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Baptists
ODAY
NEWS JOURNAL



Serving
Scientist 34

AUGUST 2013

baptiststoday.org



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Nurturing
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BIBLE STUDIES

for adults and youth

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Participants in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, held in June in Greensboro, N.C., visit the *Baptists Today* exhibit and Nurturing Faith bookstore. Several attended a workshop on the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies found inside the news journal. See page 40 for the texts and themes for 2014. Photo by John Pierce.

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Cover photo by John Pierce. Frank Murphy balances painting and sculpting in his home studio with a ministry to college students.



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Young woman advocates for
women near and far

By Terri Byrd

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In the Posture of Prayer / Camp Pinnacle, Clayton, Ga.

Artistry *as* Ministry



Detail of Georgia Baptist Missions & Ministry Center ceiling

Frank Murphy brings creative expressions of faith to church

ROME, Ga. — The women in Frank Murphy’s weekly art class enjoy painting and laughing together. Frank moves from one canvas to another giving advice — and sometimes a stroke or two with the brush.

“That’s worth \$5,” joked one budding artist when Frank trims down the figure of a girl in a beach scene. “Well, I’ve got 10 more dollars to earn,” he responds.

Another woman tells of taking an earlier painting home and hearing her husband say: “That leaf looks great!”

“It should,” she said sarcastically. “I paid Frank \$15 to paint it.”

One gets the idea that these art students consider their \$15-a-week painting class to be one of their better investments. And for Murphy, it is the chance to interact with others who seek to express themselves in creative ways.

A bi-vocational minister who balances his painting and sculpting with leading

Baptist campus ministries at two local colleges, Murphy is as multifaceted as the weekly schedule he juggles. A sports enthusiast and musician as well as visual artist, his signature paintings hang in the First Baptist churches of Tallahassee, Fla., and Rome and Dalton, Ga., along with other places where he is asked to bring a biblical story or theme to life.

Baptists Today editor John Pierce, who years ago enlisted Murphy to paint original magazine covers, asked him about his approach to artistry as ministry.

BT: How do you balance your time as an artist and minister? One calls for pulling away to create while the other calls for leading and engaging people.

FM: When I made the commitment to give more of my time to my artwork, one of the things that was very important to me was continuing in my role as minister. I was concerned

that I might “bury” myself in my artwork because I am basically an introvert, but I knew I needed an outlet for staying engaged with people, students and ministry.

Ministry keeps me grounded and more well rounded in my approach to everything I do. I try to keep my schedule consistent on a week-to-week basis so that I know what times to give to ministry and what times to give to my art.

Usually the nighttime works better for doing art simply because it allows me the most uninterrupted time. But there is a need to get some things done during the day when I am fresher mentally and creatively. So parts of some days are devoted to art, and some nights are more devoted to ministry activity.

BT: Who and what experiences have influenced you as both artist and minister?

FM: Artistic influences have been those who were both great artists and committed in their



Detail *Pieta* / Property of the artist

faith. Michelangelo, Rembrandt and Bach come to mind first.

Obviously Bach was no visual artist, but he was a dedicated composer who transformed the way we worship. Michelangelo, especially as he matured, realized the great importance of his faith, and it became more and more evident in his work.

He also was one who didn't always agree with the religious leadership when it came to their perception of his art and vision, and he often felt frustrated at their inferior ideas and lack of vision. Yet he remained devoted and pushed forward with his work despite the obstacles. I can relate to that.

Also, my love of marble sculpture gives me a great appreciation for the power of his work.

Rembrandt was the ultimate expresser of art and faith. He has been hard to equal among painters and etchers when it comes to expressing the heart and soul of art. The 350-year period since his time has been something of a challenge because he raised the bar so high.

The stained glass windows of my home church, First Baptist Church of Sylacauga, Ala., were my first influence. They are so magnificent and stimulated me in ways that most sermons didn't while I was growing up.

Certainly my parents have had a great influence on my faith, as well as others who have challenged me. Friends like Doug Dortch (now pastor of Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala.), who encouraged me to try Baptist Student Union summer missions while in college, were instrumental in my first efforts of serving.

My two campus ministers, Rodney Ellis and Bob Ford, had great influence on me too. Rodney went out of his way to see that I got involved in BSU, and Bob gave me a vision of



Rapunzel / The B. B. Comer Memorial Library, Sylacauga, Ala.

what I could do. Ronnie Brewer (now pastor of First Baptist Church of Bristol, Va.) was also an enormous friend and confidant in helping me become the person that I am.

BT: How do you perceive congregations — especially Baptist ones — today when it comes to incorporating art into worship and other aspects of church life?

FM: One of the great challenges of the church today is to completely use the full range of the arts for worship. Tim Keller in the book, *Making Art for the Glory of God*, says that the arts are how we try to “get the praise out” when it comes to worship. They are the main means for us to try to express our faith and our inspiration.

I cannot imagine what worship would be like without the arts. Of course, we use music in remarkably diverse ways in worship and praise, but the other arts — drama, dance, visual arts, etc. — are either placed out of the reach of the church or used in such poor ways that you could hardly describe them as having anything to do with “getting the praise out.”

Visual arts were at their zenith in the church in the Renaissance, but much of what is done today is poorly conceived or rejected outright. Few in church leadership seem to have any vision of what architecture and painting and other visual forms do to enhance and inspire the church to worship and give God glory.

Dr. Robert White of the Georgia Baptist Convention had a great vision of what the convention's new Missions & Ministry Center could be architecturally and visually, but so few others seem to share that kind of vision for expressing faith. Baptists, especially, seem almost



ALANA AND ALICIA

In the 1990s, Frank Murphy painted this portrait of two sisters for the Lanier family in Rome, Ga. About two years later, Sylvia Lanier, the mother, asked Frank to come take a closer look at the painting. “Did you paint a third figure in the portrait?” she asked. No, Frank said. Rather, in the background he had added figurines in a glass case that created a reflection. To Sylvia's eyes, however, it was a memorial to an older daughter who had died. “It means so much to me,” she said of the portrait that is treasured now even more than when it was first completed.

Frank Murphy's art will be exhibited at Berry College in Rome, Ga., Oct. 21–Nov. 15.



Lowering the Paralytic to Jesus / First Baptist Church, Tallahassee, Fla.

antagonistic to the idea of art in the church.

Perhaps it is the residue of the Reformation. But it seems that many Protestants have thrown the baby out with the bath water.

A new vision, not bound to technology and cutting corners, is needed to make the church more vibrant in worship and with a greater vision of what the church can be in expressing the glory of God. It seems that the extent of creativity in the “new worship style” is relegated to a rock band and a bunch of praise choruses.

A true vision would include a larger cross-section of the artistic community than guitarists and drummers. Dancers, writers, composers, theatre specialists and visual artists could bring a fuller vision of worship.

I belong to an organization of artists called Christians in Visual Arts (CIVA) whose goal is to see that the visual arts find their rightful place in the church’s mission. This is a national organization founded in the Midwest by Christian artists from various denominational backgrounds.

They have made great strides in some areas and have introduced me to other artists who are making an impact across our nation. The South has been a little slower in catching up to this vision, which makes living here more of a challenge — although there are certainly other things worth the trade-off: Go Braves, Roll Tide!

BT: How do you approach painting or sculpting? What is on your mind? Where do the ideas, concepts and results come from?

FM: My work is almost exclusively involved with the human element: emotions, struggles, redemption, forgiveness, character, and the narratives that develop those themes.

As a painter, I think the narrative becomes the key element to my work, even if it is a simple picture of a young mother holding a child. Somewhere in that image is “the” story or “a” story that draws us to the image and makes it come alive for us.

The composition is another key element, artistically speaking to my work as a painter. As a sculptor, the human form seems to take precedence over the narrative.

The beauty of the shape and the contours of the figure are most interesting to me and cause me to create and contemplate the artwork. I suppose that makes sculpture more vibrant to me right now because it calls for more creativity and passion.

I would probably do nothing but sculpt if the right offer came my way — hint, hint.

These days the ideas for my artwork seem to be relegated to what commissions I am doing, but I try to continually have something “other” going on that is not what I am asked to do. That’s what keeps me fresh and interested as an artist. That’s what drives me to do more excellent work.

I am very conscientious of doing quality work and doing what is best. I always hope that the things I am doing reflect both quality and passion.

BT: Your paintings hang in several churches. As an artist, what do you like to hear from someone commissioning art for a church?

FM: I like to hear: “Hey, we’d like to have you do a painting/sculpture for us. This is the broad idea we’d like you to consider as a theme. Please come to visit with us so you can get to know us. We want to be fair with you on the cost of doing this. Then be as creative as you like. We trust you as an artist.”

Period. No suggestions of ideas or the colors you want. Trust the artist.

BT: What are you working on now?

FM: I am working on a marble sculpture of a woman and camellias. I have beautiful camellias growing for months in my yard that need to be used.

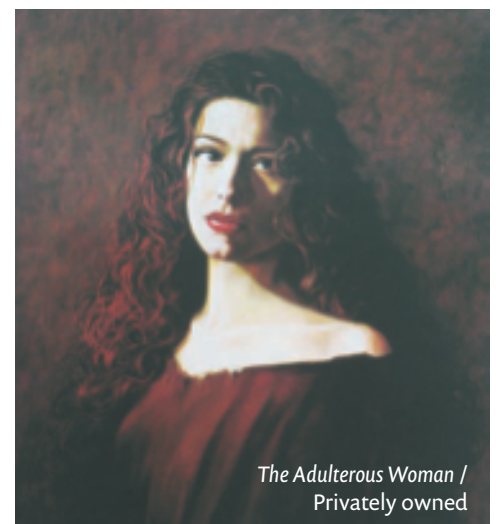
I have a good idea about how to incorporate them, and I have been at the Marble Festival in my hometown of Sylacauga, Ala., where I have gotten a start on this sculpture. A lot of this summer will be spent working on this piece.

I am also painting a piece for First Baptist Church of Tallahassee, Fla., of *Jesus Washing the Disciples’ Feet*. I am really excited about this piece and how it will be hung in the church with another piece I just finished, *Lowering the Paralytic to Jesus*.

After that I have a large painting of *Jesus Feeding the 5,000*. And I just got a great 350-pound block of marble that I’ll start dreaming about how to bring to life.

Also, I am going to the CIVA biennial conference at Wheaton College near Chicago, and am looking forward to interaction with other artists and for the inspiration it will bring. And I will try to see the Cubs and/or the White Sox while I am there also. **BT**

—Artist Frank Murphy can be reached at frankmurphy@netzero.net.



The Adulterous Woman / Privately owned

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September 22-24, 2013

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Co-Sponsored by

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

Main Presenter — Lillian Daniel

A national speaker and writer, Lillian Daniel has served as senior minister of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, of Glen Ellen, IL, since 2008.

She is the author of *1000 Little Acts of Reclaiming the Promise of Tomorrow*, the story of one church's attempt to get members Protestants in talk to each other about God.

Her recent book, *This Fall and Wilderness Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers*, co-authored by Martha Capenhaven, is a humorous and honest look at ministry.

Rev. Daniel also co-hosts the Chicago-based public television program "My Good Minutes." A contributing editor to *Christian Century* and *Leadership* magazines, her work has also appeared in *Christianity Today*, *Book and Culture*, and *Journal for Preachers*.

She has taught preaching at Yale Divinity School, Chicago Theological Seminary, and the University of Chicago Divinity School, and serves on the boards of Interfaith Worker Justice, Yale Divinity School and Chicago Theological Seminary.



Other speakers scheduled for the three-day program —

- Rob Nash, Professor, McAfee School of Theology
- William D. Shiell, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Tallahassee, Fla.
- Garen Brown, Pastor, Crossroads Church, Nashville
- Shaun King, Pastor, Johns Creek Baptist Church, Alpharetta
- William G. Wilson, Center for Congregational Health, Watsonville, N.C.
- Ruth Perkins Lee, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Atlanta
- Bill Carter, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Gainesville

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

A gift basket is planned for Monday afternoon.

Questions regarding registration or lodging?

Contact Diane Hester at (770) 547-4476

or Jahara@mcmafee.edu

EVENT SCHEDULE

Sunday Evening, September 22

6:00-8:00 PM Dinner

- 6:00-7:00 Book and registration
- 7:00 Bill Nash, Professor, McAfee School of Theology: "Are Preaching Skills?"
- 8:00 "Ministry and Wilderness" by Rev. Ruth Perkins Lee, St. Simons

Monday Morning, September 23

- 8:00 Billie Beal of Peace Builders
- 9:00 Bruce of Wilson, James Education Builders
- 9:00-10:00 Rev. Bill Nash, Professor, McAfee School of Theology
- 9:30-10:00 William D. Shiell, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Tallahassee: "Are 'Old-Fashioned' in Ministry Worth It?" Preaching and Pastoral Experiences
- 10:00-10:30 Teaching, John Ouel, Baptist Church, Alpharetta: "Are You a Preaching Star?"
- 10:30-11:00 Rev. Garen Brown, Crossroads Church, Nashville
- 10:30-11:00 Rev. Bill Nash
- 10:45-11:30 (No Show)

Monday Afternoon, September 23

- 10:15 Bill Nash
- 2:00 "Stories of Faith in Action: The Witness of Bill Hester"

Monday Evening, September 23

- 6:00 (No Show)
- 7:00 Dinner at the resort on-site

Tuesday Morning, September 24

- 8:00-9:00 Billie Beal of Peace Builders
- 9:00-10:00 William G. Wilson, Center for Congregational Health: "The Power of a Health Audit"
- 9:30-10:00 Billie Beal of Peace Builders, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of the 100 South Sea Coast
- 10:00-10:30 Bill Carter, First Baptist Church, Gainesville: "What You're Doing Now: Preaching Your Sermons"
- 10:30-11:00 "Ministry and Wilderness"
- 10:30-11:00 (No Show)
- 11:00-11:30 Announcement about WU 2014 and departure

quotation remarks

“This is not parachute missions. This is self-sacrificing, biblical, honest, holistic service that provides a platform for meaningful church engagement and sustained national ministries. This is co-missioning. It is not cheap; nor is it the kind of venture that can be run for the change left over in your car cup holder. This type of Christian engagement is worth the lives of our partners and field personnel, and it is worth our serious investment.”

—*Suzii Paynter, new executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, speaking to the CBF General Assembly in Greensboro, N.C., about the array of missions and ministries tied to the Fellowship*

“Bring back (family) dinner if you want to improve how children learn history.”

—*Historian David McCollough (60 Minutes)*

“The purpose of church is so people can get together and remind themselves to think about something other than themselves. Most churches fail miserably! We take ourselves to church often knowing what we want to get out of it before we arrive.”

—*Michael Elliott, a longtime Baptist social ministries leader in Louisville, Ky., and Savannah, Ga. (Facebook)*

“We oppose demons, we don’t demonize opponents; ... we can’t fight like the devil and please the Lord.”

—*Russell Moore, Southern Baptists’ new ethics and religious liberty leader (ethicsdaily.com)*

“[People today are often] less willing to let strangers into their homes. Their main points of contact with others are often via the Internet.”

—*Mormon apostle L. Tom Perry on the church’s 70,000-strong missionary force making greater use of online technology and doing less door-to-door outreach (Salt Lake Tribune)*

“Throughout much of history, men have defined religious norms and texts, and women’s voices were silenced. It is time for women to reclaim their religion.”

—*Ziba Mir-Hosseini, a founding member of Musawah Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family, speaking at a June event at The Carter Center in Atlanta*

“However audacious our calling and claims may seem, remember that our audacity must be traced to God. God, who had the audacity to empty divine grace and truth into humanity and place it in the world in Jesus, is at work with us.”

—*Judge Wendell Griffen, pastor of New Millennium Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., during a June 27 commissioning service at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly in Greensboro, N.C.*

“When it comes to God and country, white evangelicals report the most intense patriotic feelings in a new poll, with more than two-thirds (68 percent) saying they are extremely proud to be an American.”

—*Reporter Lauren Markoe of Religion News Service*

“Superman has always had a bit of a messiah complex, born as a modern-day Moses in the imagination of two Jewish guys during the Depression and over the years developing and amplifying his Christ-like characteristics.”

—*David Gibson of Religion News Service, reporting on the movie, Man of Steel, whose creators are seeking a strong Christian audience*

“We should not have a cultural elitism that hinders passing the torch to a new generation of leaders. If your church loves the way you do church more than your children, it loves the wrong thing.”

—*Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research (Outreach)*

“It seems to me the institution of marriage is alive and well — and in serious trouble ... The trouble is poverty. The less affluent you are, the more likely you are to have a child without the benefit of a partner, at an age too young for effective parenting, and in chaotic living arrangements.”

—*Tom Ebrich in a Religion News Service column titled “The real threat to marriage”*

It’s just not important right now. We’re not doing politics here.”

—*Pastor John Crowder of First Baptist Church of West, Texas, on doctrinal differences among the variety of Christians giving aid following a deadly fertilizer plant explosion in April (ABP)*

“Profanity is a primary vehicle that brings disrespect, anger and hostility into our lives. Try to imagine using profanity in a kind, civil way ... The prevalence and acceptance of profanity, however, has altered the way people treat each other.”

—*Joel Snider, pastor of First Baptist Church in Rome, Ga. (ethicsdaily.com)*

What to do with inherited faith

For some people, inherited faith lasts a lifetime. Little or no alteration is needed; it just seems to fit fine — for the long haul. The certitudes of faith handed from one generation to the next remain certain and often unchallenged.

For many others, inherited faith no longer fits. Those steeped in a certain understanding of faith often have experiences, insights and questions that cause discomfort with the theology, worldview, religious practices and priorities passed on to them.

In such cases, reactions vary. For some there is outright rejection and perhaps even rebellion. Many others simply shed a few layers of the old for the new along the way.

It is rare that anyone could experience the vast technological and sociological changes of the modern era and have no questions about what was once passed along as truth for all times.

What seemed so clear and certain in another time and place will brush up against realities not known earlier. Exposure to new ideas and experiences, as well as new people who bring different perspectives and dispel our notions of having all the truth packed away in our little boxes of beliefs, can be either threatening or refreshing — depending on how open one is to new possibilities for seeking truth.

Those who encounter realities that bring earlier ideas of truth into question tend to react in one of three ways.

The first possibility, and one that brings the most immediate comfort, is to simply ignore any information or experience that contradicts those earlier teachings. A college student in an introductory New Testament

class, who first encountered scholarship that contradicted something she had been taught as a child, responded: “That may be true, but I like believing the way I always have.”

Also, fear that one’s entire belief system might unravel can result in the fortification of all aspects of inherited faith. This fear doesn’t allow for any serious reconsideration of the belief system that was handed down from those most trusted and instilled deeply since childhood.

A second possible response is to reject the whole package of inherited faith as being out of date or out of touch. Sometimes one’s particular understanding of Christianity that has been inherited is generalized to be fully representative of Christianity — and it all gets tossed away in one swift move.

Persons who feel they were misled or mistreated by the persons and institutions providing religious instruction will often take this approach. They may even feel cheated out of time by those who taught them that Christians believe and act in certain — usually very restrictive — ways.

While some may respond in anger to inherited but now rejected faith, others do so with appreciation for the care and nurture they received — even if they no longer hold to what they were taught as truth.

Such gratitude is often a part of the third possible response: to rethink, re-evaluate and reshape one’s belief system rather than embrace or reject inherited faith in whole.



This is a slower process that unfolds rather than is forced. It happens when an intriguing sentence is read a second or third time — and then the book is set aside for a few moments of quiet reflection.

It occurs when a son or daughter asks a question that would have never been raised in one’s own childhood and youth. It results from a conversation with a neighbor or coworker who grew up with a very different worldview — yet is very unlike the stereotyped version of such persons that we once imagined from an impersonal distance.

Reconsideration of inherited faith is a natural consequence of life that includes growth. It is only shocking to those whose faith is too fragile to stand vigorous analysis or so frivolous that it can be thrown away with the first excuse.

The late Baptist theologian John Eddins counseled his students who were diving into fresh waters of theological exploration to not discard inherited faith in whole.

“Hang on to what you have until you have something better to replace it,” he advised.

The irony is that faith can be both firm and flexible. In fact, there is a refreshing freedom in asking questions of one’s own inherited belief system without fear of losing it all.

What one does with inherited faith is as varied as the kind of teaching or indoctrination one received — some of which deserve quick dismissal. For many of us, however, we look appreciatively at the nurture and support we received but remain open to new discoveries and good replacement of parts along the way.

On one hand, our understanding of truth stays open to new possibilities. On the other, it remains firm in all of life’s ebb and flow. **BT**



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Answers to Baptist Questions

from a historical perspective



QUESTION: What do Americans think about Baptists?

Do you ever wonder what the American public really thinks about Baptists? Well, wonder no more. Google, that online fount of all knowledge, has compiled what everyone thinks about everything — well, almost.

When typing in a search term, Google automatically supplies additional words in the search box. This “autocomplete” feature, according to Google, “predicts and displays queries to choose from. The search queries you see as part of autocomplete are a reflection of the search activity of all web users and the content of web pages indexed by users.”

Results vary over time, reflecting shifts in public perceptions. In addition, a user’s geographical location can influence results.

Translated, this means that Google is keeping track of what web users are searching for and what people are writing online on web pages, in blogs, on Facebook, in discussion forums, and in other online venues.

In other words, if you want to know what the (online) world thinks about a given subject matter, start typing the relevant keywords into

a Google search and notice how Google tries to complete your search.

To illustrate, a recent search using the phrase, “why are Baptists” resulted in Google’s autocomplete feature supplying the following suggestions:

- “why are Baptists crazy”
- “why are Baptists against drinking”
- “why are Baptists against catholics”
- “why are Baptists against dancing”

And when searching for “why are Baptists so,” it turns out that the general public wonders:

- “why are Baptists so stupid”
- “why are Baptists so judgmental”
- “why are Baptists so crazy”
- “why are Baptists so annoying”

Looking under the hood of Google-revealed public opinion a bit more, we find that Southern Baptists in particular are considered narrow-minded, judgmental and against alcohol. As to Christians at large, public perceptions are a bit more complex as they are viewed as weird, fake, nice, hypocritical and persecuted.

Yet, according to Google, there is not enough data for definitive public opinions on more moderate Baptist organizations such as

the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

And while Baptists may be perceived as disliking Catholics, the general public, according to Google, also thinks Catholics are mean, wrong, arrogant, weird, judgmental, strict and arrogant. It thus appears that Baptists and Catholics occupy much online common ground.

What about public opinions regarding Muslims and Mormons? Google reveals that Muslims are considered angry, strict, afraid of dogs, radical and extreme.

Mormons, on the other hand, stand apart from other religious groups in terms of their public image. They are perceived as elders (referring to the title of “elder” as applied to adult male adherents who meet certain qualifications; the title is prominently displayed on name tags worn by Mormon missionaries), successful, rich and secretive.

As to other faiths, public perceptions are a mixed bag. Buddhists are perceived as vegetarians, happy, bald, selfish, peaceful, annoying and Muslim killers. And Hindus are vegetarians, rich, cheap, peaceful and rude.

If, by this point, you are wondering about the validity of Google’s database of public perceptions, do a Google search for “why is [my state]” and note how Google finishes the search query.

In the case of my state, the public wonders why Montana is “called big sky,” why the state is “so liberal,” why it is the “treasure state,” and why the state name is “Montana.”

Maybe you’ve asked one of those very same questions about Montana at one point or another.

I suggest you Google it; everyone else does. **BT**

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

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Baptist Women in Ministry celebrates 30 years

GREENSBORO, N.C. — “Tonight we have come here to give thanks to God for Baptist Women in Ministry,” said Pam Durso, the organization’s executive director. “Tonight we are especially grateful for those who 30 years ago founded this work.”

Thirty-three women gathered March 20-21, 1983, in Louisville, Ky., to form an effort to encourage women to fuller ministry in churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. That June, 75 people attended the first meeting of the group, initially called Women in Ministry, SBC.

The organization changed its name in 1986 to Southern Baptist Women in Ministry and in 1995 dropped the “Southern” designation, since by that time the nation’s second-largest faith group officially discouraged women from serving in pastoral roles.

Nancy Sehested, co-pastor of the Circle of Mercy Congregation and prison chaplain at Marion Correctional Institution in Asheville, N.C., was keynote preacher at the anniversary celebration. Sehested, an early catalyst in the movement, told of meeting a stranger on a plane who said he had never heard of or met a Baptist woman in ministry. She joked it was because they are all “in the witness-protection program.”

“I want to thank Baptist Women in Ministry for 30 years of protecting the witness of women in ministry,” she said.

Like most Baptist movements, Sehested said, BWIM “started with a sense of outrage.” Women who huddled at convention gatherings and talked in late-night phone calls about their exclusion from full participation in Baptist life didn’t discuss starting an organization for justice and equality for women in Baptist churches, she said. “We simply stood up and said, ‘I am ... a daughter of God and the church.’”

In the early days, Sehested said, Southern Baptist women in ministry were “practiced in the art of ducking when three little words were spoken: ‘The Bible says ...’ Duck! Run for your lives!”

“And there were even times when we tried to define ourselves by tossing Bible verses like



Nancy Sehested, an early organizer of Baptist Women in Ministry, said founders “simply stood up and said, ‘I am ... a daughter of God and the church.’” Photo courtesy of ABP.

grenades across enemy lines in hopes that it would explode in new conversions,” Sehested said. “It went back and forth like that for a while. Then we realized the Bible could be used to justify just about anything.”

“We soon learned to ask simply one question to our detractors: What are you afraid of?” she said. “Transforming of heart and mind for most of us does not come through a verse or two of Scripture, but the living letter of human beings who bear witness to this radical gospel of love.”

Elizabeth Flowers, assistant professor of American religious history at Texas Christian University, said the first known ordination of a Southern Baptist woman in 1964 gained little denominational attention. The numbers of ordained women grew during the 1970s, she said, and by the 1980s women’s ordination was a full-blown controversy, with churches being disfellowshipped for calling women as pastors.

In 1984 the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution encouraging the service of women “in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination.”

In 1990 the SBC amended the *Baptist Faith & Message* to specify: “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”

While some in the SBC viewed both liberalism and feminism as enemies of the faith, Flowers said, others worked to develop “a uniquely Baptist theology of women in ministry.” They re-imagined a calling shaped

by GAs, Acteens, missions involvement and Baptist colleges and seminaries in light of the Baptist tradition of being “against the status quo” and to “create a place for the marginalized and oppressed.”

Suzi Paynter, the first woman to named executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, described Baptist Women in Ministry as “a chorus of Baptist women of call.”

“Be diligent to voice potential as much as you are to assess limitations,” she challenged the audience. “We are not in charge of the inspiration and the arc of our lives toward the Kingdom of God, but we are in charge of our obedience to Christ.”

BWIM established two new awards: The first Baptist Women in Ministry Church of Excellence recognition went to Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, N.C., that was first to ordain a Southern Baptist woman, Addie Davis, to the gospel ministry in 1964.

The inaugural Frankie Huff Granger Distinguished Mentor Award went to Anne Thomas Neil, a retired missionary to Nigeria and Ghana who at age 60 was present for the founding of BWIM and served as the organization’s convener in 1984. The award is named for the longtime minister of education at First Baptist Church in Berea, S.C., who was a role model for younger women discerning their own call to ministry.

Durso also announced a new campaign, BWIM 360, challenging supporters to give \$30 a month for the next 12 months to help the organization expand its ministries. **BT**

Study says gays find most U.S. faiths unfriendly

By Adelle M. Banks

Religion News Service

Gay Americans are much less religious than the general U.S. population, and about three in 10 of them say they have felt unwelcome in a house of worship, a new study shows.

The Pew Research Center's study, released June 13, details how gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans view many of the country's prominent faiths: in a word, unfriendly.

The vast majority said Islam (84 percent); the Mormon church (83 percent); the Roman Catholic Church (79 percent); and evangelical churches (73 percent) were unfriendly. Jews and nonevangelical Protestants drew a more mixed reaction, with more than 40 percent considering them either unfriendly or neutral about gays and lesbians.

Ross Murray, director of news and faith initiatives for the gay rights group GLAAD, said relations between the religious and gay communities have warmed in recent years, but before the last decade they were "pretty painful."

He thinks the sense of unfriendliness comes in part from the loudest voices of faith speaking through an anti-gay frame.

"The leading anti-gay voices always put it in religious terms, which taints how people view religion," Murray said.

While Pew researchers found that U.S. gays noted increased social acceptance, 29 percent of those surveyed said they personally have felt unaccepted in a house of worship. That compares to 39 percent who say they've been rejected by a close friend or family member, and 21 percent who say they've been treated unfairly by an employer.

Almost 50 percent of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender adults say they have no religious affiliation, compared to 20 percent of the general population. One-third of religiously affiliated gay and lesbian adults say there is a conflict between their faith beliefs and their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Although many gay Americans seem to eschew faith, the majority of those who are religiously affiliated are Christian. Just like the general public, younger gays and lesbians are less likely to have religious ties. **BT**

Exodus International shuts down, president apologizes

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey

Religion News Service

Exodus International, a group that billed itself as "the oldest and largest Christian ministry dealing with faith and homosexuality," announced in June that it's shutting its doors.

The announcement came just after Exodus president Alan Chambers released a statement apologizing to the gay community for many actions, including the organization's promotion of efforts to change a person's sexual orientation.



Alan Chambers

Exodus functioned as a support group for men and women who were struggling with their sexual orientation, and early on embraced the idea that gays and lesbians could become straight through prayer and counseling.

But the belief in "reparative therapy was one of the things that led to the downfall of this organization," Chambers said in an interview, noting that Exodus in recent years redirected its focus to helping men and women work through their sexual identity.

"I am sorry we promoted sexual orientation change efforts and reparative theories about sexual orientation that stigmatized parents," Chambers said in the apology. "I am sorry that there were times I didn't stand

up to people publicly 'on my side' who called you names like sodomite — or worse."

Chambers, who is married to his wife, Leslie, said his core beliefs about sexuality have not changed, and admitted he still wrestles with his own same-sex attraction.

Chambers, who was hired in 2001, had already disavowed reparative therapy at the annual Gay Christian Network conference in January 2012, and his apology "is the acknowledgement many of us have been waiting to hear for a long, long time," said GCN executive director Justin Lee.

"Alan has been moving this way for awhile ... but this apology is much more explicit and leaves no room for support for change therapies or demonizing gays," said Warren Throckmorton, a psychology professor at Grove City College who has long observed the ex-gay movement.

Chambers announced the closure of Exodus at the ministry's 38th annual conference in Irvine, Calif. Local affiliated Exodus ministries, which are autonomous, will continue, but not under the name or umbrella of Exodus.

In his apology, Chambers acknowledged stories of people who went to Exodus for help only to experience more trauma.

"I have heard stories of shame, sexual misconduct, and false hope," he said. "In every case that has been brought to my attention, there has been swift action resulting in the removal of these leaders and/or their organizations. But rarely was there an apology or a public acknowledgement by me." **BT**

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Southern Baptists condemn Scouts policy, but no boycott

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

Southern Baptists overwhelmingly voted June 12 to stand with churches and families that drop ties with the Boy Scouts of America over its decision to allow openly gay Scouts, and urged the BSA to remove leaders who supported the change in policy.

Members of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, gathered on the final day of their annual meeting in Houston, also acknowledged the right of churches to remain in Scouting, urging them to "seek to impact as many boys as possible with the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ."

The Baptists' resolution stopped far short of calling for an all-out boycott, as they did in 1997 with the Walt Disney Co. to combat

what they saw as the company's gay-friendly policies. That boycott was ended in 2005.

Nonetheless, Southern Baptists expressed their "continued opposition to and disappointment" with the recent change in policy. The lengthy resolution notes their concern that some BSA officials and gay advocates expect the May decision will eventually lead the Scouts to allow openly gay adult leaders.

"We encourage churches that choose to sever ties with the Boy Scouts not to abandon their ministry to boys but consider expanding their Royal Ambassadors ministry, a distinctively Southern Baptist missions organization to develop godly young men," the resolution stated.

BSA spokesman Deron Smith said his organization has "deep respect" for Southern Baptists but stressed that the new policy is about accepting a boy with same-sex attraction,

not condoning homosexuality.

"We believe the BSA policy is fully consistent with how Southern Baptist churches respond to young people in their congregations, and (it) allows them to maintain their beliefs about homosexuality and minister to children who are still learning and developing," he said soon after the vote.

A.J. Smith, president of the Association of Baptists in Scouting, also supported continued ties to the Scouts, saying troop-chartering churches can enforce a conduct code that prevents "any kind of sexual activity" and can remove those who violate it.

"I believe that it is possible, even desirable, for Baptist churches to continue to utilize Scouting as an outreach ministry of the church," said Smith, whose association includes Southern Baptists. **BT**

Gettysburg museum explores role of faith in Civil War

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald
Religion News Service

When Confederate soldiers bore down on Gettysburg, Pa., in 1863, a quiet seminary building atop a ridge was transformed — first into a Union lookout, then a field hospital for 600 wounded soldiers.

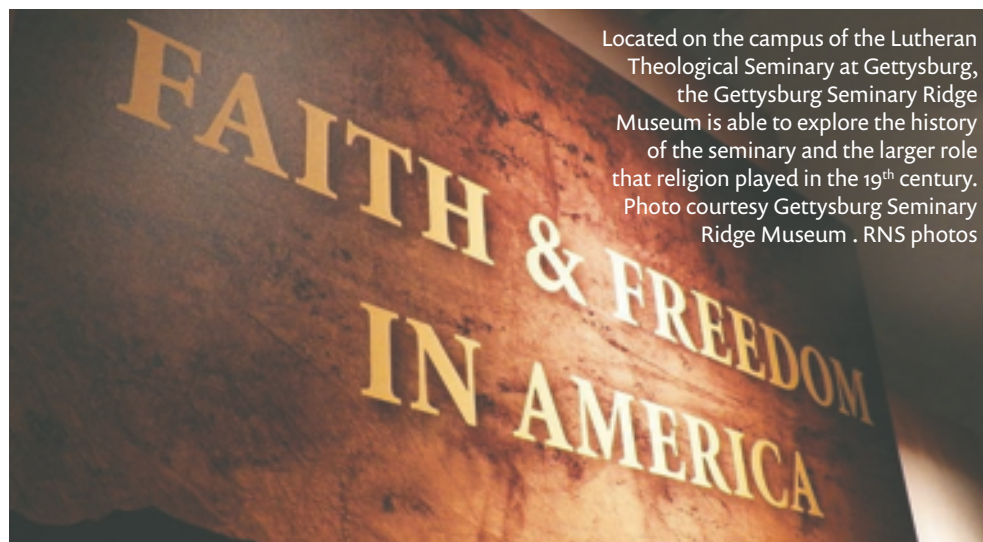
Now the structure that stood at the center of the Civil War's bloodiest and most pivotal battle has been transformed once again.

On July 1, the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, Schmucker Hall, located on the campus of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, reopened as a museum reflecting on the epic battle, the costly war and the complex role of faith.

Seminary Ridge Museum takes visitors into the minds of those who fought and explores their conflicting ideas of freedom. Some 750,000 soldiers died during the Civil War and many of them carried and quoted from the Bible. But they read it in divergent ways that still reverberate in a polarized America.

"People have found it comfortable to find a way to think about the Civil War in terms of valor and heroism," said Barbara Franco, executive director of the museum. "We want to really look at these other parts of it — causes, consequences — and leave people thinking there's more to this than just the simple answers."

"Here were these young men, caught



Located on the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, the Gettysburg Seminary Ridge Museum is able to explore the history of the seminary and the larger role that religion played in the 19th century. Photo courtesy Gettysburg Seminary Ridge Museum. RNS photos

up in these events, and trying to be as faithful as they could be as good Christians," said Maria Erling, professor of church history at the seminary. "They were consoled by those faith commitments."

In interactive exhibits, visitors grapple with mid-19th century moral dilemmas: Would you harbor a fugitive slave if it meant you could go to prison? What motivated nurses, such as the Catholic Daughters of Charity, to tend to the injured on both sides?

Exhibits also showcase religious belongings of soldiers who fought at Gettysburg including a 3-inch-by-2-inch Bible carried by Medal of Honor recipient Jefferson Coates.

The museum, which cost \$15 million to

develop, popularizes new insights from recent scholarship, including how clergy on both sides were physically attacked for taking unpopular stands on slavery.

"It's really a war of words that precedes the war of sabers and guns," Franco said. "The slavery debate is very influenced by biblical passages to support one side or the other."

As it turned out, both sides came to interpret Scripture in ways that would support their views on slavery.

"The North had its own agenda, its own reasons for reading the Bible the way it did," Erling said. "And the South had its own reasons for reading the Bible the way it did. ... That's how we have a Bible Belt." **BT**

Life in the aftermath of Sandy Hook

By Jason Coker

Here is the conversation I had with my 6-year-old first grader before he returned to school the Monday after the Sandy Hook massacre:

“Son, a man who was very sick in his head came into a nearby school and hurt a lot of children and teachers.”

(Immediately) “Is he going to come to my school and hurt me, Daddy?”

“No, son, he can never hurt anyone again.”

(Immediately) “Why, Daddy?”

(Pause) “Because he died, Son.”

(Immediately) “Did he go to heaven, Daddy?”

(Pause) “I don’t know, Son. I hope so.”

(Immediately) “Do you think God and Jesus can help his head, Daddy?”

(Pause) “Of course they can, Son.”

It’s hard to write that exchange without being overcome with emotion even after several months. Taking away my son’s innocence and replacing it with anxiety was never part of my parental plan.

Although the tragedy of the Sandy Hook massacre was felt widely, our proximity to Newtown made it more acute in the Fairfield County area. All of our schools were locked down when the events at Sandy Hook were taking place, and we parents were notified by our local superintendents of schools that police were dispatched to our children’s schools as a safety measure.

That was a phone call I never thought I’d receive, and nothing can truly prepare you for it. I’m a pastor and my wife is a social worker, and we were still taken aback by the call.

Other parents in Newtown received much worse news, of course. Our experience was one of secondary trauma, but trauma nonetheless.

For the next several weeks we picked up our children from school, who had to walk around a police car to get to us.

Some parents cried. All of us grabbed our kids and lifted them up in bear hugs.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, people wanted answers. Many turned to clergy and other care providers for help. Personally, I was looking for answers myself and was trying to find someone to follow who had all the answers.

To my shock, I discovered that everyone in my purview was looking to me for answers. I was the pastor, and for many this made me the mouthpiece for God.

In an attempt to provide provisional answers and help process the depth of these experiences, I worked with others to develop a conference that would equip pastors and care providers in our region to help others. It was designed to help the helpers.

In April our church hosted “Clergy and Crisis: A Conference in Response to the Sandy Hook Tragedy.” Care providers from all over lower Fairfield County, Conn., and the New York metro area came. Some had counseled Newtown teachers.

The conference was transformative. I learned several things that are universally applicable in situations of crisis and trauma.

No one is exempt from crises. Traumatic experiences happen, so churches and other places where people come for answers and help need to be prepared at some level.

As a pastor, I need to be ready to field the questions people have and to be a “non-anxious presence” that helps rather than hurts.

In crises, leadership is essential to help coordinate the responses so that responses will “give life” rather than “take life.” There were

so many good intentions after the Sandy Hook tragedy, but that intended goodwill crushed Newtown.

In events such as these, leadership effectively communicates the real needs, and intercepts responses that are well intended but provide a sense of relief for those responding rather than those in need. Sending a teddy bear may make someone feel like they are helping, which makes them feel good, but thousands of teddy bears only get in the way of real work.

Leadership helps communities navigate the space between the help that is needed and the help that is offered. Although this kind of leadership may concentrate on mechanics of crisis, it provides those who are most affected by crisis with the space to feel the way they need to feel.

Community is essential. Those most affected by the Sandy Hook tragedy will never be the same. This crisis is not something they will “get over.” Rather it is a crisis that has altered their lives, and they will have to live in a “new normal.”

In processing this tragedy, my own community — both local and national — has been essential. Belonging to a larger community empowered our church (and me as an individual) to be more than it could be for our area.

The relevance for denominations and greater fellowships has never been more pronounced in my career as a pastor. The larger community to which we belong came as guest speakers, financial resources and intellectual resources that functioned as the real presence of God.

In a world where we have to have painful conversations with our kids because we have traumatic experiences like Sandy Hook, I hope these reflections are helpful at any level no matter how provisional they may be. **BT**

—Jason Coker is pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Conn.



Community is essential. Those most affected by the Sandy Hook tragedy will never be the same. This crisis is not something they will “get over.”

Blues, Rock and the Gospel

By Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service

Bono calls for actions over ‘signs of righteousness’

U2 frontman Bono exchanged Bible references and bantered about music, theology and evangelicals’ role in AIDS activism in a June radio interview with Focus on the Family President Jim Daly.

Growing up in Ireland with a Protestant mother and a Catholic father, Bono imitated C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, where Lewis argued that Jesus was a lunatic, liar or Lord.

“When people say ‘Good teacher,’ ‘Prophet,’ ‘Really nice guy,’ ... this is not how Jesus thought of himself,” Bono said. “So, you’re left with a challenge in that, which is either Jesus was who he said he was or a complete and utter nut case.”

“And I believe that Jesus was, you know, the Son of God,” Bono said, according to a transcript provided to Religion News Service. “I understand that for some people and we need to ... if I could be so bold, need to be really, really respectful to people who find that ridiculous.”

Bono made comparisons between biblical characters and music.

“First of all, David’s a musician so I’m gonna like him,” Bono said. “What’s so powerful about the Psalms are, as well as they’re being gospel and songs of praise, they are also the blues. It’s very important for Christians to be honest with God, which often, you know, God is much more interested in who you are than who you want to be.”

As Bono praised David’s “honest language with God,” Daly noted that “sometimes it gets you into hot water with the more orthodox folks, because they see you as edgy, maybe too edgy at times.”

It’s a criticism that Bono’s used to hearing. “You’ve gotta be very careful that grace and politeness do not merge into a banality of behavior, where we’re just nice, sort of ‘death by cupcake,’” Bono said.

“Politeness is, you know, a wonderful thing. Manners are in fact, really an important

thing. But remember, Jesus didn’t have many manners as we now know.”

Bono recalled the section in Luke 9 when Jesus told a man not to wait and bury his father but to follow Jesus immediately. Daly responded to Bono’s summary, “Seems cold-hearted.”

Bono replied, “No, seems punk rock to me. He could see right into that fellow’s heart. He knew he wasn’t coming and he was just, it was pretense. We’ve gotta be a bit more cutting edge, not look to the signs of righteousness. Look to the actions.”

Bono made an explicit connection between his faith and his work with the ONE Campaign, the humanitarian organization he founded to fight poverty and disease.

“It’s very annoying following this person of Christ around, because he’s very demanding of your life,” he said while chuckling. “You don’t have to go to university and do a Ph.D. to understand this stuff. You just go to the person of Christ.”

Daly threw a C.S. Lewis quote at Bono: “When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that’s left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less.”

Bono jokingly replied, “Yeah, that could turn up on the next U2 album, but I won’t give him or you any credit.”

In his work on HIV/AIDS, malaria, poverty and other areas, Bono noted the challenge of finding the right issue to take on. Most of the 9 million HIV/AIDS victims who were saved are alive because of treatments funded by the U.S., Bono said.

“I am here to thank the American people for that,” he said. “And I also want to thank the evangelical community for that, because it wouldn’t have happened without their leadership, because they like myself, pestered George Bush and the administration, who actually deserve praise for starting this out.”

He compared HIV/AIDS to biblical stories of leprosy.

“People don’t understand in that Scripture, the Samaritan was at odds with the ideology of

the person he stopped on the road for. This is why we call it The ONE Campaign,” he said. “You and I can have many disagreements on many philosophical, theological things. But on this we know we can agree on.”

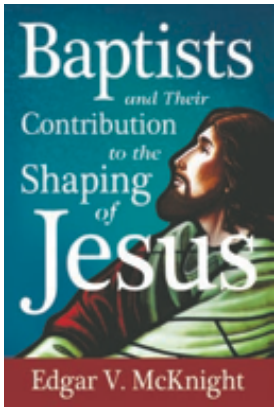
Daly said he expects potential blowback from Focus listeners who might see Bono as unorthodox.

“Does he use a bad word here and there? Yeah, probably. Does he have a Guinness every now and then? Yeah, probably,” Daly said. “When you look at it before the throne of God, I think (God will) say, ‘You saved so many children.’”

Daly said his predecessor James Dobson might not have done an interview with Bono, but Dobson did get blowback for having Dr. Laura Schlessinger on his program because she is Jewish.

“Bono clearly accepts Jesus as Lord. I wasn’t prepared for his quickness in inserting Scripture into the dialogue,” Daly said of the artist who has been married to his wife, Ali Hewson, for decades. “I celebrate with them that they have four children and have been married 30 years. Not everyone in the Christian community can say that.” **BT**

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In the Know

Ronnie Brewer is pastor of First Baptist Church of Bristol, Va., coming from the Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship where he had been coordinator since 2010. Earlier he was pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Madison, Ala., and was Baptist campus minister at the University of Alabama.

Cherilyn Crowe is director of communications for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C. She had served as associate director since 2009 and formerly worked as a television producer in Nashville.

D. Perry Ginn died May 17 at age 84. His pastorates included First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga. (1965-1973) and Peachtree Baptist Church in Atlanta (1990-1997). He and his late wife Betty established a lecture series on faith and science at Mercer's McAfee School of Theology.

Don Hustad, 94, a leader in evangelical church music who taught for decades at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,

died June 22. Hustad, once full-time organist for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, served on the faculty of Southern Seminary's School of Church Music from 1966 until his retirement in 1986. He continued to teach courses and lecture at the seminary in Louisville, Ky., for the next 20 years. He published five books, including *Jubilate!* — a book that analyzes evangelical church music and sets forth his own philosophy of church music — and *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder & Majesty*.

Dale Peterson was recognized for 40 years as minister of music at the First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala. He also serves as composer in residence for the church and teaches at Auburn University.

Charles Watson Jr. is education and outreach specialist for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. A graduate of The Citadel and Mercer's McAfee School of Theology, he has served as children's director at Atlanta's Buckhead Baptist Church and as a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship-endorsed chaplain. **BT**

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SEPT. 15, 2013

Luke 16:1-13 — Counting Coins
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Luke 16:19-31 — Counting Options
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Youth Lessons are on pages 22–23.



Adult teaching plans by **Rick Jordan** of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina are available at nurturingfaith.net

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Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Jeremiah 2:1-13

Sept. 1, 2013

Lost Love

It happens all the time, really: Children who appear to adore their parents while young grow up and turn a wary eye toward all they've been taught, rejecting the path their parents had set them on and choosing to follow their own way.

Sometimes that's a good thing: Not all parents provide the kind of example that children should follow. Often, however, it's discouraging, as children who were brought up to honor God and participate in the church turn their backs on both God and the community of faith.

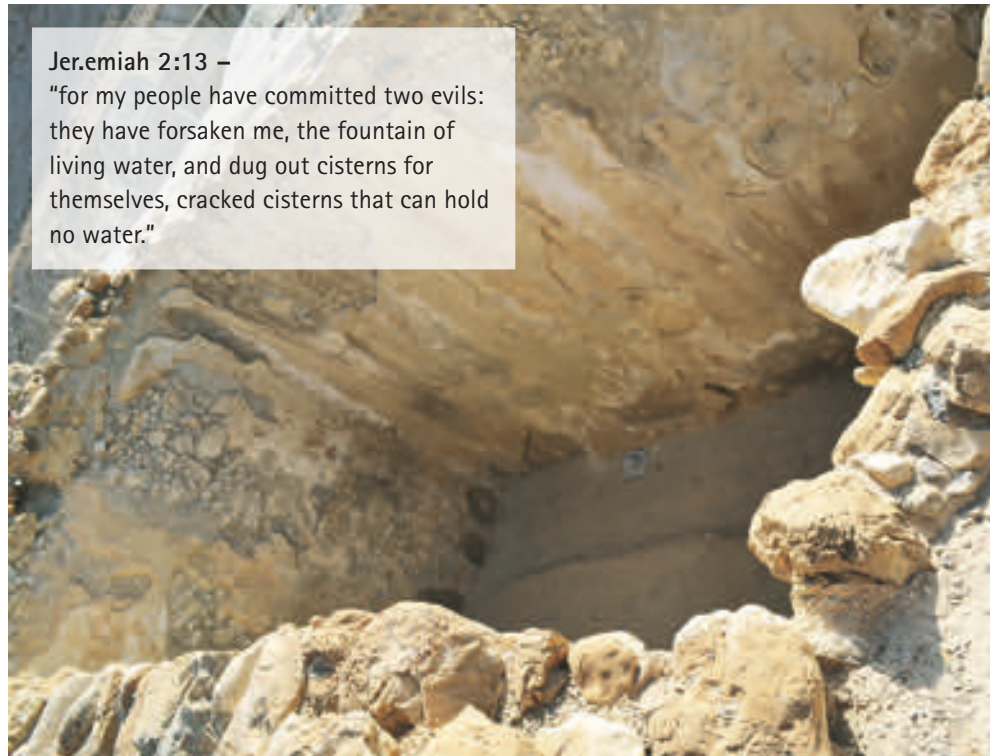
What God remembered (vv. 1-3)

Today's text offers the small comfort of knowing, at least, that the pattern is not new. Jeremiah portrayed God as a caring parent whose children had once been devoted to the one who had delivered them from bondage, but later turned their hearts to gods who could not deliver a fly from the mud.

The Hebrew prophets often spoke in oracles, messages that claimed to be a direct word from God, and that could be directed toward any number of subjects. 🛖 Much of Jeremiah 2-24 consists of oracles of judgment against the people of Judah and Jerusalem. 🛖

Jeremiah 2:1-13 includes two oracles, both illustrative of the prophet's preaching against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

The first three verses are not included in the lectionary text, but provide crucial background for understanding vv. 4-13. Speaking for



Yahweh, Jeremiah spoke wistfully of how God remembered the days when Israel's people, freshly delivered from their bondage in Egypt, were convinced of God's presence and devoted to God's way.

The prophets often spoke of Israel's time in the wilderness in idealized fashion, imagining it as a sort of honeymoon period in which God and God's people enjoyed a time of mutual love and devotion.

But the honeymoon, if it ever existed, was over. 🛖 Jeremiah insisted that the people who were once devoted to God had turned their backs and redirected their allegiance to empty idols.

What Israel forgot (vv. 4-8)

Jeremiah's work covered the last quarter of the seventh century and the first dozen years of the sixth century BCE. Israel had been in the Promised Land for 500 years, but the northern tribes (often referred to as "Israel" or "Ephraim") had been conquered and

captured more than 100 years previously, and now the southern tribes (often referred to as "Judah") were in danger, too.

Believing that judgment was both imminent and a direct result of the people's desertion of God, Jeremiah called them on the carpet for their unfaithful ways.

God's desire to be recognized as the only true God was made clear in the Ten Commandments, given through Moses on Mt. Sinai: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3). The worship of images was specifically condemned (Exod. 20:4-5). Yet, the narrative declares that God's chosen people persistently followed the lead of their neighbors by incorporating Canaanite idols into their worship practices.

Thus, God asked: "What wrong did your ancestors find in me, that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?" (v. 5, NRSV).

Jeremiah's commentary was sharp.

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



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The word translated “worthless” is *hebel*, the same word Qoheleth used in Ecclesiastes when he said “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” The word derived from the image of smoke that blows from a fire, or the fog that rises in the morning but quickly blows away. The term carries the connotation of something empty, insubstantial, worthless.

Jeremiah’s word choice was also clever in that Israel had deserted Yahweh for Baal, and the word *hebel* looks and sounds much like *haba^cal*, the Hebrew way of referring to Baal. They were worshiping *hebel haba^cal*, Bulemic Baal, the vapor god.

Looking back, we are tempted to wonder how the people could do such a thing: How could they forget the God who delivered them and turn to the god of their Canaanite neighbors?

Jeremiah was even more incredulous, amazed that they would forget the God who delivered them from Egyptian oppression, led them through a desert wilderness filled with danger, and kept them alive in a forsaken land (v. 6).

Perhaps, in the polytheistic environment of the ancient Near East, the Hebrews came to think of Yahweh as a desert god only, as a traveling god or a war god. After getting settled in the Promised Land, what they cared about most was having more children to provide social security for their old age, and having more cattle to provide them with wealth, and growing more crops to feed themselves and the cattle.

Their Canaanite neighbors claimed that their gods, particularly Baal and Asherah, could promote fertility and make it rain so the land would produce crops – and the Canaanite gods were a big hit with the Hebrews.

It didn’t hurt that serious Baal worship involved drinking a lot of wine and having sex with temple prostitutes. Some evidence suggests that practices from Baal worship were even introduced at the temple in Jerusalem. People can convince themselves that just about anything is right if they want to do it badly enough.

Jeremiah reminded the people that

they didn’t need a separate or local fertility god in order to grow crops in Canaan. “I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruit and its good things,” he said, in God’s behalf. “But when you entered, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination” (v. 7).

Even those who should have known best failed to be faithful, Jeremiah insisted: there were failures at every level. The priests did not call on God, the experts in the law didn’t know the God who gave them the law, the leaders of the people led them away from God, and prophets declared that they spoke for Baal rather than Yahweh (v. 8).

Is it any wonder that Jeremiah – who had remained faithful to Yahweh – was flabbergasted by Israel’s shift in allegiance?

What difference it makes (vv. 9-13)

To emphasize the seriousness of Israel’s rebellion, Jeremiah spoke as if God were bringing a formal lawsuit against Israel, a common pattern of speech among the prophets. ⚡

“Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD, and I accuse your children’s children” (v. 9).

The word translated as “accuse” can mean “strive” or “contend” in a generic sense, or “bring charges” in a specific legal context. Jeremiah’s terminology suggests that Israel’s abandonment of Yahweh was not a new problem.

God had charged their ancestors with the same kind of behavior, and expected to indict their grandchildren for the same thing. Still, God spoke with disbelief that Israel, among all the nations, had traded in the “glory” of their God for the impotence of idols. ⚡

The word translated as “glory” has its roots in the sense of something being heavy, substantive, or worthy of respect. Israel had exchanged the weighty substance of the true God for

the insubstantial smoke and mirrors of the Canaanite prophets.

With v. 13, Jeremiah used a striking metaphor of spiritual thirst both to summarize his charges and to introduce a more detailed description of the people’s sin. They were guilty of two major evils, he said, forsaking the divine fountain of “living water” in favor of cisterns of their own making, broken tanks that could hold no water (v. 13 – see “The Hardest Question” in the online resources for more).

It’s easy for us to join Jeremiah in condemning Israel, but we should look in the mirror before doing so. It’s not uncommon for church members to trade in their devotion to God like a used car. It’s possible to think of oneself as a follower of God while for all practical purposes living as a deserter.

We have known people who were raised in church and loved God as a child, but left their allegiance to God when they left home.

Others may have followed God for a long time, but when things didn’t work out as they expected or some tragedy came into their lives, they became angry with God. To express their disillusionment, they may have stopped praying or going to church, thinking that if God could not or would not protect them from trouble, there was little point in worship.

We may also know people who have wandered from God, but who learned that fast times or big dollars or alternate religions did not feed their spiritual hunger, and they returned to God. They discovered that God is waiting and willing to forgive, always longing for relationship with us.

It is entirely possible, of course, that we might find ourselves in any one or more of those categories. It is good to know that no matter how far off track we may wander, God still loves us and does not give up on us. God is always willing to welcome us home with open arms, where we find the meaning and hope and joy that come with trusting the God we knew as children, the God who *is*. ⚡

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 14:25-35

Sept. 8, 2013

Counting the Cost

Have you ever given up on something that seemed way too difficult for you? Running a marathon, for example – is that something you would even consider attempting? Or climbing Mount Everest – is that on your bucket list?

What about being Jesus' disciple? Would you give that a try? After reading today's text, you might change your mind. 🇩

Radical demands (vv. 25-27)

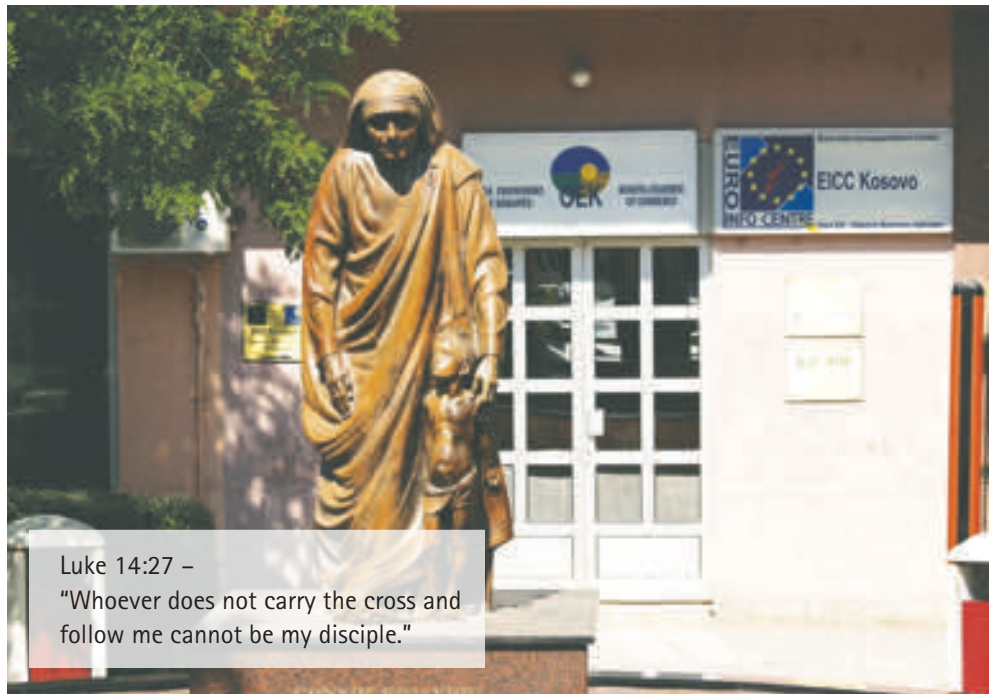
There is no getting around the difficulty of this text, which contains some of Jesus' hardest teachings and portrays discipleship as something so radical that very few would even aspire to it, much less attain it. 🇩

Our challenge is to do the passage justice without watering it down to make Jesus' demands more palatable, or writing it off as unattainable and thus beyond serious contemplation.

Luke observes that "large crowds were traveling with him" (v. 25). The immediate target of Jesus' teachings, then, was the conglomeration of the committed and the curious, the groupies and hangers-on who had coalesced around Jesus and followed him about. 🇩🇩

Jesus' first demand was that those who would be his disciples must hate their families – parents, spouse, children, and siblings (v. 26).

What? How do we deal with such an outrageous statement? Are there any interpretive gymnastics that can save us from believing that Jesus actually meant



Luke 14:27 –
"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

what he said?

A common approach is to suggest that Jesus was using a Semitic hyperbole – exaggerating for effect. Just as we would say "If I've told you once, I've told you a million times" – knowing full well that we haven't come close to a million – Jesus could say "hate" when he really meant "love less." 🇩

That, in fact, is the way Matthew puts it in his version of the same story: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me ..." (Mat. 10:37).

So, we are not off base in suggesting that Jesus used the word "hate" in a figurative rather than a literal sense. Jesus consistently taught an ethic of love, calling for his disciples to love one another (John 13:34-35), to love their neighbors (Mark 12:31), even to love their enemies (Matt. 5:43-44).

It's inconceivable, then, that Jesus would want his followers to truly hate their families, at least in the sense of harboring hostile emotions or ill will toward those who should be closest to them.

Even understood figuratively,

however, the word "hate" is jarring. It demands love and commitment to Jesus at such a high level that love for family will seem like hate by comparison. 🇩

The bottom line, the unavoidable requirement, is that to qualify as Jesus' disciple, one must love Jesus more than one's own family and be willing to act on that love, even if it means leaving family behind.

Leaving one's family is just one aspect of what it means to carry one's cross while following Jesus, which is the second requirement (v. 27).

Here we must again avoid the tendency to dilute this demand by thinking of day-to-day burdens as cross bearing. It's common in our language to describe a physical ailment or a live-in relative as "my cross to bear," but Jesus was not talking about being burdened. He was talking about dying.

Crucifixion was the Romans' favorite means of execution, especially for slaves. To make public examples of those perceived as wrongdoers, the Roman authorities would often force them to carry their own crosses to the place of execution.

Additional background information
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Jesus wanted disciples who were willing to follow him all the way, even to death. This demand packs little punch for modern readers in countries where Christianity is the dominant religion. We have no sense of what it would be like to face death for the “crime” of following Jesus and refusing to acknowledge the emperor as a god. 🇺

Luke’s readers would have known this, however. Some of them lived in places or during sporadic times of persecution when Christians could be hung on a cross or used as lion-bait in the arena for refusing to worship the emperor.

The demands of discipleship are hard. Are any of us truly willing to meet them?

Pointed parables (vv. 28-33)

Luke’s account includes two brief parables not found in the other Gospels. The parables, both in the form of questions, describe quite different dilemmas, but both relate to the theme of counting the cost. 🇺

The first parable asks whether anyone would set out to build a tower – probably a farmer’s watchtower from which one could guard crops from predation by either humans or animals – without running the numbers to see if he could afford it. A half-finished tower would be not only a waste of resources but also a source of ridicule by the community (vv. 28-30).

The message is that would-be followers should count the cost and not start what they can’t finish.

The second parable is more difficult, because the king in question is already in a tight spot: An enemy is apparently approaching, though still far away, and he must decide whether to march into battle and fight against forces that outnumber him two-to-one or send an envoy to negotiate terms of peace (vv. 31-32).

The problem here is that the price of peace would almost certainly cost him and his country something. To keep the enemy from invading, they would have to pay tribute and probably agree

to some sort of subordinate status.

As unappealing as that thought might be, it would be a better outcome than sacrificing many lives in a battle one seems destined to lose and having the enemy invade the country, raping and pillaging as they go.

It’s also possible that a king might determine that his soldiers, though outnumbered, were better trained, more committed, and thus capable of defeating the enemy – but only if the king risked everything by sending them into battle, knowing victory would come at the high cost of many lives.

Jesus knew that his followers would be outnumbered and many would die, but he still called for a total commitment that risked everything.

The conclusion, in v. 33, is that real disciples must be willing to risk it all, specifically in terms of renouncing worldly possessions and giving up all their stuff.

How much risk is there in our faith?

Words of warning (vv. 34-35)

The lectionary text stops at v. 33, but the literary unit is clearly designed to include Jesus’ stern warning in vv. 34-35. These words seem to be directed toward those who had already decided to follow Jesus rather than those who were still counting the cost. Jesus speaks of salt that has lost its saltiness and become worthless.

Unappetizing food can always be seasoned with salt, but there is no help for salt that has lost its saltiness – or for disciples who don’t live up to or maintain their commitment. Such salt, Jesus said, was good for nothing – not even for killing weeds on the soil or for kick-starting decomposition in a manure pile – and is subsequently thrown away. (For more on salt, see “The Hardest Question” online.)

The message is that insipid

disciples are likewise good for nothing. Jesus’ concluding statement that anyone with ears to hear had better listen was a clear warning against half-hearted discipleship.

What can modern readers do with a text like this? Do we know *anyone* who meets these requirements for discipleship — anyone who has shown a willingness to forsake their families, forgo all possessions, and carry the cross of risking their lives for the sake of the gospel?

And if we’re not in that category, does it mean there is no hope for us?

Perhaps we should acknowledge, as Richard B. Vinson suggests, that it’s just too hard for most of us and that we don’t qualify as disciples, but can still take intermediate steps toward fuller discipleship (*Luke*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2008], 497-98).

Instead of giving up, if we’re already contributing financially to support church and charitable efforts, we could set a goal of increasing our level of commitment and living on less so more ministry could be done.

If we are already giving some of our time to Christian-inspired social ministries that help the poor or homeless, perhaps we could give more – even if it takes us away from our families.

Our admitted failure at becoming the sold-out disciples Jesus called for – and who were particularly needed in the early years of the Christian movement – does not mean that Christ’s grace does not extend to us as we strive to become better disciples and to be, if not yet pure salt, at least good for something.

The great danger is that we write off these hard words as not applying to us at all. Too many evangelists and pastors have portrayed discipleship as something that is easy, imploring sinners to walk the aisle, “give their hearts to Jesus,” and be assured of eternal salvation – with no mention of the cost of real discipleship.

Jesus sets before us a real challenge, demands so hard that they seem impossible. 🇺 How will we respond? **BT**

YOUTH

September 1 — September 29, 2015

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



of the Bible lessons by Tony Cartledge.

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

Drifting Away

Jeremiah 2:4-13

It really isn't that uncommon: You were best friends with someone in elementary school, maybe even played on the same teams. When you got to middle school, you were placed in different classes and started to make other friends. You promised you would always be friends, but you saw each other less and hung out even less often. By the time you got to high school, you just passed each other in the hall with a nod but didn't really know what to say.

We all have friendships that have drifted apart. The text from the second chapter of Jeremiah addresses a similar relationship, but in this case it is the people of Israel who drift away from God.

Jeremiah begins when the relationship was on good terms — when the people of Israel were wandering around in the wilderness. But he soon focuses on how they turned away from God. He blames the fall of Israel on the fact that the people had started following the Canaanite god Baal.

Jeremiah does not understand how the people can abandon the God who led them out of bondage. He reminds them that the Canaanite gods are not promising them anything new, and that they have pledged themselves to the one true God.

The people of Israel have committed two major evils: forsaking God and favoring their own empty desires. Because of this, Jeremiah claims they have turned from God to make themselves gods.

SEPTEMBER 1

Think About It:

We aren't so different from the people of Israel. The gods we turn to have names that relate to individualism, greed and desire. What are the things in your life that get in the way of your relationship with God?

Make a Choice:

We have more choices today than ever before. We are constantly bombarded with information and ads. How will you choose not to succumb to these pressures and instead to keep God in the center of your life?

Pray:

O God, may we make you first in our lives and may everything we do be done for you.

The Cost

Luke 14:25-35

Have you ever looked at something and thought, "There is no way I'm even going to try that"? Maybe it was trying out for a team at school or applying to a prestigious college. Maybe it was getting an "A+" in the subject you despise or walking a tightrope across the Grand Canyon without a safety net. Whatever that "thing" was, you had some clear reasons for not saying no.

Now, read Luke 14:25-35 and ask yourself if you really want to follow Jesus. Really read it. Don't just skim over it and decide, because this is the cost of following Jesus. If we are honest with ourselves, we know this text isn't easy to read or completely follow.

Jesus is calling us to a high level of devotion and love. Our first love is to be Jesus, even if that means leaving our family behind. That call seems minor to the next act Jesus calls us to: carrying our cross for Jesus.

In his day, carrying a cross meant execution was near. Jesus is calling each of us to follow him, even to the point of death. Not that we have to die to follow Jesus, but if put in the situation where we will die for following Jesus, we are to do it.

The parable about salt further emphasizes the point: If salt loses its saltiness, it has no use. Jesus is calling us to make a clear, real choice. If we aren't willing to accept the costs, why act as if we are following Jesus? Does Jesus ask too much?

SEPTEMBER 8

Think About It:

Jesus asks a lot of those who want to follow him. What are some things you might have to give up or change about your life to follow Jesus?

Make a Choice:

Jesus doesn't say we have to follow him; he gives us a choice. And before we make that choice, he lets us know what it will cost. What will you choose? Will you follow Jesus?

Pray:

God, forgive us when we have not really followed you. Give us the courage to fully give ourselves to you.

Lost and Found

Luke 15:1-10

Have you ever lost your cell phone or driver's license? Did you stop everything else to go and look for it? Maybe you retraced your steps or called your friends trying to track it down. What fears ran through your mind as you searched? How did you react when you found it? When this happens to me, I usually feel a wave of relief and gratitude.

Luke 15:1-10 offers two parables where excitement comes about because something that had been lost is found.

Why does Jesus tell these two parables? He wants the Pharisees and scribes to understand why he is hanging out with so many "unsavory" people — those who society rejects.

The parables seem illogical to the Pharisees and scribes because they would never leave the 99 to save the one, and they certainly won't throw a party for finding one coin — much less a party that cost more than the coin is worth. But for Jesus, the lost are found! It is time to rejoice and be glad.

SEPTEMBER 15

Think About It:

What kind of party would Jesus throw when someone who has been lost is found today?

Make a Choice:

Would you choose to go after just one friend even if you had 99 others?

Pray:

God, may we value others — even the outcast ones — just as you do. Thank you for seeking us even when others seem not to care.

I Serve

Luke 16:1-13

Have you ever tried to have two best friends? I mean really try and give yourself equally to both people — time, energy, money, re-tweeting their tweets. It's hard to do, and in the end, you can't do it. You end up treating one differently or you wear yourself out trying to keep everything equal.

Jesus knew the problems with splitting our attention. That is why he wants us to devote our entire lives to him, because

as soon as we start to divide our devotion, our relationship suffers. The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16 is no different.

In the parable, a manager has been trusted with the boss's property but he wastes it. The manager finds out he is about to be fired and knows he will have nowhere to go, so he adjusts all the accounts so that the people owe less. We might expect the boss to be displeased, but he instead commends the manager for acting shrewdly.

SEPTEMBER 22

Think About It:

Why do you think the boss was pleased with the manager lowering the bills of the people? What does this say about how God wants us to treat others?

Make a Choice:

What areas of your life call for your attention and tempt you away from God?

Pray:

God, may we be generous in using what you have given us so that we may improve the lives of others.

Extremes

Luke 16:19-31

It is easy to imagine what it might be like if we were rich and famous. It is easy to imagine because this dream is promoted everyday through ads, movies and TV shows. Now, can you just as easily imagine the face of someone who is homeless? If you can, do you know that person's story and needs?

The parable from Luke 16 features a rich man and a poor man when they are alive and after they have died.

When they are both alive, the poor man (Lazarus) is hungry and begs for the rich man's table scraps, but he is ignored. When they both have died, their situations are reversed and the rich man is begging to have even a drop of water on his tongue.

When the rich man is denied, he wants to save his five brothers and asks for Lazarus to go and warn them. But Abraham refuses him and says that if the brothers cannot learn from the teachings of Moses, even a risen man will not change them.

SEPTEMBER 29

Think About It:

How do think God wants us to treat the poor and hungry today?

Make a Choice:

We have wealth beyond our needs. What small steps can you make to help those who have too little?

Pray:

God, when we see the poor and hungry, may we feel your care and mercy for them. Help us find ways to make a difference in our world.

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 15:1-10

Sept. 15, 2013

Counting Sheep

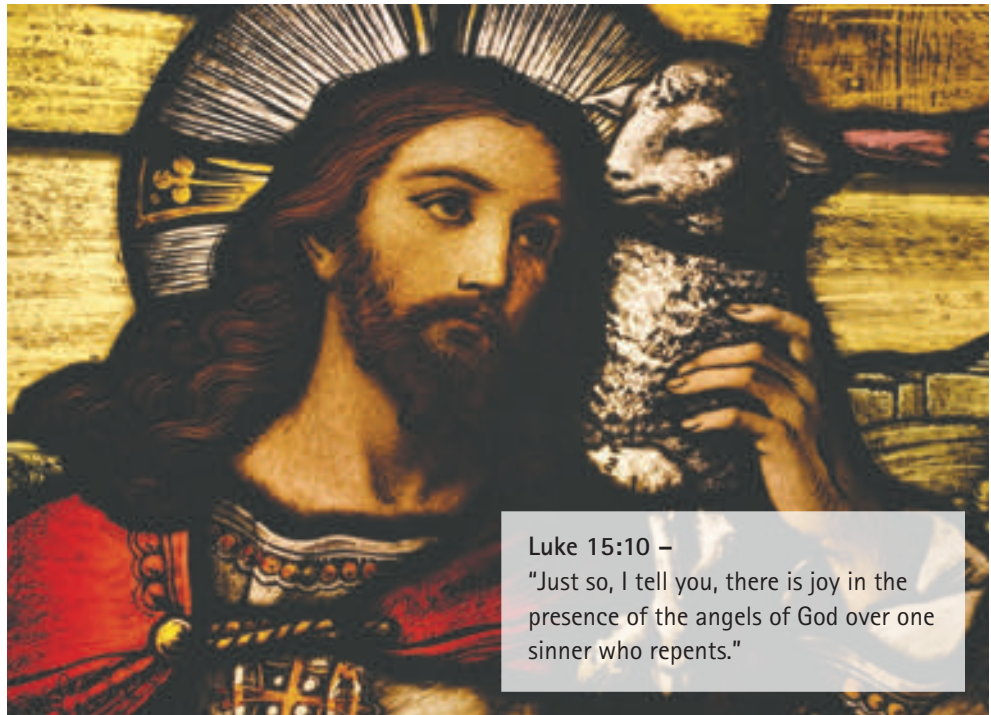
Years ago I read about a woman named Mandy who lost a chocolate Labrador retriever named Wheeler. She'd had the dog for three years before it wandered away from home while Mandy was out of town. The woman who'd been hired to look after the pets let him out to run one day, and Wheeler didn't come back. Mandy was convinced the dog had set out to look for her.

Over the next weeks, Mandy placed dozens of hand-lettered cardboard signs along area roadsides. She taped up hundreds of colored posters in convenience stores. She mailed scores of letters to area veterinarians. She put ads in several local newspapers, and created enough attention to rate a feature article in the local newspaper.

By that point she had spent more than \$1,000 on the search, and offered a \$1,000 reward to anyone who found Wheeler (from the *Raleigh News and Observer*, Sept. 11, 1995).

I remember being amazed that anyone could care that much about a dog, and it's not as if Wheeler was Mandy's only friend. She also had three cats and two other dogs, but she searched for Wheeler as if her life – or Wheeler's – depended on it.

Years later, I walked into a local attorney's office on some unrelated business and discovered that the paralegal occupying the outer office was that same Mandy – and lying on the floor beside her was a chocolate lab: Wheeler had been found, and the story she told involved some serious celebrating.



Luke 15:10 –
“Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Carping critics (vv. 1-2)

Perhaps Mandy would understand our text for today much better than many of us. Luke 15:1-10 consists of an introduction (vv. 1-2), followed by two parables that make the same point from slightly different angles.

The truth, of course, is that there are actually *three* parables in Luke 15 that make the same basic point, for the story commonly known as “the prodigal son” completes the chapter: Luke has brought together the parable of the *lost sheep*, the parable of the *lost coin* and the parable of the *lost son*.

Why the apparent overkill? Luke wanted to emphasize how Jesus deflected criticism from a group of religious leaders who couldn't understand why he insisted on hanging out with unsavory people – the same type of people for whom Luke may have written his Gospel.

Jesus' pious critics thought he should follow their example of relating only to the righteous rather than risking bad influence from associating with

common sinners.

So it is that vv. 1-2 set up the three parables that follow: “Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

Their near-sighted critique deserved an enlightening response, and Jesus was happy to provide it.

A lost sheep (vv. 3-7)

Jesus first told his audience to imagine that each of them owned a hundred sheep – a premise that would likely have been offensive to his detractors. The Pharisees and scribes probably considered keeping sheep to be a step below their station in life. But, a hundred sheep – why, that's quite a lot. That's enough to make you well-to-do, even if tending them makes you smell-to-do. ♣

A man had a hundred sheep, Jesus said, but lost one of them. So, he asked, “if you were in his sandals, wouldn't

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



you leave the other 99 in the wilderness and go in search of the lost sheep until you found it? And when you had it safe in hand, wouldn't you call in all the neighbors and throw a big party to celebrate?"

Considering how Jesus posed the question, we would expect the answer to be "Of course!" But the real answer is, none of the scribes and Pharisees would have done that, and few of us would, either.

We'd consider it irresponsible to leave the other sheep unattended, where they could be stolen or attacked by predators or wander apart. A smart shepherd would put them in a pen or have someone watch them while he or she went searching for the lost one.

If we found the rambling troublemaker, we'd probably be too angry to throw a party for it. And if we did host the kind of banquet Jesus described, we'd probably have to kill other animals to provide the food. None of that makes economic sense – and that's the point.

The gospel has a reckless quality about it that might seem like foolishness to our ordinary ways of thinking. Prudence would have us focus on keeping the 99 safe, but Jesus focused on seeking the lost.

God is not like us, and that's good news, because we've all been lost. 📖

What is more, to hear Jesus tell it, nothing brings God more joy than to find the lost sheep and welcome them into the kingdom. "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (v. 7).

Perhaps we should perceive more than a little sarcasm in that statement. The 99 "righteous" sheep were not as righteous as they thought they were, or as needless of repentance (and neither are we). But Jesus showed no interest in that: he wants us to move beyond law abiding and to become loving. 📖

In Jesus' economy, and that of the kingdom, there is always special concern for the people on the margins, or

even beyond the margins. And when one of those precious souls is brought from the outside to the inside, all heaven rejoices.

The parable of the lost coin (vv. 8-10)

Some parables were designed to leave hearers wondering, but this one made a clear point. Even so, Jesus bolstered the message by telling another parable to illustrate the same truth. He asked those listening to imagine that they were housewives. If he had not offended his officious critics before, he surely would have offended them now. 📖

None of the scribes or Pharisees would want to picture themselves as the peasant's wife Jesus described, living in a small house with a dirt floor, minimal furniture, and a fire pit for cooking.

The woman didn't have much, Jesus said, but she did have ten silver coins, ten drachmas, each one equivalent to the standard "minimum wage" for a day's labor. 📖

Somehow, the woman noticed that one of the coins was missing, so she lit a lamp, started searching, and didn't quit until she found it. "Wouldn't you do that?" Jesus asked. "Wouldn't you forget everything else and burn the oil and turn the house upside down until you found the coin?" Maybe they would, if they were poor enough.

But then things go strange again. Jesus pictured the woman as inviting all of her friends and neighbors over to celebrate. What is unspoken is that hospitality would require her to prepare food and drink for all of the guests – a celebration that could easily cost more than the coin was worth.

Again, Jesus asked the question as if the normative answer would be "Sure! That's exactly what we would do!" But it's unlikely that we would. Even if one of us managed to retrieve a lost diamond ring from the sink drain,

it's unlikely that we would throw a party to celebrate. One lost coin wouldn't be that important to us – but every lost sinner is important to Jesus.

There's something strange and amazing about a woman who would throw such a celebration over finding one little coin – and there is something that seems equally crazy about Jesus getting so happy when a sinner like you or me repents and turns to God.

We don't get that excited, but Jesus said the angels in heaven do: "Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (v. 10). 📖

The kingdom of God is like a party, which Jesus once compared to a wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-2). It's a party to which everyone is invited, where there is no division between the pious and the prurient because we know that we're all sinners and none of us deserve to be there, but that's the way God wanted it. 📖

God isn't like us, but we are challenged to be more like God.

These short but remarkable parables suggest the joy that comes with our own sense of being found should send us on mission to seek others who are lost.

We can be stiff and self-righteous if we want to. We can sit on the sidelines like the angry elder brother who got mad when his father had a barbecue to celebrate the prodigal's return, but if we do, we'll miss the party God has prepared for us. There's little doubt that the people who will enjoy the party most are the ones who brought the most people with them.

Jesus welcomes everyone to his table: men and women and children, saints and sinners and in-betweens. And, as we celebrate the love of a God who cared enough to search us out, we're challenged to join God in searching for others. Ultimately, then, we can also join in the dance of the angels, for with every person who accepts the invitation, heaven goes wild. **BT**

Bible Study

Luke 16:1-13

with Tony W. Cartledge

Sept. 22, 2013

Counting Coins

Most of us would agree that Jesus was an innovative and effective teacher. He knew that people liked stories and would listen to them, so he did most of his teaching in stories. Today we call them parables. Jesus also knew that people would remember a story better and think about it more if it had a surprise ending, so many of his parables conclude with an unexpected twist. 📖

A surprising parable

Surprises can be fun, but they can also make us uncomfortable. Who wants to read a book where the bad guys win? Or who wants to hear a biblical parable where a crook is congratulated? It just doesn't seem right.

But there it is. We cannot avoid it. Here is a parable Jesus told about a low-down, double-dealing, two-timing scoundrel, yet Jesus held him up before his flabbergasted audience and said, "You can learn something from this man."

How?

We can begin by taking a look at the literary setting. Luke is the only Gospel to record this parable, and we can understand why. But look at where Luke puts it: Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that a cross was at the end of the road. His mind was on eternity.

A group of Pharisees confronted Jesus about his tendency to hang around with sinners and others less pious than they. In response, Jesus told them a series of parables about being part of the kingdom of God.



Luke 16:13 –

"No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

He told the story of a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son who wasn't punished for his wastrel ways, but welcomed home with a party. The Pharisees didn't like *that* surprise ending. Jesus likened them to a sanctimonious elder brother who got mad and wouldn't come to the party.

A troublesome story (vv. 1-8)

From there we come to this troublesome story about a rich man and his crooked business manager. 📖 Every now and then we read about some newly rich actor or athlete who hires a business manager to look after all that wealth, and the manager steals him or her blind. That's nothing new, apparently.

The rich man entrusted the business dealings of his estate to a manager, but he was not a trustworthy man. 📖 In fact, he squandered a great deal of his boss' property (v. 1). It's not a coincidence that the word for "squander" is the same Greek word used to describe how the

prodigal son wasted his inheritance. Luke wants us to see the connections in these stories.

The wealthy man trusted his manager so much that he didn't check up on him, and didn't know he was being robbed until someone blew the whistle – maybe another employee who hoped for a reward or a client who was also being fleeced. Convinced of the manager's guilt, he summoned the slyster and told him to turn in the books as quickly as he could, then clean out his office (v. 2).

As the manager went out to get the books in order, he did some fast thinking: "Yikes! What can I do now? I'm too weak for construction work and too proud to beg. How will I eat when he kicks me out?" (v. 3). An ancient cartoonist could have put a little oil lamp in a balloon over his head as the manager got an idea: He would get all of his boss' creditors indebted to him so he could go to them for assistance later (v. 4). 📖

Plan in hand, the tricky thief made the rounds of everyone who owed

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money to his boss. To the first man, he said “How much do you owe?”

The answer was 100 jugs of olive oil, each containing eight or nine gallons – the annual production of a very large olive grove, painstakingly squeezed in stone-weighted olive presses, worth many thousands of dollars in today’s currency. 🍷 “Okay,” said the sneaky steward, with a big wink, “here’s what we’ll do. Take your bill, cross out the ‘100,’ and make it ‘50.’ Don’t ask any questions – just don’t forget who cut you so much slack” (vv. 5-6).

He asked the next creditor the same question, and the answer was “100 kors of wheat.” That’s probably about 1,000 bushels – all the wheat produced by more than 100 acres, painfully harvested and threshed. 🍷 “Okay,” said the charlatan. “Here’s your bill. Mark that down from ‘100’ to ‘80’ kors. Don’t ask any questions – just don’t forget” (v. 7).

And so the manager did with all his employer’s clients, 🍷 and he did it so boldly that the boss knew about it. You would expect him to be furious, to blister the manager’s ears, to try and have him thrown in jail. The manager certainly deserved it.

Instead, the rich man just laughed. His books may have been doused with red ink, but he knew that his own reputation had risen among his clients, for everyone was feeling better about what they owed. And, he was impressed at the crooked but clever steward’s resourcefulness. “You’re a genius!” he said. “You’re an evil genius, but a genius nonetheless!” (v. 8a).

A confusing commentary (vv. 9-13)

That’s where the story ends, with Jesus commenting that his hearers could learn something from the scalawag. There was another time when Jesus encouraged his disciples to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16). This man could teach them something about the “wise as serpents” part. He was *smart*. He used his head. When he saw a crisis coming, he acted decisively to ensure his future well-being. The

fact that he did this by dodgy means is apparently beside the point. He used his head, he used the money entrusted to him, and he made enough friends to be sure he’d always have a place to stay.

So, Jesus says, all of us should learn to make wise decisions about our future, and use what wealth is entrusted to us to lay up treasure in heaven rather than on earth (Matt. 19:21). This is a difficult verse to understand, and there’s no way around it. Jesus says “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes” (v. 9).

The reference to being welcome in the eternal homes (literally “tents” as dwelling places) calls to mind the steward’s plan to cultivate friends who would “welcome me into their homes” (v. 4).

But can this be right? Is Jesus recommending that we use dishonest gain to buy a ticket to heaven? In the first place, we must understand that Jesus was probably using “dishonest wealth” (or “unrighteous mammon,” KJV) as a euphemism for money of any sort – for treasures on earth. What we own is really “on loan,” as it were, from God. So, there is a sense in which our wealth is no more ours than the money used by the dishonest steward belonged to him.

If we grant that “dishonest wealth” is a reference to money or material possessions in general, how do we use it to make friends for ourselves so that, when worldly wealth is gone, we’ll have an eternal home?

Let’s think about that. Who lives in God’s eternal home? According to the Bible, God does. Angels do. The saints who have gone before us do. What is one way we can make them happy and gain their appreciation? We can do that by using our money wisely and responsibly, by being generous, by supporting God’s work in all its forms. That does

not mean we buy our way into heaven – it’s what true believers do. It’s another way of saying we should lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

Luke has collected several proverbs on the proper use of wealth and attached them to this verse. Ultimately, they all make the same point. Our earthly decisions have eternal consequences. At some point in life we have to decide whether eternity is important to us and to determine what our priorities are.

We have to understand that we cannot serve two masters (vv. 10-13). We cannot be devoted to material gain and serving God at the same time. Those who are wise will recognize that our very life is an extended moment in crisis, for we never know when the jig will be up, when the bills will come due, when our life will be over. How we handle our wealth in the present – whether faithful in much or little – is an outward sign of our inner decision regarding Christ and the future.

Those of us who have had loved ones unexpectedly die – or who have come near to death ourselves – have learned how close our transition to eternity can be. Such an understanding makes a marked difference in the way we look at life, at the future, and at worldly wealth.

Money is always to be used, not loved, and people are to be loved, not used. Being at home in the kingdom is so much more important than accumulating wealth on earth. If we believe that, we can’t keep living like the rest of the world.

Jesus wants us to know that we can learn, even from a crooked, low-down scoundrel – but a *smart* scoundrel – that when we recognize the moment of crisis, it is crucial to act decisively and wisely.

The good news of the gospel declares that the smartest decision we can make is to acknowledge Christ as Lord, to repent of our sins, and to devote our lives to following him. That’s living wisely in the present with an eye to the future. We never know when we’ll be surprised. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Luke 16:19-31

Sept. 29, 2013

Counting Options

How do you think it would feel to belong to the idle rich – to lie around the pool all day while the hired help brought you grapes and gave you back rubs and kept your lemonade fresh? What would it be like to dress in the finest clothes and to wear fine linen underwear imported from Egypt? Could you get into that?

On the other hand, imagine being so poor that you can't even afford clothes, and so sick that they won't even take you in at the homeless shelter? What would it be like to sleep on the street, too weak or crippled to move, praying for someone to toss you some table scraps and too weak to fight off the dogs who lick your ulcerated skin and wait for you to die so they can drag away your skin and bones?

A sad picture (vv. 19-21)

It may be hard for us to imagine either of those extremes, but such is the picture Jesus paints in today's text. It is an ugly picture: a rich man who thinks only of himself and refuses to help the poor, even those who sit outside his own gate, and a poor man whose life is one misery after another. ↓

Lazarus is the only character in Jesus' parables who was given a name. It is the Greek version of the Hebrew Eleazar, which means "God helps." No one else was helping Lazarus. God was his only hope. The man who had everything remained unnamed, foreshadowing the reversal of fortunes that lay ahead. ↓



Luke 16:39 –

"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

The two men lived side by side, except that the aristocrat slept in a soft bed within his comfortable gated home, while Lazarus slept in the street, exposed to the elements, apparently unable to relocate his feeble body (v. 20). ↓

Although Lazarus is named, he is peripheral. The story is mainly about the plutocrat who lived an openly ostentatious life, wearing expensive purple garments and feasting fabulously while ignoring the frail and incapacitated man who was dying on his steps (v. 19).

The text makes a point of saying that what fell from the rich man's table would have been more than enough to feed Lazarus, but the scraps were left for the dogs, who cleaned the floor and then licked Lazarus' sores for dessert. ↓

The men lived only a few yards from each other, and there came a night when they died near each other, as well. (v. 21). Lazarus' death would have been unremarked, but the rich man's demise would have been surprising news, and his burial would have been an elaborate affair.

A surprise twist (vv. 22-26)

The story begins as we would expect, with the rich man. In the second act, however, the poor man appears first – by dying.

In first-century Judaism a belief had developed that everyone went to the underworld (here called Hades), where they would await the final judgment. It was believed that the dead might enjoy – or suffer – a foretaste of what might lie ahead after the judgment (for more, see "The Hardest Question" online).

Lazarus, however, appears to have skipped this step. There is no mention of him being buried: he simply died and "was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham" (v. 22a). For the Jews, to rest "in Abraham's bosom" was as good as it gets in the afterlife.

The rich man, in contrast, "was buried" (v. 22b), and found himself in the underworld, suffering the same sort of lack that Lazarus had experienced on earth. The poor man's skin must have


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burned as the dogs licked his sores and he ached for something to slake his thirst.

No longer in his world of privilege, the rich man felt a burning sensation and longed for a drink of cool water. The parable imagines that the man could look into Paradise and see Lazarus resting (and possibly feasting!) with Abraham, and initiated a conversation with the illustrious ancestor (vv. 23-24). 

From the conversation we learn that the rich man had been aware of Lazarus – he knew him by name – and yet had failed to help him: his was not a sin of ignorance. We also learn, surprisingly, that though he may have learned that his wealth had not followed him to the next world, he had yet to learn that social status did not carry over. Although he had done nothing for poor Lazarus, he expected Lazarus to fetch for him (having Lazarus dip his finger in water just to cool his tongue is almost certainly hyperbole: surely he wanted more than that).

Finding himself in the less privileged position would have come as a surprise to the rich man. He had grown up with a theology that taught wealth was a sign of God’s blessing and poverty was the mark of God’s curse – though he had apparently ignored that system’s clear instructions for those who were blessed to help the poor.

Abraham explained that the tables had been turned – permanently.


All his life, the rich man had been digging a great chasm between himself and the poor, separating himself from those who needed his help. Little did he realize that the great gap would follow him into eternity. And even less did he understand that, all the while he was digging that ditch of separation between himself and the less fortunate, God was on the side of the poor. Now the ditch was dug and there was no way to cross it, no way to fill it in. He had chosen to live for himself alone, and he had died to spend eternity alone.

A stubborn people (vv. 27-31)

To his credit, the man who had lost everything seemed to have at least one

unselfish thought. He remembered his five brothers, who would no doubt be enjoying the family wealth even as they spoke, digging their own graves in full confidence that they were blessed, and without a clue about what was coming.

Dead but wiser – though still expecting Lazarus to do his bidding – the no-longer-rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers, thinking that if the old beggar should come back from the dead like the ghost of Christmas past, they would repent and change their ways (vv. 27-28, 30).

Once, again, Abraham’s answer was disappointing. He flatly refused the request, insisting that if what his brothers learned from Moses and the prophets did not convince them to obey God’s teachings and lay up treasure in heaven by caring for the poor, they would remain unconvinced, even if one should return from the dead (vv. 29, 31). 

So what is the point? *When we shut out the poor, we shut out God.* There is no more sin in being rich than in being poor, but there is great sin in keeping God’s blessings for ourselves alone.

God has always had a special concern for the poor, and the Old Testament instructs God’s people to show compassion for the less fortunate. What did “Moses and the prophets” say?

Deuteronomy quotes Moses as the mediator of God’s instruction: “Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land’” (15:11). And this was not to be a grudging minimum: Israel was told to “Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake” (15:10).

And what about the prophets? They had much to say, especially Amos,


Micah, and Isaiah of Jerusalem. Recall the words of Isaiah that we studied just a few weeks ago, as Isaiah spoke about the sort of piety God desires: “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” (Isa. 58:7).

To his disciples, Jesus said “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise” (Luke 3:11).

Jesus so identified with the poor and downtrodden that we cannot distinguish between doing something for the poor and doing something for Christ. When Jesus told the story of the great judgment between the sheep and the goats, he said “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40).

It is not possible for Christ’s disciples to have the love of God in them and *not* share with others. The writer of 1 John put it this way: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 John 3:17).

We cannot separate loving God and loving the poor. *We cannot dig a moat between ourselves and the poor without also digging a moat between ourselves and God.* That is what this parable is teaching us. Like the rich man, we may not believe it until we die. The lure of materialism is strong, but Jesus made it clear that when we follow him, we recognize that our resources follow, too.

How then do we approach the question of Christians and wealth? The first letter to Timothy closes with a word of advice to the prosperous: “They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life” (1 Tim. 6:18-19). 

Many people love the old hymn “All to Jesus, I Surrender.” Do we ... really? **BT**

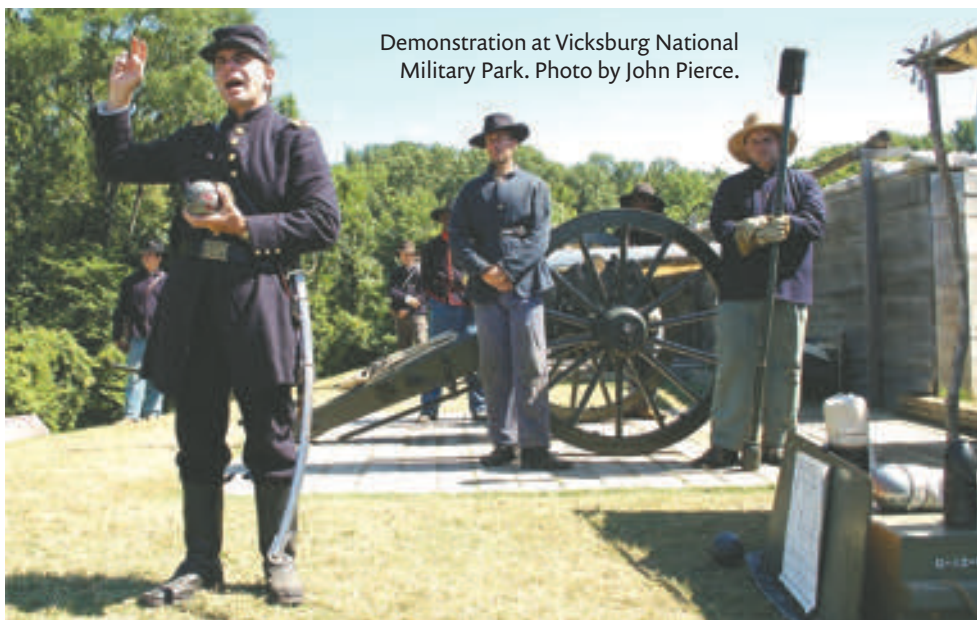
BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Following Union victories in the battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee offers his resignation to President Jefferson Davis, who refuses the offer. Discouragement and disillusionment settle over the South, mixed with a determination on the part of many soldiers and citizens to fight to the end.

In the North, the victory over Lee leads citizens, soldiers and politicians to anticipate a quick resolution to the war. A national day of Thanksgiving is filled with sermons and speeches rejoicing that African slavery is almost banished and victory over the South is at hand. One such discourse is delivered in the Baptist church of Brookline, Mass., by John D. Murdock, who near the conclusion declares:

It is the glory of our National Constitution that it bases itself on the sacred rights of human nature. It recognizes the divine foreordination of freedom for all men. Chief among its objects was to promote the general welfare, and to secure the blessings of freedom to posterity. And though it has been perverted and thwarted by men whose aims were alien to its spirit, it has at last been wrested from their hands, and freedom is now proclaimed under the broad shield of its authority, throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof. Hitherto its exceptions have been exalted above its leading design. Its temporary provisions have been set in opposition to its fundamental principles. But at length the exceptional wrong has given place to the essential right. If the people have only the virtue and firmness to stand upon its noble aims, and the public policy just inaugurated in pursuance of them, the clouds will soon clear away, and a new day of freedom and prosperity will dawn on the land. The Constitution shall at last be recognized as the bond, while the Flag shall be the symbol, of Universal Freedom. And out of this chaos of blood and strife a new order of equality and justice shall emerge, and the rejoicings of the free shall be like the song of the sons of the morning in the dawn of creation.

In no mood for celebration, the Confederate nation observes a day of fasting. Southern Baptist divine I.T. Tichenor delivers the fast day message before the Alabama legislature, in which he laments:



Demonstration at Vicksburg National Military Park. Photo by John Pierce.

150 YEARS AGO

August 1863

Two weary years of war have wrung this question from the agonized heart of our bleeding country. "Oh! That we could have peace!" exclaims the statesman, as he ponders the problems that demand solution at his hands. "Peace," sighs the soldier, as he wraps his blanket around him and lies down to sleep upon the open field. "Peace!" moans the widow, as she reads the fatal news of her heroic husband fallen on some bloody field, and bitterly thinks of the darkened future in store for herself and her orphaned children. The prayer of the land is for peace. You may hear it in the sanctuary, at the fireside, around the family altar, in the silent chamber, on the tented field. When will it come?

Tichenor goes on to express his confidence that God is on the side of the slave-based Confederacy:

If God governs the world, then his hand is in this war in which we are engaged. It matters not that the wickedness of man brought it upon us, that it was caused by the mad attempts of fanaticism to deprive us of our rights, overthrow our institutions, and impose upon us a yoke which, as freemen, we had resolved never to bear.

Amid the animated discourse, little formal military action takes place this month. But far to the west, Quantrill's Raiders, a band of southern guerrillas, attack Lawrence, Kan., and kill some 183 men before burning the town. On Quantrill's hit list is Jacob Ulrich, a German Baptist minister, and Abraham Rothrock, an elder in Ulrich's church. Neighbors, the two men are prominent abolitionists. Warned of the impending attack, Ulrich and his family flee and hide in the nearby woods, as does Rothrock. The raiders set the Ulrich's house and barn on fire, but the family saves the house once the men ride away.

Union forces retaliate by evacuating Confederate sympathizing citizens out of four Missouri counties and burning homes, barns and crops.

Meanwhile, black soldiers are entering Union army ranks in droves. The American Baptist Missionary Convention seeks U.S. President Abraham Lincoln's permission to send black Baptist chaplains among black soldiers. Lincoln replies that their "object is a worthy one, and I shall be glad for all facilities to be afforded them which may not be inconsistent with or a hindrance to our military operations."

This month thus sets the contours of the second half of the war: A confident Union presses a withering but defiant Confederacy, both sides certain of God's favor, while U.S. army ranks swell with soldiers of the very race that the South is determined to keep enslaved in perpetuity. **BT**

And justice for all

I was recently honored to receive notice that I had been named Juror Number #145308. Like you would be, I was excited to get my invitation to report to the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center.

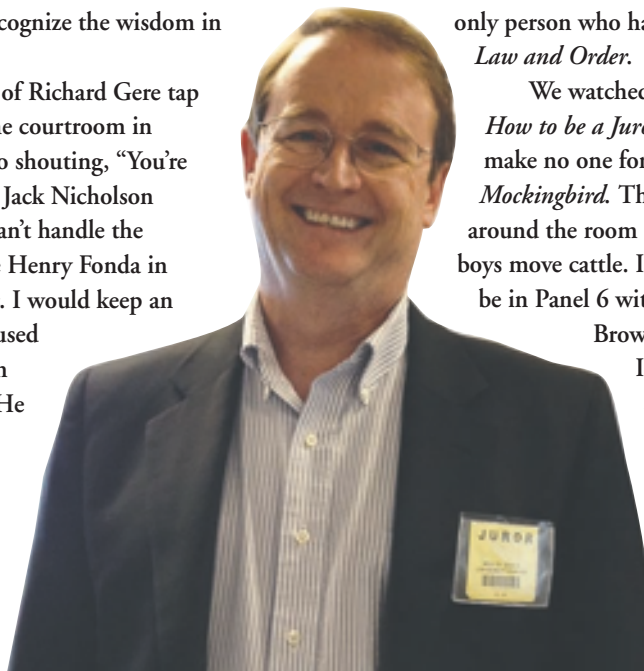
For a few misguided slackers, the goal is to get out of jury duty. I told Carol that I would be home soon. Most lawyers are not eager to try their cases before ministers. This line got me rejected once before: “As a Baptist minister, I think our justice system needs to focus on redemption rather than revenge.”

Conventional wisdom is that if you wear a “Jesus Is Coming Soon” T-shirt, carry a King James Bible, and whistle “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” you will be back for lunch. But deep down I wanted to be picked. These are small dues to pay for living in a country that values justice. I was eager to do my civic duty, and felt no contempt of court.

Juror #145308 started preparing. I read the Book of Judges, which was not as helpful as you might hope. (Samson, in particular, is not an exemplary magistrate.) I looked at 1 Kings 3 where King Solomon suggests, “Cut the baby in half,” but am still not sure the baby would recognize the wisdom in this.

I had dreams of Richard Gere tap dancing around the courtroom in Chicago, Al Pacino shouting, “You’re out of order,” and Jack Nicholson screaming, “You can’t handle the truth!” I would be Henry Fonda in *Twelve Angry Men*. I would keep an innocent man accused of shoplifting from the electric chair. He would owe his life to me and would never know my name.

I got there at 7:40 a.m. for my 8:00



appointment and gathered with 300 other devoted protectors of the Bill of Rights. A few looked a little too eager, as though they were about to burst out: “I would love to be paid \$30 to judge someone. Pick me! Pick me!”

Most seemed to be preparing their excuses:

“I am attracted to the prosecutor. Is that a problem?”

“I don’t understand what’s so great about being impartial.”

“As my mother used to say, ‘You may not be guilty of this, but you probably did something else.’”

“I can tell if people are guilty just by looking at them. Like the guy in the robe.”

Dressing inappropriately was a popular strategy. George wore his baseball cap at an angle that screamed, “I do not belong on a jury.” Miranda was dressed like Kim Kardashian; she would not be chosen to serve on a jury dealing with solicitation. Ivan’s tattoos and chains said, “Felons are not eligible for jury duty. I’ve committed several felonies, but I haven’t gotten caught. Does that count?”

When the bailiff came, he looked nothing like Bull on *Night Court* or Rusty from *People’s Court*. Knowing these references makes me old. They kept explaining who’s who in the courtroom by saying, “If this were *Law and Order*, he would be ...” I am the only person who has never seen *Law and Order*.

We watched a video — *How to be a Juror* — that will make no one forget *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They moved us around the room much like cowboys move cattle. I was thrilled to be in Panel 6 with Judge Carol Brown as Juror #20.

I tried to start a conversation with Juror #19, but Elise had an iPhone.

Panels 1-5 were in courtrooms

when Rusty (not his real name) told us to go to lunch. We were escorted to the “prison food” — as a fellow citizen put it — where I paid \$9 for a “Lucky Sub” that was named after an inmate named Lucky who made the bread early in a long sentence.

By 1:30, it felt like we were doing hard time. I sent Carol a text, “Bring a cake with a file in it.” I started humming Bob Dylan: “Any day now, any day now, I shall be released.” Judge Wapner could have been through a dozen cases by now.

When the bailiff said to Panel 6, “We’re only going to take 15 of you,” jurors 16-19 seemed delighted, but I felt sad as I turned in my plastic badge.

John Milton wrote, “God doth not need man’s work ... They also serve who only stand and wait.” This would have been more applicable if I had not spent the day sitting and waiting.

The Catholic church in Garrison Keiller’s fictional hometown is called “Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility.” Many of us grew up in the “First Baptist Church of Unending Obligation.” We might wish we did not have such a deep-felt need to do our part, but even when we do not recognize it, there is something holy about showing up. **BT**

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

Available as a digital download (ebook) or in print at nurturingfaith.info



A quintet of musicians greets participants in the Baptist World Alliance annual gathering in July as they arrive at the Roaring River Great House near Ocho Rios, Jamaica, for a welcome celebration sponsored by Baptists in the host country. Photo by Tony Cartledge.

Baptists and the Holy Spirit in Ocho Rios

By Tony W. Cartledge

The Baptist International Conference on Theological Education (BICTE) meets every five years in conjunction with the Baptist World Alliance. This year's meeting was in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, where more than a hundred theologians, pastors and other Baptists were surrounded by party-happy vacationers at an aging but all-inclusive resort.

While other guests slept off hangovers or baked on the beach, we Baptists heard papers on a Baptist understanding of the Holy Spirit.

William Brackney of Acadia University shared a paper on "Baptist Contributions to Theological Reflection on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit." Starting with Thomas Helwys, he noted that Baptists have typically focused mostly on Christology, mainly echoing views on the Holy Spirit that reflect other Trinitarian groups and responding to others' doctrinal discussions rather than sparking our own.

Overall, Brackney said, Baptists have

tended to undervalue the third person of the Trinity, but he expressed hope that further dialogue with other Christian groups on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit may bring more "variety and energy to the Body of Christ."

Burchell Taylor, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church near Kingston, Jamaica, offered a paper on "The Holy Spirit and Social Justice." Taylor called for a "Spirit-empowered praxis" that propels believers beyond the walls of the church to join the Spirit in the healing of creation and the promotion of justice and peace for the world.

Day two focused on a continued discussion of Baptists and the Holy Spirit before turning to ecumenical dialogue and emerging trends in theological education.

Graham Hill, of Morling College near Sydney, Australia, spoke on healing as it relates to the atonement and one's understanding of the Holy Spirit. Many Pentecostals and Charismatics believe the Bible promises healing to those who have sufficient faith and enough people praying for them, he said, but he knew

firm believers in that teaching who also died slow and painful deaths.

Hill reviewed several texts often cited as evidence of God's desire to heal (Isa. 53:4-6, Matt. 8:16-17, and 1 Pet. 2:24), and offered a critique of the claims. Texts such as "with his stripes we are healed," spoken of the coming Messiah in Isaiah and cited in the New Testament, are largely metaphorical he said, though not entirely. To the extent that the Messiah was expected to bring restoration to Israel-in-exile's suffering, physical aspects could be involved.

Hill said the Kingdom of God has present and future dimensions. Believers are spiritually healed in this life, and may experience physical healing from time to time (though with no guarantees) while awaiting the ultimate healing that will come with the bodily resurrection. The church needs a broader, more robust, deep, biblically sound theology of healing, he said:

"We are also such pragmatists that we don't want to think too deeply about theological issues imbedded here."

Deji Isaac Ayegboyin of the University of Ibadan in Nigeria wrote on understandings of atonement and the Spirit as they relate to material prosperity. He noted that advocates of the prosperity gospel have become popular, promising material wealth and claiming that God wants it to be that way.

The paper was mainly a critique, noting that the prosperity gospel picks and chooses verses that speak of God's desire for people to prosper while ignoring texts calling for the rich to become poor and indicating that God is often on the side of the poor.

In many cases the church has lost its prophetic voice, Ayegboyin wrote, by buying into the prosperity gospel. The scripture does emphasize positive use of resources, he added, but it is dangerous to conclude that success is due to one's own striving or positive thinking.

Doug Weaver of Baylor University presented a paper on Baptists, the Holy Spirit and corporate worship. Early Baptists, beginning with John Smyth, he noted, spoke often of the role of the Spirit in worship, believing it was a restoration of New Testament worship.

The Spirit played a role both individually and communally in Baptist worship, he said, as seen in baptism, which is intensely personal but also a communal event. The Baptist emphasis on experiential religion depends on a belief that the Spirit is at work in worship in every way, from the inspired scripture to preaching to prayer to music and the individual's response.

An emphasis on the availability of the Spirit also contributed to the Baptist emphasis on the freedom of conscience, he said, believing that God could lead individual believers as they formed beliefs and made decisions.

"A free conscience was integral to authentic worship and tied to each believer's relationship to God," Weaver said.

The past 100 years have seen an explosion of interest in "the explicit longing for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the experience of worship," Weaver acknowledged, as emphasized in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

Baptists have absorbed several aspects of this movement, Weaver said, including contemporary worship's emphasis on heart-touching songs and hands raised in prayer, what he called "a generic evangelical Pentecostalization of worship in Baptist and other churches." **BT**

—Baptists Today's *involvement in and coverage of the Baptist World Alliance is supported by a generous gift from Roy and Charlotte Cook Smith of Winston-Salem, N.C.*

Trying to make sense out of SBC decision making

By John Pierce

In its constant pursuit of a narrowly defined orthodoxy, Southern Baptist Convention leadership refuses to let logic interfere with decision making. Hence, the recent well-publicized efforts to ostracize Boy Scouts and to keep peace with the Calvinists who are gaining ground among them.

Making sense out of how Southern Baptist leaders make decisions — and what rises to the top of their priority list — can be challenging. But why not give it a try?

SBC leaders are bent out of shape that BSA leaders won't, by policy, exclude or dismiss youthful participants who might confess to same-sex orientation. (Sexual behavior, Scouts leaders have continually affirmed, is not permitted in Scouting.)

So the hatchets of several Southern Baptist pastors — including the current SBC president, the past convention president and the chairman of the SBC Executive Committee — have fallen on the merit-badge-seeking, knot-tying boys and troop leaders tied to their congregations.

Logically, one must ask: Will these churches treat youth within their congregations in the same way they want Boy Scouts to be exclusive?

For example: If a faithful teen (perhaps even the son of a minister or deacon) who has long been active in the church confesses to his youth minister that he feels same-sex attraction, will he be booted from the youth group and have his name removed from the church roll?

It is a fair, yet unanswered question.

Apparently, many churches have no problems treating gay and lesbian persons so harshly. A recent Pew Research Center study shows about one-third of gay and lesbian persons stating they have felt unwelcome in a house of worship.

So I guess the strong response from SBC leaders toward the Boy Scouts makes a lot of sense if you don't think about it too much. But taking such actions to their logical conclusions can be baffling.

However, SBC leaders themselves seem baffled by their denominational decline and

can't imagine why everyone would not want to be just like them. So they are attempting to avoid a growing split over Calvinism.

A report from an advisory committee called for "unity" based on the odd idea that it is OK to believe "more" than what's found in the convention's doctrinal statement but not "less." Logically, if one dares to think about it, that means their minimums of faith are the most important ones.

Therefore, for example, a fellow Baptist who believes a woman can be called to pastoral ministry (something SBC Executive Committee President Frank Page once defended as biblical in his doctoral dissertation) does not meet the minimal requirements of Southern Baptists.

However, if a fellow Baptist believes that God died for a predetermined few, rather than for the whole world (as John 3:16 claims and Page argued in his book, *Trouble with the TULIP*), that is an acceptable "more" belief that allows for inclusion within the Southern Baptist fold. To Southern Baptist leaders, that's a minor doctrinal difference compared to the role of women in church leadership.

I'm trying hard to make sense of this.

So if I were interested in being a Southern Baptist again — and I'm not — I could embrace the belief that one of my two daughters is destined for heaven while the other is destined for hell (regardless of the spiritual nurture we provide or her own response to Jesus). But I cannot believe that one of them might receive a divine calling to pastoral ministry.

When you think about it, that's how Southern Baptist leaders believe now — "more" or "less."

But, as one friend asked me: "What if I believe my daughter is predestined to be a pastor?" Don't confuse the matter, please.

Once again, as hard as I try, it is impossible to make sense out of current SBC decision making and priorities. Yet one thing is clear: Southern Baptist leaders prefer to obsess over orthodoxy by holding and defending a narrow view of "being right" that trumps grace and love as well as logic. **BT**

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY JOHN PIERCE

Louisiana layman Kenny Crump is a serving scientist

RUSTON, La. — Risk assessment may not capture the attention of many, but Baptist layman Kenny Crump finds such data intriguing. A scientist who majored in electrical engineering at Louisiana Tech, he did graduate studies in mathematics at the University of Denver and then Montana State University where he earned a Ph.D.

Kenny met his wife, Shirley, through the Baptist Student Union at Louisiana Tech in Ruston where they returned to raise their family. Kenny taught and did research at his alma mater.

However, his growing interest in risk assessment was soon followed by the realization that the field was wide open for research. So Kenny took a one-year leave from teaching to make “a bigger impact on the world” — and became a visiting scientist at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) in North Carolina.

“I found myself doing research in the field of risk assessment and developing statistical models that could be used to set standards for exposure to toxic chemicals,” he said. “The field was undergoing rapid changes at that time, and I was fortunate to become engaged at an opportune time.”

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) adopted some of the methods Kenny had developed, and he began getting requests to work on various projects and provide consultation.

So in 1980 he left his position at Louisiana Tech to begin a consulting company based in Ruston, and traveled widely. Seven years later he sold his company to a Washington, D.C., consulting firm, but continued to work for the firm for another 20 years.

Kenny then returned to Louisiana Tech for three years as a research scientist on projects funded by EPA grants. Today he works out of his home on select projects that interest him. He has made a lasting mark in the important field of determining the impact of toxins on human life.

He was the keynote speaker for an annual meeting of the Society for Risk Analysis, which



Shirley and Kenny Crump

Data *and* Discipleship

commemorated a seminal paper he had written many years earlier.

To date, he has authored 135 scientific papers in peer-reviewed scientific literature and has served on a number of science advisory boards including the Science Advisory Board of the National Center for Toxicological Research, the Science Advisory Board of EPA, the Science Advisory Panel of the Mickey Leland National Urban Air Toxics Research Center, and the Board of Scientific Counselors for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

And while Kenny has also served on several committees of the National Academies of Science, he has not spent his life squirreled away in a lab or at his computer.

For 11 summers, Kenny and Shirley taught English classes in China. One year his class consisted of 10 pastors from some of the largest congregations in the nation.

“Shirley has a passion for helping internationals and has taught an English class every Wednesday at our church for the past 25 years,” he said.

Also the Crumps are engaged in a Sunday school class for internationals that Kenny started in 1993 with Dan Erickson who had come to Louisiana Tech as director of international affairs. For the past seven years, Kenny has served as the teacher — with the class now using the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies within *Baptists Today* for the attentive students who

come to nearby Temple Baptist Church.

Students were from Viet Nam, Uganda, Gabon, China and Armenia on a recent and “pretty typical” Sunday, said the teacher known affectionately as “Dr. Kenny.”

“It’s all about relationships,” said Shirley of their engagement with international students. “That’s what really matters.”

As if that is not enough, Kenny also leads the music (a role he defines as “song-picker-outer”) for a small Baptist church that meets earlier on Sunday mornings and is deeply involved in an ecumenical prison ministry called Kairos.

“It about what is really important,” he said. “It is nonjudgmental and emphasizes the four Ls: love, love, listen, listen.”

The Crumps are well invested in their family too, which includes six grandchildren. One daughter’s family is in Ruston, and the other is in Katy, Texas.

Their son is a medical doctor and researcher at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Cal. He also picked up a master’s degree in theology along the way and further stirred his father’s interest in reading theological works.

Kenny serves on the board of directors of *Baptists Today* and has been treasurer for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of

Louisiana since 2004.

When not engaged in family activities, volunteer service or sorting through risk assessment data, one is most likely to find Kenny on his bike.

For six summers he and his son took long bike trips to destinations in the West or in Europe. In 1993 they rode all the way across Canada.

More recently Kenny has taken his biking adventures to Oregon, California, Hawaii, Ireland and, his favorite, New Zealand.

“I am blessed because Shirley enjoys sagging for me,” said Kenny of the important role of having a support vehicle. “I still often carry my bike on land trips, and I seldom use my car except on Sundays.”

Born and reared in the small town of Haynesville in northern Louisiana, Kenny has seen a lot of the world and done a world of good with his groundbreaking research and caring ministries.

An inmate who participated in a retreat that Kenny helped lead last April said appreciatively: “You treated me with respect.”

That’s the way Kenny and Shirley relate to everyone. They love, love and listen, listen — because “relationships are what really matter.” **BT**



Kenny Crump (left) talks with Bernd Schroeder, chair for mathematics and statistics at Louisiana Tech.

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Still making neighbors

Influence of Mister Rogers continues a decade after his death

PITTSBURGH, Pa. — Fred Rogers, the man behind the long-running *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* children's show, died 10 years ago, but his influence is still felt deeply here, the city he called home.

In June, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary devoted its summer leadership conference to insights from his life and work. The conference drew an eclectic mix of participants, including psychologists and social workers, educators, clergy and laity.

It also functioned as a reunion of various cast members and staffers from the show, which ran on the Public Broadcasting Station from 1968 to 2001. Two films about Rogers were screened, alongside panels on Rogers' ability to handle life transitions creatively.

Rogers' widow, Joanne, wearing a Neighborhood Trolley pin, spoke briefly as well.

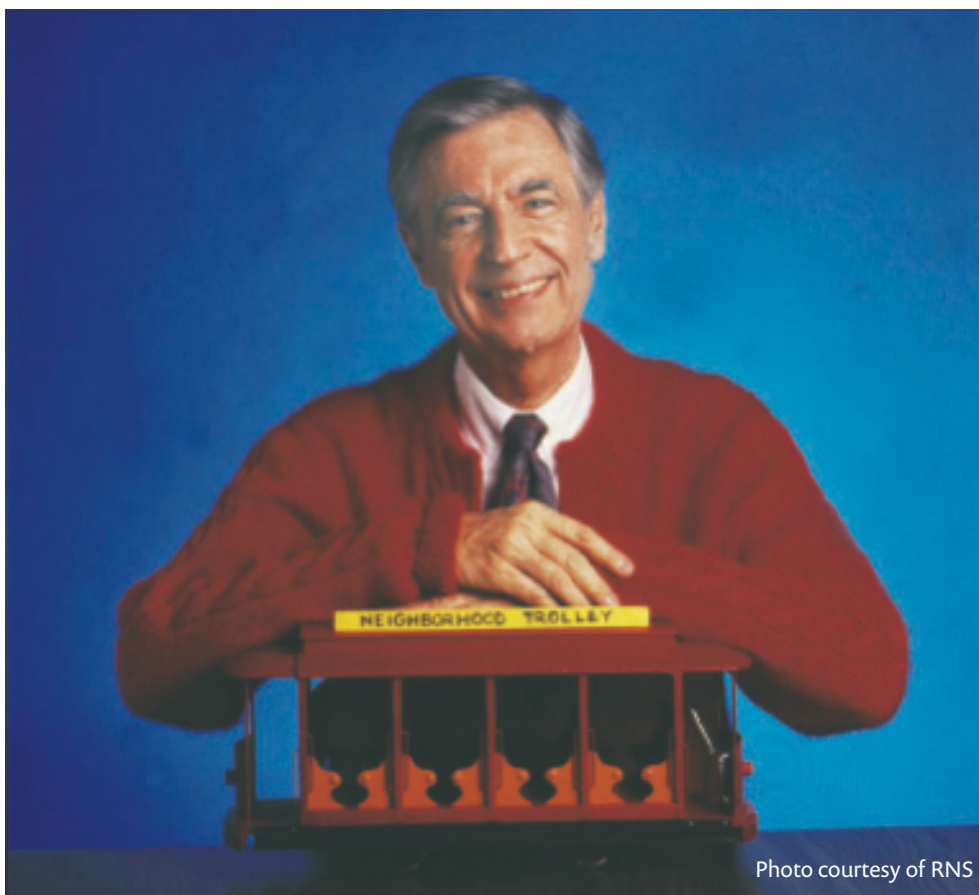
Rogers earned a degree in children's ministry from the seminary and later was ordained a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). He never led a church, but saw his career in broadcasting, including 33 years as writer and star of the Pittsburgh-based children's program, as a ministry.

His show taught children how to respond to challenges, fears and life transitions. And while it was never overtly religious, it cultivated the virtues: neighborliness, hospitality and respect for others.

Children's spirituality "is not an add-on to children's lives but part and parcel of who they are," said Patricia Crawford, associate professor of education at the University of Pittsburgh. She said the conference helped her understand that children's sense of "caring and kindness" needs to be nurtured.

Retired Pittsburgh pediatrician Jane Breck came to the conference to pay tribute to Rogers, who earlier in her career had asked for her help in explaining physical check-ups to children.

She remembered the show's producers visiting her practice in 1993. They wanted to replicate the feel of a real pediatrician's office to



demonstrate the experience of having a physical exam. Breck recalled the producers took with them tongue depressors and otoscopes to inspect ears. Then she was asked to find two children who might be comfortable having a full physical exam on camera.

Now a part-time student at the seminary, Breck recalled how Rogers was attuned to what made children anxious.

She'll never forget the question he asked her: "When you look in my ears, can you see through to my brain?"

"He really was the way he played himself on TV," she said. "Spending time with Fred Rogers left an indelible mark on everyone's soul and psyche."

Judith A. Rubin, the "art lady" on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* for three seasons, screened a documentary on Rogers. She recalled the freedom he gave her on the set to help children and parents explore their creativity.

Her movie examined Rogers' early days on the *The Children's Corner*, a live puppet show

produced by WQED from 1953 to 1961. It also looked at some of the experts Rogers came in contact with — psychologists Erik Erikson, Anna Freud and Margaret McFarland, as well as pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock. Adult audience members sang along as the movie played clips from the children's television show.

James Davison, director of continuing education at the seminary, spoke of the Christian principles he glimpsed in the show, suggesting that the parable of the Good Samaritan formed the basis for the show's central question, "Who is my neighbor?"

Davison believes what was unique about Rogers was his "ideas of how to treat others from his biblical religious background," deepened by Rogers' studies of psychology.

That neighborliness was never just a TV construct. Margaret Eisen Fischer, a Pittsburgh resident, recalled that her son's preschool was out walking one morning on a Pittsburgh street when Fred Rogers saw the group and told them: "I'm glad to know you're my neighbors." **BT**

The sweated crusader

The summer blockbuster movies are sprinkled with heroes who come from other planets, are altered by nuclear radiation, or are simply gifted at violence, but when I hear the word “hero,” I don’t think of make-believe characters that populate comic books and movie screens.

I think of Mister Rogers.

It has been more than 10 years now since Fred McFeely Rogers zipped up his white sweater and sat down to put on new sneakers from St. Peter’s Provision Company, and I miss him.

You can still find reruns of old shows and a web site packed with more lessons than the Land of Make Believe.

But I miss knowing that he would read my letters and write back on a gray note card with a red trolley on the front and a flowing script from a teal-colored Flair pen on the inside — knowing that every word would reflect something of what I’d sent him with affirming thoughts that were as real as the stamp.

He was a friend to me when he had no need to be, and I will never forget it.

Fred was always on a quiet crusade to help people get past their own heavy self-judgment,



Photo by Tony W. Cartledge of a display in his office honoring Fred Rogers, who was supportive following the death of Tony’s daughter due to a drunk driver.

appreciate who God made them to be, and to feel better about themselves.

In *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember*, he said: “Some days, doing ‘the best we can’ may still fall short of what we would like to be able to do, but life isn’t perfect on any front — and doing what we can with what we have is the most we should expect of ourselves or anyone else.”

For those who find ourselves constantly trying to do more than is humanly possible, a recent Family Communications newsletter reminds us of these sage words:

“You rarely have time for everything you want in this life, so you need to make choices. And hopefully your choices can come from a deep sense of who you are.”

For those who had the rare privilege of knowing Fred as friend, just being around him was a constant lesson in self-understanding and other-appreciation.


Almost 20 years ago, on a cold day in December, I sat in Fred’s tiny office above the Pittsburgh studio where *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* was filmed. There was no desk or computer, just a couple of broken-down couches and a chair piled with research materials, hand-written scripts, and toys to autograph for children.

None of his many awards were displayed, but the walls bore inscriptions about love and grace in Hebrew and Greek, along with a large piece of Chinese calligraphy. He said it should be translated: “If you want to see yourself clearly, don’t look in muddy water.”

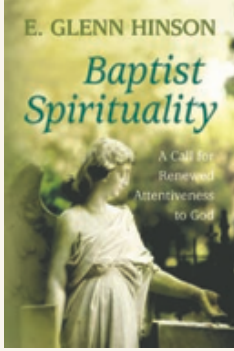
There was nothing muddy about Mister Rogers: he helped you discover that deep sense of who you are, things you knew as a child but have forgotten as an adult. That’s what a hero is to me: someone who not only enriches the world, but also reflects back the goodness and potential that lie in others.

Such living leaves a trail of starry-eyed smiles behind, the happy response of people who know a hero when they see one — and are inspired to be one. **BT**


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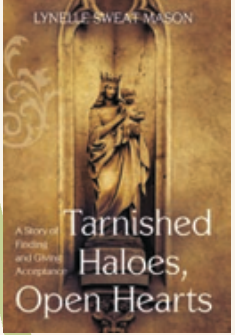
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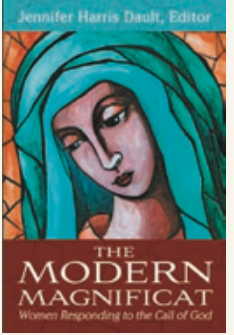


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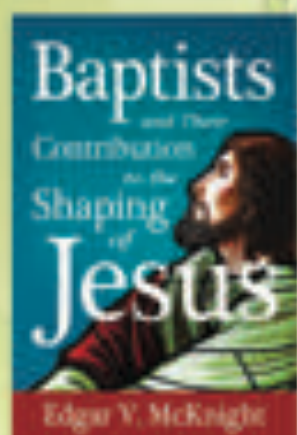
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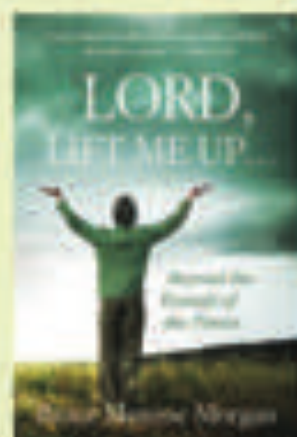
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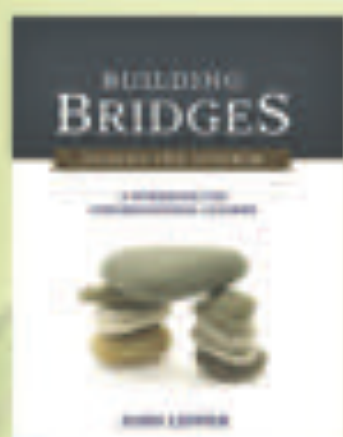
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FAITH

How I became a lectionary preacher

If Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Phil. 3:5), then I lay claim to being a “Baptist of the Baptists.” The Cradle Roll ladies enrolled me before I was born, and my Sunday school lineage includes Beginners, Primaries, Juniors and Intermediates.

I was baptized at age 9, and even secretly enjoyed Training Union when I was a teenager. And, to top it all off, I graduated from an “official” Southern Baptist seminary in due time.

My spiritual formation taught that the preacher must be led by the Spirit to discern from the Almighty just exactly what text to lay before the people. Given 66 choices on any given Sunday, what’s a pastor to do about choosing scripture from which to declare, “Thus saith the Lord”?

I don’t remember the first time I encountered the word “lectionary.” But I had a vague sense that Catholics and some of those “other” denominations had preachers who were told what they had to preach. They couldn’t just pick a text and humbly follow the Spirit like I could.

So for years I dutifully labored selecting texts and building sermon “series” according to the needs of my congregations as best I could. I thought I was being pretty conscientious in trying to cover the Bible over time. I was willing to tackle the occasional Old Testament story, preaching from what a visiting evangelist once called the “white pages” of the Bible due to their lack of underlines and penned-in sermon notes.

After about 10 years of preaching effort, however, I decided to see just how much of the Bible I had covered in my sermons. When

I finished the tally, I was ashamed to see how little of the “Good Book” I had spoken from and how often I returned to my favorite passages and topics. It seemed that the Holy Spirit’s leading often coincided with what I liked to read and talk about from the Bible.

While doing some study in a non-denominational divinity school, I encountered the Revised Common Lectionary in a homiletics class. The “preaching list” I had heard about many years earlier was actually an organized plan to take preachers and their congregations through the Bible (more than 90 percent of it) over the course of three years.

For each Sunday there were four or more texts from which a preacher could pick and choose: one from the Hebrew scripture, one from Psalms, one from an epistle of the New Testament and one from a gospel (alternating among Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.)

I called a Lutheran pastor friend for some help, who enlisted Methodist, Presbyterian and Disciples of Christ ministers to join a scripture study group. I began to discover a whole new world!

I dipped my toe in the water that first year with an extended sermon series I called, “Telling the Story of Jesus from Advent to Easter.” I was still nervous about using the word lectionary in a Baptist church. But, when it was all said and done, they liked it.

I went back to my old habit of building series and topical sermons from scratch — but noticed that it seemed like a lot more work than it used to. Then I stepped in and out of the lectionary for a few more years.

Then I took the plunge, using the lectionary for an entire year.



John Fairless

The church year — telling the story of God’s work through time — begins with Advent (the four Sundays before Christmas) and moves through events such as Epiphany, the baptism of Jesus, Christ’s passion and death, and Easter.

There’s the ascension of Jesus, Pentecost and then a stretch known as “Ordinary Time” — which is a great time to catch up on some of those marvelous Old Testament texts.

By following the lectionary, I was able to give my members a much broader, more theologically diverse diet of Holy Scripture than when I just “picked the texts” on my own. And, true to the promise of Christ, the Spirit was often at work so that events and questions that were on the mind of my listeners were amazingly in sync with the text(s) for the day.

Support for studying the lectionary texts is abundant. Our own *Baptists Today* offers a full Bible study curriculum based on lectionary texts. I became so enthused with the possibilities for preaching, that I began working with my Lutheran friend to publish a weekly commentary website (www.lectionarylab.com.)

The lectionary assures that I will regularly engage with a healthy balance of scripture as I seek God’s word for my congregation. When the Spirit so leads, I can still “step out” of the lectionary to prepare and deliver any relevant topical sermons. Then, all I have to do is “step back” in.

I encourage others to give it a try, and find a group of preachers who are using these texts. Get together to talk and pray about them (the texts, not the preachers!). And, I hope that you will be every bit as amazed and energized as I was. **BT**

—John Fairless is pastor of First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Fla. Resources for lectionary study include textweek.com, lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu, and nurturingfaith.net.

By following the lectionary, I was able to give my members a much broader, more theologically diverse diet of Holy Scripture than when I just “picked the texts” on my own.

Nurturing Faith: *Texts and Themes for 2014*

BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE

*Order the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies within *Baptists Today* at 1-877-752-5658 or nurturingfaith.net.

Jan. 5 – John 1:10-18

“The Word That Walks”

In Jesus we learn what God is like – and how to live as God’s children.

Season of Epiphany

Jan. 12 – Acts 10:34-43

“Who Converted Whom?”

Cornelius and company became Christians, but Peter may have had the most significant conversion of all.

January 19-February 23

Things That Matter

Jan. 19 – 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

“Certain Strength”

Paul thanks God for the Corinthians’ progress in the faith and affirms his confidence in them.

Jan. 26 – 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

“Perilous Polarities”

Divisions and polarization can threaten even strong people, and strong opinions can lead to strong divisions.

Feb. 2 – 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“Foolhardy Wisdom”

Paul’s thoughts on wisdom and foolishness may be surprising.

Feb. 9 – 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

“Spiritual Secrets”

Some things are beyond purely mental comprehension.

Feb. 16 – 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

“Baby Talk”

The Corinthians’ immaturity frustrated Paul, who called them babies and pleaded with them to grow up.

Feb. 23 – 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

“Quality Construction”

All believers begin with the foundation Christ laid; what we build on it is up to us. How do our temples look?

Mar. 2 – Psalm 2

“More Than Meets the Eye”

Believers, like kings in Israel, are “adopted” by God and brought into a special relationship that calls for transformation.

Season of Lent

March 9-April 13

Songs for Serious Seekers

Mar. 9 – Psalm 32

“Forgiveness”

Observing Lent begins with repentance and forgiveness.

Mar. 16 – Psalm 121

“Preservation”

The confidence needed for bold living comes from God.

Mar. 23 – Psalm 95

“Worship”

The closer we come to God, the more we are drawn to worship.

Mar. 30 – Psalm 23

“Trust”

Sheep thrive when they trust the shepherd.

Apr. 6 – Psalm 130

“Hope”

Even the strongest believers face trials that force them to rely on hope.

Apr. 13 – Psalm 118

“Multi-tasking”

The psalmist blessed God, prayed for deliverance and celebrated God’s answer – all at once.

Season of Easter

Apr. 20 – Matthew 28:1-10

“Who’s Afraid?”

The post-resurrection Jesus told the women not to be afraid, but others needed to hear the message more.

April 27-June 1

The Challenges of a Changed Life

Apr. 27 – 1 Peter 1:3-9

“Hopeful Faith”

Faith and hope are closely related; we can’t have one without the other.

May 4 – 1 Peter 1:17-23

“Deep Love”

Deep love isn’t a surface phenomenon; it comes from the heart.

May 11 – 1 Peter 2:13-25

“Paradoxical Living”

How can people be slaves and free at the same time?

May 18 – 1 Peter 2:1-10

“Living Stones”

The temple of God is built of the living stones of God’s people.

May 25 – 1 Peter 3:13-22

“Good Suffering?”

Can anything good come out of suffering?

June 1 – 1 Peter 5:6-11

“Lion Taming”

Temptation never goes away, but it can be tamed.

June 8 – 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

“One and Many”

The gift of the Spirit connects many persons into one body – a marvelous, miraculous feat.

Season after Pentecost

June 15-July 27

Words about Words — from God

June 15 – Genesis 1:1-2:4a

“And God Said ...”

The Bible begins with a lesson on the creative power of divine speech.

June 22 – Jeremiah 20:7-13

“Fire in the Bones”

Jeremiah learned that a personal message from God isn’t easy to ignore.

June 29 – Jeremiah 28:1-17

“Not Just Yoking Around ...”

The words Jeremiah heard led to some peculiar behavior and intense confrontations. Are we ready for that?

July 6 – Zechariah 9:9-13

“Prisoners of Hope”

Those who have been captured by hope are free to hear God’s promise of freedom.

July 13 – Isaiah 55:6-13

“The Fertile Word”

Where God’s words are planted, amazing things grow.

July 20 – Isaiah 44:6-20

“The Real Thing”

God’s word to Isaiah reveals the glory of God and the folly of idolatry.

July 27 – 1 Kings 3:3-15

“A Listening Heart”

Deep wisdom comes from listening – to God.

Aug. 3 – Matthew 14:13-21

“A Picnic to Remember”

Jesus fed the multitudes with far more than physical food.

August 10-August 31

Talking Tough

Aug. 10 – Romans 10:5-15

“No Distinction”

We may draw social lines consciously or unconsciously, but Paul reminds us that God does no such thing: that salvation is for all.

Aug. 17 – Romans 11:1-32

“What about Israel?”

Paul struggled to understand and explain the ongoing place of Israel in God’s plan. It’s not an easy issue.

Aug. 24 – Romans 12:1-8

“Everyone Is Gifted”

God’s grace, like God’s salvation, is available to all. Every believer is gifted for service and responsible to be a good steward of those gifts.

On the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies

by Tony Cartledge
in *Baptists Today*:

“This curriculum ... is a huge time-saver over what I had been doing. All the gathering, culling and creating have been done, and I feel like the online resources are quite helpful. THANK YOU!”

—ELAINE ANDERSON SARRATT,
SPARTANBURG, S.C.

“Thank You!”

“This has been a **wonderful study for our class**. None of us had ever ventured into a study of Revelation because we were worried about not understanding the symbolism that seemed so difficult to understand. We feel this book has become in our American culture a symbol about ‘doom and gloom’ rather than the book of encouragement it was written to be. All of the class members have **really enjoyed this six-week study**. Tony’s videos have been extremely helpful. Thanks again for helping us stretch our comfort zone and realize that this is a book to encourage and not threaten us in our walk with Jesus.”

—ANN BOLINGER, WEAVERVILLE, N.C.

Aug. 31 – Romans 12:9-21

“A Labor of Love”

Paul unleashes a string of imperatives – all of which can be fulfilled through genuine love.

September 7-September 28
Hard Lessons

Sept. 7 – Matthew 18:15-20

“Confrontation and Community”

What should we do with sinners in the church?

Sept. 14 – Matthew 18:21-35

“The Power of Forgiveness”

Forgiveness is not a one-time thing; it is a life-long attitude.

Sept. 21 – Matthew 20:1-16

“A Question of Fairness”

When the first are last and the last first, what’s fair about that?

Sept. 28 – Matthew 21:23-32

“Who’s in Charge?”

Honoring human authority while remaining faithful to God can be tricky.

October 5-November 23

Growing Pains

Oct. 5 – Psalm 19

“Silent Speech”

God speaks in many ways; not all of them are audible.

Oct. 12 – Exodus 32:1-14

“Rebels Without a Cause”

The golden calf episode was a tragedy; Moses’ intercession was instructive.

Oct. 19 – Exodus 33:12-23

“Holy Boldness”

Moses’ determination to seek God *and* intercede for the people earned a reward.

Oct. 26 – Deuteronomy 34:1-12

“A Good End to a Good Life”

Moses’ death was a reminder of both possibilities and limitations.

Nov. 2 – Joshua 3:7-17

“Crossing the Jordan”

Crossing rivers with no bridges calls for creativity and faith.

Nov. 9 – Joshua 24:1-25

“Making Choices”

Joshua’s call to “choose this day” is really a call to make good choices every day.

Nov. 16 – Judges 4:1-17

“What Women Can Do”

Women can do whatever needs doing – as illustrated by Deborah and Jael.

Nov. 23 – Ezekiel 34:1-31

“The Good Shepherd”

Sometimes it’s good to be a sheep.

Season of Advent

November 30-December 21

An Adventurous Advent

Nov. 30 – Isaiah 64:1-9

“The Cry of the Clay”

The Advent season begins with a cry of hope.

Dec. 7 – 2 Peter 3:8-15a

“While We Are Waiting”

Israel and Christians alike look toward a coming day of consummation. While waiting, our behavior matters.

Dec. 14 – 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24

“Imperatives Abounding”

Paul could get very specific about what God expects from those who anticipate the Messiah’s arrival.

Dec. 21 – Luke 1:26-38

“When Heaven Comes to Earth”

Gabriel’s visit to Mary set world-changing events in motion.

Season of Christmas

Dec. 28 – Galatians 4:4-7

“Children of God”

As we celebrate a baby in a manger, we remember that we are all children of God.

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“How do we live out the life of Christ as a people in the midst of those who deal with despair, who deal with fear, who ask what future they will have where the gap between rich and poor seems to grow ever wider?”

American Baptists re-elect Medley to two-year term

Roy Medley, American Baptist Churches USA general secretary since 2002, has been elected to a two-year term as head of the 1.3-million-member body that met in metropolitan Kansas City in June. He plans to retire when the term ends Dec. 31, 2015.

American Baptist News Service reported Medley's re-election June 19, the second day of a three-day meeting of the ABC/USA Board of General Ministries.

A native of Ringgold, Ga., who joined American Baptists as a young adult, Medley served previously as executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of New Jersey, one of 34 regions within the denomination, from 1992 until 2001. He was ordained in 1975 by First Baptist Church of Trenton, N.J., where he served as a seminary intern and then associate pastor (1974-1977).

The biennial gathering also marked

the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the first American Baptist missionaries, Ann and Adoniram Judson, to Burma, now known as Myanmar, and the 375th anniversary of the First Baptist Church in America in Providence, R.I.



Roy Medley

The gathering took on a new format that grouped participants in “Mission Summit Conversations” to explore a wide range of ministry and mission topics.

“I want people to come away from these conversations with a

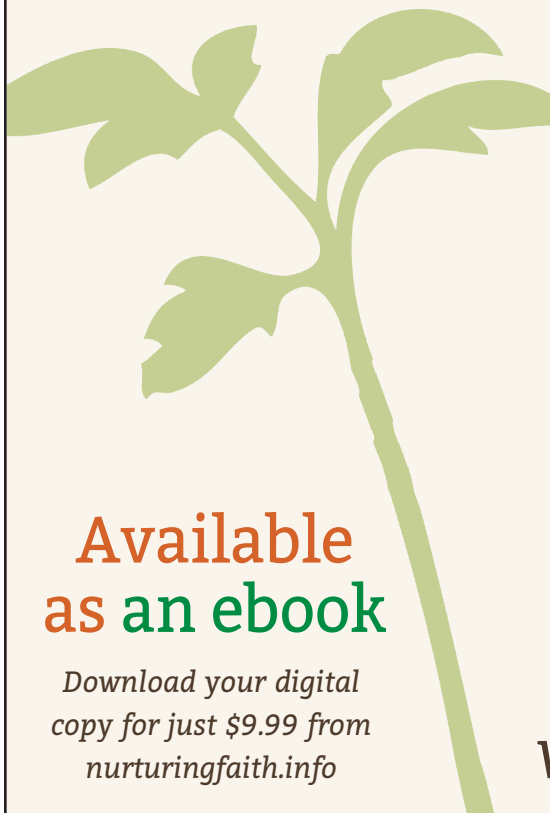
sense of encouragement derived from our history, but also with a sense of freedom,” said Medley, “a freedom to try new things.”

He also encouraged American Baptists to ask new questions.

“How do we live out the life of Christ as a people in the midst of those who deal with despair, who deal with fear, who ask what future they will have where the gap between rich and poor seems to grow ever wider? Is there a way for us to be a blessing to our community that we have not been before?” **BT**

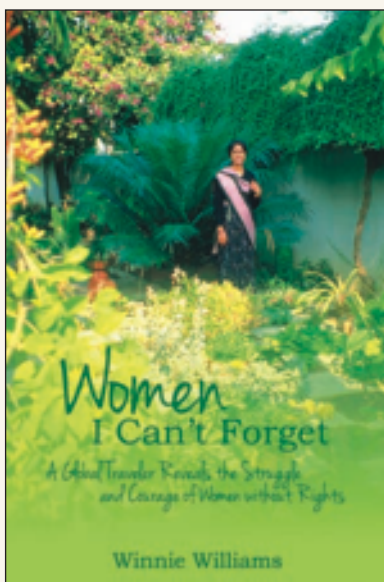
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Young woman advocates *for women near and far*

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — At age 21, Lily Womble's advocacy for young women has already had a rippling effect around the world.

When Lily was an eighth grader, her youth group at Vestavia Hills Baptist Church in Birmingham looked to International Justice Mission to learn about justice issues around the world.

"We studied human trafficking and slavery, praying for ministries and people around the world facing these issues, and it was very inspirational and life-giving for me," she said.

Older friends in the group formed a local chapter of IJM and held a concert to raise awareness and money. It opened Lily's eyes to the reality of making a difference through action.

Then, in the 11th grade, she used a school project to address human trafficking and was horrified to discover that human trafficking wasn't just an issue in other parts of the world.

"As a young person, I felt so safe and was blessed with a good family," said Womble. "I couldn't believe there were girls just like me who were literally enslaved in our own backyard. I couldn't stop at a research paper."

Lily met Sara Jane Camacho, founder of Freedom to Thrive, Alabama's anti-trafficking coalition, and offered to start a youth component. She called it "JustUs."

"I began going to youth groups at churches to tell them about human trafficking, sex trafficking in particular, and its presence in Alabama," she said. "We made t-shirts and ornaments to raise money to help fund the anti-trafficking coalition."

JustUs had grown to approximately 50 teens when Camacho and several Alabama state representatives wrote Alabama's first anti-trafficking bill. Lily was invited to go with them to Montgomery to present the bill to the legislature.

JustUs members called on legislators to inform them of the bill and to lobby for its passage. For a week the youth handed out cards about the bill and asked people to sign their



t-shirts as an act of support.

The bill passed a year later, and the lobbying efforts of JustUs and the leadership of a 17-year-old made an impression on the community.

After entering Millsaps College, Lily discovered a non-profit organization called Smart Girls At The Party that highlights girls who make a difference by being themselves. So Lily began interviewing young girls in Jackson, Miss., about their hopes and dreams.

She also attended the Women in the World conference in New York City where she met Jane Sloan, vice president of development for The Global Fund for Women. Sloan invited Lily to lunch a couple of days later and made it clear that she wanted to invest in Lily and her future.

"I have been inspired by incredible women all of my life, especially in the church," said Womble. "But this was that pivotal moment when a professional woman believed in me and wanted me to succeed."

Sloan offered to send Lily to the Association of Women's Rights in Development conference in Turkey so she could learn about the movements on behalf of women going on around the world. Three weeks later Lily and her mother were on a plane to Turkey.

There she interviewed women living in current and former conflict zones. She heard

how women's rights were uniquely affected by war and post-war experiences.

Returning to Millsaps, she became the campus ambassador for *Half the Sky* and brought the documentary to her school, showing it to hundreds of her peers. She also began doing workshops in schools to raise awareness about global issues relating to girls, such as education and equality. But she also saw many of the same issues in Mississippi.

"The issues of poor self-esteem, access to opportunities, the poverty divide, and issues regarding education are just as prevalent in Jackson, Miss., as they are in other countries," said Womble.

This spring, Lily went to Cameroon in Central Africa with nine other students to study development, social change, and women's issues while living with a local family and traveling around the country. After returning, she was asked to be a panelist at the Women Deliver conference in Malaysia.

The panel dealt with how to sustain women's movements — and Lily shared information on JustUs and her continuing quest to make a difference for women around the world.

"Before (going to Cameroon) I would have said that the solution to many issues, such as inequality, was to send a girl to school," said Womble. "But now I've learned that, though education is an important solution, it is not the only solution that we need to be looking at."

In Cameroon, rape has been on the rise since the 1970s where the majority of victims are ages 11 to 15, said Womble. At the same time more girls are attending school.

"Learning that paradox opened my eyes," she said. "... We tend to simplify things here ... and I'm uncomfortable with that."

Now Lily is seeking where God is leading her from this point.

"I was on a plane over Japan, coming back from Malaysia, looking at the sunset and realized that it's not my job to come up with a vision ... that has already been done and it is God's," she said. "I guess my job now is to live into that vision." **BT**



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