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NEWS JOURNAL



30 moments  
in 30 years **10**

APRIL 2013

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**Cover photo:** By John Pierce.

Baptist laypersons Pat and Bob Barker built a successful business, now led by their son and daughter, that supplies prisons and helps reduce recidivism.

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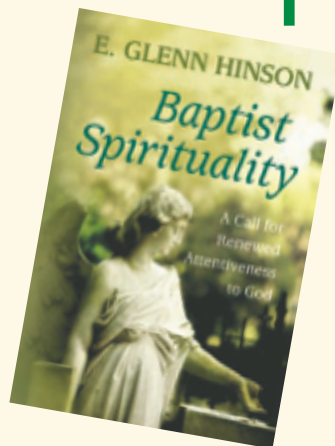
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# Values *at* Work

## Barkers supply prisons while seeking to reduce recidivism

FUQUAY-VARINA, N.C. — The Bob Barker Company makes and sells everything imaginable for prisons from the colorful two-piece uniforms to indestructible mattresses to mini-cells for transport vans to the company's own brand of Maximum Security toothpaste.

**S**tarting from scratch, Baptist lay leaders Bob and Pat Barker have grown the company into the world's largest detention supply business.

And Bob is the first to admit that the highly successful company bearing his name benefited greatly from the growing impact of illegal drugs on American society in recent decades — that led to enlarged prison populations and tight restrictions on which items family and friends can provide to prisoners.

“The only way to keep drugs out [of prisons] was to keep everything out,” Bob explained. “So jails started to supply toothpaste, razors and everything else.”

### GOOD MOVES

Raised in North Carolina's textile mill culture, Bob learned the value of hard and honest work, thriftiness and responsibility. He often balanced work with school responsibilities. And his many jobs through the years included milk truck driver, bellhop at Hotel Charlotte, lab technician and salesman — first of china and crystal and then Fuller Brush products.

Later he entered the grocery and convenience store business, with his brother, as well as owning, editing and publishing a newspaper.

In the mid-'70s the Bob Barker Equipment Company, based in Apex, N.C., was formed to provide everything needed for restaurants, convenience stores, schools and other businesses with commercial kitchens.

Pat was a talented chemist who developed hypoallergenic cosmetics for Almay.



Bob and Pat Barker

However, she was passed over for promotions, which she believed were due to being a woman.

So in 1977, after 12 years with Almay, she left the steady employment and dependable paycheck to join the young family business with just six employees. Bob called it the best move in the company's history.

“It was an enjoyable time in building a company,” said Bob of the work the couple did together.

Pat said she and Bob were intentional about sharing leadership and including women equally in employment opportunities. And outside of the workplace, she said, both were active in advocating for the Equal Rights Amendment.

The biggest challenge was to separate the ongoing demands of growing the company from their home life. Their young children at the time, Nancy and Robert, would sometimes say: “Let's not talk about business.”

### GETTING INTO CELLS

The Barkers had no long-range plan to move into the prison supply business. But one of Bob's classmates from Campbell College (now University) stopped by in 1979. He had gone from inspecting jails to supplying them.

However, his business was struggling and he was looking for a way out. He thought Bob might be interested in buying his inventory.

But Bob had a bigger idea. He bought the inventory and brought his old friend into the business. Then he began learning all he could about prison operations.

“I'd never been in a jail in my life when I started in the business,” Bob said.

He pumped his friend for insights, and then began visiting prisons and asking lots of questions.

“I started traveling up and down the East Coast talking with jailers,” said Bob. “I got an education real fast.”



One of the greatest concerns, he learned, was safety — stemming from inmates making everything imaginable into a weapon.

Pat and Bob, who had been in the newspaper business, produced a large catalog with the supplies they believed prisons might need — some of which they had no idea where they would come from — and distributed the hefty books to as many prisons as possible.

“I just put stuff in there that I thought jails might want,” Bob said.

The orders starting coming in — and the Barkers started scrambling to fill them.

## BOOMING EXPANSION

With the philosophy “if you can’t find it, make it,” Bob once bought an old commercial sewing machine and taught himself to sew whatever products were in demand. It put him in touch with his textile mill roots.

As the demand for linens, uniforms and more grew, he found a new operator of the sewing machine and, eventually, a room full of them.

Pat said the 180-page bound catalog became the “bible of the industry” for prisons — with orders flowing in steadily.

“It just boomed,” said Bob of the prison supply business that grew exponentially in the mid-’80s. Now the massive warehouse and manufacturing sites in Fuquay-Varina, N.C., are just part of the business with operations in the western U.S. and overseas as well.

Bob recalls the time he and other employees scrambled to fill a rush order for 300 bright orange prison uniforms in January 2002. Just days later, while watching CNN, he saw those products that his company had made and sold being worn by al-Qaeda prisoners in Afghanistan.

While growing the business, the Barkers have insisted on creating an environment in which employees are treated well and have equal opportunities for advancement. The current vice president of operations started in the warehouse, and the vice president of business development was first a receptionist.

“From the beginning we’ve shown a real interest in our employees — to treat them well,” said Bob. “You show you care about people, and they’ll walk through fire for you.”

While Bob never asked anyone to walk through fire, employees have been known to walk a good distance through a rare ice or snowstorm to get out orders on time.

## FAMILY EFFORT

While other relatives worked in the company and have now retired, the Barkers made no assumption that their son and daughter would choose the company for their own careers.

However, they were given the chance to learn the business from the ground up — a better opportunity at this stage, however, than when they were paid a little to clean the old equipment showroom after school.

Their daughter Nancy started in sales before moving into training and other positions. She and Pat completed MBA degrees together at Duke.

Robert, their son, explored a variety of interests including filmmaking and the restaurant business before rejoining the company in 2002.

The year before, Bob had turned leadership of the business over to Nancy, who served as president from 2001-2005. She created an independent board of advisors and other initiatives.

In 2005 Nancy turned the presidency over to her brother so she could give more attention to her own growing family. When her youngest child began school, Nancy returned as marketing vice president.

In January of last year, however, Nancy took on a new position as vice president for corporate social responsibility. Her work is now focused on more strategically carrying

out efforts that are consistent with the values the company has long espoused and practiced.

“We are very blessed to have two children who were capable of being president of the company,” said Pat.

While Bob and Pat are very happy with the next-generation leadership, they continue going to the office — as well as to national trade shows. Bob said the company’s success has made him into “the Col. Sanders of the detention supply business.”



In the manufacturing plant, Bob Barker watches an employee assemble mattresses with welded seams for sanitation and safety purposes in prisons. A vacuum Bob helped develop reverses the covers at this stage.



The Bob Barker Company screen prints shirts and uniforms for jails and prisons. More than 10,000 items are sold including house brand Maximum Security toothpaste and deodorant, and a toothbrush that cannot be made into a weapon. Clear products and containers prohibit the hiding of contraband.

## COMPANY VALUES

The Barkers credit their children with clarifying the company's values and goals, including a vision statement that reads: "Transforming criminal justice while honoring God in all we do."

Of Nancy's work with the foundation, Bob said with an approving smile: "She's trying to put us out of business."

He explained that a title of the company's profits is now being used to reduce recidivism — the negative actions of former inmates that result in a return to prison. He credits his children for this excellent idea of stewardship.

"We're looking for successful programs for getting people out of prison and into jobs and with their families," he said.

The foundation has added an employee to find the best programs to support. And funding is provided as well to get families better connected with inmates.

"We're getting more and more into it each year," he said.

Pat added that studies show between 60-70 percent of those who get out of prison return within three years. "So we saw a need ... to really help prisoners to not return."

Support is also provided to associations of sheriffs and jailers — with one national jailers' association giving its annual award to Bob. It's the only time a vendor has received such recognition.

"We try to support them financially and they appreciate it," he said.

## SAFER SHAVER

Some former inmates have worked for the Bob Barker Company, making the good case: "I've used these products."

"That's one of the biggest hurdles," said Pat of the challenge in finding work after prison life.

At one time the company had five operations within prisons until regulations made it unfeasible. And some of the innovative products — among the more than 10,000 now offered — resulted from bright ideas suggested by prisoners and jailers.

Safety is often the ultimate goal of envisioning, manufacturing and selling new products.

"That's where we've innovated a lot," said Pat, "in making things safer."

Such innovations include tear-away linens and clothing that cannot be made into nooses, welded mattresses that cannot be opened to conceal things, and personal items such as toothbrushes that cannot be made into crude weapons.

Bob laughs that he is often asked to test prototype razors in an ongoing effort to provide one to prisoners that gives a good shave but cannot be broken down into something dangerous. He's sent a lot back for refinement.

"This is my baby," he said of the company that has exploded in growth. "I can't get away from it."

## CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Pat and Bob are good citizens. Earlier he served as mayor of Apex, N.C., and as a state senator. They are involved in many community activities.

They are especially supportive of Bob's alma mater, Campbell University. Bob has served as chairman of the trustees, and both a dormitory and stadium bear his name.

The Barkers are also charter members of Woodhaven Baptist Church in Apex, N.C. An appeal was made in 1985 for families from various Raleigh area churches to help form a new congregation.

Bob was adamant: "I didn't want to go,

really." But he added: "Nobody would go."

So the Barkers left Salem Baptist Church after 20 years with the plan to give the new church start a year of their time. They were among the first four couples to start the new congregation.

"Our son and daughter were the whole youth class," he recalled.

The Barkers remain active members of the Woodhaven congregation while providing space in their office building to two new church starts in Fuquay-Varina.

Today, the Bob Barker Company is a massive operation — but with the same personal touch. Employees are given good salaries and benefits — along with incentives to improve their lives by stopping smoking, losing weight and gaining education. Programs are set up to assist employees in completing GEDs or college degrees.

Treating others with respect is a part of what it means to have integrity, said Bob. And "I've tried to live and show it in my life."


It shows when he and Pat walk through the humongous distribution warehouse and manufacturing plant — where employees greet them warmly rather than cower. The Barkers show interest in their employees' work and talk with them about the latest innovations in providing safe supplies to prisons.

Pat and Bob both credit their parents with instilling the Christian values that have marked their personal and business activities.

In his book, *I'm in Cells: The Captivating Story of Bob Barker and the Bob Barker Company*, co-written by his friend and former pastor Tony Cartledge, Bob writes: "We believe our products help to make life better for inmates while they are in prison, but we also want to help improve their lives after they are released." **BT**



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- 9:00 P.M. Welcome reception for Suzii Paynter



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\*Denotes events that may require additional registration

# quotation remarks

“Rather than spot a person’s flaws and say to myself, ‘Well, too bad, that disqualifies her or him from service to God,’ I now try to say, ‘I see some of the flaws there, but I wonder what God might do with him or her anyway.’ The same change in question applies to how I look at myself.”

—Mike Smith, pastor of Central Baptist Church of Fountain City in Knoxville, Tenn., in a blog titled “Flawed Heroes” (ABP)

“Symbols are very popular in church, so fried chicken became the symbol.”

—Pastor Michael O. Minor, whose Oak Hill Baptist Church in Hernando, Miss., forbids the potluck staple along with sweet drinks in an effort to promote healthier eating (AL.com)

“I’ll be indebted forever to Malcolm Tolbert, who said to us a thousand times in New Testament classes: ‘If you want to be orthodox, be loving,’ and ‘Since we’re all going to err on one side toward legalism or on the other side toward grace, always go with grace.’”

—Pastor Bill Coates of First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga., on his former seminary professor who earlier held that pastorate (Visions)

“It’s special to us because the [African Methodist Episcopal] Church was founded, really, on issues of social justice and equality and so her actions actually help us to keep that legacy alive even to this day. Her learning and her teaching in the AME Church served her well when she had to make a very important decision, and she made that decision I don’t believe just for herself but I believe she made that decision for a lot of other people.”

—Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, chairman of the AME Church’s Commission on Social Action, on the full-sized statue of AME member Rosa Parks placed recently in the U.S. Capitol (RNS)

“If you accept that number, you sell your soul to the devil.”

—Walter Slonopas, 52, who quit his job as a maintenance worker at Contech Casting LLC in Clarksville, Tenn., after his W-2 tax form was stamped with the number 666

“I am grateful for men of God like these who are willing to stand up and act like men rather than wimping out when it gets a little controversial and an inconvenient thing to stand for the truth.”

—Pastor Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church of Dallas, whose controversial comments led Tim Tebow to back out of speaking at the church’s building dedication, thanking supporters while taking a swipe at the outspoken Christian football player (RNS)

“It’s really gaining steam. Every church we talk to wants a coffee shop.”

—Architect Brad Lechtenberger on the popularity of Starbucks-like features in church additions and remodels (Tulsa World)

“I handled it poorly, multiplying the challenges. I increased the pain of a hurting community.”

—Matthew Harrison, president of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, who had asked Lutheran pastor Rob Morris of Newtown, Conn., to apologize for participating in an interfaith vigil two days after the school massacre there (RNS)

“Liberty [University] figured out how to recruit masses of students via the Internet years before elite universities began ballyhooed experiments with free online courses.”

—Washington Post reporter Nick Anderson on the conservative Christian school, founded by Jerry Falwell, with a current enrollment of more than 74,000 with nearly 62,000 seeking degrees online

“In combat, unit ministry teams need to know how to respond to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual trauma. This ability comes with experience. However, it raised the question: Can’t some of these skills be trained in a simulation environment when the stakes are not so high?”

—Army Chaplain Jeff Zust, a minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and an EMT who served 15 months in Iraq, on the development of virtual battlefield simulation to train chaplains for ministry in combat settings (RNS)

“She has done all this with an amazing amount of grace, good cheer and tireless devotion.”

—Rep. Rafael Anchia, who introduced a resolution approved by the Texas legislature honoring the advocacy work of Suzii Paynter who left the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission to head the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (ABP)



By John Pierce

# Leadership, for good

My late father was a pipefitter. Once during a labor dispute I recall him saying: “Nothing is better than a good union, and nothing is worse than a bad one.” I felt the same way about coleslaw, I told him. He wasn’t humored.

However, it does seem fitting (no pun intended) to apply my dad’s comment to those who assume voluntary leadership in our churches. Nothing is better than a good church leader, and nothing is worse than a bad one.

Much attention is given these days to the leadership styles and skills of ministers — ranging from a CEO model to one who goes along for the ride. Consideration of how church professionals assume leadership is important, but it’s not what I want to address here.

From my observation, a Baptist congregation’s health and faithfulness to its mission may be tied more to the lay leadership than any other aspect of church life.

And it cannot go unnoticed, though it is often unsaid, that some of the meanest, most self-absorbed people I have ever known held leadership roles in a church. There they could exert authority over others in ways not afforded them in other areas of their lives.

And, sometimes, those who do hold positions of power in their workplaces mistakenly try to use those same supervisory methods in relating to other volunteers in

the church. It doesn’t work that way.

Congregations are different than businesses, large or small — as well as from other organizations such as civic clubs.

The church is to be Spirit led and focused on being a worshipping community with the single mission of being the

presence of Christ in a particular local setting and beyond. Using leadership positions for self-gratification or to advance personal agendas creates an internal problem that hampers the effectiveness of the congregation in addressing the external cultural changes that must be faced for relevant ministry.

How we lead is reflective of who we are. It reveals how we see ourselves in terms of both gifts and limitations and also how we value others.

Leadership is first and foremost about relationships. While leadership philosophies and strategies abound, simple courtesy and consideration of others go a long way in creating a healthy faith community that is effective and therefore faithful in carrying out its mission.

As a member of a church where about one in 20 is shaped by theological education, it is important too that we see ourselves as no more or no less a part of the process. We help our staff ministers and our lay leadership best when we do not assume to have all the answers they need. Being supportive is often the best role of a minister-member



— who uses his or her ministry gifts when called upon.

Joyfully, most of our congregations are blessed with extraordinarily gifted and willing lay leaders. I simply marvel at the time, talent, resources and kindness given.

However, when that is not the case, committed lay leaders are much better positioned than the paid help to address the concern. We need you, sisters and brothers. We need you. **BT**

## A greater CELEBRATION

This month marks 30 years since the first issue of *Baptists Today* (then known as *SBC Today*) rolled off the press — thanks to the vision, sacrifice, and hard work of founding editor Walker L. Knight and others who helped in various ways.

We honor this milestone in articles on pages 10-15 of this issue and also in a big celebration set for April 25. Two books, the memoirs of Walker Knight and a gift book in memory of W. Reaves McCall that commemorates these 30 years of publishing, will be premiered at that gathering in Gainesville, Ga.

While we celebrate the past and focus on our future mission at this time, we are keenly aware of a greater celebration. This 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue arrives in most homes or churches just as we reach Easter Sunday — and enter this great season of ultimate hope.

It is this greater celebration of life over death, joy over sorrow, and hope over despair that empowers us to work for good causes and to share the grace and love of Jesus Christ. Have a joyful Easter season! **BT**



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BY BRUCE T. GOURLEY



# Thirty moments in 30 years

*Recalling events and comments from the pages of Baptists Today*

This issue of *Baptists Today* commemorates 30 years of enabling, recording and shaping a new Baptist movement. There have been many significant moments in the life of Baptists and the news journal during this time. All have been chronicled by *Baptists Today* (first known as *SBC Today*).

Following is a representative selection — a brief historical journey — through this 30-year period.

## **The first issue of *SBC Today* rolled off the presses dated April 1983.**

*SBC Today* filled a void as a national, autonomous news journal for Baptists. The first issue presented national and international news along with a firsthand report of the annual Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission meeting in Louisville and a March meeting of 33 women who envisioned what would later become the Southern Baptist Women in Ministry organization.

## **Baptist Women in Ministry was birthed during the 1983 Southern Baptist Convention.**

Seventy-five women attended the inaugural June meeting of the organization then named as Southern Baptist Women in Ministry. The theme was “We Have This Treasure,” based on 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. Speakers included Debra Griffis-Woodberry, Anne Neil, Nancy Hastings Sehested and Christine Gregory.

In her presentation, Griffis-Woodberry declared: “Cultural mores, attitudes, and expectations about who women are constitute the greatest obstacle blocking women from actualizing their calls to vocational ministry. Confusion abounds when women express calling to a culture that has not the ears to hear it.”

Participants fashioned the organization as an independent entity and adopted a purpose statement to “provide support for the women whose call from God defines her vocation as that of minister ... and to encourage and affirm her call to be a servant of God.”

## **In 1984 the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America formed in Louisville, Ky.**

The organization was birthed by peace advocates from American Baptist, Southern Baptist and Canadian Baptist churches in order “to unite and enable Baptists to make peace in a warring world.” The Baptist Peace Fellowship assumes publication of a newsletter, the *Baptist Peacemaker*, initially published by the Baptist Pacifist Fellowship formed in 1940.

## **SBC messengers in 1984 approved a resolution stating that women must be submissive to men because Eve brought sin into the world.**

Convention resolutions are designed to be non-binding on congregations but simply an expressed opinion of the gathered messengers. However, this resolution began a continuing effort by SBC leaders to codify and enforce a position in opposition to women holding equal leadership in churches and at home.

## **The six Southern Baptist Convention seminary presidents adopted the Glorieta Statement in 1986.**

In 1985 the SBC Peace Committee had been formed in an attempt to unite moderate and fundamentalist Baptists, but fundamentalists maintained the upper hand. The Glorieta

Statement thus reflected the dominant view of fundamentalists in declaring that “the 66 books of the Bible are not errant in any area of reality.”

Afterwards, Texas pastor Cecil Sherman resigned from the SBC Peace Committee, protesting that moderates had no meaningful voice within the committee.

## **The Southern Baptist Alliance (now Alliance of Baptists) formed in 1987.**

Moderate Baptist individuals and congregations, displeased with the increasingly fundamentalist-controlled Southern Baptist Convention, launched the organization to oppose the fundamentalist threat to Baptists’ “historic principles, freedoms and traditions.”

## **In 1987, SBC president and Memphis pastor Adrian Rogers summarized the demands of fundamentalists.**

Concerning Southern Baptist seminary professors, he said: “If we believe pickles have souls and they can’t teach it, then they shouldn’t take our money.”

For moderate Baptists, the statement was viewed as encapsulating fundamentalists’ raw desire for power and disrespect for sound theology and dissenting perspectives.

## **Jack Harwell was ousted as editor of the *Christian Index* in 1987.**

By a vote of 57-54, the Georgia Baptist Convention’s executive committee in December forced Harwell into early retirement. Afterward, he was asked to become the editor of *SBC Today* effective June 1, 1988, with Walker Knight remaining as publisher.





**The January 1988 issue of *Baptists Today* reported that a commission had been appointed by the Southern Baptist Alliance to explore the feasibility of a new seminary or divinity school.**

Fundamentalist incursions at Southeastern Seminary led to the forming of the commission. The Virginia Baptist General Board and the trustees of Mercer University were also exploring new opportunities in theological education.

Over the next few years, trustees of Wake Forest University, Duke Divinity School, Baylor University and other schools took steps to form their own schools of theological education. The sudden proliferation of new Baptist schools of theological education was unmatched in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Baptist life.

**In 1988 a “centrist” group calling itself “Baptists Committed to the SBC” formed in an attempt to recapture political control of the convention.**

Texans Winfred Moore was named chairman and David Currie coordinator. In the years following, a number of related groups formed at the state level to actively resist fundamentalism in Baptist life.

**Southern Baptist Alliance directors hired Stan Hastey of Washington, D.C. in January 1989 as the group’s first full-time executive director.**

Alliance directors also voted to fund the publishing of Sunday school lesson commentaries in *SBC Today*. The new Sunday school material was a sign of the declining influence of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Southern Baptist life.

**Morris Chapman defeated Daniel Vestal for the SBC presidency in 1990 by a margin of 58-42 percent.**

The next morning, Vestal announced plans to call a national “dialogue” of moderate Southern Baptist leaders to consider their future in the strife-torn SBC. More than 3,000 disenchanted Southern Baptists gathered in Atlanta Aug. 23-25, 1990 to create a funding mechanism for supporting mission work and to form a fellowship and steering committee to consider long-range plans.

W.A. Criswell of Dallas said of the Atlanta gathering: “That little bunch over there ... would be like a flea on an elephant’s body.”

In mid-January 1991 a temporary panel voted to incorporate and to recommend the name “The Baptist Fellowship” to the upcoming convocation in May.



**In June 1990 Al Shackleford and Dan Martin of Baptist Press were fired during a closed-door meeting of the SBC Executive Committee.**

Afterward, Nashville lawyer Jeffrey Mobley announced the creation of the independent news service Associated Baptist Press. Meanwhile, Baptist Press began refashioning itself as the public relations arm of the SBC Executive Committee.

Also in the Baptist media world of 1990, Bill Leonard’s book *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* and Nancy Ammerman’s *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (that began with research and writing for *SBC Today*) were published and became widely heralded for their authors’ insightful analysis of the new Baptist landscape.

**In May 1991 more than 6,000 moderate Baptists gathered in Atlanta, this time giving themselves the name Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.**

They also adopted a constitution, a budget and a plan for world missions. With the formation of CBF, the Southern Baptist Convention, formed in 1845, lost its status as the only remaining major denomination in America to have never experienced a major split.

**Executive director James Dunn promised that the Baptist Joint Committee would continue its fight for separation of church and state.**

Dunn’s comments came after the agency supported by multiple Baptist bodies lost the last of its funding from the SBC. In the years that followed, the religious liberty advocacy group prospered and expanded its work in Washington, D.C.

**In August 1991 Robert Parham announced the launch of the Baptist Center for Ethics.** Parham left his position with the SBC Christian Life Commission to begin the new Nashville-based organization to promote Christian ethics.

**From 1991-1992 the SBC Foreign Mission Board cut \$365,000 in promised funds to the Baptist seminary in Rüschtlikon, Switzerland.**

In response, CBF moderator John Hewett delivered a check for \$241,000, collected from CBF congregations, to the seminary’s president John David Hopper. Fallout from the defunding by Southern Baptists mobilized moderate Baptists to a new mission cause.

Fundamentalist control of the FMB continued to grow, leading to the March 1992 announcement that Keith Parks would leave as president. Later he became the first global missions coordinator for the Fellowship.

**President Jimmy Carter addressed the 1993 CBF General Assembly in Birmingham.**

The long-time Baptist deacon and Sunday school declared that there is a “priesthood of preachers” within the SBC that is “incompatible with my historic beliefs as a Baptist.” In the years that followed, the world-renowned advocate of peace and justice became a leading lay leader within CBF.

**Baptists Today editor Jack Harwell wrote in 1994: “Russell H. Dilday Jr., is the latest casualty in the pitiable Southern Baptist Convention holy war.”**

The mean-spirited manner in which Dilday, the popular president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was dismissed gave more Southern Baptists, especially those in Texas, a closer view of the fundamentalist tactics at play in the SBC.

Also in 1994, Molly Marshall, the first woman granted tenure in the Southern Seminary school of theology, resigned under threats of being fired.

**In 1996 Jerry Falwell, a pillar of the independent Baptist movement, led his Lynchburg, Va., congregation to affiliate with the SBC.**

Falwell had been advisor and ally of the SBC fundamentalist movement since the beginning of the takeover, and therefore was warmly welcomed into convention life by fundamentalist leaders.

**A Kentucky woman, Paula Peek, in 1998 became the first chaplain endorsed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.**

The endorsement of chaplains signified CBF’s role as a denominational entity, even as leaders eschewed using denominational language. The Fellowship’s role as a chaplain-endorsement agency has continued to grow through the years.

**Roy Medley was nominated in 2001 for general secretary of American Baptist Churches, USA.**

Medley’s selection came at a time when the denomination was facing a variety of challenges within its diverse constituency. Known as a good-humored and thoughtful bridge builder, he has been elected to three consecutive four-year terms.

**In 2002 William J. Shaw, the soft-spoken veteran pastor of Philadelphia’s White Rock Baptist Church, was elected over 10 other candidates as the new president of the troubled National Baptist Convention, USA.**

Shaw called for convention-wide reform, emphasizing vision, integrity, structure and accountability. Shaw would lead a restoration of the historic Baptist group’s reputation following the presidency of Henry Lyons who served more than five years in prison for misappropriating millions of dollars.

**The SBC Foreign Mission Board in 2002 imposed the convention’s narrowed doctrinal statement on its missionaries.**

*Baptists Today* editor John Pierce wrote in response: “Now ... all missionaries must subject themselves to the SBC’s latest doctrinal sledgehammer to prove their faithfulness to doubting critics living cozily and comfortably back home.”

The document, the 2000 *Baptist Faith & Message*, was viewed by many Baptist historians as creedal rather than confessional.

**In March 2003, Baptists Today expanded its web site to include daily news and then blogs.**

The news journal’s growing online presence reflected a commitment to delivering news, opinion and commentary through evolving digital mediums — while maintaining and eventually expanding its popular monthly publication in print and as a digital subscription.

**The Southern Baptist Convention announced withdrawal from the Baptist World Alliance in 2004, with leaders citing liberalism within the world body of Baptists.**

The editorial in the September 2002 issue of *Baptists Today* had initially addressed the growing move of SBC leadership away from the Baptist World Alliance.

In the February 2004 issue, BWA general secretary Denton Lotz was quoted: “We are extremely sorry at this tragic decision which alienates 16 million Southern Baptists from the rest of the 32 million Baptists of the world.”

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship had joined the BWA in the same year, irritating SBC leaders. The BWA’s 2005 Centenary Congress drew a large crowd to England.

**Homosexuality moved to the forefront of Baptist discussions and division.**

In April 2007 Alliance of Baptists leader Stan Hastey declared that the 20-year-old organization’s affirmation of gay and lesbian persons “has cost us in terms of growth potential” but “we are convinced this is an issue of justice and that our position is biblically and theologically valid.”

Meanwhile, both American Baptists and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship struggled with the issue as many younger — and

some older — Baptists signaled a growing acceptance of same-sex relationships.

**In 2008 President Jimmy Carter assembled in Atlanta a large and unprecedented gathering of Baptists across racial and convention lines.**

The Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant included Baptist groups whose collective membership represented the majority of Baptists in America. Participants covenanted around Jesus’ mandate in Luke 4 to “bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

SBC president Frank Page, who declined to participate, said, “I will not be a part of [the] smokescreen left-wing liberal agenda” of the Covenant.

Thousands of Baptists from a wide range of theological backgrounds participated in the event, however, with well-known speakers including President Bill Clinton and novelist John Grisham along with popular preachers.

**The Georgia Baptist Convention in 2009 broke fellowship with the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., for calling a female pastor, Julie Pennington-Russell.**

The action of the state body reflected ongoing efforts by many Southern Baptist associations to disassociate themselves with churches that call women as pastors.

Women in ministry, an initial point of division among moderate and fundamentalist Baptists, has remained a flash point for more than 30 years after the beginning of the takeover of the SBC. Now, however, hundreds of women in Baptist life are serving as pastors.

**In June 2011 Baptists Today premiered a redesigned, full-color, 44-page format with the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge.**

At a time when most news periodicals were declining in print circulation, and in some instances abandoning print altogether, the introduction of the new Bible study material led to increased print circulation for *Baptists Today*.

Sunday school classes using these lessons embraced the combination of Bible study and current information in one publication. **BT**



# Birthday Gifts

A trusted source of information, interpretation, inspiration

This month, *Baptists Today* is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday in a variety of ways. Foremost, a big dinner event is planned for April 25 at First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga. Everyone is welcome!

It will be an exciting evening with great music by Kate Campbell, a video tribute to the news journal's three decades of service, an award presentation to centenarian physician and missions advocate Virginia Connally, and the release of the autobiography of founding editor Walker L. Knight and a commemorative book on the birth and evolution of *Baptists Today* over 30 years. (See reservations and other information on page 15.)

For 30 years *Baptists Today* has been a trusted source of information, interpretation and inspiration for those seeking to live faithfully in a fast-changing world. Trends and issues that were on no one's radar when the news journal began in April 1983 are now impacting church life dramatically.

Therefore, *Baptists Today* has been adaptive through this swirl of change. However, the news journal is still rooted in a strong commitment to responsible editorial freedom and independence from any outside influence that dares to restrict the free flow of news, opinions and other information.

Also unchanged is *Baptists Today's* reliance on those who share these values and appreciate the unique mission that is being carried out year after year.

Unlike denominational-funded and controlled publications, *Baptists Today* relies on support from like-minded partnering organizations and individuals who believe in this cause.

The funding needed to continue and expand this ministry comes in a variety of ways. Gifts to the annual fund, memorial gifts and three-year pledges are the backbone of support.

Estate gifts — from those who want to sustain this ministry with the assurance that its future is held in the good hands of an independent Board of Directors — are blessings beyond measure. These gifts allow for much-needed reserve funds or endowment, as well as for sponsoring special projects consistent with the donor's interests.

The most unusual gift to *Baptists Today* came in 1988 from the family of legendary Baptist pastor, editor and denominational leader Louie D. Newton: a historic and refurbished 1972 Cadillac.

The long-time pastor of Atlanta's Druid Hills Baptist Church had been given the car by layman Warren P. Sewell of Bremen, Ga. Newton cared for the car like a baby, wrote about his many travels in it to various speaking engagements late into life, and refused efforts to replace the aging car with a newer model.

After Newton's death, his family donated the classic car to *Baptists Today* to provide transportation for editor Jack U. Harwell who had a long and close relationship with the

## Louie D. Newton's historic auto given to SBC TODAY by family

A historic automobile owned by Louie D. Newton, founder and first editor of *Baptists Today*, has been donated to the news journal by his family. The car, a 1972 Cadillac Coupe de Ville, was given to *Baptists Today* by the family of Louie D. Newton, founder and first editor of the news journal, in 1988. The car was given to *Baptists Today* by the family of Louie D. Newton, founder and first editor of the news journal, in 1988. The car was given to *Baptists Today* by the family of Louie D. Newton, founder and first editor of the news journal, in 1988.



"Our family wants the larger Baptist family to know that the Newton family supports *SBC Today* (now *Baptists Today*)," said Catherine Robertson, daughter of legendary Baptist leader Louie D. Newton, in presenting her late father's car to editor Jack Harwell in 1988.

influential Baptist leader who served as vice president of the Baptist World Alliance and president of the Southern Baptist Convention (1947-48) and was an outspoken advocate for religious liberty.

Eventually, the car was sold with the funds supporting the news journal.

While *Baptists Today* is not looking for a collection of classic automobiles, the news journal does rely on the generosity of many donors as it looks to a bright and hopeful future.

Birthday gifts — of all shapes and sizes — are deeply appreciated. Such generosity is a cause for even greater celebration as *Baptists Today* moves ahead nimbly, boldly and faithfully. **BT**

## Happy 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday, *Baptists Today*!

I/we join in this 30<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration by:

- Making a one-time gift for \$ \_\_\_\_\_. (Enclosed, or by credit card at [baptiststoday.org/donate](http://baptiststoday.org/donate) or 1-877-752-5658)
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- Making a three-year pledge for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per year.
- Including *Baptists Today*, Inc., in my/our estate.
- Dropping off a 1972 Cadillac Coupe de Ville on my next trip down I-75 traveling through Georgia.



**SEND GIFTS TO:** *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318.

Baptists Today Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Walter B. Shurden, Chairman

# April 25 releases

Nurturing Faith publishes founding editor's memoirs, book commemorating news journal

Two new books from Nurturing Faith, the book-publishing arm of *Baptists Today*, relate to the news journal and will be available later this month.

**F**rom *Zion to Atlanta*, the memoirs of founding editor Walker L. Knight, is an honest and compelling personal story of facing challenges with faith and hope. From a Kentucky upbringing that included desertion by his newspaperman father, to service abroad in World War II, to a long and loving relationship with his beloved wife Nell, to carving out a career combining his dual calling to journalism and ministry, Walker takes readers on a fascinating life journey.



Online editor and historian Bruce Gourley has written/edited a commemorative gift book to celebrate the news journal's milestone.

Titled *Baptists Today at 30: Enabling, Recording and Shaping a Baptist Movement*, this special tabletop book will be revealed at

the April 25 dinner event. Those in attendance will receive a copy.

These and other authors of Nurturing Faith books will be signing books as part of the 30-year celebration in Gainesville, Ga. The books will also be available for purchase through the online store, [nurturing-faith.info](http://nurturing-faith.info). **BT**



## Why come to Gainesville, Ga., on Thursday, April 25?

- **Celebrate 30 years of *Baptists Today*** on this joyful evening of good food, friends and memories.
- **Share in the presentation of the Judson-Rice Award** to 100-year-old pioneer physician and missions advocate Dr. Virginia Connally of Abilene, Texas.
- **Enjoy the inspiring music of Kate Campbell.**
- **Meet Suzii Paynter**, the new executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.



- **Check out the latest resources** from Nurturing Faith with book signings by authors.
- **Preview a new video** that reflects on the history and evolution of the news journal.
- **Receive a copy of Bruce Gourley's commemorative gift book, *Baptists Today at 30: Enabling, Recording and Shaping a Baptist Movement*.**
- **Hear how the nation's only independent, national Baptist news journal is looking ahead to a hopeful future.**

**See details on how, when and where on page 15.**



# BAPTISTS TODAY

A celebration of 30 years!

Thursday, April 25  
First Baptist Church  
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Gainesville, Ga.

\$25 individual reservation  
\$250 designated table for eight  
\$1,000 sponsorships (organizations or individuals)

**5:30** Reception, book signings, exhibits, fellowship

**6:30** DINNER CELEBRATION with recognitions,  
media presentation, and music by singer/  
songwriter Kate Campbell

**JOIN US!** Bring others! Receive a copy of Bruce Gourley's new history of *Baptists Today*.  
Reservations: [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org) / 1-877-752-5658



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Jay Smith, Ph.D., principal



## Classifieds

**Pastor:** Kathwood Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C., affiliated with national and state CBF, is seeking a full-time pastor (female or male). The candidate must be a graduate of a moderate seminary with five years or more of ministry experience in a pastoral position. He or she must love the church, have leadership skills, and be energetic, an effective communicator of the gospel, mission-focused, and willing to work with the vision of our church. Send résumés to Pastor Search Team, Kathwood Baptist Church, P.O. Box, 6486, Columbia, SC, 29260-6486 or to searchteam@kathwoodbaptist.org by May 1.

**Pastor:** Godwin Heights Baptist Church of Lumberton, N.C., is seeking a full-time pastor with five or more years of ministry experience and who holds a seminary degree, preferably a Master of Divinity. The ideal candidate would be an effective communicator and preacher who works well with the church family and community, a strong leader who promotes the spiritual interests of the church, and a caring individual who is gifted in pastoral care. Interested candidates should submit résumés to Pastor Search Committee, Godwin Heights Baptist Church, 704 Godwin Ave., Lumberton, NC 28358.

**Minister of Youth and Children:** First Baptist Church of Richlands, N.C., is seeking a minister of youth and children. A complete ministry profile for the position can be found at fbcrichlands.com. FBCR is dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Interested candidates should submit a résumé by March 15 to office@fbcrichlands.com or Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 100 Rand St., Richlands, NC 28574.

### in your own words

"We were very pleased with both the number and the quality of the résumés we received from our ad with *Baptists Today*. We know of no better way to get our need out to a widespread audience than through *Baptists Today*."

**Louis O. Ball Jr.**, retired associate professor of music and dean of fine arts at Carson-Newman College and former conductor of the Tennessee Baptist Chorale, died Feb. 28. He and his late wife, Mary Charlotte, endowed an institute for church music at Carson-Newman.

**Leonard Hill** of Nashville died Feb. 18 at age 83 after a long illness. He was a distinguished journalist in Southern Baptist circles, holding both a journalism degree from Oklahoma Baptist University and a doctorate in theology from Southwestern Seminary.

**Brian Layman** is associate minister to students at First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga.

**James T. Manley** died Feb. 13 at age 85. He served as pastor of churches in Georgia, Alabama and Florida where he was also a pastoral counselor in the Fort Lauderdale area. In retirement he returned to Atlanta and served as pastor to students at Mercer's McAfee School of Theology.

**Betty Pugh Mills** will become pastor of Hampton (Va.) Baptist Church May 15, 2013. She currently serves as pastor at Grace Baptist Church in Richmond.

**Don Rutledge** of Richmond died Feb. 19 at age 82. His award-winning photography told the story of Southern Baptist missions in the U.S. and abroad for decades. A native of Tennessee, his photos appeared in major magazines including *LOOK* and *LIFE*, and in the 1961 book, *Black Like Me*, by John Howard Griffin.

**W. Ches Smith III** died March 2. He was pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church of Tifton, Ga. An Atlanta native, he was a Mercer University trustee, president of the

## In the Know

Georgia Baptist Convention (1980-1982), and chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee (1976-1978) among other leadership roles.

**Glen Stassen** will receive the 2013 Baptist World Alliance Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award. The Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Seminary and former professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is the author of *Just Peacemaking, Kingdom Ethics* (co-written with David Gushee), and *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age*. His late father, Harold Stassen, was governor of Minnesota and served as president for American Baptists.

**Steve Tondera** of Huntsville, Ala., died Feb. 13 at age 79. An active layman in Huntsville's First Baptist Church, he served as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and on the steering committee that formed the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

**Jim Walls** will become associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., May 15, coming from Johns Creek Baptist Church where he served as minister of youth.

**R.V. Wells Jr.** of Ringgold, Ga., died Feb. 18 at age 82. He entered ministry after an early career as a teacher and coach in northwest Georgia. His pastorates included Peavine Baptist Church in Rock Spring, Ga., and Mission Glen Baptist Church in Rossville, Ga. He was a long-time volunteer chaplain and then a hospice chaplain in Ft. Oglethorpe, Ga. **BT**

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

## HOW TO USE THESE BIBLE STUDIES

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

### Teaching the Lessons

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

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

### How to Order

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

- \* Orders may be placed at [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org) or 1-877-752-5658.
- \* The price is just \$18 each for groups of 25 or more — for a full year — with no additional costs.
- \* All **online** teaching resources are available at no charge and may be printed and used by teachers of the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies.

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*May lessons in this issue*

## Truth in Mystery

Revelation 21:10-22:5 — Better Than You Can Imagine  
MAY 5, 2013

Revelation 22:6-21 — I Am Coming Soon!  
MAY 12, 2013

Psalms 104:24-35 — Life in the Spirit  
MAY 19, 2013

Romans 5:1-11 — Something to Brag About  
MAY 26, 2013

**Youth Lessons are on pages 22-23.**



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

### Thanks, sponsors!

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

# Bible Study

Revelation 21:10-22:5

with Tony W. Cartledge

May 5, 2013

## Better Than You Can Imagine

What's the most beautiful dwelling place you can imagine? A quaint cabin by a peaceful stream in a verdant forest? A downy bed with fluffy pillows in a luxury hotel? A private villa on the beach of a tropical island?

In today's text, John does his best to describe the wonders and glories of the eternal dwelling place God will provide, stretching metaphor to the limit as he speaks of gigantic jewels, golden streets, verdant trees and a crystal river highlighting a new Jerusalem, an eternal dwelling place for God and God's people.

Today's lectionary text begins at 21:10 and then skips to 22:1-5. Because we want to get the larger picture of John's image, we'll include all of 21:9-22:5.

### The city of God (21:9-21)

In last week's lesson we heard John describe a new heaven and a new earth, with a new Jerusalem descending from heaven to rest on an earthly mountain – probably an idealized version of Mt. Zion (21:1-5). 🇺🇸

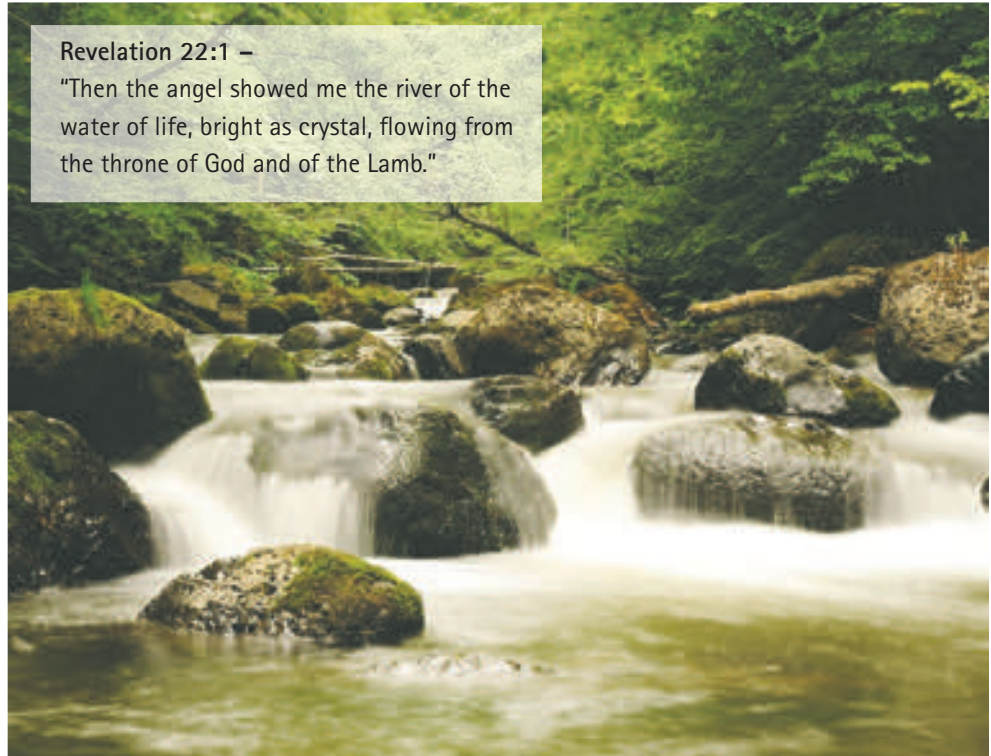
In today's text an angel takes John on a tour of the city (21:10), which glowed like clear jasper because of the presence of God (21:11), John said, with 12 gates arranged with three on each of the square city's four sides (21:12). The gates, not inlaid with pearl but constructed from single massive pearls (21:21), were inscribed with the

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



Revelation 22:1 –

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb."



names of the 12 tribes of Israel (21:13).

The city rested on a foundation of 12 gigantic gemstones (21:14, 19-20), a collection similar to the 12 jewels found on the high priest's breastplate described in Exod. 28:15-20. A notable difference is that, while the gems in the priest's breastplate were inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, the enormous jewels on which the new Jerusalem rested bore the names of the 12 apostles.

Some commentators interpret this to mean that the church has supplanted Israel and thus will inherit the promises once given to Israel, a view called "supersessionism" (for more on this, see "The Hardest Question" in the online resources). It is more likely that the vision portrays God's eternal dwelling as including those who entered through both the old and new covenants: While the foundation stones bear the apostles' names, the 12 gates – where people enter the city – are named for the 12 tribes of Israel.

The significance of the number 12 continues with the description of the

holy city's size: The angel showed it to be shaped like a cube, measuring 12,000 stadia on each side. English translations range from 1,400 to 1,500 miles for this dimension, but the significant thing is not the precise size but the symbolism behind the number 12,000, another allusion to the 12 tribes and/or apostles. 🇺🇸

The number 12 again comes into play with John's assertion that the city's bright jasper wall measured "144 cubits," or about 72 yards (21:12, 17-18). Whether this refers to the height or the breadth of the wall is unclear: John doesn't say. A wall more than 70 yards high might seem immense to us, but it would appear tiny outside of a city more than 1,400 miles tall. It is possible that John was referring to the width, but earlier he had described it as a "great, high wall" (21:12).

Again, the significance is in the numerical symbolism: 144 is the product of 12 times 12, perhaps another indication that both Israel (represented by the 12 tribes) and the church



## Resources to teach adult and youth classes

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(represented by the 12 apostles) will have a role and a place when heaven comes to earth.

The bejeweled nature of the city also calls to mind Isaiah 54:11-12, where the prophet saw a day when God would secure the storm-tossed city of Jerusalem: “I am about to set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of jewels, and all your wall of precious stones.”

The materials and design aren’t an exact match, but both Isaiah and John saw the comforting image of a new Jerusalem built of the strongest and most beautiful materials imaginable. 📖

### The city of light (21:22-27)

John’s description of the city bears many similarities to Ezekiel’s apocalyptic writings, but v. 22 brings a sharp shift in emphasis. In Ezekiel’s vision of a restored Jerusalem, the temple is the focal point of the city. In fact, the bulk of Ezekiel 40-48 is dedicated to an elaborate description of the renewed temple, its measurements, and its personnel.

John’s vision of the new Jerusalem, however, has no temple, “for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22). The purpose of a temple in Israel, as throughout the ancient Near East, was to represent the dwelling place of the deity.

In the new Jerusalem, no temple is needed because the city itself is God’s dwelling place, with the throne of God at its heart. In Ezekiel, “the glory of God filled the temple” (Ezek. 43:4-5), while for John the entire city is filled with God’s glory (21:11).

As the city needs no temple, neither does it need the sun, the moon, nor lamps, because “the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (21:23). This image recalls Isaiah’s vision of a time when “The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory” (Isa.

60:19, see also 60:1-2, 20). 📖

Note John’s careful and constant association of the Lamb (Christ) with God. The work of one is the work of the other. Though he speaks of them in separate terms, the full image of deity includes both God (the Father) and the Lamb (Christ, the Son). 📖

As a city of light, the new Jerusalem will attract the kings of the nations to bring their glory into it (21:24-26), even as Isaiah had predicted: “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isa. 60:3, also 4-11). 📖

### The river of life (22:1-5)

John’s vision again recalls Ezekiel as the angel guide shows him “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city” (22:1-2a).

Ezekiel had also described a river, one flowing from beneath the renewed temple, with lines of trees growing on either side (47:1-7). The river would bring life, for “Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes” (47:9).

Moreover, the trees on either side of the river would bear fresh fruit every month, with their fruit offering food, “and their leaves for healing” (47:12).

The city of John’s vision features a “river of the water of life” pouring out from beneath the throne of God and the Lamb and flowing down the middle of the main street, with fruit-bearing trees on either side. 📖

As in Ezekiel’s vision, the trees bear different kinds of fruit, producing crops year round that provide both food for eating and leaves that bring healing to the nations. 📖 While one might

think of making herbal poultices from the leaves to bring physical healing, the image is almost certainly metaphorical. In the shade of the trees of life, by the river of life, all who gather there will find whatever healing and health is needed for life.

In vv. 3-5 we find earlier images repeated: Accursed things are excluded from the Holy City. The throne of God and the Lamb are there. God provides a constant source of light for the city and rules forever.

Of particular interest is the note in v. 4 that, as God’s servants offer worship, “they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” The Hebrews believed that anyone who saw God’s face would die (Exod. 3:6; 20:19; 33:20-23), and thus that no one had ever seen God (John 1:18, 1 Tim. 6:15).

In the Holy City, however, believers experience a new intimacy. Standing or kneeling by the river of life and beneath the trees of life, there is no death, and all may finally behold God’s face without fear.

That worshipers would have the name of God written on their foreheads recalls Rev. 3:12, 7:1-8, 9:4, and 14:1. Being marked with God’s name is a striking way of saying that the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem are truly God’s people, living and ruling with God for all time (22:5).

John’s vision of the eternal city offers words of both warning and hope. We are reminded that those who continue to reject God’s way have no place there. Since John was writing to Christian people who were facing the temptation to “do as the Romans do” in order to escape persecution, these words would urge them to remain true to their faith, even at the cost of their lives.

At the same time, the glorious future in store for believers – with special attention given to those who are martyred for their faith – could engender courage to stand strong in perilous times.

Are we any less in need of a similar message, words of both caution and of hope? **BT**

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Revelation 22:6-21

May 12, 2013

## I Am Coming Soon!

**H**ave you ever had someone say they were on their way, yet you waited and waited, wondering if they would ever really arrive?

We may feel a bit like that in reading today's text. In the epilogue to the Book of Revelation, John quotes Jesus as saying "I am coming soon" no less than three times, and it seems clear that John expected "soon" to mean in the near future, within his lifetime.

Yet, almost two millennia later there is no sign of Jesus' coming, though self-styled prophets have often found some reason to argue that the "signs of the times" point to a soon coming in their generation.

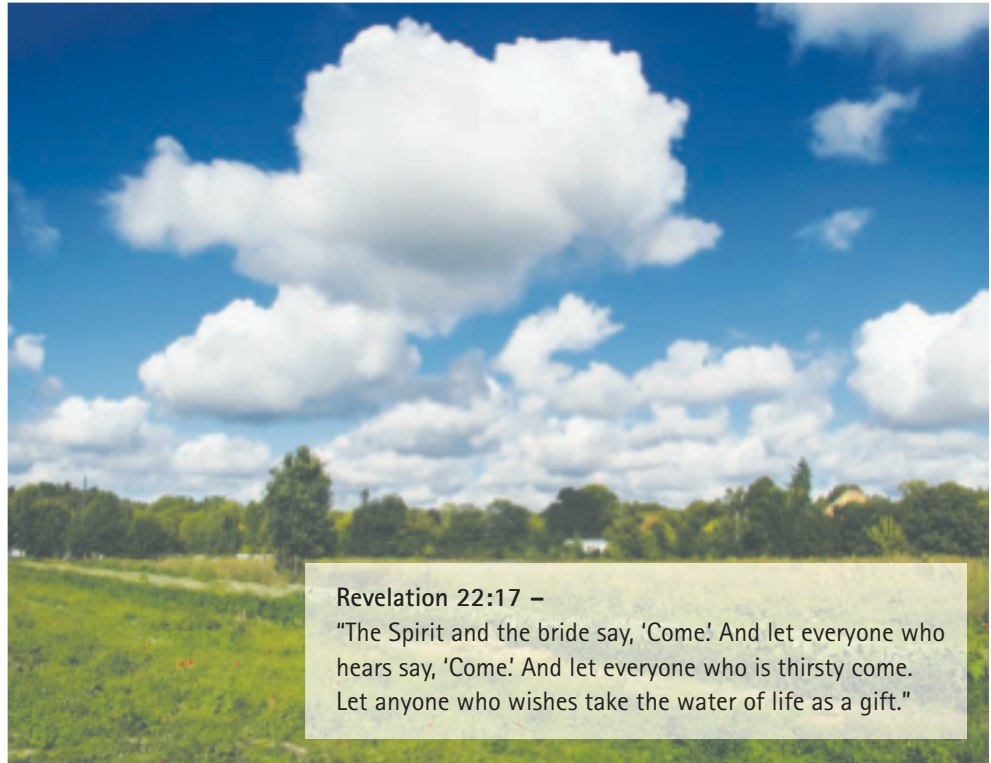
What do we make of this? Should we be expecting Jesus any day now, or not?

### An announcement (vv. 6-11)

We mentioned in the first lesson of this series that Revelation is primarily an apocalypse but cast in the form of a letter. As such, it contains a prologue (1:1-8) and an epilogue (22:6-17). These "bookends" share a number of similarities that remind the reader of the book's most important themes. ⚓

The epilogue includes three speakers: Jesus, the angel, and John. Sometimes it is difficult to be sure who is speaking: The early manuscripts did not include punctuation such as quotation marks, so modern translations may differ. ⚓

The "he" who speaks in v. 6 is probably the same angel who had taken John on a tour of the new Jerusalem, assuring him that the words of testimony he had



Revelation 22:17 –

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come!' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift."

received were "trustworthy and true," and clearly including John in the exalted company of the prophets.

"See, I am coming soon!" (v. 7) marks a shift in speaker as Christ takes the floor. It is not an angel's coming, but the return of Jesus that gives hope to John's readers.

This is the first of three predictions in the epilogue that Christ will arrive soon (see also vv. 12, 20), though each brings with it a different emphasis. In v. 7 the prediction is followed by a beatitude or blessing on "the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book," that is, who pays heed to John's warnings and lives with the courage and hope needed to remain faithful in trying days. ⚓

With v. 8, John himself speaks, testifying that he had indeed seen and heard the things written in the book, vouching for their accuracy. As if to emphasize his honesty in telling "the whole story," he admits to having been reproved by the angel when he fell at his feet as in worship, and was told to worship God alone (v. 9). ⚓

The angel's insistence that John should not seal up the prophecy are in direct contrast to a quite different instruction in the book of Daniel (Dan. 8:26, 12:4, 9). The last six chapters of Daniel are written under a pseudonym by an anonymous person in around 175–165 BCE, when the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes was wreaking havoc upon the Jews and doing his best to eradicate Judaism.

The author who encouraged the distressed Jews to persevere wrote as if Daniel had seen the visions nearly 400 years before – but had been told to "keep the book sealed until the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). The writer presented his work as the "unsealing" of the ancient prophecies, whose secrets could finally be revealed in his day, which he portrayed as "the time of the end." ⚓

In contrast, John openly claimed to be the visionary and author of the book, and wrote as if he truly believed the end was near. Thus, John was compelled to publicize his work as quickly and as widely as possible.

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





John's words in v. 11 – quoting the angel – are a bit of a puzzle. Was John to simply accept that evildoers would remain evil while the righteous remained just? Was it too late for the wicked to repent?

The saying is based on Dan. 12:10, which notes many would be purified, cleansed or refined while the wicked would remain firm in their wickedness. Even the statement in Daniel offers little hope of real change: It was the faithful Jews who would be purified, cleansed and refined, while there appears little or no hope that the wicked would change their ways.

Similarly, the angel's words offer little expectation that sinners will be converted by the severe warnings revealed through John. His statement, in fact, is in the imperative mood: Let the wicked remain wicked, he seems to say, while the holy remain holy. 📖

This does not mean there would be no opportunity for change, either for the wicked to turn toward Christ or for Christians to fall into apostasy.

### An invitation (vv. 12-17)

The possibility of change becomes apparent as Jesus speaks again, offering an affirmation of John's testimony, a witness to himself, a blessing upon righteous believers, and a clear invitation for all who wish to come and drink from the water of life.

Christ's second announcement that "I am coming soon" is joined by an affirmation that "my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work" (v. 12). This does not suggest a return to a works-righteousness theology. The work of the faithful is to put their faith in Christ and to live accordingly. Believers facing trials were tempted to turn away from their faith, but John insists that Christ will arrive soon with their recompense in hand.

Jesus' reference to himself as the Alpha and Omega (v. 13) echoes 1:8, where the same term was used as a title for God. This is yet another of Revelation's affirmations that God and Christ

are inextricably bound together.

Verse 14 offers a benediction to those who "have washed their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by its gates" (compare 7:14). These are contrasted with those who may not enter the city but remain without: "dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (v. 15, compare similar lists in 21:8 and 17). 📖

With vv. 16-17 we come to some of the most memorable words in John's remarkable book. Jesus affirms again that he is responsible for the message, and identifies himself as "the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star" (v. 16).

The first title draws on Isaiah's prediction of a coming one as both a shoot and a root from the stump of Jesse, David's father (Isa. 11:1, 10). This prediction came to be understood in messianic terms. Thus, for Jesus to claim the title "son of David" was to acknowledge his identity as the messiah.

Jesus' self-description as "the bright morning star," which may have some root in Num. 24:17, is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, though Jesus elsewhere refers to himself as the light of the world. 📖

In v. 17 we find the beautiful, repetitive words of invitation that make Revelation a book of hope as well as warning. The first two lines may be understood as a call for Christ to return or as the first part of an invitation that concludes with an opportunity for all to choose life.

John sees a time when Christ's work is done, the gates of heaven are opened, and "anyone who wishes" may come and "take the water of life as a gift."

The beauty and simplicity of the invitation do not obviate the importance of repentance and faith, but simply

focus on the universal availability of salvation to those who thirst for it, who come for it, and who receive it as a gift.

### A warning (vv. 18-21)

The last few verses bring a change in tone as John pronounces a curse upon anyone who adds to or takes away from what he has written (vv 18-19). This was not an uncommon practice, and its intention was obvious: to maintain the book as John wrote it, without change.

People in the ancient world took curses seriously. Tomb inscriptions often concluded with a curse directed at anyone who disturbed the bones of the diseased, and with some important documents, official ceremonies placing a curse on violators might be held. 📖

Following the curse, John returns to a more positive conclusion. He affirms again that his words are directly from Christ, who asserts, for the third time, "Surely I am coming soon" (v. 20a).

John responds with an exclamation, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus!" John indicates that he is ready, willing, and hopeful that Christ will indeed come, and come soon.

How should modern believers respond to John's Revelation? We do not live in the same sort of desperate times that plagued John's hearers. And, we must acknowledge that John's predictions of Jesus' quick return did not materialize. Does this mean that John's book is not inspired or useful for believers of today?

Contemporary Christians misuse the Book of Revelation if we dwell too much on its apocalyptic predictions, anticipate a literal fulfillment of John's metaphorical images, try to construct a timetable for Jesus' return, or draw building plans for the new Jerusalem.

We can, however, find in John's word-pictures beautiful images of the Christian hope: that we can rest secure in the power of God and the Lamb to rule the universe and redeem those who hear and follow the call to trust and faithful discipleship. Surely we can join John in saying "Amen" to that. **BT**

# Youth

May 5 - May 26, 2013

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

## The Holy Tour

Revelation 21:10-22:5

The trend started with the television show *The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. MTV piggybacked on the success and created *Cribs*. Now it seems that every cable channel has its own show revealing the life of various artists and stars. In most of these shows, viewers are invited into the homes of the famous to see what it is like to live behind the Hollywood curtain. The stars show off the biggest and newest features of their homes, usually customized to their tastes. As you can imagine, the homes are immaculate and offer incredible luxuries.

Today's passage from Revelation 21 is its own kind of unveiling, but it is not a fabulous home that is unveiled; it is the eternal dwelling place that God will provide. Remember that during the time when Revelation was written, Christians were often persecuted or killed for

their faith. Revelation offered them hope.

John is taken up to "a great high mountain" by an angel to begin his holy tour. He looks out to see a glow about the city because of the presence of God. John tells us of the square city that sits on a foundation of 12 gemstones with 12 gates, each made of a single pearl, and the door to each gate has one of the 12 tribes of Israel engraved on the door. The number 12 continues throughout the description of the city, representing the role that Israel and the church will play in this city of God.

Surprisingly, one thing missing from John's description is a temple. Because God is present in the city, there is no longer the need for a temple. Take a moment to read the passage and imagine the hope this promised city could offer to the frightened and weary Christians of John's time.

MAY 5

### Think About It:

*There is no need for "days" in the city because eternity is timeless. Each moment is made whole. How might you live so that each moment demonstrates your commitment to God?*

### Make a Choice:

*Those who reject God will have no place in the city that John reveals. God alone is present and no evil resides. Will you choose the light of God or the darkness of the world?*

### Pray:

*God of hope and God of light, help us live with hope that gives light to the dark world around us.*

## An Invitation

Revelation 22:12-21

Every time I log onto Facebook or check my Twitter feed, there are invitations waiting: invitations to "like" a page or accept a friend request, invitations to play a game or enter a contest, invitations to follow someone or click on a link to a point of interest. We are bombarded with invitations to like or join, follow or play, but in the passage from Revelation 22 we are given another invitation.

The invitation begins with Jesus telling us that he is "coming soon." The invitation is open, but each person needs to continue to live faithfully. The warning that "the wicked will remain wicked and the holy will remain holy" is repeated, not to say that these choices are final but to remind the hearer that there is a choice to be made.

The invitation is repeated by Jesus, but this time he adds: "My reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work." The work of the people is to choose Jesus and to remain faithful. The outpouring of this work is witnessed through the fruits of their faith, in the way they live and treat others.

The final invitation is a simple one: "Come." The invitation is for Christ to return. The invitation is for all to choose life. The water of life is available for all who come. After the final invitation there is a warning in the form of a curse for anyone who adds to or takes away from what has been written. The warning is there to reveal the importance of the invitation.

The final words are John's spoken acceptance of the invitation Jesus has given: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

MAY 12

### Think About It:

*The Book of Revelation offers an invitation for all to come to Jesus. It offers hope, but some interpreters have often used the book to instill fear rather than to pass the invitation. Why is hope stronger than fear?*

### Make a Choice:

*Jesus, the Spirit, and the bride invite everyone to come to Jesus and find hope. Where do you need hope in your life?*

### Pray:

*Pray that you will accept the invitation to move toward Jesus and find hope in the future he brings.*



## David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver



### Spirit of Creation

*Psalm 104:24-35*

**D**o you have a friend who is always coming up with ideas? Do you know someone who seems always to be thinking of something new to do or make? If you were to walk into that friend's room, you might find all kinds of projects he or she has started but not finished. Perhaps another creative idea came along before the last one was completed!

Today's reading from Psalm 104 speaks of creating, but it is God who is creating. There is nothing left undone, but these creations are made in perfection. The psalm challenges us to praise God for the Spirit that creates newness.

This portion of Psalm 104 can be seen in three sections. In the first, the psalmist lists some of the things that have been created,

reminding us to praise God for what is created through the Spirit. It is as if the psalmist is saying, "Hey, you know all these things? God created them through the Spirit." If you read the psalm and remember the creation verses in Genesis, you might find some similarities.

The second portion of the psalm highlights the way God's Spirit provides goodness and sustains life. "These all look to you to give them their food in due season ... when you open your hands, they are filled with good things" (v. 28).

The final section offers enthusiastic praise to God. "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being." In many churches, today is recognized as Pentecost Sunday, celebrating the coming of the Spirit. It's easy to see why this psalm is read on such a day.

MAY 19

#### Think About It:

*God is worthy of our praise because of the creative work of God's spirit. Where and how have you noticed God's spirit bringing goodness in your life?*

#### Make a Choice:

*Sometimes we enjoy the blessings of life and forget that such goodness flows from God's spirit. How can you offer real praise to God?*

#### Pray:

*God of creation, may we praise you with all we are and in all we do.*

### Follow the Lead

*Romans 5:1-5*

**D**o you enjoy building with Legos? It can be fun to start with a pile of multi-colored, multi-shaped plastic blocks that will eventually end up looking like the photo on the box. From this pile comes order because of a little picture-filled book of directions. Step 1 leads to step 2 until the creation is complete.

In Romans 5, Paul offers a step-by-step guide for faith. Step 1 for him is justification by faith, and you can follow his steps through verse 11. These steps are designed to build a strong assurance of salvation — so strong we might be tempted to boast about it.

So what does Paul's "picture book" look like? Following is the "Dummies" version: Step 1: We have access to God because of God's offer of grace.

Step 2: We must have faith in God to accept the grace God offers.

Step 3: We are justified by this faith and not by how good (or not) we are. Through all of this we can have confidence.

Just in case we only relied on the pictures of peace and joy, Paul provides another "picture book" for us: hope. For these instructions, he begins with suffering and moves to endurance, then to character and ends with hope. Through all of this we can boast.

And how are we to boast? We can boast because Jesus moves us away from weakness, ungodliness, sinning and generally being distant from God. We would be stuck in each of these ways if it were not for Christ. Our "boasting" is not about us but about the goodness of God.

MAY 26

#### Think About It:

*Paul is trying to help us understand the gift of God's eagerness to accept us, regardless of whether or not we deserve God's love. How well do you understand this gift?*

#### Make a Choice:

*God's willingness to offer us grace even when we do not deserve it can remind us to be grace-filled in dealing with others. Is there someone who needs your gift of grace?*

#### Pray:

*Dear God, thank you for the free gift of grace. Let us respond to your love for us by also showing grace to others.*

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Psalm 104:24-35

May 19, 2013 (Pentecost)

## Life in the Spirit

Christian tradition celebrates the seventh Sunday after Easter as Pentecost Sunday, commemorating the gift of the Holy Spirit as recounted in the second chapter of Acts. Why, then, does today's text come from the Psalms?

The Hebrew Bible also speaks of God's Spirit as a gift to humankind, and the Psalm text from the lectionary this week gives us insight into the ancient Hebrew understanding of the Spirit.

### The God who creates (vv. 24-26)

It is helpful, in overview, to read Psalms 103 and 104 together. They appear side by side for a reason. Both psalms begin and end with the call to praise: "Bless the Lord, oh my soul." While Psalm 103 praises God for mighty acts of salvation, Psalm 104 celebrates God's initial and ongoing acts of creation.

Our text for today begins near the end of a long recitation of God's creative works, as Psalm 104 follows a similar pattern to the familiar story found in Genesis 1: God creates the heavens first (vv. 2-4), then the earth and sea (vv. 5-9), followed by animals, plants, and people (vv. 10-26), with reminders of other creations scattered throughout (springs for the animals, vv. 10-13; the mountains, v. 18; the moon and sun, v. 19; even darkness, v. 20).

In Gen. 1:1-2:4a, God appears distant and creates by speaking alone, but here God is portrayed in much more personal or anthropomorphic terms, as in the second creation story, found in



Psalm 104:30 –  
"When you send forth your  
spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of  
the ground."

Sara Moses/stockxchange

Gen. 2:4b-25. The psalmist describes God as being "clothed" with honor and majesty, and "wrapped in light" (vv. 1b-2a). God stretches out the heavens like a tent and sets beams for the heavenly abode above the cosmic waters (vv. 2b-3a). God uses the clouds as a chariot and rides on the wings of the wind (v. 3b).

Like a wise builder, God made the foundations of the earth firm and then blanketed its surface with water before limiting the sea's boundaries (vv. 5-9).

Everything needed for life is attributed to divine causation: God makes springs to flow, causes grass to grow, and provides plants that humans can use to make bread, wine and oil (vv. 14-15).

In beautiful, lyrical fashion the psalmist credits God with putting the moon in place to order the annual calendar, even as the sun's light and the darkness of night set the daily rhythm of life (vv. 19-20).

Creatures of the land (including

humans) are featured in vv. 10-23.

Today's text, which opens with v. 24, begins with an expression of awe at God's magnificent work and the incomparable wisdom required to create such an amazing world and fill it with living creatures (v. 24).

The poet then shifts to the sea, noting that it is also teeming with life, from "creeping things innumerable" to "living things both small and great" (v. 25). Humans are there, too, albeit in ships, along with "Leviathan that you formed to sport in it" (v. 26).

Leviathan has a mixed reputation in scripture. In some texts, Leviathan is a fearful seven-headed sea serpent, a symbol of the forces of chaos that God had to overcome in creation.

Here, however, Leviathan is portrayed simply as a great sea creature, a part of God's good creation. Ancient mariners would have seen the occasional whale, and that is probably the image in mind here.

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





## The God who provides (vv. 27-30)

With vv. 27-30 the psalmist turns from the theme of creation to provision: The God who has created all things also feeds them.

“These all look to you to give them their food in due season” (v. 27) follows immediately on God’s creation of sea creatures in vv. 25-26, but refers back to all animal life, including humans, who gather the bounty of good things that come from God’s hand (v. 28). This reference does not discount the work humans do in tilling the ground, sowing seed and caring for the plants as they grow (v. 23), but the ancients understood that crops needed rain in order to thrive. They believed that rain was the product of heaven’s benevolence and drought the result of divine displeasure. ↓

God provides more than rain for daily sustenance, however. The psalmist believed that life itself is due to God’s favor, for breath – whether for lower animals or for humans – comes from God. “When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust,” the psalmist declared, but “When you send forth your spirit they are created ...” (vv. 29b-30a, NRSV).

With this reference to God’s spirit we have the text’s closest connection to Pentecost, so it deserves a closer look. The Hebrew word translated as “breath” and “spirit” in vv. 29-30 is the same: *ruah* (or *ruach*, to emphasize the hard “h” sound) can be translated as breath, spirit or wind, with many shades of meaning.

In this context it is the breath of life. The sending forth of God’s spirit creates life and renews creation: the word for “they are created” is the passive form of the same word used in Genesis 1 for God’s creative activity.

In contrast, when God “gathers their breath” (a literal translation), living things die and return to “their dust,” a reminder of their pre-created state.

The imagery recalls the creation story in Gen. 2:4b-25, in which God is also described in near-human form, actively creating: “then the LORD

## Resources to teach adult and youth classes

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

God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). A different word for “breath” is used there, but the concept is the same.

That story also testifies that death involves a return to the ground, “for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

God’s spirit gives life, but the Hebrews also believed people could be blessed with the spirit in special ways, gaining a special closeness to God or unusual abilities. When Israel was in need and God called out strong leaders such as Othniel or Gideon to deliver and lead them, it was said that “the spirit of the LORD” (*ruah-Yahweh*) came upon them (Judg. 3:10, 6:34).

When Samuel anointed young David as the next king of Israel, the “spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward,” even as “the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul” (1 Sam. 16:13-14).

When prophets spoke in God’s behalf, it was believed that “the spirit of the LORD” inspired them (1 Kgs. 22:24, Ezek. 11:5, Mic. 3:8). When Isaiah spoke of a coming servant of the Lord in language that would later be applied to Christ, he emphasized that “the spirit of the LORD” would be upon him (Isa. 11:2, 61:1).

In all of these texts the word is the same as in Ps. 104:29-30, but it implies more than life-giving breath. God’s spirit can also provide wisdom, discernment, leadership or surprising power.

## The God who empowers (vv. 31-35)

Reflecting on the creative, sustaining, life-giving power of God brings the psalmist to hope that Yahweh will eternally exult in self-adoration (vv. 31-32). It also inspires him to pledge that he

will sing praise for as long as he possesses God’s life-giving spirit: “I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being” (v. 33).

While v. 34 continues the poet’s joyful acclamation, the first half of v. 35 comes as a bitter surprise, so jarring that the committee responsible for the lectionary chose to skip over it for the day’s reading. Finding a text difficult is no reason for ignoring it, however, so we press on.

At the very end of his paean of praise to God, just before the closing benediction, the psalmist injects: “Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more” (v. 35a).

This malediction may be surprising, but is not entirely out of place. The poet is so high on God’s creative and caring power that he wants to see God praised by all means possible, including his own meditations (v. 34).

The poet believed that those whom God has blessed with the spirit of life owe to God thanksgiving and praise. Indeed, he is so overcome with gratitude that the thought of people rejecting God’s way leaves him thinking that such persons don’t deserve to continue living. Thus, he prays, “let the wicked be no more.”

This conclusion may seem extreme to us, but for the psalmist it was a negative way of emphasizing the positive message he has asserted throughout: As creator and sustainer of all life, God is worthy of perpetual honor and praise.

We are unlikely to go as far as the psalmist in wishing that all sinners would cease to exist, and not just for fear that we and our family and friends could be numbered among them.

Even so, we could profit from joining the psalmist in his meditation upon God’s amazing and ongoing gifts to humankind. If we truly believe that God is responsible for the wonders of the natural world and for all life – including ours – then we certainly have cause to join the psalmist in praising God for as long as we live. ↓

Do we? **BT**

# Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Romans 5:1-11

May 26, 2013 (Trinity Sunday)

## Something to Brag About

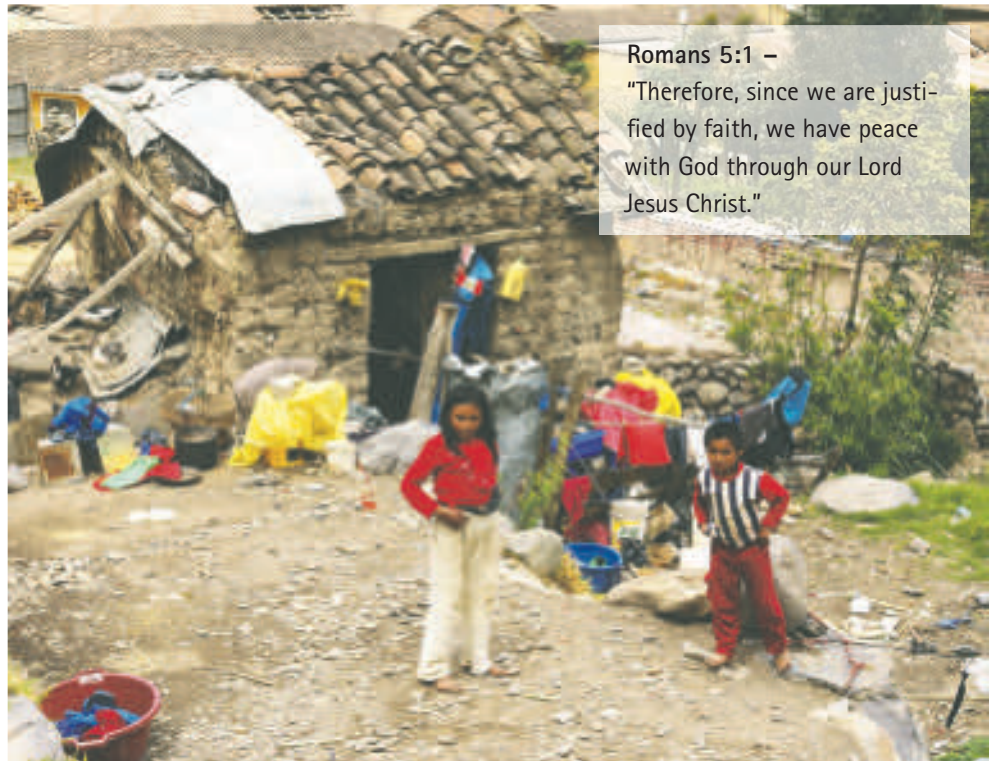
The only “C” I ever made came in a college calculus course for which I was woefully unprepared. I kept up fairly well until the teacher started talking about imaginary numbers – and I couldn’t imagine them.

Today is Trinity Sunday, a day that celebrates a numerical conundrum even more difficult to understand or imagine. Church tradition sets aside this day to recall and celebrate the belief that God, in some way far beyond our comprehension, exists as a divine unity who has been revealed in three “persons” — for lack of a more appropriate word. ⚓

Today’s text was not designed to teach the doctrine of the Trinity, though it does include separate references to God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Paul’s primary concern in this passage is an assurance of salvation so strong that believers can boast of it.

The subject of pride is always a paradox for Christians. When we were young, parents or teachers encouraged us to “take pride” in our appearance or our work. But we may also have been warned that “pride goes before destruction” (Prov. 16:18) and “the boastful pride of life” is a wicked, worldly thing (1 John 2:16).

In today’s text, Paul talks about three aspects of Christian faith that are proper causes for pride (the lectionary stops at v. 5, but we’ll continue through v. 11). A key structural word in the passage is “boast” – not in the sense of bragging, but of happily celebrating. Paul teaches the believers in Rome that it is appropriate to exult in the peace they obtain through faith in Christ



Eva Schuster/stockxchange

(vv. 1-2), in the sufferings they endure for the sake of Christ (vv. 3-5), and in Christ himself as their savior and Lord (vv. 6-11).

### Proud of our peace (vv. 1-2)

“Since we are justified by faith” connects Romans 5 with the two previous chapters, in which Paul had established that salvation comes through faith, not works. Through this salvation, Paul taught, we can experience peace with God through Christ (v. 1). As an ethnic Jew and trained rabbi, Paul was taught that God would ultimately redeem Israel, but he had come to believe that God desired to save all people through Christ, “through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand” (v. 2a).

Paul reminds us that our free access to God is not because of our good works or high position, but because of God’s grace (v. 2a). God has chosen to extend grace, and this alone is the key to our relationship. ⚓

Because of our new standing with God, we can joyfully “boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (v. 2b, NRSV), or “rejoice in the hope of God’s glory” (NET). Paul taught that our present life of fellowship with God through the Spirit is just a foretaste of the life that lies ahead for us. ⚓

Those of us who know what it is to mourn the loss of loved ones can have hope and even rejoice as we contemplate a glad reunion one day. Those who are oppressed and downtrodden in this world may yet have hope and rejoice, looking forward to the eternal inheritance prepared for God’s children. This hope brings both peace and joy.

In 1877, in a sermon delivered at Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was preaching from Rom. 15:13, in which Paul offers a wish similar to that expressed here: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” In the course of the sermon, Spurgeon illustrated the

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





relationship between joy and peace with an oft-quoted (but rarely attributed) statement: “Peace is joy resting, and joy is peace dancing.”<sup>U</sup>

There’s a thought worth pondering!

### **Proud of our sufferings (vv. 3-5)**

Lest Paul’s readers be carried away with visions of peace and joy, Paul reminds them that their suffering is not past. Believers will experience suffering just as other people do, and have no reason to expect anything different. Paul uses the term *thlipsis*, which can be translated with words such as trouble, hardship or suffering. The world brings trouble enough for us all, and being Christian does not make us immune. Indeed, there are times when following Christ may even add to our trials, especially in times of organized persecution against people of faith, which some of Paul’s friends experienced.

Christians cannot avoid trouble, but we can approach it with a positive attitude. Paul argued that even suffering could be a cause for pride, because “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (vv. 3-5).

We can boast in our sufferings, Paul said, because we can see past the present difficulty to the future blessing. Like an athlete who endures the pain and discomfort of training for the hope of improved skills and conditioning, we can accept suffering as an essential step in the development of faithful patience and Christian character.

The words Paul uses are significant. They speak of patient endurance and personal character that have been proved by testing. Just as a structural engineer may test potential bridge components by putting them under stress, so our own character is proved and even strengthened through testing.

For Christians, the ultimate outcome of suffering is hope in the future

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God has prepared for us. Hope will never disappoint us, because it is ever-present. When all else is taken away, we still have hope.

When my daughter died tragically almost 20 years ago, I thought my world had come to an end and I questioned many things, including my faith. But on days when I found it hard to have faith, I discovered the incredible power of hope.

One day the image came to me that faith, in a sense, is like hope with feet on it – hope to the point of commitment. My experience is that this hope has a power all its own, a power that does not disappoint. Paul attributed this hopeful confidence to the love of God, “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”<sup>U</sup>

### **Proud of our savior (vv. 6-11)**

Paul was no wallflower. He contended that believers should openly rejoice in the peace and hope that come through knowing Christ. In vv. 6-11 Paul homes in on the work of Christ in our lives. He uses four descriptive adjectives to portray our former state, which has been transformed by the power of Christ: we were weak, we were ungodly, we were sinners, we were enemies of God.

“While we were still weak,” Paul says – while we were still living under the world’s ungodly sway – “at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (v. 6). The word translated as “weak” usually means “sick” but can also describe a condition of weakness or helplessness. For Paul it indicates an inability to save ourselves. But who would go so far as to die for people who not only were weak but also far from God?

“Christ died for the ungodly,” Paul says. The enormity of that simple statement becomes evident with vv. 7-8. On some rare occasions we might hear of

someone willing to die for another person – usually someone close to them. The amazing thing about Jesus is that he died for us “while we were still sinners.”<sup>U</sup>

Our past experience gives rise to present hope. If we believe Christ has truly brought reconciliation with God through his death on the cross, then we have confidence of a true redemption (v. 9). According to his custom, Paul spoke of salvation in the future tense (cf. 5:10; 9:27; 10:9, 13; 11:14, 26). We already have been “justified” to have a right standing with God, but the time of judgment and ultimate salvation lies in the future.<sup>U</sup>

If God loved us enough to reconcile us to himself through Christ’s death “while we were enemies,” Paul believed, then surely he will love us enough to continue his saving work through Christ’s resurrection life (v. 10).

This thought leads Paul to return to the theme of boasting, as we “boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (v. 11). The word translated as “reconcile” has the basic meaning “to exchange.” Here, it means “to exchange enmity for friendship.” Wherever the terms “reconcile” or “reconciliation” are used in the New Testament, it is always God who does the reconciling and humans who are reconciled by virtue of God’s work in Christ.

In Paul’s mind, the fact that we don’t deserve God’s reconciling love is no reason not to celebrate it with joy and even a bit of holy pride.

Paul’s notion of boasting about what God has done may not sit well with us, perhaps because we have all known people whose self-righteous attitude or cocksure evangelism came across as offensive. The apostle did not expect his friends to boast of their faith in the streets, but urged them in worship or personal conversations to express a confident hope that was grounded in God, effected through Christ, and experienced through the Spirit. **BT**

# BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

The arrival of the spring season signals the resumption of military activity and an increase in homeless and hungry, poor white, home-front citizens of the Confederacy.

Warfare is especially felt upon the oceans and rivers. Although Confederate forts repel a Union Navy assault upon Charleston, a federal fleet sails past Vicksburg's batteries on the Mississippi River while suffering little damage. By the end of the month, Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant begins landing troops near Vicksburg. A Confederate victory over federal forces at Plymouth, N.C., offers some solace for the South but cannot ameliorate the worrisome Union naval encroachments on the Mississippi.

Meanwhile, in Union-occupied Murfreesboro, Tenn., poor white refugees from the surrounding countryside are camped out in the yard of the city's Baptist church. A local businessman, with some disdain, offers an eye-witness account:

*There is a large number of [white] country people, from different sections, that has congregated here. That is commonly called refugees, who, as a class of people, are generally a degree below the negro, but, like the negro, make their appearance. Man and woman, half clad, with a half doz tow head children, all with small bundles under their arms of old quilts and a few articles of clothing. Another set-a man carrying a bundle, which appears to be about the house hold for himself, wife, and three or four tow heads and a dog or two. His elbows and knees out, a seedy hat, and an apology for shoes, wife half clothed and look like she had not been near water for a month or more. Children frequently bare-footed, hair resembling porcupine quills. These motly crouds make their appearance, tell a pitiful tale, say that everything they had was taken from them. It is plainly seen, they had nothing to take.*

At the same time, unrest surfaces in the Confederate capital of Richmond, Va., where famished women demand bread. Gathering at the Belvidere Hill Baptist Church to discuss



150 YEARS AGO

April 1863

food and fuel shortages, female workers in Richmond's munitions and ironworks war facilities request a meeting with the governor. Their request denied, the women begin looting food from downtown shops.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis emerges from the capitol building to address the women. Emptying his pockets of change, he tosses the coins to the angry women while the governor orders home-front guards to confront the rioters. The military threat quells the Bread Riots, but Richmond will seethe with unrest for the remainder of the war.

Even as poor whites increasingly challenge Confederate officials, enslaved blacks grow all the bolder. By the thousands they are now running away from their masters to freedom behind Union lines. Among those remaining, many become more assertive in their bi-racial congregations, requesting fewer restrictions in their spiritual lives. In the Van Wert Baptist Church

in Georgia's Paulding County, for example, "A colored Brother, Moses, applied through Brother Heaton for permission to preach in this house, when, on motion, her consent was withheld."

In another instance, the black members of the First Baptist Church of Charlottesville, Va., ask to be allowed to meet separately in the church basement and choose their own deacons and pastor. The black members, courteous and mild in their request, well understand the delicate nature of negotiations. They agree to be led by a white pastor, signaling continued subservience to white church authorities. White members vote to grant the request, but two months later black members sunder ties with the white pastor. In response, FBC warns that the black congregation must "not place the colored brethren beyond the control of the church."

Throughout the Confederacy, white church members thus continue exercising control over their enslaved brothers and sisters as they have for decades, albeit sometimes with more elasticity in the midst of mounting anxiety and fear. Frequently, church houses become bases for slave patrols, home-front groups of white men



tasked with policing slaves on the plantation and hunting down fugitive slaves.

Meanwhile, at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia on April 30, the day appointed by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln as a “Day of National Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer,” Baptist pastor Daniel C. Eddy offers his reflections on national righteousness. In concluding his sermon, he declares:

*O, what a country ours will be when the States shall be reunited; when the dear old flag wave from Maine to Georgia, from the Atlantic to the Pacific; when slavery shall have become extinct; when the barbarism of Southern society shall have given way to a better civilization; when those immense cotton fields shall be worked by free labor, or cut up into farms for our brave soldiers; when by those blood-dyed rivers shall rise huge manufactories; when there shall be no cause of desolation and strife, but when all will be animated by a common faith*

*in Liberty and Religion! That day will come. It may be away over some dark trials, beyond fearful calamities, but it will come. It will be such a day as Washington and Hancock and Adams pictured and dreamed about, and prayed for. It will come with blessings, and be greeted with Hallelujahs, it will be the Millennium of political glory, the Sabbath of Liberty, the Jubilee of Humanity.*

Some of Eddy’s prophecies prove too optimistic. Today’s visions of millennial glory will not stand the test of time. While liberation does lie on a distant and bloody horizon, true liberty and freedom for African Americans will be thwarted far too long by dominant systems of white supremacy throughout America. At the same time in the post-war years, descendants of today’s poor white refugees are destined to endure economic hardships in the Gilded Age of robber barons and beyond. Yet for now the hope of freedom for all energizes the Union and menaces the Confederacy. **BT**



*“Even as poor whites increasingly challenge Confederate officials, enslaved blacks grow all the bolder.”*

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# Healthy conversations about hard things

By Bob Ballance

In December, Adam Lanza killed 20 first graders and six school employees at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. As the details from the shooting poured into media outlets, a stunned nation reacted with tremendous emotion.

Families, communities and the country divided quickly over what should be done about the growth of gun violence.

The debate spilled over into churches and synagogues, mosques and temples. Pastors and priests, clerics and imams began weighing in, and, regardless of their positions, found themselves at odds with some in their congregations.

In some cases, the discourse gave way to threats and significant conflict. Long-tenured relationships snapped and in many instances, remain unresolved.

Like many others in ministry, I weighed in immediately, declaring the need for more gun control laws. While many agreed, push-back from others was lightning fast and emotion laden. I posted my sharp positions online, where many agreed wholeheartedly, but others struck back — many long-time friends — with stinging criticism.

While I considered my position a no-brainer, I quickly realized that if I continued pressing hard on the issue I would lose long-tenured friends and parishioners. Having healthy conversations about difficult topics is a challenge with which many of us are not comfortable.

On a number of occasions as a pastor I have chosen to keep charging ahead on divisive issues — embracing the roles of pastor as both priest and prophet. On this issue, however, I decided to step back.

Personally, I still feel strongly that we need new legislation. I have, however, started listening carefully and patiently to

those with very different opinions.

My new approach on the issue led me to make a series of carefully crafted statements. I offered these as a means to end shouting matches and to begin a dialogue. The statements were:

"Can we at least agree that gun violence is growing?" Almost all agreed.

"Can we at least agree that a gun in the hands of someone who is not well emotionally and/or mentally is a dangerous and unwanted thing?" All agreed.

"Can we at least agree that we've done a poor job as a society and culture of paving the way for people who feel emotionally/mentally distressed to find meaningful, accessible, professional assistance?" All agreed.

"Can we at least agree that sometimes when a family member or friend feels someone else is not well emotionally/mentally — to the point of possibly harming himself/herself or others — we do not have a meaningful, suitable process for initiating a conversation and getting help if needed?" Almost all agreed.

"Can we at least agree that too often in our society — whether in video games, movies or other forms of media — acts of violence are glorified and are demanded in increasing numbers?" Almost all agreed.

"Can we at least agree that too often guns do end up in the hands of those who should not have access to them?" There was some resistance, but almost all agreed.

"Can we at least agree that we all need to give serious and intentional thought as to how we should address these issues?" All agreed.

This approach did two things: First, it caused those of us with strong emotions to distance ourselves from our feelings and to begin thinking more critically about what specific actions might be needed. We moved

beyond legislation about guns to a national conversation about mental health issues.

Second, it caused those who had been adamant that their second amendment rights be protected at all costs to take a step back from their long-tenured, well-rehearsed responses. Suddenly, they were at least willing to give alternative notions some thought.

So far, those of us sharing in this conversation about this situation have not come to any definitive decisions, but at least we're giving shared, meaningful thought to a major challenge before us all.

Throughout this discourse we stopped shoving facts and anecdotes upon others that bolstered our positions, and we started sharing personal stories. Those who wanted more gun control laws shared childhood stories of hurt and harm that seemed senseless — things that deeply affected their lives.

Those who wanted their second amendment rights protected shared stories of loss, where something significant was taken from them without meaningful cause. Through these stories the differing sides were better able to understand and appreciate the perspectives of others.

At the moment we share these conclusions: Reasoned dialogue is better than shouting matches. A friendship kept is better than a friendship lost. Living with an enlarged sense of the perspectives of others — even when we strongly disagree — is better than a myopic view of reality.

We're not done yet. We have much more talking to do — and our opinions are still differing. But at least we are talking, we are still in relationship, and we are still being humble. That feels healthy.

Finally, during this discourse we couldn't help but remember the words of the prophet: "'Come, let us reason together,' thus saith the Lord" (Isa. 1:8). **BT**

—Bob Ballance is pastor of Pine Street Baptist Church in Boulder, Colo., and former editor of *Baptists Today*.

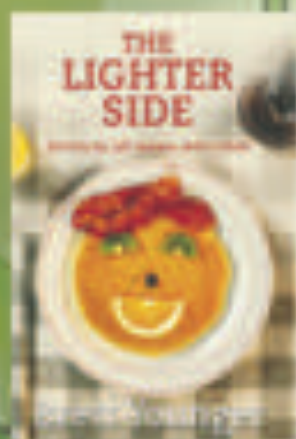




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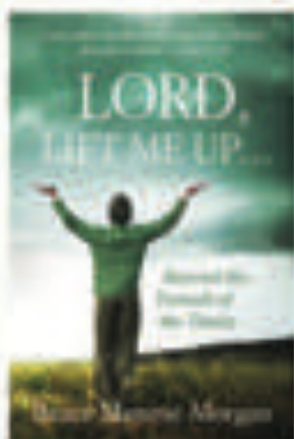
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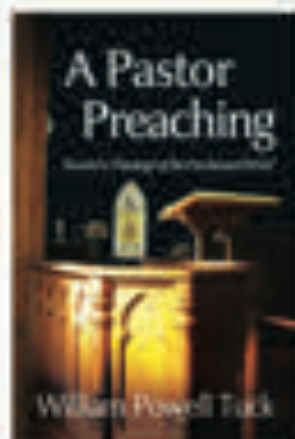
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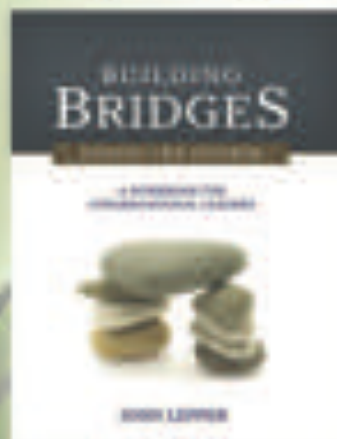
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# Aging religious leaders often struggle with letting go

By Adelle M. Banks

**W**hen aging religious leaders reach the top echelons of temporal and spiritual power, their followers have a certain expectation: Till death us do part.

But Pope Benedict XVI's surprise resignation has shifted that calculus, prompting introspection about traditional understandings of religions' senior management and when, if and how to let them go.

While many rank-and-file pastors and priests retire in their 60s, their superiors maintain their posts far longer: Benedict resigned at 85, the same age as Mormon President Thomas Monson. The Dalai Lama is 77 and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the world leader of Eastern Orthodoxy, is the youngest of the lot at 72.

Some religious leaders prefer to step aside before they die in the job. Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams retired last year at the relatively young age of 62. Others are term-limited and ease themselves into retirement and fade from

the public scene.

Evangelist Billy Graham, now 94, turned the reins of his evangelistic association over to his son Franklin in 2000 but continues to comment on the political scene.

Robert H. Schuller, 86, resigned as the Crystal Cathedral empire he built crumbled and declared bankruptcy amid a nasty family battle. He resurfaced in January at his daughter's Hope Center of Christ congregation in Orange County, Calif., and "is looking forward to joining us once a month," Pastor Sheila Schuller Coleman said.

Benedict's retirement has drawn admiration from some religious leaders who hope non-Catholic officials may follow his lead.

"This is an historic moment that alters expectations for sacrificial leadership in all communions," said National Council of Churches President Kathryn Lohre, in a statement after the pope's announcement. "He is bravely facing up to the realities we all confront: the fragility of the human body and the inevitability of the time when we can no longer shoulder the burdens

placed upon us."

The pontiff said he was resigning "for the good of the church" — and some large church pastors are taking comparable steps, said megachurch expert Scott Thumma.

"I think that's what megachurch pastors have come to say, too: 'This is bigger than me and if I don't have a responsible plan to move the congregation beyond me, then I'm not doing my task of ministering to this community,'" said Thumma, a sociologist at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

Age and health have long determined when religious leaders hang up their zucchetos, yarmulkes and kufis, but there's another looming factor.

"Ministers have big egos, so they don't like to be as candid as the pope has in assessing his weaknesses," said E. Glenn Hinson, professor emeritus of spirituality and church history at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. "Now, though, he has set a persuasive example in putting the concerns of the church above the traditional way of holding office until death." **BT**

## Catholic schools see future in Latino students

By Aaron Schrank

*Religion News Service*

**A**s the country's fastest-growing population, Latinos now make up nearly 40 percent of all U.S. Catholics, but represent less than 14 percent of students at Catholic schools, according to the National Catholic Educational Association.

In the past decade, 16 percent of U.S. Catholic schools have closed, dropping from 8,114 to 6,841. Enrollment nationwide has declined 23 percent — driven by competition from charter schools, fallout from the church's sex abuse scandals and changing demographics.

Catholic leaders now tout Latino outreach as one answer to the system's problems. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops called on its schools to increase Latino outreach in a 2005 statement. Since then, dioceses around the country — including Boston, Cincinnati and Phoenix — have launched initiatives.

At the forefront of this effort is the Catholic School Advantage campaign, organized by the University of Notre Dame. It aims to double the number of Latinos in Catholic schools nationwide. The campaign works closely with parish schools in cities with large Latino populations, including New York, San Antonio and Los Angeles.

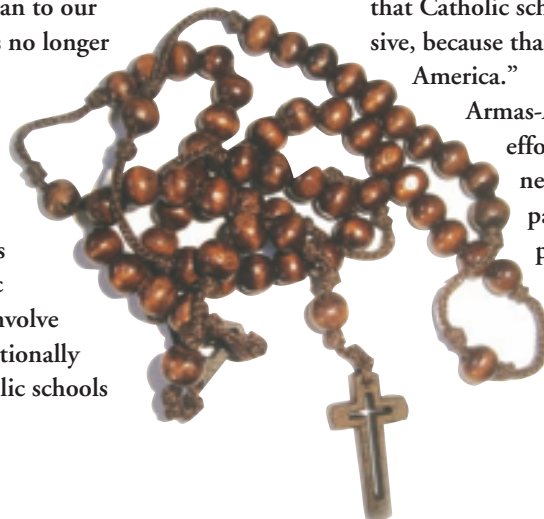
"We've just taken it for granted that people will come," said Sylvia Armas-Abad, the program's Los Angeles field correspondent. "And at one point in our history, they did — they ran to our doors. That's no longer how it is."

In some parts of the country, efforts to bring Latinos into Catholic classrooms involve making traditionally Anglo-Catholic schools

more culturally accessible. In Los Angeles — where the majority of Catholic school-teachers and students are Latino and the Virgin of Guadalupe adorns most classrooms — efforts are focused on persuading low-income parents that Catholic education is a worthwhile investment.

"Many in the immigrant population are just worried about the day-to-day," Armas-Abad said. "We don't have the luxury to explore anything beyond what our government offers us for free. We come in thinking that Catholic schools are elite and exclusive, because that's how they are in Latin America."

Armas-Abad's grassroots outreach efforts include canvassing neighborhoods surrounding parish schools and forming parent volunteer groups — called "madrinas" (Spanish for "godmothers") — at schools around the city. **BT**





# Faith came first for pianist Van Cliburn

By Jeff Brumley  
*Associated Baptist Press*

News reports of Van Cliburn's Feb. 27 death in Fort Worth, Texas, extolled the internationally acclaimed pianist as one of history's greatest classical musicians. Friends at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, however, remember him as a great Baptist whose Christian faith came before his career.

Cliburn shot to fame at age 23 by winning the 1958 International Tchaikovsky Competition — and with it the hearts of Nikita Khrushchev and the Russian people.

The man who was 78 when bone cancer claimed his life is also recalled as a great humanitarian, philanthropist and friend. His generosity included a sizable donation to help Broadway Baptist Church purchase the Rildia Bee O'Bryan Cliburn Organ, with 191 ranks and 10,655 pipes — the largest organ in Texas — named after Cliburn's mother and completed in 1996.

"We have lost a giant," said Tom Stoker, minister of music at Broadway in the 1990s.



"People of this generation do not understand that Van did as much as anybody to thaw the Cold War — and he did that carrying Christ in his heart."

Cliburn was an international sensation in his 20s. It was six months after the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik* that he arrived in Moscow for the first-ever Tchaikovsky

competition. With much the same fanfare that comes today with *American Idol*, he captivated Russians and Americans alike as he won round after round.

He was met with a ticker tape parade in New York City upon his return and soon graced the cover of *Time* magazine as "The Texan Who Conquered Russia." He performed for heads of state around the world, his concerts were sell-outs, and public sightings of him reportedly caused riots. His recording of a Tchaikovsky piano concerto went platinum.

At Broadway he kept a low profile in the congregation, preferring to contribute financially to music and other ministries rather than being a performer.

"When he was in town he showed up here on Sunday mornings — but not in a way that called attention to himself," said pastor Brent Beasley.

Shortly after his diagnosis last summer, Cliburn told Beasley that prayer was holding him up after getting the news. "He said one of the most profound truths is ... to 'pray without ceasing' — that is how I lived my life." **BT**

## Secularism not anti-religious godlessness, scholars explain

By Kimberly Winston  
*Religion News Service*

A conference at Georgetown University in Washington in February focused on cleaning up what many Americans consider a dirty word — secularism.

The goal of the conference, called "Secularism on the Edge," was, in part, to define what secularism is and what it is not. It drew participants from France, Israel and the United States — all countries with strong secular and religious strains.

"(Secularism) is a guarantee of two things: freedom of religion and freedom from religion," said Jacques Berlinerblau, a Georgetown professor, conference organizer, and author of *How to be Secular*.

"In a perfect world, it balances the citizen's need of those two fundamental rights."

Secularism is not, Berlinerblau continued, a synonym for godlessness or atheism or any other form of

anti-religiousness. Secularism is interested in maintaining government's disinterest in religion, he said.

How successful the United States has been at separating religion and government was the subject of the first session, an interview conducted by Berlinerblau of John Fea, a professor of American history at Messiah College and author of *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?*

Berlinerblau showed a film clip of John F. Kennedy's famous 1960 speech before the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in which he proclaimed that his belief that "the separation of church and state is absolute" and that presidents' religious views should be private.

Berlinerblau then showed a clip of President Obama speaking at an Easter prayer breakfast about the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. Berlinerblau looked at Fea and asked, "Are these presidents of the same country?"

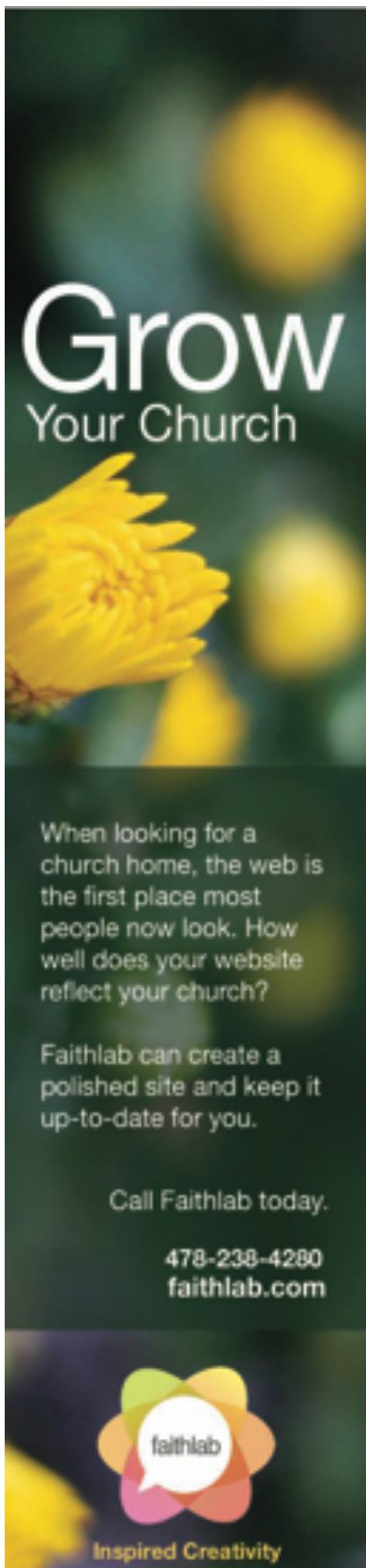
How the United States went from Kennedy to Obama in less than 50 years

formed the bulk of the interview, with discussions of the rise of the religious right in the 1970s and how secularists — who can be both religious and nonreligious — failed to respond.

Other sessions at the conference explored secularism in France, where there has been conflict over how much the government can regulate Islamic dress in public spheres, and in Israel, a secular state where religious groups, particularly ultra-Orthodox Jews, wield heavy influence. There was also a focus on American "nones," those who claim no religious affiliation and whose ranks have grown to 19 percent.

Fea, an evangelical Christian, and Berlinerblau, an atheist, found that they agreed more than they disagreed. Both argue that the Founding Fathers were "to a man," in Fea's estimation, religious believers — but not necessarily Christians. Some, like Jefferson, were deists.

And both agreed that religion and government should not mix. **BT**




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# Right fit

Evangelical leader talks about Baptists' place in contemporary culture

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — Church growth specialist Leith Anderson spoke to representatives of the North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF) last month on how Baptists might fit in a constantly changing, post-denominational world. He led the Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minn., to consistent growth despite ongoing cultural shifts, before retiring in 2011 after 35 years as pastor.

Anderson has been president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) since Ted Haggard's departure in 2006. He had previously led the NAE from 2001-03, and is the author of several books including *Dying for Change* (1998).



Leith Anderson

After reviewing the history of evangelicals in America and reflecting on the development of the NAE, Anderson addressed the question of how Baptists fit in the contemporary milieu, and what they must do to remain relevant.

In some ways the country has become post-denominational, Anderson said, but despite the number of nondenominational churches, most congregations remain affiliated with denominations.

Anderson outlined seven challenges for Baptists as they seek to find or hold their place in contemporary culture: maintain Baptist distinctives, be culturally relevant, be biblically orthodox, be committed to evangelism, social justice, church planting and diversity.

Wooddale Church first affiliated with the Baptist General Conference (now Converge Worldwide) in 1949, in order to get a \$500 loan to purchase its first property. The church has maintained a Baptist identity, though it also affiliated with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference and dropped "Baptist" from its

**The North American Baptist Fellowship**, a regional body of the Baptist World Alliance, will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014 by meeting March 6-7 in Philadelphia, where it will also mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "Triennial Convention," the first denominational organization of Baptists in America.

*Baptists Today's* involvement in and coverage of North American Baptist Fellowship and Baptist World Alliance activities are made possible through a gift from Roy and Charlotte Cook Smith of Winston-Salem, N.C.

name when it relocated from Minneapolis to the suburban town of Eden Prairie in 1981.

Generally, evangelicals have changed little in their belief systems, said Anderson, while being bolder in changing methodology to remain relevant.

Evangelism should not be about proselytizing, but about persuasion, Anderson said, as believers demonstrate the importance of faith through their actions. Planting new churches, he added, is essential for the future growth and health of the church.

Wooddale believed so strongly in the mandate to begin new churches that it has even planted churches affiliated with other denominations — including Christian Reformed and Southern Baptist congregations.

Wooddale brought church-start pastors on staff and let them recruit current members so the new congregation could begin with 100-200 committed members, something Anderson said few pastors will do.

Evangelism and church growth should be accompanied by a concern for social justice and a willingness to embrace diversity, Anderson said, something that younger adults feel particularly passionate about.

While the NAE is widely known for promoting conservative stances on family and abortion issues, Anderson said other core principles include religious liberty, justice and compassion for the poor and vulnerable, human rights, the promotion of peace and opposition to violence, and creation care. After speaking to the NABF gathering, Anderson met along with other evangelical leaders at the White House to talk with President Obama about comprehensive immigration reform. **BT**



# 'Quest for freedom'

Biblical art museum highlights African-American connections to Scripture

**N**EW YORK — A new exhibit at New York's Museum of Biblical Art makes one point clear and inescapable: Biblical narratives and imagery have been an underlining constant in the life of African-American Christians.

From the days of slavery onward, "African Americans felt the Bible was a powerful tool that established their quest for freedom and identity amidst the madness they were living in," said guest curator Leslie King-Hammond. "The Bible was the constant."

King-Hammond is the founding director of the Center for Race and Culture at the Maryland Institute College of Art and helped organize the exhibit, *Ashe to Amen: African Americans and Biblical Imagery*. (The "ashe" in the exhibition's title derives from the African Yoruba language and refers to an artist's power or "inner eye.")

The exhibit of 59 works reveals a wide breadth of genres, from painting to crochet to sculpture. "There is no such thing as monolithic African-American art," said King-Hammond, adding that the exhibit is a way for African-American artists who have worked in the visual arts to get an overdue recognition for their "profound achievements."

The timing of the exhibit — beginning during Black History Month, and later traveling to other locations in Maryland and Tennessee — was also deliberate. This year marks both the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington and Martin Luther King's landmark "I Have a Dream" speech.

"The timing is just right," King-Hammond said in an interview.

Why has the Bible drawn so much attention from African-American artists? In short, history and lived experience.

Those who have roots in Africa are the products of many belief systems, and religion, "as it moved from geography to geography, never lost its sense of potency," King-Hammond said. "Practice and belief have been so resilient. It's the thing that helped them survive."

The Bible was first introduced to



Taking pride of place in a new exhibit at New York's Museum of Biblical Art — literally — is a 12-foot hand-crocheted artwork of cotton and acrylic yarn by New York artist Xenobia Bailey titled *Sistah Paradise's Great Walls of Fire Revival Tent; Mystic Seer; Faith Healer; Enchantress Extraordinaire*. RNS photo courtesy New York's Museum of Biblical Art.

American slaves through oral tradition. Its narratives and parables of the enslaved finding freedom served as personal and communal inspiration amid the cruelties and absurdities of life in the United States, both during and after the American Civil War.

"(The Bible) quickly came to function as a language-world, the storehouse of rhetorics, images, and stories that, through a complex history of engagements, helped establish African Americans as a circle of the biblical imaginary," biblical scholar Vincent L. Wimbush noted in his 2003 book, *African Americans and the Bible*.

Or, as King-Hammond put it, "It gave them meaning to survive the most horrendous situations."

Given such depth of experience, it is not surprising that the exhibit's featured works by Romare Bearden, Sister Gertrude Morgan, Henry Ossawa Tanner and others share thematic links. Yet each is a distinctly personal reflection of artistic vision. "Going into that

**"Ashe to Amen" is on view at the Museum of Biblical Art in New York City through May 26.**

personal religious space," King-Hammond cautioned, "that's very guarded space and you have to tread carefully."

Taking pride of place in the exhibit — literally — is a 12-foot hand-crocheted artwork of cotton and acrylic yarn by New York artist Xenobia Bailey titled *Sistah Paradise's Great Walls of Fire Revival Tent; Mystic Seer; Faith Healer; Enchantress Extraordinaire*.

This tribute to the black church's "call and response" tradition has its own backstory — the fate of the piece was in question when Bailey's studio along the East River in Manhattan flooded during Hurricane Sandy. The fact that it survived and is displayed so beautifully at the museum is itself, King-Hammond believes, a "miracle."

Other works are striking for being ahead of their time — perhaps most notably the work of William H. Johnson. His bold and vivid *Jesus and the Three Marys*, from 1939-40, features a black Jesus on a cross: denoting the era's practice of lynching but also hinting at the emergence of black liberation theology in the 1960s and '70s by putting black religious experience and representation front and center.

Some works combine a mixture of solemnity and whimsy. Margo Humphrey's lithograph, *The Last Bar-B-Que*, from 1989, "translates the biblical narrative of the Last Supper into a background picnic," as a museum description puts it, with watermelon and chicken joining the wine and bread at the table. Patricia C. Pongracz, the museum's acting director, said Humphrey's work suggests a very pointed question, "What does a savior look like?"

Humphrey herself says of the piece — where all depicted are African American and two of the disciples are women — that it is "a rewriting of history through the eyes of my ancestry, a portrayal of a savior who looks like my people." **BT**

# Q&A *with* Jack Causey

A conversation about mentoring, mutual trust and meaningful change

STATESVILLE, N.C. — Jack Causey is a native Mississippian and long-time Baptist minister and leader who retired as pastor of First Baptist Church of Statesville, N.C., in 2000. Earlier he was pastor of Pendleton Street Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., and First Baptist Church of Gaffney, S.C., and associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Greensboro, N.C.

**H**e worked as mentor for the young leaders' program of the Center for Congregational Health. Currently, he serves as ministerial resources coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

He and his wife, Mary Lib, live in Statesville. Editor John Pierce posed questions to Causey about the changes he has observed in congregational and denominational life and lessons he's learned from working with a variety of churches and ministers in recent years.

**BT: Congregational ministry is different now than when you first entered the pastorate. Can you reflect a little on some of the changes you have observed?**

JC: Changes in congregational ministry may be seen best in the three primary functions of the pastor.

One: In his or her pastoral role, the minister must learn how to do more by doing less. The pastor must provide pastoral care for the congregants, but it must be done in a more intentional manner. This can be done by doing it better but in less time.

Two: In the role of leader of the congregation, ministers are expected to be more involved in the administrative affairs of the church. By the time I entered the ministry in 1960, churches had grown significantly and more churches had staffs with multiple



ministers. The pastor had to learn “on the go” how to manage a staff. As congregations are getting smaller, now churches are having more “solo pastors.”

Three: As worship leaders, ministers are called upon to lead in various styles of worship and still be authentic in their worship of God.

**BT: Can you say a little more about the first function? How does a minister “do more by doing less”?**

JC: I mean being more intentional about pastoral care. For example, rather than sitting in a surgical waiting room with a family during the length of surgery, meet with the patient and family to have prayer before surgery, stay with the family for awhile as you focus on them and then excuse yourself to take care of other responsibilities. Then return about the time the surgery is completed.

Or another example, when visiting a patient in the hospital, sit during the visit rather than standing. Sitting says, “I have time for you.” Standing says, “I’m in a hurry and can’t stay but a few minutes and I need to get out of here as soon as possible.”

I spent less time in the hospital room, but the patient thought I spent a lot more time than I actually did. Hence, “doing more by doing less.” It’s simply focusing on the patient.

Again, early in my ministry, I did a lot of counseling. Then in the latter stages of my ministry I did more “referral counseling” while staying in touch with church members, but only in a caring, focused manner rather than spending hours counseling them. And, of course, professional counselors could do that a lot better than I could anyway.

It’s focused, listening carefully, planning strategically.

**BT: You are known as a mentor to other ministers. When did that role emerge, and how has it evolved over time? What about the role of mentor to ministers is meaningful to you?**

JC: I have always had good ministers as role models from Dr. Walter Moore, who was my pastor when I was a teenager, to Dr. Claud Bowen, who was the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Greensboro, N.C., where I served as assistant to the pastor after graduating from seminary.

The position in Greensboro was designed to learn about congregational life while assisting the pastor in the performance of his responsibilities. I learned so much then in just watching and listening to the other ministers on the staff. As I left to go to my first pastorate, I thought it would be great if I could create such a situation for other young ministers.

When I was called to the Pendleton Street Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., I met with L.D. Johnson, who was the chaplain at Furman University, and Jim Pitts, his associate. Together we planned an internship for students at Furman who felt that they might be called into ministry to come and shadow those of us on the staff of the church and share in our ministries, to seek to discern their own call. This program grew significantly over the years.



Then when I came to Statesville, David Odom, who had been a Furman student, called and invited me to serve as the minister in residence for the young leaders' program of the Center for Congregational Health. When I retired several years later, I joined the center's staff on a part-time basis to continue to work with the young leaders' program and to work with young ministers beyond that program.

My work with young ministers has been a fulfillment of my call to ministry in a way I never expected. It has also helped me to continue to grow in my ministry as I learn from ministers, both young and old.

**BT: Your current work with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina involves helping ministers and churches in transition. What challenges — for congregations and ministers — are you discovering? Are there particular issues related to a church extending a call to a minister as well as a minister who senses a call to congregational ministry?**

JC: The greatest challenge facing congregations today, I believe, is changing from a maintenance to a missional mentality. In this regard, some of the practical issues that congregations face are:

- Keeping up buildings and programs with fewer people coming to church and fewer dollars in the offering plate
- Loss of a sense of community
- Multiple distractions that pull people away from the church
- Changing family structures
- Cultural diversity

The challenge is for a congregation to be less concerned about maintaining what it has and more concerned about accomplishing its God-given mission.

**BT: What challenges face younger ministers today to which both they and seasoned laypersons need to be sensitive?**

JC: The greatest challenge that younger ministers and seasoned laypersons face today in congregational life is not change because change is inevitable. The challenge is to learn how to effect meaningful change by creating mutual relationships of trust and respect.

These relationships are accomplished by listening to each other, demonstrating consistency and integrity, and seeking to discern God's leadership rather than merely living out of our own biases. Such relationships then establish safe places to talk about difficult issues.

**BT: The interim period following the resignation or retirement of a pastor can be a scary time. The congregation can be vulnerable to factions within the church seeking power or efforts to define the next pastor's role based on the likes or dislikes of the former pastor.**

**You have said that this time in the life of a church can be one of danger and opportunity. What do you mean by that, and what must congregational leaders do to ensure the interim period is productive?**

JC: When a pastor resigns or retires from a church, the congregation is often filled with anxiety. People begin to wonder who will provide the leadership now, who will lead in corporate worship and on an even more personal level, who will care for me and my family in a crisis?

In the midst of this anxiety, the congregation rushes to get its next pastor and in doing so only the strongest voices and factions in the church are heard. Too often, then, this leads to mistakes.

On the other hand, the interim is one of the most opportunistic times in the life of a church. With a good, stable interim pastor, whether traditional or intentional, the congregation can take the time to celebrate its past, to deal with hidden issues that have been swept under the rug, to clarify its identity, and to determine its mission and the direction it needs to be moving.

With this work done, the congregation and the pastor search committee can develop a profile for its next pastor. Knowing what is expected of him or her, the next pastor will be able to lead the congregation to accomplish what [the members] have discerned is their future under God's leadership.

**BT: Your time as a Baptist minister and leader has spanned great changes in denominational life as well. Yet you have been a leader in both old and new forms.**

**What have those shifts looked like from your perspective? How have you had to adjust — and to lead your congregation to adjust? Where do you sense denominational life is going in the near future for Baptists?**

JC: There have been two major shifts in denominational life during my years as a minister.

The first shift has to do with programs and denominational staff. In the past the denomination would pass down to the local church the programs that would help the church to grow.

These programs would deal with subjects such as stewardship, evangelism and education. The denominational staff would then serve as consultants to come to the local church or association to teach these programs.

The shift has been from providing program material for the church to the denominational staff helping each local church to clarify its own identity and then to strategize ways of achieving its individual mission and future. The denomination may point the church to resources to help it accomplish this or to network with other churches that have similar identities and needs.

The second shift is away from ownership and control to partnership and collaboration. In the future, denominations will probably own and control less, but will partner with other organizations and agencies to collaborate how best together they can build the Kingdom of God.

The adjustment I was beginning to have to make, before my retirement 13 years ago, was to look for community groups and national organizations with which our church could partner to live out the gospel. **BT**

—Jack Causey also serves on the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today*.

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# The Lighter Side

By Brett Younger

## Easter Extras

When I was growing up, Christmas ranked ahead of Easter in almost every category. You never have to guess the date for Christmas. Easter keeps moving around, though pinning it down is simple enough I suppose. Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox — as I am sure you do not need me to tell you.

Presents that were primarily hard-boiled eggs did not help Easter's ranking. My church was against egg hunts for theological reasons that were never explained. My mother, not usually a subversive, once came home a few days before Easter with a PAAS egg-dyeing kit in a brown paper bag. We would have been no less shocked if she had bought a bottle of whiskey.

We waited until my father was gone to fill six coffee cups with colors not found on an egg in nature. The magic crayon made it possible to declare our faith decoratively: "Happy Easter!" "He is risen!" "Jesus #1!"

We surreptitiously hid eggs in our backyard and repeatedly around the living room. We found the last egg behind the couch several weeks after the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox.

I received a Cadbury chocolate bunny every year from my grandmother. It looked substantial but was as hollow as an April Fools' joke. Grandma shopped for bargains.

I usually got a new white dress shirt. Dressing like extras on *Downton Abbey* was part of the ritual. While I do not want to seem ungrateful, especially since I will in all likelihood be wearing a new white shirt on March 31, there are not many ways to play with a dress shirt.

Most second-grade Sunday school students today assume that somewhere in the Bible there is the story of a long-eared, cotton-tailed bunny named Peter meeting Mary Magdalene in the garden. The rabbit offers Mary painted eggs, yellow marshmallow chicks in gardening hats and a basket of scrumptious



Easter goodies. Mary, understandably confused, "fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized her. She said nothing to anyone because she had no idea why a rabbit would be giving away eggs."

Scholars without serious subjects to study suggest the Easter bunny can be traced to Germany in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Pagan festivals celebrated the Teutonic goddess of fertility, Eostra, whose symbol was the rabbit, at the spring equinox. These feasts resembled youth lock-ins more than Easter at First Baptist Church.

Easter eggs showed up in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Roman Catholicism arrived in Germany. Christians wanted a more suitable symbol of new life than rabbits — which seem vaguely disreputable. Bugs Bunny, Br'er Rabbit and Roger Rabbit all have a shady side.

The first story about a rabbit laying eggs and hiding them in a garden was published in 1680 and did not make anyone forget Shakespeare. When German immigrants settled in Pennsylvania in the 1700s, they brought the tradition of making nests for rabbits to lay their eggs. (This is according to the University of Florida's Center for Children; they may be making things up.)

The church has been trying to spice up

Easter for two thousand years. Subversive mothers and German immigrants worry that Easter is coming off second best. Ministers can end up overwhelmed by Easter's extras proclaiming "Christ is risen" in a weary voice. When the message should be most joyous, ministers often depend on the organ, choir, band, flowers, candles and women in hats to nudge the congregation to joy. But the organist, choir, band and congregation may be letting their own eggs, chocolate bunnies, new clothes and spring allergies get in the way.

We need to remember how it all started. Mary rushed to the cemetery before sunrise, looking like Anne Hathaway in *Les Misérables* just after she gave up on the dream she dreamed. According to John's version of the story, Mary did not have anything with her — no perfume to anoint the body or flowers for the grave.

She hears her name — no trumpets, no choir, no cathedral bells — just "Mary." The voice she hears in the cemetery is the same voice that invited Mary to believe in the first place, the voice that taught the multitudes, the voice that comforted the disciples on the stormy sea, the voice that spoke peace into Mary's soul.

Maybe we should consider a new tradition: coming to Easter empty-handed, content to listen for Christ calling our name. **BT**



# Having it ‘My Way’

By John Pierce

Some people have accused me of beginning every day by participating in a coffee ritual at the nearest Panera Bread Company. That’s a barefaced lie, of course. They are closed on Christmas Day.

Early morning hours accompanied by hazelnut coffee are the makings of productivity. The day is new, and the mind is refreshed.

The coffee shop provides just enough activity without distracting (usually) from the tasks at hand. And observing human behavior there (uh, here) sometimes gets worked into my writings.

For example, the coffee station reveals that taste is highly individualized. Panera affirms such personalization on a sign above the stash of sweeteners and containers of dairy options: “Cup it. Stir it. Mix it. Sip it. Enjoy coffee the way YOU like it.”

For some customers, it should also say: “Don’t take forever. This is not a chemistry

experiment.”

We regulars who knock down the doors at 6:30, however, have created dance-like moves that allow for more than one of us to fill our cups with the right mixture of coffee and crème (and sugar or another sweetener for those who like to ruin a good cup of coffee in that way).

We do-si-do around each other, since not everyone knows that crème goes in the cup before the coffee to avoid stirring — and so the guilt-ridden can add a little decaf to each refill.

So here are the conclusions I have presented so far:

Mornings are the best time to work — because that’s the time of day I find most productive.

Sugar or other sweeteners ruin a cup of coffee — because I don’t like sweetened coffee.

Crème should go in the cup ahead of the coffee — because that is my way of doing it.

Selections from recent blogs  
at [baptiststoday.org](http://baptiststoday.org)

If everybody just did everything like I do it, there would be no problems.

Such an attitude might work well for hermits. But for those who live in community (families, churches, larger society) it is that which makes for a holy — or holier-than-thou — mess.

Sinatra may have been the best, but he was not the lone voice belting out “My Way.”

It seems that many set up their own ways of viewing and doing things — from politics to work habits to worship styles to coffee taste — as the standards for all others.

However, a sign of maturity is our ability and willingness to separate our personal preferences from what we declare to be the only valid perspective for all persons.

In fact, our families, churches and other communities are enriched when the distinctions between “my way” and “the only way” are clarified and even celebrated.

(But the crème does go in first.) **BT**



## Apologizing to Rosa

By Tony W. Cartledge

While in Washington D.C. for a meeting of the Baptist World Alliance’s executive committee, I made a brief pilgrimage to the U.S. Capitol — not to convince Congress to act like adults and compromise for the good of the country, but to apologize to Rosa Parks.

A nine-foot bronze statue (counting the pedestal) of Parks was unveiled in Statuary Hall on Feb. 27, the first full-size statue commissioned by Congress since 1873.

I wanted to apologize because, when I was a boy, I thought she was uppity. I grew up among a prejudiced people and didn’t know any other way to be. Neither school nor church encouraged me to think otherwise.

A small handful of black students were first allowed to attend the school I attended with all the other white kids

when I entered the ninth grade, and we were not kind to them. That’s actually quite an understatement.

Ten years later, at my class’s 10-year reunion, I apologized to those brave souls — but didn’t see any of my other white classmates speak to them all evening. They haven’t been back to any of the other reunions.

The same residual guilt that had me apologizing to my courageous, pioneering classmates drew me to the Capitol so I could stand before the statue of a daring, trailblazing lady who had the courage to stand for what is right, even if she had to sit down to do it.

Rosa Parks is just one of so many people whose vision, sense of justice, and fiery valor make them heroes not only to the people they fought for but also for those of us who needed a grown-up wake-up call in order to appreciate them.

Well done, Rosa. **BT**

# Soundtracks of life

Songwriters share craft, faith experiences

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — On a breezy Saturday morning, 15 songwriters gathered at Vestavia Hills Baptist Church here to play and sing their songs for someone they knew would give them helpful feedback. Accomplished songwriter Pat Terry nodded in encouragement as the melodies filled the room.

**D**onita Gwyn Newman's original tune ended with the words: "Don't miss the beautiful..." She explained that she wrote the song with her granddaughter in mind.

"It feels real," said Terry with a smile and a nod. "You wrote something you care about, and you can hear it in the lyrics."

"Pat is very good at giving great nuggets to take away," says Newman. "Last time I attended a songwriting workshop with him, I went home that night and was able to work on a song right away with what I had learned."

Newman went on to explain that it really isn't hard to sit in a room and listen to someone critique your music if you want to improve.

"I truly want to hear what someone

has to say ... someone with credibility," she explained. "I'd prefer for someone to tell me the truth rather than make me feel good if it will help me become a better writer."

However, being the one giving the critique is not easy, said Terry.

"I want to be helpful, and I wish there was time to sit down one-on-one with some of them because they are so talented."

## SEEKING SUCCESS

Most of those who gathered for the workshop don't live off of their songwriting.

"I'm a lawyer, but don't tell anybody," said Dean McConatha with a laugh.

For this session he brought his older Martin guitar covered with autographs written in black Sharpie marker.

"The first time I played the Bluebird Café, I asked everyone who performed that night to sign my guitar," said McConatha. "Now, I only take it when I know I'm going to see someone I really respect."

Before he leaves, he asks Pat Terry to sign his guitar.

The songwriters traveled from various parts of Alabama — Sylacauga, Tuscaloosa and Huntsville. Others drove over from Mississippi.

The hope for musical success was thick

in the room: farmers, teachers, lawyers and preachers, all with a desire that someone might hear their songs and it will mean something to them.

Terry's songwriting success is an inspiration to them. In the 1970s he traveled widely with the Pat Terry Group, singing his own version of Christian music, and then performed solo in the 1980s.

"It was all about Jesus for me," said Terry. "I started writing songs because the Christian songs at the time didn't speak for me."

He filled concert halls, stadiums and churches performing the songs that shared his faith journey.

Later he stopped performing but continued writing songs on his own and with other successful songwriters in Nashville for popular artists such as Travis Tritt, Tanya Tucker, the Oak Ridge Boys, Kenny Chesney and B.J. Thomas. That's why his encouragement matters to the handful of songwriters gathered in a church classroom with their own journeys to share.

## STORIES TO TELL

Like Newman, whose song was inspired by hopes for her granddaughter, many of the writers share stories about their own lives.

"It's about paying attention to your experience," Pat assured them.

Gary Furr, pastor of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church and a songwriter, mentioned the power of people's stories.

"In my profession, I've heard so many life stories — the heartbreak and the joys."

"Preachers and bartenders..." someone interrupts as the room breaks into loud laughter.

Furr and Terry then shared about songwriters who tell their stories through music and the many listeners who resonate deeply with the stories revealed in lyrics and chords.

"Songs really do become a part of people's lives," said Terry. "Most people have a soundtrack of their lives made up of the songs which remind them of their own journey."

"So often the truth I meet in a person's story doesn't fit into their religious box," Furr added. "But somehow, there is still hope."

That's why people are hungry for good storytelling said Terry. "If you get people to embrace the artistry of the song, that's a spiritual experience right there." **BT**



Dean McConatha (right) asks Pat Terry, who co-wrote Travis Tritt's first number one record, *Help Me Hold On*, as well as hits for other artists, to add his signature to a classic Martin guitar that contains the names of other successful songwriters.



# ‘Renewed attention to God’

E. Glenn Hinson calls Baptists to recover contemplative tradition

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s Missional Congregations Initiative has sponsored the publication of a new book, *Baptist Spirituality: A Call for Renewed Attentiveness to God*, by E. Glenn Hinson. A long-time professor and writer, Hinson is well known for his groundbreaking work among Baptists in the area of spiritual formation.

This book, published by Nurturing Faith, an imprint of *Baptists Today*, brings together a series of lectures Hinson gave last year.

“His words will bring to the reader equal measures of illumination, challenge and affirmation,” said Bo Prosser, the Fellowship’s coordinator for missional congregations, who planned the lectures in partnership with Upper Room.

The central thesis of the lectures and therefore the book, said Hinson, is that Baptists should recover and teach the



contemplative tradition out of which the movement arose in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

His concern, especially for modern Baptists in America, is the ongoing reshaping of spirituality and worship

“in ways whereby God ends up as the one we expect to serve our programs and whims rather than the one we serve.”

Hinson credits Thomas Merton, whom

he first met at the Abbey of Gethsemani more than a half century ago, with sharing great insights into the contemplative life.

A Bible scholar and church historian with more than 30 published books, Hinson describes the writings in this book as a distillation of his many years of “reflection on the spirituality of Baptists within the context of Christian spirituality as it has developed through the ages.”

He points often-distracted and overly busy Baptists to a future rooted in the traditions of authentic spiritual disciplines and practices. He urges a refocusing on God and the resulting changes in congregational emphasis.

“Above all, we Baptists should seek to make our churches schools of love that will offer to the world something it doesn’t already have more of than it needs.” **BT**

## AN EXCERPT FROM BAPTIST SPIRITUALITY BY E. GLENN HINSON

In spirituality, Baptists have changed a lot in these four centuries. They have evolved from the contemplative approach they inherited from their medieval forebears to a pragmatic one in which God is the forgotten one.

They have become more interested in telling God what to do than in listening to what God is telling them. Attentiveness to God is, I think, what spirituality is all about. It is the bottom line.

To define the “crisis” in Baptist spirituality today, or Christian spirituality in general, I would say that inattentiveness to God is the same fault believers have suffered from since the first humans emerged on earth, but now it is magnified in the culture we have been creating for ourselves. It is the magnification that raises our situation to crisis level...

Through the centuries homo sapiens have found ways to cope with the diminishment of attentiveness to God. They have retreated, drawn back, to escape from

the press and struggle of everyday existence. They have spent time in solitude and silence.

Solitude gives room for the senses to recover their homing instinct. As noise and over-exposure to light desensitize, so solitude and silence resensitize.

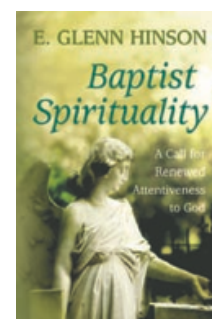
Sadly, the more dependent our culture becomes on the pseudo-nature of technology, the less it permits or encourages us to take time for solitude and silence in nature that might allow our sensors to recover from the bombardment they endure day after day and hour after hour.

There is no question that busyness and distractedness pose massive challenges for spirituality in today’s world. There is something more subtle and sinister, however, that has intruded recently—a phenomenon that people of my generation did not confront as it is now impacting the current generation of seekers after mature faith.

You and I are participants in a massive revolution in the way we humans

appropriate and transmit knowledge and relate to the world around us. This revolution in many ways reverses the one that took place at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of a great technological revolution: Gutenberg’s invention of movable type. **BT**

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# Good *timing*



## Passport camp, father-son mission connect in Liberia

**M**ONROVIA, Liberia — Georgia pastor Michael Helms and his son, John, a former Marine who attends the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, made a return visit to Liberia late last year to prepare for an upcoming home-building project. The timing of their travel allowed for participation in Passport Liberia youth camp.

“John and I went to Liberia to test soil for the 714-Earth Block Press,” said Michael, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jefferson, Ga., whose involvement in earth-block house building was featured in the February 2012 issue of *Baptists Today*.

Michael has a close relationship with the Ricks Institute in Liberia and its principal Olu Menjay. In 2007 he and John, along with brother Ryan, made a trip to help restore water to the Ricks campus.

### YOUTH CAMP

On this latest trip, Michael and John happened to be at the Baptist-related boarding school at the same time the Passport Liberia youth camp was underway. This was the third time the youth camping ministry based in Birmingham, Ala., had sponsored a camp

experience on the Ricks campus.

Liberian James Blay, a Passport veteran and recent graduate of Mercer University, enlisted staff and directed the camp.

“He carried his Passport experience and passion for experiential learning back to his home country and poured it into a team of leaders,” said Michael, “which he assembled from the Ricks community and from the Liberia Baptist Youth Fellowship.”

Passport president David Burroughs, whose experienced organization takes training and preparation seriously, noted that the Liberian camp staff faced an unprecedented obstacle: The crate containing all of the supplies did not arrive in time.

“So James and his team had to do what Liberians have been doing since the end of their civil war,” said Burroughs. “They got resourceful and figured it out with no supplies.”

### FAITH EXPERIENCES

Writing afterward to Passport supporters, Blay described the “look of anxiousness and disappointment” when discovering and sharing with other camp leaders that the supplies would not arrive in time. But then Blay,

coordinator of servant leadership at Ricks, shared what unfolded.

“By the grace of God, we were able to dig deep and offer a meaningful week of camp for 134 campers from all over Liberia,” he reported. “We went ahead and taught Bible study, led games, mission sites, parties and worship. It was a good week of camp.”

John Helms spoke on the second night of camp about how his faith had grown during service in the Marines. He and his dad enjoyed the unexpected pleasure of participating in the camp experience.

“Worship at camp concluded in a most unique way,” said Michael, who spoke on the last night of camp. “The youth had been studying about servant leadership throughout the week, and the sermon on the final night challenged the youth to go out into the world and be servant leaders.”

Various biblical examples from throughout the Old and New Testaments were given of servant leadership, he said. Then the focus turned to Jesus as the supreme example of a servant as seen in his washing the disciples’ feet.

Then that story came to life in Liberia. “We concluded with an invitation



— asking the campers who wanted to enter a life of servant leadership to come forward and have their feet washed as a symbol of their commitment,” said Michael. “John and I joined several staffers as feet washers, and a large number of campers came forward for one of the most unique and moving invitations I’ve ever experienced.”

## LESSONS LEARNED

That experience, Michael said, caused him to wonder how the first disciples must have felt as Jesus washed their feet. “One thing I know: it was an experience they never forgot.”

Then he added: “I have to believe the campers will never forget having their feet washed at camp, and I have to hope they will always remember why it was done. Liberia needs them to go and do likewise.”

One camper, Adrian Andrews, told Michael that the “camp was a reminder to him that Christ did not come to be served but to serve.” To build community between conflicting factions, he said, will require modeling Jesus’ example of being a servant.

While the campers learned about servant leadership, the camp staff learned about flexibility, adaptation and trusting the Spirit rather than their own plans. **BT**

## LESSONS FROM CAMP

Johnnette Jallah, a teenager from Lofa County, Liberia, said her favorite thing about Passport Camp Liberia was making new friends. For many of the campers, it was a rare and enjoyable experience to travel to Ricks Institute, a boarding school located 16 miles outside of Monrovia.

Staffed by Liberians, this unique Passport camp gave the youth a chance to grow in faith by focusing on “Life Together,” a theme built on Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book by that title. They also enjoyed ushering in the New Year together.

In a country where those who committed crimes against their neighbors have been assimilated back into the general population, community building in Liberia is especially challenging.

Faliku S. Dukuly, a Ricks graduate and student at United Methodist University in Monrovia who was one of the camp staffers, said the biggest challenge of building community “is to extend God’s love to your neighbors without any limitation, especially to those who are your enemies.”

Camp director James Blay quoted Bonhoeffer as saying, “God will not allow us



John Helms, a college student and former Marine, washes the feet of a participant in Passport Liberia on the closing night of camp. Photos by Michael Helms.

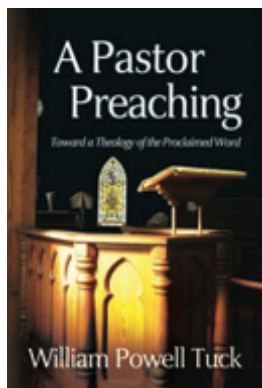
to live in a dream world...” He added that participants in Passport Liberia discovered the real world of community and service — that requires commitment and hard work.

“I can say with confidence that most campers left with a new attitude towards community and service to others,” said Blay. **BT**

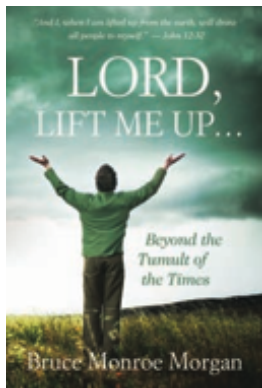
For more on Passport camps for youth and children, visit [passportcamps.org](http://passportcamps.org).

# New releases

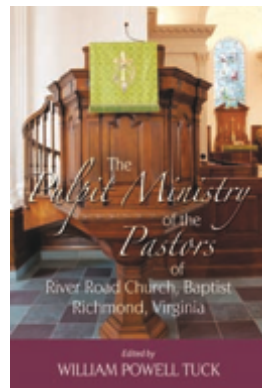
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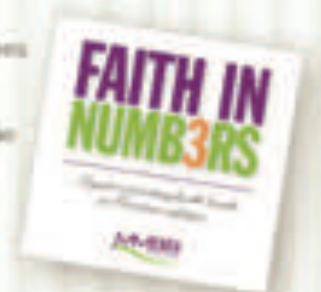
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