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Cover photo by John Pierce. Baptist observances of Holy Week are growing. **Story on page 4**

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The significance of Holy Week

Growing attention given to the dark days leading to Easter

Some Baptists have never heard of Maundy Thursday — while others have discovered in more recent years the significance of this observance of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples as well as other Holy Week services.

“When I first became a minister, Holy week consisted of kids waving palms on Palm Sunday, and then Easter Sunday...,” said Tim Hobbs, now pastor of Community Baptist Church in Henderson, Ky. “It was as if nothing else happened to Jesus during that last week of his life.”

Pastor Lee Canipe of First Baptist Church of Murfreesboro, N.C., however, has never been a part of a congregation that did not give rapt attention to the unfolding of Jesus' betrayal, arrest and crucifixion leading up to Easter.

“Maybe because of the kind of churches

I served early in my ministry, Holy Week has always been a given,” he said. “In other words, I've never served a church that didn't at least observe Maundy Thursday.”

EMPTY TOMB

Easter Sunday has always been the high point for worshipping congregations of all shapes and sizes. Resurrection is that grand celebration that brings eternal hope — but often with little or no attention to the significant events in Jesus' life that put him on a cross.

Barry Howard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla., said he grew up in a rural area and had no concept of Holy Week until entering college. But Easter received prime treatment.

“For many years my home church, a Pentecost-style Missionary Baptist Church, held an Easter sunrise service, literally at sunrise,” he recalled. “We would arrive between 4:30 and 5:00 a.m. and wait for the sun to come up to begin singing.”

Following the music, the pastor would preach an enthusiastic “empty tomb” sermon, he said.

“Then we would go home for breakfast and return to church for Sunday school at 9:45 and Easter worship at 11,” he said. “The usual Easter sermon began in the upper room, and the narrative reached a crescendo with the Resurrection.”

Jim Thomason, pastor of First Baptist Church of Anderson, S.C., recalled no emphasis on Holy Week when growing up in a Baptist church, nor while serving congregations as a music minister during his college and seminary years.

“I made sure the music I selected for the services reflected the seasons of the church year, but there were no special services other than on Easter Sunday, complete with sunrise services.”

DARKNESS TO LIGHT

That changed for Thomason, he said, upon assuming the pastorate of Rosalind Hills Baptist Church in Roanoke, Va., where a Maundy Thursday Communion service was held each year during Holy Week.

“That soon became one of the most meaningful services of the year for me,” said Thomason, “and I continue to hear this from the people I serve now at First Baptist Church of Anderson, S.C.”

He also leads a Tenebrae service that begins with the ancient words, *Tenebrae Factae Sunt* — “all is darkness.” A growing number of Baptist churches have added this service to Holy Week, often on Good Friday though sometimes on Maundy Thursday, to recall the darkness of Christ's death on the cross.

Thomason said the Holy Week services prepare the congregation to more fully embrace and celebrate the victory of Easter.

“Everything moves from darkness to light, from somber to celebratory,” he said. “The contrast is powerful.”



SEASONS OF FAITH

Advent is often the first season of the Church Year to be introduced within Baptist congregations that previously focused on Christmas and Easter only. But if the season of Advent paves the way for Christmas, then wouldn't the Lenten journey be good preparation for Holy Week and Easter?

"Yes," said pastor Keith Herron of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City. "Once a church values Advent and Holy Week, the other seasons of the Church Year begin to make sense and can be valued by Baptists."

Since the seasons follow the life of Christ, he said, an emphasis on occasions such as Holy Week naturally focuses attention on following Christ more faithfully.

"I think the church values its Christian heritage over the centuries as it reflects on the meaning of Jesus' life and ministry," Herron said. "When one follows the footsteps of Jesus as the old hymn suggests, we experience more deeply and see these seasons as sacred stories that illuminate our own lives."

WILDERNESS TRAINING

The 40-day season of Lent leads to Holy Week and then Easter — following Christ's life from the wilderness to Resurrection.

Lee Canipe sees value in Christians sharing that continuous journey to more fully experience the significance of Christ's salvific work.

"During Lent we put a cross out on the lawn in front of the church, with a purple cloth draped over the arms," he said. "On Good Friday we replace the purple cloth with a black one, to symbolize Jesus' death."

That same cross gets him up early on Easter morning.

"On Easter I'll set my alarm for early — like 5:30 or so — and walk up to the church in the dark with the white cloth," he said. "Before anyone is out on the street, before the sun has started to rise, even before the rooster down the street crows, I'll take off the black cloth and replace it with the white one announcing the resurrection."

"That moment every Easter Sunday morning is one of my very favorite things I get to do as a pastor," he added. "I feel like I'm the first person in Murfreesboro who gets to find out that Christ is risen."

LEARNING CURVES

"Pretty much across the board, I have found that whenever I want to introduce a new

element to worship — or an entirely new service like Maundy Thursday or Ash Wednesday — the best place to start is with Scripture," said Canipe. "Not only do I think it's theologically responsible — I mean, if there's no warrant for something in the Bible, then I'm not sure we need to be doing it in worship — but it also helps to reassure skeptics who worry we're going off the Baptist rails."

"Even the most suspicious Baptist will find it hard to argue with God's Word (though many do try)," he added. "Plus, when we can tie worship practice to Scripture, it gives people another example of how the Bible is not just an old book of rules ... but the means by which a holy, living God is working to shape us into his image."

Stephen Cook, now pastor of Second Baptist Church in Memphis, was serving on a church staff years ago in which the congregation put strong emphases on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, but not on the days in between.

"We were in a long pastoral interim and the staff decided that we would be creative during that time and take advantage of the opportunity to introduce some new elements to our worship life," he recalled. "We wanted to make sure that people didn't leave from the Palm Sunday parade and come to the Easter celebration without going through a graveyard."

Midday worship with Communion was held each day of Holy Week.

"In other places I have been fortunate to participate in ecumenical daily services among a group of churches," he said.

His congregation in Memphis pays particular attention to Palm Sunday and the Passion elements of the day, he said. And they host a Maundy Thursday service and a noontime Good Friday observance with readings, prayers and musical reflections for the day.

GOOD COMMUNICATION

Tommy McDearis, pastor of Blacksburg Baptist Church in Virginia, recalled introducing a Maundy Thursday service in 1981 at historic Cane Creek Baptist Church near Hillsborough, N.C., a pastorate he assumed as a seminarian.

"I explained it by discussing Jesus' mandate that we celebrate the Lord's Supper, and then I walked the church through the first Lord's Supper by talking about the Seder meal," he said. "I was shocked at how well it was received. In fact, the next year I had people ask if we were going to celebrate 'that special Lord's Supper service.'"

Seasoned pastoral leaders warn that introducing unfamiliar worship practices and terminology should be done with care. Otherwise, confusion and even feelings of exclusion might result.

Brett Younger, associate professor of preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta, said that after leading an Ash Wednesday service for the first time in a church he served as pastor, a member tearfully told him how much she was going to miss Bible study.

"When I explained that we would have Bible study the next Wednesday she was suddenly fine," he said. "She did not mind us doing the new thing, but did not want to lose the old thing."

Good communication goes a long way in the acceptance of change, he added.

"When we introduce new, old ways to worship, we need to do so pastorally and with good explanations," said Younger. "No one needs to feel excluded as we explore the possibilities together."

TRIAL AND ERROR

Introducing some worship elements may not come easy for the congregation — or the minister.

Jim Somerville, now pastor of First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., recalled preparing for an Ash Wednesday service for the first time. Most churches either burn palms from the previous year or buy ashes from a church resources provider.

Somerville said he thought burning newspaper would be just fine for his student pastorate in New Castle, Ky.

"The ash I ended up with was flaky, not powdery ...," he recalled. "I dipped my thumb into that, and made a flaky sign of the cross on my reluctant parishioners' foreheads, telling them, 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.'"

"One of them ended up with a ghostly notice on his forehead that green beans were selling for 39 cents a can at our local grocery store," said Somerville. "How's that for a reminder of mortality?"

Stephen Cook's early attempt at leading an Ash Wednesday service for youth at Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem years ago drew much attention.

"I hatched this brilliant plan that the youth would write their confessions on index cards, and then we would burn the confessions for ashes," he recalled.



The cards were placed in a bucket and set on fire — a larger fire than Cook expected.

“Then I managed to kick the bucket over,” he said. “I instinctively, but not very brightly, picked the bucket up by the handle.”

That’s when his well-starched shirt caught fire. Smoke filled the room. The youth and children’s wing was vacated and choir members, who smelled the smoke, arrived with fire extinguishers.

Years later, he said, those present would quote a seventh-grade girl who exclaimed: “O Jesus. Stephen, you’re on fire!”

The next year he invited a Benedictine monk to come explain Ash Wednesday to the youth.

PERSONAL TOUCH

Often the desire to introduce a new worship experience comes from the spiritual impact such a service has made on the minister’s own life.

As a divinity school student, Lee Canipe visited his fiancée in Savannah, Ga. It was Holy Week and, since she was working, he attended a noon service on Good Friday.

“The service was simple — no singing, a very brief homily, a few prayers, readings from the biblical account of the crucifixion and burial,” he recalled. “The story itself, though, is so powerful that you really don’t need to add anything to it.”

But outside the church he experienced something very different.

“I left the service with a heavy, heavy heart — and stepped out into a glorious, Savannah spring afternoon, with people bustling around on their lunch hour, laughing, enjoying the sunshine,” he said. “I remember thinking: How can they be so happy when

Jesus has just died? Don’t they know what’s happened? Don’t they care?”

“The contrast was just so sharp,” he added. “And then it struck me that, for just about everyone else in Jerusalem on the day that Jesus died, it was just another business-as-usual Friday. Only the people who loved Jesus really cared — or even noticed — that something bad had happened. It was one of those a-ha moments for me that wouldn’t have been possible without that Good Friday worship.”

UNEXPECTED LESSONS

Sometimes the significance of Holy Week comes in response to what happens rather than what anyone has planned.

Barry Howard of Pensacola was serving as pastor of First Baptist Church Williams in Jacksonville, Ala., when a Palm Sunday tornado hit the area in 1994. Goshen United Methodist Church was the hardest hit of five nearby churches struck during morning worship.

“The tornado lifted the roof and then released it,” he said. “As the ceiling came crashing down on the congregation, many were injured and 20 lives were lost — including six children.”

In the aftermath, many were questioning how God could have allowed such a tragedy to be inflicted on a worshipping congregation, recalled Howard.

“One of the wiser things I heard went something like this: ‘It’s like Holy Week. You move from the celebration of Palm Sunday to the tragic injustice of it all. But then comes Easter. We couldn’t face this week, if we didn’t believe that our Easter is coming.’”

While that experience is seared in his

mind, what leads to Easter always deserves attention, he said.

“I think we need to sense the pain of the betrayal, the agony of the cross, and the despair of the tomb, before we can truly feel the joy of the Resurrection.”

Four years ago, at Blacksburg Baptist Church, pastor Tommy McDearis led a Good Friday service that emphasized the Lord’s Supper as being Jesus’ ultimate vote of confidence in his disciples.

Following Communion by intinction, each person coming forward was given a stone to drop at the cross to symbolize the sin that Jesus had already forgiven. A young man, who was new to the faith, took Communion and then dropped the stone — but returned to the darkened sanctuary.

“He circled back around to the back of the long line,” McDearis recalled. “When he got back to the table, he picked up three more stones and he went back to the cross and dropped them.”

After the service, the pastor asked him why.

“He said, ‘I’ve had four really, really bad choices that have haunted me since college that I never thought were forgivable. Tonight I realized for the first time that God forgave me the day of the cross, and he had believed in me since the cross, and my responsibility was to accept that fact and then to leave the guilt behind. So I decided it was time to lay all four of those burdens down so I could leave here a free man.’”

SIGNIFICANCE SHARED

Bob Browning, pastor of First Baptist Church of Frankfort, Ky., said his own spiritual life has been enhanced by the Lenten journey and Holy Week observances that were not part of his early years.

“I do not remember seeing a crown of thorns or a towel and pitcher of water on a Communion table. There was never a cross in our sanctuary draped in black to symbolize the death of Christ or one adorned in white to commemorate his resurrection. There were no banners depicting the Stations of the Cross, and no mention of the Via Dolorosa. If the local ministerial association sponsored ecumenical Holy Week luncheons, I was completely unaware of them.”

All of those are a part of Holy Week for Browning now, he said, and have been for more than 20 years.

“I cannot imagine the celebration of Easter without the six-week period of

preparation we refer to as Lent, culminating in Holy Week,” he said. “The absence of this opportunity to reflect upon Christ’s journey toward Jerusalem and make sacrifices to identify with Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice on the cross would reduce Easter to nothing more than a celebration of spring.”

Browning and his ministerial colleagues at Smoke Rise Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, Ga., where he previously served, would use the church newsletter and other communications to explain new ways of worshipping.

Greg DeLoach, pastor of First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., said Holy Week affords the time to focus on the call to deny self, pick up the cross and follow Jesus. Last year he gave each congregant a wooden cross from Bethlehem to start the Lenten journey. Then each day he posted a different image of the cross on his blog. At the end of the season, the images were compiled into a booklet.

“In order to get to the joy of an empty tomb,” he said, “the cross must be engaged.”

Mike Smith, pastor of Central Baptist Church of Fountain City in Knoxville, Tenn., said that paying attention to Holy Week connects Christians, through their imaginations, to the scriptural story.

“We become mentally and emotionally engaged, so that we feel the flow and ebb of the week,” he said. “By the time we get to Easter, we’re more than ready for and convinced of our need for the good news of the Resurrection.”

Browning added that the observance of Holy Week gives him a clearer image of Jesus’ dedication, courage, compassion and strength.

“It also pulls back the curtain and lets me see what evil is capable of doing when it is exposed and challenged,” he said. “On the other hand, it reminds me that God will have the final word in our lives, not evil, and that word will be good.”

“Evil, even in its rawest and most violent form, cannot overcome the power of love and the faithfulness of a merciful and righteous God,” he added. “The empty tomb reveals this... Easter encourages me to follow in his footsteps in the pursuit of justice and peace, knowing God will always be at my side, and my efforts will not be in vain.”

HUNGER AND THIRST

Les Hollon, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, said he approached Holy Week observances with a “cautious openness.”

“Cautious because some Baptists feared taking on a Catholic practice,” he explained. “Openness because people hungered for something more than a typical bookend approach to the hosannas of Palm Sunday and the hallelujahs of Easter.”

Once explained biblically, most people were open to a seven-day Holy Week.

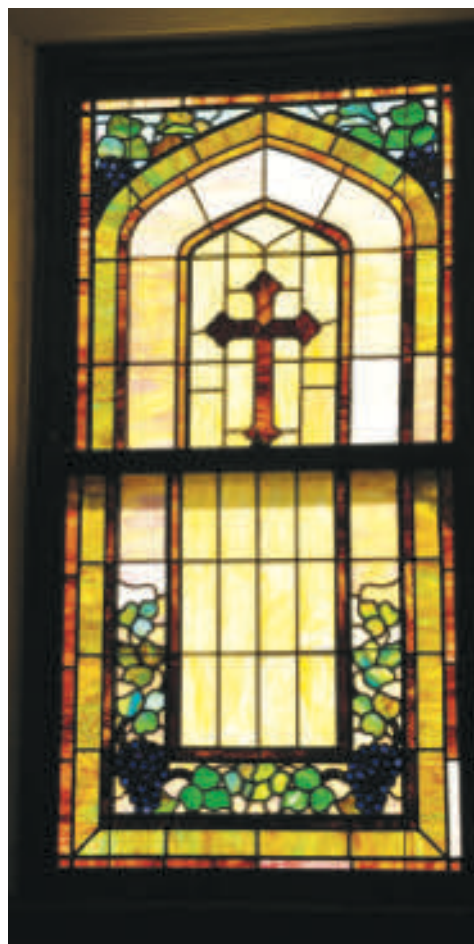
During a seminary pastorate he introduced Maundy Thursday as a “re-experience of the Last Supper.” He explained that Maundy is a Latin term (*mandatum*) for the New Commandment that Jesus taught in John 13:34-35.

“The initial experience was well received by most worshipers,” he said. “They were glad to have a set-apart time to reflect on Christ’s love and what it means to love others as he has loved them.”

Such observances can meet spiritual needs, he said.

“We thirst for meaning and to know our place in the larger scheme of life,” said Hollon. “So a pathway to Easter, which is how I explain Lent, was and is worth the effort.”

His congregation has written devotionals for a “Preparing for Easter” booklet that is distributed for the Lenten season. And Hollon said an intentional sacrifice (fasting) can heighten a person’s awareness of God.



“That ‘sacrifice’ may be to talk less, not eat a particular food, spend less time watching television or on the computer,” he said. “And then to use that time and money in a spiritual practice, such as praying, reading the Bible, serving the poor, singing hymns, journaling, reaching out to people with whom we have not been connected.”

By traveling through Lent and experiencing Holy Week, he said, “we find that God has been shaping us along the way.”

Hollon recalled a couple, headed for divorce, coming to him for counseling.

“I challenged them not to make a decision until after Easter and to invest their efforts between now and then in the experiment of seeing if God could resurrect their marriage,” he recalled. “They used Ash Wednesday as a time to confess their sins and to receive forgiveness. They started new practices in their marriage as part of Lent. They worked hard at counseling, where their hurts were identified and their anger addressed. Self-defeating habits in their marriage needed to end, be buried, and put behind them so a new and wiser love could be born.”

“During the response time on Easter Sunday, they came forward as a couple to celebrate how God had changed them from the inside out,” said Hollon. “Their marriage was resurrected.”

WHAT’S NEXT?

Daniel Glaze, pastor of First Baptist Church of Ahoskie, N.C., said that Holy Week is an exhausting time for ministers — which can have significance as well.

“I feel physically and emotionally drained as I journey through Holy Week,” he said. “While I am in no way attempting to compare my physical weariness with the agony Jesus endured, my own tiredness echoes the movement of the week.”

Since Christians know how the story ends, it’s tempting to jump ahead to resurrection, he said, “without understanding how we got there.” But the wait is worth it.

“One Good Friday service, after all the candles were extinguished, the congregation sat in silence for a few moments in the sanctuary to meditate upon what was just experienced,” Glaze recalled. “One young boy, intrigued by the night’s drama, whispered loud enough for all to hear, ‘What comes next?’”

“He, like most of us, I suppose, was expectantly hopeful for what God would do next.” **BT**

quotation remarks

“People think they will stop handling snakes because someone got bit, but it’s just the opposite. It reaffirms their faith.”

—*Ralph Hood, a professor of psychology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, who has been studying snake handlers for decades, on mourners who left the Feb. 15 funeral for pastor Jamie Coots, killed by a snake bite, to attend a snake-handling service at Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus’ Name church in Middlesboro, Ky. (CBS News)*

“The only language the church understands is money.”

—*Maria Bozza, 69, urging fellow parishioners at Holy Family Church in Nutley, N.J., to withhold contributions to the Archdiocese of Newark after a newspaper disclosed that Archbishop John J. Myers is building a 3,000-square-foot addition costing more than \$500,000 to the expansive home where he will spend his retirement (RNS)*

“Slave-holding was that impediment to the gospel preached by Southern Baptists in the 19th century. And I believe the oppression of women is that today, and that the detrimental effects of that oppression to the witness and testimony of the Southern Baptists and other gender-hierarchist Christian groups will increasingly become a stone around their necks that they cannot bear.”

—*Greg Hahn, blogging at onacracker.wordpress.com*

“... I have to work hard at reading the Bible right. I have to see myself basically as aligned with Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Caesar. In that case, what does the Bible ask of me? Voluntary poverty? Not necessarily. But certainly the Bible calls me to deep humility — a humility demonstrated in hospitality and generosity. There’s nothing necessarily wrong with being a relatively well-off white American male, but I better be humble, hospitable, and generous!”

—*Brian Zabmd, founding pastor of Word of Life Church in St. Joseph, Mo. (brianzabmd.com)*

“I love to watch you play.”

—*Brad M. Griffin, associate director of the Fuller Youth Institute, on the only six words parents should say to their kids about sports*

“James Madison, the lead author of the United States Constitution and the fourth president of the United States who died in 1836, could not be reached for comment.”

—*Kolton Parker of the San Antonio Express-News, reporting on former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay’s assertion that God wrote the U.S. Constitution*

“Individual Christians can be agents of redemption by rejecting destructive criticism in their church and supporting their minister with their prayers, affirmation and love.”

—*Michael J. Brooks, educator and bi-vocational pastor in Mt. Olive, Ala.*

“It has been a privilege to fulfill a dream that God put in our hearts.”

—*Retired New York Yankees closer Mariano Rivera, after his foundation restored a vacant church building north of the Bronx to house a Pentecostal congregation led by his wife, Clara (Newsday)*

“Three boxes of corn dogs and a package of chicken patties were reported stolen from the Northside Church of Christ (in Jacksonville, Fla.)”

—*A March 4 report from First Coast News*

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a new publishing venture from
Baptists Today and Faithlab
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“[God] has graced my life with opportunities that I know are not of my hand or another human hand. He has shown me that it’s a scientific fact that gratitude reciprocates.”

—*Actor Matthew McConaughey, accepting his Oscar for best actor for his role in Dallas Buyer’s Club (RNS)*

“Christian schools, like Bryan, [that] repeatedly affirm a Christian mission usually give an ultimatum: sign or leave. In the world of higher education, where full-time positions are vanishing and adjuncts make up 74 percent of college faculty, this is the same as sentencing a family to poverty and homelessness or hypocrisy.”

—*Brandon G. Withrow, who studies academic freedom, on Bryan College in Dayton, Tenn., requiring faculty to affirm that Adam and Eve were historical persons from whom all humanity descended (HuffPo)*

“From my daughter’s Sunday school class this morning:

Teacher: ‘Who knows what “evangelism” is?’

Boy in class: ‘That’s like destruction of property, right?’

Teacher: ‘Ummm, no. That’s vandalism.’

Then again, I’ve met some folks who do evangelism a lot like vandalism. Out of the mouths of babes ...”

—*Facebook posting by Don Durham, founder of Healing Springs Acres in North Carolina*

There is no such thing as selfish Christianity

There is a remarkably bad trend in much of American Christianity: a mission to serve the needs and wishes of American Christianity. Too often our causes are, well, *our* causes.

It would be of great benefit to examine how much time and how many resources are spent on protecting our own interests or seeking to get what we desire. (By the way, how we spend our time and resources is the true measurement of our priorities — not what we pencil in at the top of our list.)

If we are seen as always fighting for *our* rights, *our* beliefs, *our* way — should anyone be surprised when the public perception of American Christians is that they care primarily about themselves?

In some cases, recently, self-interest has been masked as “religious liberty.” Such arguments, at times, sound as petty as the 6-year-old who won’t eat broccoli because it’s against his religion.

Christianity doesn’t function well on the defensive. If the Bible in general and Jesus in particular teach us anything, it is that our focus is to be outward.

We are to worship God and serve the needs of others — not be consumed with protecting ourselves from being tainted by those who might not share our religious/political ideologies. Being overly sensitive to

guarding one’s doctrinal purity makes it hard to be as loving and affirming as Jesus.

That is not to suggest that our doctrine and disciplines are unimportant — or that our ways of living in the world have no contrast with the larger culture. But what if that contrast was better observed in terms of selflessness and concern for others rather than seeking to protect one’s own religious identity and interests?



While the Bible can be mined for a lifetime, it’s really about just two subjects: how we relate to God and how we relate to others.

While the literature may be complex at times, these larger biblical themes are rather obvious and simple. The hard part comes in getting beyond our own selves and loving God with all of our being and loving our “neighbors” who see and do life differently.

Jesus didn’t spend time in the wilderness scheming up a plan to get his own needs met. Nor did he endure the cross for self-fulfillment.

Perhaps the question to ask ourselves each time we take on a new cause or get riled by the latest battle in the culture wars is this: “If I’m honest, is this really about me?” **BT**

ANOTHER WORD FOR THE SEASON

Continual changes in the cultural and technological landscapes bring both unique challenges and fresh opportunities. So, rightly, we spend a lot of time seeking ways to be faithful in our Christian callings.

Old ways of being church get called into question; new ways are scrutinized before embraced.

In these pages each month, we seek to present both information and inspiration that help faithful Christians and congregations in their ongoing commitments to reflect both the attitudes and actions of the one whose name is claimed.

Healthy discussions and even debates, thoughtful opinions, and creative ideas all aid those of us who honestly seek to discern the best ways to be live out an ancient faith in a time and place with little resemblance to the setting of first-century Christianity.

Yet when we come to this time of the year, our focus is on wilderness, rejection, and then Resurrection. Even in a vastly different, technologically advanced era, we can resonate with the realities of fear, hurt and hope.

The cruel cross and the empty tomb still speak — if we slow down enough to listen.

We at *Baptists Today*, and our many friends, are glad to share this journey of faith with you — knowing that the route includes darkness, but ultimately leads to light and life.

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NURTURING FAITH EXPERIENCE ISRAEL

with Dr. Tony Cartledge

REVISED DATES: November 6-17, 2014

Nurturing Faith Bible Studies writer Tony Cartledge, who holds a Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies from Duke University, will lead Sunday school teachers and other interested persons on a personal tour of Israel Nov. 6-17, 2014.

Join Tony and other *Baptists Today* staff on this unique opportunity to see firsthand the places where biblical stories came to life and to gain insights into the culture and languages of this remarkable setting.

DESTINATIONS will include Megiddo and other ancient cities, the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, Capernaum, the Mount of the Beatitudes, the Golan Heights, the Jordan River, Jericho, Qumran, Masada and the Dead Sea.

In Jerusalem, view the city from the Mount of Olives, walk down the Palm Sunday Road, visit the Garden of Gethsemane, and follow the Via Dolorosa to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Then visit the City of David and slosh through Hezekiah's Tunnel, pray at the Western Wall, and walk around the Temple Mount.

In Bethlehem, visit the Church of the Nativity and Shepherd's Field — then venture through the Valley of Elah to Moreshah for an archaeological dig, bringing pottery and other finds to light for the first time in 2,000 years. Other highlights will include the Israel Museum and Israel's Holocaust memorial.

COST is \$3,800 and includes airfare (from select cities), lodging, breakfasts and dinners, and travel on a luxury motor coach for the entire trip. The group will be joined by one of Israel's most experienced and sought-after guides, Doron Heiliger.

TO RESERVE YOUR SPACE, send a deposit of \$250 per person, payable to *Baptists Today* and marked "Israel," to P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318. Include full name of each person, mailing address, email and phone numbers.

Indicate your departure city as Atlanta, Raleigh-Durham or Dallas-Ft. Worth. If from another region of the U.S., we will try to secure a closer departing city.

FULL PAYMENT will be due July 1. Any refunds due to cancellations will be based on airlines/accommodation policies.

Please be sure necessary forms of identification, including passport, are current at the time of travel. A complete itinerary will be provided closer to travel dates, but may be adjusted during the trip.

This tour requires some long days and considerable walking. If assistance is needed, please notify us in advance.

QUESTIONS? Call (478) 301-5655 or email info@baptiststoday.org



"There is such high and wide respect for the remarkable leadership that Dr. McCall has given to Baptists, and on behalf of Baptists to the larger faith community. We look forward to acknowledging those contributions and celebrating this occasion with him, his wife Marie, and the many who love them."

—JOHN PIERCE
Executive editor of *Baptists Today*

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The Judson-Rice Award was created by Baptists Today in 2001 to celebrate the contributions of early Baptist leaders Adoniram Judson, Ann Hasseltine Judson and Luther Rice, and to recognize a current Baptist leader who has demonstrated significant leadership.

NURTURING FAITH EXPERIENCE MONTANA

AUGUST 18-23, 2014

This "experimental experience" in Big Sky Country, Aug. 18-23, will be a unique retreat opportunity. While addressing key issues impacting congregational ministry today, the group also will shape a model for future events in Montana.

Sponsors include *Baptists Today*, Baptist History and Heritage Society, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina and The Pittman Center of Gardner-Webb University. Programming will make good use of the many talents within the group as well as leaders in Montana.

COST

\$1,200 (based on double occupancy) and includes:

- Ground transportation from time of airport arrival in Bozeman (Aug. 18) until airport departure from Bozeman (Aug. 23)
- Western dinner and housing in Bozeman on Monday night
- All meals from Monday dinner through Saturday breakfast
- Two-day private tour and lodging for one night in Yellowstone National Park

- Three nights lodging, meals and activities at Parade Rest Guest Ranch near West Yellowstone, Montana

LODGING

Housing at the ranch and Yellowstone Park varies. These are cabins and lodges, not the Ritz. For anyone insisting on a private room throughout the week, please add \$250.

REMINDER

- Each person is responsible for his or her own travel to and from Bozeman. Reservations should be made as soon as possible.
- Much time will be spent in the great outdoors with a variety of optional activities.

To secure a spot, please send a \$400 deposit to *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318 marked as "NF Montana." The balance (\$800) will be due June 15.

Survey finds British children and adults are biblically illiterate

(RNS) CANTERBURY, England — Three out of 10 British children have next to no understanding of the Bible and their parents aren't that knowledgeable, either.

A survey released in February by the Bible Society, founded in 1804 to spread knowledge about the Scriptures, said most boys and girls aged 8 to 15 years old did not know that Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark or Jesus' birth were rooted in the Bible.

More than a third of the 800 children surveyed did not know that David and Goliath and the story of the Good Samaritan were Bible tales.

One in 10 mistakenly thought the story about King Midas and Icarus was in the Bible. But not just children are Bible ignorant.

Nearly half of the 1,100 parents surveyed failed to identify Noah's Ark as a story from the Bible. More than one-third thought a Harry Potter plotline was or might have come from the Bible.

The Bible Society published the research to mark the launch of its "Pass It On" campaign, which aims to encourage parents to keep the Bible alive by passing its stories on to their children.

In a foreword to the report, Richard Chartres, the Anglican bishop of London, said sharing Bible stories "is as vital now as it has ever been." He added: "There is work to be done." **BT**

Survey shows Americans turning sharply favorable on gay issues

By Cathy Lynn Grossman
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — Americans' attitudes toward the lives and choices of gays and lesbians have changed radically since Massachusetts first legalized same-sex marriage a decade ago.

A new survey finds a significant shift toward tolerance across every religious, political and age group and every region of the country, said Robert P. Jones, CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute. PRRI's survey reveals the ramifications of these changes in family, church and community life.

"Only the issue of marijuana looks anything like this in terms of rapid movement in favorability," Jones said. "But with that one exception, it's unusual to see this much change in a relatively short amount of time."

Overall support for same-sex marriage jumped 21 percentage points, from 32 percent in 2003 in a Pew Research survey to 53 percent in 2013 in PRRI's survey.

During this period, gay marriage became legal in 17 states and the District of Columbia and the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act, that blocked federal recognition of legally wed gay couples.

Since 2003, the Episcopal Church and

the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America opened their doors to gay bishops and clergy, even as most other major U.S. denominations kept their teachings against homosexual behavior intact. Yet over the decade, PRRI found, the number of people who say same-sex marriage is against their religious beliefs dropped, from 62 percent to 51 percent.

Meanwhile, religious leaders' continued preaching against homosexual behavior is driving some people out the church doors, Jones said. PRRI found that people perceive three major religious groups (the Catholic Church, the

Mormon Church and evangelical Christian churches) to be "unfriendly" toward lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) people.

Among those who say they left their childhood religion and now have no religious identity, nearly one in four (24 percent) say their church's negative teachings or treatment of LGBT people was an important reason they left. That rises to 31 percent of millennials, damaging churches' ability to bring in — and keep — young adults, Jones said.

At the root of change: A personal connection to someone who is LGBT. The number of Americans who say they have a close friend or family member who is gay or lesbian rose from 22 percent in 1993 to 65 percent today. Again, millennials lead the way: 71 percent say they have a close friend or relative who is gay or lesbian. **BT**



In Jerusalem, Jews & Muslims quarrel over mosque loudspeakers

By Michele Chabin
Religion News Service

JERUSALEM — A long-standing row between the Jerusalem municipality and Muslim officials over the decibel level of prayers emanating from the city's mosques at prayer times intensified recently after reports that the city will begin monitoring for noise pollution.

While the issue isn't unique to Jerusalem, it is a particularly sensitive matter in this city, where Jews, Muslims and Christians live in close proximity; both Israelis and Palestinians claim it as their capital.

The call of the muezzin, broadcast by loudspeakers on nearly 200 minarets, can be

heard across Jerusalem's hills and valleys, especially in the middle of the night, when the rest of the city is asleep.

News that the city's municipality plans to create a task force to measure noise levels in the city's mosques angered the city's most senior Muslim official.

"Mosques in Palestine in general, and in Jerusalem in particular, have been targets of a vicious campaign by the occupation authorities," Muhammad Hussein, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, said in a statement March 2, according to the Palestinian Ma'an news agency.

Hussein accused "the occupation authorities" of trying to "efface all Arab and Palestinian landmarks in Palestine and replace

them with Jewish landmarks."

A Jerusalem spokesperson said the city has received numerous complaints about excessive noise from mosques through the years and has earmarked \$57,000 for a pilot noise-monitoring program.

Israeli media reported that mosques exceeding legally permitted noise levels will be given devices to lower the volume.

Moshe Mordechai, a resident of Armon Hanatziv, a Jewish neighborhood situated next to a couple of Arab villages in east Jerusalem, said the prayers broadcast Friday from the mosques over huge PA systems is "deafening."

"I believe in freedom of religion," Mordechai said. "But this is truly noise pollution." **BT**

Bob Jones University rehires firm hired to investigate on-campus sex abuse claims

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey
Religion News Service

After firing an independent watchdog group to investigate allegations of sexual abuse on campus, Bob Jones University has rehired the same group.

The university had contracted with Lynchburg, Va.-based GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) in November 2012 but suspended the contract on Jan. 27. The university met with GRACE officials Feb. 18-19 to discuss the review.

“GRACE satisfactorily addressed the University’s concerns and Bob Jones University is confident the review can be completed in a timely and professional manner,” the university said in a press release.

“To be clear, GRACE and BJU are united



in their commitment to a review that is thorough, transparent and objective.”

In December, BJU President Stephen Jones announced his resignation due to health concerns, and he cited the “ongoing challenges in leadership change” in a letter that terminated the contract with GRACE. School officials had previously cited “differences” between the two sides, a charge that the watchdog group said came as a “complete surprise.”

Now that GRACE has been rehired, a spokesman for BJU said it’s unclear when the

final report will be released. The investigation is led by Boz Tchividjian, Billy Graham’s grandson.

Tchividjian, who blogs for *Religion News Service*, has written and spoken on why evangelicals struggle to report sex abuse claims.

“At the heart of the struggle is a fear that is rooted in the need to self-protect,” he wrote earlier. “All such ‘fears’ are usually masked by a rationale that the reporting of such abuse may ‘damage the reputation of Christ.’”

GRACE was fired last year by an independent Baptist missions agency shortly before it could conclude another abuse investigation of missionary children.

Bob Jones is a private Christian university in Greenville, S.C., with about 3,000 students. **BT**



Stephen Jones

Baptist ministries see spike in number of young applicants

By Jeff Brumley
Associated Baptist Press

Leaders of student-based service programs across Baptist life are reporting significant increases in volunteers due, they say, to shifting attitudes among youth about missions and ministry.

Organizations that depend on seasonal and year-long ministry volunteers and interns report that young Baptists are becoming more interested in programs that encourage long-term, meaningful relationships with the communities in which they serve.

The trend is resulting in windfall recruiting classes for some ministries.

“It’s a huge percentage increase for us,” said Amy Derrick, field personnel selection manager for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and director of Student.Go.

At Student.Go, where college and graduate students can serve in short- and long-term mission projects in the United States and abroad, the number of applicants for the extended service opportunities increased

50 percent in the fall and this spring. As a result, CBF is considering making internal changes in order to accommodate the trend.

Derrick said young people are tuned into the current thinking in missions today, namely that quick-hit, short-term trips can actually be toxic for those they’re intended to help. Longer, relationship-building missions are now sought after.

“I think they really want to feel they went somewhere long enough to build a relational ministry,” Derrick said.

David Burroughs says the old-fashioned, weeklong mission trip may deserve some of the credit for interest in summer- and year-long domestic and international missions.

“There was a huge upsurge in the last decade in young people doing short-term missions,” said Burroughs, president of Passport, Inc. that provides youth summer camps.

Many of its young camp staffers, Burroughs said, were campers once.

Another factor is that young people today are much more informed, thanks in part to the Internet and especially social media, about

the variety of service opportunities available to them.

Those who come back for longer experiences are reporting long-lasting spiritual benefits, said Nichole Prillaman, missions volunteer coordinator for the Virginia Baptist Mission Board.

“Those that do engage in mission volunteerism are developing lasting and significant relationships with those they serve alongside,” Prillaman said. “What typically begins as an ‘us/them’ type of relationship quickly develops into more of a ‘we’ type relationship.”

As a result, more are “staying the course” by committing to spending years establishing and nurturing those relationships, she said, adding this development is what matters most.

“It seems more significant to count the lasting transformation that comes from living life together.”

“We are seeing an uptick in the number of folks who want to give a summer or more than one summer to this,” Burroughs said. “We have had multiple interns for several years — it used to be we were scraping to find one intern.” **BT**

Study finds work ethic not just Protestant anymore

America's vaunted Protestant work ethic is getting a makeover: Now it is more of a nonreligious work ethic.

A new study has found an inverse relationship between the religiosity of a state's population and its "productive entrepreneurship." That's professor-speak for "entrepreneurial investment responsible for real economic growth."

In other words, the less religious a state's population, the more likely it is to have a healthy economy.

The study, titled "Religion: Productive or Unproductive?" by economists Travis Wiseman of Mississippi State University and Andrew Young of West Virginia University, was published in the March edition of the *Journal of Institutional Economics*.

In the study, Wiseman and Young find that the "measure of total Christian adherents is robustly and positively correlated with states' unproductive entrepreneurship scores" in a given state.

"This could be because religion imposes



opportunity costs in terms of time and resources that may otherwise have been devoted toward productive entrepreneurship," they write. "For example, time spent in church reduces time available for engaging in business activity. More subjectively, religion may create psychic costs to pursuing worldly gains rather than salvation in the beyond."

On the flip side, they find that the percentage of a state's atheists or agnostics is "positively and significantly related to productive entrepreneurship" within that state.

"One possibility is that productive

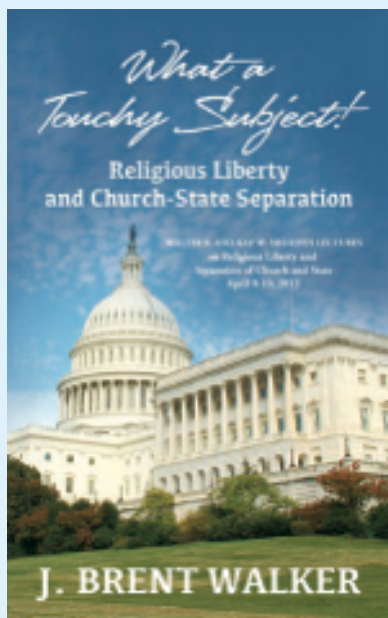
entrepreneurial activities are largely substitutes for religious ones," Wiseman and Young suggest.

The study, which stemmed from Wiseman's doctoral dissertation and is part of a larger work on entrepreneurial practices, relied on data from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's Religious Landscape Survey of 2007, Gallup's State of the States surveys of 2004 and 2008, and the U.S. Census Bureau's Religious Congregations and Membership studies of 2000 and 2010.

The authors do not, however, rank individual states according to their score. In separate studies, Gallup has ranked Mississippi, Utah, Alabama, Louisiana and South Carolina as the five most religious states; Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts and Oregon were the five least religious states.

The authors examined the religious affiliation of each state's population, as well as their level of religiosity based on four factors: attendance at religious services, belief in God, prayer, and the level of importance placed on religion. **BT**

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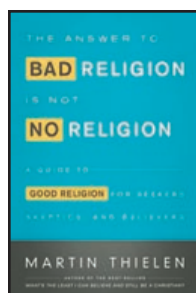
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—From the foreword by
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Review by John Pierce



The Answer to Bad Religion Is Not No Religion

A Guide to Good Religion for Seekers,
Skeptics and Believers
By Martin Thielen

Bad religion

Pastor/author urges embrace of 'good religion' rather than rejection of faith

Christianity, along with other faith traditions, is often soiled by the abuse of power, harsh legalism, and the accommodation and even advocacy of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. Religious faith often looks very ugly.

Martin Thielen doesn't hide from that fact in his book, *The Answer to Bad Religion Is Not No Religion: A Guide to Good Religion for Seekers, Skeptics and Believers* (2014, Westminster John Knox). In fact, he faces it head on.

The pastor of Cookeville (Tenn.) United Methodist Church, and a former Baptist editor, affirms what should be obvious but is sometimes missed: Ugly religious expressions, though much too numerous, don't represent the millions whose faith motivates them to live in ways that are kind, loving, generous and even sacrificial.

Therefore, it is possible (and wise) to reject "bad religion" — without generalizing those negative characteristics to all expressions of religious faith.

Thielen is not on the defensive. He rolls out all the ugliness that is often spouted from the mouths of religious leaders or carried out in the dark corners of religious enterprises. He offers as much condemnation of such hostilities and abuse as any outsider.

Instructively, however, he shifts in the second part of the book to the fair but sometimes missed reality that eliminating all religion because some religion is bad is neither wise nor possible. The Soviet Union and China had that quest, he noted, and it failed.

Thielen does some good theology in chapter seven, addressing the toxicity of bad religion, the abuses that can come from those claiming belief in a literal Bible, and the mysteries (that honest believers acknowledge) resulting from the problem of suffering in the world.

"One of the major challenges to religion is the problem of suffering," he writes. "I don't pretend to have easy and simple answers to this issue. However, Christian believers do have some thoughtful responses ..." — which Thielen addresses well.

To reject religious faith *in toto* does an injustice to those whose faith commitments to justice have a remarkable influence on society — even when facing opposition from those with bad religion. The civil rights movement, led by Christian ministers and headquartered in African-American churches, is but one good example.

Thielen writes in a popular style that is intelligent, yet easy to read. He brings good theological insights mixed with historical context as well as recent accounts in the news.

His book will find a spot in my study on the shelf with Wayne Oates' *When Religion Gets Sick* (1970) and Charles Kimball's *When Religion Becomes Evil* (2002), along with other good writings on this subject. These are important lessons to be learned and remembered.

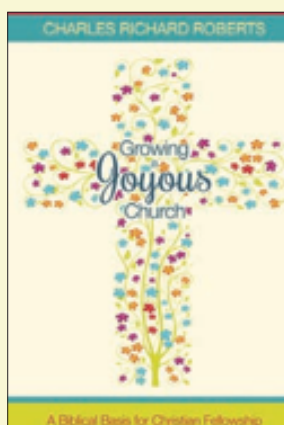
The fear of scientific discovery by *some* believers, the selective hostility toward gay and lesbian persons by *some* pulpit pounders, the continued oppression of women by *some* churches, denominations and other religious groups, the ugliness of funeral protestors (whose names I'll not acknowledge), and the numerous examples of tragic abuse of children and others in *some* religious circles deserve sound condemnation and rejection.

Such ugliness, however, does not represent the millions whose faith motivates them to free the oppressed, care for the vulnerable and speak truth to evil. That's not a defensive position, just a fair one.

The creator God made known in Jesus Christ needs no human defense. Yet the image of God is soiled as well by those who claim divine blessings on their narrow-minded bigotry and acts of evils.

Rejection of that kind of misrepresentation is needed, too. For as I've said before: I don't believe in the god that people who don't believe in god don't believe in. **BT**

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Good mental hygiene crucial for pastors

By Barry Howard

Maintaining good physical, spiritual and mental health is uniquely challenging but crucial for a pastor. While these three areas of wellness are inseparable, in my own life and the experience of many colleagues, I recognize that more attention has been given to physical and spiritual health, and mental health is often neglected, causing a diminishment to all three.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. Every human experiences highs and lows. Although some forms of mental illness are genetic, other expressions of mental illness may be related to circumstances or body chemistry, and may be preemptively avoided or proactively addressed by practicing good mental hygiene.

A common but naïve misconception is that pastors, or persons with strong religious faith, are exempt from mental distress. The Apostle Paul is noted for his courageous ministry, but he confessed: "Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28 NIV).

The pastoral task requires remarkable investment in the lives of others. A pastor who neglects mental hygiene can gradually slip into a state of melancholy or emotional chaos, and then compound the dilemma by ignoring the symptoms for fear of stigmatizing his or her ministry.

I can identify at least five areas that commonly place stress on a pastor's mental and emotional health:

Unrealistic expectations

Whether real or perceived, unrealistic expectations can be generated by vocal congregants or be self-imposed by a minister with a "messiah complex."

Most congregations have ambivalent expectations that fluctuate between market-driven goals (e.g., attendance, budgets, awards) and mission-driven goals (e.g., participation, stewardship, life transformation). The wider

the gap between these two categories, the more intense the stress on the minister.

Perpetual preparation

The task of perpetual preparation can be mentally exhausting. Many professional public speakers have four or five niche speeches they give over and over to different groups. Professors and teachers have lectures and lesson plans that are updated and revised, but they usually follow a core curriculum.

A preaching pastor is unique in that he or she is generally expected to prepare and deliver 40-50 different Sunday sermons per year to virtually the same group of people, in addition to devotionals, Bible studies and speeches for community events.

Diverse emotional encounters

A minister deals with grief, grace and everything in between on a daily basis. Perhaps more than any other vocation, a pastor regularly moves in and out of situations with polarizing and intense emotions such as death and birth, divorce and marriage, perversion and conversion, and conflict and resolution.

If a pastor is not careful, the residual emotions from these encounters will linger and intermingle, creating either emotional apathy or spiritual neuropathy.

Problem people

Not to be confused with people with problems, problem people are unusually high maintenance individuals who consume an exorbitant amount of a pastor's time with an unnecessary complaint or unconstructive criticism.

Marshall Shelley refers to these "well-intentioned dragons" as "sincere, well-meaning saints, but they leave ulcers, strained relationships and hard feelings in their wake."

Confidentiality cache

Pastors are entrusted with a lot of confidential information that is locked away into their mental storage. The volume of this information can become a heavy emotional weight if it is not appropriately archived.

To preserve good health and promote longevity in ministry, each pastor has to identify and adopt hygienic habits that fit his or her context and personality. Here are some practices I am finding to be helpful in my own pastoral routine:

- Establish and maintain a consistent prayer and devotional life.
- Maintain friendship with a trustworthy conversation partner, perhaps a pastor outside of your church.
- Convene a small accountability group, with a confidentiality covenant, that meets monthly.
- Read regularly in multiple genres including biography, history and fiction.
- Pay attention to diet, especially limiting sugar, caffeine and other foods that can trigger emotional swings.
- Develop a regimen of physical exercise.
- Follow a consistent routine for sleep and rest.
- Periodically disconnect from the work of the church, especially from mental labor (problem solving, conflict management), cell phone calls and social media.
- Have an annual physical examination, as well as an eye examination and a dermatology screening.
- Participate in a peer network of pastors who convene with a covenant of confidentiality, and who vent and vision together.
- Be alert to when mental distress leads to dysfunction, manifested by ongoing and overwhelming symptoms of depression, chronic anxiety, paranoia and/or insomnia. Immediately enlist the care of a medical professional. To procrastinate getting care prolongs the process of recovery.

Most of us would not think of leaving home in the morning before bathing our bodies, combing our hair and brushing our teeth. And yet we will often go days, months or years without flossing our mind or cleansing our emotions.

Practicing good mental hygiene can enable a pastor to become mentally sharp, emotionally balanced and spiritually perceptive in all seasons. **BT**

—Barry Howard is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla.



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The Challenges of a Changed Life

1 Peter 1:13-25
Deep Love
May 4, 2014

1 Peter 2:11-25
Paradoxical Living
May 11, 2014

1 Peter 2:1-10
Living Stones
May 18, 2014

1 Peter 3:13-22
Good Suffering?
May 25, 2014

Youth Lessons are on pages 22–23.



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Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 Peter 1:13-25

May 4, 2014

Deep Love

Hope is a powerful thing. The measure of its power, however, lies in its source. If we put our hope for financial success in winning the lottery, or place our hope for lasting love in an unstable partner, we are likely to be disappointed – but there is a better alternative.

For Peter, the source of true hope is Jesus. Trusting in Christ brings salvation, and the redeemed life leads to mutual love.

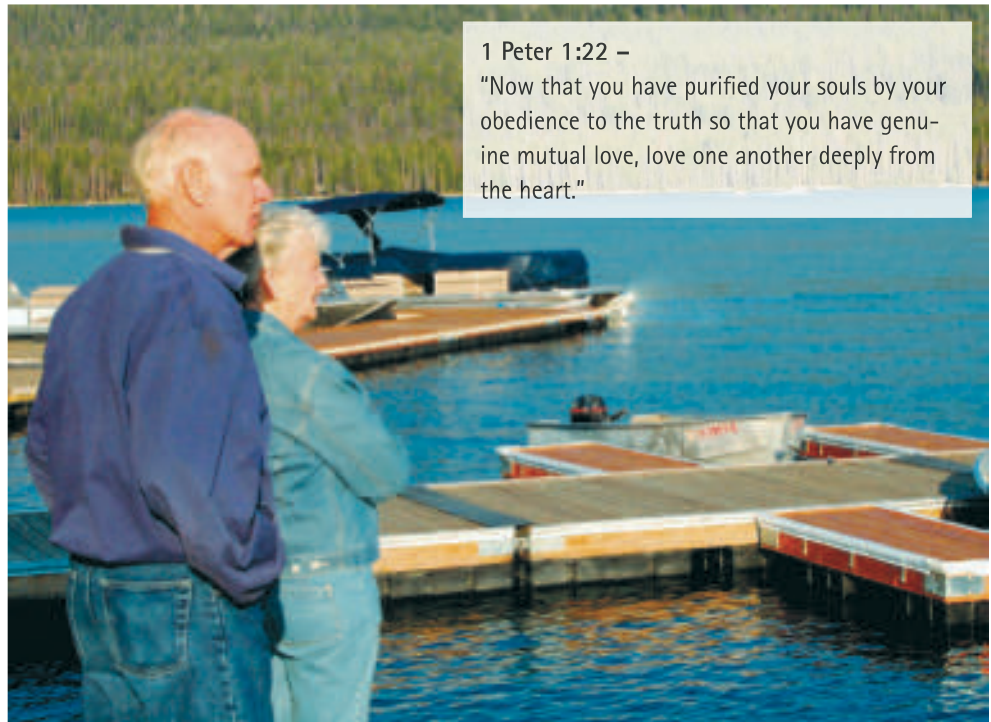
Do you like the thought of living with confidence, of loving and being loved? Then read on. 📖

Of hope and holiness (vv. 13-16)

Peter's letter begins with a prayer that praises God for the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, and for the readers' acceptance of it (vv. 3-12). He is not satisfied to celebrate salvation as if that's all that matters, however. The prayer is a call to action for believers, a mandate for a new and different kind of life.

"Therefore," the author writes, "prepare your minds for action" (v. 13a). Right behavior begins with right thinking. "Prepare your minds" translates the ancient idiom "gird up your loins," a reference to someone gathering up the skirt of his or her robe and tucking it into the belt in preparation for running or some other physical action.

Peter applies the idiom to mental rather than physical activity, adding a second modifier to suggest the need for a sober or disciplined mind.



1 Peter 1:22 –

"Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart."

To "gird up the loins of your mind" is to get mentally prepared for the challenge ahead. It means to tuck in the loose ends of things that don't really matter, and to focus on what is really important. Christians of every generation must wrestle with their faith, interpret the scriptures, and apply the gospel message to the culture in which they live.

With disciplined minds, ready for action, believers learn to think for themselves. They don't blindly accept everything they hear or read, whether it comes from a televised prosperity preacher, a popular book, or their own pastor. They think it through and reach their own understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

In doing so, believers recognize that their ultimate hope lies in Christ alone. "Set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed," Peter said (v. 13b). 📖 📖

Christ-centered hope and disciplined thinking lead us to become more like Jesus and less like those who are shaped by selfish interests and cultural pressures

(vv. 14-15). As we become more like Christ, we fulfill the covenant command that "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (v. 16, quoting from Lev. 19:2). 📖

Can we honestly say that we are shaped more by Christ than by our culture? What is the evidence for either?

Reverence and redemption (vv. 17-21)

Having called on believers to get our thinking straight and our living straight, Peter moves to the subject of healthy associations: a right relationship with God (vv. 17-21) prepares us for right relationships with others (vv. 22-25).

Relating rightly to God begins with the understanding that God judges all people impartially "according to their deeds" – a statement that would leave all of us falling short, for none live without fault. But the judgment we all deserve – the fear of which should keep us living in humble reverence before God (v. 17) – is tempered and held in tension by the grace God has offered through Christ.

The author speaks of this atoning

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grace through the metaphor of paying a ransom, one of several images used in scripture and developed by the church to try and explain the mystery of how Christ's earthly life, death, and resurrection reconciled us to God (see "The Hardest Question" online for more on theories of the atonement).


No attempt at explaining the atonement fully captures a truth that only God can truly comprehend. The metaphor of Christ's death serving as a ransom payment (v. 18) or sacrifice (v. 19) for our sins is an incomplete image, but a powerful one. It is a reminder that Christ died *for us*, and that in some way beyond our understanding, Christ's death and resurrection opened the door for us to be reconciled and brought into a positive relationship with the judge of all people.

Peter's purpose is not to elucidate the atonement, but to remind his readers that Christ is the means by which we have come into relationship with God, "who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God" (v. 21).

Love and loving (vv. 22-25)

The author of 1 Peter believed that loving God would naturally lead to loving others: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply, from the heart" (v. 22).

God created us to live in community. From the creation stories of Genesis 1-2 to the Ten Commandments to the preaching of the prophets, the scriptures challenge God's people to love and care for all people, especially widows, orphans, and strangers. Jesus reflected this same ethic of caring for all, even "the least of these."

Christ-followers, especially, are called to "have genuine mutual love," to "love one another deeply from the heart" (v. 22). 

Love is to be not only reciprocal and real, but fervent and heartfelt. "Love deeply" translates a verb that describes unconditional love, and an adverb

that means "earnestly," "eagerly," "intently," or "constantly."

Talking about love and demonstrating it are quite different things. A spiritual relationship grounded in God's love inspires a community characterized by love in action, something more than high ideals or empty talk. It is a love that walks.

If we are to get our thinking straight, get our living straight, and get our relationships straight, we need each other. We need mutual support and unconditional love. We need someone to care, even when we are not acting very lovable.

This is why God gave us the church as a family of faith to encourage us, to inspire us, to hold us accountable, to love us in good times and bad times. We all need someone who believes in us and loves us deeply, from the heart.


Such love should come naturally to those who truly "have been born anew" through their response to the gospel message, Peter suggests (v. 23).

The author's mention of "the living and enduring word of God" that brings us into relationship with God set him on a brief tangent, as he pauses to cite a familiar quotation from Isaiah 40: 6-8. Humankind and human glory are no more permanent than grass or flowers that grow and then fade, but "the word of the Lord endures forever" (vv. 24-25a).

This verse is often taken out of context and used as a reference to the Bible or in defense of an interpretation of scripture that someone claims to be unchanging. The verse is not about the Bible, however, or even the Old Testament.

When used in scripture, "word of God" commonly refers to a special revelation from God, a clear word that comes through a prophetic oracle or other means.

Lest we misunderstand – as many have done – Peter explained his


meaning in the conclusion of the verse, a part that is rarely quoted: "*That word* is the good news that was announced to you" (v. 25b). 

"Good news" translates a form of the Greek word *euangelizo*, "to proclaim good news." It is the word from which we derive "evangelize." It refers to the gospel message of Jesus, the good news of salvation for those who put their faith and hope in God through Christ.

That good news – that word from God – endures forever.

The love of those who live in relationship with God should likewise be as sure as it is sincere, both ardent and lasting. It is this kind of life that both experiences and enacts what it means to participate in the kingdom of God.

From the perspective of the last verse in chapter one, we should look back to the first, where Peter addressed his readers as "exiles of the dispersion." This terminology would suggest an audience of immigrant Jews living in the northern reaches of Asia Minor. Some, no doubt, would have been members of the churches addressed in this letter.

The author's use of the term "exiles" (vv. 1, 17) is not limited to Jews no longer living in Palestine, however. The churches would also have included Gentile believers, who may well have been in the majority. 

The "exile" that Peter has in mind is a lifestyle so devoted to Christ that it puts believers at odds with the materialistic and pagan culture in which they live. As they love God and love each other with the kind of fervency that Peter described, they become, not "strangers in a strange land," but strangers in their own land, people who live apart from the norms of polytheistic worship and self-focused living.

The language of exile should set all of us to thinking. Do we feel a bit like outsiders in the overtly materialistic and morally misguided society that surrounds us, or do we feel perfectly comfortable in our culture?

As far as Peter is concerned, feeling too much at home could be to our peril. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 Peter 2:11-25

May 11, 2014

Paradoxical Living

Submission: It's not our favorite word—not even close.

There's something about our heritage as Americans, or as Baptists, that doesn't welcome anyone else telling us what to do. We don't want the NSA prying into our business or denominational officials telling us what to believe. We may resent getting instructions from our supervisor at work, or begrudge the expectations that our family members have of us.

We want to do our own thing, right?

We are not the first to kick against the goads or resist accepting direction from others. The author of 1 Peter understood that learning how to relate to authority figures is an important life skill – and a potential arena for an effective Christian witness. 📌

Called to virtue (vv. 11-12)

In 1 Peter 2:1-10, the author calls on believers to discard the sinful ways of their former lives and seek spiritual sustenance as they grow toward maturity and ultimate salvation (vv. 1-3). He challenges them to join together as spiritual stones in building a spiritual house that will honor Christ through the spiritual sacrifices of praise, prayer, and obedient lifestyles (vv. 4-8). He reminds them that God has chosen them to be a holy people, bringing the light of Christ into a dark world (vv. 9-10).

With vv. 11-12, Peter circles around and returns to the theme of choosing to live in upright, honorable, God-pleasing ways (vv. 11-12).

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



1 Peter 2:21 –
"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps."

By virtue of choosing to follow Christ, believers inevitably find themselves at odds with a culture that worships other gods, whether their names are Apollo or Diana, Money or Pleasure. That makes Christ-followers "aliens and exiles" in their own land, surrounded by the temptation to behave in ways that "wage war against the soul" (v. 11). 📌

Sinful behavior obstructs spiritual growth, so believers who seek maturity will naturally work to overcome it. Our motivation should not be limited to the desire for an eternal reward, however. Living ethical and honorable lives helps us to be an effective witness to others.

Non-Christians who dominated the local culture in first-century Asia Minor might incorrectly accuse Christians of doing wrong, but Peter insisted that the believers' good behavior would vindicate them and lead their neighbors to "glorify God on the day he visits us" (v. 12, probably a reference to the day of judgment). 📌 Whether Peter hoped former slanderers would glorify God because they had been converted or

because they would be forced at the judgment to admit their error is unclear.

American Christians are rarely ridiculed for their faith, though some go out of their way to claim persecution. Have you ever been criticized for being a Christian? If so, how did you respond?

Called to submission (vv. 13-17)

Christians owe their ultimate loyalty to Christ, but also live under the authority of earthly institutions. Peter insists that believers recognize the role such institutions have in keeping order, and submit to their authority: model behavior could promote the Christian witness in a way that political rebellion would not.

"Accept the authority of every human institution" (NRSV) could be translated "be subject to every human creation" or even "every human creature." Since Peter goes on to talk about relationships involving governing authorities (2:13-17), masters with slaves (2:18-21), and family members (3:1-7), he probably has the institutional sense of the word in mind (v. 17).

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Peter's address to his readers as "aliens and sojourners" suggests that most of them were fairly low on the social or economic totem pole. They had little choice but to live in submission to the authorities of the city-state in which they resided.

Peter's advice, then, doesn't tell them something they don't know: he tells them why. "It is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish" (v. 15). Their respect for authority has its roots in God's will, not the emperor's worthiness.

Though free in Christ, they should not claim exemption from being responsible citizens who do good rather than evil. In this way, no one would have grounds to condemn them.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is liberating. It assures women and men of all stations in life that they are people of dignity and worth. Peter knew, however, that freedom has a dangerous side. Those who have been "set free" by the gospel may be tempted to live without restraint, and to use the promise of forgiveness as an excuse to sin. So, he cautions against using Christian freedom as a pretext for evil (v. 16).

Peter fleshes out what it means to live as servants of God with a string of four imperatives (v. 17). First, Christians are to show respect to all people, reflecting God's love for everyone.

Secondly, believers are to have a special love for their Christian family. The word "church" does not appear in this letter, but the author gives new meaning to an old word when he urges believers to love the "brotherhood" (literally), which NRSV renders as "the family of believers."

The word for "love" is from *agape*, another word that was given a distinctively Christian meaning. It is used in the New Testament to describe the unconditional love of Jesus, which he calls us to share with others.

While loving others, Christians are to reverence God (the third imperative). The phrase could be translated as

"fear God," but the author is not suggesting that we live in terror before the Almighty. Thoughtful believers live in awe of God's majesty as creator, sustainer, and ultimate judge. Our greatest reverence belongs to the one who has the final word. ↓

Peter's fourth imperative circles back to the emperor, who is to be honored – though not revered. At times the Roman Empire treated its potentates like gods, instructing all subjects to worship the emperor by offering incense and saying "Caesar is Lord!"

Peter reminds the people that reverence and worship are reserved for God alone. One's proper attitude to governing authorities is described with the same word of respect used at the beginning of the verse: believers should honor the emperor, respecting both his position and his personhood, period. ↓

Called to endurance (vv. 18-25)

In Peter's day, a discussion of relationships would include slavery, a tough subject reflecting a culture very different from our own. As a whole, contemporary culture would never condone slavery, though we tolerate it. By some estimates, through illegal underground human trafficking, there may be more people living in forced servitude now than at any time in human history. ↓

Peter knew that many of his readers were literally in bondage to other men and women. It was a reality of life in the Roman world. The author neither condones nor condemns this situation, but encourages Christian servants to be patient and to show respect to their masters, including those who are harsh (2:18-20). Even when mistreated, believers should remain faithful to God and not give in to the temptation of retribution, Peter said. ↓

The thought of Christian slaves suffering unjustly led Peter to call upon

Christ's example as a model for believers to follow (v. 21). When suffering comes our way – including undeserved suffering – we are to bear it with grace, trusting that our righteous suffering will find favor with God, and may sow the seeds of grace in the lives of those who harm us.

In 1896, Charles Sheldon published *In His Steps*, a novel in which 1 Peter 2:21 appears as a subheading over the first chapter: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps." The book imagines a small town in which a local pastor challenged his congregation to shape their lives and decisions around serious consideration of the question "What would Jesus do?"

The book went on to sell more than 30 million copies, and is currently available as a free e-book (<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4540>). In the 1990s, the same thought inspired a movement of youth who wore "WWJD" bracelets as a reminder to ask "What would Jesus do?"

In our present context, however, the specific question relates to the unmerited suffering of Christian servants. Like Jesus, Peter implies, we should not be obsessed with whether the pain that life brings us is fair. Patient endurance of suffering can be a positive witness to the world.

To reinforce his position, in vv. 22-25 the author quotes loosely from Isa. 53:7-9, understood by the early church as a prophecy of Christ's patient endurance in the face of unjust suffering. Interspersed with the citation, the author adds his own commentary. As Christ's suffering was redemptive, he said, so believers should live righteous lives and inspire their persecutors to have faith.

The believers to whom Peter wrote had once been lost sheep, but had found their way to Christ. Could it be that, through following Christ's example of suffering without complaint, they could lead others to the Good Shepherd, too? **BT**

Youth

May 4 — May 25, 2014

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



of the Bible lessons by Tony Cartledge.

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

Hope In

1 Peter 1:13-25

I had a superstition when I played soccer: I wouldn't wash my socks in between wins. I had this feeling that my skill and luck from the winning game would be soaked into my socks, so I couldn't risk washing that out in between games.

My mom, on the other hand, thought my socks just made everything stink. Our compromise was that she wouldn't wash my socks in between wins and I wouldn't bring my soccer bag in from the garage.

Even though it was my tradition, I knew that simply avoiding washing my socks would not ensure a winning season. My hope of winning had to be in my team's practice and preparation.

How often do we put our hope in things that are trivial or that won't last? First Peter reminds us that we are to put our hope in Jesus.

Peter reminds us of our hope in Jesus that leads to salvation, but he does not want us to think we can stop there. Our hope in Jesus is realized when we live in the way Jesus has called us to live.

Before Christ, our lives had different aims and values that usually focused on our own needs and desires. With our new life in Jesus we are called to follow his way of living, using our energy and focusing our attention on caring for others and serving God.

MAY 4

Think About It:

Our hopes and dreams are shaped by the encounters we have each day. Which people and what things influence who you hope to be? Do these lead to a holy life following the ways of Jesus?

Make a Choice:

We can put our hope in many different things. Where will you choose to place your hope?

Pray:

God, thank you for offering us the hope that we can make a difference for others in this life as we follow Jesus.

Bow Down

1 Peter 2:11-25

It could be while playing a video game and we are defeated. It could be when we get crossed-over playing basketball. It could be when an opponent is celebrating victory while we are still finishing the race. It could be when we submit to the rules of a teacher we dislike.

Most of us see it as a sign of weakness when we bow to someone else. But how do we feel about bowing down to Christ?

First Peter reminds us that we are ultimately to bow down to Christ. When we submit ourselves to Christ first, we may find that we are at odds with people in the world around us because the world is more about winning than serving; more about power than humility. Peter provides four ways to mark faithful living:

1. Respect all people.
2. Have a special love for your Christian family.
3. Show reverence for God.
4. Honor the emperor.

We are not to confuse honoring the emperor as reverence for the emperor, however. Reverence is set apart for God alone.

Living faithfully, Peter reminds us, requires endurance — the same kind of endurance that Christ showed as he died on the cross. Sometimes following Christ will bring burdens, since loving others and living humbly are not often the way of the world. Even when our burdens come unjustly, we are to bear them trusting that they will sow seeds of grace and God's favor will win out. Just as Christ's suffering led others to God, so too may our own suffering lead others to God.

MAY 11

Think About It:

Our culture tells us that we should want to be at the top; that we should want to have power and control. But Jesus is more interested in how we treat others. How can your following of others be a witness for Christ?

Make a Choice:

We all face things that we don't want to do. Many times we are asked to do these things by people with whom we don't agree. How can your response sow seeds of grace?

Pray:

God, help us to learn your ways and have the strength to lift up those around us.

MAY 18

Stones

1 Peter 2:1-10

Have you ever worked on a remodeling project? What about planting a garden? How about a pre-season conditioning program?

If you have ever been a part of one of these, you know there are some things that have to be undone before you can begin. In remodeling you may have to knock down walls to build a new one. In a garden you have to pull weeds and plow before planting. In a conditioning program you have to give up some unhealthy habits before training.

First Peter says the same thing about living for Christ: Before you can grow in your salvation, you have to get rid of those things hindering your life with Christ.

Peter is calling the faithful to have a new life in Christ. For this new life, we need to get rid of the old life. This means not only letting go of those bad behaviors that connect to your old life, but also those things that may cause you to hunger for those things again.

Once these old things have been put away, we are called to live fully committed to Christ. Each person being formed in such a way is necessary to be part of the temple of Christ's body.

Now part of the body, Peter explains, each person is to live as a priest who brings glory to the temple. The glory is not for ourselves, but we are to bring glory by serving as witnesses for God. We are to be the light that will bring others out of darkness and into the divine light of God.

Think About It:

Before bringing light into the world, we have to dust off our own lives. What do you need to leave behind in order to follow new life in Christ?

Make a Choice:

When we shed those things that cause us to not live for God, our light shines bright and people are attracted to it. Will you use this light to bring others to God or to yourself?

Pray:

God, help me have the strength to leave behind old ways that limit my life in you, and lead me to the kind of life that honors you.

MAY 25

Good Suffering

1 Peter 3:13-22

"This is good for you. It may hurt now, but it will pay off later." I can still remember my coach saying these words as we ran and trained in the dead of summer as part of a pre-season conditioning program. I also remember my mom saying something similar to me as I sat at the dinner table not wanting to eat peas. First Peter 3 says something similar when it talks about good suffering.

As Peter points out, suffering is part of life. Some people think that once they decide to follow Jesus, all of their suffering and pain will go away. I don't know what they have read or were told, but

that just isn't the case. Christians aren't exempt from suffering. All of us face suffering at some point, but Peter offers us a way to face it that can give us hope. He tells how that helpful people are less likely to get hurt, that we are blessed if we suffer for doing right, and that we are not to be afraid when we suffer.

Peter points us to the hope that we have in Christ and in knowing Christ. Peter reminds his readers that Christ will go to any lengths to reach out to those who have fallen because they have suffered for what is right and good. Even though our earthly persecutors may not lift us up, we are to suffer in kindness because we know that Christ will lift us up and bless us.

Think About It:

Where have you seen someone suffer because they followed Christ's ways of loving everyone, or forgiving freely, or for being caring and humble?

Make a Choice:

At some point, suffering will be part of every person's life. Will you grow your faith now so that you will have the kind of strong faith that will help you through harder times?

Pray:

God, thank you for understanding and caring for us when we suffer. Help us to offer that same love, support and grace to others in your name.

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 Peter 2:1-10

May 18, 2014

Living Stones

Has anyone ever implied that you had a heart of stone, or rocks in your head? Neither of those descriptions would be complimentary, but stony metaphors can also be positive. We'd like it if someone described our dependability as "rock-solid," for example, or called us a "stone-cold talent."

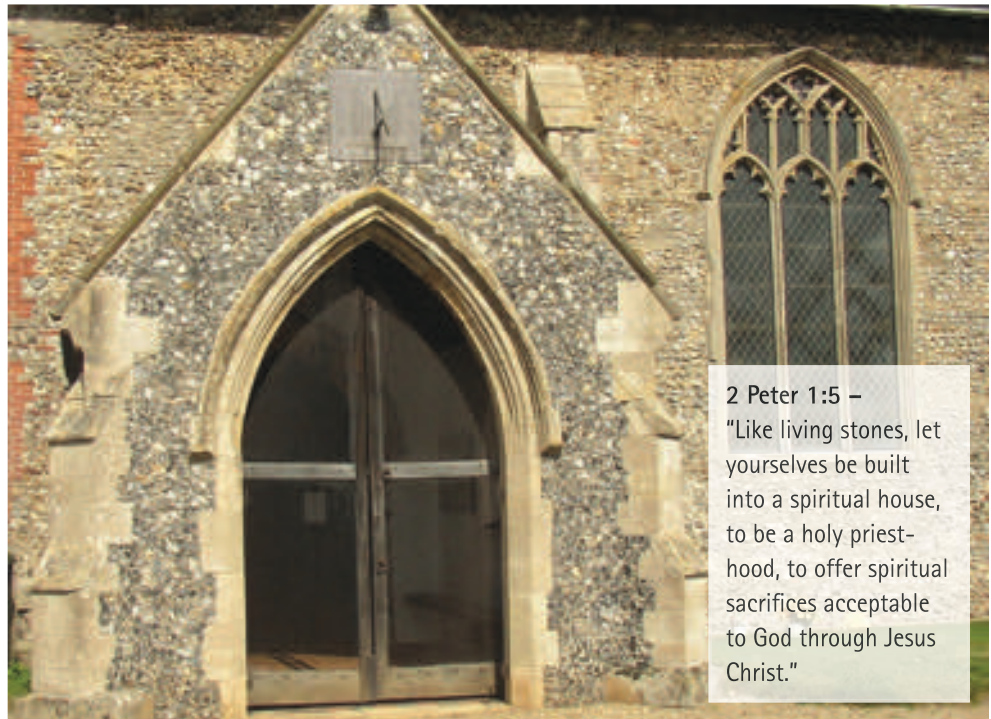
In this text, from a letter named for a man whose nickname was Peter (which means "Rock"), Christians are encouraged to think of themselves as living stones. That's a heavy subject – not to mention hard (puns intended) – but worthy of study. In this chapter, the author explores what it means to be built into the fabric of the living body of Christ.

Drink your milk (vv. 1-3)

The opening verses of chapter 2 build on the previous exhortation (1:13-25) calling Christians to be new and different people. The author has no qualms about mixing metaphors. He begins by addressing believers as babies who need milk, then as living blocks of stone built into a temple, as priests within the same temple, and as a specially chosen nation. Along the way, Peter quotes various Old Testament texts to support his views.

Becoming a new person in Christ necessarily involves a transformation of the old self, shedding destructive habits and attitudes. Thus, believers are called to strip away "malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander."

"Rid yourselves" (NRSV) or "get



2 Peter 1:5 –
"Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

rid of" (NET) suggests a turning away from one's pre-Christian behaviors: the same word introduces similar lists in Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8; and Jas. 1:21. It suggests the image of taking off an old garment to put on a new one. 📌

Peter's litany of negative attire to be discarded includes "malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander" (v. 1). The word for "malice" is a general term for wickedness, while "guile" begins a list of negative behaviors that are disruptive to the community.

In Greek, the last three vices are written in the plural form. "Insincerity" is the Greek word from which we derive "hypocrisy" (*hupocrisis*). Envy is at the root of selfish behavior that seeks to advance oneself above others. Slander involves language that intentionally defames or harms others.

The author probably did not know his audience personally. Perhaps that is why he chose rather generic terms for harmful habits to be put away. If you were writing a similar advice letter today, what negative attitudes or

practices would you encourage new believers to discard? Do you think your pastor would choose the same ones?

Can you name specific habits or ways of thinking that you consciously put away when you became a Christian? Are there needed changes that remain to be made?

Believers should not only put away what hinders spiritual growth, but also hunger for whatever enhances it. Peter called on the repentant and newly innocent Christians to think of themselves as mere babes in the faith, seeking to grow through imbibing "pure, spiritual milk" (v. 2a).

This implies that many of the readers were recent converts. "Long for" is a strong verb that suggests a hungry yearning, no less essential to survival than a newborn's instinctive appetite.

The substance of the metaphorical milk is not identified, though it is described as "pure" (free from deceit) and as "spiritual" or "genuine." The latter word translates *logikos*, which the King James Version inaccurately rendered as "of the word." The term's

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primary meaning is “rational” or “genuine.” The translation “spiritual” is figurative.

This verse is not about Bible study, then, as many KJV readers have inferred and many preachers have declared. Rather, it is a call for new believers to seek every opportunity for trustworthy guidance and spiritual growth. ↓

What might this involve? Fellowship with other Christians, worship as part of the community, communion with God through prayer, and a conscious effort to follow Jesus in loving ways can all strengthen believers. Few Christians in Peter’s audience would have access to Old Testament writings. They would need to learn about their faith from the teaching of pastors or traveling church leaders. ↓

How would this help believers “grow into salvation” (v. 2b)? Peter is not suggesting that new believers had no experience of saving grace. The phrase speaks to the importance of growing in one’s appreciation and experience of salvation. Those who have truly tasted the good life God gives will want more (v. 3, cp. Ps. 34:8). Salvation has both present and future dimensions: those who trust in Christ live in a state of grace, but have yet to know the final, full, and eternal extent of salvation. ↓

Be a rock (vv. 4-8)

With v. 4, the writer shifts metaphors. Instead of newborn babes, he now asks believers to think of themselves as stones – an appropriate metaphor for a man whose nickname was “Rock” (*petros*). Peter speaks of Christ as “a living stone, rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight.” ↓

Christ-followers should likewise think of themselves as living stones that make up the greater temple of Christ’s body (v. 5a). Such stones are not static and unchanging, like chiseled granite or marble, but are still being formed, even as the church lives and grows.

Peter calls on believer-stones who have been “built into a spiritual house”

to live holy lives as priests who offer “spiritual sacrifices” appropriate to the worship of Christ (v. 5b). The new believers in Asia Minor would face many trials, being “rejected by mortals” just as Christ was rejected. Yet, they could find comfort in knowing that they were “chosen and precious in God’s sight.”

The author reinforces this image by recalling several Old Testament texts that were understood by the early church as having Christological implications (vv. 6-8). The laying of the chosen cornerstone reflects Isa. 28:16, while its rejection calls to mind Ps. 118:22, and its role as a stumbling block for unbelievers derives from Isa. 8:14.

Early believers saw these texts as prophetic references to the life and work of Jesus, who was chosen by God and rejected by mortals, but destined to become the cornerstone by which all others would be judged. As Christ stood firm in trials, the new believers were called to do the same. ↓

Live in the light (vv. 9-10)

Baptists who cherish the doctrine of “the priesthood of the believer” have long loved v. 9, which picks up on the metaphor of believers as priests from v. 5. Quoting this time from God’s commission to Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 (and possibly Isa. 43:20-21), Peter affirms a new status for the new believers: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” ↓

These labels speak not only to our privilege as God’s chosen people, but also to our responsibility to live as priests before God. In ancient Israel, priests could be charged with seeking a message from God, and with communicating that word to others. Priests were called to intercede with God on behalf of others, and to teach others about God so they could worship in their own words.

In other words, priests are to

represent fellow humans before God, and to represent God to their fellow humans. God has chosen all believers to live as priests, not just ordained clergy or other professional ministers. As such, every believer is called to a holy life that shows reverence to God and points others to God.

We are not called as God’s chosen people and royal priesthood for our benefit alone, then, but that we might serve as witnesses in the world. As God has called us out of this world’s darkness and into divine light, so God commissions us to lead others from spiritual darkness into light (v. 9b).

Peter’s reference to believers as God’s special people led him to recall another Old Testament text, this one from the prophet Hosea. With his own broken marriage serving as a metaphor for Israel’s desertion of God, Hosea gave his daughter the name Lo-ruhammah (“Not Pitied”) and his youngest son the name Lo-ammi (“not my people”).

Hosea did not give up on his children or on Israel, however, but prophesied a day of reunion when God would have pity on “Not Pitied” and would say to “Not My People” that “You are my people.” He, representing Israel, would respond “You are my God” (Hos. 1:9, 2:23).

Peter believed that very prophecy was being fulfilled as new believers responded positively to God in Christ: “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people,” he said. “Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (2:10). ↓

Have you experienced both sides of the relationship Peter describes? Can you recall a feeling of guilt before God, knowing how far you had fallen short of God’s ideal? And do you recall the sense of relief that comes with repentance and the joy of knowing that God has forgiven your sins?

Peter wanted the Christians who read his letter to remember the former lives they had lived apart from God, and to celebrate their calling as a new people, forgiven and beloved and called to a different life. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

1 Peter 3:13-22

May 25, 2014

Good Suffering?

Do you ever catch yourself using oxymorons? Daily conversation is rife with self-contradictory expressions such as “a definite maybe,” “an exact estimate,” “pretty ugly,” “a small crowd,” or “jumbo shrimp.” Can someone really “act naturally” or have “an original copy”?

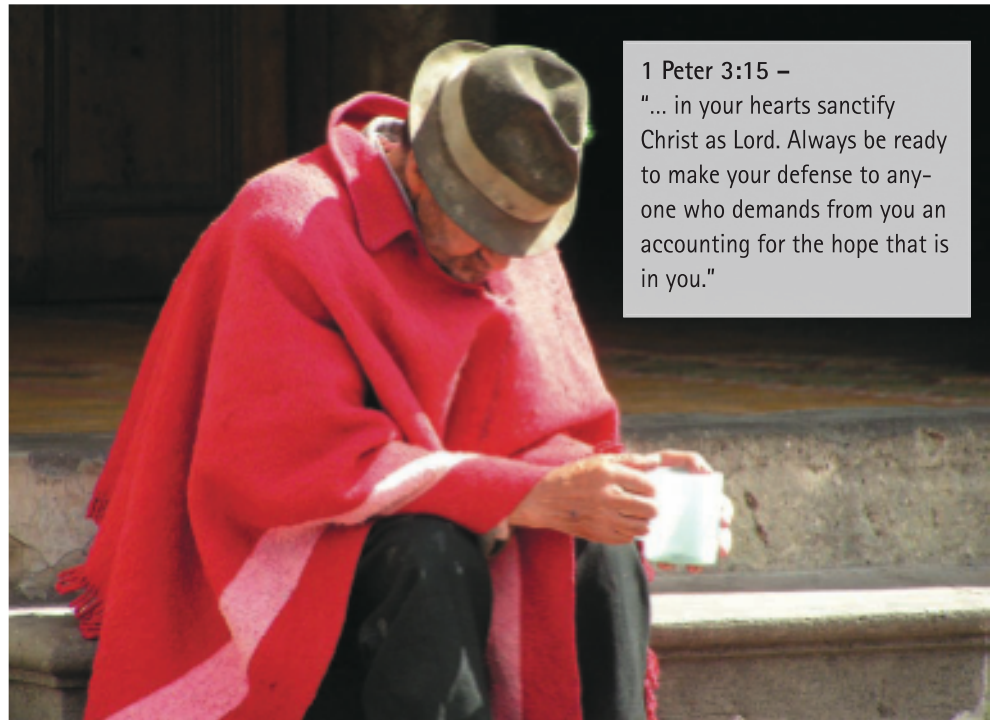
The discussion of suffering we find in 1 Peter 3 comes across as an extended oxymoron that we might summarize as “good suffering,” or “positive pain.” Can there be such a thing?

Don't waste your pain (vv. 13-17)

This is not the first mention of suffering in 1 Peter. In the first chapter, the author addressed his readers as exiles who suffered various trials on the road to a purified faith (1:6-7). In 2:18-21, he encouraged slaves to be patient and respond with goodness even when they suffered under harsh masters. In 3:8-12, Peter called for believers to respond to abuse with blessings rather than returning evil for evil.

The author understood that suffering is a part of life, and God does not make Christians exempt from it. Indeed, some people suffer precisely because they are Christian.

Jesus dealt with unjust suffering in Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:1-9. He did not answer the perennial question of why bad things happen to good people, but he did refute the popular idea that suffering is always the result of personal or family sin. While sin can lead to suffering, the one sinned against may suffer



1 Peter 3:15 –
“... in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.”

more than the offender. Sometimes adversity has no apparent connection with personal failure on anyone’s part.

Peter had no choice but to deal with the issue of suffering, because his readers faced regular ostracism and needed some sort of encouragement to help them deal with it in a positive way. So, in 3:13-17 (and later in 4:12-19), Peter offers counsel to every Christian who suffers unjustly. ↓

Peter acknowledges the common-sense idea that helpful people would seem less likely to get hurt: “Who will harm you if you are eager to do good?” (v. 13). Yet, we know that suffering is a reality. All of us will experience pain at the hands of others.

How can Peter say that “even if you do suffer for doing right, you are blessed” (v. 14a)? Can blessing come from suffering? Perhaps Peter recalled Jesus’ beatitudes about those who are insulted or persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matt. 5:10-11). Jesus had used the same word: *makarios*, “blessed.” ↓

One of the worst aspects of

suffering is the uncertainty that goes with it. We may fear what might happen next, whether past pain will reappear, whether hard times will get worse. We shouldn’t be afraid, Peter says (v. 14b). The NRSV has “Do not fear what they fear,” possibly because Peter seems to be quoting from Isa. 8:12, where Isaiah called on King Ahaz to trust God and not fear the Assyrians, as the kings of Israel and Syria did.

In that sense, “do not fear what they fear” is appropriate, but in Peter’s situation, his readers were afraid of how others might reject them because of their faith. The same words can be translated as “Don’t let the fear of them make you afraid!” ↓

Believers should not let others’ meanness intimidate them. The fear of being hurt can be worse than the hurt itself.

When struggles come, we can cope, because we have hope – the hope that comes with knowing Christ. Rather than living in service to fear, Peter says, we are to “sanctify Christ as Lord” in our hearts, something we do through

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showing reverence and obedience to Christ. Confident of our relationship with Christ, we can be ready to explain what makes us so hopeful and positive despite hardship or rejection by others (v. 15).

As we defend our faith, though, Peter insists that we do so with kindness (v. 16). Christians are not immune to arrogance and the temptation to speak in harsh or demeaning ways, but the attitude of our witness is more important than any satisfaction we might gain from a verbal retaliation. Others may bring shame on themselves in mistreating us, but we should not bring shame upon ourselves or on the cause of Christ.

Several years ago, a self-styled preacher in western North Carolina ordered his small children to stand outside of the elementary school, screaming at the top of their lungs while accusing the students and faculty of being “whoremongers and fornicators.” Father and children may have thought they were defending the faith, but their witness was shameful. It made Christians look foolish and intemperate.

In the same way, well-meaning persons sometimes leave strident gospel tracts in bathroom stalls or on waiting room tables. I have seen tracts that would curl your hair, with graphic cartoon images of Satan gloating over sinners burning in hell. That is not a gentle and respectful way to share a witness: you can’t see the love of God through the smoke.

A positive and hope-filled witness will be more effective than judgmental words spoken or written, and also more likely to foster renewed courage and healing for our own hearts.


Peter understood that the power of one’s witness can be proportional to the circumstances under which it is given. When life is going well, it is easy to have faith and easy to talk about it. When times are hard, the ability to maintain our hope in Christ and speak of it may be particularly impressive.

If we are going to suffer, Peter says, it should be for doing good and not evil.

Facing suffering in this way is a part of God’s will for us – not in the sense that God causes our affliction, but because faithful suffering can test and strengthen our faith. As the pain of strenuous exercise makes our bodies stronger and more fit, the testing of our faith contributes to spiritual health and confidence.

Remember Christ’s example (vv. 18-22)

Speaking of suffering inevitably leads Peter to Christ as the prime example of one who faced unjust suffering with courage and conviction (1:6-7, 2:18-25, 3:18-22, 4:12-19).

Peter’s discussion of suffering in vv. 18-22 begins in straightforward fashion, reminding distressed Christians that Jesus willingly “suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God” (v. 18). 

But what do we make of Peter’s following claim that Jesus, dead in the flesh but alive in the spirit, “made a proclamation to the spirits in prison” (v. 19a)? Peter says that the spirits in question lived in former times, during the period when Noah was building the ark, and were disobedient, presumably to God (v. 20).

Just what was Peter talking about? Many readers presume that Peter believed Jesus went to the land of the dead between the time of his death and resurrection, as implied by the Apostles’ Creed. In the form found in the Book of Common Prayer, the creed declares that Jesus “was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead ...”

While in the land of the dead, according to this view, Jesus preached the good news of repentance and grace to those who were there – or at least to the disobedient contemporaries of Noah who died in the flood.

Scholars who read the text more carefully and are familiar with other ancient writings believe that Peter spoke only of Jesus preaching to the “sons of God” (we would call them angels), who reportedly intermarried with human women in the years prior to the flood (Gen. 6:1-4). These “spirits” were not in the ordinary land of the dead, but in a special prison, according to the apocryphal Jewish book of 1 Enoch, which was popular in the first century and cited elsewhere in the New Testament (for more, see “The Hardest Question” online).

The content of Jesus’ preaching is not stated, only that “he proclaimed to the spirits in prison.” While some scholars believe Jesus’ purpose was only to pronounce final condemnation on the fallen spirits, others assume that any preaching of Christ must necessarily allow for the possibility of hope and redemption.

Perhaps Peter’s intent is to suggest that Christ will go to any length to reach out to the fallen – even to disobedient angels – and offer them hope.

Peter’s mention of Noah and his family, who were saved “through water,” led him to thoughts of baptism, the central symbol of our public faith.

We are not saved by the act of baptism, as a literal reading of v. 21 might suggest, but through repentance and trust in Christ that leads to the waters of baptism. As the central symbol and public profession of our faith, baptism sets us on the road to faithful living and ultimate salvation through the resurrected Christ, who is now on a heavenly throne and exalted over all other powers (v. 22).

Along that road, we will encounter obstacles and experience suffering. Such is life, but we don’t live an ordinary life. As believers, our life is bound up with Christ’s life, and we are called to follow his example of confident endurance in the face of difficult days. As we do so, Peter wants us to know, we will not only be blessed, but we also will be a blessing to others through the power of our witness. **BT**

BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

With the arrival of warmer weather, military activity and political action heat up throughout the South.

In Louisiana, the Confederates emerge victorious in the Battle of Mansfield in De Soto Parish in which the Union suffers more than 2,000 casualties, compared to about 1,000 for the Confederacy. The two armies clash again the next day, and this time the Union Army claims victory in the Battle of Pleasant Hill.

While battles rage, the political climate of Louisiana turns sour for the Confederacy. The state's Constitutional Convention, meeting in New Orleans, adopts a new state constitution that abolishes slavery. Within days, neighboring Arkansas inaugurates a pro-Union state government in Little Rock.

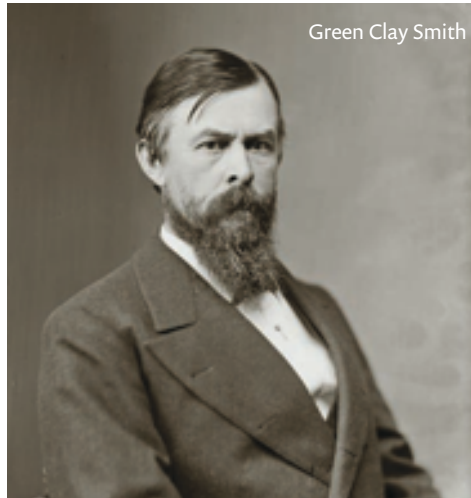
News of the capitulation of Louisiana and Arkansas is met with joy by C.H. Corey, former pastor of the First Baptist Church of Seabrook, N.H., and now serving with the United States Christian Commission in Port Hudson, La. There he preaches the gospel, distributes religious reading materials and otherwise ministers to Union soldiers. After the war, Corey serves as a missionary among the freedmen.

Meanwhile in the border state of Maryland, Dr. Richard Fuller, southern-born resident of Baltimore and immediate past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, publicly states his loyalty to the United States, even while anguishing over his hurting homeland.

Reconstruction thus gains steam, reinforced by U.S. Senate votes to abolish slavery and approve the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Nonetheless, the intensity that characterizes the beginning of the fourth year of war harbors heightened danger for African-American Union soldiers. Confederate forces under the command of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest rout Union forces at Tennessee's Fort Pillow, slaughtering a high percentage of African-American enemy soldiers. Meanwhile, Jefferson Davis orders that any captured African-American soldiers who were slaves must be returned to their masters.

Revenge and executive orders aside, trouble is evident even in the Deep South. Dozens



Green Clay Smith

150 YEARS AGO

April 1864

religion — twenty-five of whom have been baptized.”

Recently-freed slaves in the South also enjoy blessings this month. Black Baptists in Union-occupied Nashville, Tenn. separate from the white Central Baptist Church and form their own congregation, later known as the First Baptist Church of East Nashville.

The month of April thus witnesses the continued fragmentation of the Confederacy against the backdrop of a growing momentum north and south for the legal eradication of black slavery. The fate of many Baptists hangs in the balance. U.S. Congressman Green Clay Smith of Kentucky, a Baptist layman, in a congressional speech offers his thoughts on the month's developments and the future of the war:

of women in Savannah, Ga. riot over the lack of food in their city. When the riots are quelled, three women are thrown into prison.

Amid the swirl of events that collectively hold little promise for the South, the Confederacy observes a national day of fasting and prayer. Many Southern Baptist congregations gather for prayer, including churches in Macon, Ga.:

The Fast Day was duly observed in Macon by all the congregations. An unusual solemnity pervaded the city, and the people repaired to their respective houses of worship and bowed humbly before God and besought his favor; and as such appears to have been the case generally throughout the country, we expect the divine blessing upon our people and upon our cause.

Throughout all of Georgia, white Baptists are concerned about the future. The annual gathering of the Georgia Baptist Convention at Atlanta's Second Baptist Church is a subdued affair. Great concern is expressed over the lack of enough Baptist army chaplains and for the growing number of orphaned children due to soldier deaths.

Regardless, evidence of “divine blessings” upon the Confederacy seemingly finds expression in revivals among soldiers and in churches, including the Union Baptist Church of Wayne County, Ga., where this month “scores of sinners presented themselves for the prayers of the church; out of which number sixty expressed an experimental knowledge of

Louisiana and Arkansas are free, with free constitutions and free-State Congressmen. You have no conception of the vast numbers of men who come from those sections of the country to Washington and ask the Government to go on with this work. The majority of the people of this Commonwealth do not propose to resist the action of the Government. They do not seek to do it, for if they do they must meet the consequences. I love Kentucky, as a proud and glorious Commonwealth, but love my whole country more. She stands as a bright star in the galaxy of nations, and must not be plucked out. The time is coming, not only in Kentucky, but in every Southern State, when the dark clouds will pass away, and all be under one Administration, under one Government, under one flag, and you cannot prevent it. The hundreds of thousands who have lost their lives in the struggle have not lost them in vain. BT

—Bruce Gourley is executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society. For a daily log of “This Day in Civil War History,” see civilwarbaptists.com.

By Naomi King Walker

Women in ministry are here to stay

When a South Georgia congregation hired me in 1973 as its first full-time minister of music, Baptist women ministers were extremely rare. I had almost no female peers — anywhere.

Needing community, I soon joined a group of Baptist music ministers (all male, of course) who gathered monthly for inspiration and peer support. Usually I was the only female in the room (someone's wife or female accompanist would join us occasionally), but they accepted me as a sister in music ministry.

We enjoyed being together. They listened to my presentations and comments, and accepted my choirs equally at festivals and other church music events. They became my friends and co-ministers, helping shape my early years in music ministry.

By the mid-1980s, the Women in Ministry movement was gathering steam, receiving lots of press in Baptist publications. There were still very few female music ministers among Georgia Baptists, but overall, the ranks of women ministers — especially youth or education ministers — were starting to swell.

Several of us met in Decatur and officially formed a Georgia Baptist Women in Ministry group. I enjoyed helping launch this organization, even though I soon moved away and couldn't participate in its development.

I did help distribute colorful fliers announcing our group's formation at the Georgia Baptist Convention that year. The room was aglow with hot pink. Women ministers were here to stay.

Earlier, I'd begun writing about women-in-ministry issues. Over and over, I heard women ministers tell stories of both frustration and fulfillment in their ministry settings.

We all supported each other, but knew that sharing only with female peers was not enough. In order to facilitate change within

congregations, we needed a larger forum.

Ironically, we also needed outspoken men to support us. Powerful male pastors and congregations who adamantly oppose women in church leadership roles only listen seriously to other men — never women.

Prior to drafting my first article, I surveyed Baptist women ministers throughout Georgia, requesting anecdotal responses to questions regarding calling, ordination, salaries, roles and relationships with pastors/congregations/staff members.

They had plenty to say, writing in the margins and on the backs of the survey pages.

When asked about obstacles, they noted that just getting hired as a minister was the biggest challenge. One woman reported being introduced to a male pastor who blurted, "Oh, a real, live woman minister!"

Once employed, some women reported being perceived more as secretaries than ministers — expected to do their own clerical work, for instance, and receiving lower salaries than comparable male ministers.

One was constantly asked, "Where is your husband ministering?" (He was an architect, not a minister.) Another told of being patted on the head by a male minister.

One woman music minister was told she could lead the choir, but not the congregational music. Another was told she could lead the youth and children's choirs but not the adult choir, because there were men in it.

Others were told to sing but not speak. Stand to the side of the pulpit when leading hymns. Refrain from wearing slacks when on the podium — or when shopping.

Visitors one Sunday morning assumed the woman minister leading the music was a substitute for the "real" (male) minister. They returned the next Sunday, exclaiming, "You're still here?"



Despite misperceptions and imposed limitations, these women all remained certain of their calling. In the face of Bible thumpers or well-meaning but unenlightened congregations, they acknowledged God's claim upon their hearts and lives as ministers.

Constant affirmations from those to whom they ministered helped validate their call to ministry, like the father whose son conducted his first Christmas cantata as a minister of music: "I would not be here tonight except for your influence on my son."

They delighted in the changing perceptions of women ministers. Revivals were common then, and one woman music minister invited a male acquaintance to be guest music evangelist. After the first service, her young son said, "Wow, Mommy, I didn't know men did that!"

In the 21st century the women-in-ministry movement, like the civil rights movement and the war on poverty, has taken great strides, but still has miles to go. "Everything changes, yet everything remains the same."

Qualified, called women ministers permeate every area of Baptist life, yet many still enjoy far fewer opportunities than their male counterparts.

Congregational attitudes are slowly evolving, but many women ministers continue to have difficulty getting hired (especially for "platform positions," i.e., pastor or music minister), and struggle with opposition or misperceptions about their ministerial roles.

Women ministers are building on their past and looking toward a promising future.

One thing is clear: women ministers need supportive relationships with their peers — both female and male — to help shape their lives and ministries. In order to thrive, women ministers need community with others who are divinely called to professional ministry. **BT**

—Naomi King Walker is music and worship pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church in Frankfort, Ky.

“Qualified, called women ministers permeate every area of Baptist life, yet many still enjoy far fewer opportunities than their male counterparts.”

Classifieds

Church Administrator: South Main Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, seeks a man or woman with the heart of a minister to serve as administrator and oversee the church's finances (including an annual operating budget of approximately \$3.5 million), the operation and maintenance needs of its six buildings on a 15-acre urban campus, a human resources program for a staff of approximately 60 people, and other administrative responsibilities (including oversight of the church's IT and telecommunications infrastructure). Please send résumés and related materials to administratorsearch@smbc.org.

Worship and Musical Arts Leaders: St. John's Baptist Church, an ecumenical, theologically progressive congregation located in the center city of Charlotte, N.C., is seeking to fill positions on a worship and musical arts ministry staff team. We offer our worship of God through a variety of classical and creative expressions accompanied by our full Letourneau pipe organ. To request further information or to apply, please contact us at sjbcsearch@gmail.com.

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References and background check required before employment.

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Résumés:

John Sauls, Personnel Chair
First Baptist Church
412 N. Madison St.
Whiteville, NC 28472
wfbcpastor@embarqmail.com

Associate Pastor: First Baptist Church of Monroe, N.C., a downtown church affiliated with CBF and CBFNC, is seeking an associate pastor who will focus on children, youth, and their families, with strong concentration on discipleship for all age groups of the church. Emphasis will include leadership in education with fresh and creative approaches to meet changing needs of the church community. Additionally, this position includes, but is not limited to, visiting, counseling, and administrative details, and requires a high energy level. This is a fulltime position, preferably requiring a seminary degree and ordination. Interested candidates may send résumés to staffsearchcommittee@monroefirstbaptist.org.

Minister with Students and Young Adults: First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C., is seeking a minister to lead the church's ministry of nurture and faith development for students and 20-something adults. Responsibilities include planning, coordination, and evaluation of the church's ministry to and with youth, and also involves pastoral care for young people and their families. See <http://ow.ly/u443o> for a detailed position description and instructions for submitting résumés.

Minister to Students and Missional

Activities: Grandin Court Baptist Church in Roanoke, Va., affiliated with CBF and BGAV, is seeking a minister to develop and implement student ministries, recreational activities, and community missions. This person will join four other full-time ministerial staff members in serving our community. A seminary degree is required. Résumés should be sent to Search Team, 2660 Brambleton Ave., SW, Roanoke, VA 24015 or to pastor@grandincourt baptist.org. Interested candidates are encouraged to visit our website, grandincourt baptist.org.

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Silly prayers

Jim Nantz pushes through the screaming crowd to ask, “How did it feel when you hit the game-winning shot?”

The beaming player answers, sort of:

“I just want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God was in control. God was not going to let us lose. We owe it all to God. Yeah God!”

Don't you wish Jim would respond, “Let me get this straight. You think that in the moment you let go of the ball, God said, ‘I'm through letting the best team win. I'll take it from here.’ Explain this to me, college-educated theologian. If you think God fixes basketball games, why do you suppose God doesn't fix the mess in the Central African Republic?”

Brent Musburger could interject, “If you really believe that God is the reason you win, why doesn't your team skip practice to fast and pray? Better yet, why don't you spend the time caring for poor children? Given your theological perspective, why wasn't Mother Teresa a deadly three-point shooter?”

Wouldn't you love to hear Dick Vitale shout, “Listen, diaper dandy, you played Awesome with a capital A, but if you think God is the PT prime time performer for your team, how do you think that makes the other team feel? What does God have against them, baby? Unbelievable.”

If God picks the winners, why does God want Mercer, my school, to ever lose?

How often would Mark Fox, the Georgia coach, have to go to church to win as many games as John Calipari, the Kentucky coach?

If God is picking games, why do the Blue Devils keep winning and St. John's keeps losing?

Why should Las Vegas ever beat St. Mary's?

If God is in control, why doesn't Notre Dame win more often?

What are Baptists to make of Brigham Young having a good team?

Where in the Bible can we find anything to suggest that God is more interested in the Final Four than the hungry?

We should challenge silly ideas about prayer. God is not a genie, and prayer is not rubbing the lamp. God does not need to be



told what needs to be done or that God needs to get to work on it as quickly as possible.

From God's point of view it must be amusing and sad to listen to prayers for contradictory wishes. People pray vehemently on opposite sides of wars as well as basketball games. Some pray for God to rig the lottery. Some pray for our hair to grow back.

If we pray believing we will receive anything we ask for, then we will find it hard to keep praying when we do not. We may find it easier *not* to pray. Many of us have been praying all of our lives and still feel like beginners.

Every once in a while you promise to pray more. You decide to pray for ten minutes. You find a quiet place: “God, it's been a while since I've prayed. I know I don't pray enough, but I'm praying now.”

You think, “This isn't a good prayer. I have to pick up the pace. I need to praise God or something.”

“God, I praise you for being so praiseworthy.”

“Well, that sounds redundant.”

“God, I thank you for everything I should thank you for.”

“That's stupid. Maybe I should confess. That doesn't seem like fun. What's in the freezer? Do we still have any Cherry Garcia? I don't need ice cream. I should get up early

and go to the gym. Maybe I can pray on the treadmill.”

Prayer can feel like talking to ourselves. Without thinking about it, we stop praying for a while, and we don't miss it much.

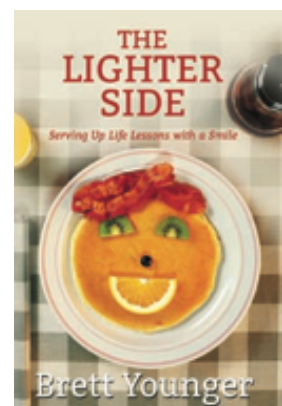
We need to keep praying because we need God. We need to pray even when we don't know what to pray, when we have bad memories that won't go away, when our addictions seem more powerful than we are, when our child is troubled and we don't know how to help, and when we can't pray like we wish we could.

You and I may feel like our prayers are silly, but if our prayers are sincere, then they are not foolish at all. So we pray in the shower, at breakfast, on the way to work, at work, at school, at home and before we go to sleep. We pray for justice, honesty and compassion. We pray because when we pray, God is there turning hatred to love and doubt to faith and despair to hope.

When we pray, God does not always answer our prayers the way we want, but God comes, and deep in our souls, that is what we are praying for. **BT**

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

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A CONVERSATION WITH STEPHEN REEVES

What is advocacy

— and why should Christians care?

DECATUR, Ga. — Stephen Reeves joined the staff of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship last fall to assume a new position as associate coordinator for advocacy and partnerships. An attorney and Baptist layman, Reeves moved from his hometown of Austin, Texas, where he served as director of public policy with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, formerly led by CBF executive coordinator Suzii Paynter.

Earlier he worked as a staff attorney with the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. He is married to Deborah Gaddis Reeves, a CBF-endorsed chaplain. They are expecting their first child this summer.

Baptists Today editor John Pierce talked with Reeves about the Fellowship's new emphasis on advocacy.

BT: Advocacy, as a word, is not considered part of our common church nomenclature. So what is your working definition of advocacy?

SR: The most basic definition is to speak out on behalf of another, to take their concerns as your own and use your voice to help change that problem or situation. While this can certainly be accomplished by seeking a change in public policy at the local, state or federal level, it can also be done on an individual basis through non-policy means.

I think it is also important for an advocate to help an individual or group find and effectively use their own voice. We should not assume we always have the right answer for what others need; we should help empower them to advocate for themselves as well.

BT: How does advocacy fit within the overall mission of Christian churches and organizations of churches such as the



Stephen Reeves

Fellowship? And how is advocacy already at work in CBF life?

SR: The biblical call to care for our neighbors — particularly the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized — is undeniable. The vast majority of churches and Christian organizations recognize and take very seriously this responsibility in a number of ways.

Fortunately, in this country that responsibility of the faithful is paired with the opportunity to impact the broader community through the democratic process. We should exercise responsible citizenship.

National religious bodies work together all the time at the federal level on issues of common agreement, to raise awareness and a shared moral voice appealing to the conscience of our elected officials on important issues. It is time that CBF take its rightful place at that table.

While an emphasis on advocacy from the national office is new, there are already many advocates within CBF life — people who have a calling to help others and improve communities.

This applies to field personnel working with some of the most oppressed and marginalized people across the world, but also to pastors and ministers of missions in local congregations as well as laity. Many of our church members are already committed to important issues like health care, education, hunger, missional business and so many others.

But, I think it is important to have a voice of advocacy at the national level because it says a great deal about who we are as a fellowship of Baptist Christians. I firmly believe that by raising the profile of our public witness, CBF has a great chance to be recognized in the broader culture as the type of Baptists that effectively work for the common good.

BT: On whose behalf do you — and others who embrace this mission — advocate? How is this different from so-called “special interest” lobbying?

SR: I think we start by advocating for and with those we come into contact in our churches, communities and mission work. When we encounter needs or injustice, we should feel empowered to speak out to help change those situations however we can.

We should pay particular attention to those who have little voice or representation in the political process whether that be at the city, county, state or national level. This is an important distinction between lobbying and being an advocate.

Lobbyists have an important place and valuable expertise. However, they are paid to represent the best interests of their client. Advocates represent the well-being of folks who aren't paying their contract. Often this can mean folks with fewer financial resources, children, victims of predatory lending or human trafficking.

This advocacy position has not been established to argue for policy that always favors our churches above others. An advocate does not work out of self-interest and, believe me, that is quite uncommon in the policy arena — and it gets folks' attention.

BT: In addition to your coming to this position, a couple of recent announcements show that CBF leaders are serious about advocacy work. How do the one-year appointment of Christian ethicist David Gushee of Mercer University and the collaboration with the Baptist World Alliance to increase efforts at the United Nations help fulfill this mission?

SR: I think, first and foremost, our pastors and church members need to have a clear understanding of what we mean by advocacy and why we feel compelled by the Gospel to be advocates in this world.

David Gushee is one of our finest theologians and Christian ethicists. He not only comes with marvelous academic credentials, but also an established commitment to communicating on a popular level to our pastors and church members.

In addition, he has stepped into the fray of public policy a number of times including on issues of torture and environmental stewardship, demonstrating that these issues are not just a cerebral exercise but need to be lived out. As Baptists, our actions should always start with a clear understanding of what scripture is calling us to do.

We need someone of his caliber to help establish and communicate a clear biblical foundation for this work. I've been following his work and writing for years, and I'm thrilled that he has accepted this challenge and for the chance [I have] to work closely alongside him.

There is no doubt our world is getting smaller and folks recognize that "neighbor" can also mean those very far away. We have field personnel in placements across the globe, and so many of our churches are engaged in hands-on international mission work.

Once again, the United Nations is a place where religious organizations with a global presence work together. The BWA has been active at the UN for many years, earning respect and all the proper credentials as a non-governmental organization.

Recently, their well-earned access and opportunities to engage have been underused. Suzii developed this partnership through her connection with Raimundo Barreto, the director of the Division of Freedom and Justice, to help advance our common concerns.

An advocate does not work out of self-interest and, believe me, that is quite uncommon in the policy arena — and it gets folks' attention.

The BWA has recently focused much of its work in the areas of human rights and sustainable development. The CBF already has two individuals committed to this work as volunteer representatives: Phyllis Boozer has begun working with the Congress of Non-Governmental Organization's committee on the status of women. And Shane McNary, one of our European field personnel, is working on international religious liberty issues at meetings of the UN in Geneva, Switzerland.

BT: You've distinguished already between advocacy on behalf of those who experience injustice (and lack the power to bring change) and lobbying to promote self-interest in the halls of power. But can you say a little about how you navigate what some might call "getting into politics" or "being controversial" — as if those are necessarily things to avoid?

SR: This type of work is not without risk. But I'm convinced the Gospel calls us to "risk something big for something good" — as the benediction that Roger Paynter recites nearly every Sunday at First Baptist Austin says.

Jesus took on the serious issues of the day including those we would now consider political. We cannot be at our most effective working on behalf of the "least of these" in our society without getting into these issues.

However, I think we need to be sensitive to the realities of the environment in which our pastors and church members live. [An example is] one that is hyper-politicized and more focused on winning an argument or being right than making progress on things that matter. In that regard there are ways to avoid or mitigate such fights, and we will work to do that and try and teach others how.

I think the most important thing is start with scripture to discern what the Bible says about an issue. By starting with what we see in our community and telling the stories of the folks we've encountered in ministry, we can put a face and a specific example to a problem that can help us break out of a partisan political framework.

BT: Where — that is, at what levels of power — does advocacy take place?

SR: Advocacy can take place on an individual basis all the way through the halls of Congress and in the White House. A great deal of progress on important issues takes place on the city and state level.

BT: How important is collaboration — the building of coalitions — to the success of advocacy? What other factors should be considered when choosing the right issue to address and the best approach to take?

SR: Coalitions are essential to this type of work, but we need to be clear about what it means and what it does not mean.

By joining with other organizations — often with very different motivations, beliefs and constituents — you do not sign off on their entire agenda. Instead, you work together strategically on the defined set of goals you have in common.

By doing so, you share the workload and also draw from the collective political strength or influence. This is quite common in the advocacy world.

It also allows us to benefit from each other's expertise. If a Fellowship pastor or church member feels called to work on a certain issue that we are not experts on, we can introduce them to other trusted partners with whom we have established a relationship through working in coalition.

Issue selection is very important. We will start by working on issues that we know to be important to our churches, pastors and field personnel.

Of course, we will never speak on behalf of all CBF Baptists. That would be impossible, and would also violate our understanding of the priesthood of the believer and local church autonomy.

We will look for an issue where there is broad consensus without being paralyzed by a lack of total unanimity. We'll also be looking for those places where our voice can be most effective — issues that maybe haven't garnered much attention from the faith community but where there is real opportunity for progress.

However, I think a large part of my job will not be about deciding "from the top" which issues to select, but to help raise up the voices of advocates already busy at work among both churches and individuals in the Fellowship; to connect them and help them to be more effective.

We hope to help generate within CBF churches a new understanding of advocacy as missions and to establish a new "ecosystem" within CBF life where other issues of emphasis will be generated from the "bottom up."

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Inspired Creativity

The community ministries of our churches and field personnel often encounter situations or issues that call for broader advocacy. Through a new cultivation of networks called "missions communities" — each focused on one of eight areas of mission — we hope to connect existing CBF advocates to one another and to the national advocacy office.

As we encourage more advocacy work by CBF churches and individuals, we also hope to help make them more effective by offering advice and expertise, and connecting them to other organizations working on their particular issue of interest.

Additionally I want to ensure that our field personnel, both international and domestic, can help identify issues of concern they encounter in their ministries that we should address.

BT: What did you and CBF Executive Coordinator Suzii Paynter learn from your work in Texas that you bring to the Fellowship and its many churches in various settings? What kind of help can you offer congregations or coalitions eager to deal with issues of injustice?

SR: I think we learned a lot in our seven-plus years working together. In particular, I think we learned how to work in a very bi-partisan or nonpartisan manner; that is, how to work in a very politically diverse and, at times, challenging environment — and to talk about and make progress on a variety of issues in a way that does not feed into the typical left-right ideological debates.

We learned how to build critical relationships based on respect and not by deciding who are the "good guys" and who are the "bad guys."

As difficult as it is, I am convinced that Christians cannot let our behavior in the public square be dictated by the typical behavior of others. We learned that *how* we advocate is often just as important as *what* we are advocating for.

BT: What are four or five issues being addressed today — or that need to be addressed legislatively?

SR: There are already a few issue areas where work has begun. These include:

1. Local church and broader policy initiatives combating predatory lending, specifically payday and auto title lending

2. Anti-hunger advocacy including work with Bread for the World, a long-time partner where CBF is represented on the board by Devita Parnell

3. Advocating for comprehensive immigration reform through work with the Evangelical Immigration Table

4. Work on international religious liberty primarily through a new partnership with the Baptist World Alliance.

Additionally, Gary Skeen of the Church Benefits Board has been out traveling the country to help individuals and churches understand the changes in health care that are occurring as a result of the Affordable Care Act and what it means for them.

BT: Often we learn best by example. Can you share a success story from your work in Austin with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission? And what are the elements of that story that might help others to do advocacy well?

SR: There are so many great stories from over the years. But one of my favorites is when pastor Jeff Johnson of First Baptist Church of Commerce, Texas, currently president of Texas Baptists, came to testify in a House committee hearing about how payday lending had affected his community.

He told a story from when he was pastor of First Baptist Church of Del Rio, about how employees of a payday lender were going to the nearby mental health clinic and soliciting adults with developmental difficulties to take out loans.

He said that many of those individuals were honored that someone would respect them enough to give them a loan, so they signed the forms and took the money. The end result was that they would essentially owe the lender their entire disability check every two weeks.

I had never heard this story. I had worked on drafting this bill for many weeks, and we had never considered this situation.

The members of the House committee were outraged and asked for a sworn statement that he and his church members had witnessed this. The next time the bill draft came back from the committee chair there was a new section outlawing solicitation or advertisements at such facilities, and the bill ultimately passed.

That is a testament to the power of a story — one told at the right time, by the right person.

The lobby forces of the multi-billion dollar industry aren't fond of additional regulations. But when a pastor, a leader in his community, took the time to come to Austin — at a critical point in the legislative process to speak out for someone else, a person his church has ministered to — it brought about change. **BT**



2014 CBF General Assembly

June 23-27
Atlanta, Georgia

Join us in Atlanta to celebrate how our stories as Cooperative Baptists are *Woven Together* with each other and with God's mission.

Register and learn about fellowship opportunities, auxiliary events, the Assembly schedule and more at thefellowship.info/assembly

Featured Speakers

This year's Assembly features a number of gifted speakers who will lead us as we discover threads of faith and fellowship.



Executive Coordinator Suzi Paynter will address the morning business session with music from the Broadway Baptist Church chapel choir of Fort Worth, Texas. The evening worship will feature a keynote address from former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young about the church's mission in the world as well as music from world-renowned operatic and concert soprano Indra Thomas and songs from the CBF of Georgia youth choir.



Moderator Bill McConnell will address the morning business session, where he will officially transition this role to Moderator elect Kasey Jones. Jones will bring a proclamation and vision for CBE with music from the CBF of Georgia Atlanta Choir. The Friday evening worship will include communion led by Suzi Paynter and a keynote address from Greg Saylor, pastor of First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.



Fellowship with friends old and new at meal events with CBF networks, partners and seminaries including:

Thursday

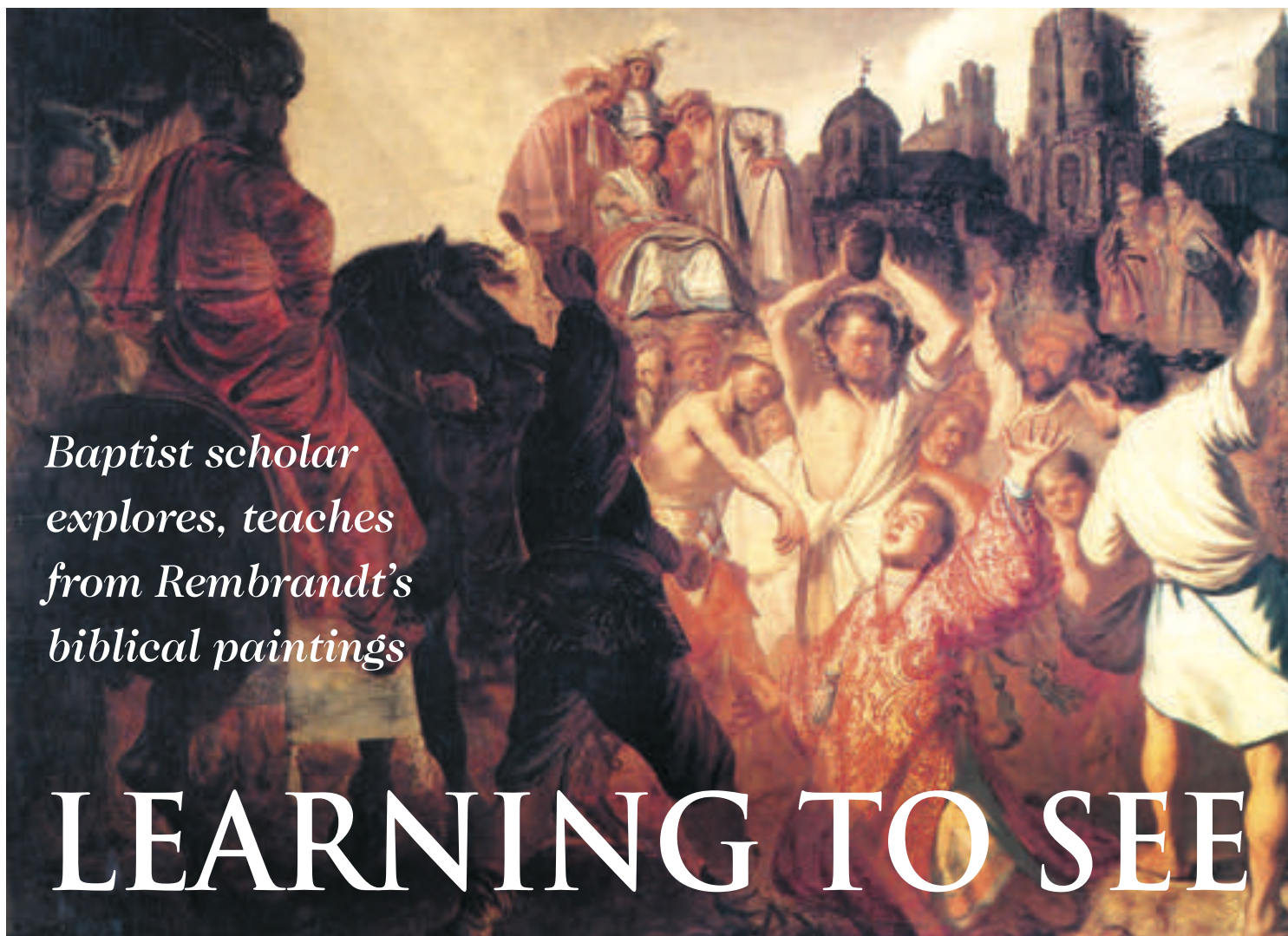
Lunch sponsored by the New Baptist Covenant with keynote speaker Allan Boesak, the Desmond Tutu Chair of Peace, Global Justice and Reconciliation Studies at Butler University and Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Ind.



Friday

The Baptist Joint Committee's annual Religious Liberty Council luncheon will feature Melissa Rogers, special assistant to the President and Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.





Baptist scholar explores, teaches from Rembrandt's biblical paintings

LEARNING TO SEE

Rembrandt Van Rijn “had such a gift for getting inside the text of the Bible,” said John I Durham, an Old Testament scholar who taught for 25 years at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., beginning in 1963.

With images of the master painter showing overhead, Durham shared his insights — learned over a half-century of studying Rembrandt’s works — in a two-night presentation to First Baptist Church of Eatonton, Ga. Recently, Durham and his wife Betty relocated from Virginia to Watkinsville, Ga., to be near family.

For those who claim that Rembrandt’s works are dark, Durham counters that “nothing could be further from the truth.” Rembrandt, he said, was “a master of light.”

Some darkness comes from aging, he said, noting that Rembrandt’s *The Militia Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq* (commonly known as *The Night Watch*) appeared much lighter after being restored following a vandal’s attack on the painting.

“He channeled the light,” said Durham.

“It was the wand of his work.”

Rembrandt’s brilliant use of light, he said, causes viewers to see what the painter wanted them to see.

“He looks into looking at what he wants us to look at — with light.”

Because of the painter’s remarkable use of light, said Durham, “You can look into Rembrandt’s pearls.”

THE BIBLE

About one-third of Rembrandt’s paintings dealt with the Bible, said Durham. And he only painted scenes that actually appeared in the biblical text.



John I Durham

In 1625, at age 19, Rembrandt’s first painting, *The Stoning of St. Stephen*, revealed his unique style and his keen interest in biblical scenes.

Part of that unique approach, said Durham, was Rembrandt’s refusal to follow artistic traditions that called for flying angels to convey divine intervention. Instead, he used “only beams of light.”

The painter, said Durham, presented biblical persons as he believed they were — without elevating them beyond their humanity.

“Rembrandt felt the people in the Bible were real people,” said Durham of the Dutch master. “He painted Jesus as a Jew, which made the people in Amsterdam mad.”

Careful observers will recognize Paul at the top of the *St. Stephens* painting, he noted, holding the coats of those who are stoning the Bible’s first recorded Christian martyr.

“Rembrandt knew his Bible,” said Durham. “He immersed himself in the text.”

The Roman Catholic Church would not commission Rembrandt because his works were not “holy enough,” he said. The artist’s way of seeing and portraying biblical persons

as real people caused him criticism for being too crude.

Rembrandt was even called “the first heretic in art,” said Durham.

“He was a rebel ...,” said Durham in a later interview with *Baptists Today*. “He chucked all the traditions out the window and painted the text.”

The longtime teacher of ancient biblical languages added: “And he studied enough Hebrew to get it right.”

PROGRESSION

Rembrandt’s approach to faith was not clarified by any church affiliation, said Durham. He was friendly with the Mennonites in Amsterdam, and more so with the local Jews.

Over the years he moved through three stages in his biblical paintings, said Durham.

“Very early on Rembrandt began illustrating the Bible,” he said. “Then he moved to attempting to interpret the Bible.”

The third stage, said Durham, was Rembrandt’s embrace of confession.

In his biblical paintings, Rembrandt would often include those who were distracted from the main event, Durham noted. For example, in *St. John the Baptist Preaching*, there are those doing about everything but listening to the preacher.

“Rembrandt put in people who are oblivious to the holy moments,” he said, “because holy moments happen all around us and we are oblivious to them.”

Durham posed a question to his audience: “Suppose you had been in Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion. Would you have bothered to go out and see it?”

Then he noted: “Nobody saw the resurrection of the Lord.”

“We’ve got to learn to see,” said the longtime Bible scholar and teacher. “Looking and seeing are not the same thing.”

Rembrandt, he said, can “teach us about seeing; he teaches us how to understand.”

In *The Biblical Rembrandt: Human Painter in a Landscape of Faith* (2004, Mercer University Press), Durham wonders if this gift is the most valuable of all Rembrandt’s gifts.

“What we can see with our eyes, the paintings and the etchings and the drawings of his biblical oeuvre that remain to us, wondrous as they are, present to us perhaps an opening, a step into what the Bible is really about, going beyond the text to what gave us the text in the first place,” he writes.

“Rembrandt may well have been



Opposite page: *The Stoning of Saint Stephen*, 1625, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon. **Above:** *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1635, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg., Russia.

attempting to help us look beyond his biblical pictures. He may even have been inviting us to *complete* those pictures by putting ourselves in them.”

PAINTING HIMSELF

In the center of *The Stoning of St. Stephen* is a man with red hair and a rosy nose. That is one of many occasions, said Durham, in which Rembrandt painted himself into a scene.

“He got into these stories — literally,” said Durham.

Rembrandt’s confessional stage can be seen in the ways he would place himself in his

paintings: distracted, remorseful and even aiding in the Crucifixion.

Particularly moving are Rembrandt’s placements of himself in the Passion paintings, *The Raising of the Cross* and *The Descent from the Cross*, which were commissioned by Prince Frederick Henry of Orange.

“Rembrandt put himself in these as a sort of confession,” said Durham.

In addition to placing himself in biblical scenes, the less-than-attractive artist did many renderings of himself.

“Rembrandt was an infamous self-portrait maker,” said Durham. “He’s not vain in the

sense of making himself pretty; he just paints himself the way he is.”

However, Rembrandt did take some liberties in his costuming. He seemed to like playing “dress up.” And sometimes his imagination took over.

Durham noted that in a self-portrait at age 23, Rembrandt added a gold necklace that was reserved for master painters with financial sponsors. It was obviously not reality.

Rembrandt made a lot of money, said Durham, but also spent it away. And only seven letters from the painter have ever been found — all attempts at collecting money for his paintings.

Yet the gifted man with the unruly hair produced more than 100 self-portraits.

“He gave us an autobiography in art,” said Durham. “He was not vain; he was involved in knowing himself.”

PAINTING OTHERS

Rembrandt painted many others into his works as well — though not always appreciated. He used the image of his wife, Saskia, for the woman sitting on the lap of the frolicking prodigal, made in Rembrandt’s own likeness, in *The Prodigal Son in the Tavern* (or brothel).

“She didn’t particularly want to be a loose woman,” said Durham.

An X-ray of the painting showed that the woman was first painted as topless — then painted over, likely following strong protest from Saskia.

While commissioned to paint scenes of Jesus’ Passion, Rembrandt was not “sponsored” like some other painters, said Durham. So he needed to sell his works — or make money from those willing to pay to appear in his paintings.

Of the 18 characters in the *The Night Watch*, said Durham: “Everybody in the painting paid to be in it.”

Dogs appeared in many of Rembrandt’s paintings including biblical scenes — for no obvious reasons. Durham concludes that it was likely another way of humanizing the scene.

“Rembrandt excelled at painting old people,” said Durham. The artist would show them with “a sense of tenderness and affection.”

Rembrandt taught his students well, said Durham. As a result, paintings by some who emulated the master, once thought to be Rembrandt’s own work, have been de-authorized upon closer examination.

One student painted Abraham giving a

The Raising of the Cross, c. 1633, Alte Pinakothek, Bayerische Staatsgemaldegammlungen, Munich



final blessing to Isaac. While the style followed Rembrandt closely, there was one obvious difference, said Durham. That scene is not in the Bible.

“Rembrandt *always* used the Bible for his biblical works,” said Durham.

At age 55, the artist used his own likeness in a painting of St. Paul.

“He was enamored with Paul,” said Durham. “His longest surviving son, Titus, was named after Paul.”

EARLY INTEREST

In the early ’60s, Durham was at Oxford University doing a doctorate in Hebrew scripture. “I’d go to London and see every Rembrandt I could.”

As he traveled more widely through the years, he always took in any Rembrandt on

display. Then the museums holding the paintings became his destinations.

“There is an invisible pull in his best works that tug at us again and again.”

The many books he read on Rembrandt were long, he said, because they started with the painter’s work and then went to the Bible — the opposite of what Rembrandt did.

Durham took a different approach in writing *The Biblical Rembrandt*.

“I am neither an art historian nor the son of an art critic,” wrote Durham, not surprisingly playing off a line from the Old Testament prophet Amos.

His understanding and appreciation of Rembrandt’s great works come from the perspective of one whose career he describes as “a thrilling romp through the Bible...”

He writes in *The Biblical Rembrandt*:



Self-portrait as the Apostle Paul, 1661 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

“A fundamental premise of my work, one that I reached only after many years of looking at Rembrandt’s works drawn from texts in the Bible, is that Rembrandt’s works reflect belief.”

Durham studied the works of Rembrandt, looking “with faith, at faith,” and has viewed the art scattered around the world for more than 50 years. It has moved him.

He recalled standing before *The Incredulity of St. Thomas* (1634) one Easter in Moscow. The artist was just 28 years old when he captured Jesus showing his wounds to the doubting disciple.

Again, Durham noticed, some people in the scene “were too busy looking to see.”

It is a theme not only found in the great works of a master painter, but also one seen throughout the biblical revelation — as well as a modern-day reality, he said.

“If you were to ask me what I’ve learned after all of these years of studying the Bible,” said Durham upon reflection, “it is about one thing: God is here!”

That is the message of both the Incarnation and the Resurrection, he said.

“It is real. God is really here now.”

GIVING, RECEIVING

“Rembrandt receives and gives,” said Durham, of the painter finding influence in the works of others and having a remarkable influence on some of the world’s greatest artists who followed him.

Rembrandt strongly influenced many painters, especially Goya, Van Gogh and Picasso, said Durham. For one, they all painted many self-portraits.

The Spanish painter Francisco Goya’s *The Repentant St. Peter* includes the symbolic “keys of the kingdom of heaven” as did Rembrandt’s painting.

Fellow Dutchman Vincent van Gogh, who sought to be a minister, sold but one painting, and then took his own life, followed Rembrandt in painting light into darkness.

Pablo Picasso’s evolving style came to look quite different from Rembrandt’s work, but the influence was strong, said Durham.

In addition to many self-portraits, Picasso painted his mother “with tenderness,” as did Rembrandt. And he painted some of the same biblical subjects, including the Crucifixion.

“Picasso’s great hero was Rembrandt,” said Durham.

SEEING, BELIEVING

Rembrandt can have an influence on those who paint with words as well, said the long-time teacher of preachers.

“I harangued my students about beginning with the Bible,” he said. “Begin with the text and the sermon will grab you — and run away with you.”

“Begin with the text!” Durham said with emphasis. “That’s what Rembrandt did.”

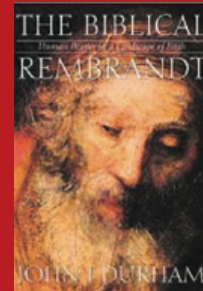
Durham noted that Rembrandt likely read a Dutch translation of the Luther Bible.

He painted his mother holding the Bible. And when Rembrandt died in 1669 at age 63, only one book was found in his library: the Bible.

The stories that flowed from scripture surely gave Rembrandt a perspective that shaped his biblical paintings.

“Learning to see is all about light,” said Durham, “... the absence of darkness.”

The long-appreciated Old Testament scholar is writing a new book now. It is a series of essays on how to read the Bible, and Rembrandt will be there to assist him. **BT**



The Biblical Rembrandt is available from Mercer University Press at mupress.org or (478) 301-2880. John I Durham may be contacted at his home in Watkinsville, Ga., at (706) 310-4085 or johnandbettyd@aol.com.



Before moving to Georgia last year, John Durham significantly reduced his personal library but retained an expansive collection on Rembrandt and other artists. Photo by John Pierce.

Storybook time

By Tony W. Cartledge

A winter afternoon in Amish country has a storybook feel despite the traffic. One doesn't have to venture more than 30 miles west of Philadelphia to be surrounded by picturesque hillsides blanketed with snow and punctuated with farm silos.

Every home, it seems, has a long pulley-operated clothesline angling from the house to the top of a barn or tall pole, so that frozen sheets and shirts hang 20 feet off the ground.

Off the beaten path of tourist stops and quilt shops, horse-drawn buggies are as common as cars, and the snowy farms seem an idyllic place to live, until you remember that milking cows in the frozen dawn and shoveling manure into a mule-drawn spreader come with the territory.

Despite their staid reputation, the Amish have a deep sense of humor, though I'm not sure it's always intended the way visitors take it. Driving along Route 30, you can drive through a town called Paradise, where there's a big sign pointing to "Christ's Home Office." I know (thanks to Google) that it's a residential children's home, but still — finding Christ's home office in Paradise was fun.



In Lancaster, at the Mennonite Information Center, you can find a life-sized replica of the tabernacle as described in the book of Exodus, with the exception that it has real walls and a roof rather than the four layers of woven cloth and skins called for in the Old Testament. It has a really cheesy feel (to me), but the guides take it very seriously.

I asked why the Mennonites have such an interest in the tabernacle. It turns out the replica was built by a Baptist preacher in Florida about 40 years ago — who later sold it to a Mennonite evangelist, who operated it in Florida for a while before bringing it north.

Stopping at Katie's Kitchen, you can sample pepper cabbage and creamed celery while falling in love with their homemade peanut butter. Then, looping back along Route 340, you can pass through communities with names such as Bird-in-Hand, Intercourse (really) and White Horse.

Running low on fuel, I wondered why there seemed to be so few gas stations, until I remembered that buggies run on one horsepower. The Prius did make it down Octorara Trail to a WaWa station in Sadsbury, and I was glad: hitching a buggy ride into town would not have been much of a storybook ending. **BT**

Bill Gothard and those who pick up the pieces

By John Pierce

During my years as a campus minister I counseled many students who had naively bought into Bill Gothard's cult-like teachings that had scarred them. He isolated himself from any questioning — presenting his rigid and often-wrong biblical interpretations as coming directly from God.

Though tragic, I'm not surprised by the revelations of Gothard's abuse of young female employees nor his refusal to take responsibility for his misuse of power. Narcissists of his order consider themselves above the accountability that they demand in others.

Before writing my doctoral dissertation on Christian approaches to the

decision-making process, I attended and critiqued his "basic seminar." It was far worse than I expected in terms of really bad theology and psychology, legalism that would make a Pharisee blush, and his failure to bring any perspective other than his own into the presentation.

Most astonishing was his overt condescension toward females. His attempts at humor were always mocking of and even hostile toward women. I marveled that those in attendance didn't rush the stage. But the gullible, gathered crowd just soaked up his nonsense with the sponges they had traded for their brains at the door.

It was hour after hour of note taking without any critical analysis. What a shame.

I'm not exactly sure what Jesus meant

about being wise as serpents but gentle as doves. But enough wisdom to see and acknowledge the dangers of this man's teachings would have saved a lot of tragedies.

But, of course, those who waved warning flags were simply dismissed by his loyal followers as "not believing the Bible." But we stayed around to pick up the pieces — lots of badly damaged pieces in the name of Jesus. **BT**

(Bill Gothard, 79, has now resigned his leadership positions after being put on leave by his board of directors following the firsthand accounts of his heavy-handed ways, including his repeated targeting of young women, detailed at recoveringgrace.org.)

Search for Truth

Science group, evangelicals push new collaboration

Scientists and Christian evangelicals can collaborate for the good of society but it will take some serious effort, experts said as they launched a new campaign to change perceptions between the two groups.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science and its Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion program released a major research project in February, at the AAAS annual meeting in Chicago, and announced an upcoming series of conferences mixing believers, scientists and many who are both.

The massive survey of views on God, religion and science included 10,241 respondents and took a close look at the views of evangelicals and people in science-related occupations.

The concern is not whether “science and religion can co-exist. They already do,” said lead researcher Elaine Howard Ecklund, a sociologist and director of Rice University’s Religion and Public Life Program. “The question is how to do it well.”

“The stakes are very high,” said Galen Carey, vice president for government relations for the National Association of Evangelicals, which is an advisor on the project.

Carey shared the stage with Ecklund in panels, press conferences, and a live chat on the research and dialogue plans.

“We face so many issues as a nation and a world community where the contributions of both are needed to bring a better world,” he said.

Among the findings of the study, “Religious Understandings of Science”:

- Nearly 36 percent of scientists have no doubt about God’s existence.
- 18 percent of scientists attend weekly religious services (compared with 20 percent of the overall U.S. population).
- 17 percent of scientists consider themselves evangelical.
- 15 percent of scientists consider themselves “very religious” (19 percent of the overall population).
- 13.5 percent of scientists read religious texts weekly (17 percent overall).

Ecklund said 72 percent of evangelical scientists, and 48 percent of all evangelicals, see opportunities for collaboration across the two worldviews. Carey said there are more than 2 million evangelical scientists committed to both faith and science and able to serve as a bridge.

But not everyone is singing “Kumbayah” around the campfire.

“If you are looking for conflict, there’s a place to find it in the data,” Ecklund pointed out in an online chat for AAAS’ *Science* magazine.

The study reports:

- 22 percent of scientists and 20 percent of the general population think most religious people are hostile to science.
- 22 percent of the general population think scientists are hostile to religion.
- 27 percent of Americans feel that science and religion are in conflict.
- Of those who feel science and religion are in conflict, 52 percent sided with religion.

The groups are not synonymous. The study found:

- Evangelical Protestants are 23 percent of the general population but 17 percent of scientists.
- Catholics have a similar gap — 24 percent of the population but only 19 percent of scientists.
- For mainline Protestants, the gap is smaller — 27 percent overall and 25 percent of scientists.
- Atheists, agnostics and people with no religious identity are 22 percent of scientists but, according to this study, just 15.5 percent of the general population.

By almost every measure of religiosity — attending worship, reading sacred texts and prayer — evangelical scientists claim higher levels of observance than evangelicals in general.

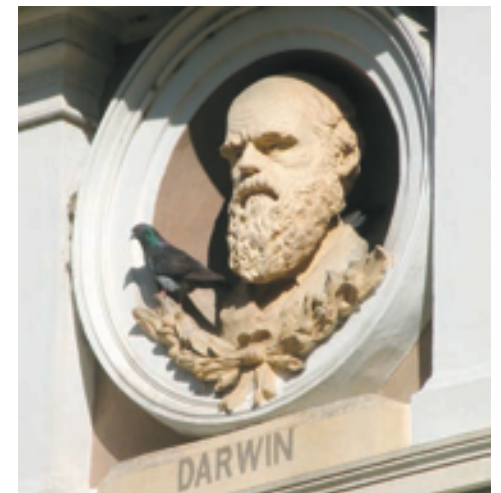
About 19 percent of the general population and 16 percent of all scientists say they consider themselves to be “very religious.” However, among evangelicals, the rate rises to 44 percent and for evangelical scientists, it’s 51 percent.

On whether they have “no doubt” that “God really exists,” evangelical scientists (85 percent) and evangelicals in general (87 percent) are statistically tied. Both share higher rates of

conviction than the general population (55 percent) and scientists in general (35.9 percent).

Ecklund, Carey and Jennifer Wiseman, director of DoSER, said the survey data would serve as a basis for a series of regional conferences in 2014 leading to a national conference next year. While the hot-button issues such as evolution may remain points of tension, both groups must persevere to build connections, they said.

Ecklund cited shared concerns such as bringing diversity to the science professions, a focus on social justice and solving issues such as food insecurity or care for the environment.



“I don’t want to sound Pollyanna-ish but we can start with areas of commonality,” she said.

Carey said the NAE is preparing a resource booklet for pastors and Sunday school classes to foster thoughtful discussion between science and religion.

“We respect the fact that science has a role to play,” Carey said. “It doesn’t have a way to study spiritual reality. It doesn’t mean spiritual reality isn’t there. We believe it is. But it has to be approached by using different methods and tools.”

But Carey also reiterated that “science needs the understanding, support and funding of society. ... We share a common vocation in the search for truth. ‘All truth is God’s truth,’ as Augustine said. ‘We have the same calling to serve society.’” **BT**



Left to right, CH, BG, David H. Cyr, USAF, Ret., CH (COL) John Schumacher, USA (Ret), Sentinel, and Sergeant of the Guard place a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns. RNS photo by Adelle M. Banks.

Shared grief

Chaplains help others grieve, and learn to grieve themselves

ARLINGTON, Va. — Seated at a table with other chaplains who have comforted grieving military families, retired Army Chaplain John Schumacher held the red rose in his hands before he passed it along, pausing to remember those who had died on the battlefield.

Schumacher then took the rose and added it to a memorial wreath. Two days later, he and another chaplain placed the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery.

“I’ve been in combat. I’ve been with a lot of wounded men. I’ve been with dead men who were my friends,” said Schumacher, a two-tour Vietnam veteran. “Chaplains give so much and carry all that pain with them for so long. It was such a tremendous honor to feel some of that pain kind of ooze out a little bit.”

The memorial ceremony, organized for

the first time by the National Association of Evangelicals Chaplains Commission, gave chaplains, who usually help others grieve, a chance to grieve themselves.

This often-unspoken need is now being addressed across the country, with new training and a greater emphasis on mentoring. As these initiatives take hold, chaplains working in hospitals, hospice and the military are finding ways to cope.

Valerie Storms, president of the Association of Professional Chaplains, said many chaplains’ organizations, including Catholic and Jewish groups, tell chaplains to take care of themselves as well as others.

Self-care ranges from knowing a chaplain they can contact on the spur of the moment to developing hobbies — from running to making jewelry — to maintain their spiritual and emotional equilibrium.

Storms, who is affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists, tends to her garden to help her through tough days as the manager of chaplaincy care at Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Fla.

“I can go mow my lawn and edge my lawn and trim my bushes and I see what’s done,” she said. “When you deal with people, you don’t often see the results of your work.”

Kristin Lindholm Gumminger, who teaches communication at Trinity International University in Illinois, said hospice chaplains “debrief” with similar personal rituals or by talking with a professional counselor.

In her 2008 dissertation on hospice chaplains, one told her that personal grief was a “constant companion.”

Gumminger is developing a workshop to help hospice chaplains. Others are working to help chaplains recognize and improve the ways they deal with grief.

This year, the U.S. Army Chaplain Center and School in South Carolina will introduce a new training session developed by the University of Georgia that includes “secondary traumatic stress” among chaplains and grief counselors.

The Army’s chief of chaplains has encouraged a “Care to Caregiver” initiative that matches retired chaplains to serve as mentors to younger chaplains.

Chaplain Milton Johnson, a soldier and family minister at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, said he relies on fellow chaplains, his wife and pastors of his Seventh-day Adventist denomination to help him channel his grief — including when he lost his running buddy to suicide.

But he said the new initiatives put a sharper focus on the need for chaplains to get help as they suffer along with their comrades. Chaplains need to heed the lesson taught by flight attendants who warn airline passengers to put a flotation device on themselves before others, he said.

“With chaplains and other professionals, sometimes it’s just the opposite; we have a tendency to put the float device on everybody else first and then put the float device on self,

“Chaplains give so much and carry all that pain with them for so long. It was such a tremendous honor to feel some of that pain kind of ooze out a little bit.”

and that’s really not the most healthy way to take care of self,” he said. “I think we are turning the corner on that. I think the paradigm is shifting.”

Chaplain Robert A. Miller, an instructor at the U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School in San Antonio, recalled a 2012 remembrance ceremony for 9/11 on a Kuwait City beach, where chaplains and other soldiers were given carnations, told to recall those they had served and lost, and watch their flowers drift away into the surf.

“I saw chaplains and soldiers alike shedding tears, embracing one another and recognizing it’s OK to share the fact that all of us do grieve, all of us suffer loss,” said Miller,

a Southern Baptist. “We cannot change, it but we cannot afford to let it change us so we can no longer be effective.”

Steven Spidell has measured some of that toll. In a 2009 survey, he found that one-fifth of health care chaplains reported “disfranchised grief,” or grief that was not supported in the workplace.

“Clergy are trained to be caregivers — that’s what we’re hired to do,” said Spidell, a staff chaplain at Houston Methodist West Hospital in Texas. “That we would need care is a foreign concept, I think, to most faith groups.”

Spidell said the hardest part of his job is when he cares for a family that has suddenly and unexpectedly lost a relative at the hospital — “sobbing and yelling and screaming and are just breaking down because their pain is so intense.”

Such an episode leaves him “physically and emotionally exhausted” and sometimes it takes days for him to admit how tough it was. But he said he is grateful for the time he spends with a family, which moves on to a funeral without him.

“I’m on to the next code blue,” he said. “My job continues.” **BT**

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