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COVER PHOTO BY JOHN PIERCE. Glacier National Park in northern Montana was the site of a Nurturing Faith Experience that focused on the spiritual aspects of spending time away from routines and in close connection with creation. Story on page 34.

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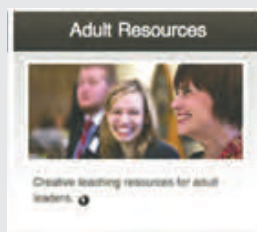
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Global Baptists

BWA gathers in South Africa to celebrate unity



The musical group “Just for Joy,” from a township near Durban, South Africa, brought much joy to the opening and closing celebrations of the Baptist World Alliance’s 21st Baptist World Congress. The gathering in Durban was the first such meeting of global Baptists to be held on the continent of Africa.

DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA — “*Ubuntu*” was a frequent watchword as more than 2,500 global Baptists from 80 countries gathered in July for the 21st Baptist World Congress of the Baptist World Alliance, the first to be held on the continent of Africa.

A term common to the Bantu family of languages in southern Africa, “*ubuntu*” denotes the common humanity of all people, suggesting the importance of kindness toward others.

In Christian contexts, it carries the sense of fellowship and a common bond shared by believers.

ONE DOOR

The desire for unity was evident from the opening night’s celebration to General

Secretary Neville Callam’s challenge in the meeting’s closing session, with each day’s worship session focusing on some aspect of the theme “Jesus Christ the Door.”

A large contingent of participants from Africa cheered and blew raucous vuvuzelas (long plastic horns) as Ngwedla Paul Msiza, a pastor from Pretoria, was installed as president of the BWA, the second African to hold the office.

Msiza called on Baptists to avoid the temptation to act as doorkeepers — controlling who can get in and out — rather than entering

to experience full fellowship with Christ and each other.

On earth we have special doors for dignitaries and other doors for common people, Msiza said, but with Jesus there is one door for everyone, “for we are all human beings created in the image of God.”

Outgoing president John Upton, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Mission Board, challenged Baptists to seek out places where people are trapped or oppressed and work for their freedom while also introducing them to Christ as the door to life.

RECOGNITION

The BWA’s Human Rights Award was presented to Corneille Gato Munyamasoko,



Celebratory singing is a vibrant part of the BWA World Congress in Durban, South Africa.

“On earth we have special doors for dignitaries and other doors for common people, but with Jesus there is one door for everyone, ‘for we are all human beings created in the image of God.’”

general secretary of the Association of Baptist Churches in Rwanda.

Speaking in behalf of the selection committee, Callam praised Munyamasoko for having dedicated his life to Christian ministries, to promoting peace and reconciliation, and to combating the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS.

Munyamasoko was born in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where his parents had fled following an outbreak of ethnic violence in Rwanda. As a teacher in the DRC, Munyamasoko worked to help Rwandans and Congolese overcome ethnic differences.

When the Rwandan genocide of 1994 spilled over into the DRC, Munyamasoko moved his family to Rwanda in hopes of helping to rebuild his native country. As a high school principal, he witnessed many atrocities, including the murders of the entire student body of a nearby boarding school.

He and his wife, Anne-Marie, took in children orphaned by the genocide to raise as their own.

Later elected as deputy general secretary of the Association of Evangelical Baptists of Rwanda, Munyamasoko oversaw 51 schools and regional churches in addition to serving as pastor of a local church.

He promoted peace and reconciliation clubs in secondary schools, and later launched a movement of “peace camps” to help young adults from different ethnic backgrounds come to terms with the violence they have witnessed and to gain a greater appreciation for one another.



Gato Munyamasoko, accompanied by his wife Anne-Marie, is presented with the 2015 Human Rights Award by longtime BWA supporter David Maddox. Munyamasoko, general secretary of the Association of Baptist Churches in Rwanda, was praised for having dedicated his life to Christian ministries, to promoting peace and reconciliation, and to combating the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS.

WORSHIP

Each worship service during the Congress featured lively music, scripture reading in a variety of languages, and a speaker from one of the BWA’s six global regions. Breakout sessions offered focus groups on a variety of topics ranging from evangelism to peace-and-justice issues to self-care for ministers.

The BWA’s elected leadership serves five-year terms, beginning and ending with the Baptist World Congress, held once every quinquennium. Smaller meetings of the BWA General Council, committees and commissions

are held annually.

The next large meeting is scheduled for Rio de Janeiro in July of 2020. For logistical and economic reasons, the General Council voted to combine the 2020 event with the Baptist Youth Congress, typically held separately. The joint meeting will be called “Celebration 2020.” **BT**

—Baptists Today’s *participation in and coverage of global Baptists are made possible by a gift from Roy and Charlotte Cook Smith of Winston-Salem, N.C.*

quotation “ ” remarks

“Back in my military days I remember wearing my uniform to church when I came home on leave — you get treated like you’re the most important person in the room.

But you know who is the most important person in the room?

It’s the person who is not in the room at all — it’s that little old lady who has quietly and lovingly been teaching the kids about Jesus while the rest of the church forgets she even exists.”

—Benjamin L. Corey who blogs at “Formerly Fundie” (patheos.com)

“The whole concept of membership smacks of exclusivity and they have no interest in it — but they do want to be involved.”

—Pastor Bob Ballance of Pine Street Church, an American Baptist congregation in Boulder, Colo., on the tendency of millennials to want to engage in congregational life without joining a church (BNG)

“We do Jesus, our faith, our church a disfavor if we confront this issue on the basis of how we simply feel about it. Instead, we need to covenant together to have an intentional spiritual conversation. It is a discussion in which we listen — really listen — to one another with the desire to see the best in one another, embrace one another, show genuine respect and love for one another, even in the midst of what could turn out to be deep differences of opinion and thought.”

—Randy Hyde, pastor of Pulaski Heights Baptist Church in Little Rock, in a sermon concerning congregational responses to the Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage

“In the end, fiscal constraints will force changes in prisons and sentencing if moral concerns do not. It seems better to make these changes out of a warm-hearted, merciful impulse than through cold fiscal realities.”

—Jacob Lupfer, a contributing editor at Religion News Service

“It is people doing what they believe. It isn’t anything to sneer at.”

—Jack Green of Stoney Fork, Ky., after John David Brock died July 26 from a snake bite during a service at Mossy Simpson Pentecostal Church in Jenson, Ky. (WKYT)

“I feel pain ... the pain over my people choosing the path of terrorism and losing their humanity; their path is not the path of the state of Israel.”

—Israel’s President Reuven Rivlin after recent attacks by Jewish extremists (CNN)

“The chancel is reserved for the really high-status people. So we decided we were going to excavate these.”

—Archaeologist Bill Kelso on finding the remains of Jamestown’s first leaders at the site where the first church in the first successful English colony in North America was built in 1608 (NPR)

“It is a hateful act. I view it as an effort to intimidate us in some way, and we will not be intimidated.”

—Pastor Raphael Warnock of Atlanta’s historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, after Confederate flags were left near the church in late July (RNS)

“There’s a whole generation of guys coming up saying we’re tired of being the lapdogs of the GOP and, worse than that, being tossed away like a Kleenex after the election is over.”

—Ryan Abernathy, teaching pastor at West Metro Community Church in Yukon, Okla., in a Religion News Service article on younger Southern Baptists seeking a less partisan approach to political engagement

“Baptists are all over the world! And we need each other — desperately need each other. We don’t need each other in order to overcome an enemy. We don’t need each other to save our world ... We need each other to actually see the world — to see each other.”

—Jason Coker, pastor of Wilton Baptist Church in Wilton, Conn., reflecting on the Baptist World Alliance gathering in Durban, South Africa this summer (BNG)

“Be prepared, do things the right way, and have fun.”

—Dansby Swanson, Major League Baseball’s top draft pick and a member of First Baptist Church of Marietta, Ga., on three “take-aways” learned from Vanderbilt coach Tim Corbin (theplayertribune.com)

By John Pierce

Liberal or conservative? Yes.

If there were ever an issue worth our serious consideration it is this: How do we get past quick, dismissive labels that divide Christian communities and larger societies?

And such division is often tied to the tagging of someone as either “conservative” or “liberal” — with disdain toward anyone who wears a label other than the one affixed to us.



One of Baptists’ brightest minds and consistent givers of grace, Bill Hull, dug deeply into this issue in the final months of his life — while struggling to the end with ALS that robbed his activity but not his clear thinking.

Following his death in December 2013, Hull’s book *The Quest for a Good Death: A Christian Guide* was published the next year. Little known was the fact that he spent the final months of his life addressing the subject of conservatism and liberalism.

His son David and daughter Susan have given this final book manuscript to *Baptists*

One cannot read this book and continue tossing around the terms “liberal” and “conservative” in the same ways as before. They will have context and meaning beyond mere dismissive labels.

Today to be published through Nurturing Faith. It will be available on Sept. 1.

A review by theologian Fisher Humphreys of Birmingham, Ala., is found on pages 14-15 of this issue along with other information about the book.

Simply put: One cannot read this book and continue tossing around the terms “liberal” and “conservative” in the same ways as before. They will have context and meaning beyond mere dismissive labels.

Of course, such terms — no matter how they are used — are relative. I recall the first doctoral seminar I attended at a Presbyterian seminary. The person sitting on one side of

me was a Unitarian-Universalist minister. To the other side was an Assembly of God pastor who taught classes at Jimmy Swaggart Bible College.

My own identity as a liberal or a conservative depended on which way I turned at the table.

Hull’s main point — though thoroughly bathed in biblical, theological and historical depth — is that conservative and liberal thought are widely present in the Bible and throughout Christian history. They offer a creative, constructive and corrective tension that is much needed today.

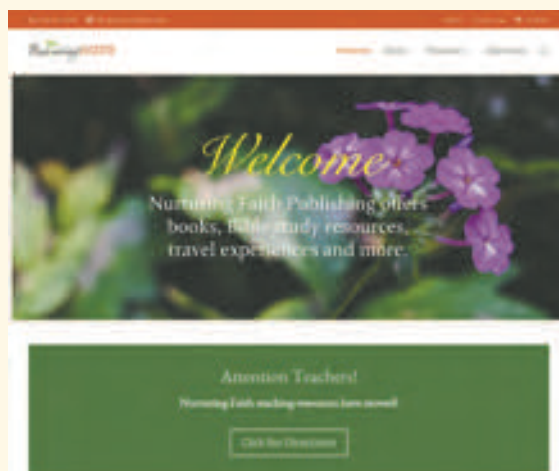
At a time when congregations and fellowships of churches are struggling with identity, this excellent and insightful book is a needed, helpful resource. Our hope is that congregational leadership teams, committees, diaconates, classes and book clubs will explore this needed topic with the guidance of Dr. Hull’s superb insights that are a lasting gift to us.

To that end, Christian educator Terry Maples has written a study/discussion guide that is posted for free online at NurturingFaith.net. **BT**

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None and Done

Leaders: Treat those with no religious preference with love, not 'like a project'

The fastest growing segment of persons responding to “religious preference” surveys reflects those who choose no religion at all. The “nones” have thus become a prime target for cultural analysis — as well as soul-searching by evangelicals who wonder why so many people now find the church unappealing.

Are the “nones” done with religion, or could they remain open to the Christian gospel?

That subject was one of many addressed through focus groups offered during the 2015 Baptist World Congress July 23-24 in Durban, South Africa.

“Nones” are not necessarily atheists, said Sam Chaise, executive director of Canadian Baptist Ministries: most still believe in a higher power.

“Nones” haven’t rejected spirituality or God so much as they’ve rejected the concept of religion that makes dogmatic statements, he added. The question is not whether the claims are true or untrue, Chaise said. The issue is that “nones” see exclusivist religion as bad for society.

While “nones” may admire Jesus, Chaise said, “They see a disconnect between what they know of Jesus and the church ... they think we’re homophobic and lack integrity.”

For them, “The question is not whether Christianity is true, but whether it is moral and good for the world. If we define Christianity as a set of beliefs, they see it as an exercise of power that creates conflict.”

Jimmy Martin, general secretary of the International Baptist Convention, an association of 72 English-speaking congregations located mainly in Europe, agreed that “nones” are not rejecting God, but rejecting religion.

They are not “seekers,” but have largely developed their own concept of what faith means and are comfortable with it, he said.

Typical beliefs of the “nones” include a

concept of “truthiness,” Martin said, the belief that there are multiple truths, and maybe nothing that is fully true, with each individual deciding what is true for him or her.

The variability of truth is influenced by “Wikiality,” he said, playing off the popular Wikipedia website, where articles are written by volunteers. “Wikiality” suggests that there is no defined truth, or truth beyond what the majority decides.

Morality has suffered the same fate as truth, Martin said: “Nones” have relegated sin to the category of sickness or a mistake, rejecting the concept of a firm and defined morality. Some believe that perfect happiness can be found on earth as people seek their own truth through feeling rather than reason, he said.

Those who hope to reach the “nones” with the gospel should carefully analyze their own goals and motivations, Chaise said. They shouldn’t think of themselves as taking God to the “nones,” because God is already everywhere.

Any ministry directed toward the “nones,” Chaise said, must be shaped by genuine love, not just a means to an evangelistic end:

“People can smell when they’re being treated like a project.”

Being present with the “nones” requires the right posture and attitude, Chaise said, beginning with patient relationship building and a willingness to listen. It’s best to see the relationship as “a journey, not an information dump.”

It’s better to share intriguing thoughts and leave people wanting more than to shower them with far more information than they want. There’s no place for arrogance, smugness or superiority in such a relationship, he said.

Ministry to the “nones” grows best from service, Chaise said, because seeing is believing. Chaise compared the church to a demonstration farm designed to promote better farming methods.

When considering a church, “People should sense something there and then want to know what it’s about.” If people are touched by a loving church that clearly adds value to the community, Chaise said, they are more willing to hear stories of faith from church members.

Martin likewise emphasized the importance of relationship building. Most “nones” are not agnostics but “ignostics,” he said, knowing little about the gospel. Others have been “inoculated” against the faith by exposure to a distorted view of Christianity, leading them to discount more valid expressions of faith.

A church that is successful in reaching the “nones” must be an inviting church with an open door, Martin said, a church where people are genuinely friendly to all comers, not just to each other. Such a church is willing to listen, not just to give answers.

“Nones” are so skeptical of organized religion that an appealing church must have an atmosphere of acceptance and true authenticity, Martin added, “where people can meet credible Christians.” **BT**



Sam Chaise



Jimmy Martin

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Trudy Usner Pettibone

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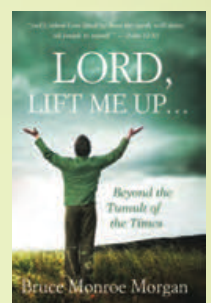
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Bruce Monroe Morgan

Reflecting on the symbolism found in the heavenward-pointing hand on the steeple of the First Baptist Church of Griffin, Ga., that church's long-time pastor shares inspirational thoughts based on the hymn, "Higher Ground":

I want to scale the utmost height / And catch a gleam of glory bright; / But still I'll pray till heav'n I've found, / "Lord, lead me on to higher ground." / Lord, lift me up and let me stand, / By faith on heaven's table land, / A higher plane than I have found; / Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

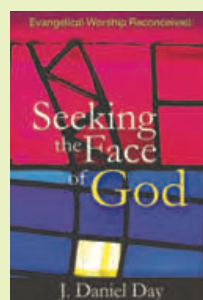


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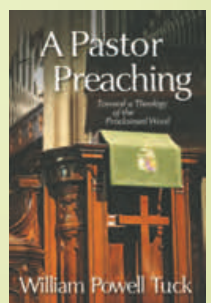


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In a quandary

Black clergy walk fine line between religious liberty, discrimination

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

Since the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage is constitutional, pastor Jerry Young of Jackson, Miss., has been in a quandary.

As the president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, a predominantly black denomination, he is grappling with a new reality: how to respond to the specter of discrimination against gays. While he doesn't support gay marriage, the refusal of some religious bakers and florists to provide services to gays prompts memories of racially segregated hotels and restaurants.

"On the one hand, you have to be sensitive to the fact that you do not want people to be victims of discrimination — that's just an absolute fact — you just do not want that to happen," said Young, who grew up in Mississippi in the civil rights era and is developing a position paper to guide NBCUSA congregations on these issues.

"And on the other hand, there is this tension between what, as Christians, we believe God has called us to do, and what it appears to be, in some sense, what the culture seems to be doing."

Though some national black Baptist denominations and the Church of God in Christ oppose same-sex marriage, a new poll from Public Religion Research Institute shows that 63 percent of nonwhite Protestants object to religious exemptions in nondiscrimination laws.

Fred Davie, executive vice president of Union Theological Seminary and a gay Presbyterian Church (USA) minister, says he thinks most black clergy share concerns about discrimination.

"Most of us know the sting of that and the scourge of that and don't want to repeat it even though they would reserve the right to choose who to marry, who not to marry, in their churches," said Davie, who is married to Michael Adams, his partner of 17 years.

Seventeen states have introduced legislation to create or alter state-level religious freedom restoration laws, some of which could affect same-sex marriages. Many Voices, a pro-LGBT group that works with black churches, said it hopes to influence legislators crafting those bills.

"Voices of faith leaders will be required to hold in balance the highly valued religious liberty we enjoy along with freedoms and protections for LGBT persons and their families," said Cedric Harmon, co-director of Many Voices.

Not all African-American clergy oppose same-sex marriage, but many oppose laws that would allow legal discrimination against a group of people.

"I know what it's like to be discriminated against, and our people do, so I don't want them to be discriminated against," said Bishop George Battle Jr., senior bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which opposes same-sex marriage. "If their money is green and you're taking green money, I think you should take it all."

But T. DeWitt Smith Jr., an Atlanta pastor and co-chair of the National African American Clergy Network, said he doesn't think owners of mom-and-pop establishments should be equated with the segregationists of the past.

"The smaller groups have to grapple with their own consciences," said Smith, former president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, noting he was stating his personal

opinion.

While some businesses may make that choice based on religious belief, "I don't really equate that with the denial of hotel space based on color, ethnicity."

Bishop Talbert W. Swan II, a Church of God in Christ pastor in Springfield, Mass., agreed that the church-run bakery down the street from his congregation should have the right to deny its services to a gay couple.

"So if someone walks into the New Hope Bakery and said, 'We wanted you to bake a cake for a same-sex marriage ceremony,' I think they should have every right to say 'No, we won't bake that cake,'" he said. "They should have every right to refuse to bake a product that's going to be associated with something that violates their religious belief."

But he said a for-profit corporation that serves the general public should not have an exemption.

To Swan, the history of enslavement of African Americans cannot be compared to gay struggles.

"I don't think it's comparing apples to apples," he said. "The history does not compare, and to me it's quite insulting to try to make that connection."

Terence Leathers of Clayton, N.C., unsuccessfully lobbied the North Carolina legislature, which passed a law allowing magistrates to refuse to perform a same-sex marriage ceremony. He feels magistrates and bakers should not deny services to LGBT people, and connects these issues to times when other discrimination was evident — like the nearby town that once had a welcome sign that read "This is KLAN country."

"It's discriminatory and should not be tolerated," he said.

But he admits to feeling like he's a lone voice among black clergy in his rural area.

"There are people who may be for me but they're keeping it silent," he said. "They don't want to cause any trouble." **BT**



Jerry Young

"Voices of faith leaders will be required to hold in balance the highly valued religious liberty we enjoy along with freedoms and protections for LGBT persons and their families."

Teen Moms

Love them so much you walk through life alongside them

By Mikel Porter

"TOMS" is a unique missional ministry to teen moms that began in August 2009 at First Baptist Church of Lewisville, Texas. That summer, Mikel Porter was serving as the church's student minister. Two grandmothers, within a week of one another, had approached Mikel concerning their teenage granddaughters with babies. They desperately wanted to connect them to the church. Mikel felt called to pray about this matter and, later that summer, five women began to pray for the teen moms in their area and the church's role in their lives. Those prayers led to the weekly meetings of the TOMS ministry that fall. The local school district has more than 100 teen parents each school year and First Baptist Church came to believe that God had called the church to love them, to meet their needs, and to introduce them to Jesus Christ. Now Mikel picks up the story.

I remember the first Wednesday meeting so well. Five mentors had prayed all summer about this ministry, and we huddled together in our hot pink decorated room hoping some girls would come.

That night we had the opportunity to meet and pray with two teen moms. Thus began the incredible love story between First Baptist Church and the teenage parents in our community.

Although we started with only two girls, God quickly added to our number. That is what he seems to do when we join him in ministry. Today, we are five years down the road and have met and ministered to more than 150 teen parents.

We have grown from one group of teen moms to a second group of older girls who meet for discipleship, and have even added a group of teen dads. Over the past year we have met more than 50 teen parents for the first time and celebrated the birth of 17 new children.

We meet weekly and plan our time together around four purposes.

First, we want every teenager to know our love for her (or him). There is no judgment,

no lectures, only acceptance and love. We feel this way about the young people, because Jesus feels this way about us. We tell them they are treasured by Jesus Christ. Our primary purpose and desire is to see each one of them in a relationship with him.

Second, we meet physical needs when we are able. The parents and children are given 20 diapers and a meal each Wednesday they attend.

Over the years our congregation has provided home-cooked Thanksgiving feasts, gift cards for Christmas and school supplies. We collect donations all year to fill our "store" so our girls can shop for baby clothing, toys, strollers and car seats.

Many church members come each week to love on the children in our preschool area while their mommas are at TOMS. We pray hard and do our best to help meet physical needs.

Third, we desire to equip these parents with life skills. We bring in speakers to cover various topics such as fitness, nutrition, drug

and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, finances, adoption, interviewing skills and college preparation, just to name a few. We encourage our girls and guys to finish school so they are in a good position to provide for their families.

And, finally, we want each teen parent to be connected to and part of a mentoring relationship. There is no greater way to minister to people than to love them so much that you walk through life alongside them. This is what our mentors do best.

In the midst of a long-term relationship, they have the students in their homes for meals, shop with them for Christmas presents, and have play dates at the playground.

They text throughout the day and spend time on the phone and shed tears on behalf of and with these parents. Our mentors are the hands, feet and voices of Jesus to these young men and women.

Today I stand in the room that held two teen moms five years ago, and now I hear the voices of many. I close my eyes to concentrate as everyone continues to sing the worship songs.

I start to pray silently before I get up to teach when I'm startled by Jonathan, a beautiful 6-year-old who stands right beside me. He doesn't say a word, but my eyes meet his as the song continues to play.

As his dimples press into his tan cheeks and his eyes squint to make room for his smile, I remember meeting him five years ago. His mother is one of our success stories, and his face reminds me that God is truly changing the lives of these children along with their moms and dads.

God is using us to give them hope and help as we seek to pave the way for a new and full life for them all. **BT**

—Mikel Porter is young adult minister for the First Baptist Church of Lewisville, Texas.



Guy Rutland III honored as director emeritus

S AINT SIMONS ISLAND, Ga. — Linda and Guy Rutland III hustled over to a July 23 luncheon in their honor after corralling more than two dozen 7-year-olds in Vacation Bible School at First Baptist Church of Saint Simons.

William Neal, a director of Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith, said that kind of commitment has long marked the Rutlands' lives.

He noted how the couple has been fully engaged in the Saint Simons church and the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., depending on where they lived seasonally. They also helped form and lead a community church in Snowmass, Colo.

An active and influential Baptist lay leader, Rutland is chairman emeritus of Allied Systems Holding, Inc. He played a strategic role in the mission of *Baptists Today* news journal according to editor emeritus Jack U. Harwell.

"Guy gave substantial gifts to the paper, sold ads, solicited subscribers, sponsored fund-raising events, served as finance chair for several years and gave us free office space in one of his [Decatur, Ga.] office buildings for



(Left to right) Board chairman Don Brewer, Saint Simons pastor Tony Lankford, Judy Neal, William Neal, Linda Rutland, Guy Rutland III and Jimmy Allen share in Guy's recognition as director emeritus.

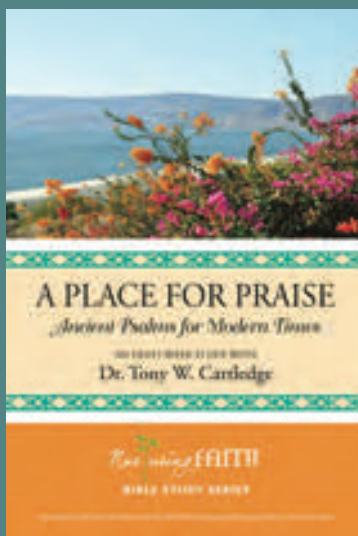
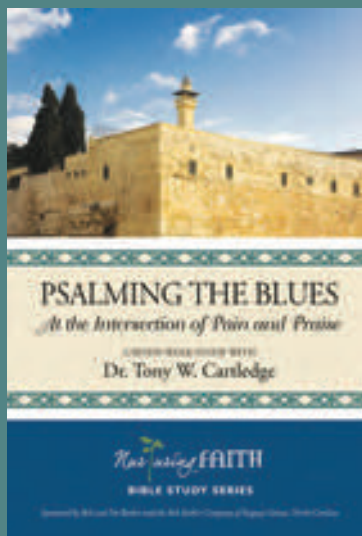
10 years," said Harwell. "In addition, he took me out to lunch on occasion, just to give me his best thinking... He was a true friend."

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responsible stewardship.

Rutland is the sixth person to be recognized as director emeriti by the news journal for significant leadership and support. The others are: Tommy Boland, R. Kirby Godsey, Mary Etta Sanders, Mel Williams and Winnie Williams. **BT**

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A review by Fisher Humphreys

Conservatism and Liberalism

Hull's final book makes a convincing case that the Christian church has always embraced both perspectives

Perhaps the best way to clarify the ideas and practices that William Hull advocates in this posthumously published book is to ask yourself how you handle the tension between conservatism and liberalism.

Do you just ignore the issues? That's understandable, given how stressful and how complex they often are.

Or, are you committed to just one position, so that you strive to be conservative (or liberal) on every issue? This too is understandable; consistency is a noble quality in our thinking and our lives.

Or, are you a middle-of-the-road person? Once you understand what the conservative and liberal views are on a particular issue, do you instinctively look for a golden mean somewhere between them?

For example, if your church is discussing whether to sing traditional hymns from hymnals or choruses projected onto a screen during worship services, do you opt for a blended service in which you sing both kinds of music, sometimes using hymnals and sometimes screens? That is one understanding of what it means to be moderate.

Or, do you try to sort out the issues one at a time, with the result that you sometimes come down on the conservative side and sometimes on the liberal?

For example, are you conservative about fiscal matters and liberal about race relations? Or, are you conservative about Jesus but liberal about the role of women in the life of the church? There is a lot to be said for thinking through issues for yourself.

In this brief, readable book William Hull advocates a particular way of handling conservatism and liberalism. It is to allow room for both points of view in your life and in the life of the church, provided neither one becomes so extreme as to create havoc.

Hull begins by pointing out how unexpected it is that the categories of conservatism and liberalism should have become so prominent in the life of the church. They are not biblical categories, nor have they been employed through most of the church's history.

They first came into use in the 18th century in accounts of the French Revolution. Even when they are employed in other areas such as economics, culture and theology, their political origins continue to color their connotations.

Hull next makes a convincing case that the Christian church has always embraced both conservatism and liberalism.

For example, the early church was intensely conservative in that, even when it went out into the Gentile world, it continually used the Old Testament as Scripture, and when in the third century Marcion advocated abandoning the Old Testament, the church condemned his proposal.

Hull points out how strange this intensely conservative view must have felt to Gentiles who were hearing the gospel for the first time: "Predominantly Gentile converts found themselves with a seemingly provincial Bible full of the genealogies of Jewish tribes that no longer existed, of the exploits of a Jewish monarchy

that no longer ruled, and of the rituals of a Jewish temple that no longer stood" (p. 16).

On the other hand, the early church did abandon four of the most characteristic practices of Judaism: Sabbath observance, temple loyalty, kosher foods and circumcision. Hull describes at length the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) at which matters such as this were discussed.

He says that the church had five kinds of leaders at that time: James the extreme conservative, Peter the moderate conservative, Barnabas the moderate, Paul the moderate liberal, and Stephen the extreme liberal who was martyred before the council convened.

On the matter of kosher food the council adopted the extremely conservative view that Christians should not eat meat unless the blood has been drained from it. But the council's decisions proved "ineffective," and the church soon abandoned all four Jewish practices.

The position the church took was not that of the extremely liberal Stephen who thought the Jewish traditions had never been appropriate, but of the moderately liberal Paul who respected the value of the traditions for the past but discontinued them for the present and future.

Hull sees the same dialectic at work through the history of the church. In the Patristic era, for example, the church created the canon of Christian writings that we call the New Testament. But the same church fathers who took this quite conservative step took the equally liberal step of translating the Christian message from Jewish into Hellenistic categories, specifically, into the categories of neo-Platonism.



In the fourth and fifth century controversies concerning the person of Christ, for example, the church confessed its faith in non-biblical, philosophical language such as *hypostasis* and *ousia* and even *homoousios* – words never used in the numerous biblical confessions concerning Jesus.

In the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas was both a devoutly conservative Christian theologian and a liberal who replaced the neo-Platonic language that the church had used for a thousand years with Aristotelian language. Thomas’s teaching was initially condemned by influential bishops, but today Thomas is a saint and the “Angelic Doctor” of the Roman Catholic Church.

Hull’s example for the Reformation era is Martin Luther, of whom Hull writes: “Luther was surely the most conservative Christian who ever lived. His mind and heart were captive to the Word of God.”

Then he adds, “On the other hand, Luther was surely the most liberal Christian who ever lived” because he challenged the collective consensus of the church in the name of his own individual convictions. Luther held together in his mind and life what Paul Tillich later termed “Catholic substance and Protestant principle.” Hull writes, “The sixteenth-century Reformation paradigm was, by its very nature, both conservative and liberal” (pp. 37-38).

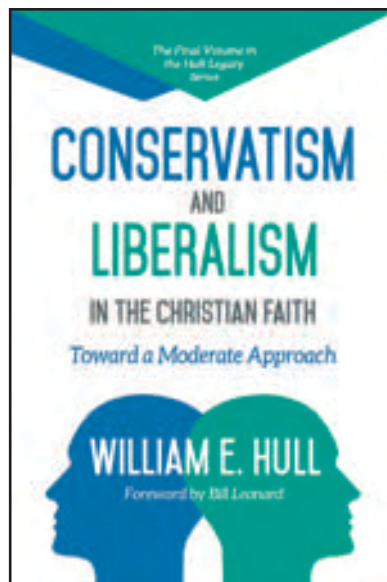
Next, Hull turns to the Baptists. The first Baptists were Anglicans who had become Puritans who had become Separatists and who then became Baptists.

Their rejection of significant parts of their earlier traditions makes them “liberal in character.” But, Hull writes, “the original Baptist impulse was also profoundly conservative” (p. 40).

This is clear concerning baptism: The Baptists were determined to return to the New Testament practice (as they understood it) of baptizing only believers.

As I said, I find Hull’s argument is convincing. Others will want to assess it for themselves.

In the course of making his case, Hull tells stories from his experiences as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Shreveport, La.; as a member of the Peace Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention; as provost of Samford University; and as a participant in theological discussions of the Baptist World



Alliance. These stories illustrate beautifully that Hull’s understanding of conservatism and liberalism is practicable.

Hull’s stories about Samford University are of special interest to me because I taught there for 18 years. Hull says that he brought to Samford as founding dean of the divinity school Timothy George, “clearly the finest scholar in the conservative movement” in Southern Baptist life. He also brought as chair of the religion department Bill Leonard, “the most influential speaker and premier historian of the moderate movement.”

These two longtime friends did not conceal their theological differences; for example, they debated Calvinism publicly. Hull reports:

I took a lot of grief over both appointments from the “impossible” crowd. Moderates were quick to assert that I had fatally compromised the new divinity school, while conservatives wanted to fire me for playing partisan politics.... Unfortunately for my bitter critics, their doom-and-gloom scenarios failed to materialize. Both the divinity school and the religion department flourished with new leadership. (p. 77)

Then he adds:

I came away from this whole episode convinced that is not healthy for either conservatives or moderates to associate only with their own ideological crowd. It makes them too totalitarian in what they claim, too contemptuous of those who differ with them, and too dependent on group loyalty to risk diversity (p. 77).

The 1987 report of the Peace Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention includes the claim that most Southern Baptists believe that Adam and Eve were real people, that the authors of the Bible wrote the books attributed to them, that the miracles reported in the Bible were supernatural interventions, and that the historical narratives of the Bible were reports of events that actually occurred.

Hull describes this list, which had been drawn up hastily, as “an effort to wrest control of what the Bible means from a handful of scholars with their endless technical problems” (p. 63).

Hull, who was a New Testament scholar, had doubts about whether he “could work with conservative leaders such as these. During the almost 40 years since then, my mind has gradually changed regarding the issues involved” (p. 78).

What changed his mind was reflection on the profoundly Christian faith and life of numerous people, including two of his uncles, who would unhesitatingly affirm this list of ideas: “I am not going to spend my final time on earth fighting [such persons] in the SBC. Anyone who wants to know and live by the Scripture is a friend of mine” (p. 79).

Hull concedes that it is difficult to put his understanding of conservatism and liberalism into practice, but he believes it is possible. And it is morally and spiritually necessary:

How can we talk about loving one another and then show disdain for those who understand some debated point of doctrine differently? Are we willing to pray for a Spirit-inspired change of heart, daring to reach across chasms of contempt and affirm — indeed embrace — those of every ideology, all of which were nailed to the cross when God through Christ reconciled the world until himself? (p. 80)

I recommend this book enthusiastically. It displays the mature thinking of an outstanding educator, pastor and New Testament scholar; a man whom we remember with respect and appreciation. **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is professor of divinity emeritus from Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School.



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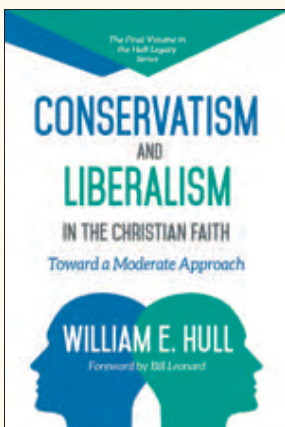
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—From Foreword
by **BILL J. LEONARD**

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Bible Study

Mark 10:1-16

with Tony W. Cartledge

Oct. 4, 2015

Hard Words and a Soft Heart

We don't live in an ideal world. That's a fact. It may be a frustrating fact, but true nonetheless. For most of us, our vision of an ideal world would be one in which all people would live in peace and harmony, in which every marriage would last happily until death, in which every child would grow up healthy and happy and successful.

But we don't live in that world, do we? We are all acquainted with brokenness and failure. Hopefully, we've known forgiveness, too.

In today's text, wrong-spirited questions run into unexpected ideals, which then beg for interpretation in the face of reality.

Jesus and legalists (vv. 1-12)

The wrong-spirited question has to do with divorce. Mark tells us that Jesus has set out for Judea, one of several geographical notes in the gospel (see also 7:24, 31; 8:22, 27; and 9:30, 33).^U

Judea was centered in Jerusalem and occupied much of the southern part of what we typically think of as Israel. The province was ruled by Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great. Antipas had famously divorced his first wife – a Nabatean princess – sending her back to her father so he could marry a woman named Herodias. Herodias, meanwhile, had divorced Herod Antipas's half-brother Herod Phillip so she could marry Antipas. John the baptizer had been harshly critical of the



Mark 10:14b –
"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

sordid affair, and lost his head because of it (Mark 6:14-29).

At some point a group of Pharisees approached Jesus, seeking to entrap him by asking him to take sides on the hotly debated topic of divorce: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (v. 2). Jesus exposed the Pharisees' hypocrisy by requiring them to confess that they already knew what the law said (vv. 3-4). Deut. 24:1-4 clearly allowed a man to divorce his wife if she displeased him because he found "something objectionable about her" (NRSV). Wives did not have the same privilege, however. (For more on the Jewish law, see "The Hardest Question" online.)

Jesus went a step beyond their debates over what the law allowed by raising the discussion to the level of what God wished. The legal allowance for divorce was given only because the Israelites were too stubborn or hard-hearted to live up to the ideal of a permanent marriage, Jesus said (v. 5). He then combined two snippets from Genesis 1 and 2 to argue that God's desire is for marriage to be permanent,

adding "Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate" (v. 9).^U

When the disciples pressed Jesus for a further word later on, he took the next logical step by declaring that divorce, whether initiated by the man or the woman, would lead to adultery against the first spouse if either remarried (vv. 10-12).

What do we do with a text like this? Are Jesus' words to be taken as a law that Christians must follow? Are divorced persons who remarry condemned to a life of ongoing adultery?

We have several points to consider. Note first that the teaching reflects a new reality: Jewish law allowed only men to obtain a divorce, but Roman law allowed a woman to do the same. This teaching puts men and women on the same level.

Secondly, recall the background story of Herod Antipas and Herodias breaking up two separate marriages so they could be wed. This, and a popular interpretation of Deut. 24:1-4 that allowed men to enjoy serial polygamy through easy divorces, showed the negative side of divorce, which needed a corrective.

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



The Pharisees' use of a serious question in a trivial way, combined with the conflicted approach to divorce among the legalists, led Jesus to leap past the quibbling of "what is permitted" to focus on God's ideal desire that marriages be for good.

That much is clear. But where does that leave us? We know that many couples fail to live up to God's ideal – indeed, to their own ideals. Does getting married automatically mean that God has sanctioned a couple's union, that "God has joined them together"? Some marriages are ill advised and doomed from the beginning. Others begin well, but over the course of years, one or both partners change in ways that can make continuing the marriage more harmful than ending it.

We know this, and God understands this. In his ministry, Jesus was far more prone to utter words of compassion and forgiveness than of condemnation and judgment. We fail to live up to God's ideal in many areas of life, not just in marriage. When we fall short, God offers forgiveness and the opportunity to start anew – including the area of marriage. Jesus' confounding of the Pharisees by upholding God's ideal over human legalisms does not condemn people in bad marriages to a life of misery, or sentence remarried persons to a life of adultery. 🇺🇸

Jesus and children (vv. 13-16)

From a teaching on divorce, the narrative moves to a lesson from children. We can learn something from the parents involved in this story. "People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them ..." (10:13a). The children did not come to Jesus on their own; their parents brought them in hopes of a blessing.

We all know what it is like to want the best for our children. We want them to have better things than we had – a better house, better food, better toys, a better education, and a better job. None of these things matter, however, unless we can also provide for them

inner security and spiritual nourishment. If we work to give our children a better education and better employment prospects, but give them no purpose in life, then we have failed.

Some denominational traditions use this text to support infant baptism, but Jesus' acceptance of little children has nothing to do with whether they have been baptized. We cannot bring a baby for baptism and then assume that she is set for life. Nor can we relax our concern when one of our older children expresses faith and seeks baptism. Christian adults have a responsibility to continue bringing the children of this world to Jesus, and not only by bringing them to church, but also through living as appropriate examples.

From the disciples we learn a more negative lesson: the serious danger of keeping anyone from Christ. When the parents brought their children to Jesus, his self-appointed bodyguards tried to prevent them, and earned for themselves a stinging rebuke. Jesus became "indignant" – a word so strong that neither Matthew nor Luke repeats it in their version of the story (Matt. 19:13-15, Luke 18:15-17).

I have known deacons who stood guard at the church door to make sure none of the neighborhood's black children tried to come in. I have known other adults who took a much less overt role in hindering children, but their general apathy and unwholesome lifestyles served to the same effect.

Jesus wanted his followers to know that those who keep children (or others) away from him are working against him, and not for him. This story is separated by only a few verses from Jesus' earlier warning about the danger of being a stumbling block to children (9:42).

We also learn from the children in this story. Jesus used the occasion to teach that we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we enter it like children:

"Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (v. 15). 🇺🇸 This suggests that there is something about the character of a child that enables someone to experience God now, and to share his kingdom life in eternity. 🇺🇸

I once studied this passage in 30 commentaries written over the past 150 years. I discovered that the child-like characteristics mentioned most frequently by scholars writing 100 years ago included things like "purity," "humility," and "meekness." Either children have changed, or modern writers are more observant, because current commentaries rarely describe children as pure, meek, or humble!

What childlike qualities did Jesus have in mind? Surely he knew that children have an innate openness and ability to trust that adults tend to lose along the way. They are not so cynical that they cannot believe, or so rational that everything has to be fully explained before they can accept it. Childlike faith must grow into a mature faith, but faith begins on a child's level – in simple trust.

Children can accept being accepted. Adults who are aware of their sin often worry if they are "good enough" to be accepted by Christ. Children do not worry about such things. A healthy child does not think "Why should Jesus love me?" She knows that she is lovable. 🇺🇸 🇺🇸

We also learn, of course, from Jesus, whose angry rebuke to the disciples teaches an important lesson about value systems. People commonly grow angry from affronts to self, but Jesus' ire was provoked when harm came to others.

Jesus' response to the children also shows a love that goes beyond what we might expect of him. The parents in question had hoped that Jesus might simply touch their children (v. 13), but Jesus "took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them" (v. 16). The word for "blessed" is actually a strengthened form of the usual term: he *fervently* blessed them.

Jesus truly cares for all of the children, no matter our age, and desires to bless us all. How great is that? **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 10:17-31

Oct. 11, 2015

Of Treasures and Troubles


If you could kneel before Jesus and ask him just one question, what would it be? Would you want to know what the stock market will do over the next five years? Would you ask how we could best deal with terrorism? Would you try to pin Jesus down on why bad things happen to good people?

Today's text speaks of a man who had the opportunity to question Jesus. He didn't ask for market tips, political wisdom, or theological explanations, but focused entirely on his own future: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now that's a question worth asking.

A lesson from a rich man (vv. 17-22)

We often call the protagonist of this account the "rich young ruler," but that title is a composite drawn from three differing Gospel accounts of the same event. Mark simply calls him a man (literally, the masculine form of "one," v. 17a), while Matthew says he is young (Matt. 19:20), and Luke calls him a ruler (Luke 18:18), probably suggesting that he was a leader of the synagogue. He was clearly Jewish, a man who sought to follow the Torah and probably the oral law as well.


All three Gospels agree that the man was rich, and they contrast his effort to earn salvation ("What must I do?") with the free acceptance of the kingdom by children in the previous verses. 


Mark offers only the sketchiest of settings. The story follows a geographical positioning of Jesus in



Judea, probably on his way to Jerusalem (10:1). "As he was setting out on a journey," Mark says, a man ran up and knelt before him, as if anxious to have an audience before Jesus departed. Perhaps he was afraid he wouldn't get another chance.

The man's approach was unusual. He is the only person mentioned in the Gospels who addresses Jesus as "good teacher" (Mark 10:17, Luke 18:18). His posture is also telling: one would not typically kneel before an ordinary rabbi, but the man knelt before Jesus. Evidently he had seen something special in Jesus that was worthy of great respect, so he showed appropriate deference.

The man was forthright about what he wanted: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (10:17b). This suggests that the man was more aligned with the Pharisees than the Sadducees in his thinking: belief in a resurrection after death followed by eternal life in a new age to come was a late development in Judaism. The Pharisees accepted it, but the more conservative Sadducees did not. 

Jesus responded with a question of his own: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (10:18). This seems an odd response, for Jesus would have been well aware of his sinless nature and we would not expect him to deny it. 

Jesus apparently did not expect a response, but went on to answer the initial question by reciting several representative commandments from Exod. 20:12-17 in random order (v. 19). Scholars have noted that Jesus did not mention any of the commandments relating to God, only those concerning relationships with other people. Perhaps he recognized that the man had a firm belief in God and was in no danger of trusting in other deities, so he focused on relationships with others – an arena in which material resources play a major role.

In that regard, we note that while Jesus did not mention the commandment against coveting, he added "you shall not defraud," which is not among the Ten Commandments. This suggests that Jesus tailored his answer to the needs of the man before him. As a person of

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great wealth, the man had little reason to covet what others had – but wealth is sometimes gained through fraud, and fraud has its roots in covetousness.

Few people today would respond with the man’s audacious comeback: “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth” (v. 20). He had worked hard to scrupulously obey the Jewish law, and apparently considered himself to have been successful. What more could the Lord ask?

The inquisitive aristocrat soon found out. Jesus looked at him intently, the text says, “and loved him” (v. 21a). Although Jesus’ actions constantly testified of his compassion, this is the only time in Mark’s gospel that Jesus is said to have loved an individual. Perhaps Mark wanted to stress that Jesus’ next response was not judgmental, but compassionate. “You lack one thing,” he said, “go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (10:21). 📌

The man was crestfallen, Mark says, and went away grieving, “for he had many possessions” (v. 22). Writers often note that this is the only gospel story in which someone refused Jesus’ direct appeal to follow him. And this – following Jesus – is a part of the story we often neglect. Most of our concern with this text has to do with explaining why Jesus expected this man (and not others) to give away all that he owned, but that command was a simple prerequisite to the more important part of his command: “then come, follow me.”

The point seems clear enough. As long as we remain bound to our physical possessions, or our selfish attitudes, or our sinful lifestyles, we cannot follow Jesus. A dog on a chain can’t run, and a prisoner in shackles cannot go where he will. The ties that prevent us from following Jesus are self-made, but no less effective because of it.

The young man reacted with shock and a saddened face, Mark says, using a word sometimes employed by Greek authors to describe a dark and stormy night. The ties that bound him to his

wealthy lifestyle were too strong, and the thought of giving it up was too shocking to accept.

A lesson from a camel (vv. 23-27)

Jesus used this teachable moment for his disciples’ benefit. Perhaps none of them had been wealthy, and so none could understand fully just how the rich petitioner had felt, but he was not the only one who would find it difficult to enter the kingdom. Jesus wanted his followers to realize how difficult it is for any person to escape the magnetic pull of self-interest, so he observed “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (v. 23).

Seeing the perplexed look on his disciples’ faces (v. 24), Jesus pulled together two common images to illustrate his point with a remarkable hyperbole: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (v. 25).

A tradition datable to Medieval times holds that there was a small gate in Jerusalem’s wall called “the needle’s eye,” through which a camel could only enter by removing its burdens and forcing it to crawl through on its knees. While such a gate is unknown, there is a spot beneath the Alexander Nevsky Russian Orthodox church where excavations have revealed the remnants of a wall and gate that some argue was part of the city wall in the time of Jesus. Beside the gate is a hole in the wall, easily defensible by a single soldier, and just large enough for an unburdened person to crawl through when the gate was closed. Church officials insist that it was the original “Needle’s Eye.” 📌

Whether or not this is what Jesus had in mind, both Jesus and the disciples knew what a needle was, and they knew what a camel was. Jesus was not

saying it was difficult for the wealthy to be saved – he was saying it was impossible. A camel cannot pass through the eye of a needle. His disciples understood this. Thus, “They were greatly astounded and said to one another: “Then who can be saved?”” (v. 26).

The answer, of course, was “No one.” No one can be saved by his or her own efforts. The man had asked “What must I *do* ...” There is nothing we can do; salvation comes from God’s grace, not our works. We must receive it with the open-faced wonder of children. It would be impossible for any of us to be saved by our own efforts, but Jesus reminded them “for God all things are possible” (10:27b).

A lesson from the disciples (vv. 28-31)

Peter, perhaps feeling a bit insecure, observed that he and the other disciples had left everything behind to follow Christ (v. 28), and Jesus did not question it. 📌 In fact, he concluded by promising a reward: those who were willing to leave all for his sake would receive a hundred-fold return in this life, along with eternal life “in the age to come” (vv. 29-30).

This is no literal promise that every dollar given to God will lead to a \$100 check in the mail, as some prosperity preachers might claim. Nor is it the promise of an easy life: Jesus said such blessings would come “with persecutions.”

This view of rewards is inherently paradoxical. Those who receive the greatest rewards are the very ones who do not seek any gain, while persons with mixed motives who hope for great rewards may discover that they are at the bottom of the list: “many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (v. 31).

The kingdom of God sets our natural mindset topsy-turvy: Those who give the most are the ones who receive the most; those who put themselves last end up on top of the heap. It may sound crazy, but if that’s what Jesus said, we would do well to listen. **BT**

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 10:32-45

Oct. 18, 2015

First and Last

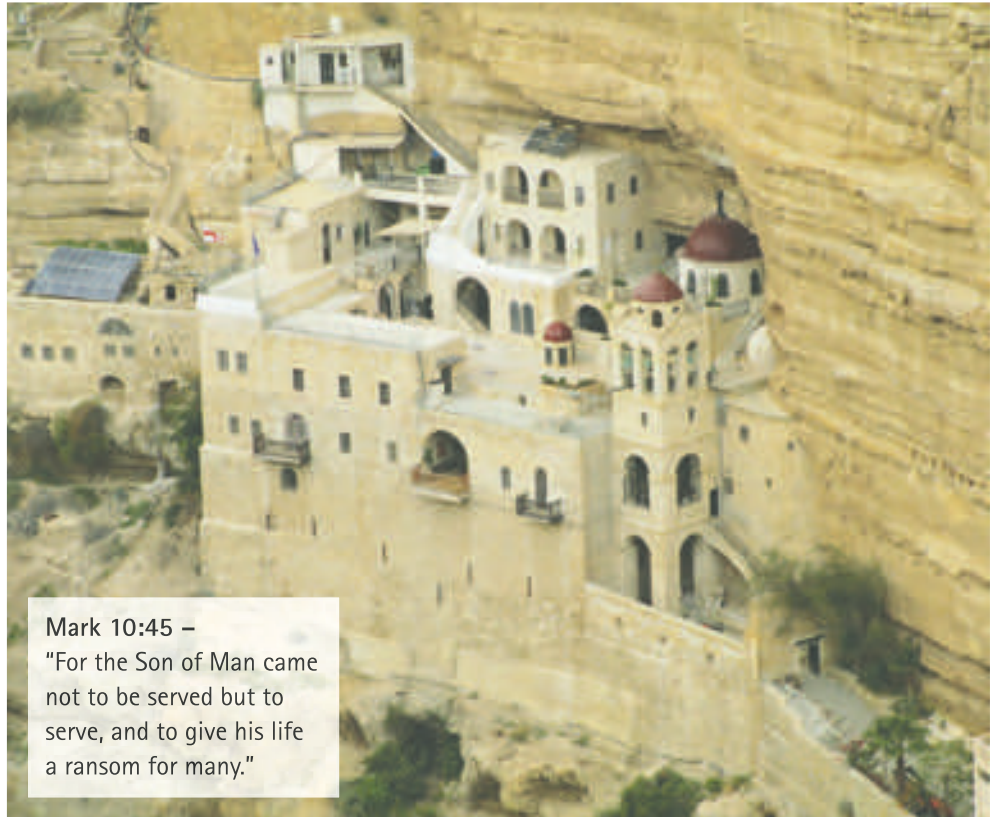
Many of us look forward to that great quadrennial festival of sport and excess known as the Olympics. At the 2004 games in Athens, the spotlight was often on sprinter Maurice Greene, who had won the centerpiece 100-meter sprint in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, and who held three of the four fastest times ever. Nearing the end of his sprinting career at age 30, Greene had adorned the upper part of his right arm with the tattoo of a roaring lion and the letters G-O-A-T, for “Greatest Of All Time.”

Greene was not the first to call himself the greatest. Muhammad Ali was famous for making similar remarks, but Ali was not the first, either. The story told in Mark 10:32-45 describes an effort by two of Jesus’ disciples to have themselves appointed by Jesus as the greatest among humans.

A hard prediction (vv. 32-34)

Anyone reading Mark’s gospel for the first time would have to conclude that the 12 disciples were incredibly dense. Mark frequently describes a clear teaching from Jesus that is immediately followed by the disciples showing their failure to understand.

The story begins with Jesus and the disciples on the road to Jerusalem. They had left behind the high country of Galilee and the high emotions associated with the transfiguration. They had traveled south through the Transjordan and into Judea. In this section, Mark keeps the focus on Jesus and the



Mark 10:45 –
“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

disciples. Others enter the picture – an unusual exorcist, Pharisees and children, a wealthy man in search of eternal life – but the stories always culminate in a lesson for the disciples.

Jesus’ teaching has been hard for the Twelve to take. He has criticized their arrogance, turned their theology upside down, and told them that first is last and last is first. How could they begin to understand this man? As they headed toward Jerusalem, Mark says, Jesus walked alone at the head of the group, while the others “were amazed, and those who followed were afraid” (v. 32).

Trying yet again to help his closest friends understand his mission, Jesus took them aside for a private conversation. For the third time, and in the greatest detail yet, he explained to them what was about to happen.

“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then

they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again” (vv. 33-34).

Can you imagine what it would have been like to hear your beloved teacher predict with great confidence that he was about to be arrested, tortured, held up to public ridicule, and killed? Since you don’t know the end of the story yet, even the promise of resurrection brings little comfort. When the leader falls, his supporters would be sure to follow.

Jesus wanted his disciples to know that he knew the horrors that lay ahead, but was going anyway. Following the first two predictions of Christ’s passion, the disciples had responded with disbelief, anger, and confusion (cf. Mark 8:31-33, 9:30-32). After this third prediction, however, they seemed to make no response at all. Perhaps they had given up on understanding him, or more likely, refused to believe that

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such a thing could happen. Instead, they clung to their lifelong belief that God's messiah would come as a conquering hero and return Israel to a preeminent place among the nations. Surely Jesus was that messiah.

A brazen request (vv. 35-40)

Thus, as Mark tells the story, when James and John came to Jesus with their bold request for positions of honor in his kingdom, they were not only concerned with personal glory, but were also seeking some affirmation that Jesus would indeed win a victory and rule over a kingdom. The request itself shows just how much they had to learn about what his kingdom would be like.

But they had a right to ask, didn't they? After all, they were the first two disciples Jesus called – except for pushy Peter and his quiet brother Andrew. And, they (along with Peter) were clearly closer to Jesus than any of the others.

When Jesus came into his kingdom (surely he would!), the Romans would be defeated, and Jesus would be king. Jesus would need a couple of strong and loyal viceroys to depend on. Who could fill that role better than James and John, the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17)?
Could it hurt to ask?

It hurt their pride, I suspect, when Jesus snapped: “You don't know what you are asking!” It probably hurt their feelings when he went on to question their abilities: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (v. 38). They had yet to understand that the real issue for Jesus was not whether they could rule with him, but whether they were willing to suffer with him.

How could they take leadership roles in a kingdom whose values they had yet to accept? The “cup” Jesus would drink and the “baptism” he would endure spoke of the intense suffering and ignominious death that lay ahead. Later, in Gethsemane, an agonizing Jesus would pray “remove this cup from me” (Mark 14:36), but the same disciples who sought to be his chief

officers first slept and later fled rather than share his pain.

The disciples responded to Jesus' challenge with a brassy “We are able” (v. 39), making it clear that they had no idea what they were talking about. Confident that they would ultimately come through, Jesus predicted that they would indeed experience the cup of suffering, the baptism of death.

A puzzling perspective (vv. 41-45)

Still, those acts of valor came only after Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit – after the disciples gained enough perspective to accept Jesus' teaching.

In the meantime, the brothers' bold power play could not remain secret in a group as close as the Twelve. The others soon heard about it, and they were incensed that James and John would seek supremacy over them. Struggles for power inevitably lead to anger, frustration, and hurt.

Jesus used the stressful moment to teach a vital lesson to all the disciples, who still failed to comprehend Jesus' notion of the kingdom of God as opposed to an earthly empire. In Jesus' kingdom, all human concepts of greatness and power would be turned upside down. “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (vv. 42-44).

The disciples had been so influenced by their culture and by Judaism's traditional hopes for a messiah-led renewal of their fortunes that they had accepted worldly models of ambition and power as the proper norm. In God's kingdom, however, the weak become

strong and servants take the lead. The same driving hunger for power that gets someone to the top of the heap in secular society will send them to the back of the line in God's kingdom.

In contrast, those who would advance in the family of Christ must become servants to one another. The word for servant is *diakonos*, the source of our word “deacon.” The call to servanthood is further emphasized by the addition of *doulos*, the word for “slave.” The term was used to describe common slaves who were the actual property of other persons. They had no rights of their own, but lived only to serve others.

Modern Christians rightly decry the concept of slavery, but this does not diminish the point Jesus makes. Those who would follow Christ offer their very lives to him, and demonstrate this surrender to Christ through service to one another. Note that Jesus speaks in the present tense. The kingdom is a present reality in the lives of believers. Lifestyle servanthood is not a prediction of what life will be like in heaven, but a pattern for Jesus' followers to live on earth.

Our model for such service, of course, is Jesus himself. “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (v. 45). Jesus often referred to himself as the “Son of Man” as a way of emphasizing his humanity and humility. We remember how Jesus gave a graphic demonstration of servanthood when he gathered with his disciples for the last supper. No servant was present to wash their dusty feet, and no disciple was willing to do it, so Jesus got on his knees and showed his embarrassed followers what true greatness was all about.

We also remember Christ's ultimate act of service – his willingness to die on a wooden cross in behalf of a sinful world. Jesus saw all people as slaves to the power of evil as expressed in their own sin. In some way beyond our comprehension, Jesus' life and death would set us free. Fortunately, we don't have to understand the atonement in order to accept God's amazing grace. BT

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Mark 10:46-52

Oct. 25, 2015

What Do We Really Want?

Do you know any Deadheads? How about Beliebers? Fans of popular music stars, especially the sort who follow their favorites from concert to concert, have picked up a variety of nicknames. “Deadheads” can’t get enough of The Grateful Dead. Justin Bieber’s young fans are called “Beliebers.” Barry Manilow has “Fanilows,” Clay Aiken has “Claymates,” Taylor Swift has “Swifties,” and Phish has “Phans.” All of us probably know a Parrothead or two: when fans of Jimmy Buffet take their children along, they’re called “Parakeets.”

I wonder if the crowd that followed Jesus around picked up any nicknames. “Yeshuites,” maybe. Today they might have been called “Jesus Freaks.” During the 1960s and 70s, a movement of Christian hippies became known as “Jesus People.”

Today’s text points to another interlude during Jesus’ determined march toward Jerusalem. In Mark 10, Jesus has traveled south through the Transjordan area and crossed into Judea near Jericho. Along the way he has tangled with Pharisees, talked with a wealthy wannabe-follower, taught his disciples, and picked up a multitude of traveling fans.

What will be next?

A hopeful parade (v. 46a)

Today’s text finds Jesus coming into the city of Jericho, and apparently leaving almost straightaway. “They came to Jericho” is followed immediately by

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Mark 10:51 –
“Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’”

“As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho” (v. 46a).

Imagine how difficult it must have been for Jesus in those days when his popularity had skyrocketed. Everybody wanted something from him. Mobs would gather when word got out that he was around. Supplicants wanted healing, supporters wanted enlightenment, and opponents wanted to debate and discredit Jesus.

Over time, a large crowd of fans began following him from place to place like groupies trailing their favorite rock star: Jesus’ entourage came to include not only the 12 disciples and the supportive people (mostly women) who helped to finance the Jesus movement (Mark 15:40-41), but also a “considerable crowd” of others.

Who do you think might have been in that crowd? Some, like the women, were likely committed disciples who wanted to learn more from Jesus by hearing him teach at every opportunity. Others may have been hangers-on who figured that staying near Jesus would assure a regular supply of food. Yet others may have been drawn to Jesus the way spectators are drawn to

a fireworks display, hoping that they might witness some great works of power. Still others might have trailed along because Jesus had healed them of some infirmity – or because they were still hoping that Jesus would get around to healing them or a loved one.

A determined beggar (vv. 46b-50)

As they were leaving Jericho, according to Mark, the Jesus train passed by a blind beggar sitting by the side of the road. That would not have been unusual: Just as homeless people today sometimes stake out a highway exit ramp with a cardboard sign seeking charity, blind or lame people in ancient Israel were often positioned near highly traveled roads. The road between Jericho and Jerusalem was a prime spot, for both wealthy merchants and pilgrims inclined to give alms would have traveled the road on a regular basis.

The man’s name was “Bartimaeus son of Timaeus” (NRSV), which identified the man in two languages: “Bartimaeus” is an Aramaic name that literally means “son of Timaeus.”

Had Jesus passed by Bartimaeus


on one of his previous trips? Had Bartimaeus missed earlier opportunities to meet Jesus because he couldn't see him pass? We don't know, but when the blind man "heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth" (literally, "Jesus the Nazarene"), he made the most of the chance.

Bartimaeus began to shout "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 47).


That the man would address Jesus as the "Son of David" comes as a surprise. Although Matthew's and Luke's birth stories emphasize Jesus' descent in the line of David, most people would not have known of them at the time. Some followers had begun to connect the dots between Old Testament prophecy of a Davidic deliverer and Jesus' appearance, however, so Bartimaeus's cry may have echoed the growing belief that Jesus was the hoped-for Messiah.

The poor man's cry, "Have mercy on me," was not only a natural way to ask for undeserved help from a compassionate person, but also an echo of several psalms in which the petitioner asks God to have mercy/pity on his or her (or the nation's) desperate plight. The plea recognizes that any potential benison would not be earned, but due to the gracious compassion of the benefactor.

Mark tells us: "many sternly ordered him to be quiet" (v. 48a). Their interference recalls the disciples' earlier attempt to keep children away from Jesus (Mark 10:13-16). Perhaps they thought Jesus had far more important things to do than stop to help a blind beggar. Others may have wanted to shush the man's shouting for fear that others would join him in acclaiming Jesus and attract unwanted attention from the authorities.

The effort was unsuccessful in any case, for the man "cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" (v. 48b). Like other veteran beggars, he had learned to shake off insults and indignities. He would not be dissuaded. He would not miss his chance. He was determined to see Jesus. 

As we have come to expect of Jesus, he stopped the entire procession and called for the blind man to come over: "Call him here" (v. 49). Why didn't Jesus walk over to the blind man rather than standing in the road and expecting Bartimaeus to put his blindness on display by feeling his way toward him? Perhaps it was because their relative locations made it easier for Bartimaeus to come to Jesus rather than for Jesus to work his way through the crowd, where others might try to pull him aside. It's possible that Jesus may have wanted to see Bartimaeus exercise faith by making his way forward – or that he wanted to invite others to practice grace by assisting him.


If v. 50 is an accurate depiction, Bartimaeus was quite practiced at following voices and finding his way. With no indication of outside assistance, Mark says that he threw off his cloak, then "sprang up and came to Jesus" (v. 50).  Whether anyone helped him or not, Bartimaeus wasted no time. When Jesus called, he jumped to his feet and came.

A compassionate leader (vv. 51-52)

One might think that what the blind man wanted would be obvious, but as he had done earlier with James and John (v. 36), Jesus invited Bartimaeus to tell him precisely what he was after: "What do you want me to do for you?" (v. 51a).

Unabashed, the man – who had apparently had vision but lost it – said "My teacher, let me see again" (v. 51b). The word translated as "teacher" (*rabbouni*) is an Aramaic word used only here and in John 20:16 in the New Testament. It is better translated as "master" or "lord": in an Aramaic targum (a type of translation) of Genesis, the word is used to translate the Hebrew *adonai*, which has that basic meaning.

The man's use of the term probably does not indicate that he has professed Jesus as Lord; it's more likely that Bartimaeus intended it as a title of respect and a sign of his own humility. He came to Jesus as an undeserving supplicant, depending entirely on the master's gracious response.

Whatever else Bartimaeus knew about Jesus, he had almost certainly heard that he could work miracles and had healed many people of various diseases, including blindness. Longing to have his own sight restored, he put exigency before embarrassment and boldly asked for his greatest desire: "let me see again." 

In contrast to earlier healings, Jesus did not touch the man or apply saliva (as in 7:33-34, 8:23-25). He simply spoke the words: "Go; your faith has made you well" (v. 52a).

Two things happened in short order. "Immediately he regained his sight," Mark says. ... No description of gradual clearing of muddy vision or scales falling from his eyes, only the straightforward statement that his sight returned.

The second thing is that the man did not leave Jesus and go back home, but "followed him on the way" (v. 52). We can imagine Bartimaeus, now able to see, falling in with the crowd who followed Jesus up the road to Jerusalem, talking excitedly about his newfound vision and emerging faith. Perhaps Bartimaeus was one of the many who waved branches and shouted "Hosanna" when Jesus later rode into Jerusalem. Perhaps he saw Jesus crucified and raised again.

We don't know where Bartimaeus ended up or what he eventually saw, but he was clearly off to a good start as a follower of "the way." To return to our opening thoughts, that is what Jesus' first fans were called: along with the derogatory nickname "Christians" ("little Christs"), early believers were known as "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). After all, they followed the one who said "I am the way, the truth, and the light" (John 14:6). Do you? **BT**

Classifieds

Minister to Students: Trinity Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn., a suburb of Memphis, is seeking a minister to students to work alongside a gifted, quality staff with a team approach to vision and ministry. Trinity has a history of quality youth ministry, highlighted by excellent parental involvement and financial support. The church recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, with an expanded and renovated sanctuary and second-floor education space used exclusively for youth and college. Our members are young and old, rich and poor, from the city and suburbs, and with backgrounds in SBC, CBF and other denominational affiliations. Job applicants should email their résumé and a cover letter to info@trinitybaptistchurch.org.

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In the Know

Rob Fox is the new vice president of institutional advancement for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. He has been field coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia since 2009. Earlier he served as director of admissions at BTSR from 2001 to 2006 and as director of the Ministry Fund at Union Presbyterian Seminary from 2006 to 2009.

Britt Hester is minister of youth and mission at Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., coming from Heritage Baptist Church in Cartersville, Ga. **BT**

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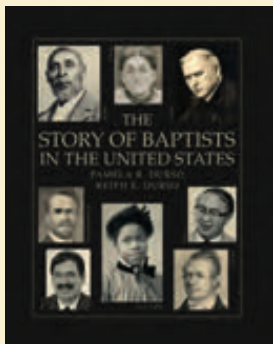


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The news from Lake Wobegon Baptist Church

Each Saturday night for 40 years, Garrison Keillor has shared the news from Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, the fictional town “that time forgot and the decades cannot improve.” Keillor recently announced that next season will be his last as the host of *A Prairie Home Companion*, a radio show with four million listeners. Many of us love the stories of Bruno the fishing dog, the Norwegian bachelor farmers, and the town handyman Carl Krebsbach who repairs the repairs of the amateurs.

In Lake Wobegon, the German Catholics worship at Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility and the Norwegian Lutherans worship at Lake Wobegon Lutheran Church, home of the National Lutheran Ushering Champions, the Herdsmen. With a population of 942, I suppose it is no surprise that this mythical town in Minnesota has no Baptist church, but I cannot be the only one disappointed that Keillor has not imagined Lake Wobegon Baptist Church. Perhaps it is not too late:

Well, it's been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, my hometown, out there on the edge of the prairie. It's the end of summer, the last week of reading books for the fun of it. The geese are packing their bags to head south. Red and orange are about to explode all over the woods. Drivers are hoping to get another season out of the snow tires. The temperature got up to 75 only once in August, but a few of the Baptists are still hoping they get to wear their one pair of shorts to the Labor Day picnic.

Lake Wobegon Baptist Church began when three displaced families who had never been north of Nashville got tired of the heat and didn't think to ask about the mosquitoes. These decent, hardworking people heard the Macedonian call to move to a state filled with pagans who had never sung a single stanza of “Just As I Am.” When they arrived among the Yankees they felt like Lottie Moon getting off the boat on the Yangtze River.

The Baptists meet in a hunched-over, elderly brick building with a little bell tower — complete with a bat — that they inherited when the Methodists gave up. The stained glass is a little too Methodist, and John David had to build a baptistery that took a row out of the choir loft.

Hazel gets to church first. She works at the Chatterbox Café making softball-size caramel rolls (“Coffee 25¢, All Morning 85¢, All

Day \$1.25, Ask About Our Weekly Rates”). Hazel arrives at work at 4 a.m. on weekdays, but on Sundays she sleeps in until 6 o'clock. She brings day-old rolls to Sunday school and has never gotten a complaint.

Billy Ray is the only native Minnesotan. His parents moved to Lake Wobegon from Little Rock during the terrible winter of 1985, nine months before he was born. Billy Ray was the 1997 Minnesota State Bible Drill champion. He does not mention that his only competitors were two 9-year-olds who entered at the last minute in exchange for the promise of getting to watch *Beverly Hills 90210*.

Pattie Mae has almost decided she would rather be down the street at the Catholic church with the incense filling the Gothic cathedral and the new priest who looks like Tom Cruise. Everyone knows that she's attended several Catholic dances. “How can I still be part of a church that takes great pride in not having wine at the Lord's Supper?” she wonders, but she's still around.

Barrett and Noelle brought their daughter for the first time. She is 11 days old and Noelle refuses to leave the baby in the nursery with Barbara Kay, who has been coughing, but Barrett really wants to show off Hannah.

Ima Jean and Curtis have always been strict people with high standards who expect everyone to live up to them. But then Emily, the granddaughter they adore, turned out not



to be much of a churchgoer. Ima Jean and Curtis are rethinking their ecclesiology.

Opal Ann started dialysis this week. She didn't tell anyone, though she knows secrets don't last long in Lake Wobegon. Opal Ann is the kind of person who listens without arguing. Churches don't have enough people like that.

Barry Wayne shuffles in late, because he was at the Sidetrack Tap last night — where old men sit and self-medicate. Barry Wayne says he's not a big hugger, but half of the reason he comes to church is his longing to be embraced by another warm body during the welcome time.

At 11:01, Pastor Billie Lou steps to the pulpit and says, “Welcome to Lake Wobegon Baptist Church. We may not recognize it ourselves, but we are God's beloved creation. We are the descendants of Abraham, the distant stars he saw shining in the sky. We are the children of our heavenly Father, our loving Mother. We are the church of Jesus Christ.”

That sounds like the kind of thing preachers say all the time, but that's the news from Lake Wobegon, where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average. **BT**

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

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fourth in a series of articles by historian Bruce Gourley on the religious faith of U.S. presidents. Gourley is online editor and contributing writer for *Baptists Today* and executive director of the *Baptist History & Heritage Society*. His latest book, *Baptists and the American Civil War: Crucible of Faith and Freedom*, a compilation of articles from the recent series on *Baptists and the American Civil War*, is now available from *Nurturing Faith*.*

Religion and the American Presidents

James Madison (1809-1817)

When Virginia's political leaders assembled in the spring of 1776 to craft a Declaration of Rights, they faced a delicate situation. Most were Anglican, the state faith. Yet many religious dissenters, primarily Baptists and quite numerous in the colony, were demanding religious liberty before taking up arms to fight for political freedom from Great Britain.

Since early colonial days, Anglican leaders had ostracized and persecuted religious heretics. Now, the assembly had little interest in reversing course. Nearly two centuries of state-sanctioned persecution had, however, ultimately failed to contain the religious rabble. And while the imprisonment of an estimated one-half of all Baptist ministers in the 1760s to the present had brought a measure of satisfaction to colonial officials, the Baptists of Virginia had both multiplied and grown all the more defiant.

Making matters worse, Virginia's leaders were forced to reluctantly concede that an alliance with Baptists and Presbyterians was necessary if the American colonies were to defeat Great Britain. Accordingly, they had made an informal pact with the dissenters, promising to grant religious freedom in return for military service.

In reality, the Anglicans had no intention of following through on their promises. When the Patriots prevailed in the Revolution, persecution of religious dissenters would resume.

But for now, the colony's elites needed to make dissenters believe they had won the battle of wills. Thus the final clause of the proposed Virginia Declaration of Rights granted religious "toleration" in Virginia.

Baptists, however, were not that easily deceived. And neither was a certain up-and-coming, influential young civic leader, one James Madison. Toleration, religious dissenters and Madison alike knew, was a far cry from freedom.

With Baptists and other dissenters as vocal allies, Madison successfully lobbied for

the language of religious liberty in the colony's Declaration of Rights. As finally drafted and implemented, the document declared that "all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience."

How did Madison arrive at a conviction long held by Baptists and other dissenters?

Born in 1751 and baptized as an infant into the Anglican Church, Madison was a son of privilege. Educated by Presbyterian clergymen at Princeton (1769-1771), the Virginia native and slave owner momentarily dallied with the prospect of entering the ministry, suggesting to a friend that his generation should "publicly ... declare their unsatisfactoriness by becoming fervent advocates in the cause of Christ."



Yet two months later he recanted and set his sights on law, launching a career in public service. References to neither Jesus Christ nor Christian doctrine are to be found in Madison's writings following his brief, youthful flirtation with the ministry.

From Princeton, Madison returned to Virginia with a more critical eye and committed to the revolutionary cause of liberty. Yet near his home he witnessed Baptist ministers being thrown into prison for preaching without licenses, even as colonial leaders talked of political freedom from Great Britain. An enraged Madison said of the jailed Baptists: "There are at this time in the adjacent country not less than five or six well-meaning men in close jail for publishing their religious sentiments, which in the main are very orthodox."

Disturbed at the theocratic nature of the colony, Madison wrote in correspondence, "that diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution rages among some." Furthermore, he fumed, "Religious bondage shackles and

debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise." Madison also noted that "Ecclesiastical establishments tend to great ignorance and corruption, all of which facilitate the execution of mischievous projects."

Mischievous was a good word to describe Virginia's Anglican leaders. The state's Declaration of Rights may have granted religious liberty to all, as Madison demanded, but it neither disestablished the Anglican Church nor revoked the church's many religious privileges.

Undaunted, alongside his Baptist allies and fellow church-state separation advocate Thomas Jefferson, Madison continued the fight. In 1785 he crafted a compelling plea for religious liberty in his state, titled "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments." The pamphlet turned the tide, leading Virginia to cease collecting religious taxes while paving the way for Jefferson's 1786 "Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom" that separated church from state in Virginia.

Madison next set his sights even higher. Calling for a national convention in 1787, he penned the first draft of a national constitution. Upon the assembling of the Constitutional Convention — of which Madison was the youngest member — and the passage of the final draft of the governing document, he was elected as a congressional senator from Virginia.

The Constitution, however, did not expressly protect religious liberty or sunder church and state in the new American nation. As a senator, Madison pressed for a debate on a Bill of Rights and shepherded the process. The Bill of Rights passed in 1791, with the first of the amendments — supported by Madison, Jefferson, Baptists and other dissenters — granting religious liberty to all and separating church from state at the national level.

By this time, James Madison had established himself as one of the new nation's elite leaders. Remaining involved in national politics through the 1790s, Madison reiterated his

opposition to church-state alliances by opposing the payment of military chaplains with public funds.

In 1801 Madison's long-time public and political service was rewarded when newly-elected President Thomas Jefferson tapped him as secretary of state, a position Madison held during Jefferson's two terms in office. Riding the coattails of Jefferson, Madison won the presidency in 1808, followed by re-election in 1812.

Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase of western lands in 1803 had opened up greater conflict with Native Americans, and it fell to Madison to deal with the repercussions. Although he at times sided with the Indians, under his presidency the rights and lands of native peoples were further reduced as white settlers moved West.

On the other hand, during the greatest crisis of his presidency, the War of 1812, Madison achieved military and diplomatic acclaim when the United States triumphed in 1815, after which the nation experienced a time of peace and prosperity.

While he sometimes attended church services, President Madison remained true to his religious liberty convictions. "The Constitution of the U.S. forbids everything like an establishment of a national religion," he declared of the nation's founding document. Opposing the tradition of government proclamations for days

of prayer, fasting or thanksgiving, he couched obligatory missives as mere suggestions.

When Congress in 1811 passed a bill assisting Virginia's Anglican Church in providing support for the poor, including the education of poor children, Madison vetoed the legislation. The congressional bill violated the Constitution, Madison declared, in that it "would be a precedent for giving religious societies, as such, a legal agency in carrying into effect a legal and public duty."

And when Congress the same year put forth a bill granting public land to a Baptist congregation in Mississippi, Madison opposed the effort, earning the praise of Baptists elsewhere. (The Mississippi Baptists, in requesting government assistance, were an anomaly within the denomination.)

Following his presidency Madison retired to his Virginia plantation, Montpelier, near Jefferson's Monticello. Now out of office, he wrote more about religion, often unfavorably.

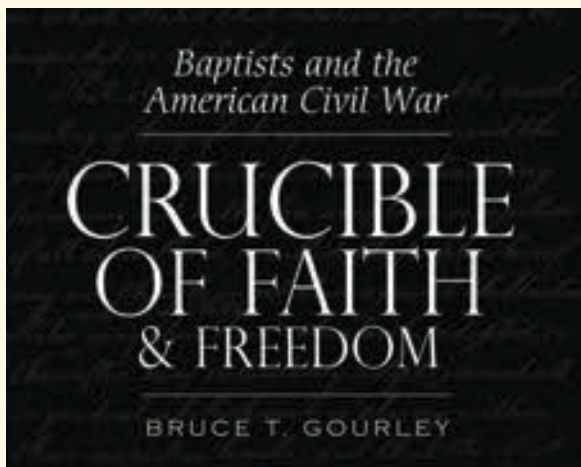
In letters he remained adamant about the "total separation of the church from the state." In 1821 he declared that "The experience of the United States is a happy disproof of the error so long rooted in the unenlightened minds of well-meaning Christians, as well as in the corrupt hearts of persecuting usurpers, that without a legal incorporation of religious and civil polity, neither could be supported. A mutual

independence is found most friendly to practical Religion, to social harmony, and to political prosperity."

At the same time, Madison remained an advocate of what he considered true religion, noting in 1822 that "An alliance or coalition between Government and religion cannot be too carefully guarded against ... Every new and successful example therefore of a PERFECT SEPARATION between ecclesiastical and civil matters is of importance ... religion and government will exist in greater purity, without (rather) than with the aid of government."

Morally, Madison at times struggled over the issue of slavery. Calling the practice "the blot of our Republican character," he nonetheless sold his own slaves only when debts needed paying. Displaying his convictions of racial separation, he supported the American Colonization Society in the transportation of free blacks to African shores. Yet emancipation and American citizenship of blacks Madison disclaimed, apparently unappreciative of the blossoming northern, religiously-driven abolitionist movement.

The former president passed away on his plantation in 1836. Blind spots notwithstanding, James Madison, the last of the nation's founding fathers, in his final days remained a champion of religious liberty for all and church-state separation. **BT**



A new release

The 150th anniversary of the American Civil War provides a grand opportunity to consider precisely what Baptists — North and South — were saying from their pulpits, in the press, and through official resolutions from that time. Bruce Gourley brings such perspectives to life by making good use of careful and significant research, creatively taking a chronological approach using primary sources.

He highlights the role of various kinds of Baptists, for example: Robert Smalls, Thomas Hill Watts, Basil Manly Sr., Gov. Joseph Brown, Gov. Sam Houston, Isaac Taylor Tichenor, Crawford H. Toy, and Frank and Jesse James — most of whom went on to great prominence in politics, religion or education.

Gourley's firsthand accounts of how Baptists on both sides sought and claimed divine favor and righteousness provide lessons as plentiful as the statues and markers that dot the many battlefields where the devastation has given way to peaceful fields and quiet woodlands.



nurturingfaith.net

Boy Scouts

Support from religious groups varies after ban on gay leaders ends

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

The Boy Scouts of America's decision to drop its ban on gay adult leaders and employees brought a range of responses from religious groups.

On July 27, members of the BSA's national executive board voted to drop the ban two years after the Scouting organization allowed gay youths, but not adults. The BSA said religious groups, which make up about 70 percent of its chartered organizations, may still choose adult volunteer leaders "whose beliefs are consistent with their own."

Here's a sampling of responses:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

Mormons said they were "deeply troubled" by the decision and said their "century-long association with Scouting will need to be examined."

The Southern Baptist Convention:

"We express consummate sadness that this once vibrant organization continues to cave to social pressure, compromising its long-held, constitutionally protected tenets," said Roger "Sing" Oldham, spokesman for the SBC's executive committee.

The SBC has grown cooler to the BSA in the past few years. Yet Baptist churches are autonomous, so each church will decide for itself.

Roman Catholic Church:

The National Catholic Committee on Scouting expressed concerns about how Scouts define "sexual orientation" and how the new policy will be put into practice, but still supports the organization.

"While this fluctuating situation will be increasingly challenging, we recognize the vital importance of providing a Catholic emphasis to Catholic Scouts and Scouters seeking ways to live out their 'duty to God,'" its leaders said.



Photo courtesy of RNS

United Methodist Church:

Gilbert C. Hanke, CEO of the General Commission on United Methodist Men, pointed out that the new policy gives religious groups the option of selecting their own leaders.

"No church will be required to accept any volunteer as a Scout leader simply because of the new policy," Hanke said.

Reform Judaism:

The Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, which in 2001 urged its congregations to stop housing Scout troops because of bans on gay members and leaders, "will swiftly review its recommendation to our synagogues," said Barbara Weinstein, its director.

Unitarian Universalist Association:

The Boston-based association will reopen a dialogue "between our two organizations in order to re-establish right relations," said its president, Peter Morales.

Faith groups, some of which are key sponsors of Boy Scouts troops, began mulling their next steps after the BSA executive committee, in mid-July, unanimously adopted the resolution that the executive board approved.

Some faith leaders said their continued support for the BSA hinged on the freedom for each group to choose its leadership.

"As a chartering organization, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has always had the right to select Scout leaders who adhere to moral and religious principles that are consistent with our doctrines and beliefs," Mormon church officials stated. "Any resolution adopted

by the Boy Scouts of America regarding leadership in Scouting must continue to affirm that right."

Four members of the church's leadership, including President Thomas S. Monson, are on the national executive board.

The LDS church has the largest Scouting youth membership of all the BSA religiously affiliated groups — 37,933 units and 437,160 youths as of 2013. All young Mormon men in the U.S. are enrolled in Scouting as part of their youth activity program, said Eric Hawkins, church spokesman.

Southern Baptist Convention ethicist Russell Moore said he's not so sure how free faith groups will be to make leadership decisions.

"I don't believe the Boy Scouts when they say that religious groups will have freedom to choose their own leaders," he said. "The Boy Scouts have pursued an ongoing evolution, if evolutions can happen at breakneck speed, toward the moral priorities of the sexual revolution. At every point, the Scout leadership tells us that they will go this far and no farther."

He predicted a continuing falling away of autonomous Southern Baptist congregations from Scouting.

"I have seen a definite cooling on the part of Baptist churches to the Scouts," Moore said. "This will probably bring that cooling to freezing."

Other religious groups liked dropping the ban on adult gay leaders.

Mike Schuenemeyer, the United Church of Christ's liaison with the BSA who urged passage of the resolution, said, "It is long past due."

R. Chip Turner, national chairman of the BSA Religious Relationships Committee, hopes that more faith-based groups will stay with the BSA. **BT**

‘Everything Is Spiritual’

Rob Bell’s tour explores the evolution of the universe

By Jesse James Deconto
Religion News Service

DURHAM, N.C. — Hipster preacher Rob Bell is mashing up quantum physics, Jewish Kabbalah and Catholic mysticism to explain humanity’s future evolution.

In his 30-city “Everything Is Spiritual” tour, the former megachurch pastor and short-lived Oprah Winfrey Network talk-show host delivers a two-hour monologue aimed to a millennial generation less interested in sin and judgment and more attuned to science and cosmic connections.

“A bunch of the old stories that we used to rely on just aren’t working anymore,” Bell told a crowd of almost 500 during a tour stop in Durham. “I want to take a stab at a new story.”

Wearing a gray denim jacket, a white collared shirt, chinos and ankle boots, Bell used only one visual aid: a large dry-erase board in the shape of a long, skinny triangle. In the far left corner he drew a small black dot representing the Big Bang. Moving to the right, as the universe expanded over the course of his talk, he sketched milestones of evolution over 13.8 billion years.

Bell maps Christian faith onto modern evolutionary science, quoting New Age healing champion Deepak Chopra, Sufi mystic Rumi and Catholic theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin — an amalgamation sure to rile some in the evangelical crowd that made him famous.

A graduate of Wheaton College and Fuller Theological Seminary, Bell became an evangelical luminary with the success of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Mich., which he founded at age 28. The church, which once boasted a Sunday attendance of 10,000, became Bell’s calling card as he urged young Christians to embrace their doubts, dig into their Jewish roots

and treat the Bible as literary rather than literal.

Then he published *Love Wins*, in which he questioned the existence of hell. Evangelicals were swift to part company, describing Bell as a modern-day heretic. “Farewell, Rob Bell,” retired megachurch pastor John Piper famously tweeted.

A year later, Bell left Mars Hill and moved to Los Angeles in search of a broadcast audience and a “more forgiving faith.” Earlier this year, the partnership with Oprah fizzled, but Bell says he’s working on another TV program.

He now talks about warring religions giving way to enlightened secularism giving way to nihilism.

“Let’s grow up,” he says, summarizing the anti-religious materialism of the modern West.

“That works until you’re standing in the hospital room and your first kid is born, and you need something more,” he said. “You and I are made of dust and bones, and yet you are also made of something called spirit. You are crammed full of a divine breath of life itself. You are an exotic cocktail of dust and soul, bone and spirit.”

Bell casts what we now call “science” not as an enemy of faith but as a source of spiritual insight.

Tony Jones, a theologian, author and blogger, said Bell is at the leading edge of a cultural move toward mysticism.

“People are getting frustrated with the pure, cold rationality of science,” said Jones. “Rob holds science in high esteem, but Rob is really a lot about mystery. You can be a thinking person who appreciates reason and science, but

there are things we can’t explain.”

In “Everything Is Spiritual,” Bell explores the religious mystery within science. Drawing on the evolutionary theology of the early 20th-century Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard, Bell argues that ever since the Big Bang, matter has been developing more complexity, depth and unity. Particles bonded to form atoms. Atoms bonded to form molecules. Molecules bonded to form cells. Cells bonded to form organisms. Humans developed language to form social bonds.

“You say, ‘I just want to be part of something bigger than myself.’ Congratulations. Everything in the freaking universe has been saying the same thing for 13.8 billion years,” said Bell. “The universe moves forward when people of similar essence and substance bond together. Loneliness is going the wrong direction. Racism is the failure to bond with another of similar essence and substance.

“Progress,” he said, in a nod to Teilhard, “is the soul of the universe.”

Jessica Russell, who attended the Durham event, said she liked Bell’s summary of “The Spirit Level,” a book-length study by British epidemiologists Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson showing how societies with wider gaps between rich and poor have more crime, mental illness, infant mortalities, illiteracy and other social ills. Even the rich in those nations have lower life expectancy.

Bell’s talk reminded Russell of Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous quote: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

“That’s consistent with the way that God has been moving,” said Russell, who is 30 and works as an outreach director for the YMCA. “If you read the Bible, some of the things seemed kind of archaic, but they were actually quite progressive in their time.” **BT**



Rob Bell



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Car key comfort

By Tony W. Cartledge

Travel can be a wonderful thing, especially opportunities to go overseas and experience different cultures, taste new foods, and see new sights.

Downsides are part of the deal, of course. Sometimes the new foods don't agree with you, or the beds are not comfortable — along with the sad reality that you can rarely find Diet Mountain Dew outside of America.

One of the things I'm always happiest about when I get home is the ability to drive.

When my wife and I left in June for a month in Israel and South Africa, I hung my car keys by the door with some reluctance, even though I knew I'd have no use for them.

My son Samuel drove us to the airport, and from there we were at the mercy of airplane pilots, bus drivers and a wide variety of taxis — some better than others.



When we got home, the first thing I did was put my car keys in my pocket. There's comfort just in knowing that the keys are in my pocket and the car is just outside.

It's a little thing, but it feels like home. **BT**

Wholesomeness for some is not liberty for all

By John Pierce

Writing in the state Baptist newspaper, *The Christian Index*, J. Robert White lamented the “violation of states’ rights” and God’s law by the U.S. Supreme Court in its *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision. The executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention yearned for the good old days.

“I found myself longing for the United States of America in which I grew up,” White wrote in his July 9 column.

Certainly, most of us have fond memories from our childhood and youth, and reminisce about family and friends from days gone by. But caution and sensitivity are needed in recognizing that the goodness enjoyed by many was not shared by all.

Not everyone wants to return to the America of yesteryear — for good reasons beyond medical advances and car seat warmers.

White failed to note that he grew up in heavily segregated Alabama during a time of institutional discrimination and racial strife, when African Americans were denied many of the basic rights enjoyed by white Americans. And women of all races had fewer educational and vocational opportunities.

Yet White, 69, warmly reflected: “I grew up in a great and wholesome America.”

For him, however, that would have been Montgomery in the late '50s and the 1960s.

In 1960, when he was age 14, a white mob attacked Freedom Riders at a Montgomery bus terminal.

In 1963, when he was 17, a racially motivated Sunday morning bombing of Birmingham’s 16th Street Baptist Church took the lives of four innocent little girls in attendance.

“Great” and “wholesome” do not describe the Jim Crow era and civil rights struggles for many who suffered from such violence, inequality and injustice.

But it sure was a nice time — for some Americans. And at least gay and lesbian people couldn't have their relationships recognized by a secular government.

White also gloried in his public school days of old when pastors prayed at football games and students, regardless of their chosen faith, began each day reciting the (overtly Christian) Lord’s Prayer together.

Yet it’s hard to recall any of those pre-game prayers including confessions of the racist culture emboldened by many of those who bowed their heads and lifted their voices.

From a broader perspective than one’s warm, selective feelings for a bygone era, however, there appear to be greater educational needs now than once again force-feeding sectarian prayer on school students:

For one, teach them more about James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, and the good Baptist John Leland, who insisted that church and state remain separate in America so that everyone’s religious liberty is protected.

Two, recount for these students (and for adults who seem to have missed the lessons as they occurred) the sacrificial struggles for racial and gender equality of past decades that older white men may remember as “a great and wholesome America.”

Again, having warm feelings for slower living and cherished family memories is a gift. However, wholesomeness experienced by a preferred group is not the same as freedom and equality for all — even when greatly romanticized.

Going back to a time when political power and educational, vocational and other opportunities favored the privileged few doesn't make America great or wholesome.

The better way is to acknowledge both the good and the evil in our past — and to move ever closer to liberty and justice for all. **BT**

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Inspired Creativity



Have you sauntered lately?

Nature has long enriched spiritual living

WEST GLACIER, Mont. — Sauntering is more than walking. It is a spiritual practice.

That's what Ken Mottram, a Montana native and hospital chaplain, told participants in the mid-July Nurturing Faith Experience at the outset of their exploration of Glacier National Park.

The grandeur, said Mottram, who has sauntered through the mountains, forests and valleys of the park for three decades, calls for us to reflect and worship.

"One of my spiritual practices has been praying in nature," he said.

SUBLIME

Ken pointed to 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant, who wrote about the feeling of the "sublime" that comes from viewing majestic mountains and other displays of nature that seem to overwhelm us.

That feeling, which can evoke fear, praise or others reactions, Ken added, comes from experiencing grandeur to the point of being



Ken Mottram (left) and Michael Helms

inspired and fully alive.

He asked those who gathered to share a week of sauntering through the northern Rockies: "So where does that come from? Why are we so inspired by mountain scenery?"

There are many answers, Ken confessed, one of which is found in Psalm 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God..."

MORE THAN A HIKE

John Muir, the naturalist who devoted much of his life to the preservation of wilderness in the

western U.S., believed people should "saunter," not just hike, said Ken in agreement. He noted that famed American author Henry David Thoreau shared the same idea.

An avid hiker, Thoreau, in his 1861 treatise *Walking*, noted that "sauntering" is derived from an old French reference to those making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. "There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*, a Saunterer, a Holy-Lander."

The "secret to successful sauntering," wrote Thoreau, is feeling at home everywhere rather than always sitting at home.

More than getting from one destination to another, sauntering provides solitude, fresh perspectives and time to hear God speak, Ken added.

CHANGES

"Nature is constantly changing," noted Michael Helms, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jefferson, Ga., who joined the group along with his wife, Tina. In the same way nature changes through the seasons and over time, he added, we experience changes in our lives.

Vickie Willis of Murfreesboro, Tenn., added that emotional, spiritual and physical well-being comes from leaving busy routines and being immersed in the mountains, valleys, forest and waterways. “Nature can be healing.”

Her husband, Scott Willis, a singer-songwriter, was so inspired by the park’s beauty that he wrote a song titled “Maker of All.” It begins:

When I look up to the mountains, view their majesty / All the vastness and the beauty that surrounds me / If there’s one thing that I learn / In all of life’s concerns / My help it comes from the Lord

PERSPECTIVE

Jim McConnell, who teaches New Testament at Gardner-Webb Divinity School in North Carolina, led the Nurturing Faith Experience sessions in Yellowstone last summer. He and his wife, Susan, not only returned as participants but also brought along their son, Evan, and daughter, Molly, both college students.

They are avid hikers — that is, *saunterers!*

“For me, visiting Glacier was akin to stepping into some of the more famous cathedrals in Europe,” wrote Jim in reflection. “In both settings I am immediately connected to the glory of God and quickly come to a sense of awe. In Glacier, I couldn’t help but praise God for God’s creative genius. It is truly a spiritual experience for me to be in such a place.”

Several participants noted that the scale of the mountains created a sense of our own smallness and limitations.

“I get that,” said Jim. “But at the same time, one must recognize that we are all products of the same Creator that is responsible for places like Glacier and Yellowstone.”

“This reinforces the sense of significance that all of humanity has in the sight of God,” he continued. “To press the point, being able to share this experience with others also reminds me that we are significant to one another; we were able to minister to one another while God ministered to us.”

The experience “was truly a time of spiritual renewal and formation, as my faith was certainly nurtured through it.”



“Nurturing my faith combines the elements of nature, with photography, and with meaningful conversation,” said John Roy, pastor of Pelham Road Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., who took this sunrise photo at Lake McDonald in Glacier Park. “To me this photo intersects these elements.”

REFLECTIONS

Joshua Breazeale chose the Nurturing Faith Experience to begin a sabbatical provided by Oakmont Baptist Church in Greenville, N.C., where he is minister of education and children.

“I always experience rest and renewal physically, mentally and spiritually in the midst of God’s great creation,” he said.

Joshua reflected on one particularly meaningful experience in Glacier.

“During one of our hikes we took a moment to stop and offer up praise and thanksgiving to God for the beauty of creation,” he recalled. “As we said, ‘Amen,’ a gentle breeze blew across the meadow. The Holy Spirit was indeed in our midst.”

Joshua expressed appreciation to his church for the time of spiritual renewal, and for the friendships made.

“I’m thankful for the 15 other people that I had the opportunity to bond with during hikes; for our conversations and laughter during van rides and as we shared meals together; and for times of worship and reflection along our journey.”

Michael Helms agreed: “Our pilgrimage brought strangers together who quickly became friends. That’s not hard to do when you share a love for God and nature.”

HANDIWORK

Helms noted that the psalmist, when considering God’s handiwork, proclaimed: “O Lord, Our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth” (Ps. 8:9).

“In the presence of the beauty of Glacier Park, the words of the psalmist seemed easier to recite,” he added. “Knowing the ages that were required for the glaciers to form, and for the glaciers to cut out the valleys and form the lakes that are currently there, and knowing that time is slowly claiming the few glaciers that remain, I understand more clearly how nature caused the psalmist to ask, ‘What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?’”

He noted, however, that the Creator has given humanity responsibilities for the earth. “To even come close to properly caring for God’s creation, we must first recognize the great gift that creation is to us.”

Daily practices, he said, such as watching birds find their next meal, noticing how stars flicker against the dark night and getting up early to enjoy the sunrise can help us to hear the voice of God.

“The majesty of God is present all around us.” **BT**



Molly tackles a Clark's Fork cinnamon roll.
Photo by Jim McConnell.

Montana Travelogue

UNC student reflects upon her Nurturing Faith Experience

Last March, in the auditorium of the Genome Sciences Building on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, environmental advocate Terry Tempest Williams spoke of the importance of visiting national parks before they are irreversibly changed.

Go before the glaciers of Glacier National Park melt into history, she urged. Listening to her words, I was grateful to be anticipating a visit in July.

ARRIVAL

Bozeman, where our Nurturing Faith Experience group gathered, is about a five-hour drive to Glacier. Upon arrival we explored Main Street with its cafés, coffee shops, hiking and backpacking gear outfitters, and my two favorites: used book stores and vintage vinyl record sellers.

Young adults wandered in and out of stores or plopped themselves down at a coffee shop or the new teasop. There was a classic candy store, and restaurants that boasted artisanal and local ingredients. The roads seemed to run into the horizon or into the mountains that rose around downtown like a wall.

Dinner at Montana Ale Works allowed the 16 of us to get acquainted. Over local foods we talked, but then mainly listened as Johnny Pierce and Marshall Kerlin regaled us with stories of the baseballs they've caught in many years of attending Atlanta Braves games.

They reminded me of the kids in the movie *The Sandlot*, playing off each other's story and butting in to tell the best parts. They seem to have as many stories as the hundreds of balls

they've caught during batting practice.

At the hotel afterward Johnny stressed the importance of community, emphasizing that it's not only where we go but with whom we travel. Indeed, by the end of the trip, we had blurred the lines between strangers, friends and family — with one person rechristening himself with my family's last name.

NORTHWARD

On Tuesday morning we left for Glacier National Park in a three-van caravan. Thankfully, Bruce Gourley brought provisions: cinnamon rolls — as large as my entire face — from Clark's Fork restaurant.

I managed to eat half of one and a bite of another. The sugar excited me as I stared out the window at the passing wheat fields, but then I crashed.

When I awoke, mountains had erupted out of the ground without the warning of foothills. They towered over the landscape in a long line, like the ridged back of an enormous dinosaur.

The mountains incited a discussion in the van occupied by my family and driven by Ken Mottram, our guide for the week. We talked about mountains and their link with spirituality, a topic I'd considered before in relation to Zen Buddhism (recommended reading: Basho's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*).

Seeing a mountain inspires awe, but also fear; when on the mountain, you don't know what will happen. It's a healthy fear, comparable to that we feel for God. We do not know the extent of who God is or what God can do, so we fear and respect God for what we do not know.

The mountains remind us of who we are not: we are not God.

EAST GLACIER

After lunch in East Glacier, near Two Medicine, my mom asked Don Brewer about a comment he had made earlier about the park being a favorite destination for his wife. She asked if it was difficult returning to his wife's favorite place after her death.

"No," he replied. "Dying's part of living. You live well; you die well."

He remarked that if 40-plus years ago, when they got married, if someone had told him he had 40 years with her, he would've taken it. And he did.

I strove to live well during this week. This place deserved that much from me.

Two Medicine is an area associated with Native American spirituality as it abuts the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Ken shared about the Native American spiritual practices of vision quests and medicine bags.



Wildflowers at Logan Pass provide spectacular views in all directions. Photo by John Pierce.

During a vision quest, people isolate themselves, fast and pray in preparation and expectation of spirits to guide them. Their medicine bags are filled with small stones or other meaningful objects thought to give them power.

Ken encouraged us to find a stone or two or other small tokens to remind us of our visit and of the spiritual associations we might make there. I refrained, my father's philosophy of taking nothing during backpacking trips but photographs sounding in my mind.

The waterfall there, however, was a welcomed sight, and the stream looked like a photograph out of *National Geographic*, with brightly colored rocks. All that was missing was a grizzly, standing in the middle with water dripping from its snout.

Earlier, however, we had seen two large black bears near the road.

WEST GLACIER

Weary from driving, we arrived at the Belton Chalet, a historic hotel built in 1910. Our group was spread out over two cabins, one room in the lodge and the Adobe House.

Adobe was quite the place for five men in the group, and while we held our gatherings there we joked that it was the party cabin. If only we had had the time and energy for that ...

To make our transition to West Glacier even more enjoyable, we had dinner at the nearby Glacier Campground, home to the Hungry Sasquatch restaurant. The open-air pavilion had picnic tables, a suspended iron fireplace and, much to the delight of Johnny and Marshall, a foosball table.

Pork chops, grilled chicken, corn on the cob, baked beans, roasted potatoes and brownies fueled us for the coming day. Eating outside makes food taste better (and makes me hungrier).

Conversations jumped from one side of the table to the next, down the length and back up again from person to person. The group began to settle into a new rhythm of community.

TO THE SUN

The next morning we went to the sun — almost. We took Going-to-the-Sun Road up to Logan Pass, and it was easy to see why this road was Don's wife's favorite part of the park.

When my mom asked why, Don told her, "Just wait until we drive the entirety of Going-to-the-Sun Road; you'll see." And we did.

The rising sun cast light over the park, and though the road was in shadows and the air cool in the July morning, the view hundreds of feet down from the road was tremendous.

Mountains rose around us, as if growing with the light of the sun, and we stood and looked, clutching ourselves for warmth as the light caught on each rock face and slope of the mountains.

Logan Pass, the highest point of the road and set on the Continental Divide, was in full sunlight when we arrived. We set out on the Hidden Lake trail, known for mountain goat sightings.

As my mother and I walked, she asked, "What are you going to do next summer?"

I don't know. There are dreams and ideas and plans, and a boy, but we're not there yet. We're here.

And as Elizabeth Bennet (from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*) says, "What are men compared to rocks and mountains?" And, for that matter, hidden glacial lakes with mirror images and mountain goats ...

One grazed just off the trail. The real nature, though, came a few minutes later, when my dad and I turned back and found several mountain goats on the trail and a group of hikers gasping and shouting, "There he goes!"

They were watching a bear pursue several goats across a hill. The goats ran and eluded the bear — which climbed onto the rock face, surveying the landscape for their bright dots of white against the green.



Joann and John Roy, followed by Jim and Susan McConnell and other Nurturing Faith Experience participants, move between historic boats, combined with hiking, as a way of exploring the Many Glacier area. Photo by John Pierce.

Looking Ahead

**NURTURING FAITH EXPERIENCE:
YELLOWSTONE/TETON**
July 9-16, 2016

Guided by Bruce Gourley
Tony Cartledge leading sessions on
“Bible stories we learned as children
to reconsider as adults”

Optional activities throughout the week
from rigorous to rocking chairs!

Details at NurturingFaith.net/experiences

We waited with held breath, hoping the bear would turn back or stay or not find the goats, but he was off again, following the same path of the goats. Real nature!

OFF TRAIL

Ken led us off the trail, down a rocky slope that never ended; it plateaued into meadows of glacier lilies, Indian paintbrush, and other wildflowers in whites, yellows and lilacs, then kept descending. Every step brought a new panorama into focus or revealed a new waterfall or a new perspective on a field of wildflowers.

Ken explained that the entire area was once covered in ocean, pointing out the striations of later glaciers on rocks. “And when did that happen?” Johnny asked the group jokingly. “Everyone together now, ‘6,000 years ago!’”

The off-trail hike took longer than expected. Half of the time was spent with eyes glued to a camera viewfinder.

I felt like Maria in *The Sound of Music* or some other fictional character walking through a mountain meadow ... Heidi, perhaps, or some Alpine maid, dressed in a dirndl and hair in braids (I had one braid; does that count?).

My brother Evan remarked that “frolic” fit this hike perfectly. We forded streams and walked up and over rolling hills, always keeping our general direction the same as we made our way back toward civilization.

This is what the mountains are for, to distance us from what we know, to take us out of our comfort zone and fill us with wonder at what we have been missing: the rushing of water over rocks, the colors of wildflowers, the breeze lifting hair up and away, the joy at natural artistry, and the easy give-and-take of conversation stopping and starting with each new hill to stand atop or each new photograph

to take. We felt like the only people in the entire park, maybe even the entire world in those hours.

CHOICES

After driving back down Going-to-the-Sun Road, some of our group took a boat ride on Lake McDonald while others of us hiked to Avalanche Lake. The atmosphere, an alpine feel, was completely different from that at Logan Pass.

Avalanche Lake was densely forested except where trees had been blown over by the air preceding an avalanche, and the ground was carpeted in pine needles. After riding in the van, I welcomed the burn of hiking and appreciated having to catch my breath. Others weren't quite as thrilled.

Joshua Breazeale, a young minister on sabbatical, and Don had opted for horseback riding. But the stables couldn't accommodate them and the boat had sailed. So they joined the hike to Avalanche Lake.

“Horseback riding would've been much easier than this,” Joshua said to Don during their unplanned additional hike just hours after trekking across Logan Pass.

Even I had to agree with that. But experiencing the park on foot felt truer and more real. I connected with the earth when my foot hit the ground and my mind engaged with my surroundings.

The bounty of the region presented itself at dinner in the form of Montana mountain trout and huckleberry pie. The group was weary after a long day, and everyone was punchy, almost giddy. We laughed with each other, at peace.

In the Adobe House that evening Ken shared about being a hospital chaplain in Bozeman where days can be dark and sorrowful.

There he is able to share hope, however.

Death is present in all our lives, and being able to engage in open discussion with Ken, who has experience in comforting the grieving and extending a hand to those trapped by illness or injury, was a welcomed relief. He reminded us that we do not have to be everything for those who suffer; we only have to be present.

SUNRISE SURPRISES

Up before dawn on Thursday, seven of us drove back to Lake McDonald to watch and photograph the sunrise. My sacrifice, an offering of sleep, did not go unnoticed.

The sky changed from blues and purples to pinks and finally to bright yellows and oranges, the rays of the sun streaming from behind a mountain peak. The scene was mirrored in the still lake below, broken only by the occasional duck and otter.

We worked in silence, adjusting settings, zooming in and out, moving to find a more appealing composition. I began to question what we actually saw.

Was it real, or did it only appear through the lens? It was far too easy to take a photograph, staged neatly with the rule of thirds and captured with the best lighting and settings. It was far more difficult to sit and wait and only watch.

Our day was centered on water. We hiked to St. Mary Falls, a glacial waterfall pouring into a cauldron of teal-colored water, accented by the white of speed and the depth of the pool.

From there we kept hiking to Virginia Falls, a jet of water over a cliff. The spray hit my upturned face in icy drops, so I walked back down to a lower portion and rested on a log. By then, the group had become quite comfortable with each other.

As we hiked back, Vicki Willis and I talked about possessions, materialism, saving sentimental keepsakes, and how people my age are less attached to the idea of “things.” I told her when I give gifts, I don’t like giving things; I like to give my time or my handiwork, or to share an experience.

We are less attached to keepsakes and sentimentality, but more attached to the objects that afford us status and respectability. Yet in these mountains, I hadn’t used my cellphone. Cell service didn’t extend there; it didn’t need to.

MANY GLACIER

We drove eastward to reach Many Glacier as the day became blustery. Thunder rumbled and rain poured as we ate lunch inside the lodge.

Once the rain ended, my family set off on a 2.6-mile trail encircling the lake. At the halfway point, raindrops began to fall again, but we pressed on. Evan taught us to power walk with our hips swiveling, and I was hot in my vest and raincoat, but didn’t want to be wet walking against the rain. By the time we completed the trail, though, my legs were soaked.

Within minutes of returning, the rain stopped and the sky cleared, leaving behind a deep blue hue and a light dusting of snow on the mountain peaks. Swiftcurrent Lake calmed as we boarded Chief Two Guns, the first of two wooden boats.

This unique experience required us to disembark, hike a half-mile, and board another historic boat on a second lake, Lake Josephine. Morning Eagle was the only boat on the lake and, if damaged, must be repaired on-site. No roads lead to the secluded lake.

GOOD TIMING

The boat captain told us about geologic features such as the Salamander Glacier and the band of igneous rock running through most of the mountains. She added that the number of glaciers in the park had fallen from more than 150 to just 25 since the park’s founding.

These remaining glaciers, she said, are disappearing quickly. Terry Tempest Williams was correct. In several years it will be too late to visit the park carved out by glaciers and actually see glaciers.

The timing of our trip had been good in that regard. But then the one disappointment of the trip occurred.

A self-proclaimed (and recognized by others) foodie, I had been looking forward to dinner back at the Belton Chalet in West Glacier. But a delay in our boat rides didn’t allow time for the long drive back before eating. So we dined again at Many Glacier Lodge.

As we drove back along Going-to-the-Sun Road, later than planned, clouds descended just before Logan Pass. Visibility decreased to a matter of feet.



Photo by Michael Helms.

Mountain goat on a cliff.



Evan McConnell (left) and others enjoy a trail break

The side of the mountain dropped off into nothingness. My fingers clenched my vest as I looked down.

Then as we emerged onto Logan Pass, we were greeted by the golden light of sunset striking the mountain peaks. It was a clear night on this side of the park, and we stopped over and over again, exclaiming at the light, the mountains, the beauty!

This was the reason we stayed longer at Many Glacier, though we didn’t know it at the time. This was a one-time moment, and we reveled in it.

Soon the golden light faded, and I fell asleep in the van to be awakened when we arrived back at Belton Chalet. This day, like the

others, had been long and full.

We pushed our gathering back to Friday morning when everyone was fresh for sharing his or her experiences. I stayed quiet, wanting to listen to everyone else.

Again and again, I heard the declarations of admiration of the land — some calling it “God showing off.” There were admissions of needing to pull away like this more often.

We were moved when Scott Willis played his guitar and sang a song he had written during the week, filled with personal emotion and worship. We sat in silence as he allowed us to experience this moment with him.

This is what creation does in and through us.

A NEW WAY

We took a different route back to Bozeman. This one offered fresh Montana cherries, Flathead Lake, and historic St. Ignatius Mission, filled with murals painted by the mission’s cook.

We stopped for lunch in Missoula at a restaurant of my choosing. Meals and food connect us, and when we eat well, we live well and we live together. We were united, one group.

Dinner in Bozeman was full of stories shared among our group. Some revealed hidden characteristics of personalities, pushing them into a new light, exposing their hearts in a dim restaurant.

Humans are meant for community, meant to take joy in creation, meant to share in our experiences with God and with the earth. And we lived into that well.

But even as we live well, we must be conscious of other people and of our surroundings. Living well means being mindful of our hurts and the hurts we can cause; we must maintain a balance of peace with each other and the earth.

Just days after we left, a massive forest fire began raging in Glacier National Park, already changing what we had seen. It was a reminder to care for the earth and to appreciate what we can experience now.

... For all of it could be gone someday. (Except Belton Chalet Restaurant, because I’m coming back for you.) **BT**

—Molly McConnell is a junior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she majors in English with a minor in creative writing.

Jubilee

Churches have important ministry opportunities amid financial crises

There is nothing jubilant about financial crisis. However, Baptist lay leaders and attorneys Laurie Weatherford Ducker and Aubrey Ducker have helpful and hopeful words for those who find themselves in such struggles — or seek to prevent them.

The Duckers, members of College Park Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla., led a workshop on “Jubilee — or what to do when financial crisis strikes” at the summer gathering of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Dallas.

Bankruptcy laws, they noted, can be seen in similar light to the biblical concept of “Jubilee” — “a time of freedom and of celebration when everyone will receive back their original property...” (Lev. 25:10).

Laurie, a bankruptcy trustee and education attorney, works daily with those seeking to regain their financial footing.

“The people who go to those predatory lenders should choose other options,” she offered as a quick but sure word to those experiencing financial crisis.

She warned church members of standing in judgment of those who — through poor choices or experiences beyond their control — need to restructure debt and create new constructive ways of earning and managing money.

“Treat everybody with dignity,” she said of people in financial crisis. “It doesn’t mean they’re a lesser person.”

Most of the bankruptcy cases she handles, she said, result from either underemployment or severe medical crises. Other financial crises, she noted, can result from spending more than one earns to “keep up with the neighbors” or from not properly distinguishing between needs and wants.



Attorneys Laurie Weatherford Ducker and Aubrey Ducker of Orlando, Fla.

Aubrey has practiced family law for 16 years, addressing health care crises and elder care among other issues with financial consequences. But why talk about this at a gathering of Baptists?

“Because churches see it all the time,” he said of those experiencing financial stress.

Therefore, he urged congregational leaders to give more attention to issues related to financial management.

“There’s a lot of scripture that involves money,” he said. More so, he added, than the social issues that dominate our conversations.

Some scriptures have been misused by proponents of the “prosperity gospel,” he warned. However, he said, biblical concepts related to money should not be ignored.

In fact, Aubrey noted, being in financial crisis can even prevent some persons from being engaged in congregational life at a time of great need.

“Some people stop coming to church because they can’t afford to participate,” he said.

Laurie shared how those who come to their church for benevolent purposes are now referred to basic financial counseling that includes budgeting and other matters.

College Park’s “Center for Life Transitions” offers seminars on subjects such as résumé writing and networking (using online resources

such as LinkedIn). Employees send job opportunities to the list of prospective employees assembled.

Churches should pay special attention, the Duckers said, when the local economy takes a big hit such as a major employer shutting down or laying off employees.

“Expand your ministry in a time of financial crisis,” Aubrey urged.

The Duckers recommend CARE (Credit Abuse Resistance Education), a program founded by the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, as a good resource for learning wise financial habits. It is especially helpful, they said, for young persons preparing to manage their own finances — and facing the overwhelming opportunities to run up credit.

The Duckers warn those in crisis to never refinance their mortgage at such a time or take retirement funds to pay credit card debt. Such practical guidance is a part of the ministry offered through their church.

“We give information on how to get more for your money...” said Laurie. “That’s something you can teach in church.”

Helping people to develop good monetary practices or restore their financial health, they said, is an important ministry that impacts individuals, families, congregations and communities at large. **BT**



NURTURING FAITH EXPERIENCE 2015

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OCTOBER 22-23
Chattanooga, Tenn.

Leaders: Bruce Gourley, Bobby Lovett, John Pierce

Sponsored by *Baptists Today*, Baptist History and Heritage Society, First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, and Tennessee Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

This two-day experience offers a closer look at Baptist involvement in and reaction to the Civil War — as well as how the war’s legacy continues to impact American society a century and a half later.

The setting, rich in Civil War history, will enhance the learning experience.



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22

First Baptist Church
401 Gateway Ave.
Chattanooga, Tenn.

5:30 p.m. – Registration and Reception
6:00 p.m. – Dinner / Presentations
Panel Discussions

“Who Is on the Lord’s Side? How Baptists North and South, White and Black, Claimed Divine Favor”

—Bruce T. Gourley, Ph.D., Executive Director,
Baptist History and Heritage Society

“Legacy and Loss: How the Civil War Still Impacts American Society”

—Bobby Lovett, Ph.D., Retired Senior Professor, Tennessee State University

Dialogue — Facilitated by John D. Pierce,
Executive Editor of *Baptists Today*

Fellowship/Book Signings

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23

Tour of Civil War Sites

Chickamauga & Chattanooga National Military Park is the oldest and largest Civil War park. Historians will share perspectives on the war during visits to Lookout Mountain (site of the “Battle Above the Clouds” and Point Park) and the Chickamauga Battlefield.

REGISTRATION FEE of \$45 per person includes all programming, dinner and tours. Register online at nurturingfaith.net or send a check payable to *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31210. Deadline to register is Oct. 12. After that date, call (478) 301-5655 to check on availability. Questions? Call (478) 719-1033.

HOUSING

Rooms at the discounted rate of \$139 (plus tax and parking) are available at the Courtyard by Marriott, 200 Chestnut St., near the beautiful riverfront in downtown Chattanooga. To reserve a single king or double queen room at this price, call (423) 755-0871 (ask for *Baptists Today* group) by Sept. 10.



Ten Years Later

Former students recall John Claypool's influence on their lives, ministry

Todd Thomason, pastor of First Baptist Church of Hyattsville, Md., couldn't let Sept. 3 of this year pass without some tribute to John Claypool who died on that date a decade ago. So he asked other graduates of Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology, where Claypool finished his career, to join him in sharing reflections of their beloved teacher and sermons that were influenced by the gifted preacher.

Claypool, a Baptist-turned-Episcopalian, impacted thousands through his inspired sermons. At McAfee, he reached a new generation of young ministers who carry on his mission of proclaiming grace and hope.

PURPOSEFUL ACTS

Todd doesn't look far each day to be reminded of his mentor.

"In our house hangs a copy of a black-and-white photograph showing Dr. Claypool and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. having coffee in the refectory of Southern Seminary on the day the civil rights icon visited the campus in 1961," he said. "It's very special to me — and not just for featuring two men whom I believe to be 20th-century saints in the same frame. It's special because, like most everything to do with John Claypool, there's a story behind it: a story about choosing love and grace over all other available options."

The photograph that Todd's wife gave him one Christmas is the same image as the original from the *Louisville Courier-Journal* that Claypool brought to class in 2002 — not to brag but to illustrate a point. "That picture got him into a whole lot of trouble."

"He chose the grace of hospitality over the safety of propriety," said Thomason. "He chose

to share a cup of coffee in calm, holy defiance of his culture's bigoted, ungodly conventions."

That simple act impacted Thomason's understanding of ministerial calling.

"The humility with which Dr. Claypool shared this photograph, and the openness with which he told the story behind it, forever endeared him to me as a mentor and exemplar of prophetic pastoral leadership," said Todd. "Throughout our time together, Dr. Claypool impressed upon me that simple but purposeful acts lie at the heart of Christian witness."

Claypool, Todd noted, modeled for ministers what civil rights leader and U.S. Rep. John Lewis calls "the right kind of trouble."

GIFT GIVING

Julie Whidden Long, associate pastor and minister of children and families at First Baptist Church of Christ in Macon, Ga., has written about Claypool's influence for an upcoming book, titled *Life Is Gift*, by Carolyn Ratliff and others. This "living legend of preaching," she said, was one of the richest yet unexpected gifts of her seminary experience.

"His genuine warmth and kind spirit drew me in," she recalled. "... He had a gift for seeking out people and making them feel welcomed and loved."

His confessional style of preaching impacted pulpits for decades — with these students being the latest. Preaching, according to Claypool, is "gift-giving," Julie recalled. "It is taking something that has proved to be a blessing to the preacher and sharing it in the hope that what has blessed the preacher will also bless the listeners."

That lesson extended beyond the seminary classroom.

"His influence is so strong on my preaching and my theology that I rarely prepare a sermon without remembering something that

he said about my chosen text or theme or preaching in general," said Julie. "Dr. Claypool generously taught us out of his preaching gifts, but he was just as quick to affirm and acknowledge our own gifts."

STRUGGLERS

Matt DuVall, director of development for McAfee School of Theology, recalled how Claypool was never distracted from conversations with students no matter who else walked into the room.

"He made me feel like I mattered, and he was genuinely engaged in the lives of his students," said Matt. "Claypool expected to learn from each of his students even as we hung on his every word."

DuVall added that Claypool took the same approach in his preaching.

"He believed that Myron Madden was right in that we all have the power to bless others and empower them to move forward in life," said Matt. "His lectures and the conversations that ensued helped me get unstuck from some difficult things in my own life. What a gift!"

Matt said he discovered the place that his own story has in ministry.

"I grew up with ... ministers who didn't give rise to more questions, but rather held tight to the answers," he noted. "The gentle nature of John's spirit was so different from so many of the personalities of the pastors I already knew."

"He had a tenderness and humility of spirit that I believe can only come from deep pain, struggle, and questions in the shadow of life's valleys," Matt continued. "John empowered me to trust my own experience of life and faith in conversation with the journey of my faith community and helped me to see how appropriate and healthy transparency can be helpful as we walk with our communities of faith toward growth and hope."

Drawing from the title of Claypool's book, a collection of powerful sermons written in the pain of his daughter's death, Matt affirmed: "More than anything, John taught us how to



John Claypool

“He made me feel like I mattered, and he was genuinely engaged in the lives of his students.”

‘be’ as we walk the journeys of life with ‘fellow strugglers.’”

TRANSITIONS

David Weatherspoon spent 10 years as campus minister at Franklin College in Indiana before moving to Memphis to become pediatric chaplain at Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital. The classes he took from Claypool at McAfee gave him needed confidence as a preacher, he said, but much more.

“I learned much more about what it meant to be Christian from Dr. Claypool in my encounters with him inside and outside of the classroom,” said David. “He was a model teacher.”

Claypool reminded students that they are to offer the best gifts they have to give, but are not in charge of how those gifts are received, David recalled.

“Dr. Claypool was quick to point out that the ego can get in the way of offering our best if we are always concerned with how others will respond and whether they will like what we have to say or how we say it,” he said. “This wisdom was both empowering and freeing.”

David said that understanding became one of the primary teachings he shared with students as a college chaplain and with others in daily living. “It has been the basis, I believe, for many to begin to see their own worth and value and begin to breathe life into others around them.”

He recalled how Claypool befriended students going through difficult transitions beyond academics.

“When my father’s cancer returned and my first marriage began to fail, Dr. Claypool was one of the primary steadying hands that I leaned upon as Dad died and the marriage fell apart,” said David. “He had been there himself, and he knew how to be present and what to say and when to say it.”

“Dr. Claypool helped me experience those two deaths and find new life by teaching me how to live again and find grace and goodness once more, despite the pain and suffering I had experienced,” he continued. “He is one of my heroes. Through it all, I continue to discover ways that he has helped shape my own life.” **BT**

Excerpts from Claypool-influenced sermons by young ministers

“I remember the first time that I preached in one of Dr. Claypool’s classes. . . . I pulled the number three, which meant that the first text I had was the sacrifice of Isaac. I was so intimidated because the sacrifice of Isaac was Dr. Claypool’s text when he preached for the first time after finding out that his daughter Laura Lue had leukemia. Back home we would call that ‘being in tall cotton.’ I have had that same feeling all week. So today I offer to you — as I offered that Tuesday morning — a humble gift from what little I have. May grace abound.”

—Matt DuVall, preaching to First Baptist Church of Athens, Ga., Sept. 4, 2005, the Sunday after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast and Matt received news of Claypool’s death

“Jeremiah spoke in prose when things made sense and the world became a little bit more clear and orderly. He spoke in poetry when things got so dark that no normal speech would do.

I knew what Jeremiah was doing: He was trying to describe what it’s like to walk that fine line between clarity and chaos. It’s when the chaos comes that our prose-world arrives at an end. It’s what Elisabeth Gold coined ‘narrative wreckage.’

‘Narrative wreckage’ happens when someone’s grief becomes so catastrophic that speech, utterance and sound itself cease to exist. The narrative a person lives by — a story that helps make sense of the world — no longer works and is dismantled by tragedy. That is until, eventually, poetry erupts in its place and gives birth to something new, something unheard of, something that gives a voice to a voiceless, speech-crushing situation.”

—Joe LaGuardia, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Conyers, Ga., returning to the pulpit Aug. 25, 2013 after his father was killed in a mass shooting in Pennsylvania

“Many of us have been fishing for a long time without any luck, and we are worn out from our nets coming up empty . . . But if we listen carefully, we just might hear a voice: ‘Cast your nets on the other side.’ The voice beckons us to try again. It invites us to move beyond our experiences and our expectations. It is a voice that calls us to hope.

When Jesus anonymously called out to those disciples from the seashore, he didn’t ask them to cast their nets out of their love for him or have faith that he would provide a miracle. They didn’t even know that it was him. The unidentified man simply asked them to hope that things might be different the next time.

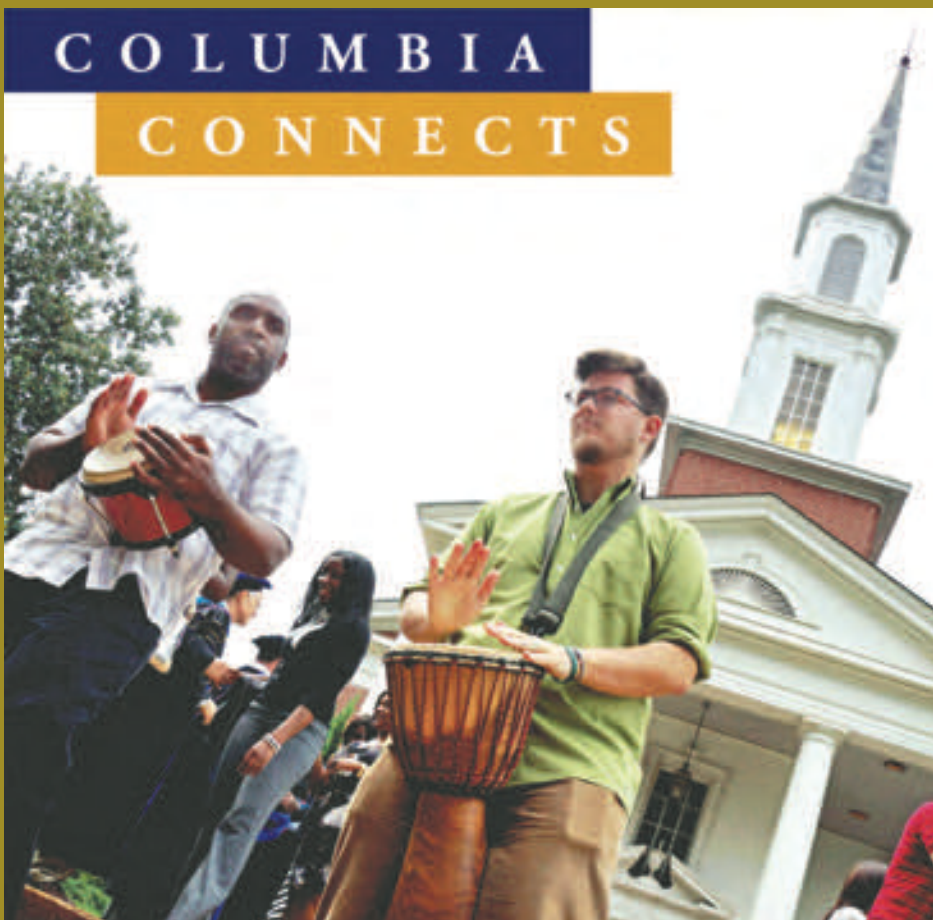
If we make this into simply another miracle story, we miss the point. The miracle happened because Peter and the disciples had learned enough about hope to try again; to expect the unexpected; to refuse to believe that empty crosses and sealed tombs are dead ends.”

—Julie Whidden Long, in a sermon from John 21 that she preached to three Georgia congregations

“One of the ways in which a Christian response to tragedy should be different from a non-Christian response is that the Christian response should be typical and not extraordinary. It should be an extension of the way we live our lives in the course of every day, not an exception we make in the wake of catastrophe.

It shouldn’t take an act of war like 9-11 for us to have compassion on someone stranded in the airport. It shouldn’t take a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina for us to want to rescue the poor and the infirm out of their perilous circumstance.”

—Todd Thomason, preaching on Sept. 11, 2011 to First Baptist Church of Hyattsville, Md.



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