year. Annually we anticipate the earthly arrival of Christ as one destined to be a life-changer, world-changer, even eternity-changer. ⬇

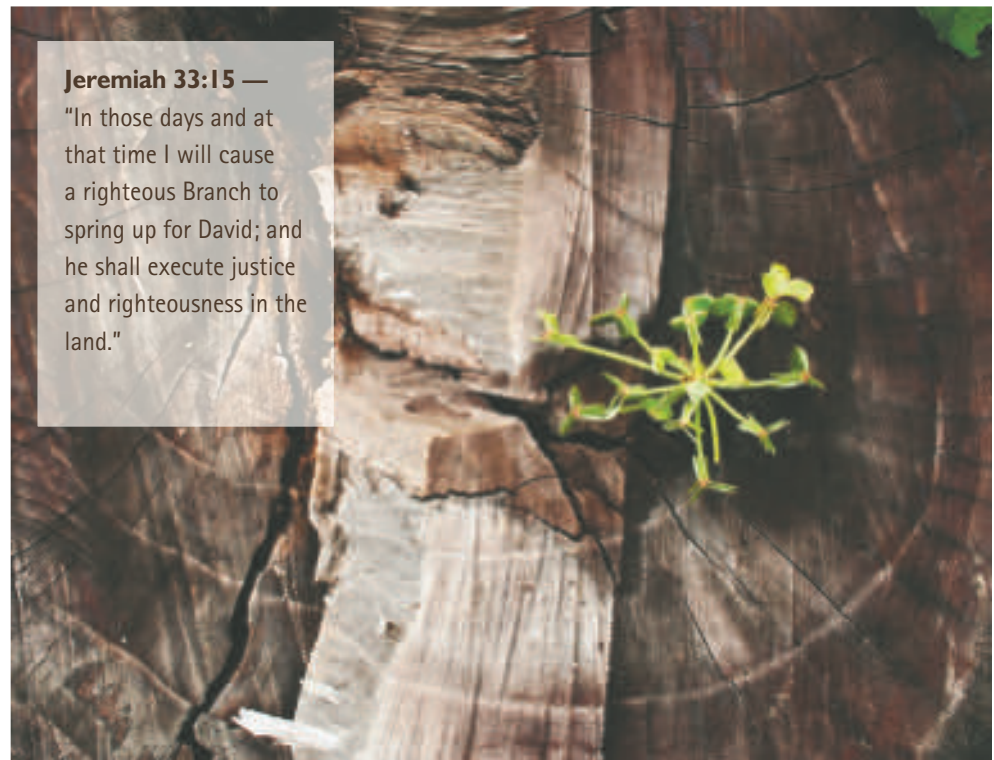
Today we begin the Advent season with a curious text from Jeremiah in which the prophet speaks of a “righteous Branch” that will arise and start something new.

Jeremiah’s “branch” calls to mind two of my favorite Christmas specials. The first is *Emmet Otter’s Jugband Christmas*, a Jim Henson-muppetized version of Russell Hoban’s book by the same name.

Emmet’s story is set in a little river village called “Frogtown Hollow,” where he and his widowed mother barely scrape by because Emmet’s Pa had invested everything in worthless snake oil.

As the story begins, Emmet brings home a “Christmas Branch” in keeping with a tradition started by his Pa, who would say “Because I didn’t cut it down, that tree will still be alive in a hundred years!” It’s a very simple pine branch, but serves as an important symbol of hope for the remainder of the program.

A homely twig of a Christmas tree also appears in the perennial favorite *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. While shopping for a Christmas tree, Charlie Brown picks out a scraggly little specimen – because he feels sorry for it. The other children give Charlie Brown much



grief for choosing such a pitiful tree, but when they gather to decorate it, the little tree becomes something beautiful.

### A righteous branch (v. 14)

You may find it interesting that three different prophets, when they wanted to proclaim the hope of a coming Messiah, used the image of a branch or shoot from a tree. Sometime near the middle of the eighth century B.C.E., Isaiah of Jerusalem predicted that the great tree of Israel would be chopped down. But Isaiah also saw a promise of hope in that “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isa. 11:1, NRSV). ⬇

Some 150 years later, after Israel had fallen to the Assyrians and Judah was imperiled by the Babylonians, Jeremiah also saw past Israel’s fall to a day of hope when God would raise up “a righteous branch” from the house of David.

Following the exile, Zechariah would use the same metaphor to express

hope that Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, was the chosen “Branch” who would rebuild the temple and the nation (3:8, 6:12).

All three prophets used the image of Israel as a great tree — especially when under David’s leadership — that had been cut down. Yet, from a stump that appeared lifeless and forlorn, the prophets saw a new shoot springing up, a branch that would grow strong with new life and bring renewed hope to God’s people. ⬇

Jeremiah’s prophecy is portrayed as a direct word from God: “The days are surely coming, says the LORD. I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (v. 14). ⬇

What promise was that? Jeremiah may have in mind other prophecies of his own (including 23:5-6, 7-8; 30:3; 31:27, 31) that also begin with “In days to come.” Behind these prophecies is God’s promise to David that his descendants would rule over Israel forever (2 Sam. 7:1-14). ⬇ The imagery in that surprising promise described a “family

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon






tree” of kings, beginning with David, who would lead Israel. The promise was to last “forever,” but included a provision that those who led Israel wrongly would be subject to discipline.

This is precisely what happened: Over a period of time, David’s descendants led Israel down paths that were evil and far from God, and David’s family tree was cut down when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and carried a wave of Israelites into exile about 586 B.C.E. Israel’s theologians interpreted the exile as God’s discipline for their errant ways.

### A hopeful promise (vv. 15-16)

Jeremiah escaped to Egypt but wrote letters to the exiles, encouraging them to remain hopeful. He did not believe God would forget the “forever promise” made to David. Thus, speaking on God’s behalf, Jeremiah declared that at the appropriate time, “I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (v. 15). 

Though Israel’s “family tree” had been cut off at ground level, the stump did not die. Those who heard Jeremiah’s prophecy did not see much evidence of new life, for the exile went on for 50 years. The end of the exile began a hopeful period, but Israel remained a sub-province of Persia and later of other kingdoms. For 500 years, there was little to suggest that God’s promise to David would come to pass, despite Jeremiah’s prediction.

But in God’s good time, a vigorous sprig sprang from the side of the aged stump and began to grow. That shoot, of course, was Jesus. The gospel writers recognized this and took pains to identify Jesus as a direct descendant of David, a scion of the family tree.

Jeremiah describes the coming “Branch” or “Sprout” as being “righteous,” and one who would “execute justice and righteousness in the land.” To first-century Jews, the notion of executing justice in the land meant leading Israel back to its former glory as a

strong and independent kingdom.

Verse 16 further strengthened this notion: “In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” The Hebrew people would naturally have interpreted this to describe the restoration of a strong kingdom and a sense of national security.

### A surprising twist

This is not, however, what happened. Jesus was indeed born as a “sprout” from the stump of David, but the justice, righteousness, and salvation that Jesus would bring to the family tree would be more spiritual than physical, more relational than national.


As “the righteous Branch” began to teach those who would listen, he revealed a new kind of justice and righteousness: a relationship with God based on divine forgiveness rather than human striving, a righteousness that works for justice and goodness because it is motivated by love rather than obligation.

The promised salvation of Judah and the safety of Jerusalem would not be fulfilled by a victorious army, but through divine grace that offers God’s people present hope and future salvation, whatever the political state of Judah and Jerusalem.

In response to God’s work, Jeremiah says Jerusalem will be called “The LORD is our righteousness.” Jerusalem was the symbolic heart of Israel and its people. Jeremiah seems to be saying that those who live in this new relationship with God will be called by the name of the very one who brings them life and hope.

We don’t use that title now, calling ourselves by the name “The Lord is our righteousness.” But we who are saved by the Messiah, by the Christ, *do* call ourselves “Christians.”

The important thing to remember is that Christ not only imparts to us his

name, but also his nature. To call ourselves “The Lord is our righteousness” is to commit ourselves to righteous living. To call ourselves “Christians” is to commit ourselves to being Christlike. 


As we go about our professional and personal lives, do we make decisions based on what Jesus would have done? If others were asked to describe our character, would they be likely to use the word “righteous”?

Most of us would have to confess that our lives are lacking. We don’t always live up to Christ’s calling. We don’t always achieve our dreams. We don’t always finish our plans.

It may be comforting to know that we are not the first. That is what this text is about: broken dreams and unfinished business. Israel got off to a great start under David, but the nation lost its way and it failed.

In our lives we may have experienced failed courses in college, a failed business venture or a failed marriage. We may feel that our spiritual journey, begun with great promise, has also foundered.

The indisputable fact is that we, like Israel, are sinful people. But even though we are sinful and stunted, and we may sabotage every new spurt of growth, God still loves us. And, just as we may redeem a scraggly tree by covering it with tinsel and lights, God in Christ wants to cover our ragged and failed lives with forgiveness and love, making of us something beautiful and alive and radiant.

Some days our spiritual lives may feel no more beautiful than Charlie Brown’s scrawny Christmas tree, but Jeremiah wants us to know that God’s grace can fill in motivational gaps and straighten our behavioral limbs. God’s love can cover us with shining ornaments of spiritual gifts that declare good news to the world. 

The real miracle of Christmas will happen when our neighbors are less impressed with how we decorate our houses, and are more impressed with the transformation in our lives. **BT**

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 3:1-6

Dec. 9, 2012

## People, Get Ready

What gets you up in the mornings? Some folks naturally wake up early, but others need a little help to make sure they arise on time when work or duty calls. Have you ever relied on an alarm clock? For years I used a small, spring-operated clock that had to be wound up every night. Its only alarm option was a raucous ring. Newer digital clocks can be set to play a variety of sounds or turn on the radio. Many of us now rely on our mobile phones as an alarm.

Whatever form they take or noise they make, alarm clocks tend to be annoying, because their whole purpose is to wake us up when we'd rather be asleep. That leaves us with ambivalent feelings about our waker-uppers. They may aggravate us, but we keep them around because we know we need them.

In a sense, John the baptizer came into the world as a divinely appointed alarm clock. His purpose was to call people to wake up and get ready to face the new day that was dawning in the life and work of Jesus Christ. John was an abrasive, irritating character whose strident comments about Herod got him thrown into a cell and deprived of his head.

### John's background (vv. 1-2a)

We study the life of John during the season of Advent because the holy disturber of the peace also calls us to wake up and get ready to meet Jesus — not just in the manger, but every day. Luke's introduction to John's ministry

#### Luke 3:3 —

"He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins ..."

stands out because it provides more detail than the other gospels about the political setting and the prophetic background of John's ministry.

Alan Culpepper suggests that the more detailed chronological data reflects Luke's view that John's advent signaled the true beginning of Jesus' ministry ("The Gospel of Luke," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Luke-John* [Abingdon, 1995], 80).

Before the system of fixing dates by the Christian era began, events were denoted by correlation to the administrations of high government officials, or by the number of years since the founding of Rome. Luke chooses the former method, dating the beginning of John the baptizer's ministry to the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Tiberius, in addition to five other rulers of lesser degree.

Even with Luke's elaborate chronology, we can't pin down a specific date, though they point to a date between 26 and 29 CE. Luke later noted that Jesus began his own ministry

at "about thirty years old" (Luke 3:23). Jesus was probably born between 4 and 6 BCE, which would have made him just over 30 at the time of his baptism. This fits well with the chronological framework Luke provides here.

Note that Luke is careful to situate John's ministry within both the secular climate dominated by the Romans and the religious culture of Judaism. This underscores Luke's special interest in demonstrating that Jesus came to redeem all peoples, not just the Jews. Luke may also have wanted to name these officials early on, because several of them (Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas) would later play important roles in Jesus' crucifixion.

### John's call (v. 2b)

Having given the context, Luke tells us that "the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (v. 2b). This is the language of prophetic calling (see Jer. 1:1-5; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:1-3;

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Hos. 1:1). In the Old Testament, the call of a prophet usually included several common elements: 1) a notice that “the word of the Lord came” to him, 2) his name, 3) his father’s name, 4) the place of his call and 5) the date, fixed by the current king of Israel or Judah. In John’s case, the final element came first (vv. 1-2a), but the others fall into the familiar pattern.

John’s father Zechariah was a priest, which is known to the reader from the account of John’s birth in Luke 1:5-25, 57-80. As one who was born into a priestly family, we may assume that John received religious training as he was growing up. At some point, however, he forswore civilized company and even civilized food and clothing, retiring to the desert for an unknown period before beginning his active ministry.

We learn a bit more about John’s sojourn in the wilderness from Luke 1:80, which describes John’s growth and his choice of the desert as his home: “The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.” This suggests that John may have repaired to the wilderness while still a young man. 📖

The wilderness was a desolate and demanding area where one lived by the skin of the teeth and was ever aware of the need for God’s help. John’s choice of camel hair clothing, along with a diet of locusts and wild honey, may suggest personal idiosyncrasies, but also emphasizes John’s total dependence on God and God’s world for his sustenance. John truly lived off the land. Even so, Luke’s description conjures up the image of a wild man who may be close to God, but not to anyone else (Mark 1:6).

In what setting do you think John found the most spiritual growth: through the shape of government, the influence of society, his religious upbringing, or the time he spent alone with God in the wilderness?

Does that suggest anything to us about our own spiritual growth?

### John’s preaching (v. 3)

All three synoptic gospels suggest that John preached throughout the region around the Jordan River. Foremost in his preaching was the need for repentance and the efficacy of baptism as a public confession that led to forgiveness of sins.

As Luke describes it, John punctuated his sermonizing with quotations from Isaiah, seeing himself as one who had come to prepare the way for the Lord (3:4-6). He lambasted religious hypocrisy and challenged his hearers to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” rather than trusting in their religious heritage for salvation (3:7-9). 📖

John went on to call for social justice in words reminiscent of Jesus’ teachings (3:10-14), and predicted the coming of another who would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (3:15-17 – we’ll look more closely at 3:7-18 in next week’s lesson).

Why did John practice baptism as a sign of repentance? Many scholars presume that John became an adherent of baptism from his supposed association with the Essenes, a strict sect within Judaism. The Essenes often lived in wilderness areas such as the desert village of Qumran, or made periodic retreats to the desert from their homes in Jerusalem. They taught the importance of regular confession and frequent ablutions to ensure ritual purity.

These ceremonies may have been based on the purification rituals of Leviticus 15, or on Old Testament references to washing as a symbol of confession and forgiveness (see Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:16; Jer. 4:14). Both John and the Essenes emphasized, however, that washing in water was ineffective apart from true repentance.

In our day, adult church members sometimes express a desire to be re-baptized, especially when they come back to the church after a period away. Sometimes they explain that they did not understand what they were doing when they were baptized as children. Do you think John would grant their request? Why, or why not?

### John’s mission (vv. 4-6)

Although John was often portrayed as a new Elijah (see “The Hardest Question in the online resources), Luke describes his mission as fulfilling the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah, who spoke of one who would arise in the desert and work to “prepare the way of the LORD.” 📖 In vv. 4-6, Luke quotes directly from Isaiah 40:3-6. While Isaiah’s language describes the sort of physical road building that would require a civil engineer and a fleet of bulldozers and dump trucks, his intent is clearly metaphorical.

Isaiah speaks of one who calls on the nation to prepare a straight way and a level road through difficult terrain in hopes of seeing “the salvation of God” appear. John’s preaching was not to cut a highway through the desert, but to cut to the quick of Hebrew hearts, calling them to repentance and readiness for the message of Jesus.

If Isaiah had been writing today, he might have referenced the painstaking 12-mile journey of the retired space shuttle *Enterprise* from the Los Angeles airport to its new home at the California Science Center. Moving the 170,000-pound, five-story shuttle called for intense planning, the shifting of countless power lines, and the removal of more than 500 trees. The hard work would be accompanied by huge crowds lining the route to greet the proud shuttle on its one-mile-per-hour journey, and finding inspiration in doing so.

Is John’s message still needed today? How much effort is required to cut into the rugged hills of our hearts so we might prepare for and welcome Jesus’ presence? **BT**

# YOUTH

December 2 — December 30, 2012

Youth Lessons by **David Cassady** and online youth teaching resources (at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)) by **Jeremy Colliver** build off



The Bible Lessons by Tony Cartledge.

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

## The Promise

"Will you spit and shake on it?" "Cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye!" "Pinky Promise?" These phrases are stuck in my head when I think back to how I used to make promises with my friends. There were no contracts to sign or notaries that were needed, just a simple gesture between friends. Jeremiah 33.14-16 reveals how a promise that God made was to be kept: by revealing it through a righteous branch.

At first glance this seems odd that the imagery used is a branch, but Isaiah and Zechariah use branch imagery when speaking about the hope of the Messiah. What is even stranger is that when Jeremiah writes this, the Israelites have been in exile for 50 years and there seems to be little of David's family tree left to rule. But the prophecy is one of

hope because the people would have remembered the promise God made to David.

So what will this Messiah bring? The Messiah will put Israel back where it belongs as a strong, glorious and independent kingdom. The Messiah that comes will bring Israel back to this state by executing justice and bringing righteousness to the land. If the hearers of the fulfilled promise have any doubts, Jeremiah squashes them, saying Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. There is no doubt in the LORD because the LORD is righteous.

The people who originally heard this promise did not see it fulfilled. It would be another 500 years before Jesus would come and fulfill the prophecy. The justice and righteousness Jesus brings are not of national upheaval, but of relational love.

## DECEMBER 2

### Think About It:

*We know that the promise was fulfilled as Jesus, but do we proclaim that promise in the way we live? Do we bring justice and righteousness to those we encounter?*

### Make a Choice:

*The righteous branch came in the form of Jesus. Will you choose to wave that branch in Jesus' name, or will you choose to wave your own branch?*

### Pray:

*We saw Jesus come as the righteous branch and then hang on a tree. May his life and death not be in vain, but may we live a life of righteousness and justice.*

## Prepare the Way

It was the same routine before every game: Put my right sock on and lace the right cleat up tight, put my left sock on and lace the left cleat tight, slide my right shin guard, and then my left under my sock; tape it at the top and bottom so it wouldn't slide around while playing. I would finish by putting on my jersey, making sure it was tucked in snugly. It was then that I was prepared to play.

Our text from Luke 3 gives us a brief snapshot of how John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus' ministry: through a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John called these people to a new life, not through him, but through the one who would follow him — Jesus.

Just as you don't want to get ready too

early for a game, or be rushed to prepare too close to the start of a game, Luke reveals the timing for John's arrival on the scene. Luke includes both Roman and Jewish events because he knows that his readers will come from both worlds.

Luke also tells us that John's call comes from God and that his message is supposed to be one of preparing people to follow the way of Jesus. The call that John preaches (to those who will listen) isn't an easy road to follow. Paths are to be made straight, valleys filled, mountains lowered, bends straightened, and the rough made smooth. The imagery, even now with large machinery, is enormous in scale. Imagine how these images felt to the original hearers of the news John was preaching!

## DECEMBER 9

### Think About It:

*The type of preparation John preached is not easy. What preparations are you making for the coming of Jesus this Advent season? How sacrificial are these preparations?*

### Make a Choice:

*Preparation matters. It can make the difference between success and struggle. Most often you have to give something else up to make time to prepare. How often do you take time to prepare? How does it make a difference when you do?*

### Pray:

*God, you have prepared the way before us and will follow where we have been. We are grateful for the preparations you make for us.*



## You're Not Serious

The crowd has gathered, and the energy is rising. They draw closer to the water, awaiting their time to be baptized. Then you see them stop as John starts, "You brood of vipers ..." John goes on to preach, with expectations escalating. Instead of the people retreating, they ask, "What then must we do?"

John does not hold back in his sermons. His confidence comes in knowing he was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. John's the one who lays it all out there. He's

not worried that the people will react in his favor, because he knows that God will raise a people from the rocks if these people don't respond.

It is not enough for John simply to get the crowd to repent, but he also wants to know that people are really different after leaving the waters. He is such a charismatic leader, the crowd wonders if he might be the Messiah. He wants no part in this and points to the one who will follow him — the one who is truly worthy.

DECEMBER 16

### Think About It:

*What might John have required of you in the way that you live?*

### Make a Choice:

*How do you make a daily choice to live out the good news of Jesus? How do you prepare the way for Jesus to arrive in the lives of others?*

### Pray:

*Dear God, we know that our road is not easy, so we ask for strength to walk in your will.*

## Joy!

Do you recall the feeling of pure joy, when the world stands still and you are so focused on that one moment when you feel like you could fly? The moment grows even better when you get to share it.

Our passage from Luke 1 gives a snapshot of Mary and Elizabeth sharing such a moment.

Elizabeth and Mary are pregnant with John and Jesus, respectively. The two women greet each other with a sense of the Holy Spirit residing in each other: Elizabeth

speaking of the blessed child in Mary, and Mary speaking of the blessing of Elizabeth's faith. Elizabeth shows humility in her gratefulness that Mary has come to visit her. This sharing of good news leads to praise for Mary and her faith in Gabriel's promise.

Mary's response to Elizabeth is presented to the reader in the form of a song. Mary's song begins with what God has done for her, but ends with what God has done for all of humanity. Her song is one of joy and praise for God and what God has done.

DECEMBER 23

### Think About It:

*Do you have the confidence and joy that Mary did in the good works of God in your life?*

### Make a Choice:

*What kind of attitude do you choose to come with in your relationship with God? How does your relationship with God bring you joy?*

### Pray:

*God, may we come to you with confidence, joy and praise for the ways you work in our lives.*

## Where Is Jesus?

Hollywood couldn't have depicted this scene any better. The parents leave to head home, and along the way they look around and can't find their son. A search begins among their own party, but to no avail. They return to find their son.

When the parents arrive back at the temple, Jesus looks at them and says, "Why did it take so long? Didn't you know I would be in my Father's house?" He is at odds with his parents not only for not knowing where he would be, but also stating whose child he really is: God's son.

So what happened while Jesus was at the temple? At the age of 12 he should be simply listening and asking questions, but instead he is providing his own thoughts and opinions. The crowd and the teachers are amazed.

We don't know if Jesus has already realized who he is or if he is on the way to this discovery. What we do know is that he doesn't leave his relationship with God at the temple, but takes it with him wherever he goes.

DECEMBER 30

### Think About It:

*Jesus takes his experiences in the temple, and they transform him away from the temple. How are you transformed by your encounters with God?*

### Make a Choice:

*Do you choose to take what you learn at church and live it outside the walls of the church?*

### Pray:

*May we be transformed by your presence wherever we encounter you.*

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 3:7-18

Dec. 16, 2012

## You've Got To Be Kidding

The small, white-frame building of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, near West Jefferson, N.C., is quaint but unassuming in appearance. Visitors who venture inside, however, discover three fresco paintings by renowned artist Ben Long. They include a portrait of a very pregnant Virgin Mary, a majestic depiction of Jesus' spirit ascending from the cross, and a rugged portrayal of John the Baptist.

Most visitors find the baptizer's image least appealing of the three: He is shirtless, wiry and deeply tanned, with a camel hair loincloth about his waist and a huge staff in one of his hands. His eyes burn through heavy brows beneath matted hair, and his lips seem poised to pronounce some bitter invective through his bristly beard.

But I like the man in that picture. It's true that he looks like a wild man, but he also looks like John. Jesus' cousin lived a hard life, and he said hard things. Somebody had to do it. But, beneath John's rough exterior there was a heart that beat for God. And, within his fiery words, there was a message that Luke calls "good news."

Luke's gospel gives us the most complete account of John's preaching to be found in the Bible. 🛖 He organizes John's teaching into three groups of sayings: warnings about future judgment and empty repentance (vv. 7-9), a call for a new ethic (vv. 10-14) and the announcement of the coming Messiah (vv. 15-17). 🛖 These sayings constitute our lesson for today.

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



### Can snakes be sorry? (vv. 7-9)

In Matthew, John's scalding words targeted the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mat. 3:7-10), but in Luke, the same words addressed everyone in the crowd who came forward for baptism. Although the people had professed repentance, John called them a "brood of vipers" – a negative appellation that accused the penitents of inner evil.

Is this any way to win new converts?

John asked the crowds "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" – but the question was rhetorical. No doubt, John himself had warned them in his own preaching; what we have in the Gospels is only a tiny summary of his sermonizing. John's call for repentance and forgiveness in v. 3 would certainly have been accompanied by warnings of judgment if they did not repent.

The reference to "the wrath to come" echoes prophetic warnings that a coming "day of the Lord" would mean trouble for the wicked (compare Isa.

2:11-22, 13:9; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:14-18, 2:2). John warned his hearers that empty repentance based on fear alone could be worse than no repentance at all.

John seemed to be concerned, however, with the sincerity of those who had come for baptism. As crowds of people came to fear that a day of judgment was drawing near, they flocked to the river for baptism. Perhaps John visualized them as a nest of snakes slithering away from danger – but without changing their serpentine nature. John wanted to see evidence of lasting, heartfelt change.


Thus, he called on the baptism-seeking crowds to demonstrate a change of life through "fruits worthy of repentance," rather than relying on their ethnic heritage (v. 8, compare 16:19-31). We presume that John was addressing a primarily Jewish audience, but the preacher wanted the crowds to know that "being Abraham's kin won't get you in."

God could make children out of stones, John said, perhaps reflecting imagery of "the rock from which you



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were hewn” (Isa. 51:1-2). God did not have to depend on the Israelites to produce children, but the “children of Israel” needed to depend on God. Returning to the metaphor of the “fruits worthy of repentance,” John warned his hearers that the ax was already poised to strike down any trees whose barren branches revealed the emptiness of their faith (v. 9). 

John’s warning could easily be addressed to Christian believers who may have responded to an altar call out of the fear of hell, only to go back to life as usual. Church members may be tempted to assume that their “once saved, always saved” doctrine of the “preservation of the saints” assures them of a fire insurance policy that will pay off no matter how they behave. John’s call for behavior commensurate with commitment is more in keeping with a more nuanced “once saved, always saved – if *really* saved.”

### The proof of repentance (vv. 10-14)

The baptizer’s abrasive words may not have comforted his wilderness congregation, but it engaged them, and some talked back to him, asking: “What should we do then?”

John’s response called for a variety of ethical reforms. What he taught was not new: Hebrew prophets as early as the eighth century had consistently called for social justice and better treatment of the poor (Amos 5:21-24, Mic. 3:3-5, Jer. 5:26-29, Isa. 58:6-9, among others).


Luke shows a special interest in the plight of the poor and the dangers of wealth. By his record, all three of John’s ethical teachings concerned themselves with the problematic issue of material greed. Those who were wealthy enough to have two tunics should share with someone less fortunate, he said, and those who had more than enough food should do the same (v. 11). 


While Luke ascribes the question in v. 10 to “the crowd,” a comparison to Matthew’s insistence that Jesus was speaking directly to Pharisees and

Sadducees may suggest that they were foremost among those who asked the question. They were followed by two specific groups of people who asked similar questions: tax collectors (vv. 12-13) and soldiers (v. 14).

Though we may assume that all who came forward were seeking baptism, tax collectors are the only ones specifically said to be aiming for the water. They also asked “What should we do?” John’s instruction was simple: they should take no more than the amount prescribed by law (vv. 12-13).

The “tax collectors” referred to here did not assess income or property taxes, but were independent contractors who collected tolls and customs fees common to daily life and business. In the Roman system, such persons would bid in advance for the right to collect certain tolls, pay their overseers the amount of their bid, and keep whatever else they could demand. The system, obviously, was open to abuse, making “honest tax collector” a near-oxymoron (witness Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10).

Those who collected taxes for the Romans faced natural enmity from their fellow Jews, who considered them to be traitors and turncoats. John does not demean their position or the necessity of collecting taxes, but calls for just taxation rather than the greedy exploitation commonly practiced. 

Soldiers made up the third group. If we are correct in assuming that John’s audience was largely Jewish, these would have been Hebrew mercenaries who worked for the Romans. This made them, like the tax collectors, subject to public derision. Soldiers did not receive a high wage, and were tempted to use the power of their office to extort money from the populace by threat of violence. 

Imagine that someone in your particular profession or your social setting had asked John “What shall we do?” What do you suppose John would have


said? How can you demonstrate the reality of repentance through caring and ethical behavior in *your* daily life and work?

### The one yet to come (vv. 15-18)

John’s authoritative preaching and amazing charisma (despite his appearance) led many hearers to wonder if he might be the Messiah (v. 15, compare to the more detailed discussion in John 1:19-28). Luke says the people were “filled with expectation,” suggesting that they hoped John would prove to be the long-anticipated Messiah.

John explained that he was not the one, but instead a forerunner who had come to prepare the way for the Messiah’s arrival. Today we might think of a head of state who has security agents and others who travel to a city prior to a state visit, making sure that everything is ready. John’s concern was not with arranging security for the coming leader, but with preparing the people’s hearts and minds to receive the Messiah’s message.

The one coming, John said, would be greater than him: so much greater that John – equivalent to a religious rock star in his day – was unworthy to carry out the slave’s task of stooping down to loosen his master’s sandals.

In further contrast, while John baptized with water, the one to come would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (v. 16). Fire can have a cleansing or purifying purpose. In this context, it is also symbolic of judgment: the following verse declares that the Messiah would winnow out the good wheat while consigning the worthless chaff to the fire (v. 17). 

Despite John’s sharp words and his warning of an imminent and painful judgment, Luke summarizes his preaching (or “exhortations”) as “good news.” Those who heeded John’s call could avoid judgment, find forgiveness, and reform their living in a way more pleasing to God.

Does that sound like good news to you? **BT**

# Bible Study

Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

with Tony W. Cartledge

Dec. 23, 2012

## Fetal Attraction

It's hard to imagine – even to begin to imagine – what it must have been like when two of the world's most unlikely pregnant women first embraced each other in a familial reunion. The most obviously expectant one is Elizabeth, who had long been barren and was getting on in years (Luke 1:7), but had surprisingly conceived after her dumbstruck husband Zechariah had been visited by the angel Gabriel (1:8-20).

Hurrying to meet Elizabeth is her niece Mary, barely more than a child, who has become pregnant in even more miraculous fashion. Gabriel had visited her, too, declaring that she had been chosen to bear a son who would be called the Son of God – while she remained a virgin (1:26-35). The boy was to be named Jesus (*yeshua*), which means something like “Yahweh saves.”

The angel had told Elizabeth's husband that their son, to be named John, would become a great man for God, in the spirit and power of Elijah (1:14-17). He later told the skeptical Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy as a way of encouraging her to believe, because “nothing will be impossible for God” (1:36-37).

Just try, then, to imagine the joyous reunion of two women at such different stages of life, but both carrying miracle babies. ↓

### A joyful journey (vv. 39-40)

By backing up 30 years and eavesdropping on Mary and Elizabeth, we continue our three-week pattern of

Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon



looking at Advent through the eyes of John the Baptist and his family.

To understand the absolute joy experienced by the two women – and the impact their children could have – we must remember that for several hundred years, messianic expectations had been growing among the Hebrews. As a subservient people ruled by outsiders, many Jews longed for the birth of a Messiah who would deliver Israel from the Romans and set up a new order with Israel in a favored position.

Neither Mary nor Elizabeth yet understood that Jesus was to be a radically different kind of Messiah than expected in popular thought, but their spiritual insight was clear enough to perceive that God was about to use their sons to shake up the world.

Luke gives the impression that Mary went to visit Elizabeth very soon after her encounter with the angel Gabriel, possibly before she experienced any signs of her own pregnancy. The angel had told her about Elizabeth's gravid state as a sign to strengthen Mary's faith. No doubt filled

with questions and perhaps anxious for confirmation of the sign, Mary went to visit Elizabeth. Luke tells us, in fact, that she set out “in haste” (v. 39). ↓

On foot or by donkey, a journey of that length over rocky roads would require at least three or four days. ↓ It is possible that Mary journeyed in company with a trade caravan or a group of pilgrims to Jerusalem for part of the journey, but when she arrived at Elizabeth's home, she was alone. Works of art often portray Elizabeth running out to meet Mary, but Luke insists that Mary first entered Elizabeth's house, which becomes the setting of their encounter (v. 40).

Luke tells the story by using a quick series of active verbs: Mary “set out,” “went with haste,” “entered the house” and “greeted Elizabeth.” Notice how this also moves the narrative from the more general to the more specific in a spatial sense: Mary went to the hill country, to a village of Judea, to the house, then to Elizabeth (Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke,” *The New Interpreter's Bible IX: Luke, John* [Abingdon Press, 1995], 54).



### A prophetic greeting (vv. 41-45)

Elizabeth appears to have been startled by Mary's happy greeting. When we are surprised in a good way, we may sense that our heart jumps within us, or we may think our stomach is doing flips. When Elizabeth heard Mary's joyful voice, Luke says, her unborn child "leaped in her womb." Simultaneously (and more significantly), Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit," who inspired the content of her breathless response to Mary's arrival. The inrushing of the Holy Spirit upon Elizabeth (and apparently her unborn but active child) fulfilled the angel's earlier prophecy that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit "even before his birth" (Luke 1:15).

The text describes Elizabeth and Mary as relatives, but does not specify their relationship: we know only that Elizabeth was considerably older. Bound by both blood and the common experience of miraculous pregnancies, Mary and Elizabeth also shared the bond of the Holy Spirit's presence within them.

Keep in mind that Mary had come "in haste" after Gabriel's annunciation of Jesus, so the story implies that her pregnancy had just begun. Yet Elizabeth (and apparently the fetal John) perceived that Mary was with child. The reader assumes that the Holy Spirit inspired this perception, as well as Elizabeth's address to Mary as "the mother of my Lord." There is no indication that the women had communicated previously or that an angelic messenger had prepared Elizabeth for Mary's arrival.

The pronouncements of Elizabeth in vv. 41-45 could be understood as a prophetic oracle, either a longer oracle in four parts or a series of briefer oracles. Some writers speak of this as the "Song of Elizabeth," and it has some poetic qualities, but these are better explained by its oracular nature.

Elizabeth first speaks to the blessedness of Mary and the child she bears (v. 42). This blessing upon Mary is

### Resources to teach adult and youth classes

are available at  
[nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net)

employed in Catholic tradition to convey semi-divine status upon Mary, but it simply means "blessed." The Greek word is *ēulogemēnē*, the root of our word "eulogy." Elizabeth's "eulogy" was pronounced at the beginning of a life, however, not at the end.

The older woman's words did not impute a state of blessedness to Mary, but recognized that God had already blessed Mary. The wording of Elizabeth's joyous proclamation is similar to those pronounced on Jael (Judg. 5:24) and Judith (Jdt. 13:18; Judith is an apocryphal book not found in most Protestant Bibles). Culpepper notes the irony involved: Jael and Judith were praised for their heroism in wielding a weapon, while Mary would experience a stab of pain to her own heart (Luke 2:35; Culpepper, 55).

Elizabeth's next prophecy comes in the form of a question, asking why "the mother of my Lord" should come to her. Note Luke's emphasis on Elizabeth's humility. "Why has this happened to me?" implies something like "How could this happen to one so unworthy?" (v. 43). Elizabeth knows that Mary bears the Messiah – whom she describes as "my Lord" – but she is not jealous. Rather, she is overwhelmed with gratitude that Mary would deign to come and visit her.

Elizabeth's third assertion affirms the connection between Mary's voice and the intrauterine activity of the unborn John, and insists that the infant was wiggling for joy to be in close proximity to the newly conceived Jesus (v. 44). Joy is a common theme in the text.

Finally, Elizabeth pronounced a beatitude on Mary (using *makarios*, the same word translated as "blessed" or "happy" in the more famous "Beatitudes" of Matt. 5:1-12). Elizabeth praised Mary's faith in believing the angel's promise.

### A special song (vv. 46-55)

Our text officially ends with v. 45, but we should take a brief look at Mary's response, which is in the form of a hymn. 📖 The poem falls naturally into two sections, with the first focusing on what God has done for Mary (vv. 46-50) and the second celebrating what God has done for all people (vv. 51-55; see Richard B. Vinson, *Luke*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2008], 42-43).

As Luke tells the story, Mary gave voice to her joy through a spontaneous hymn of praise, and it is an impressive piece of work. Had she rehearsed this song in her mind on the long trip down? Was the song inspired by the same Holy Spirit who had moved Elizabeth to perceive Mary's own pregnancy? Parts of the song are very similar to the Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10: Both songs praise God as one who remembers the faithful, topples the proud and reverses the fortunes of the poor.

Scholars have often noted that Hannah's song might have been more appropriate for Elizabeth, since those two women conceived long after everyone had assumed that they were barren. Some ancient versions attribute the song to Elizabeth, but the strongest traditions assign it to Mary.

The key theme of Mary's song is praise. She praises God's power, holiness and mercy toward the faithful (vv. 47-50). She praises God's justice and concern for the poor, expressed in the "reversal of fortunes" theme that echoes Hannah's song (vv. 51-53). God could be trusted as reliable and faithful in dealing with Israel, even as God's promises had proven true for Mary and Elizabeth. Following a pattern that grammarians sometimes call the "prophetic perfect," Mary speaks of things yet to come but uses the past tense, as if they had already happened. In doing so, she expresses confidence that God's promises would be fulfilled. 📖

What promises do you associate with God's work in Christ? Do you feel as confident as Mary did? **BT**

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 2:41-52

Dec. 30, 2012

## Questions and Answers

“Are you smarter than a fifth grader?” That question punctuated the airwaves often during the five-year run of a television game show of the same name, hosted by comedian Jeff Foxworthy. As a 12-year-old boy, Jesus was about the age of many fifth graders when he left a group of Israel’s leading theologians scratching their heads.

Like many people, I “grew up in church.” My parents took me to church from infancy on, and we worshiped together from the time I graduated from the nursery. I would sit under the balcony with my father and brothers, while my mother kept watch from the choir.

The memories of those times are special and meaningful to me. I knew we were going to church because it was important, but also because it was meaningful. We didn’t go because we *had* to go. We went because it kept us grounded.

Today’s text tells us that Jesus’ parents took him to church, too. In Jesus’ world, however, there was only one “church” for all the Hebrews. The temple in Jerusalem was a journey of several days by foot from Nazareth, so most people only went to the temple on special occasions and pilgrim festivals. At other times, they probably worshiped in local synagogues. When the adult Jesus later announced his public ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth, he appeared to have been perfectly at home.



**Luke 2:49** — “He said to them, ‘Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’”


### At the temple (vv. 41-42)

Luke’s gospel often uses a travel motif as an organizing unit, and Jesus’ journeys to the temple are a significant structural device within the gospel. Jesus’ first trip to the temple was probably for his circumcision and ceremonial naming (Lu. 2:22-38). This customarily took place when a boy was eight days old, and would have taken place while his parents remained in Bethlehem, just a few miles from Jerusalem.

We know virtually nothing about Jesus’ early life. Luke insists that Mary and Joseph were very observant Jews, however, so that “every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.” The law required all Jewish men to attend the three annual major festivals in Jerusalem (Exod. 34:23). Because of the hardships involved in travel, though, even observant Jews might have gone just once per year.

While men alone were expected to attend, women often accompanied them. Since Luke insists that both Mary

and Joseph characteristically attended the Passover celebration, the reader assumes that Jesus and his brothers went along, too.

At 12 years old, Jesus was approaching the age of accountability. Though Jewish custom varied through the years, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was accepted that a boy reached the “age of maturity” at 13. 

We cannot be sure if Jesus’ temple visit at age 12 served any ceremonial purpose, but something brought him into contact with local priests and scholars, to amazing effect.

### Among the rabbis (vv. 43-47)

Still a boy at 12, Jesus would not yet have been allowed to enter “the court of Israel,” an inner part of the temple reserved for Jewish men. The rabbis, however, generally taught in one of the outer courts or on the steps of the temple. The text implies that young Jesus joined in the rabbinic dialogue and was so fascinated by the experience that he wanted to stay long after his parents


Additional background information online where you see the “Digging Deeper” icon





readied themselves for the long journey home (v. 43).

Luke makes the extraordinary claim that Mary and Joseph had traveled for a full day on the homeward journey before they realized that Jesus was missing (v. 44). Casual readers may accuse them of neglect, at best, but one should be aware that Jesus' parents would have been traveling in a caravan of other pilgrims that would normally have included many friends and extended family members. It is likely that Jesus had made this journey several times before. It would not be unusual for an adolescent boy to remain largely out of sight. Like most 12-year-olds, Jesus may have preferred the traveling company of his friends to that of his parents.

Jesus could not be found in the caravan, despite what the Greek grammar suggests was a prolonged and thorough search. At a loss, Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem. The three days it reportedly took to find Jesus probably includes the full day's journey toward home and a journey of the same length back to Jerusalem before locating Jesus on the following day (v. 45-46a). 

Luke's narrative style expresses his delight in the story of how Jesus was found in the temple itself, sitting among the rabbis, both listening and asking questions (v. 46b). This question-and-answer style of teaching was typical for the rabbis, who often took disciples and trained them in the study and interpretation of the law.

Jesus had already advanced beyond the beginning student role of listening and asking, however. Not only did his questions reveal a high level of discernment, but he was also expressing his own opinions, and "all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (v. 47). When the adult Jesus later read the scripture and interpreted it in the synagogue in Nazareth, the people were likewise amazed (4:17). The Greek word is different, but the effect is the same.

### At odds with parents (vv. 48-52)

An interesting interplay occurs in vv. 48-49. Some frosty moments passed when Jesus' parents discovered Jesus, and they scolded him for treating them badly by causing unnecessary anxiety. Like a stereotypical Yiddish mama, Mary fumed, in so many words: "Boy, why have you treated us this way? Your father and I have been looking all over for you! We've been worried sick."


Jesus' response shows little remorse, if any. He replied with a question of his own: "Why did it take you so long to find me? Didn't you know I must be in my Father's house?" (v. 49, paraphrased). Such a rebuttal seems alarmingly precocious, suggesting that Jesus was fully aware of his identity and mission even as a child. Other texts, however, clearly imply that Jesus grew and developed as other children (Luke 1:80; 2:52), perhaps not fully coming to terms with his identity until his own pilgrimage into the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). Many scholars suspect that Luke was repeating a much-loved tradition that goes beyond the actual conversation.


In any case, Luke intentionally uses the word "father" in two different ways. In chiding Jesus for causing distress, Mary referred to Joseph as Jesus' "father." This is not necessarily inconsistent with the virgin birth tradition. Luke provides the most detailed account of the virgin birth, but also uses the word we translate as "parents" with reference to Mary and Joseph (v. 43). It would be only natural for Mary to refer to Joseph as Jesus' father, since in every way other than biological paternity he was Jesus' earthly father.


Jesus' retort that they should have known he would be in his "Father's house" reminds the reader that Jesus was not conceived in the normal way. Whether Jesus at age 12 understood

the circumstances surrounding his birth is unknown, and unlikely. For Luke, however, it is important for the reader to contemplate the dichotomy between Jesus as son of Joseph and Son of God.

While the reader may understand the double use of "father," Luke insists that Mary and Joseph had no idea what Jesus meant (v. 50). Had the angelic visitations associated with Jesus' birth grown so old that Mary and Joseph no longer thought of Jesus as "the son of the Most High"? Or, does this story derive from a tradition that does not include the virgin birth, and hence would not expect Mary and Joseph to be anything other than dumbfounded?

We cannot answer these questions with certainty, and Luke does not belabor the issue. He simply adds a few telling observations: Jesus went home with his parents and remained obedient to them, Mary "treasured all these things in her heart,"  and Jesus continued to grow in wisdom as he grew in years, finding increased favor in both the divine and human arenas (vv. 51-52).

In this way, Luke portrays Jesus as one whose origin partakes of two worlds, and who grows in wisdom and favor within both of those worlds. It is beyond our human minds to comprehend fully how Jesus could partake of both divine and human natures, for we cannot imagine where one began and the other left off. 

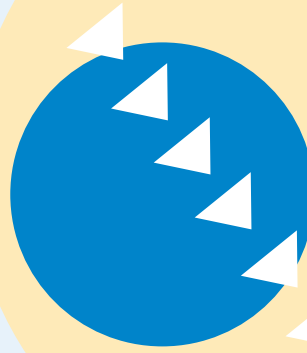
When did Jesus become aware of his true nature, and how did it happen? Was he born with divine prescience, or did he receive a later revelation? Luke's story of Jesus at the temple suggests that Jesus, like all humans, grew in self-awareness gradually. Since Jewish boys were considered to be men and often married shortly after puberty, the "temple at 12" story suggests that Jesus' attempt to understand to claim his identity was well on its way as he approached the threshold of adulthood. 

Jesus experienced the presence of God at the temple, but did not leave that experience behind on the journey home. Perhaps contemporary believers could take a lesson from that. **BT**

# Adventures with **LULER** the Hound



Kelly Belcher



## The Bow-wow

Luler says to notice people who have no way to celebrate Advent and Christmas, and practice the Golden Rule on them.



In December, a young Baptist's thoughts turn to presents. Luler likes toys and tasty treats, but her favorite present is love: a belly scratch, a game of fetch or a cuddle. What's the best present you ever received?

What's the best present you have ever given to someone? The Advent season, which begins with the first day of the church year on December 2, and the Christmas season, which goes from December 25 until January 6 on Epiphany Day, is a great time to consider giving a special gift to those you love: Give them gold.

You don't have to buy stuff made out of gold! But you can still goldify everyone you know. Celebrate Jesus' birth by following what grown-up Jesus taught: Do to others what you would have them do to you, which is called the Golden Rule.

As your gift to the people you love, show love by goldifying as many people as you can, even people you might not give a present to. See how many ways you can goldify people. Surprise them. Love is always the best present to give!



## The Idea Box

Memorize what Jesus said was the greatest commandment: "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."



**More Online:** Jump online at [nurturingfaith.net](http://nurturingfaith.net) to discover weekly ideas for children's leaders.



By Brett Younger

## Listening for the blessing

On most Saturdays Jesus attended a Sabbath synagogue service that ended with this benediction from Numbers 6:24-26:

*May God bless you and keep you.  
May God's face shine upon you  
and be gracious to you.  
May God look upon you with kindness  
and give you peace.*

Jesus heard the hope of God's blessing every week, but I wonder if everyone present heard the blessing. Did the priest ever feel like closing with something different, perhaps like this?

*May God look upon you with a look  
that says "I'm watching you."*

The Sunday morning benediction at the churches of my childhood went like this:

*The nursery workers asked me to  
remind you to pick up your children  
as soon as this service is over.  
This Wednesday night is business  
meeting, but come anyway.  
Youth, don't forget to bring a sweet or  
salty snack to the ping-pong party on  
Friday.  
Anybody got anything else? We'll see y'all  
back here at 6:00.*

On my first Sunday as a college student far from home, Dan Bagby offered this benediction:

*May the Lord Christ walk ahead of you  
to prepare your way.  
May Christ be beside you as companion  
on your journey.  
May Christ be beneath you to support  
you when you fall.  
May Christ be within you giving peace  
and joy.  
May Christ be behind you to finish what  
you must leave undone.  
May the Lord Christ be over you, watch-  
ing, calling, guiding, challenging now  
and forevermore.*



I had never heard such a thing in worship. I learned to look forward to this weekly reminder of Christ's presence. Now I wonder if on the Sunday before Election Day, Dan ever considered sneaking in a line like:

*May Christ be to the left of you,  
leading you to vote like your pastor.*

I offered this benediction several times:

*May God take your minds  
and think through them.  
May God take your lips  
and speak through them.  
May God take your hands  
and work through them.  
May God take your hearts  
and set them on fire.*

One church member repeatedly suggested I add:

*May God take your noses  
and smell through them.*

Perhaps he wanted us to smell the stench of injustice.

You may have heard this one, which seems to have been written for Senior Adult Day:

*God grant you the senility to  
forget the people you never liked  
anyway, the good fortune to run  
into the ones that you do, and the  
eyesight to tell the difference.*

What would be the reaction if a minister offered this Irish blessing?

*May your glass be ever full.  
May the roof over your head  
be always strong.  
And may you be in heaven half an hour  
before the devil knows you're dead.*

Would worshippers be amused if this were the benediction?

*May those who love us love us  
and those who don't love us, may  
God turn their hearts. And if God  
doesn't turn their hearts, may God  
turn their ankles so we'll know  
them by their limping.*

A few years ago I heard a prayer and scribbled a rough, paraphrased version on the back of an offering envelope. I tried unsuccessfully to find the source, but used it many times before a seminary student recognized it as part of a Franciscan prayer:

*May God bless you with distaste  
for superficial worship so that you will  
live deep within your soul.  
May God bless you with anger  
at prejudice so that you will work  
for justice.  
May God bless you with tears  
for those who sorrow so that you will  
share a word of comfort.  
May God bless you with enough foolish-  
ness to believe that you can make a  
difference in the world.*

The benediction calls us to live deeply into God's blessings. One Sunday I may add:

*May God bless you with dissatisfaction  
at just hearing a benediction so that  
you will truly feel God's blessing. BT*

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.

# From broken places

*Pastoral care leader Doug Dickens conveys God's redeeming ways*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — As a child, Doug Dickens didn't have grandiose visions of becoming a sought-after authority on the care and education of ministers. He never dreamed of the intricate ways God would lead him around the world to serve men and women in ministry.

**T**he son of an alcoholic father and a loving but psychologically challenged mother, Dickens survived his childhood and embraced a call toward pastoral care. So now, in spite of his professional successes, Dickens doesn't convey an exaggerated sense of importance about who he is.

"Having grown up in a children's home and come out of a very dysfunctional family, I am keenly aware that I am just one small example of how God redeems broken places in people's lives and uses us," he said. "So I really am sometimes overwhelmed and amazed at the places where I wind up and the things I wind up doing."

For 12 years he has served on the faculty of Gardner-Webb University's divinity school, where he fills the W. Randall Lolley Chair of Pastoral Studies. Earlier he taught pastoral ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, where he earned his master's and doctoral degrees.

For more than 25 years Dickens has received extensive training related to trauma and crisis intervention in refugees. Most recently, he was asked to serve as part of a new Harvard Trauma Program to work with displaced people groups and those who have been devastated from war and civil violence.

"It was mind-boggling for me... They've selected psychiatrists and psychologists and experts from all over the world, and they select me," said Dickens. "God has a funny, funny imagination."

With mission service in Rwanda, Uganda, the Belgian Congo, Russia, Thailand and other challenging settings, Dickens could stay home and simply relate those experiences to his students. But he is still motivated to make a difference on an international level.

He credits Gardner-Webb President Frank

Bonner with helping him maintain a continuing commitment to international service and missions.

"One of the ways Dr. Bonner has blessed me — and I think it has ultimately blessed the university through my classes — is that he has always allowed me to continue to be involved in international efforts," said Dickens. "When the tsunami hit Indonesia and Thailand, I was asked immediately if I could go. Dr. Bonner didn't bat an eye. He said, 'We see this as a way of using our professors internationally and using their gifts, and it will come back to us.'"

In the spring, Dickens spoke at the inaugural Global Member Care Conference, held in Thailand. The organization provides an international connection between Christian practitioners of member care at all levels. As part of the trip, he incorporated a visit that had been four years in the making.

"It occurred to me," he said, "if I attend the conference and present this paper, why can't I tie this into going a few hundred miles into the mountains to this refugee camp?"

Through quick planning, his trip ultimately included a journey to the Mae La Refugee Camp, the largest of seven camps along Thailand's border with Burma. The camps house more than 140,000 people who were forced to flee their homes when military forces burned the villages and committed atrocities that caused ethnic minorities, especially the Karen people, to believe they intended genocide.

While his primary focus was on research, Dickens sought to connect with some Karen people — which include many Baptists. Temperatures there soared above 100 degrees.

"The month of April is the hottest time of the year, and the temperatures in the camp the week I was there were 105," said Dickens.



Gardner-Webb's Doug Dickens works with persons around the world who have been devastated by tragedy and civil unrest. Photo by Niki Bliss-Carroll.



“There were at least 60,000 people in this guarded United Nations camp, split into four quadrants. No real roads in the camp; very little electricity. The Bible school had electricity, but only at certain times of the day.”

While out walking with the pastor in the camp, Dickens realized that he wasn't sweating, he was dizzy, his head hurt and he could think of only one thing: heat stroke. He knew the safest course of action was to get back to the Bible school and pour water over his head and try to stand under the one electric fan that was there.

“When I got there, they were having a brown-out [no electricity],” said Dickens. “I poured water over my head and stripped down to my shorts and decided to just sit there until my body cooled off. It was as primitive and difficult a condition as I've ever been in.”

As he sat in the Bible school, unsure of whether his body was cooling down quickly enough, he began to talk to members of the faculty and some of their students. He realized his physical condition was giving him an opportunity to talk to the people he was there to research.

“I was doing narrative interviews, letting them tell the story of watching their wives and children as they were being run out by the Burmese army who were trying to kill them,” he shared. “They were talking about their wives being raped, their sons and men just shot and killed. I mean, awful, awful stories. But I kept hearing how their faith and trust in God kept them going.”

Armed with these stories of survival and hope, Dickens traveled back to Chang Mai to participate in the conference.

“One week to the day I left the refugee camp, the Bible college burned to the ground,” Dickens said. “They had five or six buildings, all wooden buildings with bamboo leaf roofs. They cook in open pots over huge fires. One stray spark could easily ignite the buildings, and they had to go to the river to get water. Everything burned: the library, their classrooms, the faculty housing, personal items, everything.”

Dickens said he knows the school will

rebuild, and he hopes to get back to teach a weeklong course on pastoral care.

As tragedy once again touched the lives of the refugees, Dickens was inspired by the positive perspective of the Bible school leaders.

“Their response to the fire was basically that they were going to thank God for his grace for what he provided in the past, and that they were going to thank God for what they knew he would provide for the future,” he said.

These attitudes gave Dickens immediate and practical examples as he prepared to present his paper on the Beatitudes as mental health markers for missionaries and families.

For Dickens, the chance to present his paper at the first Global Member Care Conference led to an even greater learning opportunity.

“I was delighted to share my insights on the use of the Beatitudes as they relate to the mental health of evangelists,” he said. “But I gained such an incredible perspective in return by participating with the refugees and traumatized people at a Bible school in a refugee camp. I heard stories that make me ashamed of how comfortable my faith is. When a student says they want three more points on a test because they didn't think it was fair, I look at them and say, ‘What world are you living in?’”

His years of research with well-known psychiatrists have confirmed one very important thing for Dickens: There is a connection between spirituality and trauma. Research shows that people in trauma who have an intrinsic or deep spirituality or faith are more resilient.

“I've seen God, in the lives of these people, give them more,” he said. “But again, I'll go back to the beginning. My daddy, whom I loved, was an alcoholic and my momma had her psychotic episodes, and I've seen God redeem my whole life. That, I understand.” **BT**

—Adapted from an article by Niki Bliss-Carroll of Gardner-Webb University's communications office.

*For more than 25 years Dickens has received extensive training related to trauma and crisis intervention in refugees. Most recently, he was asked to serve as part of a new Harvard Trauma Program to work with displaced people groups and those who have been devastated from war and civil violence.*

## Library restoration follows fire in refugee camp

An accidental fire in late April destroyed the library and faculty offices of the Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible Seminary and College (KKBBSC), located in the Mae La Refugee Camp inside the border of Thailand. Ethnic Karen persons, who fled military oppression in Myanmar (Burma), have lived in the camp for nearly 25 years.

For 22 years the Baptist school has trained hundreds of church leaders. The fire left the school without the needed resources.

Duane Binkley, who is jointly appointed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Missions and American Baptist Churches International Ministries, led in the effort to restore the library.

Binkley, who helps coordinate Burma refugee resettlement efforts in the U.S., found financial support for the effort from Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. Approximately 1,800 books were shipped to KKBBSC in August.

Les Hill, a retired Baptist missionary who lives in Lexington, Ky., learned of the loss from Saw Alwyn, a KKBBSC faculty member who was doing post-graduate study at the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary where Hill had long served.

American Baptist mission leaders connected Hill with Binkley. Efforts to restore the library were enlarged.

James Chancellor, retiring professor of world religions at Southern Baptist Seminary, had a close relationship with the seminary's former Old Testament professor, Marvin Tate. Chancellor gathered books — mostly from Tate's library and some of his own — totaling about 200.

Executive director Tracy Taylor of the International Book Project (IBP) in Lexington, Ky., which specializes in shipping books globally, gave assistance. Dalen Jackson, academic dean of Baptist Seminary of Kentucky, selected books from IBP's warehouse.

Brinkley also received books from Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kan., Montgomery Community Church of Cincinnati and Mountain Brook Baptist Church. He will travel to Thailand early next year to determine if additional help is needed. **BT**

# Civil War Baptists changed my thinking about church-state separation

A group of Baptist historians gathered recently to read and discuss writings by Civil War Baptists. Along with more obvious issues, such as slavery and war, we looked for the theme of separation of church and state.

A bumper sticker on my laptop says, “Separation of Church & State is good for both.” I consider myself a strict separationist.

I agree with colonial Baptist Isaac Backus’ statement: “God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are distinct in their nature, and ought never to be confounded together; one of which is called civil, the other ecclesiastical government.”

My kind of Baptist loves to quote John Leland: “Government has no more to do with the religious opinions of men than it has with the principles of mathematics.”

South Carolina’s Welsh Neck Baptist Association utterly failed the strict separationist standard in an 1861 resolution. Appealing to the “requirements of Jehovah,” they implored “the God of battles” to aid their resistance to the northern invasion’s “savage barbarity,” which they believed was motivated by “glowing religious fanaticism.” Their churches unanimously pledged “unreserved submission to . . . divine authority” in a vow to “peril their lives in the glorious cause” of the Confederacy.

On the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line, the Vermont Baptist Convention of 1863 also confounded civil and ecclesiastical governments. They saw in the South’s defeat the “adaptation of our Chief Magistrate [Lincoln] to the position providence has assigned him; that Protestantism and evangelical piety are to supplant all false systems of religion and rule the world,” allowing America to fulfill its promise to be “the missionary nation to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.”

These statements were the rule rather than the exception. Civil War Baptists, North and South, constantly confused the civil and ecclesiastical spheres and called men and women to align their religious opinions with government’s divine purposes in executing war.

What are we to make of these writings? Does 19<sup>th</sup>-century Baptist involvement in

American civil religion confirm W.A. Criswell’s quip, “This notion of the separation of church and state was the figment of some infidel’s imagination”? Are contemporary Baptists who flock after David Barton and Rick Perry’s vision of a Christian America on the right side of Baptist history?

No. Baptists’ interaction with government varies according to historical context, but they consistently support separation of church and state, unless they fall into the idolatry of jingoistic nationalism. Participation in civil religion is not tantamount to rejection of separation of church and state in certain historical contexts, though in others it is counterproductive to that ideal.

With few exceptions — most notably the United States and particularly the American South — Baptists historically have been a marginalized minority within their culture. As such, they have sought strict separation of church and state to counter discrimination by established state churches and their supportive governments.

American Baptists before the Revolution were religious and political outsiders. By the 1860s, though, they had entered mainstream America, bolstered by compatibility with American democracy and rapid growth. As the narratives of the Baptist church and the American way converged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, strict separationist views naturally declined. Baptists thrived in a nation whose founding documents upheld religious liberty and whose future seemed at one with democracy and evangelical Protestant supremacy.

As Baylor University’s Doug Weaver noted in our group discussions, we cannot judge Baptists of that era by contemporary standards. Baptists in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America presumed a Christian culture with legal guarantees of

religious liberty. Expressions of civil religion such as days of prayer and fasting or sermons to legislative assemblies did not register as violations of church and state for them. They viewed such activities against the backdrop of colonial persecution and deemed them no infringement upon freedom of conscience.

Weaver pointed out that though strict separationism declined in this atmosphere, opposition to government interference with individual religious liberty remained a Baptist constant. Based on individual freedom of conscience, Baptists insisted on believers’ baptism, voluntary church membership, and “bottom up” democratic church governance in their churches.

In church and state matters, this commitment to religious voluntarism led Baptists to reject government coercion in any citizen’s religious affiliation, worship, or freedom of religious speech. For example, many Civil War Baptists rejected a paid military chaplaincy. Though not strict separationists of the colonial era type, these patriotic Baptists stood against state interference with individual religious liberty.

Baptists have always considered patriotic civil involvement and separation of church and state compatible, if sometimes problematic. Unfortunately, Baptist patriotism sometimes deteriorated into jingoistic nationalism.

Nationalism is patriotism beyond criticism, an unquestioning allegiance to the state that destroys a core Baptist principle: the unmediated sovereignty of God over the individual soul. War exacerbates nationalism’s appeal to make the state a co-deity.

During the cauldron of the Civil War, many, perhaps most, white Baptists North and South veered into nationalism. A particularly egregious example, which violated individual conscience, was fearful white Southern Baptists’ support of laws restricting slave worship and literacy.

Reading Civil War Baptist writings and hearing Baptist scholars interpret them changed my understanding of the Baptist



William Loyd Allen



# BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

No major battles take place this month. Lincoln's Republican Party suffers losses in mid-term elections, an outcome attributed to the president's plans for emancipating African slaves.

Undeterred, Lincoln declares: "We, even we here, hold the power and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free ... The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just — a way which if followed the world will forever applaud and God must forever bless."

Baptists of the North publicly voice their approval of Lincoln's course of action. The Pennsylvania Baptist Convention declares: "That as the institution of slavery stands before the world as the confessed feeding source of the present mighty and wicked rebellion against our national Constitution, we most heartily approve of the President's proclamation of emancipation, without modification in substance and without change of time in its execution."

Many other Baptists of the North, assembled in both associational and state meetings, also voice affirmation of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, invoking freedom for all persons as the will of God.



150 YEARS AGO

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On the other hand, some Northern Baptists do not view black citizens as equals.

A pending lawsuit in New York City involves the Madison Avenue Baptist Church, in which a member sues the church for refusing to finalize the "conveyance of a pew" (the practice of purchasing the annual right to sit in a given pew is a means of revenue for many churches). The church's defense is that the plaintiff "had caused a disturbance in the church by the introduction of negroes into the pew."

In the Confederacy, Pastor J. Lansing Burrows of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., chairs a committee "to raise money to purchase shoes" for some of Gen. Lee's army lacking adequate clothing and footwear for the coming winter.

The annual holiday of a November Thanksgiving will not begin until next year, but this year the Union army, along with many northern states and cities, celebrates a day of Thanksgiving on November 27. Many northerners may not yet be fully committed to emancipation, but for the nation, there will be no turning back. **BT**

—See daily entries and cited sources at [civilwarbaptists.com](http://civilwarbaptists.com).

## continued from page 34

heritage of church and state separation. Where once I looked for a golden thread of strict separationism as the only valid Baptist type, I now ask how (and if) the core principle emerges in historical contexts.

I still affirm the Baptist ideal of separation of church and state as part of Baptist DNA, but realize it evolves in accord with its external environment. Baptists persecuted by states with church establishments demanded strict separation as the necessary structure for full religious liberty. Baptists living under the American Constitution and Bill of Rights in a largely Protestant Christian culture still affirmed separation of church and state, but practiced an interpretation more congenial to certain forms of civil religion (and more vulnerable to nationalistic jingoism).

Before 1865, Baptists may have supported religious liberty while participating rather uncritically in quasi-Christian American civil religion, but times have changed. Today, religious pluralism is a settled fact and a growing reality in the United States.

Current government-sponsored religious activities that privilege Christianity marginalize citizens of other faiths or no faith at the expense of all taxpayers. The implication is clear: "Time makes ancient good uncouth."

I believe most contemporary Baptists sincerely desire religious liberty for all, but simultaneously cling to the civil religion of a bygone era and fail to see the contradiction between the two in a religiously pluralistic society. For liberty of conscience's sake, 21<sup>st</sup>-century Baptists must choose between religious liberty for all and traditional American civil religion. What is required is a division between

government and religion that allows everyone full freedom of conscience in matters of faith without government favor or hindrance.

The times call for a renewal in public life of an historic Baptist principle: strict separation of church and state. This Baptist identification marker refutes a radical secularism that seeks to suppress all religious voices in the public square, and it counters the idolatry of narrow Christian nationalism that seeks to privilege a single religion through bad history and a misinterpreted Constitution. I think I'll keep my Baptist bumper sticker. **BT**

—This article is part of the *Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Legacy Series*. William Loyd Allen is the *Sylvan Hills Baptist Church* professor of church history and spiritual formation at *Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology* in Atlanta.

# Q & A

## Theologian John R. Franke talks about the future of Christian witness in North America

**BT: What is a “post-conservative evangelical” — and why would some one identify in that way?**

JRF: A post-conservative evangelical is someone who continues to identify as evangelical but also seeks to move away from the theological conservatism that has been characteristic of mainstream forms of evangelicalism in North America. Post-conservatives prefer a reformist orientation, which has been one of the hallmarks of the Protestant tradition.

We are concerned about the ways in which some evangelicals have used tradition to stifle conversation about theological ideas that seem to others to have merit based on scripture and contemporary thought. To do this seems to be contrary to the Protestant commitment that theology is always reforming.

In other words, post-conservative evangelicals believe that it’s possible to be an evangelical without being a conservative.

People choose to identify this way for a variety of reasons: a sense that intellectual honesty requires such a stance; a dissatisfaction with the traditional answers offered by conservative evangelicals to biblical and theological issues; the desire to signal openness to genuine conversation with those who do not identify as evangelical; and to bear witness to the possibility of alternative ways of being evangelical than those that are commonly portrayed in the media and popular culture.

**BT: The changing, insider language heard from church and denominational leaders can be confusing. One such word is “missional.” What is your take on the meaning and usefulness of that rather new word?**

JRF: The word missional entered the church lexicon in a new way with the publication of a book titled *Missional Church* in 1998. The

central thrust of the book is that mission is not simply one of the many activities of the church but rather its defining characteristic.

Mission is not something that a few people in the church are called to do in faraway places, but rather the calling of the whole church. In other words, all followers of Jesus are missionaries, sent by God to bear witness to the gospel in whatever location they inhabit. This basic idea is captured in John’s Gospel when Jesus tells his followers that as the Father sent him into the world, so he is sending them (20:21).

Another theological idea that shapes the idea of missional Christianity is the notion that God is a missionary by God’s very nature. That is to say, missionary is one of the attributes of God. Hence, the term missional as a modifier of church means that the church is missional by its very nature because God is missional by God’s very nature.

The usefulness of the term is that it reminds those of us in the church that we do not exist for ourselves but rather for the sake of the world. Since God’s mission embraces all of creation, the church of Jesus Christ is not the goal or end of the gospel, but rather an instrument and witness to the gospel in the world.

If we take this idea seriously, it has the possibility of radically altering the ways we think about and do church in North America. The challenge is to move from the notion of church with a mission component to that of missional church, a community centered on and ordered around mission.

In addition, the move to a missional church has significant implications for the character of theology. Like the church, the impulses and assumptions that have shaped the discipline of theology in North America have been those of institutional Christianity rather than the mission of God.

The content of theology is still often taught and discussed from the vantage point of



older debates and concerns with little reference to the missional character of God and the corresponding missional vocation of the church. Courses in missions or missiology are generally taught only in the practical theology department and, apart from a generic introductory course, are often thought to be primarily for those heading overseas.

Rarely are such courses taught in the systematics department and the two disciplines, missiology and systematic theology, have generally evidenced little significant overlap and cross-fertilization. Like the challenge facing the church in moving from church with a mission component to missional church, so the discipline of theology, if it is to serve the church and be faithful to the missional God, must move from theology with a mission component to a truly missional conception of theology. I explore this shift in my book, *The Character of Theology* (Baker Academic, 2005).

**BT: Another such word is “emerging” when used to describe the church. Can you give us a status update on the emerging church movement?**

JRF: The emerging church movement is thriving. These days you find people who are committed to emerging or emergence Christianity in every ecclesial tradition. They are resourced by a steady stream of books, blogs, websites, gatherings and conferences that are available to learn about it, explore it more deeply, and extend it.

I believe that it is one of the most significant developments in the church and that its influence on the future of North American Christianity is still only in the early stages.



In many ways, it is quite similar to the evangelical movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. You didn't have an evangelical church *per se*, but rather some individuals and groups within Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal and Baptist churches who took on some common characteristics that came to be identified as evangelical.

The same thing seems to be happening with respect to the emerging church movement today. You don't see denominational forms of the emerging church. Instead, people who identify themselves as emergent continue to function within traditional ecclesial structures or in independent church communities with no formal connections to a larger church body.

This is why questions concerning the beliefs of people committed to the emerging church are difficult to answer. They believe lots of different things depending on a variety of factors and contexts.

From my perspective, the story of the emerging church is found in the numerous and multifaceted micro-narratives among the individuals and communities that self-identify as part of the emerging church conversation. In other words, the emerging church consists of a plurality that works against the sort of reductions involved in the question, what does the emerging church believe?

This plurality is extremely attractive to a segment of the population who are wary of the traditional forms, assumptions and requirements of the establishment, in both church and society.

**BT: In your 2001 book, *Beyond Foundationalism*, written with the late Stanley Grenz, you advocate for “an open and flexible theology” that is highly contextual. Such words scare some theologically minded people. For them, theology should be inflexible and built on timeless biblical truths that cross cultural lines unchanged. Doesn't flexibility erode orthodoxy?**

JRF: It depends of the nature of the orthodoxy. If, in fact, orthodoxy is to be characterized by inflexible and timeless truths that cross cultural lines unchanged, then, of course, flexibility will be corrosive and therefore problematic.

However, is an inflexible and timeless set of beliefs really the nature of an orthodoxy derived from the witness of scripture? I don't believe that it is.

In my book *Manifold Witness* (Abingdon, 2009), I argue that the proper expression of biblical and orthodox Christian faith is inherently and irreducibly pluralist, and that the diversity of the Christian faith is not a problem that needs to be overcome but is instead a good thing, reflective of the divine design for the church.

From this perspective, openness and flexibility are highly desirable and necessary traits for theology. In the book I defend this assertion from both scripture and Christian tradition as well as on theological and practical grounds.

Let me offer an example from the Bible itself that seems to work against the notion that biblical truths are timeless and unchanging. In Genesis 17, God makes an everlasting covenant with Abraham that requires the circumcision of every male as its sign.

This extends to all male members of the community, those born into it or those who enter in from the outside, such as those purchased from a foreigner. All are to be circumcised, and any who are not are cut off from the community because the covenant has been broken.

Contrast this with the decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 on the question of circumcision for Gentiles as a requirement to be part of the community of God's people. While some who are described as being from the party of the Pharisees argued that Gentile converts must be circumcised in keeping with the Torah, the Council — following the testimonies of Peter, Paul and Barnabas — decided not to make it difficult for the Gentiles who were turning to God by requiring that they be circumcised.

I don't think it would be going too far to say that the Council decided that the Gentile converts did not need to follow the scriptural mandate in Genesis 17, doubtless to the consternation of those from the party of the Pharisees. They determined that the actions of God in accepting the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit required that they make a decision consonant with that action rather than slavishly following the text.

This is a canonical example of a crucial, identity-forming theological decision that is reflective of an open, flexible and contextual way of thinking. I believe the church today should practice theology in a manner consistent with this canonical example.

**BT: What have you learned from your critics?**

JRF: This is a tough one, since there's so much to choose from! Thoughtful and informed criticism is a gift from God that helps clarify differences and sharpen thinking.

I've learned more from my critics than I can adequately communicate here, and I'm thankful for many friends who are also critics. That's one of the gifts of true friendship.

Having said that, let me mention some general lessons that I think I've learned by listening. One is to always be as charitable as possible when critiquing ideas and persons.

In my experience it's almost always been the case that when I look more carefully at ideas that I'm critical of, I can usually find a rationale or concern that I can appreciate and that, while not necessarily changing my opinion, often helps me to see issues at stake more clearly. While at a certain level I've known this, my critics have helped me to see how much effort this demands.

Another thing I've learned from listening is that it's not the things you don't know that get you into trouble but, rather, the things you're certain of that are wrong. My critics have pressed me to keep an open mind and to keep listening, even after I think I've reached firm conclusions on a particular issue.

Another thing I've learned is to be intentional about maintaining conversation partners among those who are most critical. One of the critiques registered by conservative evangelicals of post-conservative evangelicals has been that we have often seemed more interested in dialogue with those to the left rather than those to the right.

Due to this criticism, I have sought to stay in conversation with as much of the ideological and theological spectrum of the church as possible, and this has taught me more about both the unity and the plurality of the church than I ever could have imagined.

**BT: Speaking of orthodoxy, how do you talk about biblical authority with post-moderns? Are different words, concepts, ideas needed than with previous generations because there are different presuppositions?**

JRF: One of the most helpful ways to bear witness to biblical authority among post-moderns is to speak of it in relation to the life of a community. The authority of the Bible is not most helpfully conceived of as an abstract set of timeless propositions that must be universally followed.

As we saw in the comparison of Genesis 17 and Acts 15, this would be contrary to the biblical pattern itself. Rather, biblical authority is better understood in its connection to a community that gathers around these ancient texts as a catalyst for worship, study, service and formation in a particular way of life.

Such an approach does not diminish a commitment to the divine inspiration of scripture, but understands that this action has taken place in the midst of a diverse set of cultural contexts and circumstances. A community manifests its commitment to biblical authority both in the centrality of the Bible in its activities and its specific appropriations of biblical teaching in shaping the life and direction of the community.

This way of construing biblical authority is helpful for post-moderns because it connects biblical authority to the actual life and practices of a community. From this perspective, the best way to understand biblical authority is to participate in the life of a community that practices it.

This communal connection to biblical authority is certainly different than models that stress the Bible as a collection of truths and principles to be believed, followed and demonstrated apart from any communal participation. In my view, we don't need a new set of words and concepts so much as we need to resituate the existing ideas in a manner more consistent with the communal and missional framings that seem to be at the core of the biblical witness.

**BT: What is happening in American Christianity today that many American Christians don't recognize, but should?**

JRF: One of the most significant things happening is the groundswell of people who are calling on Christians to rethink what it means to be a faithful community or church.

In this interview we've talked about reform movements like the missional church and the emerging church and some of the ideas they've offered to assist the Christian communities in their witness to the gospel. Meanwhile, hundreds of churches are closing their doors each year and the number of members in most denominations continues to fall — in some cases dramatically.

What all of this should be telling us is that we are in a time of significant change in North American Christianity, in which the future of the church in the next generation and possibly generations to come is at stake.

Now in one sense this is nothing new; the church has been coping with change throughout its history. On the other hand, the digital revolution in information technology, social media, smart phones, an increasingly interconnected global culture, and the rapid pace of technological advancement are serving to make this period of transition unprecedented in the history of the church.

This calls for adaptive change in thought and practice, but it seems that many Christians have been slow to recognize this and continue to pursue approaches to church that seem to be more concerned with maintaining traditional models than with imagining new ones. Churches that cannot make the transition from maintenance to mission will face difficult days ahead.

**BT: How does being a church-based, theologian-in-residence help both the congregation and the theologian? Would you recommend this model for others? How does your work impact the Christian formation that takes place within the congregation?**

JRF: I've attended church for most of my life and taught at a seminary for 18 years, but never served on a church staff until my current position. It's been an eye-opening experience.

We have a running joke on the staff about a future book I might write on all the things they don't teach you in seminary. Along with that are some of the things that seminaries

focus on that don't seem to be so important in light of the day-to-day realities of life in the church.

So I definitely have some thoughts on reforming theological education. One thing I've learned in terms of teaching is that people in the church are interested in the concrete significance of ideas for their lives and generally have little patience with abstraction.

At the same time, I think that members of the congregation have valued the opportunity to hear about some developments in scholarship that they were unaware of, and enjoy wrestling with the implications of these ideas for their faith.

Time and time again I've had people comment that they've been coming to church all of their lives and never heard ideas that are fairly commonplace in the academy.

This was initially surprising to me, but the more I thought about it I realized that working pastors and other staff members simply don't have the time or inclination to keep up with the latest developments. This is not a criticism but a realization of the task-driven nature of most church ministry.

The theologian-in-residence model helps communities bridge the gap between seminaries and churches. It could also be good training for prospective seminary faculty. I'm confident I'll be a better teacher in future seminary teaching because of my time working in the church.

I think my work as a church-based theologian has been significant in the formation of the congregation in assisting members to deepen their faith through a greater awareness of the content and formation of the Bible, the dynamics of the Christian tradition, and the significance of contemporary thought. Wrestling with these contexts has had an enriching effect on many in the congregation.

The church context also provides opportunities to put theology into action in a way that does not occur in most seminary settings. I think this has been valuable for the congregation; I know it has made a difference in my own formation.

**BT: Can you recommend a couple of books you've been reading and share why others might find them insightful?**



JRF: I seldom read a book that I think all Christian leaders should read, but I'd put *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* by Kenda Creasy Dean in that category. The book wrestles with the results of the National Study of Youth and Religion and the conclusion that the faith of American's teenagers can be described as moralistic therapeutic deism.

The tenants of this are: 1) a god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth; 2) God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions; 3) the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself; 4) God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem; and 5) good people go to heaven when they die.

Dean points out that while aspects of this may be commendable, it's a long way from robust Christian faith. In addition, while young people are fine with religious faith, it does not concern them very much and it is generally not durable enough to survive long after high school.

She also concludes that the church is responsible for this situation. From this perspective she offers a proposal aimed at reclaiming a distinctively Christian faith: claiming a particular God story and cultivating a consequential faith.

All of this is presented in the context of a thoroughly missional approach to theology and Christian community. This is an accessible book that is rich with suggestions for turning around a situation that, if left unattended, will significantly weaken the future of Christian

witness in North America.

I've recently finished reading Erik Larson's book, *In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin*. This is a true story, carefully researched, with endnotes, written in a genre that might best be described as novelistic history.

It's the story of William E. Dodd, the first ambassador from the United States to Nazi Germany, and his family, particularly his daughter, and their experience in Berlin under the rule of Hitler. In addition to being a great read, it serves as a reminder of the importance of cultural and social vigilance for the sake of the common good.

The book presents a case study of the calamitous effects that occur when a society ceases to be concerned about the plight of others in the interest of self-preservation. It is a reminder of the calling of the church to be salt and light in the world, particularly on behalf of those who are disenfranchised and marginalized. **BT**

—John R. Franke is theologian-in-residence at First Presbyterian Church of Allentown, Penn., and general coordinator for the Gospel and Our Culture Network. He holds a doctorate from the University of Oxford and has served as professor of theology at Biblical Seminary. His extensive writings include *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Westminster John Knox), *The Character of Theology* (Baker Academic), *Barth for Armchair Theologians* (Westminster John Knox), and *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Abingdon). His next book, *Missional Theology: Christianity for the Sake of the World* (Baker Academic), is scheduled for publication in 2013.

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**Cooperative Baptist Fellowship**

# Technology and intimacy

By Tony W. Cartledge

Recently I sat in on a day-long seminar at the fall meeting of the North Carolina Psychological Association. The topic, “Technology in Intimate Relationships,” should interest most anyone concerned with keeping families together in today’s electronic information age.

Katherine Hertlein, associate professor and program director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, led the session. Hertlein, who is widely published in an under-researched field, provided an overview of issues facing couples when the pervasive availability of electronic communications is thrown into the mix.

Online activities can interfere with a couple’s relationship in a variety of ways, including engagement in online infidelity (whether emotional or physical), involvement in social networking, or participation in online gaming.

The amount of time devoted to such activities is not as important as whether it interferes with healthy communication and intimacy between the partners.

Engagement in some form of cybersex is a natural threat to intimacy, though what is considered troublesome can vary between partners. Cybersex can range from flirtatious or sexually-charged texts, emails, or chats to masturbating while viewing online pornography or engaging in virtual sex by means of a digital avatar.

But cybersex is not the only online behavior that can lead to jealousy or a breach of trust. Social networking through sites such as Facebook can also be threatening, not only if it becomes time-consuming, but because it puts personal interactions with other people besides one’s partner on display for a wide audience of “friends” and may leave the primary partner feeling like one among many.

Online gaming, especially role-playing games that involve teaming up with other people, can pull someone away from his or her family for extensive periods of time. Hertlein cited statistics indicating that in 2011, 72 percent of American homes had at least one

person who played online or computer games.

While it’s widely assumed that adolescents and young adults make up the bulk of gamers, Hertlein said, the average age of online gamers is 37.

With the rise in popularity of cell phones and the increasing use of computer-like smart phones, the potential for electronic-based communication to interfere with a couple’s intimacy becomes even more ubiquitous.

Hertlein’s presentation was as fascinating as it was far-reaching. She not only surveyed the field, but also dealt with common mistakes and specific therapeutic techniques for psychologists, much of which was beyond my level of understanding.

Hertlein is a pioneer in the field of “couple and family technology” studies, employing communication theories, social theories, and developmental theories to investigate both the challenges and potential benefits that technology introduces into relationships.

A few things stood out, though, that I could grab onto and pass along. One is the reminder that each member of a couple “is accountable for his/her own behavior related to using electronically-based communication to interact with others outside their relationship,”

as well as how one relates electronically to one’s own partner.

Hertlein noted ways in which both partners and parents could benefit from talking about technology rather than simply using it: mutually agreed-upon rules and boundaries for cell phone or Internet use can be helpful in maintaining relationships.

And, while the inherent challenges that technology offers relationships appear obvious, there are also potential benefits. Electronic-based communication can provide easy access to one’s partner, for example, especially when separated by distance.

This can aid in the maintenance of relationships through frequent communication. And, in some cases, one or both partners may be able to share emotions, engage in greater self-disclosure, and develop deeper levels of intimacy electronically than in person.

At the end of the day, I was reminded that communication remains the key to developing and maintaining healthy relationships. Whether we use electronic-based communications or speak face-to-face, we are responsible for what we say, how we say it, to whom we speak, and how well we listen to those who should be most important in our lives. **BT**



Photo courtesy of Jeroen Thoolen



BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE,  
*Contributing Editor*



# Ten years and growing

**Twenty-five new students** were commissioned as part of the 10th anniversary of Campbell University Divinity School's Hispanic Theological Education Program.

## *Hispanic students celebrate theological education opportunities at Campbell*

**B**UIES CREEK, NC — One of the most effective educational opportunities offered through Campbell University Divinity School (CUDS) provides no academic credit, but its students are more concerned with increasing their knowledge of God, the Bible, and ministry skills.

They accomplish this through Hispanic Theological Education, a program that is “10 years old and growing,” according to Irma Duke, director of church relations and advancement.

The program began in the fall of 2002 after more than 100 Hispanic leaders who were invited to attend a Spanish-language Bible study indicated they would welcome theological classes offered in Spanish. CUDS agreed to provide classroom space, coordinate instruction, and even recruit staff and students to provide childcare.

Forty-two students attended the first official class in the fall of 2002. In 2012, the program enrolled 127 students, its largest group yet. The program, which is offered every other Saturday and takes two years to complete, awards certificates in pastoral leadership and in Christian ministry. Students must complete eight courses in one of those areas in order to receive a certificate.

On Sept. 8, students, alumni, and friends gathered in Campbell's Butler Chapel to celebrate the program's first 10 years, during which nearly 1,000 students have attended classes, and to commission 25 new students.

Patricia Wright, founding director of the program, said the initial Bible study was designed “to test our sense that there was a yearning for theological education offered in Spanish.”

“We were not surprised at the turnout,” she said. Wright's husband, Jim, taught the first semester-long class. The Wrights served as Southern Baptist missionaries in Puerto Rico for many years before returning to minister among Hispanics in the U.S. In recent months, they have created an endowment for the Hispanic program.

In the early years, program instructors were retired Southern Baptist missionaries or staff members of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, which had encouraged CUDS to start the program and made some early donations.

Today, the ministry preparation effort is led primarily by Hispanics, some of whom have advanced degrees. Since 2007, Jaime Molina, pastor of Iglesia Renovación Christiana in Raleigh and a member of the Campbell University Board of Ministers, has co-directed the program with his wife Sandra.

“It is a joy to walk beside these students who sacrifice so much to be here on Saturdays,” Molina said.

Students are mostly Baptist, though other denominations are represented. Students pay \$145 per class, which covers about half of the program's expenses. Individual donors, churches and church-related organizations

make up the difference between the costs of the program and student revenue.

While classes are taught on a high-school level, students come with varying academic preparation. Neither Eusebio Reyes of Smithfield, nor Rosa Cuevas (now living in Texas) could read or write either Spanish or English when they started the classes. They asked the instructors to give them oral exams. But when they finished their courses several years later, Reyes read the scripture for the graduation ceremony.

Judith Hernandez, a young mother from Chapel Hill, felt God leading her to attend classes, even though she didn't have a car or a driver's license. She borrowed a car every other Saturday for years and learned how to drive in order to get the theological education she felt was needed.

Yolanda Carillo had a different problem. She used to drive five hours from Waynesville, in Western North Carolina, to attend classes. After receiving four speeding tickets on her way to class, Carillo moved her family to the Raleigh area. Her daughter also took classes.

“It has been a blessing to our school,” said Dean Andy Wakefield of Campbell Divinity School's long-running theological education program in Spanish. “It has enriched the divinity school experience for all of us.” **BT**

—Irma Duke contributed to this story.  
Photo provided by Campbell University.

# Ministry coaching makes big gains in Baptist life

The coaching craze is spreading rapidly from its beginnings in the corporate world to just about every sector of society, including religious groups. But what is coaching? Advocates usually begin with what coaching isn't.

“It’s not therapy,” said Rhonda Abbot Blevins, associate pastor at the Community Church at Tellico Village in Loudon, Tenn. It’s also not mentoring, spiritual direction or pastoral counseling, though gifts needed in those activities can overlap with coaching, she said.

“Coaching is geared toward action,” said Blevins. “If I were to coach you, it would be you deciding your goals and then I work with you to identify practical action steps.”

Those action steps are identified by asking a series of questions based on the assumption that only the student knows the answers, said Courtney Krueger, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pendleton, S.C.

Blevins and Krueger are undergoing Lilly-funded training in return for coaching McAfee School of Theology graduates who

enter full-time congregational ministry.

The effectiveness of coaching is what’s causing it to spread, said Dock Hollingsworth, executive director for the Center for Teaching Churches at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta.

Participating graduates are assigned a coach who provides a one-hour, monthly session for two years. Hollingsworth defends the approach against those skeptical of it as the latest gimmick, asserting that it would have come in useful early in his career.

Coaching is not meant to replace mentoring relationships between older and younger ministers, he said, adding the two approaches can actually complement each other.

“A coach is trying to ask the right kind of provocative questions and be a collaborative brainstormer,” Hollingsworth said.

Other Baptist-affiliated organizations are using the approach, too, including the Center for Congregational Health based in Winston-Salem, N.C., and the Pastoral Institute in Columbus, Ga. The institute is providing the training for the coaches in the McAfee program.

Experts acknowledge the coaching profession is met with doubt, and say that’s in large part because it is an unregulated activity. Anyone can call himself or herself a coach — life coach, executive coach, ministry coach, etc. — and charge money for it, said Janet Harvey, 2012 global president of the International Coach Federation.

But for more than a decade, self-regulating agencies such as the ICF have developed standardized training and certification, and coaching is becoming increasingly recognized as a legitimate profession, she said. In 1998, the organization had 5,000 certified members and today there are 20,000. There are also now about 8,500 certified coaching instructors. **BT**

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# Religious groups team up to fight sex trafficking

WILMINGTON, N.C. — Just 13. That's the average age UNICEF reports that girls enter the commercial sex trade in the U.S.

**A**nd while many Americans might think of sex trafficking as an international problem, it often starts in the United States. Prosecutor Lindsey Roberson has seen it happen.

One of her first cases involved a 17-year-old girl who met a guy at a downtown club. He wooed her, and then “took her out of town on a trip, and let her know what she would have to do to pay her way,” Roberson said.

“She had no ID, no cell phone; no way to contact her mother. And the guy ended up advertising her for sex online and trafficking her all the way out to California and back to Virginia.”

The difference between sex trafficking and freelance prostitution is who has the control and who is keeping the money, said Roberson, an assistant district attorney in New Hanover



County. If a girl or a woman is being forced or coerced by a pimp to perform sex acts without monetary gain, that's trafficking.

The North Carolina Coalition to Combat Human Trafficking ranks the state among the top 10 states for the problem. North Carolina's three major highways connect much of the East Coast, and the state has a large transient military and farm-worker population, and international seaports in the Cape Fear region.

In May, Roberson helped start a deferred prosecution pilot program for first-time

offenders with prostitution charges, partnering with a local rape crisis center.

As a Christian, Roberson is also on the board of a new faith-based effort called the Centre of Redemption, which is scheduled to open in December to help pregnant teens and teen moms who are also trafficking victims.

Law enforcement is increasingly teaming up with faith groups to combat sex trafficking around the country. Some are calling the faith-based push against human trafficking the newest “Christian abolitionist movement.”

In California, an Underground Church Network has formed to help U.S. trafficking victims. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has developed a human trafficking curriculum. And the National Association of Evangelicals' humanitarian arm, World Relief, told CNN in February that its North Carolina offices had seen a 700-percent rise in reports of human trafficking last year.

Religious groups have also rallied against the website Backpage.com, owned by Village Voice Media, which they say is a haven for pimps and traffickers. **BT**

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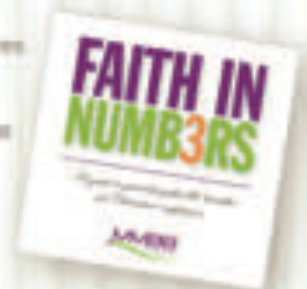
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