



7 churches
of the
Revelation

32

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Birthday Blessings

Creative parties can
teach lessons on giving | **4**

'FROM MOUTH TO EAR'

Can preaching still
communicate? | **31**



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Baptist World Alliance president John Upton (left) and General Secretary Neville Callam express thanks to representatives of the Baptist Alliance of Turkey for their hospitality in Izmir. Photo by Tony W. Cartledge

PERSPECTIVES

The importance of audience recognition and respect **7**

By John Pierce

Eight things the church needs to say **11**

By Tom Ehrich

What to do when your minister leaves **14**

By David W. Hull

IN THE NEWS

Edit wars: Wikipedia's eight religious pages people can't stop editing **8**

Nursing home evangelism gets mixed reviews **9**

Golden Gate Seminary campus fetches \$85 million **10**

Turkish official: Women shouldn't laugh in public **10**

Most Americans say shelter, not rush to deport, child migrants **10**

Rabbi David Saperstein tapped as religious freedom ambassador **10**

BWA addresses issues, encourages Turkish Baptists **30**

Scholars say women in the early church often overlooked **35**



The Whole Story:

Rabbi expresses gratitude for Baptist congregation's hospitality

FEATURES

ARTS CAMP: Birmingham congregation takes summer classes to rural setting **15**

By Terri Byrd

BAPTIST THEOLOGY: Part 3 **36**

By Fisher Humphreys

ASK the THEOLOGIAN: Part 4 **38**

Quotation Remarks	6
Editorial	7
Baptists and the Civil War	12
Classifieds	28
Lighter Side	29
Reblog	40

Cover photo by LeAnn Gunter Johns. Patrick Johns of Macon, Ga., celebrated his first birthday with guests bringing books that were donated to the local children's hospital.

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WE CAN HELP

Birthday parties can teach lessons on giving

MACON, Ga. — Patrick Johns' first birthday celebration featured colorful decorations, his two-handed dismantling of a well-decorated cake, and nice presents brought by happy guests. The books they brought, however, were in honor of Patrick's birthday but not ultimately for him.

"A couple of months ago, our local news station covered the Children's Miracle Network event for our children's hospital," said Patrick's mother, LeAnn Gunter Johns of Macon. "One request caught my attention and I thought, 'We can help with that!'"

BOOKS OF LOVE

Each year, the Children's Hospital of Central Georgia sends a book to each child who has spent extensive time in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). This continues until the child is 5 years old, LeAnn learned.

"We love reading books in our house so this really stuck with me," said LeAnn, a minister and mother of two sons. "As I was planning our younger son Patrick's first birthday, I thought about how many books and toys we already have in our playroom and remembered the story about the children's hospital needing books."

She called the child life specialist at the hospital to make sure this was still a need. The response: "Absolutely! We always need children's books!"

So LeAnn and her husband Barry, a physician, decided to invite family and friends to attend Patrick's first birthday party — and to bring children's books to be donated to the children's hospital.

TWO BAGS FULL

"At first, some of the guests asked questions about why we were doing it, but most of them were supportive and thought it was a great idea," said LeAnn. "We ended up with two bags of children's books."

So, along with others, *Amelia Bedelia* and *Pete the Cat* came to the party but soon left like other guests. They will end up in the hands of children whose early years have included challenges unknown to most families.

Someday Patrick will have greater awareness of and, his parents hope, a deep appreciation for the unique way his first birthday was marked.

"I plan on including this story in Patrick's baby book as a special way to celebrate his first birthday — sharing his love of books with other children," his mother said.

NOT ABOUT STUFF

Birthday celebrations in which children bring food, clothing or toy donations, or make gifts to an animal shelter or other charity in the name of the birthday girl or boy, or aid in caring for those in need,

serve as good reminders that one of the main reasons for the church is to help others, said Jessica Asbell, minister to

children at First Baptist Church of Roswell, Ga.

Such unique parties, she said, serve two purposes: providing items and services to those in need and reminding those with much that the real joys of life aren't found in material gain.

"Ideally speaking, this approach helps keep us from getting so caught up in our culture's yearning for

more and more stuff, better toys, the next best thing," she said. "Celebrations such as these help us step outside of ourselves and truly see others."

Jessica also noted that those who attend the party might gain a better appreciation for what it means to be a Christian and engaged in congregational life.

"This shows people outside of the church that we are sincere, that we want to help others, and that we truly do care," she said. "Birthday celebrations in which people volunteer their time or bring donations can help the church be the church, the light of Jesus, helping others move through the darkness."

"I would love to see more of these types of celebrations happen," she added, noting that not only birthday parties for children hold such possibilities. "We had a senior adult couple ask for canned food instead of presents for their anniversary party."

CAUGHT VISION

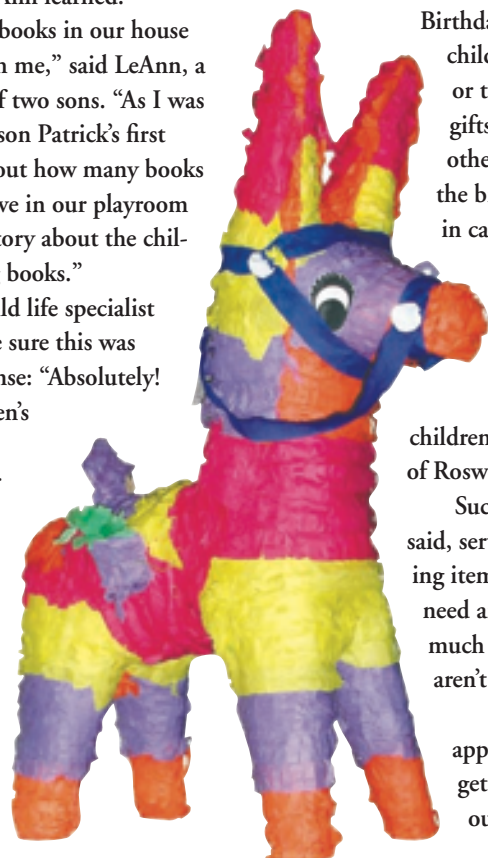
Julie Long, associate pastor and minister of children and families at First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, said children old enough to do so will likely enjoy exploring with their parents some gift-giving possibilities.

"I think it works best when the idea comes from the passion of the child," she said. "Most of the children I have observed who have done this have chosen a project that hits home with them."

Sometimes there is a personal connection through either an organization where the child has volunteered or a cause that has touched a family member or friend. One child asked for pencils for a school in Liberia, she said, because they had met some students who came from there and learned of the need.

"There are no shortages of places or people with need," said Julie. "They are not hard to find."

Awareness of needs and a desire to help are rooted in congregational life, she noted.



These books and others given by family and friends in honor of Patrick Johns' first birthday will end up in the hands of children who've spent significant time in the children's hospital.



PICK A THEME

Themed birthday parties are a good way to approach alternative gift giving, said Jessica Asbell, minister to children at First Baptist Church of Roswell, Ga.

“For instance, a superhero-themed birthday party could easily have the tagline of “Save the world from hunger” or “Save our children from hunger,” she said. “With this, children could bring canned goods, peanut butter, rice, etc.”

Here are some websites she suggested for getting ideas:

- pbs.org/parents/birthday-parties/tips_post/beyond-birthday-presents/
- gkccf.org/give/charitable-birthday-parties

Local food bank websites, Asbell added, may give ideas about what items are needed. Also, she suggested contacting a local women and children's shelter to see what they need.

Children desiring to help others don't have to end their birthday celebrations empty-handed, Jessica added.

“If children still bring regular presents to the party, the birthday person could choose to keep three toys and give the rest of the presents to a shelter that has children,” she said. “This could be a good compromise for the child, as he or she would be allowed to keep several of his/her presents, while at the same time giving to those who don't have very much.”

“Many of these celebrations that I've observed were born out of their experiences in church,” she said. “The kids learn about a mission organization or people in need, and then they want to respond.”

This serves as a reminder to church leaders, she explained, that the connection to the church's mission can go both ways: The church needs to keep its mission stories in front of the people, including the children, and then the church needs to support and assist children when they catch the vision.

GREAT POSSIBILITIES

Ruth DuCharme, children's minister at Highland Hills Baptist Church in Macon, remembered a birthday party invitation that asked for donations to the church's mission fund in honor of the birthday girl rather

than bringing gifts.

Another, she recalled, asked guests to bring pet foods for a local animal shelter.

Carrie Veal, minister to children at Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., has observed more families opting for charitable birthday celebrations in recent years.

“The most common is a toy drive for Toys for Tots,” she said. “I think for children this is the most tangible act for them.”

Carrie said she gets particularly excited when birthday celebrations are tied to the mission of the church.

“One of my main goals in ministry is to incorporate children into the life of the church, local and global,” she said. “If families are connected with their church and their church is passionate about literacy, families could host a book drive in the place of presents. Churches

have the wonderful opportunity of encouraging families and specifically children to think about the world around them and how they can make a difference in it.”

However, she noted, this unique approach to observing a birthday or other milestone should be something warmly embraced by the one being honored.

“Children will respond to helping others,” said Carrie. “This is seen every year at Vacation Bible Schools. Children will bring their pennies and dimes as an offering for a variety of non-profits. This can be easily transferred on the smaller scale of parties.”

Carrie, who recently moved to the Charlotte church, said she is interested in talking with her colleagues about how to better incorporate this very personalized approach to ministry into congregational life. **BT**

quotation remarks

“I can’t tell you how often I’ve spoken at a Baptist church (American or Cooperative) and had readers come up to me and say, ‘I can’t believe they let you speak in a Baptist church!’ because they assumed all Baptist churches are like Southern Baptist churches.”

—Blogger Rachel Held Evans, urging churches to not “assume people know all the nuances of your particular tradition” (rachelheldevans.com)

“Americans are not intrinsically allergic to Christians, but rather certain expressions of Christianity... Most people dislike Christian jerks because they are jerks, not because they are Christian.”

—Jonathan Merritt, senior columnist for Religion News Service

“You can see this manifest today in living room Bible studies across North America where lovely Christian people, with no training whatsoever, drink decaf, eat brownies and ask each other, ‘What does this text mean to you?’ Not only do they get the interpretation wrong, but very often end up quoting verses that really aren’t there.”

—Craig Hazen, director of the Christian Apologetics program at Biola University, on the frequency of familiar sayings being attributed to the Bible (CNN)

“There is a devastatingly harmful teaching present in churches across America, which claims that physical ‘blessings’ are a sure sign of God’s favor. Not only does this fly in the face of the entire Bible, but it is also a grievous offense to those Christians going through immense persecution in countries all over the world, often in impoverished circumstances.”

—Caleb Flores, blogging at madeformore.com

“I think it’s simply his desire to be coherent with the Christian message; he sees organized crime as radically incompatible with Christianity. And he is reaffirming that this has been forgotten or watered down in the past.”

—Philip Willan, author of *The Vatican at War*, on Pope Francis’ strong condemnation of the Mafia (RNS)

“First of all, factually none of the story is true. Amal’s mother is not Druze. She has not been to Beirut since Amal and I have been dating, and she is in no way against the marriage, but none of that is the issue.”

—Actor George Clooney to USA Today, responding to a British tabloid’s claim that his fiancée’s mother opposes their marriage on religious grounds (RNS)

“I have argued that both Israelis and Palestinians are victims of post-traumatic stress disorder... Yet healing is impossible until those who are victims of PTSD are willing to work on overcoming it. And this is precisely where the American Jewish community and Jews around the world have taken a turn that is disastrous, by turning the Israeli nation state into ‘the Jewish state’ and making Israel into an idol to be worshiped rather than a political entity like any other political entity, with strengths and deep flaws.”

—Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun Magazine* (Salon)

“One of the characteristics of great leaders who stay fresh is curiosity. They are just relentlessly curious, and the curiosity keeps them growing.”

—Carey Nieuwbof, an author and the lead pastor of Connexus Church near Toronto (careynieuwbof.com)

“For those of us poised to lead the next generation of Jesus followers into a better cultural expression of Christianity, one of the first things we need to do is to stop pretending we’re victims. It’s not attractive. It’s not helping. It’s not even true. One doesn’t become the victim of bullying when they’re told that they can’t make others the victim of bullying.”

—Missiologist Benjamin L. Corey, who blogs at *Formerly Fundie* (patheos.com)

“They could have been kids in any one of our Sunday schools. They had a great spirit about them, of determination, and also faces that have seen things that no child should ever have to see.”

—Russell Moore, president of Southern Baptists’ Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, after visiting unaccompanied children who crossed the U.S. border (MSNBC)

“When we gather as the Church, we are not coming as critics... We dare not approach the throne of an objectively great, timeless, unchanging and holy God with a consumer mindset that says we can only worship him if our subjective preferential demands are met.”

—Stephen Miller, pastor of worship arts at *The Journey* in St. Louis (Relevant)

The importance of audience recognition and respect

Good communication is more than spitting out words and keeping the attention of listeners. Awareness of and respect for one's audience are vitally important.

Many moons ago, Professor George Braswell — in a seminary class on cross-cultural communications — reminded us students that different subgroups/audiences use different languages. Therefore, it is crucial to speak a language that the particular group understands in order to be effective.

Christians at large, various denominations and traditions, and individual congregations have their own languages — often a series of code words and acronyms.

A good communicator knows when and where to use shared language and when to speak in terms more widely known and understood. For example, how one speaks in the pulpit or to a Sunday school class should be different than when speaking to a civic club, an ecumenical gathering or before the county commission.

However, even our congregations (and especially the larger audiences to which we often speak) are becoming increasingly diverse in background and beliefs. So good communication in all settings requires even more attention to the awareness, language and sensitivities employed.

An important part of that awareness is the recognition that what we might hold as authoritative may not be so widely held. To assume so leads to miscommunication.

Even worse, to seek to force one's source or sources of religious authority on all others in the public arena often alienates listeners and creates animosity.

It is wholly appropriate for a minister (or other Christian person) to speak of the Bible's claims as authoritative during a sermon, Bible study or in any other church setting. (Even if "what the Bible says" really means "what I think the Bible says.")

However, some Christian leaders get confused about their audiences and authority when speaking in the public arena. Or they simply insist that what they claim as truth should be legally enforced as truth for all.

The concern is not that one give up his or her commitment to biblical authority, but recognize that not everyone shares this source of authority — nor should they be expected to in places of religious diversity and freedom.

To imply that one's own biblical perspective be the norm for all others fails a basic understanding of religious liberty, American civics and the audience at hand.



In a recent article from Baptist Press, Pastor Bate Garman of Life Church in Morganton, N.C., is reported to have read a statement

from the North Carolina Pastors' Network in support of the state's ban on same-sex marriage. According to the report, he was speaking on behalf of the ministerial organization's president, David Kistler.

"We the NCPN believe marriage is God's institution," Garman read from the statement. "We also believe the Scriptures to be totally clear that marriage is between one man and one woman."

He appealed to something authoritative for himself and his ministerial colleagues. The problem is that the good reverend assumes wrongly that the state or nation is his church — or should, at least, carry out their beliefs.

Confessing that one's personal motivation for a particular cause is rooted in faith is fitting and expected. The faithful often respond to the sense of a divine call based on one's interpretation of scripture.

One good example is the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, in which Christian (and other religious) convictions motivated advocates to seek change. But the injustice being addressed was not only an issue

of "sin" as understood theologically, but also an obvious violation of that which widely called for equality and justice for all.

The words offered by the ministers group in North Carolina fit a congregation willing to hear them. A secular nation (and that's a good thing in that it allows for faith to freely flourish) does not (make that, should not) base its laws on what anyone thinks is "totally clear" according to a particular interpretation of one's choice of holy scriptures.

Though historically verifiable, this important point is always challenged by those who foolishly argue that this nation's laws are based on the Bible — and therefore their interpretations of the Bible should be the law of the land.

Such a theocratic perspective requires one to ignore the overwhelming history of the United States that details how carefully — thanks to Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and courageous Baptists who influenced their good thinking — the Founders sought to protect all Americans from being subject to anyone's understanding or application of the Bible or any other religious pressure.

The reverend from the hills of North Carolina and all of us would do well to remember: When speaking to your church or any other gathering of shared believers, it is wholly appropriate to tell them (in a shared language) what you believe your Bible tells them to do or not do. But when speaking to the citizens of your county, state or nation, the same authority doesn't work.

Taking such an approach does not disrespect one's own deep convictions. Rather it acknowledges a clearer understanding of the larger audience and the benefits of liberty.

We all have the right and privilege to argue our cases for what we believe governing documents should allow or not allow and to make clear our personal preferences. But how we do that is important.

And, always, it is more effective to know the audiences to which we speak — and to respect them. **BT**

"A good communicator knows when and where to use shared language and when to speak in terms more widely known and understood."

edit \e-dət\ vt wars \wärs\ n

Wikipedia's eight religious pages people can't stop editing

When he was a student at Brigham Young University three years ago, Anthony Willey came across a Wikipedia page on Mormons. What he read filled him with frustration.

The article focused on polygamy, which seemed odd since Mormons officially outlawed the practice in 1890.

"It didn't say what Mormons believe or what made them unique," Willey said. "I had the thought, 'Who's editing this stuff?' and that got me hooked."

Since editing that page and adding 50 percent to the content, Willey has made more than 8,000 edits to the editable online encyclopedia, mostly on articles related to Mormonism. His top edited pages include entries on Joseph Smith, Mormons, Mormonism, and Black people and Mormonism.

The problem confronting many Wikipedia editors is that religion elicits passion — and often, more than a little vitriol as believers and critics spar over facts, sources and context. For "Wikipedians" like Willey, trying to put a lid on the online hate speech that can be endemic to Wikipedia entries is a key part of their job.

Religion is among several of the top 100 altered topics on Wikipedia, according to a recent list published by *Five Thirty Eight*. Former President George W. Bush is the most contested entry, but Jesus (No. 5) and the Catholic Church (No. 7) fall closely behind.

Islam's Prophet Muhammad (No. 35) and Pope John Paul II (No. 82) are included, as well as all manner of religions, like Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, Christianity and Scientology. And countries and topics with religious sensitivities are also controversial, including global warming and Israel.

Wikipedia is the fifth most-trafficked website on the Internet and its complex policies

and regulations for editing the open-source site total nearly 150,000 words.

Any registered user can create an entry on Wikipedia, a collaboratively edited encyclopedia. Volunteers write Wikipedia's 30 million articles in 287 languages.

Willey, 29, is now a Wikipedia administrator, which gives him more administrative privileges within the volunteer-driven website. The physics graduate is looking for full-time work, so his editing is only an occasional side project. And it's only partly driven by his faith.

"I don't edit as an agent of my religion," Willey said. "I'm not going out of my way to promote a certain point of view. I am motivated by when people say things that aren't true."

It could be tempting for Wikipedia editors to portray their own faiths in the best light, or for people outside of the faith to paint a negative picture. In 2009, Wikipedia banned people using the Church of Scientology's computers and some of Scientology's critics from changing Wikipedia articles about Scientology. Wikipedia said members of the church and some critics engaged in "edit wars" by adding or removing complimentary or disparaging material.

"The worst casualties have been biographies of living people, where attempts have been repeatedly made to slant the article either towards or against the subject, depending on the point of view of the contributing editor," a committee wrote in its decision to ban users.

Some users might go out of their way to portray a religion in a bad light. Several years ago, a user who went by the name Duke53 attempted to ensure Mormonism's sacred undergarments got as much exposure as possible — it's not a topic the church generally likes to discuss. He added images to as many articles as possible, including to Wikipedia articles

such as "Clothing" and "Church etiquette," regardless of whether the images were relevant.

When Willey edits an article, he says, he avoids inserting opinions and instead uses a trusted source, such as Richard Bushman, a respected emeritus historian at Columbia University.

Willey will occasionally edit pages on other religions, such as Islam or Baha'i, or general articles on Christianity. "Nobody likes to be misrepresented," he said.

Those who engage in outright hate speech are dealt with swiftly and blocked, but combating more subtle hate speech can be tricky.

"If somebody's abiding by the rules, it's hard to block a contributor who's writing an article if they're ambiguously promoting something," Willey said.

Roger Nicholson was on the same path as Willey, editing Wikipedia pages related to Mormonism for two years to experience what the editing was like. His story, featured in the *Deseret News*, ended after he decided all the "edit wars" weren't worth the headaches.

"It's kind of like the Wild West of the Internet," said Nicholson, who works with a group called FairMormon instead. "You could spend days and accomplish the change of a few sentences and that was it."

Among the Wikipedians, a large percentage self-identify as atheists, followed by Christians, Muslims, Pastafarians (devotees of the farcical religion of the Flying Spaghetti Monster) and Jews.

Many of the smaller religious groups have editors who are deeply passionate about them, but some smaller religions that aren't as appealing to Westerners (including Native American or Central Asian American traditions) are covered less well, Carter said.

Using Wikipedia's rules, Carter says, religion can be difficult to independently verify, especially when there's a range of opinions about what events took place and what they mean. **BT**



Anthony Willey

Bus stop to eternity

Nursing home evangelism gets mixed reviews

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Rhonda Rowe and her team gathered around a diagram of the nursing home's floor plan and determined how to split up to avoid praying with anyone twice.

Rowe made her way to a room where a 93-year-old woman lay in her bed while her 87-year-old roommate sat in a wheelchair. Rowe knelt between them and went through her "Nursing Home Gospel Soul-Winning Script."

"Fill me with your Holy Spirit and fire of God," the 93-year-old repeated. "I'm on my way to heaven. I have Jesus in my heart."

Rowe was soon off to the next room, but before she left, acknowledged that she might never see them again on earth. "I'll see you girls in heaven!" she chirped.

Welcome to the world of nursing home evangelism, where teams of lay evangelists target senior citizens for one last chance in this life for glory in the next.

Rowe, who attends The River at Tampa Bay Church, was in town for a three-week "Celebrate America" revival in downtown Washington led by the church's pastor, Rodney Howard-Browne. Each night, attendees heard Howard-Browne preach at the Daughters of the American Revolution's Constitution Hall. By day, as others hit the subway stations or visited Capitol Hill, Rowe and other team members made a beeline for local nursing homes.

"Do you know, for sure, that you will spend eternity in heaven?" Rowe would ask a typical resident.

Pastor Eric Gonyon, coordinator of the Celebrate America revival, reviewed the rules before the teams departed.

"If you do go to the nursing homes or assisted living homes, there's HIPAA rules and we do follow them," he told about 60 people at a training session, referring to the Health

Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, the federal law that governs patient privacy. "You can't give follow-up information in nursing homes and assisted living homes. We don't bring anything in."

Ministry officials had contacted a nursing home here ahead of time to get permission for the visit. After checking in, the team immediately went to work for about an hour.

Sometimes, Rowe and her five-member team asked residents who couldn't speak for nonverbal answers, such as blinking their eyes or squeezing a hand if they agreed with the script.

The website of Revival Ministries International includes detailed instructions on how to search Google for nursing homes, determine the size of a visiting team based on the number of beds and tally the decisions garnered during the visits.

Of the millions of souls the ministry claims to have won, Gonyon says more than 500,000 came from commitments and commitments at retirement and nursing homes since 2007.

"Pastor Rodney says: 'The retirement home is the bus stop to eternity,'" Gonyon said.

"Many of these people, they don't have friends or families that visit," said Lauren Bowerfind, a 27-year-old student at Howard-Browne's River Bible Institute who was on Rowe's team. "We're the only Jesus that they may see."

Some experts on elder spirituality said the methods give them pause. Nursing home residents are, after all, a mostly captive audience — many of them hobbled by mental as well as physical ailments.

"In a sense, it's good that they were remembering older people who often are just totally not remembered, but I do just have some reservations about the sort of conversion emphasis," said Nancy Gordon, director of California Lutheran Homes Center for Spirituality and Aging.

John McFadden, a retired United Church of Christ minister and the memory care chaplain at Appleton Health Care Center in Wisconsin, said spiritual care in elderly home settings ranges from a "wonderful, person-centered" approach to those "fearful that some of the residents are going to go to hell if they don't do the deathbed confessions." Most religious groups, he said, tend toward the first option.

But McFadden said a Catholic resident, for instance, who might not be aware of a conservative Protestant context, could think, "These are church people, so it's got to be OK and kind of goes with the flow."

During Rowe's recent visit here, some residents were more receptive than others. A 57-year-old man halted a solitaire game on his laptop and let Elizabeth Christensen, another Bible institute student, pray for "a favorable report" at an upcoming doctor's appointment.

Abebech Tebeje, a first-time trainee from Silver Spring, Md., found her English script was too hard for a bedridden resident to repeat. When she switched to Amharic from her native Ethiopia, the man followed along and repeated her words.

But a woman, who was standing in another room when Tebeje approached, listened as she started the script and eventually said: "Not today. I've got to think about it."

In the hallway, where the 1950s song "Lollipop" was piped through the sound system, the evangelists discussed whether each discussion merited an addition to their count or not. Once outside, Bowerfind tallied their total: 16.

To those who question their mission, Gonyon said the ministry answers to a higher power.

"We have no response to those who are critics other than obeying Jesus and the Great Commission to preach the gospel regardless of the physical condition of the hearer," he said. "Eternity will answer their questions!" **BT**

"Some experts on elder spirituality said the methods give them pause. Nursing home residents are, after all, a mostly captive audience — many of them hobbled by mental as well as physical ailments."

Turkish official: Women shouldn't laugh in public

(USA Today/RNS) — Many Turkish women were doubled over with laughter July 29 after their country's deputy leader said in a speech assailing "moral corruption" that women should not laugh in public and should not talk on their mobile phones so much.

Speaking at a celebration marking the end of Ramadan, Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc took aim at contemporary life in Turkey, arguing for more chastity, humility and reading of the Quran and less consumerism, oil consumption and sex in the media, the *Hurriyet Daily News* reported.

Social media lit up as news of the speech spread, with hundreds of Turkish women posting photos of themselves and friends laughing in public places.

Most Americans say shelter, not rush to deport, child migrants

(RNS) — Most Americans say the waves of children crossing into the United States from Central America are refugees fleeing danger at home. And they say the U.S. should support these children while reviewing their cases, not deport them immediately according to a new survey by the Public Religion Research Institute.

Democrats (80 percent), independents (69 percent) and Republicans (57 percent) favor offering support to unaccompanied children while a process to review their cases gets underway.

Most major religious groups say the same, including white evangelical Protestants (56 percent), white main-line Protestants (67 percent), minority Protestants (74 percent), Catholics (75 percent) and the religiously unaffiliated (75 percent).

Church of England approves women bishops

(RNS) — After 20 years of turmoil and angry debate, the General Synod of the Church of England said "yes" to women bishops. At a July meeting in York, the General Synod gave final approval to legislation introducing the changes by the required two-thirds majority. Overall, the Synod voted 351-72 on the measure. Ten abstained. **BT**

Golden Gate Seminary campus fetches \$85M

(ABP) — A picturesque 126-acre Southern Baptist seminary campus with sweeping views of San Francisco Bay brought \$85 million in a sale finalized recently.

Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary plans to use sale proceeds to relocate its main campus in Mill Valley, Calif., to Southern California, and for a new regional campus in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Seminary President Jeff Iorg said in a press release that the deal adds \$50 million into an endowment, which took 70 years

to gather a total of \$21 million prior to the property sale. The sale includes a two-year lease-back, allowing the seminary to continue operations at the current site while officials finalize an agreement for the new campus.

Golden Gate trustees voted in March to sell the prime real estate located seven miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge and purchased in 1953 for \$400,000. The buyer is North Coast Land Holdings, a billion-dollar trust of a family foundation started with wealth from oil and ranching in Texas a century ago. **BT**

Court: Ground Zero cross can stay at 9/11 museum

(RNS) — A cross-shaped beam from the wreckage of the World Trade Center can remain on display in the National Sept. 11 Memorial and Museum at Ground Zero, a three-judge panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled, dismissing a lawsuit brought by atheists.

American Atheists filed a federal suit in 2012 claiming the 17-foot display at the museum built with a mix of public and private funds was unconstitutional. The group said its members suffered from both physical and emotional damages

from the presence of the beamed cross, resulting in headaches, indigestion and mental pain.

The atheist group filed an appeal after a lower court dismissed the lawsuit, shifting the focus from the cross to asking for an added plaque that would say something like "atheists died, too."

An observer would understand that the cross was also an inclusive symbol for any persons seeking hope and comfort in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, federal Judge Reena Raggi wrote in the court's decision. **BT**



Rabbi tapped as ambassador for religious freedom

(RNS) — President Obama tapped Rabbi David Saperstein as the next ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, the first non-Christian to hold the job, which was created in 1998.

If confirmed by Congress, he will head the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, and will be tasked with monitoring religious freedom abuses around the world.

A Reform rabbi and lawyer, Saperstein, 66, has led the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism for 40 years, and has spent his career in Washington, focusing on social justice and religious freedom issues. He was instrumental in the 1993 passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which requires the government to show a compelling reason for any action that impinges upon the exercise of religion. **BT**

School paddling declines though support continues

(USA Today/RNS) — The use of corporal punishment on disobedient students — commonly known as paddling — is banned this school year in three counties in Florida and two in North Carolina. That leaves hundreds of school districts in the 19 states where the practice is still legal.

As the number of studies showing the negative effects that corporal punishment can

have on children has increased, the number of students paddled in public schools nationally has decreased — going from 342,038 in 2000 to 217,814 in 2009-10, according to the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

Studies have shown that in states where paddling is allowed, it's used disproportionately on minority students and those with mental, physical and emotional disabilities. **BT**

By Tom Ehrich , RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

Eight things the church needs to say

If Christians stopped bickering about church, presenting sex as a first-order concern, telling other people how to lead their lives and lending our name to minor-league politicians, what would we have to say?

We need to figure that out, because we are wearing out our welcome as tax-avoiding, sex-obsessed moral scolds and amateur politicians.

In fact, I think we are getting tired of ourselves. Who wants to devote life and loyalty to a religion that debates trifles and bullies the outsider?



So what would we say and do? No one thing, of course, because we are an extraordinarily diverse assembly of believers. But I think there are a few common words we would say.

ONE: We would say the name “Jesus.” We might mean different things by that name, but he is the center, the reason we exist.

TWO: Allowing ample room for our diversity, we would say what we mean by faith in God. Not how right we are and how wrong others are, but an I-message: Here’s why I believe in God.

THREE: We would tell stories about God’s impact on our lives. Not grand doctrines, not airtight theories, not definitions of who’s inside the circle and who’s outside, but stories of personal encounter.

FOUR: We would listen to other stories, respectfully, not defensively, eager to hear what our fellow Christian has to say.

FIVE: We would each tell as honestly as we can how we are trying to lead our lives in the light of our encounters and stories. We would sketch the bridge between faith and action.

SIX: We would tell what we see in the world — not in the woe-is-me, sky-is-falling, Satan-is-winning manner people expect from us — but just what we see and how we think God cares about it.

SEVEN: We would speak of hope, a durable, solid-rock hope that God is God, and God can use us to make a difference.

EIGHT: We would talk of joy. Not giddiness, not even happiness, as the world understands happiness, but that deeper response to God that feels whole and peaceful.

Personally, I think these eight things are what we ache to say. They are why we walked in the door of a church in the first place. They are why we stay, despite abundant reasons for leaving.

Everyone has a theory about “why people are leaving the church,” “why millennials don’t come to church,” “why churches are dying” and “what’s wrong with society.”

Personally, I think we should stop worrying about institutional outcomes — especially outcomes that we hope will prove we were right all along — and try instead just to be hopeful, joyful, active people of faith.

I think we should take our parts in the great political debates — power and wealth, after all, were Jesus’ primary concern — but then agree that, whether X or Y gets elected, God will still grieve our cruelties and sufferings, and we will all have much work to do as believers.

Whatever the label — progressive or conservative, contemporary or traditional, denominational or nondenominational — we will each have something unique and necessary to contribute.

There is more binding us than dividing us. For division comes from our small and self-ish places. Binding comes from God. **BT**

—Tom Ehrich, a church consultant and Episcopal priest based in New York, is a columnist for Religion News Service.

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BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

The fall of Atlanta to Union armies on Sept. 2 dominates this month's storyline. Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood, unable to prevent Union Gen. William T. Sherman's advance upon Atlanta, abandons the city, but not before ordering the burning of all military supplies and installations. The city is aflame as Sherman's troops march in.

Upon occupying Atlanta, Sherman sends a message to U.S. President Abraham Lincoln announcing that "Atlanta is ours, and fairly won." Slaves remaining in the city welcome their newfound freedom, while white civilians are soon ordered to leave the city. Columns of refugees flow southward by rail, horse, wagon, and carriage and on foot. Many of Atlanta's white Baptists relocate to Macon and, in the weeks and months to come, worship in the city's First Baptist Church, joining other Atlantans who previously fled to Macon.

Following the capture of Atlanta, Abraham Lincoln pens a letter to Eliza Gurney, a Quaker widow, in which his words echo his Baptist Calvinist upbringing:

The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.

So significant is the capture of Atlanta that the president sets aside Sept. 5 as a national day of celebration in the United States. The victory ultimately assures Lincoln's re-election in the November presidential election.

The harsh blow to the Confederacy in Georgia is followed by setbacks for the South in Virginia. The soldiers in Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, by now having defended Petersburg for months



in trench warfare, are growing desperate. Food supplies run out mid-month. Fortunately, a successful raid to capture nearby cattle provides temporary relief.

Meanwhile, Confederate forces are driven out of the Shenandoah Valley, after which Union troops destroy the region's crops to further deprive Lee's army of food. Late in the month Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant begins an offensive to breach Confederate lines at Petersburg and assault Richmond. Grant gains ground, but Lee successfully counter-attacks, temporarily holding back the tide. The inevitable, however, has been set in motion. It is only a matter of time before Richmond, the Confederate capital, falls to the enemy.

As the North celebrates the capture of Atlanta and Lee worries about the fate of Richmond, a routine notice of a runaway slave appears in the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, an ordinary offer of a reward that hints of the resistance of the city's black Baptist community to slavery and white supremacy:

Two hundred and Fifty dollars Reward for my Servant, Edward, twenty or twenty-one years old, black, stout and likely; has a scar near or upon one ear; is a good house servant. He left my farm on Sunday night, the 28th ultimo, and is, I believe, in Richmond, where he has relatives and friends. He may possibly be found at the African Church, or other meetings of Baptist negroes.

150 YEARS AGO

September 1864

Even as clear heads north and south realize the end of black slavery is near, a desperate slaveholding culture, reflected among Southern Baptist leaders, clings with determined ferocity to the religiously-fueled certainty that liberty is for whites only. One Southern Baptist editor this month, echoing decades of Southern Baptist pro-slavery rhetoric, condemns the abolitionist "Yankee nation" as "blinded by fanaticism and infidelity" in their attempts to destroy the South's slave-based way of life.

Even as the Confederacy is collapsing, able-bodied white men are bound by duty to resist the invading northern hordes. Readers of Southern Baptist newspapers this month are again reminded that deserters from the Confederate Army are ungodly traitors deserving of death.

On the home front, Baptist associational meetings throughout the Confederacy this month reflect a weariness of the war. In such gatherings, many white Baptists remain defiant, some by now have lapsed into silence, and others fear — whether openly or quietly — that the war is lost.

Conversely, the future for black Americans in the South, Baptists included, is looking brighter with each passing day. **BT**

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



‘Beehive shower’

Gourley’s Yellowstone photo takes the grand prize

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK — Visitors to the world’s first national park have much to see with abundant wildlife, scenic vistas and approximately 10,000 thermal features.

Now they can also view Bruce Gourley’s photo of Beehive Geyser that won him the grand prize in the Yellowstone Park Foundation’s “Capturing Wonderland” photo contest.

Gourley, executive director of the Baptist History and Heritage Society and online editor for *Baptists Today*, is owner of the popular website, Yellowstone.net. He lives in Bozeman, Mont., and visits the park often with his camera in tow.

In an interview with the Foundation, he told of how he captured the award-winning image:

“Early one overcast morning in June of this year, I turned onto the drive leading to the Old Faithful Inn parking lot, as I have

hundreds of times over the years. But that morning a spectacular sight greeted me, a sight I had never seen before.

“Beehive was erupting in all her glory, which I had seen many times previously. Yet at that moment the wind was blowing firmly to the west, and the view from my distant vantage point on a small rise was dramatic. Sheets of wind-carried spray were cascading westward, forming a misty veil that made a line of lodgepole [pines] in the foreground stand out in stark contrast.”

Bruce said he quickly parked his car, grabbed his camera and got out to shoot the scene. Later in the day, when reviewing his photos, he realized his good fortune in the time of his arrival.

“The iconic nature of the photo led me to process it in black and white, for an even more dramatic effect,” he said.

To view the photo online, visit brucegourley.com/photography where this image and others are available for purchase. **BT**

What to do when your minister leaves

By David W. Hull

We lifted, grunted and sweated on a hot summer night to load a rental truck with a few belongings. My wife had been called as a pastor in another state, and this truck contained a few pieces of furniture and books to help her get started until the rest of our furniture arrived a few months later.

Because of her call to serve, I had announced my retirement from pastoral ministry in order to move to where Jane will be my pastor. In the midst of this sadness over leaving and excitement over going, several guys from our church showed up to help us load the truck.

It is easy and fun to unload the truck when a new minister arrives, but it is a special kind of love and support to do the heavy lifting required when a minister leaves.

I thought of that great passage from Acts 20:17-38 when the Apostle Paul bids the Ephesian elders goodbye: "When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship" (vv. 36-38, NRSV).

The passage ends with, "They brought him to the ship." These guys were doing the same thing in another ritual of farewell. They brought me to the rental truck with the same generosity of spirit that the folks in Ephesus had done long ago.

My departure from the pastoral ministry after 35 years has given me a great opportunity to reflect on what happens when a minister

leaves a church. I realize that there are many kinds of leavings these days.

Some are abrupt and messy, such as forced terminations or moral failures. Others are in response to the call of God to serve in another place or in another form of ministry. Whatever the cause for the leaving, it seems to me that a healthy church will always follow the lead of the Ephesian church.

Guided by this great passage from Acts 20, and based on my personal experiences this summer of leaving the First Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala., I suggest that churches think about doing the following things when a minister leaves.



Pray (v. 36) — Whatever the reason for the leaving, your minister will need your prayers. This person has prayed for you in worship, in hospital rooms and funeral homes. A good minister knows that prayer is vital to all that happens in the work of God.

So, the best gift you can give at the time of departure is to pray. A healthy church knows that at times of transition the minister will be praying for the congregation and the people will pray for the minister. That is what Paul and the people in Ephesus did. It is not that complicated to do — but too often forgotten.

When your minister leaves, will you pray?

Grieve (vv. 37-38) — There is always grief when a minister leaves a church. Regardless of the reasons for the leaving, pain results and tears often flow. That is how it should be.

It should never be easy to bring an ending to the ministry bonds between a minister and the church. Ministry is so much about relationships that there is no way to transition from the most intimate of working relationships without grief.

The Ephesians teach us well — go ahead and weep. Grief is how we respond to loss, and the departure of a minister creates a loss. I am grieving over leaving a church I loved and served for 12 years.

I have shed my own tears, even though there is gladness and excitement about a new chapter of ministry that lies ahead.

When your minister leaves, will you grieve?

Embrace (v. 37) — What a powerful picture! In the midst of their tears from sadness and grief, the Ephesians "embraced Paul and kissed him." Go ahead and grieve, but don't let your grief settle into anger or bitterness that is a possible response when hurting.

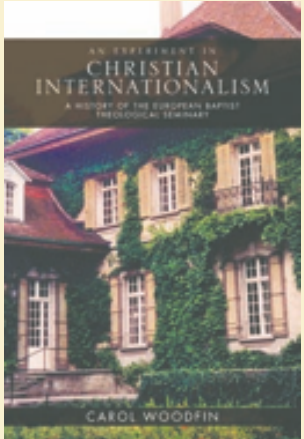
Instead, let your grief be transformed into gratitude. Allow your thankfulness for the service of your minister to lead you to bless, affirm, "embrace" and "kiss" as your minister leaves. A church that is able to "embrace" a minister when he or she leaves will be the kind of church who will openly embrace the next minister.

When your minister leaves, will you embrace?

A healthy church will pray, grieve and embrace as a minister leaves. This is the best way to accompany the minister to the ship.

This journey to the ship — or the truck — is done in faith because you trust in the God who will soon send someone your way with a truck to unload. **BT**

—David Hull, who recently retired as pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala., is the Georgia coordinator for the Center for Healthy Churches. He lives in Watkinsville, Ga., where his wife Jane is a pastor.




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Arts CAMP

Birmingham congregation takes summer classes to rural Perry County

MARION, Ala. — It was an overcast day, but the spirit was bright as children danced along the sidewalk of Judson College on a July day. Black and white, ages 6 to 12, they were switching classes at Seed Camp, an arts camp created by Birmingham's Vestavia Hills Baptist Church in partnership with the college.

"I'm headed to photography!" called out one little girl with a big grin.

"I was in silk screening," said an older boy, "and I scanned my drawing into a computer."

The arts camp came about because Vestavia Hill's missions committee was interested in partnership ministry with regional engagement. Mike McBrayer, minister of discipleship and missions, explored the possibilities. Returning to Perry County, Ala., was of primary interest.

Perry County is home to Judson College and Sowing Seeds of Hope, a rural poverty initiative with the Together for Hope program of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In recent years Vestavia Hills had offered an arts camp to children in their own community. Called "Arts on the Mountain," the camp had experienced a lot of success.



Minister of missions Mike McBrayer (first row, second from left) and children's minister Nancy Akins (top row, right) of Birmingham's Vestavia Hills Baptist Church helped assemble a team of almost 30 adults to lead an arts camp in Marion, Ala. **BELOW:** Vestavia Hills pastor Gary Furr teaches arts camp participants to pick guitars.

McBrayer spoke about the Perry County possibility with minister of music Terre Johnson and children's choir coordinator Beth McGinnis. All believed they could take components of the Arts on the Mountain Camp to the rural setting.

As they began to dream about an arts camp in Perry County, they contacted Gwen McCorquodale, dean of the education department at Judson College and a member of Vestavia Hills. She had been very invested in and involved with the school system in Marion, Ala.

Gwen was excited about the prospect of an arts camp provided by her church and held at Judson College. She connected church leaders with Scott Bullard, Judson's vice president and academic dean.

Nancy Akins, Vestavia's minister of children, joined McBrayer and McGinnis to assemble a team, shape the program and secure needed resources. They put together an artistic team of almost 30 adults to travel to Perry County to lead classes.

Between 50 and 70 children participated in the camp each day. Some students were children of professors and other college employees. Others came from throughout Marion and the surrounding rural communities.

Programming included classes in silk screening, photography, choir, creative writing, drama, guitar, recorder, origami and recreation.

Gary Furr, pastor of Vestavia Hills Baptist Church and a member of a bluegrass band called Shades Mountain Air, led a class in which he taught the basics of guitar, banjo and mandolin.

"In our class on 'Strings and Things,' a

series of guests helped me introduce instruments to kids, and we watched as experienced players gave them the opportunity to try out a violin, guitar, mandolin or banjo," he said. "Most of all we talked about how music brings people together and gives them something to enjoy all of their lives — as each player told about learning at their ages and how they found their instruments."

"One little boy, about 11 years old, took the mandolin from an instructor and, with a little guidance, started making rhythmic chops like he'd done it forever," Furr added. "We might see him on stage one day!"

Reflecting on the camp later, McBrayer noted how the kids who came to the camp brought their own gifts to the experience.

"They were grateful for the week of camp and expressed how glad they were to have something new and special to do during a week in the summer."

McBrayer drove the bus to pick up the kids for camp and take them back home. "By the second day, they were showing up at the bus stop early and would get on the bus saying, 'We've been waiting for you for an hour!'"

One of the best reminders of the reason for hosting an arts camp came from Terrell, the kind of kid who brought laughter and dancing wherever he went. He hopped on the bus every morning after the first day with a big smile and a cheery, "I love you, Mike!"

And off to camp they would go. **BT**

—Terri Byrd is the coordinator for Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

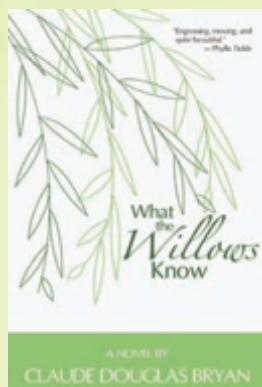
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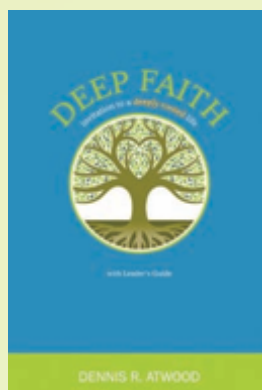


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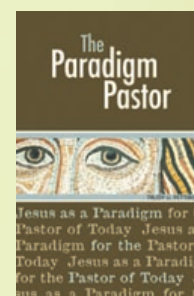


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Growing Pains

Oct. 5, 2014

Silent Speech
Psalm 19

Oct. 12, 2014

Rebels Without a Cause
Exodus 32:1-14

Oct. 19, 2014

Holy Boldness
Exodus 33:12-23

Oct. 26, 2014

A Good End to a Good Life
Deuteronomy 34:1-12

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Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Psalm 19

Oct. 5, 2014

Silent Speech

It has happened to you, hasn't it? Perhaps you were sitting on a mountainside, or by the ocean, and the sky was amazing. Maybe the heavens were brilliant blue and populated with towering clouds like mounds of cotton candy. Maybe you were agog over the brilliant light show of a colorful sunset, or watching the dawning sun crack the horizon and leap into view – and it was as if you heard God's own voice saying to you: "I'm here." 📌

The psalmist had never flown among cumulous pillars as we can today, but he had seen thunderclouds stream in from the Mediterranean Sea and drop their payloads across the hills of Judah. He had watched the sun slide gently through vibrant layers of color when the winds called *hamsin* filled the air with desert dust.

And he had heard God speak without words.

Words without sound (vv. 1-6)

Psalm 19 is a favorite psalm for many people, but also a curious one: It appears to consist of two different psalms that have been combined into one. 📌 The first six verses of the psalm, which is labeled as part of the Davidic collection, speak in majestic terms of God's self-revelation in the glory of the sky and the daily movements of the sun. The latter part shifts to a shorter and more repetitive rhythm while giving praise for God's commandments.

The effect of moving from the first section to the second is jarring, but



Psalm 19:3-4 –
"There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

there is a connection: Both parts of the psalm speak of God's self-revelation, through the heavens in vv. 1-6, and through the law in vv. 7-14. Though the style, vocabulary, cadence, and content of the two sections are quite different, the psalmist's conjunction of the poems effectively demonstrates that God's message can be revealed either with words or without them.

The psalm begins with a poetic celebration of God's splendor as revealed in the expansive beauty of the sky: "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." Note the repetition between the first and second halves of the verse, a typical style of Hebrew poetry known as "synonymous parallelism." 📌 In this verse, as in other examples throughout Psalm 19, the second line of the verse repeats or expands upon the thought expressed in the first line.

In v. 1, "the heavens" and "the firmament" both refer to what we would call the sky. The ancient Hebrews did not understand, as we do, that the earth is round, with an atmosphere held in place

by gravity, giving way to the vacuum of space. They thought of the earth as being flat and topped by a solid dome (the firmament), keeping out cosmic waters above and below the earth.

The ancients imagined that the sun, moon, and stars followed set patterns or tracks set into the dome-like firmament, while clouds floated in the space beneath. Our Copernican model of the universe is quite different, but speaks even more loudly of God's greatness. Imagine what the psalmist would have said if he had been able to grasp the place of our earth as a tiny dot near the edge of one galaxy among millions of galaxies. For those who believe God is the creator of all things, the wonder of God's creation becomes far more expansive than the psalmist could ever comprehend.

The heavens speak constantly, the psalmist says, through both day and night (v. 2). 📌 The astounding beauty of clouds and sun shouts glory during the day, and the unfettered glow of the stars in a land with no electricity to fuel competing ground-light puts on a

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nightly show that would have been awe-inspiring. **U**

While v. 2 speaks of the heavens gushing forth “speech” and declaring “knowledge,” vv. 3-4a clarify that heavenly speech requires no words: “There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.” The plural verbs refer to the heavens, which speak in both day and night.

In vv. 4b-6, the psalmist focuses on the sun as a particular witness of divine glory. God has set up a heavenly tent for the sun, he says, from which it emerges each day like a proud bridegroom on his wedding day, or like a strong runner eager to begin his course. As the personified sun runs his circuit from one end of the heavens to the other, “nothing is hid from its heat” – a reminder that nothing hides from God, either.

If you felt inspired to write a poem or devotional thought about how God has spoken to you through the wonder of creation, what would you write about? Would you echo the psalmist’s fascination with the heavens, or speak of God’s presence in a mountain vista, a majestic waterfall, or a tropical beach? Have you sensed God’s glory in the bright blue of glacier melt, or the colorful fish of a coral reef?

Can you think of other ways in which God speaks without words?

Sweetness without sugar (vv. 7-10)

As noted above, Psalm 19 makes an abrupt shift in v. 7. The cadence is less musical and more pedantic, and the theme turns from vistas of sky to matters of law.

Many readers would consider the move from heavenly heights to legal tenets to be a major comedown, but faithful Hebrews saw the law as the basis of their life with God, and thus a source of daily inspiration. The law was no collection of moribund rules, but a set of principles that could “revive the soul” and “make wise the simple” (v. 7), bringing joy to the heart and

enlightenment to the eyes (v. 8).

Note the series of synonyms in vv. 7-9: laws, decrees, precepts, commandments, and ordinances all relate to the covenant between God and Israel. They bring such spiritual profit because all are “of the LORD.” The “fear of the LORD” in v. 9 is not another synonym for God’s laws, but the mindset that motivates one to find inspiration in divine guidelines for life that are pure, lasting, true, and “righteous altogether” (v. 9). [See the online “Hardest Question” for more on this.]

God’s law in all of its manifestations is more appealing than the finest gold or the sweetest honey, the psalmist insists (v. 10). Note how repetition is used for emphasis: The law is more desirable than gold – “even much fine gold.” It is sweeter than honey – even “drippings of the honeycomb.”

Have you ever thought of the law as more enviable than gold or more delicious than the sweetest baklava? Probably not – but can you imagine living in a world where there are no laws, where everyone can do as he or she pleases and get away with it, where property rights are not respected, where no system exists to provide services for the common good?

The societal laws that bring order to the world in which we live may not excite us, but life would be very different — and much less pleasant — without them. For Israel, the source of the law was God, and it served not only to maintain societal order, but also to ensure a proper relationship with God. The psalmist recognized that as a source of daily encouragement and revelation from God.

Devotion without guile (vv. 11-14)

With v. 11, the psalmist turns from celebrating God’s law to praying for the ability to keep every precept and avoid every fault, even those of which he was

unaware (vv. 11-12). Most of us have more than enough known failures to confess, so the psalmist’s worries about being forgiven of hidden faults may seem over the top, but it illustrates the depth of his commitment to keeping God’s teachings.

The translation of v. 13 can go in one of two directions. Literally, it begins “Also keep your servant from proud (ones) . . .” The Hebrew word translated “proud” or “presumptuous” is a plural adjective, but what does it modify? The NRSV assumes that it describes bad company – insolent people whose harmful influence the psalmist hopes to avoid.

Most translations, however, see “proud” or “presumptuous” as referring back to the word for “sins” or “errors” in the previous verse. As the psalmist sought to avoid unknown faults, he also asked God to keep him from more obvious sins. Thus, NIV11 has “Keep your servant also from willful sins,” and NET has “Moreover, keep me from committing flagrant sins” (HCSB, NASB95, and KJV are similar).

Thus, the psalmist fears falling under the sway of willful sins, not presumptuous people, as he seeks a blameless life, free of “great transgression” (v. 13). **U**

The psalm concludes with a verse that millions have memorized: “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer” (v. 14).

The psalmist began his prayer by applauding God’s ability to speak through heavenly wonders, even without words. He continued by praising God’s gift of the law – revealed through words – that taught him to live rightly. He then closed the prayer with a plea that his own words and thoughts might be pleasing to the God who empowered and delivered him.

What are some ways you believe God has spoken to you? What kind of words do you use in speaking of yourself to God? Self-revelation works in both directions. **BT**

Bible Study

Exodus 32:1-14

with Tony W. Cartledge

Oct. 12, 2014

Rebels Without a Cause

Humans have a remarkable ability to shape things to their own way of thinking, including their view of God. We may not be conscious of it – or like to admit it – but many of us have customized our theology to suit our own comfort level. In other words, we want to relate to God on our own terms, rather than God’s terms.

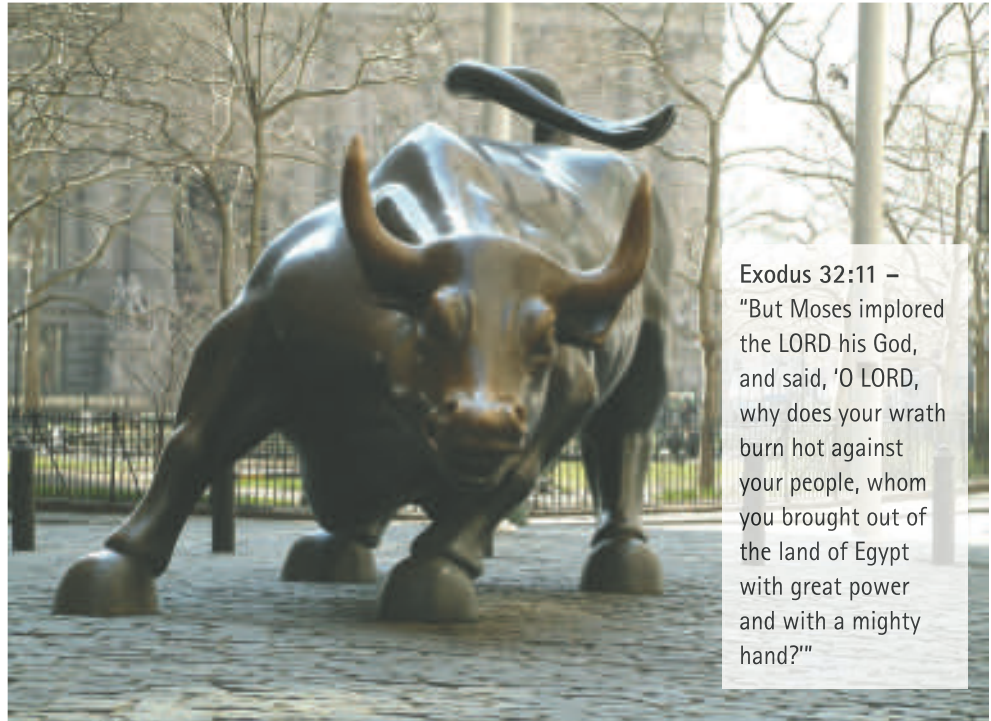
We are not the first. Today’s text, which records a pivotal moment in the history of Israel’s relationship with God, marks an impatient people’s attempt to reshape their relationship with God by making a god they could see.

A narrative interruption

Exodus 32-34 marks a bleak beginning to the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, which had been formalized in chapters 19-24. Hardly more than a month passed before the people corporately broke the covenant by fashioning a golden bull to represent Yahweh and then worshipping before it. ⚡

This section is crucial for understanding the relationship between God and Israel because it introduces the theme of covenant, rebellion, and covenant-renewal that becomes an all-too-common pattern in succeeding years. God loves the people and offers to bless them as they obey the covenant regulations, but the Israelites inevitably fall into idolatry and rebellion. This leads to divine punishment, followed by an outpouring of grace when the people repent.

The story sounds familiar to us because it is not just Israel’s story, but



Exodus 32:11 –
“But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, ‘O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?’”

ours, too. We know what it is to proclaim our trust in Christ and seek to live faithfully, only to fall short and slide into disobedience. Faced with the pain of sin’s results and the knowledge that we have disappointed God, we may also repent and experience the forgiveness that only God can offer. We know what it is to be more like Aaron than Moses.

Aaron’s misguided capitulation (vv. 1-6)

Chapter 32 begins where chapter 24 leaves off, with Moses having ascended Sinai to meet with God while leaving his brother Aaron in charge, along with a little-known man named Hur. ⚡ The visible presence of God moved from the head of the camp to the top of the mountain, where a cloud covered the mountain for six days and “the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel” (24:16-17).

Whether the cloud and fire remained visible during the 40 days Moses spent on the mountain is unsaid and uncertain,

for the people grew impatient in Moses’ absence and wondered what had become of him (v. 1). ⚡ From the time they had left Egypt, Moses had been present with them, along with the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, as visual reminders of God’s presence. For more than a month, however, both had been absent, and the people chafed at the change. They wanted a god they could see.

With no indication that Moses would return soon – if ever – the people reverted to the style of religion they had observed in Egypt and demanded that Aaron construct for them an image to use as a stand-in for Yahweh: “Make gods for us, who shall go before us.” ⚡

Despite the plural word, the people weren’t asking for a new or different god than Yahweh, and they weren’t naïve enough to think that anything constructed by humans could be divine. In typical ancient Near Eastern fashion, however, they believed that a visual representation of a god could function as a conduit for communication through worship, sacrifice, and prayer.

Aaron, feeling pressured by the

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people, perhaps uncertain about Moses' whereabouts, and possibly eager to exercise leadership, agreed to the people's demand. Showing impatience with their impertinence, perhaps, he instructed the men to "snatch off" (not just "take") the golden earrings of their wives and children and bring the precious metal to him (vv. 2-3) so he could fashion it into an image. ▽

The people were suitably impressed with Aaron's handiwork, declaring "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (v. 4). Since the people had identified Moses as "the one who brought us up from the land of Egypt" in v. 1, it seems evident that they identified the calf with Yahweh, whom Moses represented.

Aaron sought to reinforce the connection in no uncertain terms, building an altar before the image while declaring that the next day would be a festival to Yahweh (v. 5). Anxious to begin, the people rose early the next morning to offer both burnt offerings and fellowship offerings as they had done in the earlier covenant ceremony (24:5). Without Moses and the cloud present as symbols of God's presence, the golden bull served as a stand-in for Yahweh.

While "burnt offerings" were wholly consumed on the altar as a means of seeking atonement, "fellowship" or "peace" offerings were eaten by the people, with only a token portion burned on the altar (the visceral fat and tail of sheep) and a small amount shared with the priests. Thus, when the people "sat down to eat and drink," they sat down for a festal meal, after which they "rose up to revel" (v. 6, NRSV) or "play" (NET, KJV). The word used sometimes referred to sexual activity, leading some commentators to imagine a scene of widespread debauchery, but that isn't necessarily implied. A more apt translation might be "they started to party."

For modern believers, this text is a reminder that we also have a tendency to make God over in our own image. We pick and choose which parts of the

Bible or images of God best suit our inclinations, and in doing so we miss out on the richness of the multifaceted image of God that we find in scripture.

While we may prefer a God who is all love and mercy, we cannot overlook the scriptures' insistence that God also judges. While we may want every sinner to get what he or she deserves, we must also acknowledge God's persistent grace. We may like the idea that God is always present and looking after our needs, but the Bible also speaks of God's inscrutable ways that are beyond our comprehension.

The second commandment declared that graven images were not to be used as proxy symbols for Yahweh. Now, as then, God wishes to be sought, known, and worshipped by faith and not by sight.

Moses' faithful intercession (vv. 7-14)

Back on the mountain, Moses was unaware of what was happening below, but Yahweh knew. Referring to Israel as "your people, whom you brought out of Egypt," God told Moses they had "become corrupt" by violating the covenant, making an idol, and sacrificing to it (vv. 7-8).

The NRSV's translation of God's command for Moses to "go down" is a weak effort to translate two imperative verbs ("go" and "descend") that together could be translated "Scram! Get down there!"

The people had thought God was absent, but Yahweh had seen their actions (v. 9), and declared a furious intent to destroy Abraham's descendants and start over with Moses, making his family into a great nation (v. 10).

But was Yahweh really resolved to incinerate the people who were called God's "treasured possession" and "kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:5-6)?

Yahweh's statement to Moses in

v. 10 is couched as an open invitation for Moses to plead for a different outcome. Why tell Moses to go down to the people if he planned to carbonize them anyway? Why say, "Now leave me alone" if not in hopes that Moses would in fact interfere and intercede for the people?

Moses did just that, seeking not only to placate God's anger but also to mount a logical and persuasive argument for a different course of action (vv. 11-13). ▽

Moses' plea for God to show mercy had its intended effect: "Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened" (v. 14). The verb translated as "relented" is in a form that can mean "have compassion" or "take pity" as well as "be sorry." In the light of Moses' petition, Yahweh was moved with compassion to be merciful and not destroy the people.

This is not to say that the guilty ones got off scotch free, according to the text that follows. The story goes on to say that when Moses saw the image with his own eyes, he grew angry and inspired the Levites to slaughter 3,000 people (vv. 19-29). Moses then had a turn of heart and sought to make atonement for the remainder of the people, offering to have his own name blotted from "the book you have written" if God would not forgive. God agreed to remain with the people, but also struck them with a plague (vv. 30-35). The story is one of judgment as well as grace.

How do you respond to a story like this? Do you take satisfaction in seeing guilty people "get what they deserve" for bad behavior, whether it's a hard life or hard time? Or are you more likely to feel a compassionate motivation to help the wayward find a better way of living?

The story reminds us that both judgment and grace are ultimately in the hands of God. What's in our hands is the opportunity to pray for those who have fallen short, to intercede for God's mercy in their behalf – and to hope that someone is praying for us, too. **BT**

Youth

October 5 — October 26, 2014

Youth Lessons by **David Cassidy** 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.

OCTOBER 5

Speak

Psalm 19

Do you answer your phone when it rings? Better yet, how often does someone actually call you? More often than not, you and your friends communicate through texting. When you get a call, you know it is probably from your parents. But how do you hear from God?

The writer of Psalm 19 tells of hearing from God and how God chooses to be revealed to others.

In this psalm, God is revealed in two ways: through the heavens (vv. 1-6) and the law (vv. 7-14). God speaks through the heavens during the day and night, not using words but in the work of creation. Everything is warmed as the sun shines

during the day, just as God's love shines on the world. No person or thing is left untouched by the love of God. We hear or sense God when we have those "awe" moments or just stand and experience the beauty and peace of nature.

But God doesn't only speak through creation; God speaks through the law given to the Hebrew people. We sometimes see laws as restricting, but the Hebrew people saw the law as the instructions for their lives. They desired the law and described it as more desirable than "even much fine gold." The commitment that the Hebrews had for the law was so great, they prayed that they would be able to keep every part of the law — and even those parts they did not know about!

Think About It:

Psalm 19 starts with how God speaks and ends with a prayer that the psalmist will be able to "speak" words that are acceptable to God. How aware are you of your words and actions?

Make a Choice:

The psalmist makes it clear that God speaks in a variety of ways. We have the option to listen for God or to follow our own thoughts. How will you choose to listen for God?

Pray:

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."

OCTOBER 12

Idols

Exodus 32:1-14

"Iwould die if that happened!" We all know it sounds ridiculous when we say it, but we say it anyway because we are trying to show the importance something has in our life.

There are a lot of things that we consider important, and it is important to have things that we are passionate about and truly care about. However, we can't alter our life so that these things control us. When that happens, we have made that thing or person an idol.

Exodus 32 recalls the story of how the people of Israel created an idol.

The covenant with God had been created with the people of Israel, but they didn't start out on the right foot with their

end of the covenant. While Moses was meeting with God on the mountain, the Israelites were melting their gold and creating a golden calf.

Maybe Moses shouldn't have left the people alone at the bottom of the mountain without a leader who could keep them in check. But all the people had to do was to look up to the top of the mountain and see the "glory of the Lord" to be reminded of whose they were and who their leader was.

The people of Israel couldn't even keep the covenant for 40 days and instead reverted back to the religious practices they were supposed to have given up. So Moses pled with God on behalf of the people, and his pleading moved God with compassion so that the people were saved.

Think About It:

God is not visible to us. Even when Jesus came to live among the people, one of those closest to him doubted him. How do you avoid seeing God?

Make a Choice:

Every day we choose to place things or people above God, sometimes without consciously deciding to do so. What are tempting idols you should choose to limit?

Pray:

God, forgive us when we do not keep you in the center of our lives. Help us cast out the idols that we place in our lives.

Need vs. Want

Exodus 33:12-23

We all have lists of things that we really want. Amazon makes this easy – you can even tag things to add to your “wish list.” You can then share that list with other people who may want to give you a gift. We are fortunate to live in a society where we don’t have to wish for a lot of our needs. But how often do we demand our wants?

After the people of Israel created a covenant with God, their desire for the presence of God became so great that they built an idol – the exact opposite of what they were supposed to do!

Knowing that the covenant had been

broken, God told the people to head to the promised land but without God. God needed some space to determine what to do with these chosen people. Moses, yet again, stood before God and pled for his people. The hope for a response came from the favor that God found with Moses. Moses asked to know God’s ways so that he would know how to proceed with God.

The desire to know God led Moses into a deeper understanding of God and a life that is more fully dedicated to God. Moses’ pleading won favor with God again, and God chose to remain present with the people. Moses found rest in this statement, because he knew that without the presence of God, there would be no people of Israel.

OCTOBER 19

Think About It:

When Moses asked to know God’s ways, he desired a deeper understanding of God that would lead to a life more faithful to God. How does your desire to know God lead to a life more on track with God?

Make a Choice:

God did not show Moses what he wanted, but showed Moses what he needed to see. When you pray to God, do you ask for what you want or what you need?

Pray:

God, may we seek your presence and grow in understanding your ways.

Bios

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Facebook has an entire section for “About.” Twitter allows you to post a short blurb about yourself. Instagram focuses on your picture more than the words you write. Whatever platform you choose, you have the ability to describe yourself to the world that connects to social media.

Moses didn’t get the option to write his own bio on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, but his bio was shared a different way.

God told Moses to climb to the top of Mount Nebo so that he could see into the promised land. At this point, Moses knew his death was near and that he would not step foot in the promised land because of

his earlier lack of faith in God to produce water for the people. Before Moses climbed to the top of Mount Nebo, he blessed the people of Israel one last time.

The people of Israel mourned the death of Moses for 30 days. He had led them for more than 40 years, and now he was gone. But Moses did not leave them without a new leader. He had pronounced, in front of all of Israel, that Joshua would be their next leader. Before the people of Israel moved on to Joshua as their leader, however, they gave a tribute to Moses.

He was remembered as one who was “face to face” with God, and there has not since been a prophet like Moses. He was unequaled as a prophet of God, and he lived in service to the people of Israel.

OCTOBER 26

Think About It:

It’s not only the bios that you write about yourself, but also your everyday living that tell others who you are. How would someone else describe you by what they see and hear from you?

Make a Choice:

How you are portrayed to the world around you is a choice that you get to make every day. What choices do you need to reconsider to reveal who you really are?

Pray:

God, may our actions and our words reveal who we truly are so that we can be good ambassadors for you.

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Oct. 19, 2014

Holy Boldness

Have you ever felt that you had fallen so far from God's way that you must have lost God, too? A sense of God's absence can feel more frightening than the dread of God's judgment.

Sometimes God seems absent because we have neglected to keep up the relationship. Sometimes God's presence may seem to fade when darkness or tragedy strikes. Sometimes we go so far off the path of obedience that we assume God has written us off.

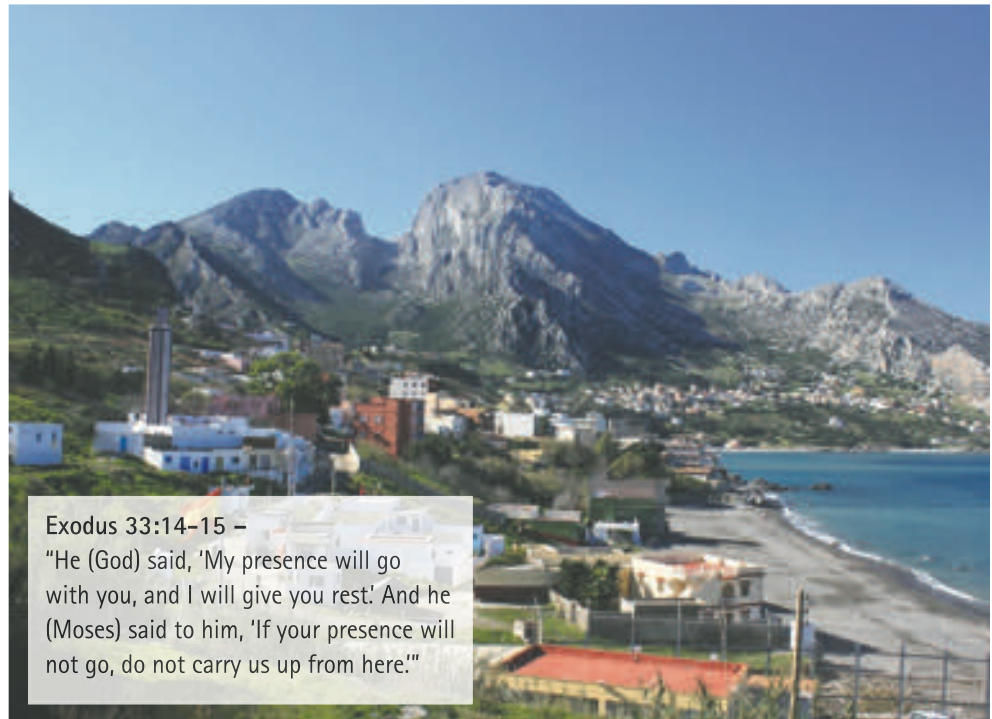
The people of Israel came close to that last alternative.

The threat of God's absence

The book of Exodus revolves around three primary themes: deliverance, covenant, and presence. God raised up Moses to deliver Abraham's descendants from captivity in Egypt, and called them into a covenant relationship as God's special people, Israel. Through mighty works and powerful words, as well as signs in fire and cloud, God's presence with Israel was manifest.

The covenant was hardly made before it was broken, however. While Moses spent 40 days encamped with God on Mt. Sinai, the people grew impatient and fashioned a golden bull to represent the invisible presence of Yahweh (see last week's lesson).

This action not only violated the covenant, but also backfired. Fearful of Yahweh's apparent *absence*, the people constructed an image to represent Yahweh's *presence*. But the action had the reverse effect: God threatened a



Exodus 33:14-15 –
 "He (God) said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.' And he (Moses) said to him, 'If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here.'"

permanent absence.

Following that account of rebellion, we find a conversation in which God told Moses to lead the people on to the land of promise, but without the divine presence. God promised to "send an angel before you" to drive enemies from the land, "but I will not go among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people" (vv. 1-3).

When Moses conveyed these words to the people, they responded with abject mourning, stripping off all ornamental jewelry and trappings as a sign of grief and remorse. 📌

The fear that God's presence would depart was devastating, but not yet certain. Although God had threatened not to travel further with them, they were to wait and mourn while "I will decide what to do to you" (v. 5). 📌

What would God decide?

An appeal for God's presence (vv. 12-17)

Moses, the great intercessor, made a heroic appeal for God's presence to remain with the people. 📌📌 Reflecting

on God's command to lead the people onward, Moses said "but you have not let me know whom you will send with me" (v. 12). God had promised in v. 2 to "send an angel before you," but having an angel go *before* him was hardly sufficient when Moses wanted God to be *with* him.

Moses based his appeal on the favor God had previously shown to him: "Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'" 📌

Leaning on his favored relationship with God, Moses bluntly asked God's intentions.

"Show me your ways" in this context is not so much an appeal for further revelation of the law, but for an answer to the question of what God had decided to do with Israel (v. 5). Moses apparently hoped that God's pleasure with him would extend to the people with whom he identified and inspire a continuing manifestation of God's presence: "Consider too that this nation is your people" (v. 13).

Notice the chain of events that is part of Moses' entreaty: "Now if I have

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



found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight.” For the people as for Moses, seeking a better understanding of God’s ways leads to a deeper knowledge of God, which should lead to more faithful obedience and thus continued favor. Modern believers should take note.

How do we interpret v. 14? The words “with you” (in most translations) are not in the text, which could literally be read as “My presence will go, and I will give you rest.” The “you” in “I will give you rest” is singular rather than plural, leading to two options for interpretation. Commentators commonly take the singular “you” as a corporate reference to Israel as a whole rather than to Moses alone. It was not uncommon for Old Testament writers to use the singular form in this way.

If this is the case, “I will give you rest” could be the first instance of the promise that God would lead the people to Canaan and give them “rest” from their enemies (Deut. 12:10, 25:19; Josh. 1:13-15, 21:44, 22:4, 23:1).^U

The text suggests that God was speaking to Moses alone, however. Although Moses spoke in behalf of the people, they were not a party to the conversation. In this case, the singular “you” would refer to Moses, and “I will give you rest” would be God’s response to Moses’ deep angst over the fate of the people. It’s as if God caved to Moses’ persistent pleas with “OK, I’ll set your heart at ease and go.”

Not fully reassured, Moses pressed for a clear and all-or-nothing answer: “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here” (v. 15). God’s presence, Moses argued, was the proof that both he and Israel had found favor as Yahweh’s special people, distinct from all others (v. 16). If God should withdraw evidence of the divine presence from the Israelites, what would there be to distinguish them from anyone else?^U For Moses, this was a matter of life or death. Without the presence of God, there would be no Israel.

With v. 17, all doubt is removed:

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.’” The verse makes the plain claim that God was persuaded by Moses’ intercessory plea, and agreed to maintain a manifest presence among the people.

The theological insight of this passage is universal and ongoing as it relates to the relationship between God and humans. As John Durham writes, “No people, no matter how religious they are and for whatever reasons, can be a people of God without the Presence of God” (*Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary [Word Books, 1987], 448).

Seeing is believing (vv. 18-23)

One might expect God’s agreement to send Moses into paroxysms of joy, but a combination of boldness and insecurity led him to press even further, essentially asking God to “prove it” or “show me” by granting him a visual manifestation of divine glory.^U

Why would Moses ask this thing? He had first met God through divine revelation in a burning bush accompanied by an audible voice (Exodus 3). He had seen God go before Israel in a pillar of fire and radiant cloud. He had not only watched the cloud of God’s glory come and rest on Mount Sinai, but had also walked into it. At the tent of meeting, he had conversed with God “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (33:11).

And yet, Moses wanted to see more, to know more, to believe more. And so he dared to ask “Show me your glory, I pray” (v. 18). Moses’ language was deferential and polite, but still audacious.

God’s response was both yes and no. For Moses’ own protection, God could not be fully seen, “for no one shall see me and live” (v. 20 – see “The Hardest Question” for more on this). Rather than exposing Moses to the glorious divine

essence, Yahweh would reveal the glory of God’s character. This is not to deny a visual component: The story that follows (extending through 34:9) clearly insists that God placed Moses in the cleft of a rock, covered him with the divine “palm,” and passed by in a way that allowed Moses to see *something* new, if only a celestial afterglow.

Even so, the most important revelation was not what Moses would see, but what he would hear. Earlier, the text put much emphasis on God’s knowing Moses by name. Now Moses’ request for deeper knowledge is met by a better acquaintance with God’s name. In making the divine goodness (or “beauty”) pass before Moses, God said “I will proclaim the name ‘Yahweh’ before you, and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy to whom I will show mercy” (v. 19, slightly adapted from the NRSV).

This is one of several conscious parallels between Exodus 33 and the story of Moses’ call in Exodus 3. The name “Yahweh,” first revealed to Moses through the burning bush, probably derives from a causative form of the verb “to be.” God is not only the great “I Am,” but also “The One Who Causes To Be.” Moses would not see how God *looks*, but learn how God *is*. He would not see God’s face, but he would hear of God’s character.

God is the one who ultimately *is* and the one who *causes to be*, the one who is loyal and loving, disposed to grace and mercy as well as judgment.

This text is a helpful reminder that God wants to live in relationship with humankind, but must be accepted on God’s terms. We cannot shape God’s nature to suit our fancy any more than we can shape a divine image and call it Yahweh. We must take God exactly as God is.

We may not like this truth, but it is one we need to hear. God did not show Moses what he wanted to see, but what he needed to see – and the explication of God’s character as living, active, loving, and gracious is a lesson we cannot hear often enough. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Oct. 26, 2014

A Good End to a Good Life

Can a death ever be good? Or put another way, can there be a good death? We tend to think of death as an enemy, a fearful specter that steals us away from life and love and family. There comes a time, however, when all of us must die, and some dyings are better than others.

We grieve at the thought of tragic deaths, young deaths, painful deaths, violent deaths, lonesome deaths, and rightfully so. None of us wants to die young, to linger in pain, or to die alone. If we could choose the circumstances of our death, I suspect most of us would wish for it to come at the end of a long and fruitful life, still in possession of our basic faculties, and knowing that we are not alone.

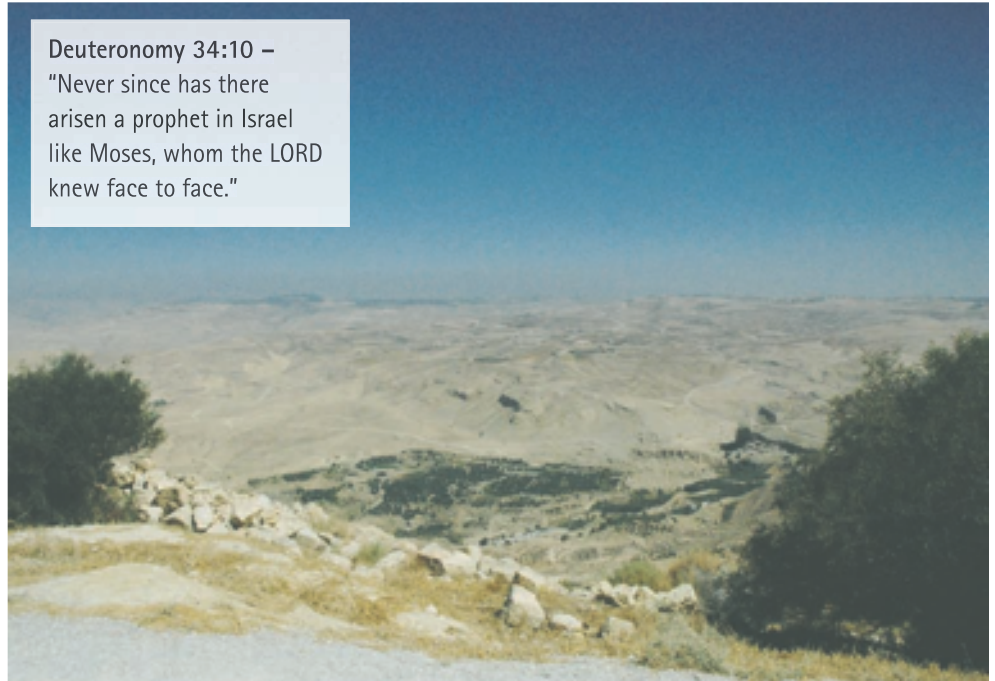
Such was the death that Moses experienced, with the added elements of it taking place on a mountaintop and in the course of a conversation with God.

Moving up (vv. 1-4)

Moses is the most prominent human character in the Torah (or Pentateuch), the first five books of the Bible — second only to God. Once he appears, with his birth recorded in Exodus 2, Moses is so dominant that the Pentateuch came to be known as “the Books of Moses.”

Today’s text comes at the end of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch, in a transitional passage that leads us directly to the book of Joshua. The story follows directly from Deut. 32:48-52, where God told Moses about his

Deuteronomy 34:10 –
“Never since has there
arisen a prophet in Israel
like Moses, whom the LORD
knew face to face.”



impending death and reminded him that he would not be allowed to enter Canaan.

As the story unfolds, Israel is encamped on the plains of Moab, just east of the Jordan River. The fertile oasis of Jericho, the gateway to the Promised Land, lies a few miles west of the river. God instructs Moses to climb to the top of Mount Nebo, from which he can see Israel’s final goal.

The reason Moses cannot enter, we are told, goes back to a wilderness stopover where God had told him to speak to a rock face to produce water for the people during a dry stretch, but Moses struck the rock with his staff in addition to making the speech (Num. 20:2-13). For this bit of grandstanding, interpreted as a failure to have full faith in God, both Moses and Aaron were banned from the land of promise (32:50-52, cf. Num. 27:14).

Knowing that he would not return, Moses pronounced a final blessing on the Israelites (ch. 33) before beginning the rugged climb up Mount Nebo. As mountains go, Nebo is not particularly tall at 2,680 feet, but it is arid and rough, and

Moses was an old man. Shortly before, in introducing Joshua as his designated successor (31:1-8), Moses had declared, “I am now 120 years old. I am no longer able to get about . . .” (31:2).

Moses’ professed infirmity did not prevent him from scaling the highest point of the mountain, to a peak called Pisgah, from which Yahweh “showed him the whole land,” from Dan in the north (near Mount Hermon) to Ephraim in the northwest, to Judah and as far as the “distant sea” (vv. 1-3). The list is hyperbolic: On a clear day, Moses could have seen as far north as the peak of Mount Hermon and looked deep into the lands of Judah and Ephraim, but the Mediterranean Sea is not visible from Mount Nebo.

Some scholars interpret Yahweh’s act of showing Moses the land and reminding him that it had been promised to Abraham’s descendants as a ceremonial way of Moses claiming the land on Israel’s behalf, but it may simply reflect Yahweh’s desire to show Moses the land, even if he could not enter.

Our text describes Moses as a man who was both physically active and

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



spiritually faithful throughout his life – even to the very end. Some of us may be nearing the end of life’s journey, while others have far to go, and none of us know where or when the road will end. Are we like Moses, always on the move, finding purpose for life in serving God and serving God’s people? Such faithfulness does not bring a promise of long life or even good health, but it will make the life we have a better one, both for us and for others.

Moving on (vv. 5-8)

Moses’ death is told in the simplest of terms: “And he died there, Moses, the servant of Yahweh, in the land of Moab, according to the word of Yahweh” (a rather literal translation of v. 5). What do you suppose it means to die “according to the word” or “at the command” of Yahweh?

It’s unlikely that the narrator means to say that Moses consciously keeled over because Yahweh told him to, as implied by the NRSV’s rendering that he died “at the LORD’s command.” Rather, since God had previously told Moses that he would die on Mount Nebo (32:48-52), one could say that his demise arrived “according to the word of Yahweh.”

Moses’ burial is couched in mystery, including the question of who buried him. The NRSV glosses over the question by changing the verb to passive (“he was buried”), but the Hebrew of v. 6 says “he buried him in the land of Moab, across from Beth-peor, and no one knows his burial place until this day.” The subject of “he buried him” must be Yahweh, who buried Moses in a secret place (or instructed an angel to do it), presumably to prevent the Israelites from building a shrine and venerating the site. That would explain why the narrator could insist that no one knew the grave’s location, even to the time of his writing. 📖

A note tells us that Moses’ eyesight remained keen until the day of his death, and “his vigor had not abated”

(v. 7). This suggests that Moses’ earlier claim that he could no longer “get about” (31:2) must have been an intentional exaggeration as he prepared Israel for Joshua’s leadership.

Verse 8 describes the people’s protracted mourning over Moses, but the text does not tell us how they learned of their leader’s death. We presume that Moses would have told Joshua what to expect, and it is possible that his associate may have accompanied him on the mountain: the text mentions only Moses, but does not say he was alone. If Joshua or someone else had gone with Moses, he could have reported Moses’ death and the disappearance of his body.

If Moses had gone alone after telling Joshua that he would die on the mountain, he could have waited a suitable time before sending search parties to confirm that Moses was no longer there, and thus declared him dead.

The Israelites grieved for Moses as fervently as they had earlier complained against him. Instead of the typical seven days of mourning, for 30 days “the Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab” (v. 8). The people had depended on Moses for more than 40 years, but now he was gone, and his absence was palpable. What would happen now?

Let’s bring this closer to home: How do *we* expect to die? Some of us may expect to expire kicking and screaming, resisting death at all costs, while others anticipate a more peaceful transition from this world to the next. Unlike Moses, we cannot expect to know *when* we will die, but we do know *that* we will die. Moses did not wait until his final day to prepare for death, and neither should we.

Moving forward (vv. 9-12)

The narrator signals a shift in the story with the last phrase of v. 8: “Then the period of mourning for Moses was

ended.” It was time for next steps, and the first of those was to acknowledge Joshua as Moses’ authorized successor and leader.

At Yahweh’s word, Moses had commissioned Joshua “in the sight of all Israel” and charged him to “Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed” (31:7-8).

Joshua was described as being blessed by Moses and “full of the spirit of wisdom,” so that “the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD commanded Moses” (v. 9). We know from stories yet to come that the Israelites were not always obedient: their history was pockmarked by one rebellion after another. They did, however, accept Joshua as their new chief, and “listened to him” (the literal meaning: obedience is implied).

The passage closes with a brief but enthusiastic tribute to Moses, who “knew God face to face” and presided over signs and wonders so powerful and frightening that they would never be forgotten by the Egyptians or by Israel (vv. 10-12).

Have you ever wondered what people will say about you when you’re gone? It is unlikely that we will receive accolades as unparalleled prophets or miracle workers, but will there be someone to say “No one could have loved me more than my mother did,” or “No one could have been a better role model than my dad”? Will there be someone to say “I couldn’t ask for a kinder friend,” or “The church never had a more faithful member”?

Whether we live 20 years or 120, we want our lives to count for something good. We want to be remembered fondly when we’re gone. To make that happen, we don’t have to be a prophet like Moses, just the best “me”— with the opportunities given us — that we can be. **BT**

Classifieds

Pastor: Suppose God called and you didn't get the message? If you're the one whom God would call to pastor a special church, wouldn't it be terrible not to get the word? That could happen with the "networking" system, which might pass you by. We can't take that risk. Third Baptist Church in St. Louis is a unique and historic church in a dynamic urban arts and education district, probing new pathways of service in a changing world. Our members are young and old, black and white, rich and poor, from the city and suburbs, with backgrounds in ABC, SBC, CBF and other denominational affiliations. You might be the one for us. So, we're sending you a message. Learn more, in confidence. Contact our search committee chair, Evelyn Kurtz, at epkurtz@charter.net or (314) 434-1201. Our information packet might contain a message intended just for you.

Pastor: New Faith Baptist Church in Annetta, Texas, is seeking a pastor for our small, rural, old-fashioned, independent Baptist church. We enjoy preaching primarily from the King James Bible, and we sing praises to God out of hymnals. Candidates may make inquiries or send résumés to info@newfaithbaptistchurch.net or to New Faith Baptist Church, 3033 W FM 5, Aledo, TX 76008.

Minister for Serving Christ: Forest Hills Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., a moderate congregation affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and with historic ties to the Southern Baptist Convention, is seeking a "minister for serving Christ." This is a full-time ministry position with benefits, and will focus primarily on the serving and caring ministries of our church and in our community along with church-wide responsibilities for children and families. An ideal candidate is eager to join a dynamic ministry staff, able to participate in

a preaching rotation, and open and flexible toward new ideas and ways of doing ministry. More information is available at foresthills.org/careers. Email résumé and cover letter to careers@foresthills.org by Sept. 30.

Associate Minister of Music: Greystone Baptist Church, located in a diverse, growing area of North Raleigh, N.C., is prayerfully seeking a full-time associate minister of music. GBC is affiliated with the Raleigh Baptist Association and CBFNC and CBF National, and partners with these and other local ministries for mission opportunities for our 750+ members. Our church affirms/ordains men and women to serve in all roles within the church, including those of deacon and minister. Greystone has a vibrant and rich musical heritage that includes a graded music program for children, a youth choir, an adult choir, handbells and other ensembles. Worship at Greystone is contextual, utilizing the diverse musical gifts of the congregation, and is grounded in the scripture readings of the Revised Common Lectionary and the seasons of the Christian year. We are seeking a spiritual music leader who is willing to share his/her musical, creative, teaching and pastoral gifts as part of our ministerial team. The candidate will bring an understanding of and appreciation for a broad spectrum of musical genres to work collaboratively with the ministerial staff, musicians and members in developing, planning and directing inspirational music that will enhance our worship. Candidates should be outstanding musicians with church worship leadership experience and have earned a graduate degree from an accredited seminary or divinity school with a concentration in church music (or similar training). For more detailed information, please visit greystonechurch.org. If you feel God is leading you to our church, please send your résumé by Oct. 15 to GBCmusicsearch@gmail.com or to Greystone Music Minister Search Team, 4814 Summit Arbor Dr. 202, Raleigh, NC 27612.

Director of Music: Neill's Creek Baptist Church in Angier, N.C., is prayerfully seeking a part-time director of music. We seek an energetic leader with a heart for worship who will assist in planning and leading music for meaningful worship services. The director of music will be primarily responsible for the adult choir but will also consult with leaders of the children's choir, adult handbell choir and adult praise team. Preference will be given to candidates who have previous experience in directing church choirs, congregational singing and overseeing a church's music ministry. NCBC averages 150 in Sunday morning worship attendance and is located in a growing community. We are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Little River Baptist Association. For a copy of the job description, contact the church at (919) 639-6126 or ncbc@embarqmail.com. Résumés may be sent to Music Ministry Search Committee, Neill's Creek Baptist Church 4200 Neill's Creek Rd. Angier, NC 27501.

Associate Pastor of Discipleship and Congregational Care

Job description:
coronadobaptist.org

Résumés by Sept. 30:
Coronado Baptist Church
Attn: Pastor Search Committee
501 Thunderbird Dr.
El Paso, TX 79912

Information:
Ron Ward
(915) 526-2609
rward@webatron.net

Reader's Response

EDITOR: I heartily affirm the article by Tony Cartledge, "The conundrum of moderate Baptist missions" (August 2014, p. 29).

As Baptist missionaries, my wife and I served in eastern Africa and Europe with the [SBC] Foreign/International Mission Board and with CBF Global Missions for a total of 32 years. I have been a professor of missions for 15 years in schools in the U.S. and Europe.

Cartledge's article delineates accurately what has transpired for world Christianity

and the missionary movement during the past three or more decades. The Christian movement has blossomed in the *majority world* in the southern hemisphere while wilting in the Western world. Authentic biblical mission has not died, but is thriving in the hands of non-white Christians who bear the Good News from anywhere to everywhere. That is the diagnosis.

The prognosis must not exclude Western Christians. Cartledge's conclusion rings true: "... If we truly believe in the Great Commandment as well as the Great Commission, we'll find a way to become as

energized by improving people's lives as by saving their souls."

A significant portion of the world's population remains deprived of the Good News. By our apathy do we make the Gospel invalid? Never.

With renewed zeal may we reinvest in the sending of long-term personnel who become incarnational servant-messengers. May our zeal for missions revive so that we, as moderate Baptists, will continue to serve together with faithful Christians of the *majority world*.

Earl R. Martin
Fort Worth, Texas

Fumbling the Bread of Life

When you go to a new place, you hope that the new people will think you are smarter than you are — or at least smarter than the people at the old place think you are. Moving is a chance to leave behind every time you dropped something you needed to hold on to, tripped over your shoestrings or forgot what you were supposed to remember.

Carol and I recently began serving as interim ministers at Santiago Community Church in Santiago, Chile, more than 4,000 miles from any of our old places. This international, interdenominational congregation is made up of gracious Christians who have never been to a Baptist church — or even wanted to!

I went to worship the first Sunday hoping that our new congregation would think that I am smarter than I really am. I was concerned about the details of the Lord's Supper in this Anglican/Presbyterian/Methodist/just-about-everything-but-Baptist church.

After the sermon (which they keep telling me is shorter in Chile) the minister walks to the front, receives the offering plates, holds up the money, says a prayer, calls for the passing of the peace, walks to the table, leads the Great Thanksgiving, recites the words of institution, eats the bread, drinks the wine that is not Welch's, moves along the railing sharing the bread, circles the choir, along the rail, and around the choir several more times. I did almost none of this when I was pastor of Mother Neff Baptist Church in Moody, Texas.

The service is going as planned. I receive the offering (*pesos* weigh more than you think), and the congregation willingly passes the peace. But when it comes time to share the bread, I walk toward the railing, stumble just a little, and fumble several pieces of the body of Christ. If this was a Roman Catholic congregation, I would have been on the next plane back to Georgia.

I kneel to pick up the bread of life and hide those pieces under my thumb. I stand and say, "This is the body of Christ," and hear the sacred response, "Your shoe is untied." This is not what I expect, but it is accurate and explains why communion wafers have hit the



floor. I kneel on the other side of the choir to tie my shoe, a skill that most master as a child.

Then I remember that I was supposed to take communion first. I am now the loser with his shoe untied who dropped the bread and took communion at the wrong time. I want those in the congregation to think of me as the kind of minister who keeps his shoes tied, holds on to the body of Christ, and takes communion at the right time, but that is not going to happen.

Most of us want the people at church to think we are better than we are. We would like to be admired, but communion is for people who are not always impressive. The Lord's Supper does not depend on us doing it perfectly, because communion is about the forgiveness God gives in the bread of life and cup of grace. One of the requirements for coming to the table is admitting that we are not as smart as we wish. We are part of the church because we are imperfect.

Christ's table is for those who need a place to go when they do something wrong. We tell a seemingly insignificant lie that threatens to poison everything. We speak a careless word that haunts us. We betray someone we love.

We wish our mistakes would fade away, but they keep showing up to remind us that we are not all we hope to be.

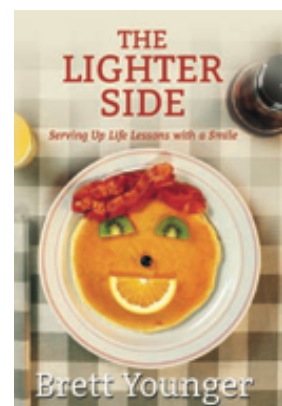
We need the church because we need a place to go when we feel empty. We bend under the weight of unfulfilling routines. The glories of motherhood give way to baby-related chores that must be repeated with nauseating monotony. The subject we loved in college becomes a dull job we must keep to pay the bills. The retirement we looked forward to for 20 years shows up five years too late to be enjoyed the way a 50-year-old imagines retirement.

The hope of the Christian faith is not that we will get it right, but that God loves us in spite of our foolish ways. The gospel is not "Be good, kind and friendly." The gospel is not "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." The gospel is "We fumble the bread of life, and God loves us anyway."

You and I need the Lord's Supper because sometimes we trip. We drop things. We forget what we should have remembered. We need a place where we can join with others who, like us, need God's grace. **BT**

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

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BWA addresses issues, encourages Turkish congregations

IZMIR, Turkey — When Baptist World Alliance leaders decided to hold the organization's annual gathering in Turkey this summer, the purpose was to encourage local Baptists as much as to conduct business, share reports, and enjoy fellowship with Baptists from nearly 60 countries.

Turkey, the western part of what is often called "Asia Minor" in biblical studies, was a prime target in Paul's missionary journeys, and was home to many of the earliest Christian churches, including all seven of the churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3.

Important councils of the emerging Catholic Church were held in Nicea and Constantinople (now Istanbul). Eastern Orthodox churches constitute most of the 350 Christian churches in Turkey, which is now almost 98 percent Muslim, though many are non-practicing.

Turkey's constitution calls for the government to be secular, but it exercises significant control over religious expression, particularly among Muslim sects. Christians are not persecuted, but often find their religious freedom restricted through measures such as difficulty obtaining building permits and state recognition for churches to operate.

Turkey has only four Baptist churches. Earlier this year, they banded together to form the Alliance of Baptist Churches in Turkey, electing Ertan Çevik, pastor of Izmir Baptist Church, as president.

Three Baptist pastors from Turkey attended the meeting, and were instrumental in arranging an impressive lineup of government spokesmen from both the ruling and main opposition parties to address the opening session of the meeting.

The speakers encouraged religious tourism in Turkey and praised religious liberty. With a presidential election looming, however, some hearers remained skeptical.

AT ISSUE

The BWA's General Council spoke out on a variety of issues through approving six resolutions, down significantly from the 17 resolutions approved during the 2013 meeting in Jamaica.

The resolutions praised and encouraged

the work of Baptists in Turkey while calling on the Turkish government to increase religious freedom; expressed concern and support for Christians in danger of persecution, while condemning the kidnapping of 200 girls in Nigeria; cited "gravest concerns" about increased restrictions on religious liberty in Myanmar; supported Baptists in both Ukraine and Russia, while calling for peace and reconciliation in Ukraine; called for Baptists to support efforts to fight corruption and promote justice among governmental and business leaders worldwide; and voiced concern about the massive influx of unaccompanied minors to the U.S., calling on government leaders to seek a resolution to the crisis and for churches in the area to practice hospitality to the children.

BWA LEADERSHIP

The Council elected Paul Msiza of South Africa to a five-year term as president of the BWA, with his term set to begin at the Baptist World Congress, to be held in Durban, South Africa, July 22-26, 2015.

Msiza, the second African to serve as BWA president, will succeed John Upton of Virginia, who has served since 2010.

Msiza was general secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa from 2001-2010, and was president of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship 2006-2011. He currently serves as pastor of the Piniel-Salem Baptist Church in Pretoria, and is chair of the local arrangements committee making preparations for the World Congress in Durban.

Twelve vice-presidents were also elected, with Jan Saethre of Norway tapped to serve as first vice-president.

During other business sessions, the General Council re-elected General Secretary Neville Callam to another five-year term.

On Callam's recommendation, the Council agreed to shuffle titles and responsibilities for current commission groups while adding three new commissions, to streamline



Paul Msiza

Coada receives human rights award

BWA members recognized Ilie Coadă of Moldova with the 2014 Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award. Coadă, a Baptist pastor, was praised for years of selfless work advocating for girls and women who are vulnerable to human trafficking, saving them from sexual slavery.

Coadă founded shelters, schools, job training, and other programs to assist vulnerable women and their children. Ultimately, he combined them under the umbrella of Bethania Christian Relief Association, which also provides services for orphans and elders.

Coadă, who worked as a mechanical engineer during the Soviet era before sensing a call to preach, said that when he saw so many needs, he had to ask, "Is there something I can do, that the church can do?"

Mafia figures involved in the sex trade have threatened Coadă's life, presenters said, but he has persevered in his mission to help others.

the process of submitting and approving resolutions, and to reinstitute "BWA Day" on the second Sunday of February and the preceding Saturday (for Seventh Day Baptists).

NEW MEMBERS

Four Baptist unions were approved as new member bodies: Chin Baptist Churches, USA; Baptist Community of the Faithful in Africa, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Baptist Evangelical Community in Central Africa, Democratic Republic of the Congo; and the Emmanuel Baptist Church of Ethiopia.

Irish Baptist Networks was recognized as an associate member, and several other applications for membership were noted as pending.

With the additions, BWA includes 231 conventions and unions in 121 countries, representing 177,000 churches and 42 million members. **BT**

From mouth to ear

Can preaching still communicate?

ZMIR, TURKEY — “Three points and a poem,” the old caricature of a typical sermon, will no longer hold most church members’ attention — but what will?

Five preaching practitioners offered suggestions during the North American Baptist Fellowship meeting, held in July in conjunction with the BWA’s annual gathering.

“Preaching is complicated,” said Joel Gregory, professor of preaching at Baylor University’s Truett Seminary, noting “a shift in emphasis on how to get it said, from mouth to ear.”

Preaching in the 19th and 20th centuries tended to be rhetorically focused, Gregory said, a deductive and cerebral exercise of linear thought that had the congregation wanting to make notes and write down the sermon’s points.

That’s changed significantly during the past few decades, Gregory said, with a swing toward narrative and inductive preaching that is more evocative and focused on metaphors or images rather than expositional points and sub-points.

How, then, can one communicate the gospel message “in a way that will engage people who like non-linear thinking”?

Gregory noted Leonard Sweet’s recent book, *Giving Blood: A New Paradigm for Preaching*. Sweet argues that image and metaphor, rather than a series of expositional points, are coming to the forefront of preaching.

Gregory pointed to evidence of this in *Baptist Preaching: A Global Anthology*, a book he edited that was launched during the BWA meeting. The book contains 35 sermons from Baptists around the globe.

Of the six sermons from North American preachers, Gregory said, “Two of the sermons are very directive and denotative; the other four are more indirect and evocative.”

“Preaching has had to change and shift to meet the needs of the people where they are,” said Naomi Tyler-Lloyd, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in the Bronx, N.Y. People coming into church “are not linear, and many are seekers,” she said, “unfamiliar with traditional didactic preaching.”

Pastors should recognize what a powerful thing it is that people will come to church and sit for an hour in hopes of receiving a word from God, said Jim Somerville, pastor of First Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.

“The secret to good preaching is to have something to say and then find a way to say it,” he said.

“In the old days, you could just go to the Bible,” Somerville said, but today preachers “almost have to persuade people that this word from the Lord is authoritative.”

Preaching is becoming more cinematic, Somerville said, as speakers focus on finding new ways to communicate the gospel.

The goal is worth the effort, Somerville added: “When you look out at people you love, you will do almost anything it takes to get that word across.”

Stephen Cook, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., spoke to the immense responsibility of preaching.

“On any given Sunday I’m aware half the congregation almost didn’t come,” he said, but for those who attend, “I can’t find any other place in the world where someone gets everyone’s attention for 20 minutes or so every seven days.”

Contemporary preaching faces a generational challenge not seen by earlier preachers, Cook said. “Preaching at its best has to be pastoral and recognize that we are living in an unprecedented time: this is the first time we’ve had five generations alive at the same time.”

As a result, preachers have to be “poly-lingual,” able to communicate with multiple generations, he said.

While many believers “have been filling up on fast-food spirituality,” preachers should look for ways to involve people in the experience of learning, and to have spiritual conversations with each other, Cook said. He noted that the young people in his church tend to sit up front, but often use their phones or tablets during the sermon. Cook sometimes

encourages them to text any questions they have to the youth pastor, who can bring them up later in the service.

Wallace Charles Smith, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., observed that “we have perhaps erred on the side of biblical exposition and cultural insights” in preaching, producing sermons that are more academic than practical. Still, he argued for sermons that have a discernable structure.

“The whole idea of sermon ‘points’ adds structure to the rhetorical moment so there’s something memorable about it,” he said. “We need to have some markers in the narrative for people to drop their anchors in.”

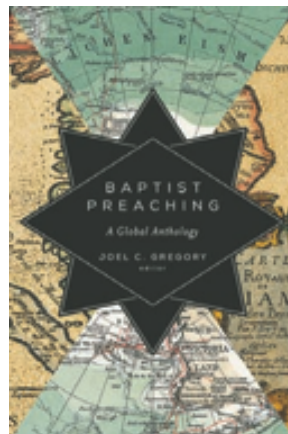
Smith noted the challenge of “trying to factor pulpit time in a Twitter/Facebook world.” In a traditional African-American church, he said, the norm for a preacher’s pattern is to begin slowly and build momentum, following the mantra “go slow ... rise higher ... catch fire!” But in a Twitter world, he said, “you get only about three minutes to catch fire.”

Preachers must recognize that words have power and can lead to memorable rhetorical moments, he said. The struggle is finding a way to get the message across during the time people are willing to pay attention.

Despite the obstacles, Gregory noted that preaching is persistent, citing Clyde Fant’s observation that “Preaching is always stubbornly there.”

“Preaching is inherently worthy of a place in the church,” Gregory said. A symphony conductor doesn’t walk out and count the house to see if it’s worth the effort of engaging the orchestra, but simply drops the baton because the music itself is worthy of playing, no matter how large the crowd.

“We might be heartened, in a post-modern culture, to hear that preaching is the same way,” Gregory said. “When the hour for preaching comes, there is an inherent worth in proclaiming the word of God.” **BT**



7 CHURCHES

*Turkey often considered
'the other Holy Land'*

The second-century Library of Celsus, in Ephesus, could have held 12,500 scrolls.



Christian pilgrims who want to visit “the Holy Land” should broaden their view beyond the traditional destination of Israel and its immediate environs: other sites have their own claim to sacredness.

When an early Christian leader who identified himself only as “John” wrote the startling letter commonly called the “Revelation” or “Apocalypse” of John, he did not send it to Jerusalem or Capernaum, but addressed it to seven pioneer churches located in the western part of what was then called Asia, and is now called Turkey.

Church tradition identifies the author as John the Apostle, holding that he left Jerusalem and came to Ephesus due to persecution under Herod Agrippa.

While on the island of Patmos — where tradition says Roman authorities had banished him for a time — John saw a cinematic vision of the future, and wrote dire warnings to the seven churches lest they be unprepared for cosmic upheavals he expected to arrive soon.

The apocalypse John anticipated has yet to happen, and the churches he addressed are long gone, but pilgrims still find inspiration in visiting “the seven churches of the Revelation.”

EPHESUS

Speaking in Jesus’ name, John addressed the churches in order, following a sharp arc that moves counterclockwise generally northwest from Ephesus to Smyrna and Pergamum, then southeast through Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

The church in Ephesus, where many believe John lived during his latter years, was first on the list. John praised the congregation for its hard work, patient endurance, and intolerance of false teachers, but lamented: “You have abandoned the love you had at first.”

The remains of Ephesus (now Epes) and the effort to uncover them are both huge: An upper city was home to administrative buildings, a small arena for council meetings and a medical center. Luxurious terrace homes with indoor plumbing, mosaic floors, and walls adorned with frescoes lined a hillside across from a broad avenue that was home to shops, public bathrooms and temples.



The theater in Pergamum, steepest in the ancient world, overlooks the modern city of Bergama.

In the lower city, an impressive library hosted a large collection of scrolls, and a massive outdoor theater facing the harbor seated up to 25,000 people.

John became a patron saint for the area. In nearby Selçuk, a massive basilica was built over the traditional site of John's tomb during the sixth century. Though destroyed by the Mongols in 1402 and pillaged for building materials, its ruins continue to impress visitors.

The commercial life of Ephesus centered around three important trade routes and its harbor, which was painstakingly dredged from a riverbed leading to the Aegean Sea. When the harbor silted in and could no longer be maintained, the city was abandoned.

Pilgrims who know that story may ask themselves if their "first love" for Jesus has fallen victim to the silting of other demands.

SMYRNA

The second church John addressed was in the coastal city of Smyrna, 35 miles north and slightly west of Ephesus. John spoke of how

the church had faced affliction and poverty, along with false teachers that he called a "synagogue of Satan."

Anticipating persecution, he charged the believers in Smyrna to be faithful unto death so that they might receive a crown of life.

The modern city of Izmir covers most of ancient Smyrna, though the ruins of public buildings and a large column-lined marketplace have been uncovered.

Tradition holds that John became a mentor to Polycarp, the second-century bishop of Smyrna who died as a martyr. The 17th-century Saint Polycarp Church continues to function, reminding believers to be faithful unto death.

PERGAMUM

John next addressed the church in Pergamum (now Bergama), about 62 miles north of Smyrna. He praised the church at Pergamum for persevering despite the presence of "Satan's throne," but took it to task because some members reportedly followed the teachings of the old Moabite shaman Balaam, while others

sympathized with a sect called the Nicolaitans, whose teachings remain obscure.

On the acropolis of Pergamum one can detect the ruins of royal residences along with a majestic temple to Trajan, who was emperor from 98-117 C.E. (see cover).

The steepest theater in the ancient world overlooked a long colonnade and a path leading to a massive altar to Zeus. A temple to Athena was at the heart of a compound housing the ancient world's second largest library, from which Mark Antony reportedly gave Cleopatra 200,000 scrolls as a wedding present.

Below the acropolis, Pergamum was home to a large asclepion, or healing center, where physicians used various baths, herbs, dream interpretation and positive thinking as healing methods.

Today's visitors may wonder if it was the roughly armchair-shaped altar of Zeus or the snakes marking the asclepion that led John to call Pergamum the home of "Satan's throne," but they are reminded to hold firm in the faith and receive the "hidden manna" John promised to those who conquer.

THYATIRA

Now buried beneath the modern town of Akhisar, Thyatira is remembered as the hometown of Lydia, a dealer in purple goods who met Paul in Philippi, where she was baptized and hosted early believers in her home (Acts 16:14-14, 40).

Inscriptions and archaeological evidence suggest that Thyatira was a hub of artisanal activity, including a brisk trade in fabrics and indigo dye.

Today, just a few jumbled ruins from later periods are visible within a fenced-off area of Akhisar's downtown, about 50 miles southeast of Pergamum.

The book of Revelation congratulated the Christians in Thyatira for growing in deeds, faith and love — but rebuked them for tolerating a woman named Jezebel who called herself a prophetess but reportedly promoted immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Early believers, like modern pilgrims, were reminded to avoid temptation, holding fast to their faith and listening for the Spirit's guidance.

SARDIS

About 30 miles southeast of Akhisar are the ruins of ancient Sardis (now Sart), an important city that was once the capital of Lydia.

Nearby mountains and the Pactolus River sands were rich in precious metals, and during the reign of King Croesus (560-547 B.C.E.), metallurgists learned to separate gold from silver in the naturally occurring electrum. The ability to mint coins of nearly pure gold or silver made Croesus legendary for his wealth.

Sardis was home to a towering temple to Artemis, a wonder of the ancient world that was more than twice the size of the Parthenon in Athens, with fluted marble columns nearly 60 feet high.

Downhill from the temple, one can find the remains of a bustling city where one end of a large public gymnasium has been partially restored in spectacular fashion. In the third and fourth centuries, a nearby Roman bath was converted into a lavish Jewish synagogue that could seat 1,000 persons, the largest in the ancient world.

Sardis was a wealthy and apparently healthy city, but John's letter accused the church there of being dead despite its lively appearance. Though a few were faithful, John wrote, the majority needed to repent and awaken to life before Christ arrived as a thief in the night.



A model mosque made of topiary mimics a real mosque across the street, with a large column from the sixth-century Church of St. John in the background.

PHILADELPHIA

The sixth city addressed in the Apocalypse was Philadelphia, another 30 miles to the southeast and now hidden beneath the modern city of Alasehir.

In Philadelphia, the oldest remains still visible are a few standing columns of brick that once supported the arched roof of a sixth-century church dedicated to the Apostle John.

The church in Philadelphia, though noted as having but "little power," was notably the only church of the seven that received no criticism. Because its members had patiently endured trials, John wrote, God had set before it an open door.

A topiary mosque in a park near the ruins of St. John's church is a reminder that the door of witness is still open in a country where only one percent of the population is Christian.

LAODICEA

The last congregation John addressed was Laodicea, another 64 miles to the southeast and at the end of the arc in his literary track through the seven churches. Only a few miles east was Colossae, and across the Lycus River was Hierapolis, both of which were also home to early believers.

Laodicea was situated on a high ridge near important trading routes, supporting a large commercial center with impressive temples and a large market area. From Laodicea, one could look across the valley and see where Hierapolis perched atop a massive white travertine formation created by mineral springs rich in calcium carbonate.

The church in Laodicea was famously charged with being neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm — not unlike the bland and tepid water brought to the city by a system of aqueducts.

Drinks are most appreciated when served hot or cold, but lukewarm drinks — like the bottled water visitors typically drink on the bus — can be hard to swallow.

It was to the church at Laodicea that Christ said "Behold, I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev. 3:20, NRSV).

Pilgrims to "the other Holy land" are reminded that Jesus' iconic invitation was not an evangelistic call, but an invitation for believers to experience renewed fellowship with Christ.

While the early churches are gone and the ancient cities lie in ruins, members of today's churches may be thankful that the invitation remains open. **BT**



Impressive colonnades lined the main streets of Laodicea, known for its banking system, wool trade, and medical center.

The larger picture

Scholars say women in the early church often overlooked

IZMIR, TURKEY — Does the name Junia ring a bell? How about Tryphena or Persis? They were women who were active in the early church, but like other churchwomen of the period, are little known today.

Meeting this summer in Turkey, home to many of the earliest churches, the Baptist World Alliance's Doctrine and Christian Unity Commission explored women's roles in the early church.

Valerie Duvol-Poujol, of France, noted that Michaelangelo's famous painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel — the one in which God's right hand stretches a finger toward Adam — shows that God's left arm is cradling Eve. Most people fail to see the larger picture, she said, and that is also true in our reading of the Bible, where women are present but often overlooked.

Romans 16 speaks of Phoebe, Junia and several other women who were close companions of Paul, she said: Of 26 people Paul mentioned by name in the book, eight were women, but few are known.

Duvol-Poujol, a New Testament professor at Paris' Institut Catholique, pointed to ways that some translators have obscured the role of women.

Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2) is called a "servant of the church" (*diakonos*) and a prophet (*prostatis*). While *diakonos* is typically translated as "deacon" with reference to men, Phoebe is called a servant. The *diakonos* was often a minister or emissary who taught or preached the gospel, Duvol-Poujol said, things that Phoebe did.

The word *prostatis* was typically used to describe Roman officials, and in 1 Thess. 5:12 and Rom. 12:8 it describes church leaders. The titles Paul ascribed to Phoebe were titles of authority and honor, Duvol-Poujol said: "She was a leader, minister and supporter of the church."

Prisca (Priscilla) is mentioned in six New Testament texts, and in four of them — all in contexts of ministry — she is mentioned before her husband Aquila. Both are identified

as co-workers of Paul, Duvol-Poujol said.

The role of Junia has been shadowed by a debate over whether *junia* is a masculine or feminine name. The difference turns on an accent mark, but the oldest manuscripts did not use accents.

When the marks were added, the name was regarded as feminine for more than a 1,000 years, until Epiphanius in the 13th century called her "Juniam" (masculine), Duvol-Poujol said. The Nestle-Aland critical edition of the New Testament, commonly used by scholars, used the feminine form until the 13th edition in 1927, when it was changed to masculine — but it was changed back to feminine in the new 28th edition.

In Romans 16, Paul puts no limitations on women's involvement in ministry, Duvol-Poujol said: "It's impressive that Paul takes the time to thank women for their participation in ministry."

Nora Lozano, who teaches at the Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio, Texas, offered an overview of women leaders in the early church. Women were among early martyrs for the faith, she observed.

These included Blandina of Lyons, a Christian slave who refused to renounce her faith. She was tortured and killed in 177 C.E., during the reign of Marcus Aurelius.

Perpetua and Felicitas, a noblewoman and her servant, were executed along with several others as part of a military celebration honoring emperor Geta's birthday in 203, and later honored in an early Christian text.

In some early churches, Lozano said, "widow" was not only a state but also an office, well established by the second century and sometimes marked by ordination. Widows who received support from the church were expected to visit the sick and engage in other

service ministries.

Women such as Phoebe also served as deacons in the early church, she said, though the title later shifted to men only.

Lozano pointed to other early women who lived an ascetic life as early nuns. These included Macrina the Younger, who lived in Cappadocia during the fourth century. Three of her brothers became bishops, including Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great, and Peter of Sebaste.

Macrina's father arranged a marriage for her at age 12, but the intended husband died before the wedding, and she chose to live as a nun. She so impressed her brothers that Gregory of Nyssa wrote "The Life of Macrina" as a testament to her devotion. She was instrumental in leading her family to convert their estate at Pontus into a monastery and convent.

Marcella and Paula, who lived in the late fourth century, were well-educated women who also lived as ascetics and had considerable influence on the church father Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin. Marcella was an early proponent of monasticism: both were later regarded as saints.

Lozano said there is some evidence that women may have served as priests or presbyters, with responsibilities for multiple churches, though the evidence is disputed.

The role of women as mothers was also important in the early church, Lozano said. Saint Monica, for example, mother of the famed 4th-5th century theologian Augustine of Hippo, is remembered as a role model for parents to be concerned about their children's salvation.

Lozano said it was painful to be reminded how women's roles in the church have been downplayed and continue to be suppressed.

"We have made some progress in the Baptist family," she said, but "we still have a long ways to go. We are losing bright women who are prepared for ministry but cannot find a place of service."

It is imperative for supporters to "act in our circles of influence to empower women," Lozano said: "As Baptists, we need to recover the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and let people minister on the basis of spiritual gifts and not gender." **BT**



Valerie Duval-Poujol



Nora Lozano

Baptist theology

PART
3

This is the third in a series of six articles on academic theology written since 1950 by Baptists. In this article we will review four more theological monographs that show some of the range and creativity of Baptist theology.

PAUL FIDDES

Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity by Paul Fiddes was first published in 2000. Fiddes has spent his entire career at Oxford University, where he is now a professor of systematic theology.

In this book he says that we can know God by participation but not by observation. The Trinity is a community comprising three subsistent relations, or relations that are real within themselves rather than existing between subjects. There are no persons at the end of the relations; the relations *are* the persons.

If the Trinity were three conscious persons, Fiddes says, that would be tritheism. The persons are not static but are movement, like a dance, weaving in and out, permeating each other. Subsistent relations cannot be visualized, but that is appropriate since God is mystery.

God acts by persuasion, never by coercion. Fiddes thinks that persuasion is more powerful than coercion.

In creating the world, God became vulnerable and invited suffering into the divine life. All Three Persons suffer, not just the Son. God forgives by suffering. This is eternally the case, but it is most evident and fully accomplished in the crucifixion of Jesus. Because the entire world is sacramental, metaphorically speaking, the world is the body of the Trinity.

Fiddes hopes this book will be pastorally helpful even to readers who are not convinced of his understanding of the Trinity, and in this he is successful. This is good because, so far as I am aware, no other Baptist theologian has embraced the theory, which originated with St. Thomas Aquinas, that the Three Persons are subsistent relations.

Fiddes is immensely learned. He conducts an insightful conversation with traditional and contemporary theology. He does the same with philosophy. For good measure, he does the same with literature.

Rather than generalizing about other writers, he engages discrete ideas from particular books, one at a time. Most of the theologians, philosophers, poets and novelists with whom he converses are major writers.

THORWALD LORENZEN

The second theological monograph is *Resurrection, Discipleship, Justice: Affirming the Resurrection of Jesus Today* by Thorwald Lorenzen.

Lorenzen was born in Germany. After teaching theology for several years in the Baptist seminary at Rüslikon, Switzerland, he moved in 1995 to Australia to serve as pastor of the Canberra Baptist Church.

In this 2003 book Lorenzen expresses his conviction that theologians have missed the point of Jesus' resurrection. Conservatives insist the resurrection was an objective event, and they use it as an apologetic to prove the truth of the Christian faith. They ignore the fact that at Easter there were no neutral observers, and they emphasize the empty tomb at the expense of the appearances of the risen Christ.

On the other hand, existentialist theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann say the resurrection was an experience in the lives of the first disciples rather than an act of God in history.

In Lorenzen's view, both groups are mistaken. The resurrection was neither the resuscitation of Jesus' corpse nor an interior experience of the disciples. It was rather an act of God that created a new reality.

The appearances stories are a necessary and also a sufficient ground for having faith that God raised Jesus from the dead. The empty tomb stories are probably true, but they are not necessary for that faith.

Lorenzen believes it is a mistake to found the Christian faith only on the teachings of Jesus, as many theologians today do. The proper foundation for Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus. It also is a mistake to affirm the resurrection without also affirming that the one who was raised is none other than the one who was crucified because of his passionate commitment to justice.

Therefore, Christian faith based on the

resurrection must include a concern for justice. Justice includes care for people who are poor, enslaved and abused, and also care for the earth. It includes the liberation of women and the ordination of women. It also includes dialogue with other religions, since the resurrection means that God's love is universal and that salvation is not reserved for those with faith in Jesus.

The best way to grasp the meaning of the resurrection is not by reason or even by worship, though these are helpful. The best way is by discipleship. The Anabaptists were right: One must live the way that Jesus taught, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, if one is to grasp the message of Jesus and his resurrection.

Lorenzen is a pastor-theologian who has sounded a forceful call to discipleship. He is realistic about the forces of darkness and death, but the resurrection of Jesus encourages him to continue to pursue justice hopefully. Though his book contains careful and persuasive arguments, in the end its central thesis seems to be carried forward as much by witness addressed to the reader's conscience as by argument.

ELIZABETH NEWMAN

In her 2007 book *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, Elizabeth Newman conducts a running campaign against distortions of Christian hospitality. It's not about being nice, it's not something you do as an individual, and it's not trivial.

When Christians gather to worship, they participate in the triune hospitality of God and are thereby trained to practice authentic hospitality. "Hospitality is not something we accomplish but a life we are given as we grow in dependence upon God and one another."

Newman thinks that the greatest contribution the church can make as it enters the postmodern world is simply to be the church. Christians need to see through the lies modernity tells.

Liberal democracy does not seek the common good but rather frees individuals to compete and thereby to pursue their individual goods. Democracy is therefore complicit in an ontology of competition and violence. People cannot become who they were meant to be

by competing and winning.

Science is not the only way to know reality; faith is a way of knowing, too. Scientists have faith just as religious people do, and they are rooted in a tradition as much as religious people are.

Religion is never a private matter. It is a public and political one. In all education there must be catechesis before there can be genuine debate. For Christians the goal of education must be love of the triune God. Newman says there are no easy solutions to the church's problems. She writes: "The church is not ours but God's; we are therefore free from the seduction of trying to save the church and the world."

Newman's message is similar to that of a theological movement in England and elsewhere known as Radical Orthodoxy. She is urging Christians to resist the seductions of modernity, including capitalism and liberal democracy, by belonging to the hospitable community of the triune God, the church.

WILLIE JAMES JENNINGS

Colonialism and slavery have been variously interpreted. In his 2009 book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, Willie James Jennings offers a theological interpretation.

Jennings teaches theology at Duke Divinity School and was formerly the academic dean there. He says that slavery separated peoples from the families, cultures, languages and lands that had made them peoples. Deprived of these things, they ceased to be a people.

The only identity that remained for them was their bodies. That is a racial identity. Colonialism thereby constructed race.

On the racial scale, white was the norm, and whites assessed all others in terms of how closely they approximated that norm. Colonialism segregated people. Slavery commodified them. Their value was understood in terms of their utility as workers.

The colonizers were Christians, and Christian theology colluded with their colonizing. It adopted a supersessionist interpretation of Israel, that God had replaced Israel with the church rather than grafted the church onto Israel.

This made Christianity susceptible to a racial understanding of people. It was an inversion of the Christian message of the incarnation of the Son of God who came as a Jew to the land of Israel.

Jennings writes: "The elimination of race is beside the point. The world has been

changed, and the earth has been taken from us."

Since the church can't abrogate race, the way forward is a renewal of the Christian imagination. Bearing in mind that God created places and peoples and that colonialism has replaced these with race, the church must try to imagine what real Christian community and intimacy look like.

The author carries out his work principally by narrating and interpreting the stories of four persons:

- Gomes de Azurara, a royal chronicler of Portugal, described a slave auction held in Lagos, Nigeria, in August 1444.
- José de Acosta Porres was a brilliant young Jesuit missionary who arrived in Lima, Peru, in April 1572.
- John William Colenso was a 19th-century Anglican missionary bishop to southern

Africa who initially collaborated with colonialism but came to oppose it.

- Olaudah Equiano, an African born in 1745, was captured and enslaved as a youth. He became a Christian, learned about business, purchased his liberty and wrote a narrative of his life.

In addition to these stories, Jennings engages in lengthy, running conversations with many other thinkers. This is a passionate book by a brilliant theologian about a topic that the author believes deserves more attention than it has received. **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is professor of divinity, emeritus, of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. This series is a revision of part of a longer article titled "Baptist Theology Since 1950," published in *Baptist History and Heritage* (Fall 2013) and used by permission.

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Ask the Theologian: Part 4

STONE MOUNTAIN, Ga. — At the April meeting of the Board of Directors of *Baptists Today*, editor John Pierce posed questions to theologian Fisher Humphreys during a session titled “Ask the theologian.” Questions were submitted by those who serve on the board with Humphreys. His responses appear here in print (as the fourth entry in a series) as well as in full on video at baptiststoday.org.

QUESTION from Roger Paynter, pastor of First Baptist Church of Austin, Texas:

Every young clergy person I interview is all about social justice and concern for the poor. While this is most encouraging, I never hear anything about a personal relationship with Jesus. How do we address this?

FH: Last year a half dozen other theologians and I engaged in an extended conversation about the phrase “personal relationship with Jesus.” To my surprise I found myself resisting the phrase, and I’ve tried to figure out why.

One thing that troubled me was the individualism. We say, “I have a personal relationship with Jesus.” We never say, “The church has a personal relationship with Jesus.”

The phrase treats as private what is in fact a social reality.

Another thing that troubled me is that the phrase seems to imply exclusivism and superiority. “You may believe in Jesus, but I have a personal relationship with him.”

A third thing that troubled me was that the phrase suggests a familiarity that I think is irreverent. Our relationship with Jesus is intimate, but we are not peers. We are close to Jesus because he loves us and saves us and because we are grateful and want to try to do with our lives what he calls us to do.

There’s another problem that isn’t implied by the phrase, but people who use the phrase often function this way. Their personal relationship with Jesus becomes so important to them that following Jesus, living the way he taught, seems a secondary matter.

Some Christians prefer to dispense with the phrase rather than to have to address all these problems. This is understandable; after all, the phrase isn’t found in the Bible.

On the other hand, the phrase does alert us to some things we need to remember.

Christians do not just believe things about Jesus. We believe in him; we trust him.

And the life of the church is not just a matter of trying to follow Jesus’ teachings the way people follow the teachings of Marx or Mao. The church has a personal relationship with Jesus in the sense that the Spirit of Christ is present in the church, guiding and empowering the church as we attempt to live by Jesus’ teachings and carry out the mission God has given us.

QUESTION from William Neal, president of Developmental Disabilities Ministries of Georgia and a member of First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga.:

How is the theology behind Christian marriage likely to change in light of society’s new acceptance of gay marriage as well as heterosexual couples living together and having children prior to marriage? It seems the attitude toward divorce and God’s acceptance of it has already changed.

FH: Our understanding of marriage has been changing for a long time. Don Browning described what he called the Bible’s long march toward monogamy.

For much of the church’s history, marriages were arranged by families rather than chosen by the spouses themselves. And husbands received their wives’ dowries when they married.

For much of its history the church’s understanding of marriage was entangled with patriarchy. Husbands were dominant and wives submissive. For many but not all Christians this has been replaced by egalitarian relations, and companionship has become an important goal for marriage, alongside other goals such as having children.

And, as noted in the question, the church has dramatically altered the way it treats people who have been divorced. In my judgment, all



these changes have been for the good.

When couples live together and have children before they marry, they are not conforming to the Christian understanding of marriage because they have not made the commitment to stay together permanently, “in sickness and in health.”

I suspect that in many cases the issue is that they do not love deeply. Genuine lovers always want their love to last “as long as we both shall live.” It’s superficial lovers who say “as long as we both shall love.”

I have been surprised at how quickly society has changed its attitude about gay marriage. It was so much faster than the change about woman’s suffrage and the change about racial integration.

A few years ago I asked a friend in New York who watches all this closely why he seemed so confident that our society would become more accepting of gay people. He said that America had changed about race even though no white couple ever woke up one day and said, “We have a black child.” All over America couples are waking up and saying, “We have a gay child.”

I think a lot of Americans see gay marriage as a justice issue. Is it fair and just to give heterosexual couples a tax break when they file a joint return and not make the same break available to gay couples? Is it fair to allow a heterosexual person to visit his or her spouse in the Intensive Care Unit and not allow a homosexual person to visit his or her partner? And so on.

I am not aware of any reason the increased acceptance of gay marriage should erode the traditional understanding of heterosexual marriage.

“Christians do not just believe things about Jesus. We believe in him; we trust him.”

QUESTION from David Turner, pastor of Central Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.:

How would you explain the difference between an ordinance and a sacrament? Why don't Baptists have sacraments?

FH: One definition of a sacrament is that it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. In that sense the Bible, for example, is a sacrament.

It is outward and visible; we can hold it in our hands and read it with our eyes. It contains something that is inward and spiritual, namely, the gospel of the Lord. We believe that God works through the Bible to give us grace, that is, God's loving help for our lives.

In this general sense there are many sacraments. One medieval list included 32 sacraments. The Catholic bishop of Nashville, James Niedergeses, once said to me, "We are all sacraments to each other."

The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches also use the word "sacrament" in a more limited sense, to refer to seven religious rites. They are baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist or Lord's Supper, penance and reconciliation, anointing of the sick, marriage, and ordination.

We Baptists practice four of these: baptism, the Lord's Supper, marriage and ordination.

In the Catholic and Orthodox Churches two of these sacraments have priority over the others. They are baptism and Eucharist. There are two justifications for this priority.

First, unlike the other five, these both picture the gospel events: Baptism, when practiced by immersion, pictures Jesus' burial and resurrection, and the Lord's Supper pictures Jesus' broken body and his blood.

Second, also unlike the other five, Jesus commanded his followers to do these two things. That is why we call them ordinances, which means commands.

Baptists, like many other Protestants, have had serious concerns about the sacramental system that was developed by the medieval Catholic Church. We are troubled by what seems to us to have been magical or superstitious understandings of the Eucharist.

We also are troubled by the way the Church sometimes seemed to use the threat of withholding the sacramental means of grace as leverage to gain power. The ultimate power is not the power to kill someone; it is the power to damn someone eternally.

Because of these concerns, we reacted against the sacramental system. One expression of that was that some Baptists refused to use the word "sacrament" and used the word "ordinance" instead.

The reaction is understandable and to some extent justifiable. But it can be taken too far. I think this is done when, for example, we restrict the meaning of the Lord's Supper to a memorial.

It is true and important that when we are taking the bread and wine we are remembering the Lord's death until he comes. But that is not the whole story.

The communion table is the table of the Lord. Christ is present with us as together we take the bread and wine. He ministers to us spiritually through this sacred meal.

QUESTION from David Turner of Richmond:

Do the family baptisms referenced in scripture allow for the possibility of infant baptism as an appropriate model of baptism?

FH: Yes, family baptisms are evidence that the early church practiced infant baptism. So is the fact that Paul saw a parallel between baptism and circumcision.

Both were rites of initiation, and Paul spoke of baptism as a "spiritual circumcision" (Col. 2:11-12). And infants were circumcised.

On the other hand, there is other evidence in the New Testament that supports restricting baptism to believers. In the Great Commission Jesus spoke of baptizing those who become disciples (Matt. 28:19), and at Pentecost Peter spoke of baptizing those who have repented (Acts 2:38).

You may be surprised to know that in ecumenical circles today it is routine to think of believers' baptism as normative. The most influential Christian theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth, and his well-known contemporary, Emil Brunner, both supported believers' baptism even though they were members of churches that baptized infants.

In the Roman Catholic Church the RCIA, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, treats believers' baptism as normative. The most widely discussed of ecumenical documents, titled "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry," says that "baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents."

In 2008 the eminent Methodist

theologian Geoffrey Wainwright startled his listeners at an ecumenical meeting by saying, "As far as the issue of baptism goes, the Baptists have won!"

Of course, most churches still practice infant baptism. Is there any way to bridge the gap? I think there is.

Baptism is initiation into the church. Our primary objective in restricting baptism to believers is to have a believers' church. But a believers' church can be achieved if the churches that baptize infants insist upon confirmation as an essential part of Christian initiation and then use confirmation as an occasion to call upon people to affirm their faith in Christ.

The great Anglican scholar Alan Richardson did this. In an article titled "Christian Initiation" he said that infant baptism "is justified only if baptism and confirmation are looked upon as together making up the one act of Christian initiation."

This was done also in "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry": "In the case of infants, personal confession is expected later, and Christian nurture is directed to the eliciting of this confession. . . . The personal faith of the recipient of baptism and faithful participation in the life of the Church are essential for the full fruit of baptism."

I am a loyal Baptist, committed to believers' baptism. On the other hand I deeply regret that the practices of infant baptism and believers' baptism are dividing the Christian church. I feel that, since we Baptists contributed to this division by insisting on believers' baptism, we are obligated to try to mend it in whatever ways we can.

One way is to affirm the appropriateness of understanding Christian initiation as comprising both baptism and confirmation. In the end, all the churches want to affirm the value of infants growing up in the faith and life of the church, and all the churches want those infants, when they come of age, to trust in Christ and to commit themselves to live as Christians in the fellowship of the church. **BT**

—*Fisher Humphreys of Birmingham, Ala., has written several books on theology including Thinking About God: An Introduction to Christian Theology, The Way We Were: How Southern Baptist Theology Has Changed and What It Means To Us All, Fundamentalism (with Philip Wise) and God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism (with Paul Robertson).*

What a shame!

By John Pierce

Three Southern Baptist “biblical counseling experts” have given advice to families with gay or lesbian children that is frighteningly unloving and unhealthy. According to Baptist Press, seminary professors Heath Lambert, John Babler and Sam Williams call for “unconditional love” — then throw in their conditions.

They propose a so-called “culture of honesty” where family members with same-sex attraction can “confess their sins and ask for help.” Those are big conditions.

For them, acknowledgment of homosexual orientation must be accompanied by the confession that such feelings deserve condemnation and treatment. Apparently, truly unconditional love of a son or daughter requires too much from them.

“Ultimately this loved one’s eternal destiny may rest in” the needed confrontation of sin, said Babler, who apparently believes heterosexual orientation is an additional requirement for life eternal.

Williams calls this heavily-conditioned

approach “a properly Christian form of ‘coming out of the closet.’” And Lambert pastorally warns parents not to be too “creeped out” by confessions of same-sex attraction — noting with great theological depth that “sin is sin.”

Also, the professors advance the widely-disclaimed case for sexual orientation reversal that results from a heavy dose of confession and discipline — more discipline, of course, than is required of heterosexuals since there are permitted expressions of sexuality for them.

So the advice from these “biblical counseling experts” to those experiencing same-sex attraction is this good news: Come out and confess or be condemned!

And we wonder why so many young persons with same-sex attraction attempt suicide and sometimes succeed, or why so many people in general want to have nothing to do with a church that keeps putting such conditions on love.

Not surprising, these Southern Baptist leaders seem more concerned about doctrinal purity than showing Christ-like love. Babler warns families with gay or lesbian children to “keep their theology and their biblical belief intact, and not accommodate due to the fact that it’s one of their loved ones ...” That’s a “big temptation,” he said.

In fundamentalism, doctrinal purity

trumps all else — including love and grace. That’s why love is always conditional. Therefore, fundamentalist Christianity, with its narrow view of rightness loaded with condemnation, is one of the more hostile environments in which a young gay or lesbian person could find himself or herself today.

Beliefs are firmly set in the concrete of certainty that allows for no doubt or reflection — or admitting being wrong in the past — and empowers them to proclaim (as did Babler in this article) that the Bible is clear in stating that homosexuality is a sin issue.

Never mind that such cocksure claims about the Bible’s clarity were and are used to justify human slavery, to portray persons of color as inferior to whites, and to demean women — as well as other injustices carried out in the shameful name of the Christian gospel.

These men, who want young people struggling with their sexuality to bear such shame, are the ones who should be ashamed themselves — ashamed of misrepresenting the Gospel, of calling Christian families to be less than fully loving of their children, and of putting the preservation of their losing cultural war and narrow doctrinal boundaries above all else. **BT**

Paul’s hill

By Tony W. Cartledge

Christian visitors to Athens, Greece, are often drawn less to the classical wonders atop the Acropolis and more to the adjacent stony outcrop known as the Areopagus, or Mars Hill. The Greek name combines Ares, the Greek god of war, with *pagos*, the word for a big piece of rock.

The Roman god of war was named Mars, so they called it Mars Hill. It is a relatively small hill of solid rock that is slick, uneven and difficult to walk across. Yet, the high visibility of the outcropping made it ideal for public trials.

In Roman times, a council concerned with ethical, religious and cultural matters was also called the Areopagus, after the meeting place. It was such a debate that brought the Apostle Paul there during his visit to



Athens, as recorded in Acts.

Paul had created such a stir with his teachings in the synagogue and marketplace that a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers invited him to appear before the esteemed council. Paul, standing in full view of the temples on the Acropolis, noted that he had observed a number of altars to various gods and even one “to the unknown god.”

He declared that he had come to teach them about the true God, the one they had sensed, but not yet known.

Remembering Paul’s defense while standing on the slick, uneven stone of Mars Hill, often struggling for balance, one cannot help but be thankful for the God that Paul proclaimed, the one “in whom we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). **BT**

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THE WHOLE STORY

Jewish congregation's leader expresses gratitude for Baptist church's generosity, grace and open-heartedness

I don't really know if anyone knows the whole story. The whole story is painful. It is beautiful.

When my little congregation formed in January 2004 as a *havurah*, our first meetings were held at a local church in Concord, N.C. One of our interfaith couples suggested that church; one of the two spouses was an active and happy member at that church.

So we met in their fellowship hall once a month or so for about a year.

None of us knew that there was a deep division in the community about our presence.

None of us knew that the minister — who has long since moved away — was being visited each week by church members who believed Jews worshipping in the church was a real danger to the community.

She told me later what they had said.

“The Jews will destroy the church.”

I had a few other minister friends in Concord. One was Pastor Steve Ayers of McGill Baptist Church.

Wounded and shocked, I told him what had happened.

He said, “Come to McGill, Barbara.”

So we moved to a Baptist church in Concord.

We knew that some Jews would automatically assume that we were messianic and would not dare to come and find out otherwise.

We knew that some people would call McGill and ask if Jews met there.

We knew that both congregations might take a hit for their conviction that they could worship in the same space with love, tenderness and respect.

In the first year we were at McGill we learned we would have to raise thousands of dollars to restore our first Torah. For 12



Rabbi Barbara Thiede of Temple Or Olam and Pastor Steve Ayers of McGill Baptist Church in Concord, N.C., became closer friends when the Baptists welcomed the Jewish congregation to share space for worship and fellowship. Photo by Ronald Hartsell.

families, that was a daunting challenge.

Steve told me that McGill Baptist would refuse to take any rent; whatever money we had should go to the restoration.

To this day, I remind congregants that some of the letters on our first Torah were put there by Baptist generosity.

Sometimes, despite all our busy schedules, we managed to do congregational things together: a joint Hanukkah-Christmas party, a trip to see the Dead Sea Scroll exhibit when it came to Charlotte.

I visited the McGill Baptist adult

education class every year and spoke on a range of different topics to a community of enthusiastic and loving learners.

I stood before the congregation recently to thank them. I cried through each word. I thought of the things that had happened to me in that sanctuary.

Before we made the move to McGill, the congregation had invited me to deliver a talk on Judaism. After a long and wonderfully enthusiastic conversation with congregants at a program that was supposed to last an hour and turned into almost three hours, I turned to my

“We knew both congregations might take a hit for their conviction that they could worship in the same space with love, tenderness and respect.”

husband, Ralf, and said, “I think I better apply to rabbinical school — I need to know a lot more than I do to answer questions like those.”

Later, I joked that I got the “call” in a Baptist sanctuary.

I have sung *Avinu Malkeynu* with passion and power in that room. I have prostrated onto its floor. I have felt the souls of my ancestors attending to our prayers.

I have heard birds chirping at the window while we sang *Elohai neshama*, “my God, the soul you have given me is pure.”

I have seen my congregants dance across the sanctuary floor. Children have sung prayers and chanted from our Torahs.

We have celebrated, and celebrated, and celebrated again.

God has flowed right through my bones.

How could I manage to tell those generous people at McGill that I became a better rabbi in their sanctuary, that I learned how to serve the Holy One there?

At the recent service, Pastor Steve gave Temple Or Olam a blessing. He wished us well

as we move closer to the university area, to another location and a different part of the way on our path.

He reminded his congregation — and us — that living the love of God is our task. We are the face of the divine, he said. Sometimes we are the only messengers to others for that love.

He spoke about what it means to love others who are not always like you, who speak or look or act differently, but who need your outstretched arms, your heart and soul extended.

B'tzelem Elohim, in the image of God were we created. Each of us is a face of the Divine.

To all of you at McGill Baptist Church: For your grace, your generosity, your open-heartedness, and your love, I say again, “thank you.”

God knows the whole story. **BT**

(This column written by Rabbi Barbara Thiede of Temple Or Olam first appeared as a blog at adrenalinedrash.com, and is used by permission.)

In the Know

Melanie Baggao of Placentia, Calif., has been endorsed by American Baptist International Ministries as a development worker to serve in Lebanon.

Doris Joe Caudle Blacker died July 8. She and her husband, Robert, were American Baptist missionaries to the Hopi-Navajo congregation at Keams Canyon (Ariz.) Community Church, before assuming the pastorate of Shepherd of the Hills Church in Morenci, Ariz.

Robert G. Gardner died Aug. 11 in Macon, Ga. A church historian and author, he was senior researcher at Mercer University following his 1994 retirement from Shorter College where he taught religion and philosophy for 37 years.

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