

# Baptists ODAY

NEWS JOURNAL



*NC leader shares valuable lessons learned from Canadian Baptists*

8

DECEMBER 2012

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1871

Second pastorate of James C. Furman 1871-1875

Women members accorded voting rights in congregational affairs

1872

Members Lula Whilden and Junille Whilden Williams (sisters) appointed foreign missionaries; Lula Whilden becomes first single woman to serve as career SBC missionary



1875  
J.C. Heiser  
Pastor 1875-1879



18...  
Pastor



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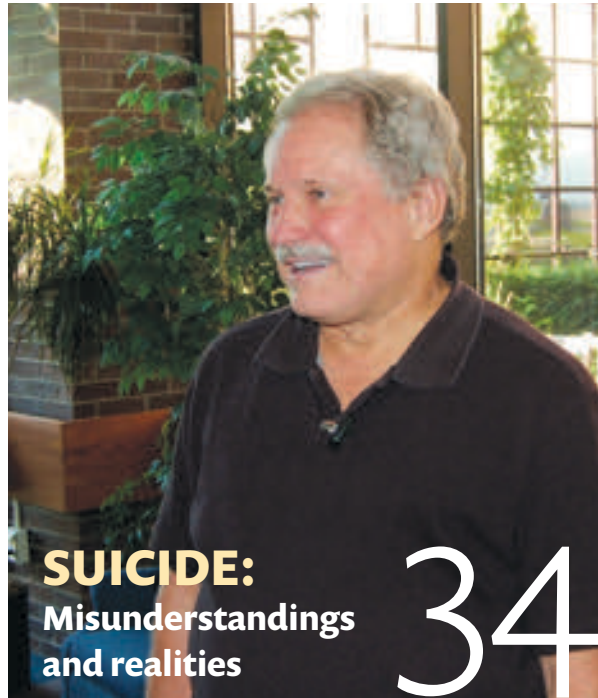
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**TASK FORCE** — A group of women in Greenville’s First Baptist Church is raising mission awareness and funds in the name of pioneering missionary to China, Lula Whilden. Left to right are missions coordinator Laura Stout, Louise Stanford, Jamie Womack, Carrie Cruce, Peggy Good, Eleanor Bean, Jeanette Cothran and Evelyn Scaringi.

# ‘Do you know Lula?’

## Church’s mission offering gets a name and a boost



**BACK TO GREENVILLE** — After serving for more than 40 years among the most abused people of Canton, China, Lula Whilden returned to South Carolina where she died and was buried in Greenville’s Springwood Cemetery.

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Like many congregations with historic ties to the Southern Baptist Convention, First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., long rallied support for overseas missions in the name of Lottie Moon. It was as much a part of this season as decking out the sanctuary in green and filling the church calendar with Christmas events for all ages.

**B**ut after the SBC took a hard turn toward fundamentalism a couple of decades ago and imposed a narrow theological creed on its missionaries, the Greenville congregation — like many others — embraced new partners for carrying out the task of missions.

Primarily, the church works in partnership with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, CBF of South Carolina and the Alliance of Baptists. However, the mission giving in recent years lacked the same focus and energy it once had when named for the pioneer, single female missionary to China, Lottie Moon.

“Our mission emphasis had kind of lost its oomph,” said church member Jamie Womack, a psychiatrist and mission advocate. “... We were trying to increase participation in the global missions offering at any level.”

Enter Lula Whilden.

### **BIG QUESTION**

During the new fall emphasis, those who enter the doors of Greenville’s First Baptist Church will hear one question repeated: “DO YOU KNOW LULA?”

Children shout it in a promotional video.

Materials are printed and various events are planned both to raise the question and to answer it.

Louise Stanford, a member of the church's task force driving the offering, has done significant research into the life and ministry of Lula Frances Whilden — who is buried among family in Springwood Cemetery in downtown Greenville.

Young Lula joined the Greenville church on April 4, 1868, when coming from Camden, S.C., to attend what is now Furman University. She stayed until 1872 when she left for missionary service in Canton, China.

She had been to China as a small child of a missionary family — that returned to the U.S. for several years after her mother died. But as a teenager in South Carolina, she committed herself to missions.

In China, Lula ministered among the “boat women,” who were forced to spend their entire lives on small vessels, and homeless children, especially young blind girls.

“These girls were either blind from birth or blinded to enter prostitution — or to stitch,” said task force member Eleanor Bean of the abused girls whose intricate weavings were sold for the benefit of others.

Lula served more than 40 years in China. Returning to the States after suffering a vicious attack, she died in Baptist Hospital in Columbia, S.C., on Sept. 26, 1916, and was brought to Greenville for burial.

## GOOD GIVING

Such a remarkable example of sacrifice and service should not go unnoticed according to this committed group of current churchwomen. So they are eager for everyone within and many from without the congregation to know about Lula Whilden — and to help carry along her mission zeal.

This task force of mission-minded and engaged women, which formed nearly two years ago, keeps the Lula Whilden World Missions Offering before the congregation. Their efforts are succeeding.

Last year, the first time the newly named offering was promoted, the congregation's giving rose from \$60,000 to \$91,000 — with 102 more families participating. The women's group promoting the offering expects an even greater response to this year's goal of \$100,000.

“Many [members] are not from Baptist backgrounds where mission giving was emphasized,” said Laura Stout, the church's missions coordinator. Therefore, she added, the Lula



Various items related to longtime missionary Lula Whilden have been collected, including artwork she brought from China to relatives in South Carolina.

Whilden World Missions Offering emphasis allows for educating and energizing members about the various local to worldwide ministries supported by the congregation.

Much of the support goes to those currently working with oppressed, suffering people — the same kind of ministry that Lula carried out among the outcast population in China.

“We did so much with Lottie Moon,” said longtime church member Peggy Good, expressing hope that an awareness of and appreciation for Lula Whilden will bring similar commitments to support current efforts to share the Gospel and bring hope to exploited persons around the world.

## ANOTHER HEROINE

“In no way are we out to displace Lottie Moon,” said Jamie Womack of the longtime Baptist mission heroine who gave her life in service to the Chinese people.

However, the Greenville congregation is “intrigued” by another mission heroine, she said. And Lula Whilden — who left Greenville for China 140 years ago — was one of their very own.

Jeanette Cothran, who serves on the task force, was surprised to hear fellow church member Eleanor Bean mention Lula Whilden when talking about her family roots. Lula had been the first cousin of Eleanor's grandmother.

So Eleanor was invited to join the task force — where she shared some personal items that Lula had brought to family members from China.

“We all became very attracted to this Lula figure,” said Jamie, as more and more information about the remarkable woman came to light.

A timeline that is part of the historical display at First Baptist acknowledges Lula Whilden as being appointed by Southern Baptists in 1872 as the first single female career missionary. The Greenville women

noted that this assignment occurred a full year before Lottie Moon's appointment.

## LULA AND LOTTIE

Speculation about why Lottie has received so much more attention than Lula included the possibility that Moon's family was better connected. But Catherine Allen of Birmingham, Ala., who has done extensive research on early Baptist mission work in China and wrote a biography of Lottie Moon, suggested that it was more likely due to circumstances surrounding Lula's assignment.

At that time, only men had formal status as appointed missionaries when married couples went overseas, she said. Lula wrangled permission to go along as a “companion” of her married sister, Jumelle Whilden Williams, and brother-in-law who had been appointed to China.

Therefore, the appointment of Lottie Moon the following year would make her, technically, the first woman to be granted such status — although Lula was already deeply immersed in China.

Lula's innovation in getting to China to do mission work helped crack the door for the female missionaries who followed, said Catherine. “Actually, Lula deserves more spotlight.”

She added: “Lula Whilden was a noble soul, very durable. Like Lottie Moon, she got out there and stuck with the task.”

## MISSION AHEAD

Now, nearly a century and a half after leaving Greenville, S.C., for Canton, China, Lula Whilden is getting much unsought, yet well-deserved honor from the congregation that sent her on her way.

It is the kind of attention the pioneer missionary would have appreciated the most: a renewed commitment to carry on her Christian service to the most marginalized persons in the world.

Do you know Lula? You do now — thanks to a group of mission-focused women in Upstate South Carolina.

One of them, Louise Stanford, said they have discovered that Lula was “feisty” and “knew what she wanted to do and got it done.”

It seems such a description fits this group of mission-driven women in Greenville as well — who are putting Lula's name on everyone's lips and are helping carry on her mission to the world. **BT**

# quotation remarks

“Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. Advent is winter training camp for those who desire peace. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place.”

—Edward Hays in *A Pilgrim's Almanac*  
(*Meditative Meanderings*)

“[Advent] is a time of quiet anticipation. If Christ is going to come again into our hearts, there must be repentance. Without repentance, our hearts will be so full of worldly things that there will be ‘no room in the inn’ for Christ to be born again ... We have the joy not of celebration, which is the joy of Christmas, but the joy of anticipation.”

—John R. Brokhoff in *Preaching the Parables*  
Cycle C (*appleseeds.org*)

“Give us, O God, the vision which can see your love in the world in spite of human failure.

Give us the faith to trust your goodness in spite of our ignorance and weakness.

Give us the knowledge that we may continue to pray with understanding hearts.

And show us what each one of us can do to set forward the coming of the day of universal peace.”

—Commander Frank Borman of  
*Apollo 8 space mission on Christmas Eve 1968*  
(*socyberty.com*)

“All women can relate to the feeling like they’re falling short of some sort of ideal and, growing up in the conservative evangelical subculture, that ideal for me had always been biblical womanhood. I wanted to playfully challenge that idea and challenge the idea that any of us are actually practicing biblical womanhood all the way.”

—Rachel Held Evans, author of *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* (*TODAY Show*)

“I think the reason Al Mohler and people of his mold don’t get Christians like Rachel [Held Evans] is because they don’t speak irony, which is the first language of a large chunk of my generation and younger who inhabit the postmodern world outside the gated communities of suburban megachurchianity. Christians today who want to share the gospel with any credibility in postmodern culture must learn how to talk like Tina Fey, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, et al.”

—Blogger Morgan Guyton on SBC leader Mohler’s criticism of the book *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*

“The uncommitted drift through their lives, miss their opportunities and waste their potential. In ways that aren’t so immediately obvious, the overcommitted are at risk, too. Not for drifting through their lives, but rushing through them: speeding to the next thing and hurrying past love, joy and meaning.”

—Pastor Guy Sayles of *First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C.* (*ethicsdaily.com*)

“What has happened over the last 30 years is the religious right has perverted the Bible to fit its narrow view of what

Christians should pay attention to. Abortion and homosexuality. Nothing else matters. Well, my Bible is bigger than that. My faith is bigger than that.”

—CNN commentator Roland Martin

“Number one: I got here first, it was my idea. And number two: I’m a good public speaker ... I’m not a good pastor. I’m not good at hospitals. I’m not good at weddings. I’m awkward at funerals. I’m uncomfortable.”

—Andy Stanley, who built the multi-site *North Point Community Church* in metro Atlanta into one of the nation’s largest congregations and reconciled with his father, Charles Stanley of Atlanta’s *First Baptist Church*, after his parents’ divorce, when asked about his success (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

“They’ve won a few where they could win. It’s still 32 victories on our side and four on theirs.”

—Former *Christian Coalition* head Ralph Reed, who now leads *Faith & Freedom Coalition* after Maine, Maryland and Washington approved legalization of same-sex marriages (*RNS*)

“The issue of gay marriage is a generational one, a battle that social conservatives have lost ... The American people have changed their minds on the issue, and fighting this one is political flat-earthism.”

—Conservative columnist Jennifer Rubin in *The Washington Post* (*RNS*)

“We rarely hear the term ‘poverty.’ It’s a very revealing term, and other words have been substituted to remove the reality and responsibility that we have to deal with poverty.”

—President Carroll A. Baltimore Sr. of the *Progressive National Baptist Convention* (*RNS*)

# Heaven is not behind us

Sometimes my channel surfing turns to channel suffering. Although he's been dead for a few years, TV preacher D. James Kennedy still hits the airwaves with messages about returning America to an idyllic time that did not exist.

Videotapes of his sermons are broken up with Jerry Newcombe's promotion of a book, *What if America Were a Christian Nation Again?*, that he co-wrote with Kennedy.

Such was the central theme of the late Jerry Falwell when he became overtly political — and one still sounded by some Southern Baptist leaders and others like author David Barton who share this religious/political ideology based on highly selective historical renderings and biblical texts.

Their big idea is that America should be in reverse. The nation's future is actually in the past — a needed return to a time when it was truly "Christian." Words such as "drifting" and "forgetting our roots" are used to describe the current state of being beyond that blissful time long ago.

It would be hard to find someone whose nostalgia surpasses mine. I love reconnecting with old friends and revisiting — literally and in my mind — places that shaped my life. A time machine that allows for a brief return to times and places lodged in my memory would be warmly welcomed.

However, the past gets romanticized. And perhaps most revealing is that the voices calling us backward are often the same ones earnestly seeking to impose civil rights restrictions today. But this we know for certain: the kingdom of God was never something we found and lost or left. To exactly what time and place in American history do we return to find the fulfillment of

pure, unadulterated love of God and all who fit Jesus' definition of neighbor? When was justice complete and humility widespread?

Was it when native inhabitants were driven from their lands? Or when laws called for forced conformity in faith and practice? When those with weird ideas — like the Baptists who thought the church comprised only baptized believers — faced penalty and punishment? When "liberty for all" was taken to mean liberty for those in power?

Was it that time when imported Africans were the property of those who populated and led a large portion of Christian churches in America? Or who, after abolition, sought to deny every right possible to those of another race who had been freed?

Or a time when women had little control over their destinies — without rights to voting, equal education or employment opportunities? When abused women lacked the economic power and social structures for an escape?

Exactly when and where did this Christian culture exist to which these voices call us to return? Listen closely and you can hear of a 1950s and '60s culture that is familiar, comforting and empowering to aging white men today.

There are plenty of reasons to be concerned about the future. Challenges of economies, global shifts and political unrest must be faced. Most alarming to many, especially some Christian leaders, is the loss of cultural dominance once enjoyed by Protestant and Evangelical Christians.

But didn't some of the greatest abuses of respect for human dignity — a basic Christian conviction — occur under the watchful eye and, sadly, sometimes helping hand of those bearing the name of Christ?

Surprising to some, when we temper our fears and stop rekindling a well-edited yesterday, it is possible to be quite hopeful. Not all news is bad news.

Recent reports show that anti-Semitic incidents are at an all-time low in the U.S. Women have more educational and vocational opportunities — and increased support networks.

Racial discrimination is still a challenge, but even conservative Christian denominations — including Southern Baptists — are seeking redemption for a racist past. Concerns about equality for all persons remains at the core of American ideas and the religious center of a religiously diverse nation.

Our biblical call is always forward looking — driven by hope rather than despair. It is neither a call back to an idealized time on some outdated calendar nor an embrace of any modern political philosophy.

Rather it is rooted in an honest confession that we have never lived up to our high calling. The prophet Micah's call to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly is not something we have attained at any point in the past or in the present.

Jesus' clear and careful reduction of true faith to a simple two-part commandment to love God and neighbor fully remains beyond our achievement and experience.

We have not been there. We have not done that. It is before us yet. **BT**



By Larry Hovis

# Looking north to find direction

Navigators know that finding north is essential to reaching the desired destination. Ancient travelers depended on looking up and finding the North Star.

**T**he compass, a basic navigational tool, operates by finding the magnetic North Pole and orienting other directions around that.

In recent years I have been asked by both churches and seminaries to speak on the topic of the future of the church in America, especially in our region of the country. All are seeking direction in these challenging, rapidly changing times.

As part of a sabbatical this past summer, I decided to travel north to Canada for a glimpse at what the future might look like. My theory is that the tremendous challenges church leaders are facing today, as the church is being shifted from the center of the culture to the margins of the culture, are not unique to our context.

These shifts began in Europe, then moved to Canada, and now are impacting the United States, even those of us who live in the Bible Belt. Why not learn from those who have already traveled this path before us?

Marc Wyatt aided me in planning my Canadian sojourn. Marc and his wife, Kim, are Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel living and serving in Canada.

Marc connected me with numerous Canadian Baptist leaders and congregations who provided me with a glimpse of the future of the mission of the church, leaders I believe will serve as valuable conversation and ministry partners in the years ahead. Space doesn't permit a detailed account of my travels and encounters, but here are a few of my conclusions.

### We now live in a mission field.

The Canadian Baptists I met are no longer under the delusion they live in a culture that is dominated by a Christian worldview. They don't pretend that the average Canadian understands what church is or feels a need to be a member of a congregation.

They are learning to view their own



Larry Hovis, executive coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, (left) meets with Sam Chaise, general secretary of Canadian Baptist Ministries — an organization that coordinates the global missions efforts of regional Baptist groups in Canada.

communities in much the same way missionaries in the developing world view the places in which they minister.

The U.S., even the South, is rapidly becoming like Canada in that there are increasing numbers of our neighbors for whom church is irrelevant, even a foreign concept. The attractional, programmatic church model that has dominated the lives of those of us inside the church will need to give way to a church-as-missionary-outpost model as we move into the future.

I believe that the missionaries we support can help us in learning how to make this change.

In the past, when missionaries came home for off-field assignment, other than rest, I viewed their primary task as speaking in churches to tell their stories and secure resources to return to the mission field. I now believe we need to utilize them as resources to work with our churches so that we can learn from them how to minister in the mission field in which we live.

### Hospitality is the key.

I have the privilege of visiting many congregations. Most describe themselves as a “friendly church.” And for the most part (except when they have conflict), they are friendly toward one another. But far too often, their friendliness is extended only to those most like them.

The Canadian Baptists who are successfully reaching their communities for Christ are doing so with a revised understanding of Christian hospitality. They are opening not only their doors, but also their hearts to their neighbors, who in many cases are much different from them.

Canada has historically had an open immigration policy and is now an extremely culturally diverse nation. The citizens have learned to welcome newcomers through intentional practices of hospitality.

These hospitality ministries include housing (e.g. the Matthew House movement), furniture banks, English as a second language, and more. As they have learned to welcome



newcomers who are different from them, their churches are being revitalized and renewed.

I had the privilege of preaching in Bromley Road Baptist Church in Ottawa. This historically Anglo congregation looked and felt much like the churches in my region of the U.S.

However, in worship that Sunday, in addition to those who have traditionally been part of that church, there were also significant numbers of persons of color, particularly Haitian and Karen immigrants. These newcomers have been integrated into the congregation in every way and are breathing new life into an established church.

### Reframe mission trips as global discipleship.

I had productive conversations with leaders of Canadian Baptist Ministries, the organization that coordinates the global mission efforts of four regional Baptist conventions. I found one aspect of their ministry particularly intriguing.

They have developed a very intentional process for persons who participate in short-term mission trips. This process involves a deliberate preparation phase before the trip and a focused reflection phase both during and after the trip.

With this process, participants are not only better prepared before they leave home, but also able to translate what they learned and apply it in ministry in their church and community after they return.

In this way, mission trips are not simply work trips or mission tourism, but serve to connect Christians in different contexts to learn from and serve one another, and build up the church at home and around the globe.

### Contextualize theological education.

I enjoyed another helpful encounter with a Canadian Baptist seminary leader at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. His seminary reflects the diversity of Toronto, which is the most multicultural city in the world.

While they offer a variety of degree programs and teach classical theological disciplines, I was intrigued with their “in ministry” Master of Divinity program. In this program, students are divided into cohorts who take all their classes together.

They are required to be involved in ministry on a church staff or another ministry context. All classes are taught with their ministry setting in mind, and from a missional perspective. In this way, even esoteric topics are processed through the filters of current ministry issues.

### Embrace new organizational models.

The Canadian Baptists I encountered partner through a different organizational structure than the ones utilized by Baptists in the southern U.S. Rather than developing redundant ministries at the regional and national levels, they have divided duties according to gifts and capacity.

In practice, this means that the four regional conventions are responsible primarily for ministries within their regions, such as leadership development and congregational resourcing. They work together under the leadership of a national organization, Canadian Baptist Ministries, to pursue global missions.

I served on a task force that recommended changes to Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s organizational structure, which were approved at CBF’s 2012 annual meeting. Our plan moves CBF in that direction.

Canadian Baptists can be our guide as we begin implementing this vision, one that I believe will enable us to strengthen local churches and ultimately be more faithful in our shared pursuit of God’s mission in our communities and around the globe.

### Develop new metrics.

Churches have measured success primarily by counting “nickels and noses.” How many members do we have? How many were added last year? How many attend worship, Sunday school and other programs? How much money did our members give?

Denominations have tended to do the

same. How many churches affiliate with us? How much money do they give? How many attend our annual meeting and other events? How many paid missionaries do we have?

Unfortunately, most churches and denominational expressions aren’t faring well according to those metrics. And even when the numbers looked better, there is little evidence that our efforts actually brought about significant benefit to those we claimed to serve.

The time has come for us to develop new metrics. What positive difference is our church making in our community? How are lives being changed as we share the love of Christ?

What are the signs of genuine spiritual growth that are being exhibited by our members and leaders? In what tangible ways is the Kingdom of God coming “on earth as it is in heaven”?

Canadian Baptists are learning to ask the second set of questions more than the first. I pray that we Baptists further south can begin to do the same.

I’m proud to be an American, even a southerner. I have no desire, nor do I feel God’s call, to live anywhere else. But before I’m a southern American, I am a Christian.

God’s truth knows no regional boundaries. As we seek God’s direction for the future of our churches and our cooperative efforts, I’m finding it helpful to follow the lead of many travelers before me and look north, to brothers and sisters in Canada. **BT**

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



CBF of North Carolina leader Larry Hovis (left) and his wife Kim visit with Tim McCoy, executive minister of Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, as part of a sabbatical to explore how Baptists in Canada minister where their faith is not dominant in the culture.

# Foot traffic threatens Sistine Chapel

By Alessandro Speciale  
*Religion News Service*

VATICAN CITY — Five hundred years ago, on Oct. 31, 1512, Pope Julius II led an evening prayer service to inaugurate the Sistine Chapel and Michelangelo's newly finished vault frescoes.

But when Pope Benedict XVI, on Oct. 31, celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Renaissance masterpiece, the Vatican said the growing number of tourists who visit the historic site every year might eventually lead to limiting access to the chapel to help preserve the frescoes from human-born problems and pollutants.

"We could limit access, introducing a maximum number of entries," wrote Antonio Paolucci, the director of the Vatican Museums, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican's semi-official newspaper. "We will do this, if the pressure from tourism were to increase beyond a reasonable level and if we were to fail in resolving the problem efficiently."

Paolucci stressed, however, that in his opinion such measures will not be necessary "in the short to medium term."

Some 5 million tourists visit the Sistine Chapel every year, with peaks of around 20,000 visitors per day, making preservation of the



centuries-old frescoes an "arduous challenge."

The "dust, the humidity which bodies bring with them inside, the carbon dioxide produced by perspiration" risk "damaging the painting in the long run," according to Paolucci.

The chapel, which is dominated on the altar wall by Michelangelo's later masterpiece, the *Last Judgment*, completed in 1541, is where cardinals congregate in strict secrecy to elect a new pope.

The vault's frescoes were painted by Michelangelo, who worked mostly lying on his back, between 1508-1512. They include the iconic image of God extending his finger to give life to Adam.

"In the encounter between God's finger and man's finger, we see the contact between heaven and earth," Benedict said at a vesper service to commemorate the chapel's inauguration.

After a 14-year restoration project in 1994, the chapel was fitted with a ventilation system

to purify and dehumidify the air.

But Paolucci announced that the Vatican has commissioned Carrier, a subsidiary of Connecticut-based United Technologies Corporation, to design a new, "radically innovative" air-conditioning and climate control system for the Sistine Chapel to help deal with the increasing numbers of visitors. "The new equipment should be operative in a year," he said.

The debate over limiting access to the Sistine Chapel was sparked in September after Piero Citati, one of Italy's leading intellectuals, published a polemical article in a leading Italian daily.

Describing a visit to the chapel in the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper, Citati claimed that visitors thronged the sacred space "like drunken herds," while the vapor from their breath and the noise from their voice made "any form of contemplation impossible."

"In the universal confusion, no one saw anything," he said.

Responding to Citati in *L'Osservatore Romano* on Sept. 28, Paolucci wrote that "the days when only Russian grand dukes and English lords ... could gain access to the great masterpieces are definitely over." In the era of large-scale tourism, he added, "limiting numbers is unthinkable. **BT**

## Vatican opens new exhibit of papal cars

By Alessandro Speciale  
*Religion News Service*

VATICAN CITY — When an American archbishop offered the Vatican a car as a gift in 1909, Pope Pius X refused, saying he preferred to ride in a comfortable and much quieter horse-drawn carriage.

A century later, a new exhibition at the Vatican Museums shows just how far papal transportation has come since then.

A new permanent exhibition showcasing two centuries of papal travel was unveiled at the museums in October.

Among the items on display in the newly refurbished "Padiglione delle Carrozze" (Carriage Pavilion), there is the white, open-top 1980 Fiat Campagnola that Pope John Paul II was riding in on May 13, 1981 when he was shot and almost killed in

St. Peter's Square.

It is a symbol of "a church that always gets back up on its feet when it is wounded," the curator of the exhibition, Sandro Barbagallo, told Italian news agency Ansa.

The most extravagant item on display is probably the majestic Berlina di Gran Gala, created in 1826 on the orders of Pope Leo XII. A "moving throne room" that was carried around Rome's streets by six horses, it is painted in gold leaf and decorated with allegories representing papal virtues such as faith and justice.

The first car to enter the Vatican was a Bianchi Tipo 15, presented as a gift to Pope Pius XI shortly after his election in 1922. Italian carmaker Bianchi quickly doubled the gift with a newer Tipo 20 model, thus earning the title of first Vatican official car supplier.

Only a few years later, in 1931, the era of horse-drawn carriages came to an end at the Vatican.

Vatican license plates were introduced in 1929, when the signing of the Lateran Pacts with Italy led to the end of the papal isolation inside the Vatican. Today, the pope's car carries a white plate with the tag "SCV 1" in red letters. "SCV" stands for "State City Vatican."

In 1975, Pope Paul VI introduced the "popemobile," a white jeep-style car that allowed the pontiff to salute crowds as he was slowly driven around. The popemobiles are now made by Mercedes-Benz.

The latest addition to the papal car collection is a couple of electric cars by French carmaker Renault that are used on the grounds of the Vatican villas in Castel Gandolfo, the pope's summer retreat south of Rome. **BT**



Jerry Pattengale, who was hired by the Green family to help find a new owner of a college campus in Northfield, Mass., points out the stone chapel that was once deemed unsafe but has been repaired. RNS photo by G. Jeffrey MacDonald.

## After winning free campus, Grand Canyon University says ‘no thanks’

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald  
*Religion News Service*

**F**ive weeks after accepting a free, 217-acre campus in western Massachusetts, a for-profit Christian university walked away from the gift.

Grand Canyon University of Phoenix, Ariz., faced millions in unanticipated costs as it moved to open its first East Coast campus in Northfield, Mass., according to GCU President Brian Mueller. So rather than complete a property transfer from the billionaire Green family of Oklahoma, GCU decided to dissolve the deal.

“We were willing to make a \$150 million investment, but we really had trouble with the city of Northfield,” Mueller said. “Northfield was concerned that growing the campus to 5,000 students would alter the basic culture and the basic feel of the area.”

The surprise development marks the second time in less than a year that plans to give away the free, newly renovated campus have collapsed.

The Greens, who bought the property in 2009 with plans to give it to a Christian institution, initially offered it to the C.S. Lewis Foundation to launch a C.S. Lewis College on the site. But fundraising efforts for the college fell short last year. In January, the Greens began soliciting new proposals, and in September named GCU the recipient.

The other finalist to receive the campus was the Southern Baptist Convention’s North American Mission Board, which later withdrew.

But GCU got little local cooperation, Mueller said. Not only would the town not help cover \$30 million in sewer and road upgrades, but it also reportedly called on GCU to conduct an environmental impact study at the university’s expense.

“We were ending up having to cover the burden of all of that,” Mueller said. “It started to get overwhelming.”

As the Greens prepare to reopen the gifting process, the prospect of local opposition looms. Some residents protested earlier this year when Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University emerged as a top contender.

“One thing that is anathema to any quick resolution is if there is another outcry locally in Northfield when the selection process begins anew,” said an e-mail from Jerry Pattengale, a college administrator who’s overseeing the gifting process for the Greens, who own the Hobby Lobby arts and crafts chain.

“While most communities nationwide are offering amazing abatements and have teams that roll out the red carpets for new businesses ... many in Northfield basically shut doors or tried to.”

Formerly owned by Northfield Mount Hermon School, the 43-building campus carries symbolic importance for evangelicals since it was established in 1879 by famed evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Several Christian organizations remain interested in the campus, Pattengale said. Selecting a new recipient is expected to take at least a year. **BT**

## Anti-Semitic incidents in decline in U.S.

By Lauren Markoe  
*Religion News Service*

**A**nti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. dropped by 13 percent in 2011, according to a report released in November by the Anti-Defamation League, which tracks assaults and other attacks on Jews.

There were 1,080 incidents against Jews last year, according to the ADL, the lowest tallied by the non-profit civil rights group in two decades.

“It is encouraging that over the past five or six years we have seen a consistent decline in the number of anti-Semitic incidents across the country and that the numbers are now at a historic low,” said Abraham H. Foxman, ADL’s national director.

“To the extent that these incidents serve as a barometer, the decline shows that we have made progress as a society in confronting anti-Semitism and pushing it to the far fringes, making expressions of anti-Jewish hatred unacceptable,” Foxman said.

ADL’s annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents for 2011 included 19 physical assaults, 731 cases of harassment and threats, and 330 incidents of vandalism.

Documented cases of anti-Semitism ranged from graffiti on a Brooklyn subway station that read “Jews were responsible for 9/11” to an incident in which a Pennsylvania middle school student wrote numbers on another student’s arm and told him to “Go die in the ovens.”

The report highlighted particular concern about anti-Semitic bullying in schools and cyber-bullying by students.

“ADL continues to receive a distressing number of complaints about children, adolescents and teenagers engaging in anti-Semitic behavior, both on and off school grounds,” said ADL National Chair Robert G. Sugarman, who called for a sustained emphasis on Holocaust and diversity education in schools. **BT**

# Muslims, Hindus more likely to refrain from premarital sex

By Jeanie Groh

Religion News Service

With their “True Love Waits” jewelry, conferences and T-shirts, Christians may be the face of the abstinence movement, but Muslims and Hindus are more likely to abstain from premarital sex. That’s the conclusion of a new study in the *American Sociological Review*, which also found that Muslims and Hindus — at least in the developing world — are more likely than Christians and Jews to refrain from extramarital sex.

“All major world religions discourage sex outside of marriage, but they are not all equally effective in shaping behavior,” said Amy Adamczyk of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, who co-authored the study with John Jay doctoral student Brittany E. Hayes.

Drawing on the Demographic and Health Surveys funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the study included data from 31 developing nations collected between 2000 and 2008. The authors focused on individuals’ responses to questions on religious affiliation, marital status, and sexual behavior outside of marriage.

Adamczyk said the study evolved from another study she was doing that found countries with large Muslim populations have very



low rates of HIV and AIDS. “I was trying to figure out why that would be,” she said. One reason she considered was lower rates of sex outside of marriage.

The authors hypothesized that the larger the proportion of Muslims and Hindus in a country, the lower the rates of premarital and extramarital sex.

Adamczyk and Hayes found that 94 percent of Jews in the nations they studied reported having premarital sex, compared to 79 percent of Christians, 65 percent of Buddhists, 43 percent of Muslims and 19 percent of Hindus.

As for extramarital sex, 4 percent of Jews reported having sex outside of marriage, compared to 3 percent of Christians. Less than one percent each of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists reported having extramarital sex.

“In many countries around the world, but in Muslim countries specifically, there’s just much less interaction between the sexes,” said Adamczyk. “It’s just going to be much less likely that they’re going to meet a potentially romantic partner.”

Paul Sullins, a sociologist at the Catholic University of America, said the study’s findings are not surprising, because much of the data comes from conservative Islamic nations.

“The burqa really works,” Sullins said. “When you cover your women head to toe with cloth to keep them from being viewed by men outside their family, and you keep them strictly segregated from men throughout their growing years until they get married, you’re going to have less premarital sex.”

Suzy Ismail, a marriage and divorce counselor and the author of several books on Muslim marriage, said low rates of premarital and extramarital sex among Muslims are rooted in the religion.

“For Muslims, any form of zinna (fornication or adultery) or anything that leads to zinna is religiously prohibited,” Ismail said. “In consistently reminding others and oneself of the importance of modest dress, modest actions, and modest interactions, Muslims tend to inculcate the concepts of sexual morals from a young age.” **BT**

## Knights of Columbus, allies fund anti-gay marriage drives

By David Gibson

Religion News Service

The Knights of Columbus, a wealthy and influential Catholic charitable organization, has been a leading funder in the push to make same-sex marriage illegal, according to a coalition of gay rights groups.

The Knights contributed millions of dollars directly to several of the campaigns to stop the legalization of gay marriage and have channeled money through other Catholic groups. They also have provided extensive financial support to the National Organization for Marriage, according to the Human Rights Campaign, one of four advocacy groups that compiled the research.

“In the aggregate, the (Catholic) church and NOM are the single largest funders of discrimination, responsible for

funding nearly 60 percent of all anti-equality efforts in Minnesota, Maryland, Maine and Washington,” HRC said in a statement.

The two groups have spent a combined \$2.5 million, the report says, with much of it coming from the Knights, a group that has become increasingly involved in conservative culture war issues under the leadership of Carl Anderson, a longtime Republican activist.

“Carl Anderson is using the good name that the Knights have developed over generations as cover while pursuing policies and making alliances that many Catholics find deeply troubling when they learn about them,” said Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA, an organization of gay Catholics that was part of the coalition behind the report.

The report, which culled information largely from the Knights’ Internal Revenue Service filings, found that the Knights

donated \$6.25 million to fight same-sex marriage initiatives between 2005-2012. Close to \$2 million of those funds went directly to NOM.

The Knights of Columbus responded that while they have helped fund the fight against same-sex marriage initiatives as a reflection of their principles, that funding represents a small fraction of their spending.

“The Knights of Columbus supports Catholic Social Teaching and the bishops of the Catholic Church, and some resources have long been dedicated to promoting that teaching on moral issues,” read a statement released by the group.

“This report mentions \$6.2 million donated by the Knights over the past seven years, during which time we also donated more than \$1 billion to charitable causes, with more than \$225 million of that coming from our Supreme Office.” **BT**



Abbot Justin Brown looks on as Novices Joseph Eichorn, left, and Dustin Bernard move a handmade wooden casket through the woodwork shop on the grounds of St. Joseph Abbey outside of Covington, La. Credit: RNS photo by Ted Jackson/The Times-Picayune

# Monks win latest round in bid to sell caskets

By Richard A. Webster  
*Religion News Service*

NEW ORLEANS — In a sometimes harshly worded ruling, a federal appeals court in October smacked down the Louisiana funeral board's continued attempts to prevent a group of monks from St. Joseph Abbey from selling their hand-crafted caskets.

**“T**he great deference due state economic regulation (does not require) courts to accept nonsensical explanations for naked transfers of wealth,” wrote Judges Patrick Higginbotham, Catharina Haynes and Stephen A. Higginson of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. “We insist that Louisiana’s rules not be irrational.”

The appellate judges sent the case to the Louisiana Supreme Court, refusing to consider the funeral board’s appeal of a lower court ruling that said it was unconstitutional for the state to give funeral directors exclusive rights to sell caskets.

“Simply put, there is nothing in the licensing procedures that bestows any benefit

to the public in the context of the retail sale of caskets,” U.S. District Court Judge Stanwood R. Duval Jr. ruled in July 2011. “The license has no bearing on the manufacturing and sale of coffins. It appears that the sole reason for these laws is the economic protection of the funeral industry,” which he wrote is not “a valid government interest.”

After Hurricane Katrina destroyed the abbey’s timberland outside Covington, La., a longtime source of revenue, the monks decided to sell their handmade caskets as a way to supplement their income. The abbey invested \$200,000 in St. Joseph Woodworks and sold two types of caskets, “monastic” and “traditional,” priced at \$1,500 and \$2,000 respectively.

“To be sure, Louisiana does not regulate the use of a casket, container, or other enclosure for the burial remains; has no requirements for the construction or design of caskets; and does not require that caskets be sealed,” the appeals court ruled.

“Individuals may construct their own caskets for funerals in Louisiana or purchase caskets from out-of-state suppliers via the internet. Indeed, no Louisiana law even requires a person to be buried in a casket.”

The monks did not offer funeral services, prepare the body for burial or participate in

funerals, except as pastors.

In response, the Louisiana Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors sent the monks a cease-and-desist letter, threatening thousands of dollars in fines and up to 180 days in prison based on a law prohibiting the sale of coffins without a funeral director’s license.

In their Oct. 23 ruling, the appellate judges took aim at that regulation, stating its sole purpose is to restrict the intrastate sales of coffins “to funeral homes.”

“There are no other strictures over their quality or use,” the appeals court said. “The district court found the state’s scheme to be the last of its kind in the nation. The state board had never succeeded in any enforcement actions against a third-party seller prior to its effort to halt the abbey’s consumer sales.”

Deacon Mark Coudrain, who manages the Abbey’s casket-making project, said the case is as much about “economic liberty” for the monks as it is “religious liberty.”

“The court recognized that the U.S. Constitution doesn’t let the government prevent monks or anyone else from earning an honest living unless there is a really good reason, the kind of reason that was nowhere to be seen here,” he said in a statement from the Virginia-based Institute for Justice, which is representing the monks. **BT**

## Kenyan churches say herbs threaten HIV/AIDS patients

By Fredrick Nzwili  
*Religion News Service*

**N**AIROBI, Kenya — Church leaders are pressing the Kenyan government to scientifically test herbal medicines that are used by millions, saying the nontraditional therapies could be putting patients' health at risk.

The leaders say HIV/AIDS patients and others suffering chronic conditions are widely using the medicines, whose efficacy is unknown.

"We are urging the government to test the medicines in modern laboratories so that citizens can be advised scientifically about what they are taking. That's a challenge we are also throwing to universities," former Anglican Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi told reporters in mid-October.

The natural medicines are so popular that some churches are advising their congregations and people with AIDS to use them to boost their immunity, alongside standard anti-retroviral medicines, said Nzimbi.

Sometimes, that advice is being interpreted to mean that sick people should abandon their medicine in favor of the herbs, according to Nyabuto Marube, an evangelical church leader.

"That's the risk," he said. "They should not be seen as replacements for modern medicines, but as supplements for now."

Gideon Byamugisha, the Ugandan Anglican priest who in 1992 became the first African religious leader to declare he was HIV-positive, told a recent medical conference how he had used herbs to fight opportunistic infections.

"When I became sick in 1998, a time when there were no ARVs, I used garlic to fend off infections," said Byamugisha. "There are many herbs in use, but we also need to know how they combine with modern medicines."

A "miracle herbal cure" allegedly discovered in 2010 by a retired Lutheran pastor, Ambilikile Mwasapile, recently attracted more than 4 million pilgrims within a year. **BT**

## Adventist leaders call actions to allow for women's ordinations 'mistakes'

By Adelle M. Banks  
*Religion News Service*

**L**eaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in October said recent decisions by two regional bodies to allow ordained female pastors were "serious mistakes," and women who are ordained won't be recognized — at least for now.

"They directly challenge two world Church decisions on the matter of ordination," reads a statement, passed by a 264-25 vote during the Annual Council meeting in Silver Spring, Md. "They create doubts about the importance of collective decision-making as a basic feature of denominational life."

The decisions by the Maryland-based Columbia Union Conference and the California-based Pacific Union Conference came as the worldwide church is in the midst of a broad study of the "theology of ordination" that is expected to be considered at the denomination's 2015 General Conference Session.

Many Adventist women pastors hold a "commissioned" credential, which does not permit ordination, while most male pastors hold a "ministerial" credential, which does.

In 1990, the General Conference Session, the highest authority of the church, approved a recommendation that prevented authorizing

ordination of women to ministry. That was followed by a 1995 rejection of a request by the North American Division to permit regional groups to authorize ordination regardless of gender.

In their new statement, Adventist leaders noted that they were dealing with church "structure and procedures," and not specifically addressing ministerial ordination.

Gerry Chudleigh, spokesman for the Pacific Union Conference, said leaders and members in his region were "grateful that the world church leaders took no punitive action against the unions that recently voted to ordain both men and women." Since its August decision, that regional group has approved 14 women pastors for ordination and most of them have already been ordained.

Columbia Union Conference spokeswoman Celeste Ryan Blyden said members of her region were encouraged that "this topic is back on the agenda of the worldwide church." Since its July decision, one woman pastor has been ordained and 14 others have been approved for ordination.

Garrett Caldwell, a spokesman for the world church, said current women pastors will continue to serve "but declarations of ministerial ordination for them will not be recognized until such an action is in harmony with a decision by a General Conference Session." **BT**

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## Mormon missionary applications soar by 471 percent

By Peggy Fletcher Slack  
*Salt Lake Tribune*

**S**ALT LAKE CITY (RNS) — Mormon apostle Jeffrey R. Holland predicted that lowering the age limits for young Mormon missionaries would trigger a "dramatic" uptick in their numbers.

Turns out, "dramatic" was an understatement. Try a 471 percent jump in applications — so far.

Just two weeks after Mormon President Thomas S. Monson announced that young men could go on full-time missions for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at age 18 (down from 19) and young women could go at 19 (down from 21), the Utah-based church saw applications skyrocket from an average of 700 a week to 4,000 a week.

"Slightly more than half of the applicants

are women," LDS Church spokesman Scott Trotter said. That represents a massive shift. Typically, women make up less than a fifth of the LDS missionary force, which currently stands at more than 58,000 worldwide.

Ultimately, Mormon leaders hope more missionaries will translate into more converts.

Matt Martinich, who tracks LDS growth, said in the past 33 years, he found each missionary has baptized — on average — six converts, though that number has dipped to five during the past decade.

The church reported 281,312 converts last year. If it sustains the current ratio of one missionary for every five converts a year, Martinich said, there would be 300,000 such baptisms when the number of missionaries reaches 60,000; 350,000 if the number of missionaries reaches 70,000; and 400,000 if the proselytizing force reaches 80,000. **BT**

# Why?

*Answers to  
Baptist questions  
from a historical  
perspective*



## **QUESTION:** Why do Baptists practice congregational government?

**A**rising in the early 17th century from a crucible of religious unrest in Europe, Baptists from their beginnings embraced what they believed to be the New Testament way of doing church: autonomous, congregational polity, whereby Christ was recognized as the head of the local church and the people of Christ (local church members) together directed the affairs of their local congregation under the Lordship of Christ. In short, congregationalism democratized the concept of the local church.

In the centuries between Christ and the birth of the Baptist faith, local congregations had been ruled by a hierarchy of centralized church leaders (episcopal polity) who claimed to be God's representatives and spokespersons on earth. In addition to breaking with post-New Testament episcopal polity, Baptists departed from the Presbyterian polity model — rule by (non-pastor) "elders" — that emerged from the Protestant Reformation.

Puritans in the New World also adopted congregational government, becoming known as the Congregational Church. But while the Puritans limited democratic principles to their church only, Baptists of Rhode Island secured democracy in their colony's charter. Within and without their churches, colonial Baptists led the way in transferring governance to the people.

Historic Baptist commitment to church governance by the people reflects core convictions in the principles of the priesthood of all believers, freedom of conscience and voluntary faith. Voluntary profession of faith in Christ and participation in believer's baptism are requirements for church membership. Church membership, in turn, is a prerequisite to participate in church decision-making.

Thus, church leaders in Baptist life are neither self-appointed nor installed by a pope

or bishop. Baptist layman Thomas Helwys in 1611 explained how Baptist churches stood apart from other denominations in selecting church officers. Those holding a local church "office" were chosen by "election and approbation of the church or congregation whereof they are members." Helwys' congregation turned to the New Testament in determining that the "offices" of the church should be "elder" (pastor) and "deacons, men and women." As in the New Testament, pastors were to "feed the flock concerning their souls," while deacons were to minister to the "poor and impotent." For centuries following, the Baptist model of church leadership remained a pastor (usually referred to by the title "elder") and deacons.

However, Baptist life is now a bit more complicated than in 1611, or even 1911. Church leadership positions have expanded to include multiple pastors in addition to worship leaders, youth directors, and a whole host of other staff positions. In addition, congregational decision-making encompasses another set of issues, from building facilities to establishing day-care policies to Wednesday night programming.

Nonetheless, in Baptist life of the 21st century, the offices of pastor and deacon yet represent the core leadership of most Baptist congregations. However, some modern Baptist congregations in America have departed from the historical practice of democratized church governance and have embraced the Presbyterian polity of church governance in which a small number of "elders" (always men, and not to be confused with the office of pastor) make decisions for the congregation.

Commonly referred to as "elder rule," this movement away from congregationalism and to Presbyterian government has been primarily

led by the revival of strict Calvinism in some quarters of Baptist life in America. Many prominent Calvinists in Southern Baptist life argue that some New Testament local congregations may have had a plurality of elders. In addition, distancing themselves from the Baptist understanding of elder as pastor, these Calvinists define the term to refer to males appointed to dictate theological beliefs and direct the affairs of local congregations. Indeed, Presbyterian polity seems to be a good match for the male-dominated, non-democratic, doctrinally-pure driven nature of modern Calvinistic congregations.

Surprisingly, however, elder rule has crept into some non-Calvinist Baptist congregations. For reasons not entirely clear, elder rule is increasingly common in American Baptist (ABC-USA) life and is occasionally found in non-ABC moderate Baptist life. While this emerging trend has not been studied enough to be quantified, anecdotal evidence points to non-Calvinistic Baptist elder rule as a response to disinterest of church members in congregational decision-making processes, the implementation of business models in large congregations, and the ever-present danger of the abuse of democratic practices within a congregation.

While each Baptist congregation is free to develop — and change — polity as it sees fit, the move by some churches to elder rule represents an odd development in Baptist life: namely, the utilizing of Baptist freedom in principle to take freedom away from church members in practice. Whether in the name of Calvinism or pragmatism, this back-tracking on congregational polity presents a challenge to the upholding of scriptural principles of the priesthood of all believers, freedom of conscience and voluntary faith. **BT**

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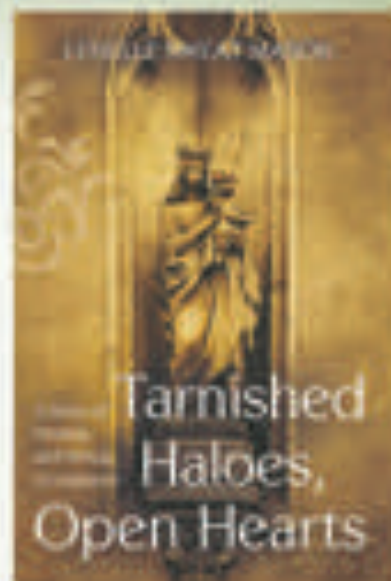
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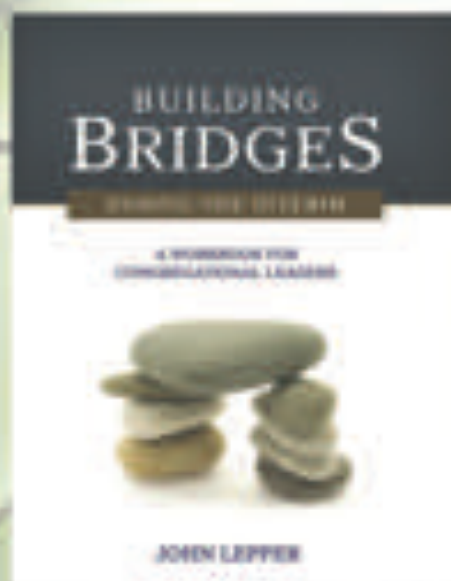
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For **adults** and **youth**

*January lessons in this issue*

## God's Desire and Israel's Glory

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# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Isaiah 60:1-9

Jan. 6, 2013

## Rise and Shine

As Christ-followers embark on a new year, it is appropriate that we focus on the one we follow, and the season of Epiphany celebrates the appearance of Christ among us (“Epiphany” is from a Greek word that means “appearing”).

During the first few centuries of church history, after Dec. 25 was popularly observed as the birthday of Christ, it became customary to identify Jan. 6 with the visit of the Magi and Jesus’ consequent revelation to the Gentiles. Some church fathers even held that Jesus’ public revelation through baptism and his initial demonstration of power at the wedding in Cana occurred on the same calendar date, though years later. ⚓

So, if Epiphany is all about Jesus, why is today’s text from Isaiah?

Isaiah 60 is one of the most beautiful and hopeful passages in the Hebrew Bible, promising an amazing age of salvation for God’s people and glory for God. From a Jewish perspective, the hope of a light that would draw all nations to Jerusalem has yet to be fulfilled.

The early church, however, thought of Christ as the promised light of the world sent to draw all people to God. Thus, readings from Isaiah 60 became a regular part of the liturgy for Epiphany. ⚓

### A light in the darkness (vv. 1-3)

Isaiah 60 almost certainly dates from the early postexilic period, long after the eighth-century Isaiah of Jerusalem inspired the book that bears his name,

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



Isa. 60:1 —

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.”



and shortly after the Persian king Cyrus allowed Jewish exiles to begin returning to Jerusalem in 537 BCE. ⚓

One would expect an exuberant era as the former exiles exulted in their return to Jerusalem, but those who made the long journey from Babylon were distraught at what they found: The glorious city their grandparents remembered lay crumbled and overgrown, a home for foxes and not for people.

Even though the Persian king had provided financial assistance and other exiles contributed funds, reconstruction was a slow and painful process, made more difficult by the enmity of neighboring peoples.

The Babylonians had left behind residents thought too poor or uneducated to prove a threat, and through the years they had intermarried with neighboring residents of differing ethnic backgrounds. The returning exiles considered themselves to be the only “pure” Jews remaining, and wanted

nothing to do with their ethnically mixed cousins, which provoked intense animosity between the groups. It was a dark time for a struggling population badly in need of a word of hope.

Into this discordant and discouraged setting, the prophet injected a timeless promise, calling the dejected people to “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you” (v. 1, NRSV).

What do we make of the verbs translated “has come” and “has risen”? Tangible evidence of God’s restored favor remained lacking. The verbs are both in the perfect tense, which is often translated like the English past tense, but can sometimes be translated as present or even future. Thus, the NET Bible renders them as “arrives” and “shines.” The perfect also appears in oracles as a “prophetic perfect,” describing an as-yet-unfulfilled future, but using the past tense to indicate the certainty of fulfillment.

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The prophet switches to the imperfect (uncompleted) tense in v. 2, making it clear that his vision was not yet fulfilled. Note the sharp contrast between darkness and light. “Darkness shall cover the earth,” he said, “and thick darkness the peoples,” while “the LORD will arise upon you and his glory will appear over you” (v. 2).

This verse helps us to understand that “the light” of v. 1, where it appears in parallel with “the glory of the LORD,” must refer to the very presence of God made manifest among God’s people. “Yahweh (the Hebrew name for God translated as LORD) will arise upon you,” said the prophet. An alternate meaning of the word rendered as “arise” is “shine” – it was used in conjunction with the dawn, when the sun appears to both “rise” and “shine.”

This is the connection to Epiphany: Reading this text through the lens of Jesus’ life and work, the church interpreted the promise of light as a sign of the incarnation. God had come to dwell with humankind. As we read in the gospel (John 8:12, 9:5) and celebrate in song, “the light of the world is Jesus.” It should come as no surprise that Jesus’ birth would be marked by the appearance of a bright star.

Isaiah envisions a time when foreign nations, blanketed in darkness, would be drawn to the light of God shining over Jerusalem, and they would come streaming to the city, both kings and their peoples (v. 3). This calls to mind the eschatological hopes of Isaiah 2:2-3 and Micah 4:1-2 and the New Testament emphasis on the gospel being for all nations.

### A global response (vv. 4-9)

While modern interpreters look at Isaiah’s promise through a New Testament lens, we can’t ignore the fact that the dispirited exiles would have heard the oracle quite differently.

For Israel, the hoped-for sign of God’s appearing would be the return of all the exiles who had been scattered across the known world, so that

Jerusalem would once again be populated by the faithful. We recall that, while the leading citizens of Judah had spent about 50 years in Babylon, their kindred from the much larger northern kingdom had fallen to the Assyrians in 722 BCE, and its people had been dispersed to other lands.

Thus, the promise of v. 4 that “your sons” and “your daughters” would return in the company of the nations would have come as welcome news. The image suggests that the peoples among whom the exiles had lived would now treat them as honored guests as they escorted them home.

What is more, the exiles would not return empty-handed. The nations would also bring an influx of wealth to Jerusalem, riches that could be used to rebuild the city and restore its glory. “Wealth on the seas” speaks of distant peoples who would travel to Palestine by ship, while “riches of the nations” encompasses all who would come to Jerusalem (v. 5b).

Such good news would cause the grieving Jerusalemites’ grieving hearts to tremble and swell, leaving them radiant with joy (v. 5a) – highly appropriate for people who have been bathed in the light of God’s presence.

The wealth flooding into Jerusalem would be so great that the city would be inundated with the camels required to carry it all, according to v. 6. But the prophet appears to assign the camels more than a task-bearing role. The beasts themselves come “proclaiming the praise of the LORD”!

This metaphor is amplified in the following verse, where Isaiah announces to Jerusalem that the “flocks of Kedar” and “rams of Nebaioth” will “serve you” and “go up on my altar with favor” (v. 7).

Translators usually gloss over the poet’s apparent intent by saying the rams would “be acceptable on my altar”

(NRSV) or “be accepted as offerings on my altar” (NIV), but the text suggests that the rams willingly climb the altar to offer themselves as a sacrifice.

Animals from foreign lands that come to praise God and offer themselves as a sacrifice build on the image that all creation will recognize and pay homage to God’s presence in Jerusalem.

While vv. 6-7 imagined wealth flowing in from southern and eastern regions, vv. 8-9 look westward to the “coastlands” of the Mediterranean Sea and the “ships of Tarshish” that would bear both long-lost Hebrews and their accumulated wealth back home. Here, the coastlands and the ships do this “for the name of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel,” a further indication that both the earth and inanimate objects would contribute to the praise of God.

### Two perspectives

Isaiah’s vision of a day when God’s presence would bathe Jerusalem and its environs with light, a day when foreigners would escort the exiles home and bring treasure by the boatload and camel load, has yet to occur in a literal sense. Jerusalem remained a rather nondescript place and never regained its former majesty until Herod the Great expanded and enlarged both the city and the temple nearly 500 years later. The temple was destroyed again in 70 CE.

For Jewish readers, then, the prophecy remains a matter of hope and promise (see “The Hardest Question” online for more thoughts on this).

Christian believers who know Matthew’s nativity stories, however, see an obvious hint of its fulfillment in the visit of the wise men (Matt. 2:1-12). The magi came from the East (a long journey that would have required them to ride camels), and they brought gifts of gold and incense, precisely what the camels deliver in Isa. 60:6. The purpose of the wise men’s visit was to pay respect to one they believed would be king over the Jews – the one Christians believe embodied the very epiphany of God. **BT**

# Bible Study

Isaiah 43:1-7

with Tony W. Cartledge

Jan. 13, 2013

## You Are Mine!


**D**o you ever get embarrassed when you see a familiar face but can't remember the name that goes with it? Or, has someone ever approached you, saying "I think I know you – remind me who you are"? We usually give our name and assume we have answered the question, but there is far more to knowing who we are than knowing our name. Perhaps we should occasionally ask ourselves "Who are you?"

We may ask the question unconsciously, at different stages of our lives, or in times of crisis. Whether it is our "mid-life crisis" or the "seven-year itch," we go through predictable stages characterized by an internal search for identity – but it can also be helpful to purposefully step apart and look to our heart and say "I think I know you, but I'm not sure. *Who are you?*"

Inevitably, we discover that *who* we are depends in part on *whose* we are. The family systems, communities and cultures to which we belong shape us in many ways. Learning who we are begins with learning whose we are.

### God's people (v. 1)

This is one reason we are fortunate to have Isaiah 43, for it is addressed to persons who were going through an identity crisis. Some of them had forgotten who they were.

Our text, from a prophet often called "Second Isaiah," was probably written about 540 BCE.  The prophet's audience consisted of citizens


Isa. 43:4b —


"...you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you."



and their families from the southern kingdom of Judah, who had lived in exile for nearly 50 years. They were surrounded by the gods of Babylon, the worldview of Babylon, the values of Babylon. Descendants of the original exiles had never known any other home. Many had lost all sense of who they were as the people of Israel, the children of God.

It took an effort to remain a faithful Israelite while living in Babylon. Indeed, the passage just before today's text (42:18-25) is an oracle of judgment on a hard-hearted people who had forgotten their God.

God, however, had not forgotten the people. Thus, the exilic Isaiah spoke through a very personal oracle of salvation as a powerful reminder of God's claim on Israel: "But now, this is what Yahweh says – he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine" (v. 1; translations from Isaiah 43 in this lesson are my own). 

The exiled people of Israel had been away for so long, and had become so assimilated to their lives in Babylon, that they had forgotten who they were. The prophet took it upon himself to remind them. 

Isaiah reminds Israel of *who* they are by reminding them of *whose* they are. His challenge is true for every person who now is or who wishes to become a part of God's family of faith. When we remember who we are by remembering whose we are, we are also reminded of what a special thing it is to be God's treasured possession (see Exod. 19:4-6, 1 Pet. 2:9-10).

### God's presence (vv. 2-3a)

God makes an amazing promise in vv. 2-3a: "If you journey through the waters, I am with you, and through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. If you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, the flames will not consume you, for I am Yahweh, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

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It is important to note that this is not a promise of perfect protection or an assurance that God's people would not experience trials as they made their way home from exile. Nor does this tell modern believers that God will help us to avoid either fire or water. In both cases, the prepositions and verbs are insistent – it is when we are going *through* the rivers of turmoil and *through* the fiery stress of life that God is with us, to redeem us, to call us by name.

When the prophet spoke of being preserved from overwhelming waters, his Hebrew hearers may have remembered how God had saved Noah and his family in the time of the flood, or how God had safely brought one generation of their forefathers safely through the sea on their escape from Egypt, and led the next generation to cross the raging Jordan River without fear or loss.


When the prophet spoke of fire, perhaps the people would have remembered how God saved Lot and his children from the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or how their own parents had escaped the fires that engulfed Jerusalem when it was destroyed.

We sometimes feel overcome by rivers of stress, fearful that we are drowning in the busyness of our lifestyle, or losing our footing as the pressure of our secular society sucks us down into the mud of a moral swamp, threatening our core identity as a child of God. The promise of scripture is that God knows our struggles and says to us, literally, “*With you – I am!*”

Isaiah's metaphor of fire brings to mind the raging inferno of personal tragedy, the blistering heat of marital discord, the scorching flames of personal loss. The heat may arise through circumstances beyond our control – or from the sparks of our own sin coming home to roost.


In either case, we are reminded that God is with us. Daniel 3 relates a heroic story of how three Hebrew men in Babylon were thrown into a fiery furnace because of their refusal to bow down to an alien god. But the fire did

not kill them, and those looking in saw four images, with the fourth appearing like a “son of God” (more likely an angel than a proleptic reference to Jesus). The story claims that the men emerged without so much as the smell of the fire clinging to their clothing.

Other biblical texts speak metaphorically of fire, even for Christians. In those cases, trials are seen as having a purifying function, burning away the dross while leaving our essential nature as God's children unharmed (1 Cor. 3:12-15). 

### God's possession (vv. 3b-7)

Isaiah declared that God cares so wonderfully because God loves so much. The following translation of vv. 3b-7 attempts to preserve some of the emphatic Hebrew word order:

“I would give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead, because you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I – I love you. I would give peoples in exchange for you, and nations in exchange for your life. Do not be afraid, for I am with you! From the east I will bring your offspring, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back!’ Bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, who I formed, indeed, whom I made!” 


At first sight, this text may seem troublesome. Would God allow one group of people (who are also God's children) to be captured in behalf of another? Even more, does this text suggest that God would give over darker skinned persons in behalf of the lighter (Egypt, Cush and Seba were all African nations)? The identity of the three nations is not as important as

the prophet's belief that God had the power to direct the course of worldwide events, and that God was willing to pay any price in order to redeem Israel, who had been created for God's own glory (see the online “Hardest Question” for more).

God's intention is to speak tenderly and lovingly to those who feel exiled and lost. The Hebrews experienced an exile of geography, a separation from their beloved home in and around Jerusalem. Some Christians may think of a particular church in the same way and feel lost apart from it, but we generally do not look to a physical place to encounter God as the Hebrews did. Still, we may feel separated from God and in spiritual exile.

Whether we feel disconnected due to geography or behavior or trouble, God calls us home, because we are precious in God's sight. The text makes this point with great vigor; rarely do we find a verse that speaks with such passion. The prophet emphatically employs both the first person pronoun and the first person form of the verb: “*I – I love you!*”

Because of such love, God is willing to be our redeemer (v. 1), willing to do what it takes to set us free from exile. Isaiah metaphorically suggested that God would be willing to surrender possession of other nations in return for Israel's salvation, but those who know the gospel stories see a different fulfillment of the promise.

According to the Gospels, God did not give up Egypt, Ethiopia or any other nation in order to redeem those who are lost in exile. Rather, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life” (John 3:16, NRSV). “The son of man came not to be served but to serve,” Jesus said, “and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). 

God is willing to give so much, because God loves so much. Let us never forget the amazing extent of God's care for us. No matter what happens, we can know that we are loved. **BT**

# Youth

January 6 — January 27, 2013

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

## Get Up!

*Isaiah 60:1-9*

"**R**ise and shine!" Maybe these aren't the exact words you hear in the morning, but it's easy to imagine hearing them. Some people bounce from their bed with energy and are chatty, while others emerge from the covers more slowly and quietly. Sometimes the only thing we want to do when we hear those words is pull the covers over our heads and go back to sleep.

The first nine verses of Isaiah 60 are a sort of "rise and shine" statement, but the promise of Isaiah is much more than another day at school. The promise of Isaiah 60 is an amazing picture of hope and an age of salvation for all of God's people.

The Israelite people were streaming back to the promised land only to find it in

ruins. The places described in the stories they had heard of the promised land were either destroyed or in terrible shape.

Today's passage from Isaiah helps these people find much needed hope. It describes all nations being drawn by the light of God shining over Jerusalem. Those who would come would bring their wealth to fund the rebuilding of the city. But it would be not only wealth that was brought, but also the name of the Lord would be praised — even by the animals that carried the travelers.

When we feel things are too dark and too tough, we need to remember that our hope is in God — not ourselves. God can restore that which is broken, bring peace where there is strife, and offer hope where there is fear.

JANUARY 6

### Think About It:

*Do you have a favorite place? Imagine that you visited there again but it was in ruins when you returned. What would that feel like? What would make you hopeful about it returning to the memories of your past?*

### Make a Choice:

*You get to make the decision to let the light of Christ shine from within you, or to dampen the light of Christ that burns within you. What choices will you make to show the light of Christ shining from your life?*

### Pray:

*Pray that you will be the light of Christ to the world that surrounds you.*

## You're Mine!

*Isaiah 43:1-7*

**S**he looked her opponent right in the eyes, and with an edge said, "You're mine!" When this sort of statement is said on an athletic field, there is no sense of kindness involved. It's about competition and winning. Your opponent is about to see your best effort in the game.

The first verse of Isaiah 43 offers a similar statement, but it has the opposite meaning from an athletic event. Isaiah is the mouthpiece of the Lord when he says, "You are mine." So when the words are spoken, you know you are about to get God's best effort. God's "You are mine" means God will do whatever it takes to love you.

God desires for each of us to belong to God. The promise is not only to belong when things go well, but also when we go through

tough times. God is with us and we are God's! God is so intent on reaching us that God is willing to pay any price. All of this is because of God's love for each one of us.

Written like the verses of a song, Isaiah 43:1-7 uses powerful images of rushing rivers and raging fires to show the extent of God's love and protection for Israel. Multiple times, God asks them to have no fear, for God is with them. The passage is like a love song from God to the people.

Verse 3 explains that God would give entire nations to rescue the people, and that those who are called by God's name — those who belong to God — will be gathered together from across the earth. Today's passage ends with a reminder that God has created each of us: "Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

JANUARY 13

### Think About It:

*What's the greatest way you could show someone your love? What can you do to show love to those around you? How have you been shown the love of God?*

### Make a Choice:

*The love we receive from God is freely given. You have a choice to hold onto this love or freely to give it away. Will you find ways to daily show that love to others?*

### Pray:

*Pray that you show the love of God to each person you encounter today.*

## David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver



### Wedding Bells

Isaiah 62:1-12

Do you ever think about the type of person you one day might marry? Do you have a mental list of the qualities you want your spouse to have? What is that picture like? What emotions emerge as you consider this future person? Is there a smile creeping across your face as you answer these questions? Having someone who loves you for who you are is one of the greatest gifts of life.

In today's passage the prophet uses the image of God as married to Israel to highlight the remarkable love and faithfulness God had for the people. The image of marriage showed that God was supporting them and was beside them as they faced an unknown and frightening future.

After being away for generations, the people had returned from exile to their

promised land. Until now they had only heard of Jerusalem in the stories of their parents and grandparents. The excitement of coming home was dashed as they saw the destruction around them. Instead, the promise of this land turned out to be the heavy burden of rebuilding and lots of taxes to be paid.

In the midst of these dark days, the prophet speaks of the confidence he has in God — God will restore the people. In fact, the people would become the crown jewel of God. The prophet calls for the people to stand on the walls and cry out continuous prayers to this God who loves them and will help them build a bright new future.

God loves us and seeks a close relationship with us. Even when things look dark, God is working to lead us to a brighter and better future. What sort of relationship are you building with God?

JANUARY 20

#### Think About It:

*A relationship cannot happen when only one person is involved and committed. How involved and committed are you in your relationship with God? How can you keep up your relationship with God if you don't talk with him?*

#### Make a Choice:

*Your commitment is shown when you act on your love for another person. The same is true with God. What choices do you make that show your love for God?*

#### Pray:

*Pray that you might show your love for God by showing love to others.*

### Happy New Year!

Nehemiah 8:1-12

What New Year resolutions did you make this year? Have you already broken them? Have you already forgotten what you resolved to do? What if you got a second chance to begin again?

Today's scripture from Nehemiah 8 tells of the beginning of the "Feast of Trumpets," an observance of the new year beginning. The people of Israel recite the law and renew the covenant commitments made with God.

Can you imagine starting the new year by gathering together to spend the morning hearing scripture read and interpreted for you? In today's passage, the men and women eagerly gathered in the square to hear the most famous teacher of the law, Ezra. With him stood 13 other men who were present to show Ezra's authority and hold themselves accountable for

what he taught. As he read from the book of the law, Ezra and the Levites would interpret what it meant for the people that day.

The men and women were there with Ezra all morning, until midday, listening and learning. They were moved to weeping as they heard the law read and interpreted to them, but Ezra would have none of this. Instead, Ezra commanded them "to eat the fat and drink the sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared" because this was a holy day of the Lord. He wanted them to celebrate!

Ezra, on this day when covenants were remembered, wanted the people to embrace "the joy of the Lord that gives them strength" instead of weeping and mourning. Ezra didn't want the year to start with mourning; he wanted the people to be filled with joy as they started their new year with the Lord.

JANUARY 27

#### Think About It:

*Ezra commanded the people "to eat the fat and drink sweet wine." But does it surprise you that Ezra instructed the people to prepare a portion for those who had not prepared anything? How often do you think about those who have nothing?*

#### Make a Choice:

*The people of Israel wept as they heard scripture, but Ezra wanted them to celebrate. When it comes to your faith, do you come with a heavy heart or a heart filled with joy?*

#### Pray:

*Pray that your heart may be filled with joy and that you find strength in the Lord.*

# Bible Study


with Tony W. Cartledge

Isaiah 62:1-12

Jan. 20, 2013

## New Days and New Names

**M**etaphors are a mainstay of the biblical story, especially with regard to relationships. In the Old Testament, Israel is like a vine that produces worthless grapes (Isa. 5:1-7), an ox that doesn't know its owner (Isa. 1:3), or a wild donkey in heat (Jer. 2:24). Despite their recalcitrance, God carries the wayward Hebrews as an eagle bears its young (Deut. 32:11), and cares for them as a mother nurses her children (Isa. 49:14-15, 66:12-13). In the New Testament, Jesus tells parables about mustard seeds and stony soils, and broods over Jerusalem like a mother hen fretting over her chicks (Matt. 23:37, Luke 13:34).

One of the more surprising metaphors – one that would be shocking if it were not so familiar to regular churchgoers – is the image of God and Israel as husband and wife.  Nowhere is that metaphor presented more forcefully than in today's text, which continues to celebrate the manifestation of Christ during the season of Epiphany.

The lectionary limits today's text to Isa. 62:1-5, but the theme persists through the end of the chapter, so we will carry on through v. 12.

With this passage, we return to a prophecy of "Third Isaiah" (chs. 56-66), who preached amid the ruins of Jerusalem after a small vanguard of Israelites had returned under Cyrus' patronage to rebuild their home.

It was a depressing time. Second Isaiah had spoken beautiful prophecies of how Jerusalem would be rebuilt (44:28), enriched with the wealth of




**Isa. 62:4b** —  
" ... but you shall be called  
My Delight Is in Her, and  
your land Married ..."

the nations (45:14) and bursting at the seams with new growth (45:19-23; 54:1-3). But the physical reality was a far different story, as the hopeful exiles returned to find overgrown ruins, opposition from their neighbors (Ezra 4:1-5) and heavy taxes to pay (Neh. 5:15).

The people grew discouraged. Some of them wanted to give up, but the prophet pressed a new and hopeful vision.

### A new relationship (vv. 1-3)

Isaiah spoke out of his own determination to offer a brighter prospect: "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch" (v. 1, NRSV). 

The prophet could see that the city was covered with the darkness of despair, but he was confident that God had not forgotten Jerusalem, and that God's own work of salvation would

bring light and hope to the ancient city.

Other nations would witness Israel's coming vindication, Isaiah believed, when God established a new relationship symbolized by a new name and by treatment fit for royalty (vv. 2-3).

As Isaiah described the future Jerusalem as a "crown of beauty" and a "royal diadem" in the hand of God, listeners might envision a beautiful city on a hill with its rebuilt walls and parapets looking very much like a giant crown. Notice that the crown is not on God's head, but in God's hand. As Exod. 19:5 speaks of Israel as God's "special treasure," this text pictures the people as God's "crown jewel." The crown was not yet complete, however: God was still about the task of redemption.

When non-believers trust in Christ for salvation, we also take on a new name. In America, the common name is "Christian." In some countries, where the term "Christian" has taken on a negative connotation, names such

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as “believer” or “Christ-follower” are often used. If you could choose a name to indicate your relationship with Christ, what would it be?


### New names (vv. 4-5)

The theme of a new name for Jerusalem (symbolic of Jerusalem’s people) emerges with force in vv. 4-5. The abandoned and desolate city would see better days, Isaiah declared: “You shall no more be termed ‘Forsaken’ (*‘Azubah*), and your land shall no more be termed ‘Desolate’ (*Shemamah*), but you shall be called ‘My Delight Is in Her’ (*Hephzibah*), and your land ‘Married’ (*Beulah*); for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married” (v. 4). 

We know what it is to change a name. Children who are called by diminutive nicknames as children often revert to their given names as adults. Persons entering marriage typically take a common name, whether it is the husband’s surname (in line with tradition) or a hyphenated version that preserves both. In either case, the change of name is significant. It indicates a change of relationship.

Yet another name appears in v. 5, as Isaiah speaks of Jerusalem as God’s bride: “For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” 

### Prayer and peace (vv. 6-9)

Having indicated his own determination not to be silent or to rest until Jerusalem was restored, the prophet calls on others to join him in the task, to “remind the LORD, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth” (vv. 6-7). 

Like watchmen, they are to stand on the ruined walls of Jerusalem and perpetually cry out for the promises of God to be fulfilled. What an audacious

instruction! And yet, this is not the only time the Bible speaks of importunity in prayer. Jesus told stories about a needy and determined man who kept on knocking until his friend opened the door (Luke 11:5-10), and about a dogged widow who badgered a crooked judge until justice was done (Luke 18:1-8). Jesus related these to prayer, even as he commended the Syro-Phoenician woman for her tenacity in seeking his blessing (Matt. 15:22-28).

Is it irreverent to imagine that God will not hear us without persistent pestering? Perhaps the best interpretative approach is to realize that post-exilic Israel was facing a crisis, and there was little hope other than for them to cry out to God. Jesus was known to pray all night long when facing important decisions (Luke 6:12). Such prayer may serve to purify or focus our own hearts more than to bend the will of God, but like the insistent ascetic Simeon Stylites, we have a biblical mandate for “battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer” (from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “St. Simeon Stylites”).

One of the promises Isaiah declared was that God would no longer allow enemies to rob Israelites of the food and wine for which they had labored (vv. 8-9). We should recall that when the exiles returned, they were not given rights to all of Israel or even of Judah. In fact, their new borders stretched only a short distance beyond Jerusalem itself. The “new Israel” was a tiny province called “Yehud,” where the former exiles lived under Persian jurisdiction. Fierce and antagonistic neighbors inhabited the surrounding provinces. When the early returnees put crops in the fields around Jerusalem, it is likely that nearby “armies” or gangs of bandits showed up at harvest time and robbed them.

Isaiah dares to claim that Yahweh had sworn an oath to end such larceny. Ancient persons typically swore that

they would (or would not) do something by calling on a god to strike them down if they did not perform their oath (e.g., 2 Kg. 6:31). While mortal persons swore by the deity, Yahweh had no “higher power” to appeal to, and had to swear by God’s own self (Isa. 45:23; Jer. 49:13; 51:14) or by divine attributes such as God’s holiness (Ps. 89:35), great name (Jer. 44:26), or here, “by his right hand and by his mighty arm.”

### Homecoming (vv. 10-12)

The prophet concludes the chapter with an appeal for the pioneering refugees to prepare the way for other Israelites to come home. These verses are sometimes interpreted as a missionary text, but their primary concern is the coming manifestation of God that will bring salvation to the people and reunite the scattered people of Israel. The inhabitants of the new and future Jerusalem are called to raise the flag, proclaim the salvation of God, and call God’s scattered people home (vv. 10-11).

Then, Isaiah declared, the people and the city would receive yet more new names, including “The Holy People,” “The Redeemed of the Lord,” “Sought Out,” and “A City Not Forsaken.” By these new names, the people would reflect their new character and exert their attraction for others to join them.

When God’s people (whether Israel, or the church) display true holiness of character, when they demonstrate through loving living that they are indeed “the redeemed of the Lord,” then others will naturally want to “come home” and join them. When this happens, the renewed city of Jerusalem (or the faithful church) will no longer be called “Ignored” or “Desolate.” Instead, the restored city will be “Sought Out” by those who seek to know God.

Every day we come into contact with people who have no relationship with God, but would like to. Is there anything about our lives that would make us “Sought Out” as fitting guides to God? **BT**

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Jan. 27, 2013


## Law School

**D**o you ever get a little impatient before Sunday school or worship ends, wishing it didn't last quite so long? If so, take heart that your class is not like one taught by Ezra the scribe nearly 2,500 years ago: It was held outdoors, started early in the morning, and lasted until noon!

Today's lesson continues the Epiphany theme of God's appearing. Prophetic texts from Isaiah we've studied the past three Sundays speak of God's manifestation to Israel as a light (ch. 60), as a savior (ch. 43), and even as a loving spouse and redeemer (ch. 62). In each case, we have sought to perceive how the bedraggled Hebrews would have understood the prophecies, as well as how they look from a New Testament perspective.

Today we shift from the scintillating promises of Isaiah to the prosaic proclamation of Ezra, who read and explained selected texts from the "Book of the Law." In this text, God is manifested in word, in the reading and interpreting of scripture.

### Gathering and hearing (7:73b-8:3)

The structure and chronology of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah have puzzled interpreters for centuries.  The story concerns Ezra, but is carefully placed in the book of Nehemiah.

The story follows the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls (Neh. 2:17-6:19) and a census list of those exiles who had returned to Jerusalem (7:1-73a). With security improved by the walls'



**Neh. 8:10b —**


"... do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

completion, the Persian king had commissioned Ezra to deliver a considerable amount of silver, gold, and furnishings for the temple and the support of Jerusalem (Ezra 7) – along with 5,000 additional returning exiles. Ezra also brought a copy of the "Book of the Law," and a commission to determine if it was being followed.

Ezra was known as one who "had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). He returned to find that the residents of Jerusalem had become quite lax in their observance of the law, and he apparently let it be known that the city was in need of reform and renewal.

The people had resettled in their homes in towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem after rebuilding the walls (Neh. 7:73b), but soon returned to the city for the New Year's festival. Perhaps excitement had been growing as word got out that the Hebrews' most famous teacher would read from the law and explain how the people could live in closer accord with the

commandments, improving the chances that God would bless their land with greater prosperity.

Thus we read, "all the people gathered together" (literally, "as one man") in an open area before the Water Gate. The text speaks as if it was a spontaneous gathering, but we have to assume it was organized in advance. The first day of the seventh month was a festival day, a New Year's observance celebrated as the "Feast of Trumpets" (Lev. 23:23-25, Num. 29:1). It was a time when reciting the law and renewing covenant commitments would be most appropriate. 

A tall platform wide enough for Ezra and a dozen other men had already been erected. So, while the text says "they told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses" (8:1), the request was probably part of the ceremony.

Significantly, Ezra's audience consisted of "both men and women and all who could hear with understanding" (stated twice in vv. 2-3). This is an important reminder that worship and Bible study are important for all who have the ability to understand — even children.

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



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Reading alone accomplishes little, but the narrator insists that the people listened attentively. Literally, “their ears were toward the book of the law.”

### Reading and responding (8:4-8)

Some readers have noted that v. 3, which says Ezra read from the law, could hardly precede v. 5, where he “first opened the book” (actually, a scroll). This raises no problem if we understand that vv. 2-3 provide an overview or summary statement of what took place from early morning to mid-day, with vv. 4-8 adding further details about the service.

As the convocation began, Ezra stood in plain sight on the tall platform, accompanied by 13 men who are not otherwise identified (v. 4), leaving us to guess that the men were either governmental officials or family elders. Their presence appears designed to endorse Ezra’s reading of the law, to hold themselves accountable for following it, and to encourage the people to do the same.

When Ezra opened the scroll, we read, the entire congregation stood up in a show of respect for the reading of the text (v. 5), a practice that many present-day churches continue to observe. Before reading, Ezra offered words of blessing to “Yahweh, the great God.” The people responded with lifted hands and a two-fold “Amen” before falling prostrate with their faces to the ground (v. 6) – a response less frequently practiced today!

The following verse names another 13 men, clearly identified as Levites, whose function included teaching and instructing others in the law. Since “the people remained in their places” (v. 7), we presume that the Levites either moved about or were stationed with a portion of the congregation.

A number of questions come to the fore at this point. While v. 3 implies that Ezra did all of the reading, v. 8 says “so *they* read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation.” Did the men who shared the platform with Ezra also read, or the Levites? Or, does

“they” refer to a joint effort in which Ezra read and the Levites interpreted?

One approach, widely accepted, is to assume that Ezra read from the law in Hebrew, then paused while the Levites translated into Aramaic, which had become the common language of the people. It is also quite possible that the Levites’ role was to paraphrase or explain the meaning of each passage as it was read.

A larger question relates to precisely what Ezra read. The text says only that he read *from* the Book of the Law, presumably excerpts that would have been particularly pertinent to the current situation (see “The Hardest Question” online for more on this). Whatever texts Ezra chose to read, they served the intended purpose, prompting an outpouring of renewed conviction and repentant contrition.

Can you remember a time when a particular text spoke to you in a powerful way, convicting you of some particular wrong, or reminding you of how far from God you had gone? How did you react? Have you ever responded to scripture with weeping?

### Repentance and rejoicing (8:9-12)

The people, who had gathered as one, now joined as one in expressing sorrow for their shortcomings: “all the people wept when they heard the words of the law” (v. 9b). This would not do, however. Ezra and the Levites, perhaps accompanied by Nehemiah, insisted that the people dry their tears and celebrate the holiness of the day (v. 9a).

As contemporary churches often spice special days with a sumptuous “dinner on the grounds,” Ezra instructed the people “to eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared” (v. 10a).

More significant than the special foods is the commandment to provide portions for those who had no food. Whether the hungry neighbors were poor, old or just unaware that they should bring food for the feast day is unclear, but the call for generosity is certain, and adds to the celebratory atmosphere.

In v. 11 we find the most memorable phrase from today’s text, a line memorialized in song and often remembered in prayer: “for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Just as we find encouragement for the heart and strength for the soul when we gather for worship and praise God together, Ezra taught the Israelites that their joyous celebration of communal faith should be a source of strength.

We should note that the word translated “strength” has a special nuance, however. It does not describe an intrinsic fortitude so much as a stronghold or place of safety. In this context, the place of safety was needed as protection against the judgments of the same God who offered joyous grace.

Ezra may have read passages such as Leviticus 26 or Deuteronomy 28, explaining their insistence that God would bless the obedient but punish the unfaithful. Convicted of their infidelity and fearful of divine reprisals, the people had responded with weeping. Repenting and celebrating a renewed covenant relationship, however, offered the people new assurance of safety and strength.

Reading and teaching the Torah had special significance in the postexilic community, whose leaders sought to focus community life on obedience to God, especially as expressed in faithful support of the temple.

Our Bible is much more extensive than the “Book of the Law” from which Ezra read, but the importance of gathering for worship and hearing the scriptures read and explained is no less important for the passing of the years. Worshipful reminders of God’s word and grace are a source of great joy, and in such joy we find strength for every day. **BT**

## Classifieds

**Pastor:** Blackwell Memorial Baptist Church, located in northeastern North Carolina, is seeking a full-time pastor to proclaim first and foremost the gospel of Jesus Christ. We seek a person who is a graduate of a seminary or divinity school. We are a mission-minded fellowship with 125 members that believes in the autonomy of the local church, and ordains men and women deacons. Mail references and résumé by Jan. 18, 2013, to Pastor Search Committee, Blackwell Memorial Baptist Church, 700 N. Road St., Elizabeth City, NC 27909, or to blackwellsearch@yahoo.com.

**Pastor:** Rosewood First Baptist Church has begun the prayerful search for a new pastor. RFBC is dually aligned with the SBC and CBF and is located in Wayne County adjacent to Goldsboro, N.C. We seek a pastor who will lead the congregation in bearing witness to God's work in Jesus Christ and in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. Work schedule will focus on leading the church in its vision for ministry, the sacred work of preaching and teaching, providing leadership to the staff and programs of the church, and caring for the spiritual needs of the congregation. Prospective candidates should hold ministry preparation credentials from an accredited seminary or divinity school. Résumés may be submitted by Dec. 31 to applyrfbc@gmail.com or to Susan Tyner, 182 Community Dr., Goldsboro, NC 27530.

**Minister to Students:** River Oaks Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, is seeking a minister to students (7-12th grade) to develop and implement discipleship and ministry events. The student minister will assist in outreach ministries to River Oaks Baptist School. Some ministry experience is desired. Send résumés to mmiley@robcc.org.

**Fred A. Ansell** died Nov. 4 in Topeka, Kan. He was executive minister of the Central Region of American Baptist Churches USA from 1996-2006, and earlier served as associate executive minister.

**D. Ross Campbell** of Signal Mountain, Tenn., died Nov. 2 at age 75. He served as a medical missionary in Bolivia before becoming a noted child psychiatrist. He served on the Ministering to Ministers Foundation Board and wrote 15 books including the bestselling *How to Really Love Your Child*. He and Gary Chapman co-authored *Five Love Languages of Children*. A memorial service was held at Signal Mountain Baptist Church.

**Scott Dickison** is pastor of First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Ga. A native of Charlotte, N.C., he is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and Wake Forest University, and recently completed a two-year pastoral residency at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas.

**John Dunaway** died Oct. 18 in Huntsville, Ala., at age 79. He served pastorates in Kentucky, including First Baptist Church of Corbin, and was instrumental in the naming of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in the early 1990s. He also helped found Community Baptist Church in Henderson, Ky., and Baptist Seminary of Kentucky.

## In the Know

**Mark Gaskins** in pastor of Smithwood Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn., coming from Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church in Sanford, N.C.

**Don Gordon**, pastor of Yates Baptist Church in Durham, N.C., will become pastor of Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, effective Jan. 6, 2013.

**Ruth Perkins Lee** is director of missional congregations for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, coming from First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala., where she was college minister for 10 years.

**Miriam Méndez** is associate executive minister for the American Baptist Churches of the Central Pacific Coast (formerly ABC of Oregon).

**Debbie and Keith Myers** have been appointed by American Baptist International Ministries and assigned to serve in Mexico with *Consejo Indígena Campesino Evangélico de México, A.R.* (Council of Rural Indigenous Evangelicals of Mexico, A.R.). **BT**

Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology, in partnership with the Baugh Center for Baptist Leadership, is adding a Ph.D. program in religion with a focus on Baptist studies.

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# The All-American worship quiz

You are delighted that your son wants you to visit his church, but when he picks you up he is wearing a Hawaiian shirt, shorts and sandals. You don't want to show up dressed for big church when everyone else is ready for the beach, so you rush upstairs for your gym clothes. You're afraid you're going to miss the prelude, but walk in just as the music begins. Something is terribly wrong: "That sounds like a guitar. Is the organ broken?" You're a victim of worship whiplash.

To avoid worship-related trauma, we need to know how churches are categorized in the Yellow Pages. (If you still look in the Yellow Pages, your church is probably old.) How formal, informal, traditional, contemporary, spirited, scripted, classical or rock and roll is your church? These scientific questions will answer all your questions.

**1. Which one of these words is in the name of your church?**

- a. Holiness
- b. Saint
- c. First
- d. Community

**2. What are the first words spoken in worship?**

- a. Praise the Lord!
- b. The Lord be with you.
- c. Good morning!
- d. Testing, one, two.

**3. What are the last words spoken in worship?**

- a. Praise the Lord!
- b. May God look upon you with kindness and give you peace.
- c. See you tonight.
- d. Let's get the band back out here.

**4. What is the primary musical instrument?**

- a. Enthusiastic grandmothers
- b. Organ
- c. Piano
- d. Guitar

**5. Where are the songs?**

- a. In our hearts
- b. In the hymnal
- c. On the wall
- d. In the hymnal, on the wall and, on occasion, printed in the order of worship

**6. How would you describe prayers?**

- a. Hard to hear over the electric piano
- b. Well-written
- c. Familiar
- d. Awesome

**7. How many Bible verses are read during worship?**

- a. Hard to remember
- b. A Psalm and an Old Testament, Gospel, and Epistle Reading
- c. At least one from Paul
- d. One screen's worth

**8. Does the preacher sweat?**

- a. Lots
- b. If the robe is wool
- c. During revivals
- d. During the songs

**9. What does the preacher wear?**

- a. Something that doesn't show sweat
- b. A black robe
- c. A nice suit
- d. Nikes

**10. How would you describe the pulpit?**

- a. Irrelevant
- b. Ten thousand pounds
- c. Vanishing
- d. What's a pulpit?

**11. How old is the pastor?**

- a. Hard to tell
- b. 70
- c. 50
- d. 30

**12. What do you call the pastor?**

- a. Brother/Sister
- b. Reverend Doctor
- c. Brother
- d. Blake

**13. Who is a much-loved prophet?**

- a. Ezekiel
- b. Isaiah
- c. Amos
- d. Rob Bell

**14. What is a favorite Bible verse?**

- a. Acts 2:17
- b. Micah 6:8
- c. John 3:16
- d. "Lord, I lift your name on high"

**15. Who is the preferred member of the Trinity?**

- a. Spirit
- b. God the Father/Mother
- c. Jesus
- d. The Awesome Lord

**16. Who is a favorite preacher?**

- a. T.D. Jakes
- b. The Archbishop of Canterbury
- c. Rick Warren
- d. Stephen Colbert

**17. To what radio station do you listen?**

- a. The Fish
- b. Classical
- c. Talk radio
- d. What's a radio?

**18. What's a terrible sin?**

- a. Sitting quietly during worship
- b. Not recycling
- c. Sex
- d. Being old

**19. What kind of coffee do you drink?**

- a. Folger's
- b. Soy latté
- c. Dunkin' Donuts
- d. Starbucks

**20. Where do you get your news?**

- a. TBN
- b. NPR
- c. Fox News
- d. iPhone

If most of your answers are ...

- A. Get excited. You're Pentecostal!
- B. Keep calm. You're liturgical.
- C. Good news! You're an evangelical.
- D. You're too contemporary to be taking this quiz.

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

# BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

This month opens with U.S. President Abraham Lincoln reiterating his commitment, in the State of the Union address, to the emancipation of Confederate slaves. Many Northern Baptists support the president. Although many Democrats agitate against emancipation and for an end to the war, Republican support ensures the president's agenda.

In addition, two major battles with differing outcomes take place this month. In the first, Conf. Gen. Robert E. Lee crushes an offensive by U.S. Gen. Ambrose Burnside in the Battle of Fredericksburg (Va.). Several Baptist churches are damaged during the fighting, including the Fredericksburg Baptist Church. An eyewitness describes the scene following the battle:

*There is scarcely a house in the town that has not some mark of the siege. Chimneys knocked off, roofs torn up, and walls scarred with holes of various sizes, some as large as a man's head and others as large as a flour barrel. The large tall houses suffered more than the low buildings. A large Baptist Church [Fredericksburg Baptist Church] has fifteen large holes through the walls, four through the steeple and the roof torn up in many places. I think there are twenty five or thirty houses burned.*

On the last day of the month, the Battle of Stone's River (or Second Murfreesboro) in middle Tennessee begins. The Union ultimately wins this battle, but at a high cost. Both sides suffer the highest percentage of casualties of any Civil War battle. Out of about 75,000 troops

150 YEARS AGO

*December 1862*

total, there are nearly 24,000 casualties.

Meanwhile, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, suffering from economic recession and the federal blockade of Confederate ports, is shuttered. In response, Richard Fuller, Baltimore pastor and former SBC president, establishes a provisional mission board in the Maryland city, allowing some communication with missionaries.

In the place of foreign mission work, Southern Baptists for the remainder of the war focus primarily on Confederate soldiers. Many Baptist leaders are now concerned that the Southern Army is godless and a hotbed of sin, yet their calls for ministers to the soldiers often fall upon deaf ears. Of the Baptist pastors who do serve as army chaplains and missionaries, the tasks are almost overwhelming: evangelize the hundreds of thousands of heathens, reclaim backsliding church members, provide religious sanctioning of the killing of enemy soldiers, and in the face of death offer assurances of heaven to soldiers who have claimed the name of Jesus.

If mission work remains the heartbeat of Southern Baptists, state and regional newspapers serve as the public face of Baptists in the Confederacy. Such periodicals, typically published weekly, focus on Bible lessons, doctrine, Christian advice, associational and state meetings, church revivals, the Confederacy and the war. War hardships, however, have already led to the closure of several publications. This month, the *Mississippi Baptist* becomes the latest Baptist



newspaper of the South to fold up shop.

Not yet celebrated as a national holiday nor in Baptist churches, Christmas Day is far from festive this year. The Lincolns visit wounded Union soldiers. In Kentucky, Conf. Gen. John Hunt Morgan makes a Christmas raid into Kentucky, destroying 35 miles of railroad track in an attempt to thwart Union advances. In the army camps of both nations, some regiments celebrate Christmas, while others do not. North and South, many wives and children spend the day longing for their husbands and fathers.

Against the backdrop of political intrigue, bloody battles, Baptist struggles in the South, and empty chairs on both home fronts, the year draws to a close with growing anticipation in the hearts of African slaves. Lincoln is their champion. The Emancipation Proclamation is tomorrow. Dreams of freedom now seem a little less far-fetched. **BT**

—Daily entries and source materials cited at [civilwarbaptists.com](http://civilwarbaptists.com).


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# Can't get enough

By Tony W. Cartledge

Back in the 1960s, Post cereals promoted its popular “Sugar Crisp” cereal with a singing cartoon character named Sugar Bear, who had first appeared on the Saturday morning “Linus the Lionhearted” cartoon show.

Sugar Bear was sort of an ursine version of Dean Martin, always laid-back and cool. In the commercials he frequently sang, “Can’t get enough of that Sugar Crisp, Sugar Crisp, Sugar Crisp ... can’t get enough of that Sugar Crisp, it keeps me going strong.”

If you’re too young to remember the tune, it closely follows “Joshua fit de battle of Jericho.”

After *Consumer Reports* ran an article showing that Sugar Crisp (along with Kellogg’s Honey Smacks) had the highest sugar content of any cereal then on the market (more than 50 percent), Post tried less sugary names, finally settling on Golden Crisp.

I was never crazy about puffed wheat and sugar, so it didn’t take me long to get enough of that Sugar Crisp. As I started reading the Bible, though, I found that I couldn’t get enough of the Book of Genesis with its weird, wonderful and wide-ranging stories.



Cosmic creations, talking snakes, brotherly battles, 900-year-old men, flood-borne cruises, tall towers, spooky rituals, fire and brimstone — what more could a boy ask? Sometimes I found myself humming “Can’t get enough of that Genesis, Genesis, Genesis ...”

So it’s no surprise that as a grownup teacher I would find Genesis to be fertile ground for a collection of Bible studies, and contributed them to a series published by Smyth & Helwys.

*Sessions with Genesis: The Story Begins* includes an introduction to Genesis and 10 Bible studies that examine manageable texts but always against the context of the larger narrative, helping the reader get the big picture

as well as the smaller ones.

Four of the studies deal with “Stories about Beginnings” and four more with “Stories about Ancestors,” accompanied by two “Sidetrack Stories.” The latter two concern R-rated accounts I could only scratch my head over when I was a boy.

Have you ever studied the story (Genesis 34) of how Jacob’s daughter was raped by a prince, and how Jacob’s sneaky sons took revenge by ravaging his entire city? It’s not pretty, and it’s not flattering — so why is it in the Bible?

It may be even less likely that you have carefully considered the story (Genesis 38) about two sons of Judah who married the same woman, but each was so wicked that “God killed him” (that’s what the text says!). Before the story is over, the woman (Tamar) cleverly portrayed a prostitute in order to be impregnated by her father-in-law — and was praised for her actions. What is that story doing in the Bible?

My hope is you will be curious enough to buy my little volume. But all you have to do is read the first book of your Bible to start humming, “Can’t get enough of that Genesis ... it tells where we came from.” **BT**

## The Gospel and Iran

By John Pierce

*Baptists Today* director Tom Waller, a lay leader in Johns Creek Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Ga., introduced my colleague Ben McDade and me to David Yeghnazar. Over lunch, David talked about Elam Ministries (Elam.com).

Elam focuses on providing training for Iranian church leaders, support for persecuted Christians, and Persian New Testaments — with the one millionth copy printed this year.

Because of its open border with Iran, Turkey is where Elam trains those who lead the persecuted church in Iran. Groups of 12 students complete the 90-day training in a series of one-week classes.

David, who comes from a family of Iranian Christian leaders, is now based in the Atlanta area but travels frequently. In September, he returned to Turkey for the baptism of 97 new Iranian Christians.

Iranians are very open to the Christian Gospel, he said, because of their dissatisfaction with the fundamentalist Islamic theocracy that has failed their nation. It also



helps, he added, when they discover that Christianity is not a “Western religion” but one with roots in their part of the world.

Individuals and churches — including Johns Creek Baptist and First Baptist Church in Midland, Texas — partner with Elam. David said he is seeking to encourage more American Christians to pray for Iranians and get to know those who live or work near them — and to provide them with New Testaments.

“People are still very afraid of the Muslim world,” said David, noting that many Americans mistakenly assume that the Iranian people share the views of their extremist leaders.

While Christian ministry within Iran is risky, David said the opportunities in the U.S. are numerous and have a great impact: “Whoever comes to faith here, goes back and reaches their families.” **BT**



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First Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Bladenboro, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Cape Girardeau, Mo.  
First Baptist Church, Carolina Beach, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn.  
First Baptist Church, Clemson, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Columbus, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Commerce, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Dalton, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Eatonton, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Elkin, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Evans, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Forest City, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Ft. Myers, Fla.  
First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Fla.  
First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Gaithersburg, Md.  
First Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C.

First Baptist Church, Greenwood, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Griffin, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Hawkinsville, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Henderson, N.C.  
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First Baptist Church, Jasper, Ga.  
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First Baptist Church, Laurinburg, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, London, Ky.  
First Baptist Church, Madison, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Marion, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Middlesboro, Ky.  
First Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala.  
First Baptist Church, Mocksville, N.C.  
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First Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tenn.  
First Baptist Church, New Bern, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, North Platte, Neb.  
First Baptist Church, Orangeburg, S.C.  
First Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla.  
First Baptist Church, Radford, Va.  
First Baptist Church, Rome, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Sanford, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Savannah, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Smithton, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Spruce Pine, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Sylva, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Tifton, Ga.  
First Baptist Church, Tryon, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Va.  
First Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Wilson, N.C.  
First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.  
Forest Hills Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.  
Godwin Heights Baptist Church, Lumberton, N.C.  
Grace Crossing, Charlotte, N.C.  
Grace Fellowship Baptist Church, Meridian, Miss.  
Haddock Baptist Church, Haddock, Ga.  
Hampton Baptist Church, Hampton, Va.  
Hayes Barton Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.  
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Highland Hills Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.  
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HillSong Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, N.C.  
Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.  
HomeStar Fellowship, Apex, N.C.  
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Trinity Baptist Church, Seneca, S.C.  
University Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, N.C.  
Viewmont Baptist Church, Hickory, N.C.  
Vineville Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.  
Watts Street Baptist Church, Durham, N.C.  
Weatherly Heights Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala.  
Westwood Baptist Church, Cary, N.C.  
Wingate Baptist Church, Wingate, N.C.  
Winter Park Baptist Church, Wilmington, N.C.  
Woodhaven Baptist Church, Apex, N.C.  
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## The Miracle of Grace

An Autobiography

By E. Glenn Hinson

Mercer University Press

Review by Michael A. Smith

# Hinson autobiography helps readers learn to discern the grace of God at work

Pay careful attention to the preface of E. Glenn Hinson's autobiography *A Miracle of Grace*. There he establishes a conversational tone, which he maintains throughout the book. He also lays out his goals:

- to use his life story to explore how God enters our lives
- to face his own shortcomings
- to explain what he calls "a curious career path"
- to offer perspective on his relationship to Southern Baptists and the larger Christian family
- to reflect on his attempt to serve both the church and the academy.

Hinson succeeds. Readers will recognize the debt he owes to classic writers such as Steere, Merton, Augustine, Bunyan and others. I think most readers will also come to believe *A Miracle of Grace* earns a place on their bookshelves alongside classic spiritual autobiographies.

Two things struck me as I read.

First, Hinson knows how to tell a story, and he has quite a tale to share. The opening chapters deal with his boyhood and adolescence, which were spent in the context of a dysfunctional family and rural poverty. College, work, courtship, marriage and his student days at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary follow.

He tells of how he came to join the seminary faculty and begin a career pilgrimage that would come to include New Testament, church history and spirituality as teaching specialties. We learn how he developed his trademark approach to classroom teaching and about his struggles to bring focus and balance to his work, and catch a glimpse of the internal life of the seminary community.

Hinson devotes considerable space to his escalating conflict with Southern Baptist fundamentalists. As we might expect, he carefully documents the particulars and successfully

refutes mischaracterizations of his work and theology. He also is honest and does not hesitate to identify his differences with fundamentalism. Throughout the account, he is self-confident yet humble.

The tale of Hinson's growing relationship with Thomas Merton, his increasing immersion in spirituality, and his ever-deepening ecumenical involvement runs concurrent with and beyond the story of the conflict among Southern Baptists. Such developments sustained him during the dark times.

Indeed, spirituality and Christian formation became the larger world in which his many spheres of interest found their home.

The latter portion of the book deals with his "retirement years" as a teacher at Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond, Lexington Theological Seminary, Louisville Seminary, Candler School of Theology and Baptist Seminary of Kentucky. Hinson does not shy away from telling of the medical, financial and other challenges that come with family life and aging.

Second, Hinson tells a story within the story. His primary goal is to help us learn how to discern the grace of God at work in our particular lives.

To that end, he notes the ways in which God's grace has played out in his life. Persons ranging from a beloved aunt and uncle to teachers to unexpected friends made along the way feature prominently. Religious experiences, good books, prayer and centering exercises also proved crucial.

Hinson learned to see God's grace more clearly as he crossed theological and other boundaries and sought to see through the eyes of others. The scriptures, especially the gospels, played a key role.

Even his loss of hearing helped him better experience God's grace by teaching him empathy, prodding him to accept as well as give help, and leading him to partner with God to work out his salvation with fear and trembling.

I find the concluding chapter — "The top ten things my life has taught me" — worth the price of the book. Some of my personal favorite lines include:

*At the head of the list of things my life has taught me is that life is grace, given to me more than planned, earned or achieved by me.*

*Living my life with a hearing deficiency has taught me that you have to play the hand you are dealt, making allowances for your limitations.*

*My life has confirmed an insight aptly phrased by Douglas Steere: "Life's interruptions often turn out to be God's opportunities."*

*My life has taught me that persons matter more than projects.*

*Life has taught me that the object of education should not be simply information but formation.*

No doubt, other readers might select different citations. These, though, serve to illustrate Hinson's hard-won wisdom, along with his ability to compress a great deal of meaning into a few well-chosen words.

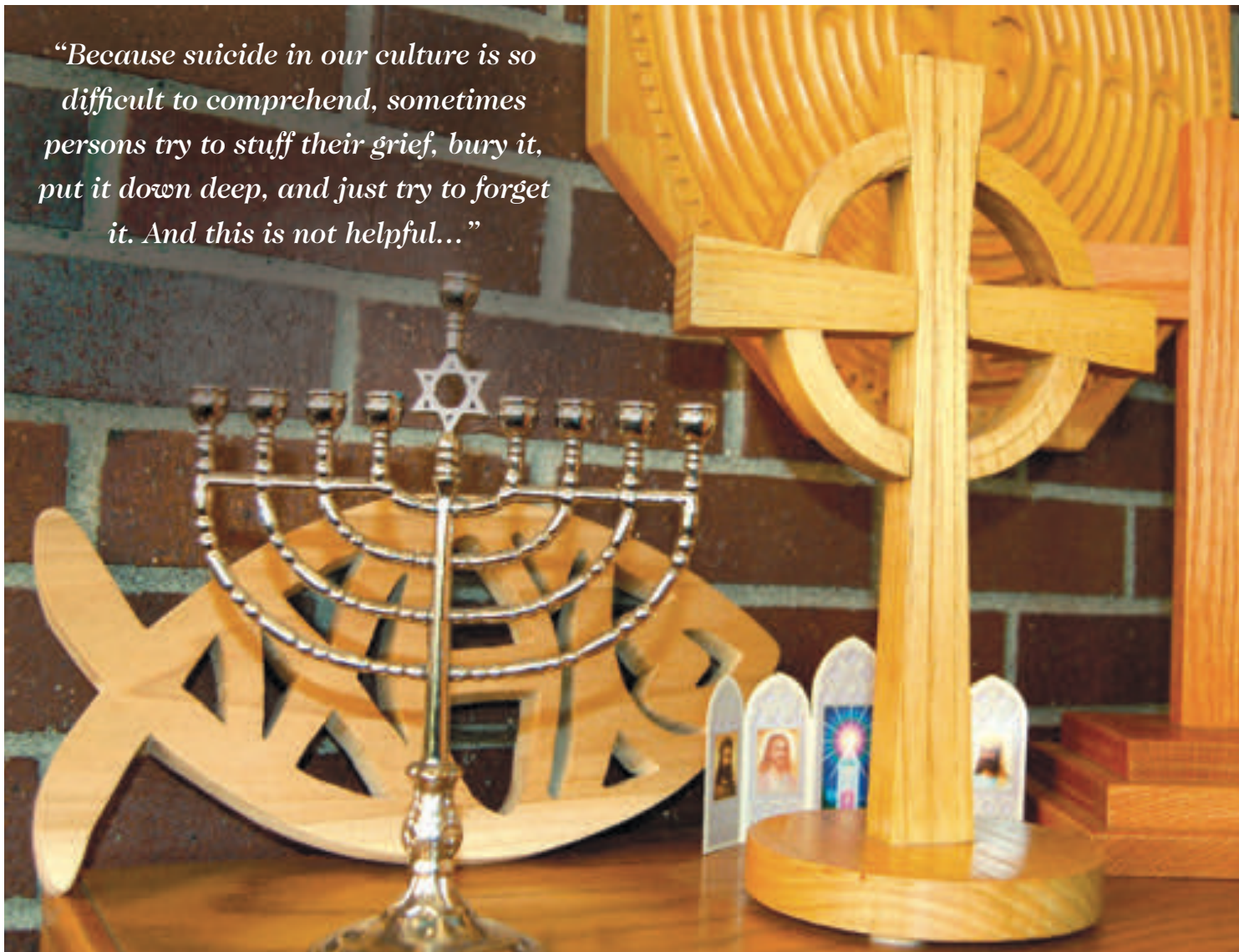
I commend *A Miracle of Grace* to all those willing to seek and find God in the midst of life. **BT**

—Michael A. Smith is pastor of Central Baptist Church of Fountain City in Knoxville, Tenn. His Ph.D. work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was done with Hinson.



Michael A. Smith

*“Because suicide in our culture is so difficult to comprehend, sometimes persons try to stuff their grief, bury it, put it down deep, and just try to forget it. And this is not helpful...”*



#### SUICIDE STATISTICS

- 38,364 persons died by suicide in 2010 (latest available statistics).
- An average of one person every 13.7 minutes died by suicide.
- Suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the U.S. (third for young persons).
- More Americans now die by suicide than die in car crashes (HealthDay News, Sept. 20, 2012).
- There are 959,100 non-fatal suicide attempts each year.
- Each suicide intimately affects at least six other people on average.

(Source: suicidology.org)

# Compounded *tragedy*

A conversation with Chaplain Ken Mottram about the misunderstandings and realities of suicide

**B**OZEMAN, Mont. — “This is my dream job,” said Chaplain Ken Mottram, manager of spiritual care for Bozeman Deaconess Hospital. In addition to directing the chaplaincy program, he serves as part of the emergency room trauma team.

“I’m working with the smartest people,” he said of the medical staff, and “always working with crisis.”

A Montana native and Baptist minister who has been on the hospital staff for eight

years, Mottram had the unique opportunity to have author and minister Eugene Peterson serve as local supervisor for his doctoral project. They met monthly for four years.

“He was almost more of a spiritual director than a [doctoral] supervisor,” said Mottram.

When asked what he learned from Peterson, Mottram replied: “His biggest contribution in my life was to see that everything we do as Christian people is sacred. All parts of your life [are] where God is active.”

Mottram is the author of *Caring for Those in Crisis: Facing Ethical Dilemmas with Patients and Families*. Also, he was principal investigator on a team exploring “Spirituality and Suicide” for a Montana State University project.

It was this painful, and often misunderstood, subject that he discussed with *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce.

### **BT: When you talk with those who have lost a loved one to suicide, what do they tend to be experiencing?**

KM: As a facilitator of our Suicide Loss/Saving Lives community support group, I see a wide variety of persons who are dealing with the aftermath of a suicide loss. Inevitably they show a certain shock and numbness at the sudden death.

The death throws their entire world into one of complete disbelief, and with a sense of almost unreality. What they thought to be true about their loved one, and about security and trust in the world, is undermined and thrown into question as they try to understand what happened.

For Christians this even touches their faith in God, as they can't imagine that God would allow something so devastating. Their “assumptive world,” as psychologists term it, has been destroyed. What they thought to be the way their life would play out is drastically changed. And how they thought God to be “in control” is also now not so sure a thing.

This numbness results from the overwhelming nature of the loss and the inability to fit it into our life. This grief reaction from a suicide death can last for many months and on into years.

Because suicide in our culture is so difficult to comprehend, sometimes persons try to stuff their grief, bury it, put it down deep, and just try to forget it. And this is not helpful, for grief that is not felt and “lived through” will come back at a later time.

A young woman I recently met had lost her father 15 years ago. Jean was from a broken home, and her father rarely kept in touch as she was growing up. In her high school years she began to have more contact with him through letters and special phone conversations.

Just when she thought they would have a chance to meet, she got a visit at her front

door from law enforcement telling her that her father had died by suicide. He had shot himself with a gun, alone in a field near his home. Jean couldn't believe it!

Jean felt cheated and betrayed. She told me she had a lot of anger at her father for being so selfish in taking his life away from her. She buried her feelings for 15 years.

They remained stuffed right up until she decided to go back to school and get a degree in social work. In doing the preparation for her classes, the loss of her father to suicide came back to center focus in her life and she needed to resolve her anger and love for her father.

She started doing more research into his death and discovered that he had been diagnosed with a terminal illness in the weeks prior to his suicide. This began to soften her anger. She read again his letters and also found that he had saved every letter she had sent him over the years. A counselor pointed out to her that this was an act of love for her that her father exhibited.

To honor her father, she then decided to make it her mission to spread his ashes across the country in the various locations that had been important to him in his work and in their phone conversations. Jean found a new love for her father and some of an appreciation for his legacy and the times they spoke together.

But she needed to step into the grief she had hidden for 15 years, deal with her anger at his death, and work through how she could

incorporate his life into hers. In a way, this was a miracle in her life.

Other persons continue to bury their grief and end up with a variety of mental or physical illnesses, alcoholism, drug abuse, or some other hurtful way to cope with the grief and loss they had experienced.

In addition, “survivors of suicide” (those who have lost a loved one to suicide) often have feelings of guilt and regret. It is so common to take upon oneself the hurt of the one who died and to take responsibility for their action.

Suicide grief is filled with guilt. We say, “If only I would have been there, this could have been prevented.” Or we say, “If they would have told me, I wouldn't have let them do this.”

In our inner core we know that the one who died had his/her own reasons for dying. We just don't understand them, and our hurt is so great it is easier to take the responsibility for their death ourselves than to accept the choice they made.

In truth, we will never know fully why someone takes the step to end their own life. To most of us it is unthinkable. But they themselves made that choice, and nothing at this point will change that.

The loss is great. Other choices could have been made. But those choices are no longer open to us.

### **BT: Suicide survivors often suffer additionally from well-intended but hurtful comments rooted in bad theology. How can thoughtful Christians counter that?**

KM: Christians have so often made the jump from “Judas died by suicide and was condemned” to *everyone* who dies by suicide is condemned. Because of this, in the church suicide has often been treated as an unpardonable sin.

Thankfully, medical knowledge about clinical depression and chemical imbalance in the brain leading to real pain and sometimes to suicide has increased to where now most churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, accept depression as an illness and suicide as a result of that illness.

Today, those who die by suicide are no longer said to have committed the unpardonable sin (at least by official church doctrine)



*“Unfortunately, many persons are still holding unthinkingly to what they have heard at some time or another about the eternal destiny of someone who dies by suicide.”*

and are granted Christian burials and compassionate regard in their deaths. Unfortunately, many persons are still holding unthinkingly to what they have heard at some time or another about the eternal destiny of someone who dies by suicide.

A mother who was grieving the loss of her son to a tragic suicide told me she was approached in church by a person who said, “I hope you know that your son is going to hell.” When she reacted to that assertion with the words “My son was a good Christian boy” and walked off, she received a letter in the mail that next week from that same individual listing some Bible verses condemning her son.

Certainly we need new awareness as Christians to a biblical approach to suicide that incorporates the best of theological thinking and human compassion. This needs to be taught in our Bible study curriculum and from the pulpit.

Suicide is a human tragedy and more common than we might think. Many persons in our worship services have been touched by the suicide of someone in their family or someone they have known. So educate yourself in what the Bible teaches regarding suicide.

Suicide also suffers from a stigma in our society. I have had more than one survivor of a suicide tell me that when they were asked about their loss, sometimes by friends and sometimes strangers — and they told the truth that their loved one died by suicide — the questioners just “dropped their eyes, looked away, and sometimes immediately changed the subject.”

Suicide is an unacceptable death in our society and unfortunately still bears the stigma

of a taboo. People don’t know what to say and so will react in ways that are perceived as uncaring.

Education and awareness are again the keys, and our challenge, for Christians who want to be sensitive and caring to those who have suffered a devastating loss.

Plan now for when you have the opportunity to comfort some Christian brother or sister who has lost someone significant in their lives to a suicide death. Don’t give in to the stigma, and be accurate with biblical texts if you’re going to use them.

Mostly, just give a hug and say, “I know you loved \_\_\_\_\_ much. I am so sorry for your loss.”

**BT: How can those who care be most helpful to persons experiencing this loss?**

KM: I was involved in a research project on suicide and spirituality that asked survivors of suicide how they experienced support from their friends, family and congregation. What we discovered was what most of us would expect, but with a few surprises.

All those we interviewed and who were going through grief said that the cards, flowers, meals brought over, special offers of help were so very, very much appreciated. Seeing friends and church family at the memorial service for their loved one also meant so very much to them and was a great comfort.

All of them also said good things about their pastor or priest who officiated at the service and were comforted by what was said.

I was very happy that this was their experience, since I have known some pastors who are insensitive and have said disturbing things at funerals — that theology thing again.

Where we need to do better for those persons grieving a suicide death is in the continued support that is offered throughout the next year. Our study revealed a tendency for clergy and congregational members to forget the grieving person after the first week or two following the death.

One of our study participants said she never saw the pastor again after the funeral. She said it was difficult for her to attend church because she would cry all the time, but that she would have appreciated some support outside of worship. This she didn’t get, and was disappointed in her pastor and church because of it.

However, several of our participants said that they had a few friends who were always there for them and just came over to talk — or not talk — and be present with them doing whatever.

To support someone who has had a significant loss of any kind, a good rule of thumb for Christian people is just to “be there.” Don’t be absent, don’t be obtrusive, but *be there*.

**BT: Why does Montana have a high per capita rate of suicide? And are there warning signs?**

KM: Year after year, Montana is always in the top four states for suicides per capita. Currently, Montana is third for the last year statistics are available (2010).

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- The causes for this are often said to be:
- Guns are readily available. (Most completed suicides involve the use of guns.)
  - Human helping agencies are underfunded, and resources are few for those with depression. (It is estimated that 90 percent of persons who die by suicide have depression, some undiagnosed.)
  - Montanans have an independent spirit and tend to handle life's difficulties themselves without reaching out for help. Going to a counselor in Montana still has a stigma about it. (I have been told that if you live in New York or other eastern states and don't have a counselor, you're considered crazy. In Montana if you go to a counselor, you're considered crazy. We need to get over this.)
  - Poverty levels and financial stress, plus seasonal affective disorder round out the possible theories.

There are many warning signs for suicide, but they are not definitive and are usually seen after the fact. Suicide is one of the most complex of human behaviors.

However, the most significant factors to look for in an individual that you expect might be suicidal are these three: 1) serious intent, 2) a specific plan, and 3) the presence of lethal means.

Most of all, don't be afraid to ask the "s" question: "Have you ever felt like taking your life in suicide?"

Almost every human being is aware of the option of suicide and has contemplated what it might be like when faced with those terrible moments in life when it all seems to be crashing down around us. Thankfully, we quickly dismiss that option and look for help.

But just asking someone about suicide and having them verbalize what they are feeling can defuse emotions, get the feelings out on the table, and allow for help to be resourced if needed.

Whether adolescent or adult, don't be hesitant to ask about suicide. It's one of the best ways to prevent an unfortunate death.

**BT: Why would you encourage someone to participate in a suicide survivors' group?**

*"Suicide is an unacceptable death in our society and unfortunately still bears the stigma of a taboo. People don't know what to say and so will react in ways that are perceived as uncaring."*

KM: Suicide survivors' groups do a world of good for someone who has been affected by a suicide. Many individuals find help on the Internet and reading books that have been recommended on the subject. But nothing helps as well as seeing a personal counselor or attending a support group.

First, suicide loss and the grief associated with it touch us in ways that are unfamiliar. Most persons who attend the group I facilitate never thought they would ever exhibit the physical and emotional symptoms they are experiencing.

To talk with someone else who has gone through the same type of loss validates their experience and helps them to realize they are normal in their grief and not crazy.

Second, sometimes we just need to be told by another person how to take care of ourselves. The subjects of sleep disturbances, flashbacks, dealing with the stigma, relationships, family conflicts, different ways of grieving, religious beliefs, and education on the dynamics of suicide itself come up often at our support group meetings.

Talking about such topics helps those participating to take care of themselves and to grow into healthy ways of coping with all they've experienced.

**BT: With the Christmas holidays approaching, do such times increase the incidents of suicide?**

KM: The popular notion is that the impending darkness of winter coupled with the stresses of the holiday season (financial and family conflicts, etc.) bring higher suicide rates. Actually, this is a myth.

Although some suicides occur during the holiday season — just as in other seasons — the highest number of suicides peak in the spring months of March or April.

The holidays are, however, a good time for families to check in with one another, offer support to one another, and take care of one another. Always realize that life is difficult at times for everyone, but that if we bear one another's burdens we can get through it all and with God's help live well into the future. **BT**

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# Front, middle or back?

*Choose the right leadership stance at the right time*

*By Christopher R. Gambill*

From what position should someone lead a congregation — the front, middle or back? Each uses different skills, addresses different needs, and reflects different goals and assumptions.

**T**he Bible provides good examples of all three approaches that congregational leaders should master, and more importantly, learn when to use.

## Leading from the front

Most models conceive of leadership as being out front — where the leader is on center stage or at the front of the column. Whatever happens is ultimately dependent on the leader's actions.

The leader does more speaking than listening — and the success or failure of the group is highly dependent on the agency of the leader, not the followers. At particular times a leader needs to get out front and point the way to a new destination.

It took Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and individual prophets to call the Hebrew people back to faithfulness. More than once Jesus took the front position of leadership.

When the leadership task is mobilizing, giving information, demonstrating, modeling, or navigating a crisis, there is often no good alternative for a leader except to be out front. Besides the Bible, history is replete with examples of situations when this mode of leadership was necessary and effective.

## Leading from the middle

Leading from the middle may be best described by an example.

Nehemiah felt God's call to rebuild

Jerusalem. Having secured permission to do so, he said to the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest: "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem . . ." A little later the people responded to him saying, "Let us start building!"

The key word here is "us." Nehemiah did not try to rebuild it himself. Neither did he simply assign it to others. Instead, he went with them and together they did the hard work.

Leading from the middle acknowledges that there is an important role for the designated leader to fulfill, but in some situations, it is best carried out alongside of others.

I learned early on that if I was going to ask others to give their time and energy to doing the "dirty work" of ministry, I needed to be willing to do it myself. I wanted to be and to be seen as a fellow laborer in the kingdom, not a detached supervisor.

Leading from the middle is especially appropriate when the leader needs to have ongoing input, and cannot or should not just leave it to others. It is also a powerful way to build relationships. I've had significant pastoral conversations while mopping a floor or cleaning trashcans with a fellow believer.

Jesus used this leadership stance often with his disciples. In many situations, you get the clear impression that everybody was pitching in.

When it came time for some "down and dirty" ministry, Jesus himself jumped up, strapped on a towel and began washing dirty feet. I suspect that from then on there were plenty of others eager to join him in doing the same when needed.



## Leading from the back

Sometimes the best leadership position is in the back. When his disciples told him there were lots of hungry people and no food, Jesus did not lead from the front. He simply said, "You give them something to eat." And they did!

Jesus trusted and empowered his disciples. He was obviously instrumental in making the miracle happen, but he purposefully, I believe, chose to lead from the back.

Though leaders may enjoy the spotlight, sometimes the most important place to be is backstage ensuring that others take center stage — at the right time, delivering the right lines. Instead of taking a direct role, the leader becomes the supportive and empowering force behind others who themselves exercise various leadership roles.

Instead of traveling everywhere, Jesus sent his disciples out two by two and empowered them to deliver the good news and carry out the work of the Kingdom. Leading from the back assumes and believes that others can do the work of leadership and that it would be good both for them and those they lead to experience them in that role.

Leading from the back empowers, trains, encourages and builds the confidence of others. It is built upon a theological principle that, collectively, God's people can know and act upon God's will more faithfully than an individual.

There is a right time and place to exercise all three leadership positions. Considering the context and what needs to be accomplished can help a leader pick the right stance at the right time.

Timing matters in leadership. So does position. Choose it well. **BT**

*—Chris Gambill is manager of congregational health services for the Center for Congregational Health.*

# Remembering Henry Langford

Henry Langford of Richmond, Va., was a tree farmer, minister, educator and an advocate for social justice. He remained committed to the causes of freedom and equality to the end of his long life.

A graduate of Mercer University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a former Army chaplain, he died Oct. 7 at age 93.

In 2009, he made a generous gift to *Baptists Today*. He encouraged us to keep the free flow of information open and to honestly address the issues of the times. In the fall of that year, we presented a resolution to Langford for his courageous stands during the civil rights struggle, his lifelong commitments to principles of freedom and justice, and his generosity.

Henry's strong stance in support of racial equality forced him out of the pastorate in the late 1950s. In a newspaper column, he affirmed the 1954 Supreme Court ruling that school segregation was unconstitutional and predicted that "better understanding" would emerge from interracial relationships.

Henry worked for a long time with the



At a luncheon in Richmond in 2009, Henry Langford was presented with a resolution for his courage and commitment to freedom and equality by *Baptists Today* executive editor John Pierce and director Ann Beane, who hosted the luncheon.

Virginia Council of Churches Alcohol and Drug Education Council and was executive director for 21 years. But he also grew trees.

Once he told me that he and his wife squirreled away a little money at a time for many years until they were able to buy a tract of land. But the land and the trees multiplied. In 1978 they were recognized as the top tree farmers

in the nation — having planted more than a quarter-million trees on 889 acres across eight counties.

Henry carried a well-worn photograph of his wife of 59 years, Florence, who died in 2007. He was always eager to show it and to honor her memory.

Admirably, he carried no bitterness from being forced out of the pastorate decades ago, but was concerned about healthy relationships between congregations and their ministers. So some of the gift was used to begin a series of articles in *Baptists Today* that address congregational life.

With a bulldogged determination that never weakened, Henry would send handwritten notes urging me to address various issues in the news. He simply wanted churches to live up to their high callings — and to see truth beyond society's familiar cultural blind spots. So he pushed and he gave.

Blind loyalists and distant critics don't serve good causes very well. Loyal, thoughtful, supportive critics like Henry Langford do. **BT**

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# Educate students, enhance community

## *Innovative journalism collaborative at Mercer uses medical school model*

**M**ACON, Ga. — The thinning newspaper that hits fewer and fewer driveways these days is just one sign of how emerging communications technology has changed old, familiar ways of journalism. Many are asking what the future might look like for media organizations and those training for careers in the fast-changing field.

The new Center for Collaborative Journalism at Mercer University is addressing that question and drawing local and national attention — and not solely for its state-of-the-art facilities that host the journalism and media studies program, the region's public radio station and editorial offices of the historic local newspaper.

It is the innovative model — similar to training for medical students — that places students, as they move toward graduation, in increasingly closer relationships with media professionals.

Grants totaling \$5.6 million from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Peyton Anderson Foundation opened the doors for creating this new model to journalism education. The 179-year-old university founded

by Baptists and the 183-year-old newspaper show that innovation is not the sole property of upstart organizations.

“The opportunity to build something from the ground up — that is innovative — is what drew me here,” said Tim Regan-Porter, director of the center.

Regan-Porter, one of the founders of the popular music magazine *Paste*, was entertaining a job offer from a well-known travel publication and making plans to move from Atlanta to New York City when he was contacted about the Mercer project. He also has experience — and success — in innovative web development.

A former web developer for IMB and other companies, Regan-Porter's best-known creation is *Obamicon.me* — a web app that allows users to create images based on the red and blue “Hope” poster by artist Shepard Fairey.

“It took six weeks to create,” said Regan-Porter, “and one million people the first month tried it out.”

Prospective students are showing a lot of interest in the new journalism collaborative, he said. By design, Mercer is not establishing a new school of journalism. Rather, degree programs in journalism and media studies will remain within the school of liberal arts.

“While we want a lot of journalism majors, we also want to reach out to the rest of the university,” said Regan-Porter.

He noted that in whatever field of study, there is a need to speak to audiences beyond those fields. For example, Regan-Porter said scientists are often called on to speak through new media to a broader audience.

Larry Brumley, Mercer's senior vice president for marketing communications, said the university would like for students in other majors to take classes in the journalism and media studies department — particularly ones that teach them how to be good media consumers.

“I think that is what's contributing to the breakdown of civilization in society,” said Brumley of constant exposure to aggressive, often hostile media outlets.

For majors, “we have something we're literally calling a ‘boot camp,’” said Regan-Porter.

Students go from classroom studies to shadowing journalists — all in preparation for actually practicing journalism that is helpful to the professionals. A “newsroom coordinator,” employed by the university, is a liaison between the students and professionals, said Brumley, adding that she is sometimes a buffer as well.

Ashley Hopkinson, who fills that role, assigns stories from the newspaper and edits the copy from the student writers.

The university has also created a new website — modeled after one at the University of North Carolina — that combines campus and community news. It is where first- and second-year students “cut their teeth,” said Regan-Porter.

“Part of the mission is to reconnect communities to what professional journalists can do,” said Regan-Porter, who has a strong personal commitment to community building and whose parents and brother are Nazarene ministers.

He hopes the engaging of gifted students in the work of local journalism — with the newspaper and public television station — will help bring communities closer together and closer to news that impacts their daily living.

And Brumley said he hopes the hard work and innovation will lead to other rewards as well.

“I hope the day will come when we have a student or students who work with *The Telegraph* on a team that could win a Pulitzer Prize,” he said. **BT**



Tim Regan-Porter (left), director of the Center for Collaborative Journalism, and Mercer University's senior vice president for marketing communications, Larry Brumley, discuss the new effort to bring journalism students and working journalists into a closer, mutually beneficial relationship.



# In the bag

## Generosity assures rural seniors of a holiday meal

Sometimes a holiday meal comes in a bag. For more than six years, “Sowing Seeds of Hope,” a rural poverty initiative in Perry County, Alabama and part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s “Together for Hope” program, has partnered with Judson College, local congregations and other churches from around the state to provide all of the preparations for a holiday meal for senior citizens in need.

Several years ago, Eugenia Anderson was serving on the board of Judson College in Marion, Ala., in Perry County, while her friend, Jo Wills, was on the mission committee at Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham where they are members.

“Eugenia got me involved,” said Wills. “She told me the students at Judson were trying to help Sowing Seeds of Hope by providing a Thanksgiving meal for senior adults in need in Perry County. So we decided to help.”

Wills and Anderson led the team from Mountain Brook in collecting specific canned goods fit for a holiday meal. The children from the church decorated brown paper grocery bags with fall leaves, turkeys and pumpkins.

For awhile, Jo, Eugenia, and their team from Mountain Brook Baptist tried to carry frozen turkeys in refrigerator trucks to Perry County to go with the cans of green beans, sweet potatoes and cranberry sauce. That complicated process soon led to the idea of providing a gift certificate for a turkey to a local Perry County grocery store.

“That was a better idea,” said Anderson. “The people can pick up the turkey at a time when it is good for them, and the local store receives the benefits.”

Frances Ford, executive director for Sowing Seeds of Hope, expressed gratitude for the six years the Mountain Brook congregation has been engaged in this project.

“And we also have Judson College and local Perry County churches helping out,” she added.

More recently, First Baptist Church of Huntsville has joined the effort, along with Samford University professor Robin Roberts’ sociology class. Last year, Marion Military



Jo Wills of Birmingham’s Mountain Brook Baptist Church puts cans in bags to go to a “Sowing Seeds of Hope” effort to provide seniors with holiday meals.

Institute contributed canned goods as well.

“It has become a true model of a larger community effort,” said Ford.

The meals are given to senior adults who are chosen by their churches. Approximately 20 local churches also donate and support the effort and will have a minister or deacon deliver the bags to the seniors.

“The best part, in my opinion,” said Wills, “is that we can join alongside the local churches from Perry County to support a ministry that is meaningful to them and the members of their congregations.”

Ford said the goal is to ensure that seniors with limited income will have food to prepare a meal for a holiday meal.

“Many of them live on a limited fixed income they receive at the first of the month

and their food and funds are low, if not depleted, by the [end of the month],” said Ford. “Sowing Seeds of Hope and all of the volunteers help them to have food for their families.”

Instead of preparing meals, those involved with the ministry decided to provide the ingredients so that each family can determine when and how to cook their meal. This approach, said Ford, allows for individual tastes and traditions.

“Everyone likes to go to grandma’s house for a Thanksgiving meal,” said Ford.

Together, the churches and the community were able to provide 200 bags of meals to senior families over the holidays.

“This is a wonderful time to be a blessing to someone,” Ford said with a smile. **BT**

# Truce seekers

*Some Christians seeking common ground across political/theological spectrum*

If Facebook is any measure, Americans emerged from the 2012 election season convinced the nation's political and religious divisions are wider and more hostile than ever — and getting worse. But not everyone.

“I think we are moving toward a time when we will not be quite so antagonistic in the world of politics and religion,” said Duke McCall, 98, the Baptist elder statesman who led various Southern Baptist agencies and the Baptist World Alliance before his retirement in the 1980s.

He may not be alone. Observers are tracking the “convergence movement,” a small-but-growing alliance of disillusioned conservatives and liberals optimistic about the future of American Christianity.

Other observers say there are signs that some Baptists are feeling the convergence vibe and joining hands across a chasm that has divided them since the 1980s. But other Baptists describe the trend simply as rebranded Christian liberalism with little chance of success among faithful believers on either side.

Proponents of convergence deny that, noting that many liberal traits are rejected in the movement along with conservative ones.

“This is a meeting ground between what might be called ... post-evangelicals and post-progressives,” said Eric Elnes, a Nebraska pastor whose Darkwood Brew online ministry caters to this spiritual demographic.

Elnes leads a United Church of Christ congregation in Omaha and was the author of the “Phoenix Affirmations,” which called Christians to treat others fairly regardless of race, religion or sexual orientation. But convergence Christianity, he said, is different because it seeks to avoid theological extremes on either end.

Participating conservatives yearn for a kinder, less dogmatic theology that embraces mystery. The progressives desire a faith that

values evangelism, firm beliefs in Christ and avoids political correctness, Elnes said. “People are trusting that they have more common ground than differences.”

But the concept has its skeptics. Some of the leaders of convergence Christianity are also connected to other post-denominational movements such as the emergent church, said Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Convergence Christianity, he said, likely is “an effort to rebrand some kind of mediating position” between evangelicals and Mainline Protestants.

“It doesn't look like there's some middle refuge there,” he added. “It's rather wholesale theological liberalism.”

Nor does Mohler believe the trend will gain much headway among conservative and liberal Baptists, because the gulf remains too great between them — especially on biblical inerrancy, homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

But seemingly insurmountable differences can be overcome, said Frank Schaeffer, the son of famed conservative theologian Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer once embraced his father's teachings, which are considered the foundation of the rise of the Religious Right.

But he eventually converted to Orthodox Christianity and wrote *Crazy for God: How I Grew Up As One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of it Back* in 2007.

Schaeffer is now friends with former theological opponents — including Elnes — and said he sees the seeds of similar transformations in the convergence movement.

“There is not going to be a future to the witness of the gospel unless these sides can agree to back down and meet — not in some mushy middle — but in respect for each other,” Schaeffer said.

Schaeffer said he doesn't foresee a new denomination or other structure coming out of convergence, but rather alliances being formed around issues such as human trafficking and global climate change.

“This isn't regional ... this isn't liberal,”



he said. “It's rejecting the hard edge of the theological right and the political correctness of the theological left.”

Bill Leonard, professor of Baptist studies and church history at the Wake Forest University divinity school said, “This is happening already” among Baptists. Younger Baptists — liberals and conservatives — are forging relationships through social networking around common causes. “And the environment is one of those.”

Both groups, he added, worry that the church too closely reflects the nation's hostile political divisions. “A younger generation is just tired of the constant bickering and division in the church.”

Younger evangelicals are reportedly less interested in the homosexuality issue than their elders, Leonard said. They are also more likely to embrace the social use of alcohol than previous generations of Baptists.

Meanwhile, others disavow the “anti-Jesus talk” in some liberal congregations, Leonard said.

All of this likely explains, Leonard said, why a recent Pew poll found that the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans — known as the “Nones” — has grown to a third of adults under 30 and 20 percent of all adults.

“Studies show people leaving evangelical churches and not showing up at the progressive churches,” Leonard said. “They are just opting out.”

The kinds of friendships being developed in convergence Christianity once were the norm in America — even among Southern Baptists, McCall said. He was close friends with W.A. Criswell and other conservatives with whom he vigorously disagreed and argued.

“If he thought it was black, I thought it was white,” McCall said. “[Yet] I believed in the sincerity of his Christian commitment, and he in mine.”

Even in retirement in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., McCall said he's been reaching out to conservatives. “I still believe there's hope.” **BT**

# Online security of the believer

All Christians confess that Jesus is Lord, but he's a poor choice for a computer password, according to an annual listing of passwords on the Internet most prone to hacking.

“Jesus” for the first time made the list of SplashData’s “25 Worst Passwords of the Year” — the most common passwords stolen by hackers.

The list, which made its debut last year, suggests that despite several high-profile hacking incidents over the past year at major sites including Yahoo, LinkedIn and eHarmony, many people continue to put themselves at risk by using easily guessable passwords.

“Even though each year hacking tools get more sophisticated, thieves still tend to prefer easy targets,” said Morgan Slain, CEO of the 12-year-old company based in Los Gatos, Calif. “Just a little bit more effort in choosing better passwords will go a long way toward

making you safer online.”

The top three passwords, “password,” “123456” and “12345678,” remain unchanged from last year’s list. New entries to this year’s list include “welcome,” “jesus,” “ninja,” “mustang” and “password1.”

SplashData, provider of the SplashID Safe line of password management applications, compiled the list from files containing millions of stolen passwords posted online by hackers.

To make passwords more secure, SplashData recommends using passwords of eight characters or more with mixed types of characters. One way to create longer, more secure passwords that are easy to remember is to use short words with spaces or other characters separating them. For example, “eat cake at 8!” or “car\_park\_city?”.

Avoid using the same username/password combination for multiple websites. Especially risky is using the same password for entertainment sites that you do for online e-mail, social

networking and financial services. Use different passwords for each new website or service you sign up for.

For those who have a difficult time remembering multiple passwords, companies such as SplashData sell password manager applications that organize and protect passwords and can automatically log in to websites.

The full worst-passwords list, in order, is: password, 123456, 12345678, abc123, qwerty, monkey, letmein, dragon, 111111, baseball, iloveyou, trustno1, 1234567, sunshine, master, 123123, welcome, shadow, ashley, football, jesus, michael, ninja, mustang and password1.

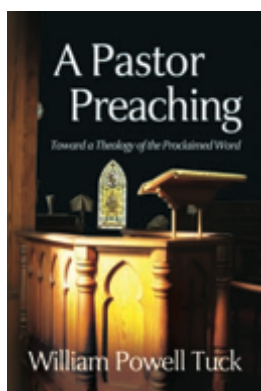
SplashData advised consumers or businesses using any of those passwords to change them immediately.

“It just takes a few extra moments to make a password better,” Slain said. “If you get started now and make it a resolution to keep it up, your life online will be safer and more secure in 2013.” **BT**

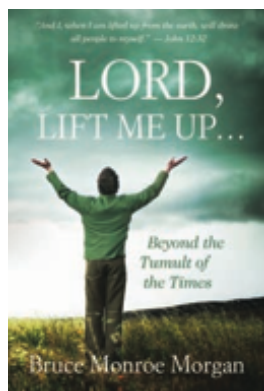


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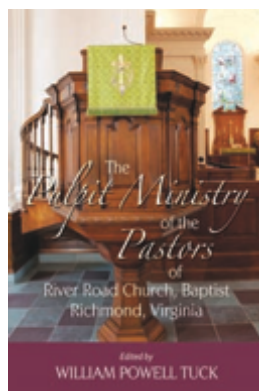
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