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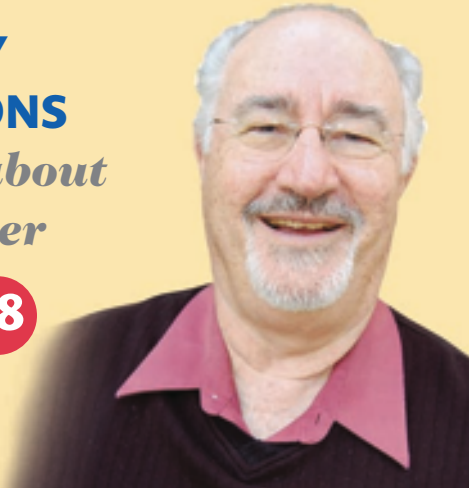
Baptists **ODAY** NEWS JOURNAL

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STORY AND
PHOTOS BY
JOHN PIERCE



“God brought us together,” said ABC President Fitz Hill (center) of his relationship with CBF of Arkansas leaders Ray Higgins (right) and Charles Ray (left).

New Vision

Fitz Hill brings remarkable changes to Arkansas campus, community

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — A former head football coach at San Jose State University and an awarded veteran of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Fitz Hill is not one to shy away from big challenges. And he has certainly tackled some big ones as the 13th president of Arkansas Baptist College.

After four seasons of coaching on the West Coast that ended in 2004, Hill returned to his native Arkansas to promote an annual football game between historically black colleges. While still coaching at San Jose State, Hill had started the Delta Classic, an annual event held in Little Rock to support his long-held commitment to advancing literacy.

Hill was visiting with college presidents to drum up support — and dropped by the small, struggling Arkansas Baptist College (ABC) in a decaying, crime-ridden section of Little Rock about 10 blocks from the State Capitol. He was informed that the school had no president but that trustees were meeting on campus — and that he could talk with them.

Hill went in to talk about a football game to promote literacy and came out with the biggest challenge of his life.

DIRE STRAITS

In early 2006, Hill became the 13th president of the college started by former slaves in 1884. His friends told him he was crazy.

“Literally, I was told that,” he said with a smile during an interview with *Baptists Today*. They asked: “Are you nuts?”

The signature building on campus,

completed in 1893 and known as Old Main, had fallen into disrepair and was closed. Enrollment had fallen below 200, and the school’s accreditation was in danger.

The surrounding neighborhood’s only notoriety was its high crime statistics.

So why would an accomplished leader — who had earned a doctorate in higher education during his 12 years as an assistant coach at the University of Arkansas, served as head coach of a prominent university, and was called upon by major media outlets for his expertise on African Americans in the coaching profession — agree to such a job after hearing trustees describe the school’s demise and admit that no salary for the president was even in the budget?

Hill had a quick answer for his doubters and detractors: “I knew it was a calling. I never swayed at all.”

For Hill, this was not a logical decision, but rather the first step through a divinely opened door.

“And God has opened doors since I said I’d do it,” he added. “Faith is not something you see but something you feel — kind of like the wind. I felt it when I came here.”

COMMUNITY IN CRISIS

Rather than avoid the dangerous community surrounding the campus, Hill's approach was to become an agent of change within the community. He chose engagement rather than isolation for the college.

A nearby carwash called "Wheels and Grills" was the most dangerous place in all of Little Rock, said Hill. So the college bought it, cleaned it up, and changed the name to "Auto Baptism."

That was just the first sign of conversion to new life. With vision, enthusiasm and motivational skills, Hill began raising money to buy and raze or renovate dilapidated homes around the campus that fostered drug sales and gang activity.

Change was coming to the college and the community each time someone else caught Hill's vision — and added to the human and fiscal resources needed to make a difference.

A restaurant and a fresh market were opened, and Hill began shaping the college's curriculum to include an entrepreneurial emphasis that could be fleshed out in the community.

Hill's plan has always been to do something more significant than just clean up a few buildings. Rather he wants to "create an infrastructure for community transformation" in an urban setting that serves as a model for other cities as well as become a significant asset to Little Rock.

Those who once doubted such could be accomplished now praise Hill's vision, leadership and perseverance.

FINANCING THE FUTURE

"If I can use creating a safe community as a leverage point for people to invest — and create this dynamic to bring people here — then we've created a better Little Rock because we've created a better community," said Hill of his best selling point.

It makes sense from both a social and economic standpoint, he said.

"We are paying more to incarcerate than we are to educate," Hill explained, noting that African-American young men are dropping out of high school across the nation at a high rate and "becoming a liability to our country."

Hill is known for driving vanloads of business and political leaders through the community to show them what has been done and what could be done with additional resources. He points out revitalized businesses and renovated homes — as well as boarded-up buildings the school would like to acquire for

stated purposes. And he puts a price tag on each project so there is no doubt about the size of the check.

"This was a community that everybody just kind of discounted — and as this institution (ABC) went, so did the community," said Hill. "As this institution comes back, so does the community. And there is an economic piece there."

President Hill reminds his listeners that the Arkansas capital at large benefits from what happens in this area of the city.

"I've said many times: you can't advance Little Rock if you don't advance this community."



CAMPUS LIFE

Physical needs on the campus were great — and obvious — when Hill stepped on campus as the new leader in 2006.

"I walked around this building and prayed and prayed," said Hill of then-closed, deeply distressed Old Main. "We got the first grant for nearly a million bucks that allowed us to start [renovation]. I just knew that God was going to provide something very special; I just didn't know what it was going to be. We just had to keep moving."

Eventually, gifts and grants — often targeted for "underserved zip codes" — were sought and received. Nearly \$35 million of capital investments have brought Old Main back to life and provided other excellent facilities for the growing student body of more than 1,000.

Hill is not afraid to ask for funding for the school. He sees the support as an investment that pays off in many good ways.

"Last year the 'little school that nobody thought of' had an economic impact on the city of \$144 million," said Hill.

ABC recently launched its extensive "Vision 2020" plan to chart the college's course for the future. Goals are big, but there are fewer doubters than when Hill assumed the presidency.

By 2020, leaders envision a college with 2,000 students, a graduate program in religious studies, an endowment of \$35 million dollars and no debt, among other goals including becoming a national think tank for underserved rural and urban communities. Guiding the achievement of each goal, however, is a commitment to the Christian principles on which the school was founded, said Hill.

The bold plan, said Hill, keeps leadership from getting distracted or moving away from its core values.

FACING THE FACTS

Hill doesn't gloss over the stark realities of illiteracy, black-on-black crime and the high odds that an African-American male will go to prison. But he doesn't run from them either.

In fact, Hill goes into the prison system to talk with those nearing release. He recruits them — with the same skills he once recruited football players — to the school's GED program that seamlessly moves students into the college curriculum.

As an assistant and then head football coach who often worked and recruited in urban communities, Hill said he was frustrated by the poverty and crime he witnessed from Richmond, Calif., to South Central Los Angeles to New Orleans to Miami to South Dallas to South Houston to Birmingham and to Atlanta.

"When you look around you see the most dangerous cities in the United States, unfortunately, are predominately African American," said Hill. "That says there is a problem that needs a solution."

Little Rock was no different. In fact, crime in the ABC campus neighborhood contributed greatly to a per capita homicide rate that trailed only New Orleans, said Hill of the time when he assumed the presidency.

"So I saw this as an opportunity to make a difference by coming here and hoping we could build a model that could be replicated, duplicated in other urban communities," he said.

Hill said God brought people with just the right gifts and experiences to help transform the school and community. But he added that obedience to God's call, more than training, has brought about the needed transformation.



“As this institution comes back so does the community,” said former college football coach Fitz Hill, now president of Arkansas Baptist College.

EMPOWERMENT

Understanding a community’s history — and overcoming some of it — is essential to bringing about constructive change, said Hill. And, he added, when it comes to racial reconciliation in Little Rock, there is still work to be done.

The sociology of an area must be understood as well, he said. And the first lesson is that a depressed community creates “brain drain” (the departure of the best and brightest) and increases criminal activity. That’s why Hill is adamant about bringing businesses into the community that surrounds the college.

“Then the currency circulates in the community and people don’t think they have to rob, steal and kill in the community,” said Hill. “I learned that in San Jose when I was head coach because that’s what other ethnic groups do.”

Cities are often “only a melting pot from 8 to 5,” he said. “At six o’clock they are in their own communities buying from their own people and re-circulating their dollars.”

Building the infrastructure of the

community will allow that to happen again, he said. That’s why community empowerment is one of the college’s seven core values, he added. It’s part of the “moral fabric of education.”

The correlation is obvious according to Hill: when the college started going down years ago, the crime in the area started going up.

“We empower our community through education,” he said. “If we’re not empowering our community, we probably go away.”

BAPTIST PARTNERS

Hill found friends and eager partners in Ray Higgins and Charles Ray of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Arkansas.

“God brought us together,” said Hill of the collegial relationships.

Charles Ray, who directs the national CBF disaster relief efforts as well as serving on the state CBF staff, spent many years restoring older homes in Little Rock. His crews went to work into the neighborhood when the college acquired boarded-up houses.

Then he and Ray Higgins, the state CBF

coordinator and a former seminary ethics professor and pastor, decided to offer more than words of support.

They moved their offices into a restored house on the college campus that has, in Charles Ray’s description, become “a dynamic environment.” The relationship and proximity allow Higgins to teach a class for ministerial students at ABC as well.

President Hill, a graduate of Baptist-related Ouachita University, where he played football and met his wife, Cynthia, builds relationships with a variety of Baptist churches and organizations. His vision is deeply rooted in a personal faith that causes him to see his work as a calling more than a job.

“What I saw was an opportunity to really make a difference rather than saying I don’t want to be a part of it,” he said. “But I knew it was bigger than me — that I would need the Holy Spirit to dwell within me to move God’s mission forward.”

TO TELL THE TRUTH

Hill, 48, said that his resolution for this year was to be as forthright as possible. So he quickly admits that the challenges facing the school have not been easy and that there is much work still to be done.

“It hasn’t been easy,” said Hill of leading the school and community through major changes. “This year has been the most challenging year I’ve had since the first year.”

Addressing what doctors say is a stress-induced, irregular heartbeat and seeking out more time for his wife and three children, Hill said the pressure mounts at times.

“The easiest thing for me to do would be to quit,” he said, “and go to an established institution and not have to worry about payroll.”

But Hill has never been one to take the easiest road.

However, he admits to feeling fear — when hearing sirens from approaching fire trucks — and then relief to discover that someone had simply pushed the wrong button on an elevator.

Yet his strong faith keeps overcoming his fears and allowing him to “trust the Lord and not lean on my own understanding.” Such faith, he said, is more compelling than an easy way out.

“I’ve questioned myself to some extent. But as I often say, in order to get a miracle you need a crisis,” said Hill. “God is in the miracle business, but we are scared of crisis. So I stepped into a crisis — and this is God’s miracle.” **BT**

Preparing the Called

Stacy Mathier '08 and Saida
Associate Minister to the University for Pastoral Care
Photo Location: Guatemala
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quotation remarks

“If this was ‘an act of God’ (the insurance term I despise), celebrities would be organizing telethons, and the church would be organizing volunteers to assist first responders to rescue the children, the elderly and the most vulnerable of the communities.”

—Kirk Lyman-Barner of the Fuller Center for Housing, which launched a Save a House/Make a Home initiative, on the home foreclosure crisis (*Ethicsdaily.com*)

“Do married ministers get asked questions about why they are married? Does being single lessen the value of my calling and all of those years of education and training? Am I not enough by myself?”

—Brittany Riddle, 25, on persistent questions about why she is “still single” during interviews for church ministry positions (*ABP*)

“Due to a variety of circumstances, this will be my last appearance on Richard Land Live!”

—Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s ethics and religious liberty agency, during a recorded broadcast of his final radio show that was shut down by his trustees following racially insensitive comments and charges of plagiarism (*ABP*)

“Every public conversation was trying to make me justify, on the one hand, my gayness or, on the other, my faith. Or both of them together.”

—Christian singer Jennifer Knave on interviews after she acknowledged being a lesbian (*RNS*)

“I’m a Baptist, not a bigot.”

—Pastor Amos C. Brown of Third Street Baptist Church of San Francisco, saying he would not perform a same-sex wedding but believes in legal equality for gays and lesbians including civil marriage (*RNS*)

“Too many American Christians — especially of the conservative variety — presume that American society as a whole is supposed to line up with a conservative Christian reading of the Bible and the value systems that arise from that. The Amish, on the other hand, don’t appear to make that presumption at all. In fact, historically, they seem to presume that the world around them is not going to match their Christian values and views. Their attitude has always been to stay committed to what matters most to them, regardless of what the world is doing.”

—Pastor Ken Fong of Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles (*EthicsDaily.com*)

“Ringgold Baptist Church right there in the center of town, big red church.”

—Dolly Parton telling a reporter that she and Carl Dean were married 46 years ago at First Baptist Church of Ringgold, Ga., just over the Tennessee line (*WRCB*)

“Although I’ve sometime been embarrassed to be a Baptist, until now I’ve never really been ashamed.”

—Baptist historian Bill Leonard of Wake Forest Divinity School after Independent Baptist pastor Charles Worley’s call for placing gay and lesbian persons in electrified fences (*ABP*)

“For every ministerial author who writes eloquently about leaving church, there are thousands of women and men who serve congregations diligently and faithfully across a lifetime. Remember, for all the pain and aggravation, the life of a minister is the finest and highest calling one could hope for.”

—Bill Wilson, president of the Center for Congregational Health (*ABP*)

“Southern Baptists have always found a way to work together, within the framework of historical Christian faith and Baptist doctrine, to support and promote our cooperative enterprises of global missions, theological education and benevolent ministries.”

—Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee President Frank Page, who wrote a book critical of Calvinism but chose not to join other denominational leaders who signed “A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God’s Plan of Salvation” (*Baptist Press*)

“You can set out to do traditional worship or contemporary worship or jazz worship or Taizé worship or gospel worship. In the end, the style you choose doesn’t matter as much as understanding what resources you have to draw upon. Shakespeare said it succinctly: ‘To thine own self be true.’

That’s one of the secrets of healthy traditional churches today.”

—Mark Wingfield, associate pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas (*ABP*)

“The answer to escaping stuckness ... isn’t technology or youth or brilliant presentations. It’s the will to embrace change and the courage to face down those who profit from dysfunction.”

—Religion News Service columnist Tom Ehrlich

Christianity, culture and change

The Church vs. culture — us vs. them — is a common theme in many Christian circles. But such an entrenched battle — with clear dividing lines — often results in the failure of Christians to be open to needed social change. It ignores the fact that cultural shifts often provide a good opportunity to rethink Christian perspectives on a variety of issues.

There is a much-needed confession in many parts of Christendom: At times, often related to human rights and equality, the larger culture has provided the impetus for needed changes in our so-called Christian viewpoints.

In other words, we have been wrong about some things and have needed outside help — even pressure — to change our minds and, hopefully, our hearts.

Reconsidering long-held perspectives is not a bad thing when done with prayer, care and the honest confession that the Church has been woefully wrong before. Such practice is rooted in the good Christian traits of humility and honesty.

However, not all Christians are willing to admit a limited vision and the possible need for renewed thinking. Why seek new light from the biblical revelation if you've got it all figured out already?

Instead, they go to battle against anything that challenges their version of truth — always in the name of God vs. culture. They often and loudly proclaim that “the Bible is clear” and “God’s Word never changes.”

Never mind that those same words and argument were used decades ago to defend atrocities such as human slavery and racial inequality as the will of God. And even after arriving at a better biblical understanding of these particular issues — albeit later in most cases than society at large — the lessons remain unlearned.

Apparently, nothing is more fearful and resisted in some church circles than fresh thinking and being open to a possibility of change.

In the May 31 edition of the Georgia Baptist newspaper, *The Christian Index*, editor Gerald Harris took this approach in an editorial with the premise that the Bible doesn’t change, so neither should we. Baptists, he wrote, need to decide if their convictions will be based on cultural changes or “on the Word of God.”

Sound familiar? Read the pulpit-pounding sermons from Southern Baptist pastors 150 years ago in defense of slavery; you’ll hear the same thing.

Check out recent and current Baptist proclamations about restricting women’s role in church and at home and note the defense: God’s Word doesn’t change even though culture does.

Perhaps such predictable arguments that use the unchanging nature of God to defend one’s own biased thinking and faulty conclusions should be ignored. In one sense, it is a simple matter of one Baptist telling like-minded Baptists what they want to hear and already believe.

Yet, on the other hand, such conclusions should not go unchallenged. There is simply no logical framework in which this argument will fit.

It is an illogical conclusion (as well as a violation of biblical truth) to equate “the Bible doesn’t change” with one’s own hardened views of how God might or might not possibly be at work in the world. The unchanging nature of

God cannot be misconstrued to suggest that some long-held “truths” of ours could never be wrong.

It’s not like we haven’t been down that road before. Are all blind spots in the rearview mirror? Has every potential misinterpretation been corrected?

Did the Word of God change — or did most Baptists of the South change some long-held interpretations regarding slavery and racial equality? But that couldn’t possibly happen again for such a confident and orthodox generation as ours — could it?

Yet these arguments continue to be made despite a long history of being absolutely and undeniably wrong on social issues in the past when “the Bible does not change” was used to justify unspeakable mistreatments of many of God’s family.

A dangerous and defining mark of Christian fundamentalism is this false and arrogant claim that one’s particular interpretation of Holy Scripture is equal in authority to the Bible itself. Such claims are based on a half-truth that is therefore no truth at all.

Part one: God is perfect and unchanging. Can’t argue with that. But the essential second half of the confession that is so often and tragically omitted is this: We are not God! Nor can we see God’s will and ways with perfect clarity.

While the Creator is unchanging, those of us in the category of the created are often in need of change. We see through dark glass — even today.

The larger biblical story — apart from isolated proof texts used to support all kinds of misguided notions sold as biblical truth — is that we are loved, redeemed and continually reshaped despite our limited vision and missed-mark living.

There is no point in the biblical story where we assume the mind of God or gain access to all truth. In fact, the whole unfolding story of redemption is about our need for change and the readiness of God to bring about such change, continuously. **BT**



More than **sport**

Why American Muslims love basketball

Omar Abdelkader, a student at Northeastern University in Boston, is an observant Muslim but admits that, at least as a kid, he was occasionally seduced by the swish of a perfect jump-shot over the Islamic call to prayer.

“Sometimes we’d sneak out of prayers to play ball,” recalled Abdelkader, who grew up attending the Worcester Islamic Center in central Massachusetts. Like a growing number of American mosques, the Worcester Islamic Center has a basketball court — and hence a built-in temptation for younger members.

“It’s not supposed to be like that, but kids love to play the game,” Abdelkader said while watching a Boston Celtics playoff game on a big-screen television at the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center. He was joined by about 20 other Muslims, a scene replicated in living rooms and Islamic community centers during the NBA playoffs.

There are at least eight Muslim players in the NBA (four Turks, two African Americans, one Iranian, and one Tanzanian) including center Nazr Mohammed of the Oklahoma City Thunder.

But the special relationship between Muslims and basketball goes beyond any particular player or team and embraces the sport itself. It is not unlike the one described in *Jews and Baseball: An American Love Story*, a 2010 documentary film written by Ira Berkow, a Pulitzer-prize winning sportswriter.

For many Muslim Americans, college and professional basketball provides heroes they can take pride in, symbols of affirmation at a time when they face hostility from some Americans. And it serves as a way to develop fellowship with their fellow believers while reaching out to non-Muslims.

“Every Muslim community I go to, there’s this obsession for basketball. Almost every mosque you go to, there’s a basketball court outside,” said Musab Abdali of Houston.

Abdali, 19, helped organize the youth program of an annual convention sponsored by the Muslim American Society and the Islamic



Zeeshan Hyder with the up-and-under layup during a Muslim Basketball League game in Southern California. RNS photo by Aamir Syed

Circle of North America, a pair of religious and outreach organizations. This year’s convention was held in Hartford, Conn., over Memorial Day weekend. The “highlight” was the 3-on-3 basketball tournament.

“Basketball has become more than a sport; it’s a culture for us,” said Abdali.

That culture is manifesting itself in Muslim basketball leagues and tournaments across the country, and is even recognized by the country’s major Islamic organizations, which are often criticized for being out of touch with Muslim youth.

Evolving from pick-up games in Chicago, the National Muslim Basketball Tournament was launched in 2010 and now holds at least four tournaments per year. The most popular one is in Chicago and has attracted 42 teams with 8 or 9 players each.

The Islamic Society of North America has recruited the organization to set up a tournament during its annual convention in Washington, D.C. this September.

Many of the leagues are highly organized and high quality: they include players with college basketball experience, and they have summer and winter seasons where games are

tracked with standard basketball statistics. Many leagues are funded by player registration fees and, occasionally, sponsors. That helps pay for certified referees, court rentals and jerseys.

Prayers are generally held before or after games, but in most leagues every third or fourth player is a non-Muslim.

“We do that so we could set a good example to non-Muslims,” said Ziad Pepic, a co-commissioner of the Muslim Basketball League in Southern California. The league started in 2005 and now has close to 300 players.

“We can’t go out to a bar Saturday night and meet people. But being able to go to a basketball court and play is a great way to meet people and build bridges with them,” said Saad Khurshid, one of the organizers of the Muslim Basketball League in Parsippany, N.J.

The league, whose motto is “Building Brotherhood Through The Game Of Basketball,” has more than 200 players who play on teams named after cities in the Muslim world, such as Mecca, Cairo, and Timbuktu.

So what explains the attraction between Muslim Americans and basketball?

For starters, basketball has provided Muslim Americans with more heroes than any

other major sport in America. To be sure, Muslims have competed professionally in football, boxing, soccer and other sports, but the number of Muslim basketball stars whose fame put their faith in a positive spotlight is unrivaled.

These include all-time NBA leading scorer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and 12-time NBA All-Star Hakeem Olajuwon, who retired in 2002 after a long career spent mainly with the Houston Rockets.

Shaquille O'Neal, in a 2010 interview with a Turkish journalist, referred to Olajuwon as a "Muslim brother" and said he planned to make the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

"We have people to look up to. We have Muslims who have won championships and who have set records," said Abdali.

His favorite player is Olajuwon, who is famous for fasting during games during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. "He was such an inspiration," Abdali said.

Shareef Abdur-Rahim, another former All-Star who retired in 2008, also played while fasting.

Another reason is the overlap between Muslim Americans and African Americans. Close to 80 percent of NBA players are black, and basketball has long played an important part in many black communities. At the same time, an estimated 30 percent of Muslim Americans are black.

Many Muslim Americans who are not black also identify with blacks as a fellow minority in a country still marked by prejudice, so they embrace popular culture associated with black culture, especially basketball and hip hop music.

"Hip hop culture still has a large sway in public life, and there are Muslims who are involved in hip hop culture, and basketball is integral to that culture," said Suhaib Webb, a former hip hop DJ and playground player, who is now imam at the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center.

Basketball is also the easiest and most affordable sport for Muslims to organize. Those are important considerations for a faith whose numbers and communal finances are still small. Basketball teams require half the number of players needed in football, soccer or baseball, and they don't need any special padding or equipment.

"My take is logistics. You don't need a lot of space like you do in football or soccer," said Basharat Saleem, director of youth programs for the Islamic Society of North America's annual convention.

The grass-roots popularity of basketball in the Muslim community means that Muslim Americans have been able to maintain their passion for basketball despite the current absence of pro and college players on par with past Muslim legends.

But that may change. The nation's top high school basketball player, Shabazz Muhammad of Las Vegas, is Muslim, and he will be a freshman at UCLA this year. **BT**

Mosque construction continues to attract opposition across U.S.

By Judy Keene
USA Today

CHICAGO (RNS) — Mohammed Labadi had a lot at stake when the DeKalb City Council voted May 29 on a request from the Islamic Society of Northern Illinois University to build a two-story mosque.

Labadi, a businessman and Islamic Society board member, said a bigger mosque is needed to replace the small house where local Muslims now worship. He also was hoping for affirmation that his neighbors and city officials have no fear of the Muslim community.

"Don't look at me just as a Muslim, look at me as an American," Labadi said. It's time, he says, "to take the unfortunate stereotypes about Muslims out of the picture."

The City Council unanimously approved the plan.

In the decade since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, animosity toward Muslims sometimes has taken the form of opposition to construction of mosques and other Islamic facilities.

In the last five years, there has been "anti-mosque activity" in more than half of U.S. states, according to the ACLU. Some mosques were vandalized, and others were targets of efforts to deny zoning permits.

Mosque opponents often raise concerns about traffic and parking, but Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU's freedom of religion program, says they can be "sham arguments" that mask anti-Muslim sentiment.

"I hope that eventually there will be greater acceptance for all faiths, including Islam," Mach said.

One thing is clear: The number of mosques is on the rise. In 2010, there were 2,106 mosques in the U.S., up from 1,209 in 2000, according to a study by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research and other groups. A 2011 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life estimated there are 2.75 million Muslims in the U.S.

Kevin Vodak, litigation director of the Chicago chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said a 2000 federal law meant to prevent zoning laws from discriminating against religious

institutions is a potent tool. He cited the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act in a federal lawsuit against DuPage County, Ill., for "unlawful conduct and discriminatory practices" when it denied a permit for the Irshad Learning Center in 2010.

A complaint against the city of Lomita, Calif., for denying an application from the Islamic Center of South Bay to rebuild its mosque, also cites the RLUIPA law.

Some DuPage County residents who objected to the permit "raised allegations of terrorism," Vodak said. "The post-9/11 atmosphere has created a lot of fear and hysteria about Muslim institutions."

Some people who object to mosque projects say religion is not a factor. The DuPage County home where Jacqueline Sitkiewicz has lived since 1978 is adjacent to a house the Islamic Center of Western Suburbs (ICWS) hoped to use as a mosque. The county board voted against the plan this month.

Sitkiewicz says her concerns were traffic, drainage and the effect on property values. "I don't care what their religion is," she said. "This is a residential area, that's all of it."

ICWS lawyer Mark Daniel says the group is considering legal action. "There was no valid reason for denial," he said.

Ebrahim Moosa, a Duke University professor of religion and Islamic studies, worries that discrimination against Muslims is growing.

"Opposition to mosques," he said, "is not a misunderstanding, because reasonable people can talk and mutually educate." **BT**



Young snake handlers grasp power of faith

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (RNS) — Andrew Hamblin's Facebook page is filled with snippets of his life. Making a late-night run to Taco Bell. Watching *SpongeBob* on the couch with his kids. Handling rattlesnakes in church.

Hamblin, 21, pastor of Tabernacle Church of God in LaFollette, Tenn., is part of a new generation of serpent-handling Christians who are revitalizing a century-old faith tradition in Tennessee.

While older serpent handlers were wary of outsiders, these younger believers welcome visitors and use Facebook to promote their often misunderstood — and illegal — version of Christianity. They want to show the beauty and power of their extreme form of spirituality. And they hope eventually to reverse a state ban on handling snakes in church.

Since the early 1900s, a handful of true believers in Eastern Tennessee and other parts of Appalachia have practiced the so-called signs found in the Gospel of Mark: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents..."

While scholars may note that this passage doesn't appear in the oldest biblical manuscripts, serpent handlers follow it literally. Their intense faith demands sinless living and rewards them with spiritual ecstasy — the chance to hold life and death in their hands.

Brother Micah Golden felt it first while standing in the parking lot with other worshippers, waiting for church to start during a three-day revival in early May. It began with a tingling in his hands that spread over his body. Then he began to moan and pray.

"There's still an anointing from heaven. Glory to God," shouted the 22-year-old convert, holding the first syllable of "Glory" out for 10 or 12 seconds and stomping his feet. "He'll still let you do the signs of God."

Then he flipped the lid of a small wooden box by his feet and pulled out three Southern copperheads, all entwined together. Golden lifted them about his head, then swung them back and forth in front of him before handing them to Hamblin, who took the snakes in one hand and lifted the other in prayer.

Other men took out timber rattlers, putting one hand on the snake's midsection, the other by the head and neck. They held the serpents up in front of their faces, almost staring

them in the eyes for a moment, then lowered them down and up in a gently swinging motion.

Hamblin began to preach about Jesus: "The same man that walked upon the water, he said, 'They shall take up serpents.' There's a realness in the signs of God."

That led to a cascade of prayers as the whole crowd began to speak in tongues. Then the shouts died down and Hamblin and other worshippers started a procession toward the door. "Come on, people, let's go have church," he said.

Hamblin and other handlers say the Bible tells people to obey the law. So he wears a seat belt while driving, obeys the speed limit and files his taxes on time. But he won't give up serpent handling, which he says is a command from God — even though Tennessee outlawed it in 1947 after five people died of serpent bites at churches in two years.

Hamblin knows that people think he and other handlers are crazy. But if more people experienced what he does when in church, they wouldn't mock it, he said.

For more than a century, serpent handlers have had a turbulent relationship with outsiders. Churches popped up around charismatic preachers, then faded after controversy or bad publicity. When the practice became illegal, true believers went underground.

Until last year, serpent-handling churches were in decline, said Paul Williamson, professor of psychology at Henderson State University in

Arkadelphia, Ark. "Most of the people who were in leadership back in the 1990s have gotten older, and there was a concern for several years that no young people were taking their places," he said.

That's changed as the children of older leaders have grown up and started handling serpents. Converts, like Hamblin and Golden, have joined them. By inviting outsiders to his church, Hamblin hopes to show that serpent handlers practice their faith in a responsible manner.

His one rule: Visitors stay away from the snakes. Serpent handlers say the Holy Spirit keeps them from harm when handling snakes. Hamblin begins each service with a warning — "There's death in that box."

Despite the precautions, serpent handlers do get bitten. Hamblin almost died at 19 when a bite from a yellow timber left him hospitalized with internal bleeding.

Over Memorial Day weekend, Randy "Mack" Wolford of Bluefield, W. Va., one of Hamblin's mentors, died from a timber rattler bite during a service at Panther State Park in West Virginia, the only state where serpent handling is legal. Wolford's father, also a preacher, died from a rattlesnake bite during a service in 1983. **BT**

—Bob Smietana writes for *The Tennessean* in Nashville. A version of this story appeared in *USA Today*.



Andrew Hamblin, 21, pastor of Tabernacle Church of God in LaFollette, Tenn., handles a rattlesnake during an April service while others sing. RNS photo by Shelley Mays/courtesy USA Today



Hell and Mr. Fudge
A Little Story about a Big Lie

By Kay Campbell, RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Film traces Southern preacher's struggle with hell

ATHERNS, Ala. — Blur or question the lines on Heaven and hell and, well, all hell can break out. At least it did for Edward Fudge in the early 1980s in this small northern Alabama hamlet.

Fudge was a young Church of Christ preacher who began to teach a doctrine of hell that contradicted the familiar view of a place of eternal fiery torment for the damned. As a result he lost his job and pulpit. Later research led to his book, *The Fire that Consumes*.

A new film, *Hell and Mr. Fudge*, explores the years when Fudge, now a Houston-based lawyer and Bible teacher, began an intensive study of the Bible that led him to questioning. Filmed in Athens last year by the nonprofit religious education organization LLT Productions, it won a Platinum Award at the Houston Film Festival.

Fudge's conclusion that hell is a place of destruction, not torture, got him fired from his pulpit. The fact that he asked a black preacher to pray at a revival didn't help.

"My life went in a direction I didn't anticipate — or particularly want," Fudge said in an interview. "But at every step, God's been there to make happen what he wants to happen. I've just kind of been along for the ride."

To outsiders and even some Christians, the debate over the nature of hell may seem like splitting theological hairs. But for those Christians who orient their lives around a literal understanding of biblical teaching, the belief in eternal hell is seen as an essential truth.

Fudge's independence of mind and determination to dig deep into the Bible — and then to stand for what he believes despite vehement opposition — is what makes the film transcend narrow questions of theology, said Pat Arrabito, director of LLT Productions, which made the movie.

The doctrine outlined in Fudge's book is now fairly widely accepted by many evangelical preachers and scholars. But historical ways of reading selected Bible texts to come to the conclusion of hell as a place of eternal torment also still flourish.

"I guarantee, if I got up Sunday and preached what Ed teaches, I would be asked


to leave," said preacher David Cox at Market Street Church of Christ in Athens, adding that "Truth is not what people want it to be; it's what God says it is."

Fudge said he is concerned about truth as


well. "To me, the traditional teaching of eternal torment is slander against God and against his character." **BT**

—Kay Campbell writes for The Huntsville Times.


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— that call for taking Jesus seriously

What should we do with truth— or let truth do with us?

By Jimmy Spencer Jr.

Sometimes, particularly in a season of elections and public discourse, we Christians have a nasty habit of showing our “truth” at others — and loving only the people who help us accomplish what we believe is right and good.

It is also worrisome when Christians who are slow to slam other people and quick to advocate for love and civil discourse get dismissed.

I have found that respecting the beliefs and perspectives of others — and actually honoring their precious personal grasps of truth — reflect a biblical Jesus more than anything else I could be doing. In fact, this approach has real theological teeth.

So, let’s talk a bit about truth.

Truth is absolute and objective. As a Christian, I believe Jesus represents truth and I have built my life around what he did and said. I am convinced that I am right — just like others are convinced they are right. But is being right — convinced that I’ve found the truth — enough?

For me, there is a more compelling question than whether I can find the truth of life. The more Jesus-centric question is: “Now that I’ve found the truth, how will I use it?”

There seem to be two general responses among Christians.

Option one: I can use my understanding of truth to coerce people around me to think, act and believe like me. Shared truth is how I distinguish between allies and enemies.

Truth becomes an effort to prove that I am right. Holding this truth gives me the right to speak into people’s lives, regardless of their willingness to participate. Truth permits me to

“Too often Christians mistakenly conclude that since Jesus is truth and we believe in Jesus, then our personal religious, political or ideological agendas must be good and true.”

advance my agenda of conforming the world around me to my image of what is right and good.

Truth is my weapon against others. Truth is the growth engine for my agenda.

Option two: This truth that I have discovered is used to advance a deep and profound purpose for my personal life. It helps me to understand what it means to be human.

If this understanding of truth becomes attractive when shown to others, I will freely and gladly share it. Truth gives me the freedom to love others because that is who I am.

Truth sets me free. I conform myself to this truth in the hopes of growing closer to God — and it calls me to respect the opinions and beliefs of others.

Choosing the second option demonstrates I am actually owning the truth of Jesus, rather than leveraging him to accomplish my own personal agenda in life, politics or religion.



At times our misuse of “sharing the truth” has warped our sense of compassion. It has given us a lower view of people than that of the Creator.

How is it possible for those who follow Jesus to have a low view of people? It occurs when we tie the value of others to their acceptance of our understanding of truth. Their value gets ignored if we are too busy trying to make them into the right kind of churchgoer or win them over to our political persuasion.

Too often Christians mistakenly conclude that since Jesus is truth and we believe in Jesus, then our personal religious, political or ideological agendas must be good and true. Then the next easy step is to move from loving people like Jesus to judging people in the name of God.

To do so means we usurp the place of God, and it reveals that we haven’t grasped the most basic truth at the heart of Jesus’ teachings: that God loves all of us — not only those like us.

It was this message that made the Pharisees so angry: that God had stepped out of their neighborhood — and beyond their theological, political and social understandings of truth. No longer were they the sole arbiters for God’s goodness and truth, and no longer did all others need to conform to their likeness.

Does this sound all too familiar? Today, are we seen as agenda-driven Christians or as those who live out the truth of Jesus? **BT**

—Jimmy Spencer Jr. is the founder and CEO of *Love Without Agenda*, a charity that seeks to maximize people’s ability to socially engage their communities through service.

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Often we limit our hearing to voices similar to ours. This new column allows for other, usually more youthful voices to speak about faith and the living out of Christianity in contemporary times. Writers will come from various backgrounds and church experiences. This series is provided in partnership with the Red Letter Christians Fellowship (redletterchristians.org).

'SO FEW'

Organizing the church around its purpose

By Jim Somerville

For several years when I was a pastor in Wingate, N.C., I taught the fifth and sixth grade Sunday school class. I had the idea that it would be a two-year "confirmation class" of sorts, where children would learn what it means to be a Christian and belong to a church.

For curriculum, I decided to use the church's constitution and bylaws. Crazy, you say? Maybe. But the constitution and bylaws covered some important ground.

Article I was the church's name: Wingate Baptist Church. I spent a full session talking about how each of those words was important to our identity.

Article II was the church covenant, and we spent weeks working through that one, talking about the promises we made to God and to each other as members of that body.

It was either Article III or IV where we talked about the church's purpose, and this is what I said to those kids: "SO FEW people know the church's purpose." SO FEW was an acronym, made up of the initial letters of the words *Service, Outreach, Fellowship, Education and Worship* — the church's purpose.

Those kids got it. Ask any one of them today, and I'll bet they could still shout it out.

At Wingate we couldn't afford a minister to head up each of those areas, but at my next church I began to think that if we could have two associates I would want them to work in the areas of outreach and education, because those were the two areas most closely related to fulfilling the Great Commission.

What I was looking for was a simplified staff structure that made sense, one that was a way of fulfilling the church's purpose and not just maintaining the status quo. At that church we eventually agreed that even if we couldn't afford a minister of outreach, we should have a

ministry of outreach, and the same for all those other ministry areas.

When I came to First Baptist, Richmond, I found a church blessed with a large staff, but most of them busy ministering to specific people groups within the congregation. I began to wonder if we couldn't organize that staff around the church's purpose. We talked about it for months, but finally we unveiled our new "missional" staff structure.

We ended up with those same five essential ministry areas that my fifth- and sixth-graders learned about in Wingate — service, outreach, fellowship, education and worship — but we called them the ministries of Christian invitation, formation, worship, compassion and community.

I introduced the concept like this:

"What does it mean to be a missional church? Let me see if I can sum it up for you in 25 words or less: *Being missional means understanding that God has work for us to do, that instead of getting saved and sitting on a pew until Jesus comes back, we have been called to work with Jesus until God's Kingdom comes and God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. OK, that's 50 words, but still not bad for a Baptist preacher.*

"If that's true, that God has work for us to do, then the question becomes how will we do it; how will we help Jesus bring heaven to earth? I think Jesus has already given us that answer. He told his disciples that the most important thing in the world was to love God with everything in them (worship) and to love their neighbors as themselves (service). He told them to love one another as he had loved them (fellowship). And finally he told them to go and make disciples by baptizing (outreach) and teaching (education).

"We've known for years that we were supposed to do these things, but we have never organized

ourselves around those things. We have tended to organize ourselves more around people groups than purpose. While there is nothing inherently wrong with that, it does give us an inward, rather than an outward, focus. I'd like to think that we could be a little more purpose-driven as a church, and that we would structure our staff in a way that would help us bring heaven to earth."

That was three years ago.

Since then, our staff has "lived into" their new roles. It wasn't an easy adjustment, but it was invigorating. One of the staff ministers told me recently that he feels more "alive" now than he has in years. And on our latest retreat we made plans for a year-long, every-member mission trip that will involve each of the five ministry areas.

As we talked, there was an energy and enthusiasm in the room that you rarely find in the mature staff of a 232-year-old church. I think we're on to something. **BT**

—Jim Somerville is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Richmond Va., and a member of the Board of Directors of the Center for Congregational Health.



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Pastor: First Baptist Church of Claxton, Ga., is seeking a full-time pastor with five or more years of ministry experience in a pastoral position and who holds a master's or doctorate degree. The ideal candidate should be an effective communicator with leadership and well-developed vision for the future of our church. First Baptist Claxton has a membership of 300 and is located in southeast Georgia, 50 miles west of Savannah. Interested candidates should submit résumés to fbccpastorsearch@aol.com or to Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 607, Claxton, GA 30417.

Pastor: Zion Baptist Church (www.zionbaptistshelby.com) is seeking a full-time pastor. We are a moderate congregation that is dually aligned with the SBC and CBF. We seek a candidate with a minimum of 5 years pastoral experience who is also a graduate of an accredited seminary or divinity school. We desire someone who is a servant leader, has strong interpersonal skills, and is an inspiring preacher. Send résumé by Aug. 15 to Pastor Search Committee, Zion Baptist Church 525 W. Zion Church R., Shelby, NC 28150 or to jlail@yahoo.com. Please note: This position is being held open due to email inbox failure. All previous applicants are urged to re-apply, and new résumés are welcome.

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Associate Pastor: First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., is seeking an associate pastor who will work with the senior pastor in the following capacities: providing ministerial staff leadership; teaching and preaching; coordinating the ministry calendar; and providing pastoral care leadership. At a minimum, qualified candidates must possess a master's degree from an accredited seminary and 5 years of ministry experience. For a complete job description or to submit a résumé, please contact dedemaddox@fbcaugusta.org.

Associate Pastor for Children and Families:

Winter Park Baptist Church in Wilmington, N.C., seeks a full-time associate pastor for children and families to help us love our children and families and the children and families of our community, and to help them follow Jesus. Please send résumés to Eric Porterfield, 4700 Wrightsville Ave., Wilmington, NC, 28403 or to eric@winterparkbaptist.org.

Minister of Music and Worship: South Main Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, seeks a full-time minister of music and worship to oversee an extensive music ministry, assist with worship planning, and serve as a part of a vibrant, collegial pastoral team. Among other things, the successful candidate will have a minister's heart; an earned graduate degree in music from an accredited school; a passion for music education; and prior experience as a choral and instrumental conductor, including arranging music for choirs, ensembles, and instruments and overseeing a comprehensive music program from preschoolers through senior adults. Founded in 1903, South Main today is a growing, multi-generational church with a 15-acre campus located in midtown Houston, between the world's largest medical center and the downtown business district of the nation's fourth largest city. Our congregation, which averages 525 in Sunday School and 600 in worship, values musical excellence, and our Sunday worship services draw from traditional Baptist, classical, and broader liturgical streams. Please send résumés to musicsearch@smbc.org.

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

In the Know

Tommy Deal is a Dalton, Ga.-based associate with Pinnacle Leadership Associates. He formerly served on the staff of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Florida.

Toby Druin received the Greg Warner Lifetime Achievement Award in Religious Journalism from Associated Baptist Press June 21 in Fort Worth. A longtime journalist, Druin served as associate editor and then editor of the Texas Baptist newspaper, *Baptist Standard*.

Julian H. Pentecost of Richmond died May 31 at age 87. He was editor of *The Religious Herald*, newspaper of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, from 1970 until his retirement in 1992. Prior to his editorship, he served as a pastor in Waynesboro and Richmond, Va.

Lee Porter of Franklin, Tenn., died May 17 at age 83. A retired editor at LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, he was best known for serving for 25 years as SBC recording secretary and overseeing the election process during the convention's most contentious years.

Minister of Children: First Baptist Church, Statesville, N.C. (www.statesvillefbc.org) is seeking a full-time minister of children. We are a dually aligned, CBF-SBC affiliated church, and have both contemporary and traditional services. The candidate should preferably be a graduate of a seminary or divinity school and have experience in children's ministry. Please forward your résumé to Children's Minister Search, First Baptist Church, 815 Davie Ave., Statesville, NC 28677 or to maryjane@statesvillefbc.org.

Minister for Preschool and Children:

Winfree Memorial Baptist Church is a healthy, growing BGAV/CBF congregation in Midlothian, Va., a Richmond suburb. We are looking for our first full-time minister for preschool and children who will partner with volunteers and parents to expand this ministry. Please send a résumé to winfreechildren@gmail.com.

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Popular Bible teacher and writer **Tony W. Cartledge** writes each of the weekly Bible studies in *Baptists Today* (beginning on page 18). Themes are based on selected texts from the Revised Common Lectionary.

These lessons — found exclusively in this Nurturing Faith section of *Baptists Today* — form the foundation for the teaching resources for all age groups. **Each class participant should have a copy of *Baptists Today* with these lessons in hand.**

Christian educator **Rick Jordan** of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina provides a teaching plan for each lesson, available at nurturingfaith.net. His FIT FAITH approach to teaching allows for class engagement with the biblical texts as well as with one another.

The Youth Lessons — found on pages 22-23 — build off of Tony's Bible studies and direct these biblical truths to the daily lives of students. Curriculum developer **David Cassady** writes the youth lessons in the news journal, and student minister **Jeremy Colliver** provides the online teaching guides for each lesson found at nurturingfaith.net (or linked from baptiststoday.org).

Thanks sponsors!

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

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

August 5, 2012

Grow Up!

Welcome to August! This month we're looking at four texts from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. All four texts relate to a topic that can be expressed with the word "up" – Paul talks about growing up in Christ, living up to our name, building up the church, and armoring up for the daily struggle against evil in our world.

We begin with the notion of growth, which brings with it the implication that we're not yet fully grown in Christ. Who, me?

Have you ever heard someone say that the pastor "has quit preaching and gone to meddling"? We usually say that sort of thing when the preacher comes down hard on one of our favorite sins, or challenges our apathy, or encourages us to take stewardship seriously.

Meddling is exactly what Paul is doing in Ephesians 4. The first three chapters of Paul's touching letter find him praying for his friends. He encourages them while teaching a refresher course in basic theology. He waxes poetic and gets lost in rhapsody as he tries to express the goodness and the greatness of God.

The first three chapters make readers want to say "Amen," but Paul wants to move us from inspiration to transformation. He wants us to live up to all the lofty ideals he has exalted.

A worthy life (v. 1-3)

And so, when Paul comes to chapter 4, he starts meddling. As a "prisoner of the

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



Lord," he tells them what difference this all makes. He brings out the "therefore," a clue that some expected action is forthcoming.

Paul does not just encourage or suggest or hope, but begs his friends in Ephesus "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (v. 1). What concerns Paul so much that he would beg his friends to respond? Several things are on the author's mind; foremost among them is the importance of unity.

If diverse people are to live, work and worship together in unity, their living must be governed by certain characteristics that promote harmony. Thus, Paul begs church members to work together "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (vv. 2-3).

Humility? Patience? Not taking offense?

We might not like any of those words, any more than Paul's readers did. They sound wimpy or weak. In the Greek world, the word for humility was typically used of slaves. The word for "gentleness" commonly described a well-trained horse. In the New Testament, however, such words take on great virtue.

When they describe attitudes that are the result of choice, none of these terms are weak, wimpy or pushover words. They describe people who know they are strong, but know when to bridle their strength; people who know they are right, but who know when it is best to let someone else have their way; people who know they are being tested, and yet give space for others to make mistakes and remain in the sphere of their love.

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What happens to church unity when everyone has to walk on eggshells because of a volatile member's temper, or when people are afraid to express their opinions for fear of being harshly judged? Unity falls to resentment. Spirits grow small instead of large.

It is a tall order to expect members in the community of faith to act with the quiet strength of humility, the bridled strength of gentleness, the wise strength of patience, and the compassionate strength of forbearance. But the church cannot experience unity without it.

Would a newcomer find these characteristics to be true of your church, your Sunday school class, or you as a person? Might someone who knows you better have a different opinion?

A common life (vv. 4-6)

Paul builds on the call to unity with a rousing declaration that may or may not have been original: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (vv. 4-6).

Many commentators have noted how much this beautiful text sounds like an ancient hymn. Perhaps it was sung in celebration of baptism or as a constant reminder of how the church is united through our common origin.

There is one God: twice a day, faithful Jews recite a text from Deuteronomy called the *Shema*, and it begins with the words "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is One!" There is one Spirit, Paul says – one Lord, one God and Father of all. The unity of the church begins with the unity of its creator.

And, Paul says, we come to know that one God through the same expression of trust: "there is one faith." Some people come to faith in Christ through an emotional experience that wrenches the heart and sets the soul free in a torrent of joy and tears, while other persons absorb faith through a quiet childhood of consistent Bible teaching

and family prayers and church worship.

We come to Christ in different ways, at different ages, and we may express our love for Christ in different manners, but we all share the same faith. We have confessed our sins and trusted in the amazing grace of God, so that we can all say "by grace we are saved through faith." We have one faith.

We worship one God, Paul says, and we have come to know him through one faith. We also share in at least one other sign of unity: we all have expressed our faith through the experience of baptism.

We do not know if everyone in Paul's day was baptized by the same mode, but every baptism served the same purpose as an outward, public profession of faith in Jesus Christ, a sacred ritual of renewal and rebirth.

Baptism is special. That is why Baptists can be downright fanatical about it. While most of us recognize that sprinkling or pouring can be legitimate modes for baptism, we also believe that baptism by immersion so beautifully conveys the symbolism Jesus intended that we want everyone else to experience it as we have – and as a believer rather than a baby.

Remember these ties that bind, Paul says. We all worship one God, revealed to us through the same Spirit. We all came to know Christ through one faith. We are joined together in one baptism. God has created the church as a unity. Those Christians who live up to their calling will work to preserve that unity. 🇺🇸

A gifted life (vv. 7-16)

As we live and work and express our unity within the church, Paul wants us to remember that we are nevertheless unique individuals who have been blessed in particular ways so that we may all serve the one church in different ways according to our ability.

We each are given gifts of grace by Christ, Paul says (v. 7). The Greek word for "grace" is *charis*. The word for "spiritual gifts" is *charismata*. So, a "spiritual gift" is really a "grace gift." The grace that brings us into fellowship with Christ is a gift, but that is not Christ's only gift to us. He has blessed us all with unique spiritual gifts that enable us to serve him better. (Wondering about vv. 8-10? See "The Hardest Question" in the online resources.)

In vv. 11-13, Paul describes some of these gifts. This is one of several lists of spiritual gifts in his writings (compare Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27-28), and none of them is exhaustive. The gifts Paul mentions here are mostly associated with leadership abilities, while others emphasize character traits such as love, faith, generosity or hospitality. 🇺🇸

Where leadership is concerned, believers may be gifted or categorized as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers, but all should work toward the same end: they are to "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (v. 12), until all grow through unity of faith and knowledge of Christ to a state of maturity in becoming more like Christ (v. 13).

Take note that Paul does not stress the growth of the church in numbers or in financial or political clout, but in unity that is patterned after Christ. If members of the church grow in oneness of spirit and love and service to Christ, then other aspects of growth will follow naturally.

In closing this appeal, Paul shifts to a metaphor of the church as a body in which spiritual formation is seen as growth in maturity until we all accept our role as members of the body of Christ. As such, we have diverse roles to play in keeping with our gifts, but we all fall under the leadership of one head, and the head is Christ (vv. 14-16).

The result, Paul says, is the building up of the body "in love" (v. 16). When we work in unity, we learn to love. When we truly love, we will strive for unity. 🇺🇸

Bible Study

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

with Tony W. Cartledge

August 12, 2012

Build Up!

Do you like to have your toes mashed? Today's text may sound more like diatribe than dialogue, as the Apostle Paul minces no words in calling for the Ephesians to put their lying, stealing, cheating days behind them and to take on the character of Christ.

No doubt, this text has given rise to many toe-stomping sermons designed to put sinful Christians in their place. Forty years ago, I preached such sermons. Modeling the style of a former pastor, I stepped on every questionable toe I could find.

Surprisingly, many parishioners affirmed such no-holds-barred preaching. Some people seemed to enjoy being told how bad they were. Others enjoyed hearing how bad everyone else was.

Some church folk like that kind of preaching because they've been told all their lives that they are bad, and hardball sermons reinforce their understanding of reality.

Others find rub-it-in-your-face preaching to be cathartic. They know they have sinned during the week, and getting whipped for it on Sunday is sort of like taking their punishment. They feel better when it's over.

Others feel attacked, and don't come back.

While Paul's admonitions in Eph. 4:25-5:2 are plain spoken, they are not unkind. He is able to "call a spade a spade" without bashing people with a shovel. He simply points out that believers should move past harmful habits and unhealthy lifestyles to take on the goodness and love of Christ.



We do this not in order to become Christians but because we are already followers of Christ, called to live up to our names.

Speaking the truth (4:25)

A baptism theme runs throughout Ephesians 4. When we are baptized, we symbolically strip off the old life of sin and bury it in the waters of baptism. We are then raised again to a new life in Christ Jesus. Paul believed that Christ has the power to transform our hearts and lives, to give us a new nature, to make of us the best people imaginable. When Paul talks to Christians, he does not tell them to go and find some goodness somewhere and put it on, but rather to live up to the goodness that is already in them as children of God. 🛖

You remember the line from Robert Burns' poem, "To a Louse":

O wad some pow'r the giftie gie us,
to see oursels as ithers see us.

Perhaps we could rephrase a bit and see Paul's goal as this:

O would some power come help
persuade us,
to be ourselves as God has made us!

Paul's concern is that believers learn to reach our potential as the children of God. He uses such straightforward language because some people don't yet know who they are, and so he finds it helpful to explain to them what the Christian nature is all about.

When Paul begins this text with "So, then ..." (NRSV), he is building on all that comes before, and in particular 4:17-24, where he had pointed out that redeemed Christians are different people than they were previously, and their lives should reflect the change. Paul was convinced that if we truly become Christians, everything changes.

An old saying insists that "You can tell a real cowboy by the way he walks." The same is true of a Christian, though it is not a bow-legged gait that identifies us, but the evidence of Christ in our living. Paul knew that the most obvious difference in the Christian's life is seen in language, attitudes and personal relationships.

Additional background information
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We must put off falsehood and speak truthfully as members of Christ's body, Paul says. That's not hard to understand. Truth telling is essential for personal integrity and for the health of the larger body.

If we lie to each other, then we can no longer trust each other and we won't be one body anymore. We will be fractured, suspicious, divided.

When someone says "I can't help you because of this ...," or "I can't contribute to the budget because of that ...," we will wonder if they are really telling the truth or just blowing smoke.

We can't have unity if we don't have trust. We can't have trust if we are not truthful with each other. These things are obvious.

Managing anger (4:26-28)

Now Paul moves to a subject that is a little harder to deal with. "Be angry but do not sin," he says. Paul knew that everyone gets angry. Even Jesus got angry. The issue is not whether we will experience anger, but how we manage it.

What do you do with your anger? Many of us try to suppress it, because somewhere along the way a well-meaning parent or teacher or friend has told us that it is wrong to be angry, that we shouldn't get angry, that we're in danger of hellfire if we ever get angry.

Paul knew better. Getting angry when we are wronged is as natural as getting wet when it rains. Of course, most of us don't stand out in the rain because we like getting soaked, or wear our feelings on our sleeves so we'll have more reasons to be angry.

Some people are so insecure that they are constantly angry, thinking everyone is out to get them. Others with the same insecurities don't get mad at all, because they think so little of themselves that they figure they deserve whatever happens.

Whatever the cause of our anger, Christians can set a good example by managing our anger in ways that are helpful and not harmful.

In essence, Paul is saying "It's okay

to be angry – just don't let your anger lead you to sin." There are mature and appropriate ways to express our anger. These do not include physical violence or character assassination or passive-aggressive behavior designed to make others miserable. We can learn to say what needs to be said in a way that is both kind and clear. We can channel that excess energy into something that is constructive rather than destructive.

That is why Paul says "do not let the sun go down on your anger" (4:26). The longer we fuel an inner rage, the more it eats at us. The longer we carry a grudge, the heavier it gets. When we finally express that anger, the more likely it is to be ugly.

It is appropriate that Paul mentions stealing in conjunction with anger (4:28). Thievery can be understood as an unhealthy expression of anger. Those who steal from other people or from their workplace are angry. Those who steal others' virtue and freedom through rape or abuse are expressing inner rage. They believe that others have not treated them rightly. Their way of making things right is to take what they want. Theft is a prime example of how not to manage one's anger.

Adjusting attitudes (4:29-32)

Paul now moves on to a series of specific comments, all of which have to do with our basic attitudes toward life and toward others. He begins by telling us to speak in wholesome ways that benefit others (4:29).

Ugly words can hurt. They can destroy self-esteem in a child or an adult. In contrast, helpful and encouraging words can do amazing things. When Paul spoke of "building others up according to their needs," he drew a wonderful picture. Our words can build up self-esteem and self-confidence in others. Our words can be a blessing that make people smile.

Our words can affirm that which is best in people and help them to believe in themselves.

Christ calls us to live obediently, empowered by the Spirit. Thus, we are not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption" (4:30). The Spirit of God lives in us, as a foretaste and promise of our ultimate redemption. The presence of harmful, hateful attitudes is an affront to the indwelling Spirit, who grieves with every spiteful word we speak.

Believers are not to be characterized by bitterness, brawling, slander or malice, Paul said (4:31). Faithful followers of Jesus do not fight either in public or behind each other's backs. Those who have the Spirit do not hold grudges, keep score or use other people as stepping-stones for personal advancement.

Rather, we are called to be kind, compassionate and forgiving (4:32). Why? Because we remember how God has been kind to us, how Christ demonstrated selfless love, how we have been forgiven. Gratitude leads us to reflect those same attitudes.

Imitating Christ (5:1-2)

This is how the Christian lives. We don't get our satisfaction from bitterness or our thrills from putting others down. We find joy in kindness. We find fulfillment in forgiveness. By this, we bring joy to the Spirit who lives in us, and not grief. We become "imitators of God" who live a life of love, "just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (5:1-2).

This is not something we can do on our own. But, because God has loved us, because God has blessed us, because God in Christ has forgiven us, we can respond with love and blessing and forgiveness toward others. Through our trust in Christ, through our baptism, through our fellowship with other believers, we have experienced life as the children of God. This enables us to show love and forgiveness and grace to others – to be imitators of God who "live in love" as Christ taught us to do.

Youth

August 5 – August 26, 2012

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

One

There is always a pause after someone says "therefore." It is usually said from a position of authority, as when a principal looks over his or her reading glasses from across the desk. You know something is coming. The hearers of Paul's letter are no different.

Even more emphasis is added as Paul begs the hearers to "live a life worthy of the calling." But the life they are to live is not merely an individual life, but one that is lived in community — or unity.

How are we to live a life of unity? Paul's prescription is humility, gentleness, patience, love and peace. (It sounds much like the fruits of the Spirit song from Sunday school.) The prescription Paul provides leads to a healthy body. And being that we are only one body as

the church, it needs to be healthy to function well.

The one church body comes from one Spirit, which is part of one Lord that you realize through your one calling, of one faith and one baptism, of the one God. Through these confusing and muddled verses, the word "one" reverberates again and again. It's not the sense of one as "everything has to be the same," but the sense that we are a unified group.

Through this unification we are all called to live out the grace that we have been blessed with through the grace of Christ. For each of us this grace will be different, lived out through various gifts. When we use our gifts for unification, the body is built up in love.

AUGUST 5

Think About It:

What makes you so angry that you want to do something to change it? If you don't know what you are gifted at or passionate about, how you answer this question will help you figure that out.

Make a Choice:

We have a choice in how we use our gifts. Will you use your gifts to build up the body of Christ in love, or will you use your gifts to advance who you are?

Pray:

May the use of our gifts build up the body of Christ as a prayer to you, O God.

Checklists

Love Twitter! You've got 140 characters to get out what you want to say. There's no long, drawn-out, ongoing, repetitive conversation. It cuts away all the other stuff and gets to the main point. Don't get me wrong, I love to debate and have great dialogue, but at some point you have to say, "So what does all this mean?" With only 140 characters, Twitter forces you to be focused.

In today's scripture, Paul takes more than 140 characters — but he still cuts to the chase.

He starts by telling the church at Ephesus to put away everything that is false. Forget about all that other stuff because it won't get you anywhere good. And if you continue to lie, you will be led further astray. Not only will you be led astray, but you also will lead others astray.

The checklist continues as Paul discusses how to deal with anger. Anger is not the sin, but rather the way you deal with your anger that either will be helpful or hurtful. If you lash out in your anger, others will be broken down instead of being built up.

Just in case you needed a reminder that stealing is wrong, Paul includes that in his list as well. The body won't be unified if members of the body take from others.

Paul's list then turns to the way we speak to one another: Use your words to build up instead of tear down. Don't be bitter, wrathful, slanderous or malicious, but rather tenderhearted and forgiving.

As if he is writing a tweet, Paul summarizes all of this in the first two verses of chapter 5: "be imitators of God ... and live in love."

AUGUST 12

Think About It:

Paul concludes this section by challenging us to be imitators of God. Who are the people that you try to imitate? What course are they encouraging your life to be like?

Make a Choice:

We make daily choices, many of them even out of habit. They are choices because we get to choose what we will do. How many times do you think about the consequences before you act? Do these consequences build up or tear down others?

Pray:

May our lives be a reflection of the grace and mercy we witness in Christ.

David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver



A Positive Start

I never noticed how many signs there were until I started to drive. There were street signs, directional signs, advertising signs, warning signs, signs on building, and even signs in my car. After awhile I started to realize there were a lot of things telling me what I needed to do and what I didn't need to do. In our passage for today, Paul gives us some of these types of signs to help us in our faith journey.

What I appreciate most about this passage from Ephesians is that Paul starts with the positive. The first thought is what we should do, instead of what we shouldn't do. His formula is basically "Do this, but watch out for this." This command calls us to be doers instead of reactors. We can be confident as we use the gifts God has given to us.

Paul begins by telling us to be careful

and wise. Don't go through life haphazardly, but be intentional in what you do. Your intentionality should have its sights set with the wisdom of God in mind. This will lead you to better live out the will of God.

We should also fill ourselves with the Spirit. There are many other things we can fill ourselves with, things that abuse and tear apart our bodies. However, when we fill ourselves with the Spirit, we are built up in Christ.

Both of these are directives of a life internal, but this section ends with a proclamation on how to relate to others. Paul calls us to be subject to one another because of Christ's love. Being in God's wisdom and filled with Christ's love will lead us to serve one another.

AUGUST 19

Think About It:

As Paul gives direction for our lives in Christ, he begins with what we should do instead of what we shouldn't do. Do you live a forward-looking life for Christ, or do you react to the world around you? Does it matter which way you begin?

Make a Choice:

We have the choice to serve others for Christ or to serve ourselves for our own gain. What choices do you make that reflect how you serve others for Christ?

Pray:

May we continue to seek your wisdom and your will as we serve others in all that we do.

From Head to Toe

I pretty much do the same thing every morning to get started for the day. I put my contacts in, take my shower, brush my teeth, put my clothes on, fix my hair and then head in for breakfast. I even have certain pockets that my phone, keys and wallet go in as I get ready. We moved recently and I had to change my routine a little. It seemed awkward and a little uncomfortable doing things out of order. Looking back, it seemed awkward because I wasn't only doing these things; I was getting prepared for my day.

In our passage for today, Paul gives us a list of things to put on every day. Why? Because he wants us to be prepared for what is coming.

Paul starts with the strength of the Lord. We will not be able to survive merely on who

we are and what we can do. We have to rely on the strength of the Lord to overcome the obstacles we face. Many times this is because the obstacles we have to overcome are obstacles we have created. To overcome what we have done, we need someone else — and that someone else is God.

Where do we find the strength of God? It is found in truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the word of God. Paul says to put all of these on as articles of clothing. We aren't merely to have them in our backpack, with them waiting there for us to pull out when needed. We are to wear these and allow them to become part of who we are.

And how is all of this sustained? Through prayer!

AUGUST 26

Think About It:

What do you do to spiritually get ready for your day? Are you as intentional as Paul is calling you to be?

Make a Choice:

Paul says that we have to rely on the power of God. Many times we rely on ourselves instead of God. Why do we rely on our own power instead of God's power?

Pray:

May we put on the entire armor so that we might be spiritually prepared to do your will today.

Bible Study

Ephesians 5:15-21

with Tony W. Cartledge

August 19, 2012

Live Up!

Are your fashion choices influenced by what other people wear, by what colors or styles are popular at a given time? I remember what it was like to first experience the peer pressure of wanting clothes that were currently in fashion.

With three boys, our family clothing budget didn't allow for a lot of cutting-edge fashion. But, whenever a new fad came along, my mother would get out the sewing machine and make at least one stylish item so we wouldn't be left out altogether. The first clothing fad I remember was calypso pants (like capris, but for boys). I was glad that didn't last long. My pair was black.

In junior high school, everyone was wearing plaid shirts that looked like they were made from checked tablecloths. Some of them may have been. My mother made me a blue one. The next year, as the Beach Boys became popular, it was "surfer shirts," which had no collar, just a little piping around the neck. Mine was yellow.

I was a junior when the Beatles popularized Nehru jackets: and my mother found some light blue satin material for mine. With a white turtle-neck, white pants and a fake gold chain, I felt like the cat's meow.

As a young preacher, my closet once held two polyester leisure suits and psychedelic shirts with long pointed collars. I finally decided that fashion would have to move along without me.

It's natural for us to imitate what others do. Peer pressure is a powerful thing, and not just when it comes to clothes.

That is precisely the problem Paul



is addressing in Ephesians 5. He knows the tendency of all people – including church people – to follow the crowd and imitate the ways of the world.

With sharply worded arguments, Paul attempts to turn the equation around. He still encourages his readers to be imitators – not of their neighbors, but of Christ. The chapter begins where last week's lesson ends: "Therefore be imitators of Christ, beloved children" (5:1). Paul challenges his readers to avoid becoming imitation Christians, and to become imitating Christians. Our motto is not to "Be like Mike," as in the old Nike commercial, but "Be like Christ!"

**Live carefully
(vv. 15-16)**

Today's text begins with v. 15, but it is helpful to take note of what has come

before. The chapter opens with a challenge for believers to imitate Christ by demonstrating the same kind of sacrificial love toward others that we find in Christ (vv. 1-2).

In vv. 3-7, Paul lists a catalog of sins that believers may have practiced in their former lives, but should now avoid, because "once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light," and should "live as children of the light" (v. 8), which reveals "what is good and right and true" (v. 9).

Thus, Christ-followers should seek to understand what pleases God and choose those behaviors and live in such a way that they will be unashamed for their deeds to be seen in the light (vv. 10-13). Quoting bits and pieces from a variety of Old Testament verses, perhaps, then adding words of his

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own, Paul intones “Therefore it says, ‘Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (v. 14).^U

Those who wake and walk in the light understand that we are called to make careful use of every moment God gives us. We are to be wise rather than unwise (v. 15), Paul says, good stewards of the life we’ve been given, aware that our time is limited.^U

Indeed, we should be “making the most of the time” (NRSV), or in the familiar King James Version, we should “redeem the time” we have in a world dominated by evil (v. 16).

The expression comes from what seems an unusual compound word. The Greek prefix *ex-* typically means “out of.” The verb *agorazo*, means “to buy,” because it is something you do in the marketplace, the *agora*. Paul uses the combination *exagorazo*, which suggests taking something out of the marketplace – out of the ordinary. To “redeem the time” is to look beyond the mundane ticking of the clock and remember that we are citizens of eternity, “taking advantage of every opportunity” (NET) to live as Jesus lived.^U

To live each day to the fullest, to live in the light, to make the most of every present moment while remembering we are citizens of eternity – that is what it means to “redeem the time.”

Live wisely (v. 17)

Paul had challenged his readers to live “not as unwise people but as wise” in v. 15, and here he returns to that theme: “So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (v. 17).

The NET translation opts for a different sentence construction that makes the point more clearly: “For this reason do not be foolish, but be wise by understanding what the Lord’s will is.”

To be wise, Paul implies, is to seek understanding of God’s will. To live wisely is to live according to God’s will. And what is God’s will? Paul has already made that clear: we imitate Christ by living in love, the same kind of unselfish love Jesus modeled and

taught his disciples, as John’s gospel recalls: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Live in the Spirit (vv. 18-21)

Christians are directed toward God’s will and empowered to love when they open their lives to the presence of Christ’s Spirit. Thus, Paul challenges readers to forgo spirits in favor of the Spirit, to avoid being drunk on wine, but filled with the Spirit of Christ (v. 18).

It’s not self-evident in most English translations, but Paul’s challenge to be filled with the Spirit is followed by five participles that appear to describe the results of a life that is in touch with the Spirit of Christ.

The participles are “speaking,” “singing,” “making music” (v. 19), “giving thanks” (v. 20) and “submitting” (v. 21). This is why we’re including v. 21 in today’s study, even though the lectionary does not.^U

One should not try to stretch Paul’s participles to draw out five very different behaviors. The first three, for example, go together. Speaking to one another in the words of psalms and hymns most commonly takes place in the context of music, “singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts” (v. 19).^U

Notice the two-pronged nature of this important element of worship: the words of our “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” are directed both to each other and to the Lord. As we sing powerful words from the heart, we not only praise God, but we also encourage

one another. This is why the musical aspect of worship is most meaningful (in my opinion) when the accompanists’ contribution does not drown out the voices of the people. Whether the people around me are in tune or off key, I like to hear the people sing; it encourages me, even as I believe it pleases God.

A primary purpose of our singing to each other and to God is that of giving thanks to God. This is not limited to worship. Paul implies that we should do this “at all times.”

And for what do we give thanks? The Greek simply says “all” – the word *pantōn* can be either neuter or masculine. Most modern translations take it as neuter and translate “for everything” or “for all things,” but the NET opts for the masculine form, which can refer to all persons, and suggests that we should thank God “for each other.” Since v. 19 sets the context of speaking or singing to each other as well as to God, it is not inappropriate to carry this forward and think of thanking God for each other. In either case, “all things” could include “each other.”

The final participle acts as a segue to the next section, which deals with the mutual submission that should characterize Christian relationships, including marriage. Those who are being filled by the Spirit demonstrate this in “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v. 21, NET), which is really another way of saying “be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love” (v. 1). We can’t follow Jesus’ command to “love one another as I have loved you” unless we are willing to put others’ needs before our own, trusting that our fellow believers will love us in the same way.

So, where does this leave us? When we hear Paul’s challenge and we examine our lives, what do we see? Are we imitation Christians who carry the name but not the substance, or imitating Christians who model our lives on the life of Christ, seeking daily to walk in the love and the light of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, to the glory of God? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

August 26, 2012

Armor Up!

What's your morning routine? All of us have some pattern, more or less organized, by which we get ourselves ready to face the day. We may put on an antiperspirant to guard against undue sweating, and brush our teeth to ward off cavities. We put on clothes to protect ourselves from the weather (and from embarrassment). We eat breakfast or grab a snack to give us energy for the morning.

How many of us give any thought to spiritual preparation? As Paul comes to the end of his letter, having offered both encouragement and instruction to the church, he closes with a fervent admonition for believers to prepare themselves daily for spiritual battle. "Finally," he says ...

Be strong in the Lord (v. 10)

"Be strong in the Lord," Paul says, "and in the strength of his power." All that follows in vv. 11-17 is an elaboration on this basic notion that believers' primary source of strength is the very One in whom they have entrusted their lives. 🛡️

All of us can name obstacles we must face each day, reasons we must be strong. We want to be strong for our children or for other family members who depend on us. We need strength to accomplish good work in our profession, whether it is homemaking or industry or management or public service or finding ways to contribute to the greater good in retirement. Sometimes, we face so many physical or emotional demands that we hope and pray for

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



strength just to get through the day.

That's not what Paul has in mind, though. He's more concerned with our finding strength to overcome the influence of evil, the daily temptations we must face as we seek to follow Paul's previous pleas to walk worthily of our faith and to imitate Christ by loving others as Christ loved us.

Wear the armor of God (vv. 11-17)

Paul elaborates on his call to trust in God for strength by laying out a dire warning against evil influence, followed by an extended metaphor on the kind of "armor" that would befit soldiers in the kingdom of God.

Some readers take vv. 11-12 as a literal description of demonic beings that consciously seek, like C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape*, to lead believers astray and engineer their downfall.

Paul rarely speaks of evil in personal terms. More commonly, he refers to the influence of evil with words such

as "the flesh," "the world," "this age" or "sin." The thought of evil beings with superhuman power was very much in vogue in Paul's day, however, and he adopted it, too.

Thus, Paul says that we do not struggle against flesh and blood alone, "but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (v. 12). Some writers assert that terms such as "rulers," "authorities" and "powers" describe an array of supernatural beings that rebel against God, threaten humanity, and must be held at bay by angels and archangels in their own ranks. (See "The Hardest Question" in the online resources for more.)

Paul writes as if he adopts this view of reality, and speaks in a way that he knows will resonate with his readers, but avoids undue speculation. For Paul, the important thing is that no evil power can stand against God in Christ, for God

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nurturingfaith.net

had raised Christ “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come” (1:21, see also Rom. 8:38-39).

God’s invincible power is available, Paul believed, but not automatic. Believers must consciously put their trust in God and bedeck themselves with the protection God offers if they are to overcome evil.

Paul describes this process through the overarching metaphor of putting on “the whole armor of God” (v. 13-17), which will enable the believer to “stand firm” against the power of evil. 📖

Paul identifies six items that the well-equipped believer needs for spiritual warfare. The first is “the belt of truth” (v. 14a). This is reminiscent of Isa. 11:5, which speaks of the coming messiah as wearing a belt of righteousness and faithfulness. 📖

Beneath their other armor, Roman soldiers wore a leather apron around their waist, extending to protect the thighs. The first step in confronting evil is recognizing what is truth and what is a lie. Deception is a powerful weapon, but truth can defeat it.

The second piece of armor is “the breastplate of righteousness” (v. 14b), which calls to mind Isa. 59:17, a prophetic image of divine justice in which God “put on righteousness like a breastplate.”

The image of righteousness is two-pronged. In one sense, any righteousness we have comes to us from God, but as redeemed sinners we are called to live a faithful and righteous life – the sort of life that does not make room for evil.

A soldier needs good footwear that will hold up for long marches or extended battle on rough terrain. Roman soldiers wore high-top leather shoes like heavy sandals, but with a thick sole. Paul’s third admonition relates to the feet, but without using the word “shoes.” Again, he draws from an image in Isaiah, who spoke of the beautiful feet of “those who bring good news, who proclaim peace.” 📖

The NRSV sees this as a call to proclaim the gospel (“as shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace”), but most modern translations see the gospel of peace as making one’s feet ready for battle (e.g., “and with your feet fitted with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace,” NIV). In other words, to stand against evil we must have our feet firmly planted in the gospel.

The fourth item in the Christian’s armor is “the shield of faith,” which protects against the “flaming arrows” of evil (v. 16). Roman soldiers carried a large wooden shield, typically about four feet tall and more than two feet wide. The shield was usually covered with leather that could be soaked with water, and provided ample protection against arrows, even those that had been covered with pitch and set afire.

We are surrounded by harmful influences or pressures that would lead us astray, but holding on to faith in Christ enables us to deflect or extinguish darts that would wound our spirits and damage our relationship with God.

Two last components are mentioned in v. 17: “the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” In Isa. 59:17, God wore a helmet of salvation, but in this text, Paul sees God’s gift of salvation as a helmet that gives the believer hope and confidence that God is with us and victory is sure.

Commentators often note that the sword is the believer’s only offensive weapon, but a sword also can serve a defensive purpose. The sword finds its source in the Spirit and its effectiveness in “the word of God.” This can be understood in a variety of ways, and despite the old Baptist tradition of “sword drills,” it is not limited to the Bible.

The Bible as we know it did not exist when Paul wrote these words:

the rabbis hadn’t even settled on what should be included in the Hebrew Bible. But Paul knew that a word from God could be found in those books that were accepted as scripture. When Jesus was tempted during his wilderness sojourn, he fended off each attack with a quotation from scripture (Matt. 4:1-11, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1-13). Christians who read the Bible and seek a word from God may also find verses that express what they need to overcome temptation or doubt and stand strong.

But Paul also believed that God, through the Spirit, could give a needed word directly to believers who faced times of trial. Jesus assured his followers that they could be brave in the face of potential arrest, believing that the Spirit would tell them what they needed to say to their accusers (Matt. 10:19).

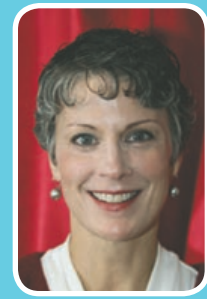
Pray in the Spirit (vv. 18-20)

Paul concludes with an appeal to prayer that is so closely connected to the preceding verses that one might consider it to be the final element in the spiritual soldier’s equipment: soldiers do not fight alone, but at the direction of their commander, with whom they must communicate.

Having commended the sword of the Spirit, Paul immediately calls believers to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (v. 18). Followers of Jesus should follow his example of being steeped in prayer. Paul urges prayer for “the saints” (other Christians) and requests a special prayer for himself, that he will be given the words he needs to “fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel” (v. 19) as an “ambassador in chains” (v. 20).

Note the similarity of this thought to the preceding idea that the sword of the Spirit provides needed words from God. Paul was a prisoner in chains, but he was neither defenseless nor without his sword. If Paul could live in such conditions and yet bravely proclaim the good news, perhaps he really does have something to teach us. **BT**

Adventures with LULER the Hound



Kelly Belcher



You might not know it, but there are some special people in your church who have been set apart to do a special job. They look just like everyone else. But they are different because they have been ordained, which means they've been chosen to serve in special ways.

Baptist churches ordain two kinds of people: deacons and ministers.

Deacons spend time getting to know folks in the church, visiting sick people in the hospital, getting things ready for worship on Sunday mornings, deciding how important things will happen, and being leaders in the projects your church does to help others.

Ministers and pastors do other special jobs. For example, they lead Sunday worship, preach sermons, teach Bible study, baptize people, lead weddings and funerals, attend meetings, listen to people when they are troubled or worried, and help everyone in the church grow into good Jesus-followers.

Baptists believe that, if you are baptized, you have promised to follow Jesus, so you are able to do any of these jobs. We elect people to serve in these special ways and we ordain them. It could happen to you one day!

The Bow-wow

Luler says to be grateful to the special servants who have been ordained. Thank them for helping you be a better Jesus-follower.

The Question Box

Who are the deacons in your church? Find one and ask her what special jobs she does. Who has been a deacon for the longest time in your church?



More Online: Jump online at nurturingfaith.net to discover weekly ideas for children's leaders.

My month of living dangerously

“Let’s begin by going around the circle and saying why we’re here.”

“I’m training for a triathlon and thought this would be a good way to get started.”

“I’m going to the beach in a month and want to fit into my bathing suit from high school.”

“My normal workout is swimming in frigid waters, running through fire and crossing an electric field while soaking wet, but I want to challenge myself.”

When it was my turn I said, “I’m here because of a lack of judgment.” No one laughed. I should have gone with, “I’m here on an AARP scholarship.”

I began to have second thoughts. Did it make sense for a person who has never voluntarily done a pushup to sign up for “Operation Boot Camp”? Should someone for whom tying his shoes feels like an aerobic exercise be paying money to take orders from the cast of *American Gladiators*?

We began by signing a waiver that gave the instructors permission to kill us. We ran up hills, steps and heart rates. We squatted, jumped and lunged. We ran with rubber bands around our ankles holding plastic plates over our heads.

We did stretching exercises: “Bend over and touch your elbows to the ground. Keep your back straight and your butt down. Put your left foot behind your head while pulling your right knee to your chest in a figure four that moves into a figure eight.”

They had cute little names for the exercises — burpees, robots, dead bugs, bear crawls, frog legs, cat vomit, fire hydrants and scorpion push-ups. I began to think of the exercises by other names: leg breaker, arm twister, hip displacer, Tylenol, Extra Strength Tylenol, and *Braveheart* — for that scene



where they torture Mel Gibson.

When I signed up for boot camp I pictured Sergeant Carter shouting at Gomer Pyle, “Move it, move it, move it,” but my instructors were encouraging:

“Brett, c’mon. You can catch up.”

“Brett, move both feet at the same time.”

“Brett, try to breathe.”

Changing your diet is a crucial part of boot camp. They gave us a diary in which to list everything we ate. I was encouraged to eat granola, yogurt, lentils, bulgur, walnuts, melons, edamame, Icelandic polenta and quinoa (which is the opposite of bacon; it makes everything less tasty). I was gently reprimanded for eating brisket, chicken pot pie, chocolate pie, mac and cheese (who would have guessed that’s not healthy?) and grape jelly (which I mistakenly counted for a fruit).

I was almost completely honest. I shortened “apple pie” to “apple” and “orange sherbet” to “orange,” but the only drive-through I’ve driven through in the last month is at the pharmacy.

Each day we wrote about how we felt after the workout. I see now that my answers correspond to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’s “Stages of Grief.”

Anger: “Who can I blame for this?”

Denial: “It’s probably a good thing that I can’t feel my legs.”

Bargaining: “If I live through this, I’m going to Waffle House.”

Depression: “If I roll behind those trees, they won’t find me.”

Acceptance: “How much older can I feel?”

The program promises to “push you to work just outside your comfort zone.”

Apparently my comfort zone is on the couch eating pizza. The brochure says Operation Boot Camp will “change the way you look and feel.” I look creaky, sore and sleep-deprived. I feel a step closer to hip replacement surgery. I find it hard to get out of bed — not in the sense of “hard to get motivated,” but as in “hard to move my legs.”

Near the end, my left calf decided it had enough and would not participate any more. The physical therapist said, “This is what happens when men your age start working out.”

At the 1924 Olympics, Eric Liddell of *Chariots of Fire* fame said, “When I run I feel God’s pleasure.”

When I run I feel God’s pity. Sometimes I hear God chuckling. God may be pleased when I run, but I am growing in my belief that God must be okay when I sit, too. **BT**

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

MERCER UNIVERSITY PREACHING CONSULTATION

September 23-25, 2012

King and Prince Beach and Golf Resort • St. Simons Island, Georgia

Co-Sponsored by

James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia

Main Presenter — Luke Timothy Johnson

Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Emory University's Gandler School of Theology in Atlanta. Professor Johnson earned a Ph.D. in New Testament Studies from Yale University, as well as an M.A. in Religious Studies from Italian University, an M.Div. in Theology from Saint Michael's School of Theology, and a B.A. in Philosophy from Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans.

A former Benedictine monk, Dr. Johnson is a highly sought-after lecturer, a member of several editorial and advisory boards, and a senior fellow at Emory University's Center for the Study of Law and Religion.

Professor Johnson is the author of more than 50 books, including *The Real Jesus: The Missional Quest for the Historical Jesus*, *The Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, and *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, which is widely used as a textbook. He has also published several hundred scholarly articles and reviews.

Other speakers scheduled for the three-day program —

- Gary Farr, Pastor, Vestavia Hills Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala.
- William D. Underwood, President, Mercer University
- Becky Matheny, Pastor of Spiritual & Communal Development, Lake Oconee Community Church, Georgia
- W. Ches Smith, retired Baptist Pastor, Titus
- Peter Rhea Jones, McAfee School of Theology, Atlanta
- Paul Stanley, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Athens
- Carolyn Hale Cabbage, Mississippi Children and Family Services, Brownsville
- Bill Ireland, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Dalton

Registration is \$100 per person and is on a first-come, first-served basis.

A golf outing is planned for Monday afternoon.

Questions regarding registration or lodging?

Contact Dawn Frazier at (678) 347-6470

or frazier_d@mercer.edu



EVENT SCHEDULE

Sunday Evening, September 23

- 6:00-7:00 Dinner and Registration
- 7:15-8:00 Book, Day Two: From Jesus' Resurrection to Easter Sunday, Birmingham, Ala.
- 7:30-8:00 Welcome and Meet Your Pastor — William D. Underwood, President, Mercer University
- 7:45-8:45 Late Timothy Johnson — Preaching Ministry: The Challenge of an Alas World
- 9:00 Devotion

Monday Morning, September 24

- 7:00 Address Book of James Underwood
- 7:30 State of Georgia Supreme Information Booklet
- 8:00-8:30 Book, Day Two
- 8:30-9:00 Day Two — Start of the Day and Meet Your Holy Spirit: Finding the Creative Edge
- 9:00-10:00 Becky Matheny, Pastor of Spiritual/Communal Development, Lake Oconee Community Church — Preaching Ministry: A Creative World
- 9:30-10:00 The South, Peter Stanley, First Baptist Church, Athens — Let Where They Set
- 10:00-10:30 Fellowship and Refreshment provided by Mississippi Children and Family Services, Inc.
- 10:30-10:45 Book, Day Two
- 10:45-11:30 Late Timothy Johnson — Preaching Ministry: The Challenge of a Scriptural Imagination

Monday Afternoon, September 24

- 10:15 Golf Tournament
- 2:00 Discussion of Text for Monday — Who is Jesus and How Do We Know? — Bill Stanley
- 5:00 Dinner to follow Tournament

Monday Evening, September 24

First Baptist Church, St. Simons

- 7:00 Main Book Lesson, Pastors, Author's Word of the Day — I can find the IRL'ed!
- 8:00 Fellowship and Refreshment provided by First Baptist Church, St. Simons

Tuesday Morning, September 25

- 8:30-9:00 Wake up to Jesus, Day Two
- 8:45-9:15 Paul Stanley, First Baptist Church, Athens — Preaching in Postmodern
- 9:15-9:45 Gordon Hall Cabbage, Mississippi Children and Family Services, Inc. — Let God Be True in the Midst of Our Unlikely Challenges
- 9:45-10:15 Bill Ireland, First Baptist Church, Dalton — Sermon by the Lord
- 10:15-10:30 Fellowship and Refreshment
- 10:30-11:30 Late Timothy Johnson — Preaching Ministry: The Challenge of a Biblical Imagination
- 11:30-12:30 Announcement that MFC 2012 will be announced

‘A fresh day’

Whitsitt Society’s mission continues through legacy series

The life cycle of the William H. Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society has come to an end. The times that called the Whitsitt Society into existence have changed.

The means to preserve and promote the society’s mission have multiplied and shifted beyond the society’s structural capabilities. In fidelity to that mission, the society’s advocacy for historic Baptist principles will continue beyond its institutional existence through an endowment to *Baptists Today*.

The Whitsitt Society was born in 1992 in the midst of a denominational controversy that harmed Southern Baptist history efforts. In the 1980s the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention found its third update of the excellent *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* permanently stalled by disagreements over who would write articles reflecting the decade of controversy.

The Sunday School Board (now LifeWay) of the SBC commissioned Leon McBeth, longtime professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, to write a history of the Board, only to have the volume shredded before publication in 1990 due to trustees who thought the text too negative about recent changes in the denomination. In 1994, the SBC abolished its Historical Commission.

In response to this silencing of historians’ voices, particularly historians on the losing side of the controversy, Walter Shurden called a conference at Mercer University in October 1992. He invited leaders of institutions formed by the losing (moderate) side of the SBC controversy to present their institutional histories.

The well-attended conference made clear two facts: First, parts of historic Baptist heritage, including soul freedom, separation of church and state, antipathy to creedalism, and local autonomy, were at best marginalized and

at worst scorned by the SBC’s new leadership. Second, a remnant of Baptists remained committed to these endangered Baptist principles.

At the last session of the conference, a proposal was made to form an organization to further the Baptist tradition represented by those present. Participants voted by monetary donation.

About \$1,500 was given and mailing addresses were collected. The Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society was born.

Its articles of incorporation state the following purposes: “to raise the historical consciousness of Baptists, to promote religious freedom, and to encourage the collection ... of ... records and other matter as will aid in accomplishing these purposes.”

There is much in a name. Heritage in its title reflected the society’s purpose to include any and all interested Baptists, not just professional historians. The society’s namesake, William Heth Whitsitt, resigned the presidency of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1899 because he refused to deny conclusions drawn from his historical research, views at odds with the majority of Baptists in his day, though almost universally accepted today.

Founders of the Whitsitt Society intended to preserve and promote historic Baptist principles in troubled times until those views, being true, regained their rightful standing.

For a score of years, the Whitsitt Society has made significant contributions to the preservation of the traditional Baptist heritage through such means as *The Whitsitt Journal*, the annual meeting at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, the Whitsitt Courage Award, and publication of pamphlets on Baptist identity in a cooperative effort with the Baptist History & Heritage Society.

Through the *Journal*, the Penrose St. Amant Lecture Series and the Courage Award, the stories of such diverse Baptist award recipients as President Jimmy Carter, human trafficking opponent Lauren Bethell, and civil rights leader John Porter have been kept before

disenfranchised Baptists. These were stories that needed to be told and held up to the light during dark times.

But things have changed. In the two decades of the society’s existence, the denominational context and the means of transmitting Baptist heritage have been altered. Through the years, *Journal* subscriptions have declined along with intra-denominational controversy.

The society sought to respond creatively to these changes, the most challenging of which were the shift from print media to digital information and the decreasing attendance at its annual meeting, with related losses of revenue. Eventually the society came to realize its time was over, though the principles it supported were as relevant as ever.

The Whitsitt Society has decided to end its usual operations and reassign its remaining resources to further its original mission in a fresh way. To this end, the society has established The Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Legacy Series through a \$10,000 endowment placed with *Baptists Today*.

This endowment will fund a series of articles that will appear at least annually and are designed to focus specifically on the theme of liberty of conscience in Baptist life. The series will educate Baptists about the indispensable role of liberty of conscience in the Baptist past and its function as a core identity marker in the Baptist present and for the Baptist future.

Preference will be given to young adult Baptist contributors. The target audience will be Baptists of all ages.

As long-time executive director of the Whitsitt Society, I close this chapter of my Baptist service with a bit of nostalgia, but I look back with pleasure at the stories told and forward with hope in the light shed on the Baptist heritage by committed lovers of Christian freedom. **BT**

—Lloyd Allen teaches church history and spiritual formation at Mercer’s McAfee School of Theology.



These young adults drive up to an hour for their missional formation community's bi-weekly meeting, which includes preparing a meal together, fellowship and discussion about a book. Gatherings typically last at least two hours.

Missional formation communities reconnect young adults

SYLVA, N.C. — Every other Wednesday night about two dozen young adults crowd into a western North Carolina home for church as most of these twentysomethings know it.

As the mountain air cools this May night, the conversation inside is just warming up.

They are cooking together as they often do, laughing and sharing stories from the week while they slice potatoes, chop garlic and finish dinner preparations. Tonight's menu is chicken casserole, salad and a lively conversation about the point of evangelism.

Add a little fun, subtract all limits on where the conversation goes, and what's left is a simple yet effective recipe for ministry among young adults, one of the hardest generations for most churches to reach.

This innovative new ministry concept — known as a “missional formation community” — is the latest young adult ministry initiative of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina (CBFNC).

At a time when many churches are watching young people leave in droves (hoping and praying that one day they'll come back), this group of twentysomethings has doubled in size in less than a year. And though some of these young adults won't drive five minutes to the nearest church, they'll drive up to an hour for

this community's bi-weekly gathering, where they talk freely about hopes, fears and faith.

How it started; why it's working

A three-hour conversation at 30,000 feet is what launched the idea for missional formation communities.

In 2010, Wanda Kidd, CBFNC's collegiate ministry coordinator, sat next to a recent college graduate on an airplane. They buckled in for a not-so-typical airplane conversation where this former college cheerleader — beautiful, smart and talented — revealed how desperately lonely she had been since graduating.

She needed friends. She needed community. Yet she didn't know where or how to find either. When Kidd left the plane, she carried her suitcase and a new burden.

“I could not get this girl out of my mind, and I had to do something about it,” she said.

The next day at a CBFNC staff meeting, she shared her concern and her colleagues joined her in imagining a new way to help young adults find their place. Kidd, a former campus minister who has coordinated college ministry for CBFNC since 2007, began hearing echoes of the young woman's story in other Christian young adults she knew.

They needed and wanted Christian community, and though many of them grew up going to church, they weren't finding it there.

Commonly known as the Millennial generation, these young adults were born after 1980 and are coming of age amid challenging times. Though on track to be the most educated U.S. generation to date, many Millennials have struggled to find jobs in a floundering post-recession economy.

It's not uncommon for today's college graduate to move back in with mom and dad instead of into a steady, promising career. Studies show Millennials are getting married later, having children later and aren't exactly flocking to church.

A recent report from Public Religion Research Institute and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs found that one in four young adults are “unaffiliated” with religion, although 55 percent of that unaffiliated group identified with religion when they were younger.

“A lot of Christian young adults stay out of the church while they are in college and then have trouble getting back in,” said Jason Foster, one of the original members of the western N.C. missional formation community. “This is why this community is great. I didn't realize how important fellowship was.”

Missional formation communities not only provide the Christian community that many young adults are longing for, but also a portal for later becoming part of a congregation, Kidd said. It's a safe place for them to develop as leaders, be challenged to look at church and faith with new eyes, engage in service and missions, and find friends post-college.

"When our friends graduated, [my wife and I] felt at a loss," said Kenny Chapman, who is the leader-coach for the western N.C. missional formation community. "We love to have people to our house, but when they graduated and left, all that ended. It was a hole in our heart. This [community] is filling that niche."

For Chapman, the group provides more than community; it became his place of ministry. When he graduated from Gardner-Webb University's divinity school, he was ready to follow God's call as a church minister. His résumé was circulating, and any day he anticipated a call from a church seeking to hire him.

So when Kidd first asked him to facilitate a new community for college graduates, he was intrigued but reluctant. Chapman agreed to help incubate Kidd's idea, serving as the leader-coach for the first missional formation community.

It was supposed to be temporary — much like the IT job he took at Western Carolina University just to make ends meet. But God has a way of changing best laid plans, he said.

In July 2011, the community was born with a dozen people. As it steadily grew over the next several months, Chapman grew into the realization that God had placed a new calling on his life. He stopped searching for ministry jobs and started embracing this community as his new place of ministry. "This ministry means that much to me," he said.

As the group's leader-coach, Chapman

helps facilitate conversation about books the group reads, as well as reflections on what impact the book has on their views of leadership, sexuality, stewardship and the church. They also serve in the local community and go on an occasional retreat together.

"This community has given me a great opportunity to grow in my faith," said community member Ashley Dolman.

The future of missional formation communities

As the missional formation community in western N.C. continues to grow in depth and size, Kidd and CBFNC hope to help launch dozens more. Their value — beyond providing community for young people — is sustaining the future of the church, she said.

"The church says, 'We want young people,' but really they want people just like them with young faces," Kidd said. "We can't bring them into church because we're not talking the same language. We'll talk our language, and they'll leave us because they have no idea what we're talking about."

Missional formation communities can bridge that gap, Kidd said, helping usher young adults into faith formation instead of out the church doors forever.

"This group has filled a hole in my life," said Foster. "I consider this community to be my church. We support each other, and we care about what is happening in each other's lives. We pray for each other, and we talk about problems. You can't really ask for more." **BT**

—Carla Davis is a communications specialist for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and a freelance writer living in Apex, N.C.

Starting a missional formation community at your church

Identify a leader-coach. Someone who understands and appreciates the postmodern mindset of many young adults, this leader facilitates the growth of the group and its members.

Look for young adults already connected to your church. Most congregations have at least a few. You'll know the community is working when these individuals invite their friends. "These communities can be portals for young adults entering congregations," said Wanda Kidd. "They don't go anywhere where they don't have a friend."

Plan the community's launch. Some congregations may wish to have a planning committee that helps manage community logistics, such as suggestions for books, when and where the group will meet, and options for missional activities in the community.

Be open-minded. Some of your community's members may have been Christians most of their life and some may have never been inside a church. With these varied faith experiences, expect conversations to go anywhere. "Give them freedom to be open and honest in a safe environment," said Kenny Chapman. "One guy in our group said, 'For the first time in my life I feel like I can say anything I want to say. I haven't felt like that in church before.'"

Facilitate community. "This population often espouses relationships as the most important goal in their lives, but they are often not very proficient in developing and carrying them out," said Kidd. "A missional formation community can provide a teaching environment for developing relationships."

—Additional networking and training opportunities for missional communities are available by contacting Wanda Kidd at wkidd@cbfnc.org.



Kenny Chapman, right, facilitates the bi-weekly discussion for CBFNC's first missional formation community for young adults. Chapman, a graduate of Gardner-Webb University's divinity school, is the community's leader-coach.

Making it work

Ministry couples find fulfillment amid balancing act

Scott and Dixie Ford

Nine of us gathered around the table at the Ford home: Scott and Dixie Ford and their four children: Allie, Amber, Thomas and Anna; Eddie, a Passport staffer from Liberia who was stayed with the Fords until camp started; and my family. Yet, dinner was a breeze for Scott and Dixie.

Scott serves on the staff of Passport Camps, Inc., and Dixie is minister to youth and children at Crosscreek Baptist Church in Pelham, Ala. They live in the Hoover area of Birmingham within walking distance of Scott's office.

The couple met at Shocco Springs, a Baptist camp in Alabama, during summer mission interviews in 1994. Both were commissioned to New England and ended up riding on a van for three days to their respective mission sites in Massachusetts and Vermont. They began dating after the summer ended, and Dixie transferred to Jacksonville State University where Scott was a student.

They were married at nearby First Baptist Church of Williams, where Scott served as the minister of youth while they were still in college. Scott was ordained by the church in 2003.

After Dixie graduated from college, the couple moved to Atlanta for Scott to attend Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology. Dixie taught elementary school music, and during the summers they worked for Passport Camps.

Yet, even while teaching school, Dixie sensed a strong call to ministry as well.

"I always felt that it would be missions," she said. "At the time the requirement for couples being missionaries was that one of the two would have a seminary education, and we felt we were fulfilling that goal."

However, after Scott finished seminary,



The Fords (left to right): Anna, Dixie with Thomas, Scott with Amber, Allie)

both ended up teaching for a year. Dixie felt that God was leading her to attend McAfee. So Scott continued his work while she became a seminary student — and they started expanding their family.

"Dixie made the 4.0," said Scott with a smile. "Showed me up."

Seminary education, said Scott, "helped us speak the same language and have the same framework for ministry."

"We found that it helped us see that we had similar convictions and purpose in regard to ministry," added Dixie. "There was definitely an understanding that 'we're in this together.'"

The challenging part of both partners being in ministry is, like many other couples, finding the right balance.

"We have four small children," said Dixie. "And it's important to us to do a good job of making time for family, our ministries and each other."

At Crosscreek Baptist Church, Dixie has the opportunity to work part-time.

"I love being a stay-at-home mom," she said. "But I also love the ministry I get

to do through the church. Right now, this is exactly what I want to do."

"Thankfully, my ministry at Passport is normally a Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm experience," said Scott. "Then, Dixie is at the church on Wednesdays and Sundays, so our schedule works."

Of course, there are times during the summers when they are both involved with camps and traveling, but they find ways to make their schedules work for the family.

"Early in my ministry I had dreamed that one day I might work for Passport," said Scott. "After a few years of serving in churches and then working for state missions with [the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia], the opportunity to work with Passport became available and we were delighted."

Scott and Dixie have found that their individual callings have strengthened them as a couple and a family. As they gather their children to get them ready for bed, Scott looks around the room and smiles at Dixie holding two-year-old Anna and says, "We're really very blessed."

ALLAN AND VALERIE BURTON

The night that Allan and Valerie Burton met through mutual friends at Southern Baptist Seminary, Allan left the gathering, turned to his friend and said, "I think I want to get to know her better."

"The feeling was mutual," said Valerie with a smile. They became friends and began to date.

"Although we had this great community of friends who really nurtured us at Southern, we knew we couldn't stay because of all that was going on at the time," said Allan.

Together they began to contemplate what the future would hold. They got engaged in April 1995, moved to Nashville, Tenn., and then married in January 1996.

"We call that our 'year of transition' because so much happened to change our lives," said Valerie. "We got married, my brother died, and then we moved to Richmond to continue seminary."

"We actually drove to Richmond with no place to live," said Allan. "We stayed with friends and, within 4 days, found an apartment and prepared to start school."

Knowing they were both called to ministry and having been engaged in ministry together provided strength during an otherwise chaotic time.

"We were trying to figure out the future during a time of a lot of angst and bitterness," said Allan. "But it was a time that really shaped who we would become as people and ministers. We had a community at [Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond] that was hopeful, supportive of each other, and shared a lot of openness."

Allan and Valerie eventually worked together at First Baptist Church in Ashland, Va., where Valerie was minister to youth and Allan was associate pastor.

"They really loved me back out of my bitterness," said Allan.

As the years passed, Allan and Valerie served in various ministry positions within churches and with organizations such as Passport Camps and Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"We were committed to not work in separate churches," said Valerie. "Our family was too important, and our spiritual journey together as a couple was too important."

Today, Valerie serves as minister for Christian formation at Birmingham's Baptist Church of the Covenant. Allan is the co-director of Hope Manifest, a non-profit organization that helps other non-profits succeed through organizational and financial development.



Being two people involved in different aspects of ministry has been enriching for them, they said.

"Understanding the sense of calling and fulfillment we each have is important," said Valerie. "It is not enough to just work a job for either one of us. We need to know that what we do has some eternal impact in people's lives."

Allan said the benefits far outweigh the sacrifices.

"Sometimes our responsibilities with church and family require a juggling act, but our parents, our church family, and our friends have been so supportive," he said. "Every stage of life that we have experienced has helped prepare us for what's next."

GLENN AND TERESA BOWERS

Glenn and Teresa Bowers have worked together at Trinity Baptist Church in Madison, Ala., since 2001. She is minister to youth and college students, and he is minister of education and missions.

We had both felt God's unique call on each of our lives before we began to date, said Teresa. Therefore, they both sensed a call to attend seminary.

"We had different feelings about our calls, but they were pulling us to the same place,"

said Glenn.

Their relationship deepened when they realized their callings were leading them in the same direction. They married in 1986, after Glenn had graduated from college and completed the first year of a two-year campus ministry internship. Teresa then completed her student teaching and graduated.

Following Glenn's internship at three junior colleges in Dothan, Enterprise and Andalusia, Ala., they moved to Louisville, Ky., to attend seminary.

"We began taking classes together as a scheduling convenience," said Glenn. "We learned that we really enjoyed taking classes together, and we only had to purchase one set of books."

The couple also discovered how their different gifts complemented each other in class.

What one person would miss, the other would pick up; we had a built-in study partner, said Teresa. It was at this point we started to really discuss the idea of working together in a ministerial position. But, we also knew those positions were very rare.

After seminary they moved to Mobile where Glenn became associate Baptist campus minister at the University of South Alabama. Their children, Hannah and Brett, were both

born in Mobile, and Teresa worked as part-time minister of education and children at Hillcrest Baptist Church.

Then they moved to Montevallo, Ala., where Glenn was campus minister at the University of Montevallo and Teresa was the part-time preschool, children, youth and college minister at University Baptist Church.

Trinity Baptist in Madison had two full-time ministerial positions open in 2001. It seemed like what they were looking for would be a good match with our gifts and skills, said Teresa. Ronnie Brewer was also a longtime friend, and he was the new pastor at Trinity. We prayed and prayed, and it just seemed evident that God was leading us to make this decision.

So what are the benefits and liabilities of a married couple working on the same church staff?

"The best part is that Teresa gets to be with me 24 hours a day," said Glenn.

"The biggest challenge is being with Glenn 24 hours a day," she responded.

Seriously, the best part is being able to work, plan and help out with each other's ministry, said Glenn. Many times family, marriage and job descriptions get a little blurred. But, it really seems to work for us and for Trinity. **BT**



Contributed photo

BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

For the first time in months, the residents of the Confederate capital of Richmond breathe a sigh of relief. Thanks to the determined efforts of Conf. Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, Union Gen. George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac is driven away from Richmond in a series of battles known as the Seven Days Battles. The darkest hours of the Confederacy to date are now past. Union hopes for a quick end to the war are dashed.

J. D. Huffham, editor of North Carolina Baptists' *Biblical Recorder*, expresses his relief that the "Great Battle" has, for now, saved Richmond and the Confederacy:

What the effects of this battle will be on the Northern people, it is impossible to foresee. It is hoped that they will gather lessons of wisdom from this disaster; that they will learn the impossibility of subjugating us and be willing to let us alone.

Many Northern Baptists, however, believe the balance of the war is on the side of the Union. The editor of the *Watchman and Examiner*, the Baptist newspaper of New England Baptists, summarizes the sentiments held by many of his fellow Northern Baptists:

The flag of the Union floats in every rebel State. The Mississippi is lost to the Confederacy, and all the cities on its banks are at the mercy of our gunboats. Mobile, Savannah, Charleston and Wilmington are the only seaports now open to them, and these can be taken at any moment, when the plans of the campaign, formed at Washington, render it expedient or desirable.

Yet for many Southern Baptists, the most disappointing aspect of their Confederate nation remains: the evil evidenced in army life. Now fully engaged in distributing Bibles and other religious literature to soldiers, they eagerly look for any signs that their efforts are leading to the salvation of lost or straying souls. One such report to this month's convening of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, a letter from an army colporteur, offers hope:



General Robert E. Lee mounted on Traveller, his famous "war horse."

150 YEARS AGO

July 1862

The soldiers do not wait for me to go among them to distribute, but they crowd around my tent by scores, asking for something to read. They receive and read with eagerness. I require them to read and return, and take others, which they do punctually. I am much pleased with the work of a COLPORTER. I had no idea it was so pleasant an employment....I have supplied two regiments from North Carolina. Soldiers read with eagerness and seeming delight the tracts and books which I am almost daily placing in their hands. I have just conversed with a Lieutenant, who, I fear, is on his death-bed, but who is rejoicing in hope of eternal life through a pardoning Redeemer.

Other Baptists of the South are inclined to publicly ignore the sins of their nation's soldiers, focusing instead on the widespread belief

(among white Baptists) that the Confederacy is God's earthly vessel chosen to defend the rightness of African slavery. The Middle District Baptist Association of Virginia sums up such sentiments rather neatly: "If a people drew the sword in behalf of a just cause, we are that people."

In the midst of the shifting winds of the war, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln reveals a critical decision on July 22, informing his chief advisors and cabinet that he will soon issue a proclamation to free slaves. The timing is crucial. In order to lend credibility to the coming public announcement, Lincoln declares that he will wait until the Union Army achieves a notable battlefield victory.

In reality, emancipation of slaves has been underway for months. The U.S. Congress has passed two confiscation acts that legally empower the Union Army to free the slaves of persons deemed as traitors to the United States, under which thousands of slaves throughout the South have already been freed. When Lincoln's formal Emancipation Proclamation comes, it will strike a psychological blow to the very life and vitality of the slave-based Confederacy that many white Southern Baptists view as wrapped in the mantle of God's Providence. **BT**

Giving Back

Third-year Campbell University Divinity School student and residence hall chaplain April Viverette (left) chats with undergraduate student Rebecca Richardson.

Divinity students serve as chaplains in university's residence halls

BUIES CREEK, N.C. — April Viverette said she was called to Campbell University Divinity School because God wanted her to minister to young people.

She thought “young” would mean children or preteens, but after more than a semester as a residence hall chaplain, the third-year graduate student from Rocky Mount, N.C., found working with college students to be very rewarding.

“I didn’t expect to like this program as much as I do,” said Viverette. “But working with college freshmen has opened my eyes ... maybe this is another outlet for me in ministry.”

“This program” is a partnership between the divinity school and campus ministry that places student chaplains in the residence halls to serve as both ministers and counselors. Four divinity students — Viverette, Charles Fiore, Daniel Fairchild and Amy Adams — worked in this role throughout the university’s 13 halls this past school year.

In addition to the resident chaplains, seven other divinity school students served as resident directors. Lacey Davis, who shepherds

more than 140 students in Campbell’s newest dorm for women, said there are daily opportunities for counseling undergraduates with a variety of needs.

According to Divinity School Dean Andrew Wakefield, the idea is a win-win for Campbell, as it provides the graduate students with real-life experience, but also provides undergraduate students with someone who can listen and offer advice and spiritual guidance.

“We as a (divinity) school have always been blessed by being part of a comprehensive university, with a wide range of resources for our students,” said Wakefield. “Now we get the even greater blessing of giving back to the university, of building stronger ties with students across this campus, of having more opportunities to be the presence of Christ within the Campbell community.”

Viverette, who is working toward her master’s degree, covers three residence halls, meaning she is the go-to chaplain for nearly 300 students. Viverette — who has an office in one of the residence halls — regularly visits the young women and engages in everyday conversation, plans Bible studies and group lunches, and keeps an open door to her office

for students who want longer one-on-one discussions.

She said the topics of those talks range from problems with a roommate to homesickness to struggling with what major to choose.

And while her position is faith-based in nature, Viverette said not all discussions involve faith or prayer.

“I have a lot of students who don’t have a particular faith tradition or who just don’t want to talk about it, so I usually ask them first how faith has played into their issue,” Viverette said. “Sometimes, that spawns a lot of conversation, and sometimes, they want to avoid it. I don’t just jump in immediately and say, ‘Are you praying?’ because I know that’s not for everybody.”

So far, the program seems to be a success, Viverette said.

“We’ve asked students to take surveys, and the response has been very positive,” she said. “I think this is something they need. A lot of freshmen don’t know where to go for counselors or just people they can talk to. If they know they have someone in their dorms who’s ready to listen ... then that’s big.” **BT**

—Billy Liggett is editor of *Campbell Magazine*.

"I've learned how important dreams are to the healing process," said Hardy Clemons (left) in an interview with *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce. Photo by David Cassady.



A conversation with Hardy Clemons

Life after Loss

SAN ANTONIO — A native of Lubbock, Texas, Hardy Clemons is a graduate of Texas Tech and Southwestern Baptist Seminary. He also studied with pastoral care pioneer Wayne Oates and did postdoctoral work at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich.

His pastorates include First Baptist Church of Georgetown, Texas, Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, and First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., where he was named pastor emeritus upon retirement in January 2000.

A former national moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, he continues to do preaching, counseling and coaching.

He served Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio through a three-year period as executive pastor. Concluding that service in August 2008, he and his wife Ardelle remained as active members of the congregation. Ardelle died on Nov. 26, 2011 after an extended illness.

Baptists Today editor John Pierce

interviewed Clemons during the news journal's Board of Directors meeting in San Antonio on April 26. This conversation is adapted from that interview.

BT: In 1994 you wrote *Saying Goodbye to Your Grief*. More recently you have updated and expanded that book and re-titled it *Saying Hello to Your Life After Grief*.

We know that much of your studies and your pastoral experiences have had to do with the subject of grief. But what have you learned about grief through your own personal experience since Ardelle's death?

HC: That's really a good question. I think it's a little early for me to be very articulate about that.

Actually, today (April 26) I'm moving into my sixth month without Ardelle. So I'm really a neophyte at this. But I have learned a lot and am still learning a lot.

I wish somebody would invent a thermometer that would give you an emotional, spiritual reading on how you are doing. I'm pretty good at reading that in other people, but I'm not worth a flip at reading it in myself.

Two days after Ardelle died, my friend and colleague Don Flowers, pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C., called me. His name came up [on caller ID] and I thought he'd say he was sorry to hear about Ardelle.

But Don said: "OK, big boy, you're this guru who writes books on grief and makes speeches on grief, what I want to know is are you going to live by that stuff or do you just recommend it to the rest of us?"

That was exactly what I needed at the moment. My high school football coach used to say the key to coaching is knowing when to put your arm around a boy and when to kick him in the pants. And I think that was the latter.

One of the things I didn't know about grief is that it really messes with your mind. At my age your mind is being messed with quite a bit anyway. To have the addition of grief, it is astounding how I mix things up that I would not ordinarily mix up.

I've always been the one who could find the car in a parking lot. But the other day I looked for five minutes before I found my car at our airport. And the reason I was out there is that I'd lost my Texas driver's license getting on a plane to go to Atlanta last week.

I used to not do stuff like that. I might need to write a book on that because I'm becoming an authority on how your mind gets messed up.

But I've learned all over again what I knew real well: that your time alone with God and your time alone by yourself are really crucially important. With that, goes time with

dear friends and other people who can share the load with you. That has been a very meaningful thing.

I'm so glad that Wayne Oates led me into taking grief and grief study seriously because I think it has helped me a lot. Ardelle and I had been married 57 years, two months and a few days.

As some of you know, that's a heavy grief to deal with. But I think I came to it with some knowledge that I would not have had were it not for the leadership of Wayne Oates.

We talk about anticipatory grief. Mine started in 1996 when for the first time we took Ardelle to a neurologist and he diagnosed what he called mild dementia. And that moved into Alzheimer's subsequently.

So my grieving has been going on for a long time — and I kind of thought that would be accounted unto me for righteousness when I got to the other side of it. Well, if it's really helping, I'm glad I'm not going through this without it — because this has been a rough ride so far.

As Don has pointed out, it has been much easier to advise other people on how to deal with their grief than it is to deal with your own.

It is important for the counselor to have a counselor, for the pastor to have a pastor. I've got a chapter in the book on "pastors are people who grieve." I kind of unpack how hard it was for me as a young pastor to learn to grieve.

I thought I was supposed to be the strong one. So I let the grief stack up and then when the dam broke it really, really broke.

So I have recommended to people to do what I've done: Everywhere I've been [as a pastor], I've had a designated counselor, supervisor, mentor, whatever you want to call this person, who has been helpful to me and has been my pastor. And I've needed that the last five months.

Something else — and I don't mean this in a judgmental or accusatory way — but I've learned that, in general, people were finished talking about Ardelle before I was ready to quit talking.

I was coming into church three Sundays ago and a guy asked, "How are you doing?" I've learned there isn't an answer to that question.

I wish somebody would invent a thermometer that would give you an emotional, spiritual reading on how you are doing. I'm pretty good at reading that in other people, but I'm not worth a flip at reading it in myself.

I thought this guy really wanted to know, so I said: "I'm still really having a hard time."

He said: "Really, has something bad happened in your life?" He knew about Ardelle's death, but he had moved beyond that and didn't understand why I hadn't.

Another thing that is really important: I have learned all over again, and I've known this for years, how important dreams and visions of dreams are to the healing process.

In Ardelle's last five or six years, she couldn't eat chocolate, she couldn't eat chips, and she couldn't drink coffee. She had this strange digestive problem that nobody ever figured out.



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I know I wasn't asleep when I had the neatest picture of Ardelle — this was about a week after her death — sitting at this kitchen table with Formica on the top. And here was a big bowl of chips, and here was a big bowl of chocolate, and here was a big urn of coffee.

And I thought: She's going to get to the spiritual stuff later.

Man, did that help me to have that little picture. I've had some brief dreams and some really elaborate dreams that have helped me an awful lot.

And, finally, I've learned how hard it is to go on with life without a partner like Ardelle. We had been married a long time and couldn't remember not being married.

So as I see it right now, I've got two major challenges. One is to make sure I am honest with myself about my need to do the valid grief work. I'm trying to do that.

The other is that I've got to figure out what I'm going to do with the rest of my life without Ardelle in it. I think I'm doing better with the first one than the second one.

BT: Times of personal loss remind us of the value of being in a faith community. How have church members and others sustained you during Ardelle's long illness and then after her death?

HC: They have been stellar. Family, friends and church — I couldn't imagine having more support than we have had.

Right after Ardelle went into hospice, one of the women deacons [of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio] came to me and said: "I think this is going to be hard for you to do, but I want to ask you to do it. We'd like for

you to make a list of the times you need for somebody to stay with Ardelle."

We never left her by herself after February 2005.

This woman said, "The women deacons want to be here... Take it from me, we've been through this with other families and you need respite time and we are going to see to it that you get it."

Well, we ended up with 60-plus men and women who soon began to call themselves "Ardelle's Angels." In the middle of the month I'd give Betty Jean Ingram the times I needed. About three days later I'd get an email telling me who would fill all of those slots.

One guy would bring his guitar, and he and Ardelle would sing. She could remember the old songs though she couldn't remember his name.

A hairstylist said she would give her time. She was here every Wednesday at 4 o'clock to do Ardelle's hair. Every week Ardelle would ask her name, ask if she had children, and try to pay her. She'd say: "No, this is my ministry."

I could go on and on. Also our daughter and her husband and our granddaughter and her husband live here. So I have wonderful family support — and old friends from college and seminary days.

We could not have had better support than we have had — and I don't think I could have made it without it. That's not hyperbole. Honestly, I think I would have gone down.

As a pastor for 50 years, I've buried the caretaker an amazing number of times before the patient died. I wish I'd kept records on that. But it's happened a bunch in every pastorate I've had including Trinity — which was an interim pastorate for three years.

Now we have a committee that's working to set up "Ardelle's Angels" to help other people who need that kind of help. Every place I have ever been pastor has been a caring church. I am grateful for that.

BT: I don't remember any all-male deacon groups coming up with a plan like "Ardelle's Angels."

HC: No. Me either... Let me go back and tell you of an experience. I did my doctoral dissertation on the theology of Harry Emerson Fosdick.

Ardelle and I spent two weeks [in New York City] riding the train out to Bronxville in the mornings. I'd done all the research... so I wanted to talk to [Fosdick] and let him talk to me about his theology.

This was a great experience in itself. At the time we were up there he was 86.

About two years later his wife died. So we sent him a card and in a few weeks I wrote him a letter because we had gotten to know her, and she and Ardelle had hit it off.

Then I thought: "Does a kid preacher from Texas call the father of pastoral care and contemporary preaching (as Clyde Fant and Bill Pinson called him in their book)? Do I give Harry Emerson Fosdick a pastoral call?"

Finally, I worked up my nerve. He answered the phone and said: "I do remember you. How is Ardelle?"

After some small talk, I said: "Dr. Fosdick, I don't want to be intrusive. I don't know where you are with your grief, but would you be willing to tell me what it is like to lose your wife?"

"Oh, would I," he said. "I knew it was going to be hard, but I had no idea it would be as hard as it is."

Then he said: "We, like every other couple in the history of universe, had assumed that I'll die first. I was the one with heart problems. We had made all of our plans and set up everything so it would work for Florence when I died."

He said again: "This has been just so hard."

Then he said: "The other day I had a thought that has kind of lifted my spirit. If I had died first, then she would be going through what I'm going through. So this is another gift that I can give to Florence."

I have thought about that a lot lately. I'm so glad we had that conversation. **BT**

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F A T H

The wonder of Wayne Ward

It was never my privilege to be a student of longtime theology professor Wayne Ward who died in Louisville May 23 at age 90. But I was his houseguest a few years ago — and he was most gracious.

Pulling onto Godfrey Avenue, adjacent to the seminary campus where he taught for decades and was once beloved, I spotted Dr. Ward waving to me from the sidewalk. A handmade sign near the door welcomed me as well.

Inside the humble abode where he had lived since 1953, we talked about his life, his ministry and the changing theological culture across the street and elsewhere.

He was warm, insightful and humorous. I understood why his former students hung on to him and his teachings long after classes had been dismissed.

From a young age he was exposed to biblical teaching and preaching that challenged both the heart and head. And he continued in such a tradition that valued both intellectual prowess and mission zeal. His lawyer father

attended the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tenn., in 1925, and reported back to his family that “the Bible had a poor defender today.”

Dr. Ward shook his head and laughed, rather than cry, when he talked about current Southern Baptist Seminary theology professors who take ministerial students to Kentucky’s Creation Museum as part of their efforts to advance young-earth creationism. The irony, he noted, is that every classroom building erected on the seminary campus, where such ideas are now taught, required blasting through millions-year-old Devonian limestone.

On the Bible that he loved so dearly,

studied so deeply and taught so well, he offered this warning: “The worst thing you can do is carve the Bible up into verses as if they have a life of their own.”

On the neo-Southern Baptists’ ever-increasing love for ever-narrowing creeds, Dr. Ward said: “I crashed three times in the Navy. I can tell you what happens when you think you are dying. I don’t go back to any statement of faith I ever signed. I just say, ‘Lord, here I come — I love you and trust you.’”

After 90 full years of earthly living, he has now made that move into the greater presence of the One he loved, served and trusted. And many fortunate, former students — and others who were blessed to hear him preach or teach — are left with the gift of an inspiring model of how faithfulness and scholarship can fit so comfortably together. **BT**



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Juilliard-trained, saddle savvy music dean helps with horse-riding rehab for children

BUFFALO GAP, Texas — “Not all of these children can move well on their own, but put them on the back of a horse and they are free,” says Robert Brooks, dean of the Hardin-Simmons University School of Music and Fine Arts.

Brooks was one of several volunteers from HSU, recruited by Six White Horses Program director Debbie Jones, to help lead the horses while children at Camp Rehab experienced the freedom of riding high in the saddle.

About 70 children attended the West Texas Rehabilitation Center’s camp for special needs children recently in Buffalo Gap, Texas.

With help from volunteers and sets of stairs, the riders would go up and onto the backs of the horses that give rides to about 15,000 children every year. The horses travel to elementary schools throughout the Big Country during the school year.

In the summer, hundreds of requests are fulfilled for horse rides at children’s camps, as well as performances at rodeos, appearances in parades, and even participation in military activities.

Dean Brooks, with his Juilliard School of Music background, might seem to be an



Dean Robert Brooks of the Hardin-Simmons University School of Music and Fine Arts helps a Camp Rehab participant enjoy his ride on Powder, part of the HSU Six White Horses team.

unlikely horse wrangler. But he obviously knows horses.

“I grew up chasing cattle and horses on our family’s ranch in northeast Texas,” Brooks said. “I used to go down to Columbus Circle in New York (City), where the horses line up to pull the carriages, and just stand there, breathing in the air and say ‘home.’”

A relaxed sigh punctuated his words.

“Horses are very therapeutic,” said

Brooks. “Many studies in equine therapy show that riding is beneficial to children and adults with a range of physical and psychological conditions.”

He said that working with horses provides more than just riding skills.

“People can learn companionship, responsibility, confidence and leadership,” he says.

Carol Lester, an audiologist for the West Texas Rehab Center who worked with the camp, agreed.

“Getting to ride these big

animals earns the children both confidence and independence,” she said. “Big animals can be intimidating, but the kids are learning to take it all in stride today. It’s a wonderful experience for all of us.”

Also helping with the activities were White Horse rider, Courtney Quijas, a sophomore psychology major from Fort Worth, who rides Powder. Other HSU horses participating in the camp were Shine, Oscar, Cotton and Titan.

A miniature horse, Titan, stands just 33” tall, making him the teams’ most huggable horse for children.

Jones said the HSU White Horses team stays really busy all year long.

“And summers are probably the busiest,” she said. “But the horses are ambassadors, and there is always more work to do, because there is nothing like the face of a child riding high in the saddle.”

Especially children with special needs — for whom a ride on a horse can be a memory they may recall throughout their lives. **BT**

—Janlyn Thaxton directs media relations at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas.



Conner gets acquainted with Titan — the miniature member of Hardin-Simmons’ White Horses team.

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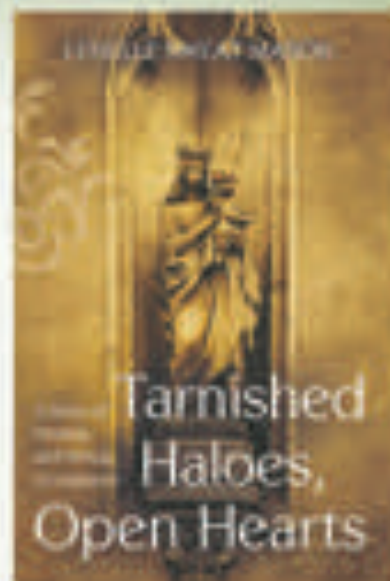
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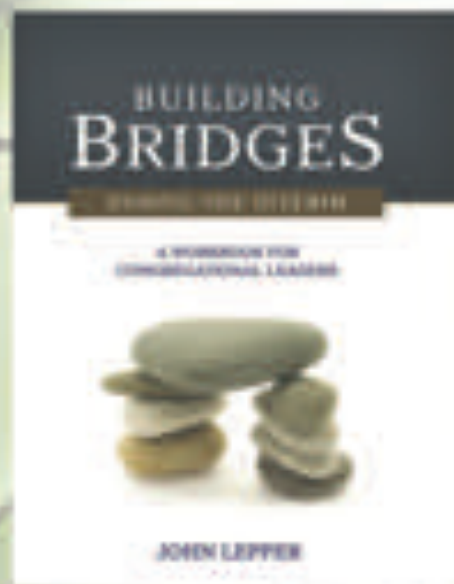
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