

The lasting
impact of

**Fred
Shuttlesworth**

5

NOVEMBER 2011

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Dead Sea Scrolls *go digital*

Five ancient texts now
available online

4

Q&A with **Bob Dale**
about leadership

34

*Nur*uring
FATHTM
BIBLE STUDIES

for adults and youth
DECEMBER lessons inside

17

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**Congregation's
coffeehouse
offers food and
connections**

42



**Career missionaries,
short-term volunteers
go hand-in-hand**

38

PERSPECTIVES

Does the partnership model for cooperative ministry work? **7**

By John Pierce

Traveling with Pomegranates:

A Review **29**

By Jackie Riley



Transitioning through seasons of ministry **35**

By Chris Gambill

IN THE NEWS

News digest **8-9**

Evangelicals stand apart on evolution, climate change **10**

Few pockets of vitality among U.S. churches **11**

Judaism without God? **12**

Megachurch pastors leaving pulpit for publishing **13**

FEATURES

Books that shape Baptist scholars **30**

ServiceFirst for college grads **32**

Mother cares for her son's Amish victims **39**

Billy Graham reflects on growing old in new book **40**

cover photos

The Shrine of the Book, part of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, houses the fragile Dead Sea Scrolls that were discovered in caves more than a half-century ago. Five of the scrolls have been carefully photographed and are now widely available to Bible scholars on the Internet. Photo from ThinkStock.com.

Story on page 4

Quotation Remarks	6
Editorial	7
Lighter Side	14
Reblog	15
Media	29
Classifieds	36
In the Know	36
Baptists and the Civil War	37

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Access to ancient texts

Five Dead Sea Scrolls are now available online



JERUSALEM — Five of the Dead Sea Scrolls that have been stored for decades in a climate-controlled exhibit at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem are now available in digital form to anyone with an Internet connection.

A website (dss.collections.imj.org.il) developed by the Israel Museum and Google allows online visitors to examine the scrolls in minute detail with the help of a magnifying feature.

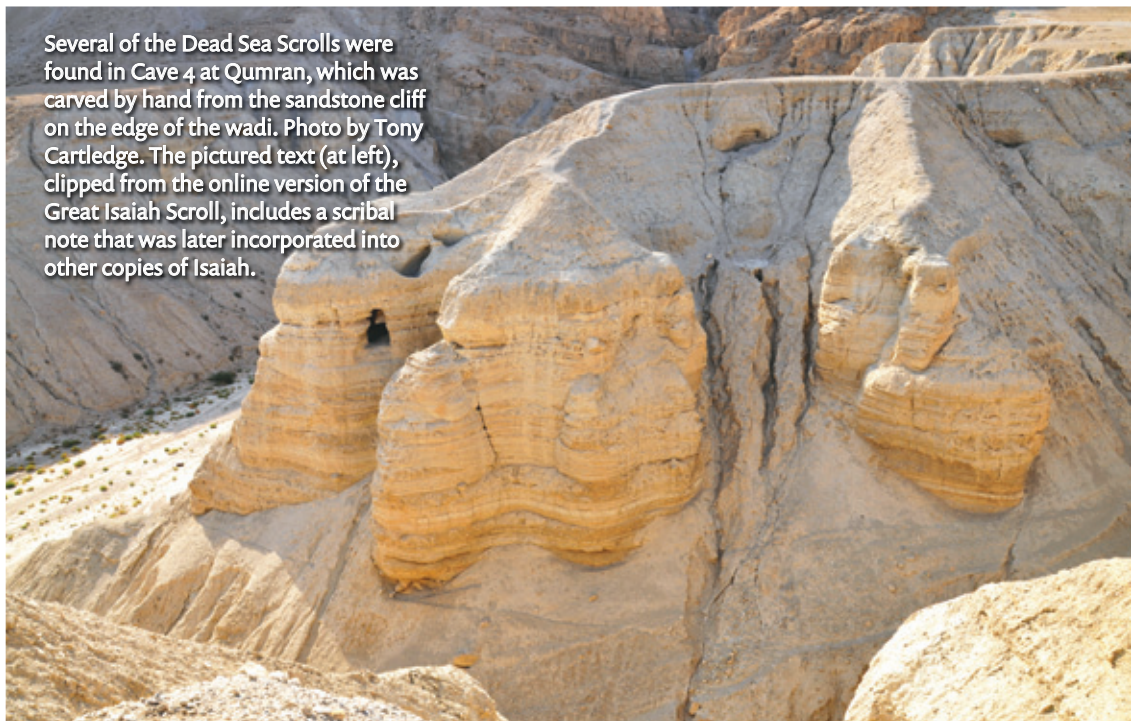
Pages for each of the five scrolls — the Great Isaiah Scroll, the Community Rule Scroll, the Commentary on the Habakkuk Scroll, the Temple Scroll, and the War Scroll — also contain brief videos and explanatory notes.

According to the museum announcement, details invisible to the naked eye are made visible through ultra-high resolution digital photography at up to 1,200 megapixels each.

Photographer Ardon Bar-Hama used UV-protected flash tubes with an exposure of 1/4000th of a second to minimize damage to the fragile and light-sensitive scrolls, the museum said.

Dating from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D., the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between 1947 and 1956 in 11 caves near the Dead Sea. The region's arid environment helped ensure their survival.

"We have seen how people around the world can enhance their knowledge and understanding of key historical events by accessing documents and collections online," said Yossi Matias, managing director of Google's Israeli research and development center, in a statement. "We hope to make all existing knowledge in historical archives and collections available to all, including helping to put additional Dead Sea Scroll documents online." **BT**



Several of the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in Cave 4 at Qumran, which was carved by hand from the sandstone cliff on the edge of the wadi. Photo by Tony Cartledge. The pictured text (at left), clipped from the online version of the Great Isaiah Scroll, includes a scribal note that was later incorporated into other copies of Isaiah.

Connecting Bible study to the news

By John Pierce

Teachers and students in Sunday school classes and other groups using the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies in the center of *Baptists Today* know that the small shovel icon in the lessons means that writer Tony Cartledge has more to say about that subject in his "Digging Deeper" background notes at nurturingfaith.net.

One of his "Digging Deeper" entries for the first lesson in December (found on page 18 of this issue) speaks to one of the many insights Bible scholars have gained from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

"Ancient scribes who made copies of scrolls that later came to be recognized as canonical would sometimes insert comments of their own," Tony explains. "Even when inserted in the margins, such comments were often incorporated into future versions of the text."

As an example, Tony points to Isaiah 40:7 — a verse that did not appear in the early Greek translation known as the Septuagint and is absent from the Great Isaiah

Scroll (known as 1QIsa^a), which is the largest of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Therefore the inclusion of verse 7 (which contains the comment: "... the grass withers, and the flower falls when the breath of the Lord blows on it — surely the people are grass!") is understood as a scribe's personal note in the margin that found its way into some translations of the Bible. And verses 6 and 8 in Isaiah 40 flow better in thought without the addition.

Because biblical texts were copied by hand, such insertions were sometimes incorporated into the regular text of the next copy. Having access to older biblical manuscripts enables scholars to identify some of these later additions to the text.

That is why the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947-1956) in a series of caves at Qumran on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea was so heralded by Bible scholars.

The hundreds of ancient texts — some dating back to the third century B.C. — are so fragile, however, that broad access has required time, care and new technology. **BT**

‘Divine insanity’

Shuttlesworth left lasting legacy, example in courage

Civil rights hero Fred Shuttlesworth died Oct. 5 at age 89. He served for more than 40 years as pastor of Greater New Light Baptist Church in Cincinnati.

He played a major role in the struggle for racial equality as a front-line organizer and fearless leader of civil rights activities in Birmingham where he was pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in the mid-’50s and early ’60s.

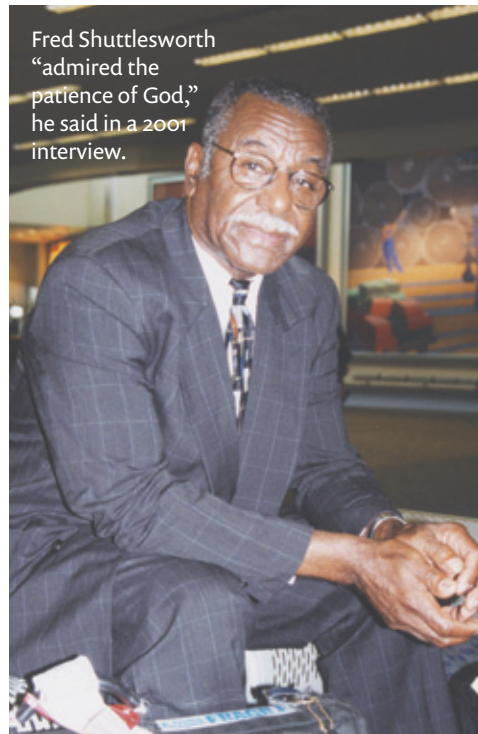
Shuttlesworth’s contributions were not completely ignored. In the Avondale community of Cincinnati there is Fred Shuttlesworth Circle. There’s a larger-than-life statue of him outside the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham — where the international airport now bears his name as well.

Yet historians like Andrew Manis, who teaches at Macon State College in Georgia and wrote the biography, *A Fire You Can’t Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham’s Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth* (University of Alabama Press, 1999), believes the fiery and courageous preacher “hasn’t gotten his dues.”

In response to Shuttlesworth’s death, Manis, who was asked to speak at the memorial service in Birmingham, said:

“Shuttlesworth repeatedly prodded [Birmingham’s law official] ‘Bull’ Connor to obey the Supreme Court’s *Brown* ruling and reject Jim Crow. Shuttlesworth repeatedly pestered Martin Luther King Jr. to join forces with him and his own organization, and launch a double-barreled nonviolent assault on segregation.”

Manis added: “Shuttlesworth convinced [King] that if they could defeat segregation in Birmingham, they could defeat it in all of



America. It was Shuttlesworth who braved the famous dogs and fire hoses in the 1963 demonstrations. And it was Shuttlesworth’s demonstrations that finally convinced John F. Kennedy that civil rights was, in the president’s own words, a moral issue ‘as old as the Scriptures and as clear as the Constitution.’”

Manis said that conviction led Kennedy to introduce into Congress what a year later became the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Those who knew Shuttlesworth best speak of his unflappable courage in the face of violence. His home and church were repeatedly rocked by dynamite. A Christmas 1956 bombing blew away the corner of Shuttlesworth’s home — an experience he said “took the fear out of me.”

He was beaten by bats and bike chains and jailed dozens of times, leading Manis to say that while the minister never became a martyr it was not because of a lack of trying.

He simply put himself in harm’s way again and again to keep the fight for justice and equality on track.

In a 2001 interview with *Baptists Today*, Shuttlesworth described his leadership style as “challenging, persuasive, determinative and brutally frank.” He said he almost took offense when first reading Manis’ description of his confrontational style, but confessed: “What he wrote was true.”

Shuttlesworth said he never separated his ministry and activism as if different callings.

“I don’t divide myself into civil rights and religion,” said Shuttlesworth in the 2001 interview at the airport in Cincinnati. “I believe with all my heart that (the civil rights movement) was of God.”

“I’m a churchman,” he added. “Even where the church is not acting like the church, it’s the best thing on earth... Even Jesus said, ‘You’re the light of the world.’”

Shuttlesworth, who suffered a concussion from mob resistance to enrolling his daughters in Birmingham’s Phillips High School in 1957 and was hospitalized by injuries from a fire hose during a 1963 demonstration, among other sufferings, said the high price of freedom was worth it.

“Those were times I was doing God’s will; I was glad to suffer,” he said. “I didn’t know if I’d be around to see the benefits, but someone would.”

Despite the odds, the courageous civil rights leader made it past his 89th year — seeing much result from this leadership and personal example of faithfulness. Shuttlesworth said he “admires the patience of God.”

In the decades that followed the hottest days of the civil rights struggle, Shuttlesworth stuck to his message: “You can’t preach about God without justice,” he told me in 2001.

Then he added: “It takes a divine insanity to follow Jesus.” **BT**

“Even where the church is not acting like the church, it’s the best thing on earth...”

Jesus said, ‘You’re the light of the world.’”

Fred Shuttlesworth

quotation remarks

“...[W]hen I read yet another news story about presidential hopefuls holding prayer services to sell their agenda to evangelical voters, I object. We don’t need a savior. We already have one!”

—Pastor Amy Butler of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. (ABP)

“Politicians seek to co-opt our religious figures for ‘prayer rallies.’ Our religious figures prognosticate on partisan elections, with thinly-veiled endorsements of candidates, often in shockingly carnal terms. And we don’t even notice ... that our neighbors are wondering: if we’re this easily duped by political maneuvering, how can we be trusted to talk about the question of the resurrection from the dead?”

—Dean Russell Moore of Southern Baptist Seminary in an online review of Aaron Weaver’s book *James M. Dunn and Soul Freedom* at russellmoore.com

“Replacing Barack Obama is more than a political issue; it is a spiritual issue.”

—Dallas First Baptist Church pastor Robert Jeffress who endorsed Texas Gov. Rick Perry over Republican challenger Mitt Romney because “we ought to prefer a born-again Christian” (Dallas Morning News)

“The world is looking at box office numbers, and I am just praising God that he is continuing to make it a David and Goliath situation.”

—Producer Stephen Kendrick on the success of the low-budget movie *Courageous* from Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., that was the No. 1 new movie during its opening weekend (Baptist Press)

“A cold-hearted church that does not recognize nor greet visitors — indeed, the members don’t even speak to visitors — is like a magnet to the criminal. Warm-hearted, caring churches are crime-resistant by their very nature.”

—Chester L. Quarles, co-author of *Crime Prevention for Houses of Worship* (ABP)

“When they say prosperity, that’s some guy on TV asking for money. Our ministry is not about that. We’re about helping people. When I hear prosperity, it means to have good relationships, to be a blessing to people, to have peace in your mind.”

—Joel Osteen, countering charges that he preaches a “prosperity gospel” (CNN)

“I will remember the legacy of Steve Jobs in a way that he might not have thought of, as the founder of an empire that linked the world in order to bring Christ to those who have never heard.”

—Chancellor-elect Michael A. Milton of Reformed Theological Seminary tying the late Apple co-founder’s technology to Christian missions (Christian Post)

“My devout father, now 88, has reached a new place in his understanding of biblical interpretations of the end times. He says when we all get to heaven, we will all be lined up and God will say, ‘You were all wrong.’”

—Religion News Service Columnist Dick Staub, the son of a longtime conservative minister

“If America became a **Christian nation**, doing what Jesus did, you would be **aghast.**”

—Episcopal priest and RNS columnist Tom Ehrlich

“Working to help people is a joy, even though sometimes it was dangerous and heavy and treacherous. I thank God for the privilege.”

—Civil rights leader Joseph Lowery of Atlanta upon turning 90 on Oct. 6 (USA Today)

“We know it will ultimately be much more.”

—Spokesman Richard Weinberg on the \$25 million needed for the first phase of repairs on the earthquake-damaged Washington National Cathedral (RNS)

“These changes are unnecessary and they don’t actually achieve what the BBC wants them to achieve. Whether you use Common Era or Anno Domini, the date is still the same and the reference point is still the birth of Jesus Christ.”

—Retired Anglican Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali on the BBC’s decision to use B.C.E. (Before Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) instead of B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini, or Year of the Lord) in its television and radio broadcasts (RNS)

“The name ‘Southern’ really no longer reflects who we are as a convention in reaching all of North America.”

—Southern Baptist Convention president Bryant Wright of Marietta, Ga., in a video explaining his appointment of a name-change study committee led by Jimmy Draper under whose leadership the Baptist Sunday School Board became LifeWay Christian Resources (RNS)

Does the partnership model for cooperative ministry work?

The oft-declared death of denominationalism has been in the news long enough to suggest that it is a slow departure. In fact, most denominational structures seem to be slimming down and refocusing rather than posting “Out of Business” signs.

The denominational dinosaur of extinction seems to be the one that is overfed by a flood of funds from churches that pay little attention to how their money is spent. They no longer consider their commitment to missions fulfilled by the size of the check they send to convention bureaucrats.

Churches are doing more missions and ministry on their own and through contacts made without going through once-familiar denominational channels. As a result, denominational leaders are scrambling to maintain the many programs and institutions that were developed during more abundant times.

Glorieta, once a popular Southern Baptist retreat and conference destination, is up for sale. American Baptists have already sold their former headquarters in Pennsylvania. And the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, like most other Baptist organizations of churches, has cut staff and budget and is studying its structure.

Unlike Baptist conventions that own and fully control their agencies and institutions, the Fellowship was built on a partnership model — in response to the fundamentalist takeover of all things Southern Baptist.

As a result, all kinds of “partners” came into being from more theology schools than anyone imagined to issue-focused advocacy organizations to various media outlets. In the early years, when more-moderate churches were funneling funds away from the SBC to the Fellowship, monies were being directed to

these partners who share some basic commitments to historic Baptist principles.

Two decades later, the funds have slowed (or been diluted by funding to state and regional organizations and direct support of various Baptist mission efforts and other projects) while the number of CBF partners has continued to multiply.

What everyone in Baptist life knows is that the combination of a down economy and the new ways that churches carry out their mission and ministry commitments mean that less money is and will be coming into denominational coffers.

Southern Baptists are talking about everything from a name change to combining mission agencies. Related state conventions are cutting budgets in response to fewer receipts and a call from some of their largest contributors to pass along more of their offerings to international missions.

CBF has a task force at work looking at what shape the organization might take in the future as it moves toward calling its third executive coordinator. One of its goals is to consider the partnership model that is somewhat unique to Baptist conventions — or convention-like associations of churches.

So does the partnership approach to ministry work?

Sometimes.

The strengths of the partnership model include the primary one that was intended from the beginning: theology schools, media outlets and other organizations are autonomous and cannot be held captive to a single political maneuver. These independent organizations tend to be lean and innovative — with close ties to good lay leadership.

Weaknesses of the partnership model are found in that leaders of these organizations must give a lot of time and energy to

fundraising — which can cause competition with other partnering organizations — and there is no denominational referee to stymie duplication.

Having led an autonomous, Baptist organization (that precedes but partners with CBF and others), I have experienced both the advantages and disadvantages of this model. While missing the steady stream of funds from my earlier work in denominational life, I have fully embraced the partnership model that provides autonomy and requires collaboration.

In fact, collaboration is probably a better word than partnership — and is used by the strong Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina to describe its relationship with autonomous partners including *Baptists Today*.

Too often, partnership in CBF has been nothing more than handing funds to an organization that is doing something Fellowship people tend to value. Collaboration calls for more accountability and engagement — without control.

At *Baptists Today*, we have fully embraced a collaborative model that calls for establishing mutually beneficial relationships wherever there are shared values, trust and respect for one another’s autonomy. Organizations that seek control of others or choose to live in isolation often find themselves in a diminishing role. The irony is that when self-preservation becomes the guiding principle for an organization, the chance of survival — and certainly effectiveness — is reduced.

Whatever shape larger denominational structures may take in this ever-changing environment, there will be an increased role for organizations and institutions that seek the common good over self-preservation and create win-win relationships with other healthy, adaptable, trusting and effective partners.

Cooperation is still a good word and concept. Collaboration may be even better. **BT**



No more political endorsements

Pat Robertson says his opinion not ‘quite as good as it used to be’

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

Marking the 50th anniversary of the first broadcast of his Christian Broadcasting Network, Pat Robertson said he will no longer make political endorsements.

“When I was in charge of the Christian Coalition I was available to mobilize grassroots support for somebody,”

Robertson told The Associated Press in an interview. “I don’t have any army right

now. It’s just an opinion, and that isn’t quite as good as it used to be.”

Fifty years to the day after his first broadcast on Oct. 1, 1961, Robertson recalled his network’s humble beginnings in an address to a crowd gathered outside CBN’s headquarters in Virginia Beach, Va.

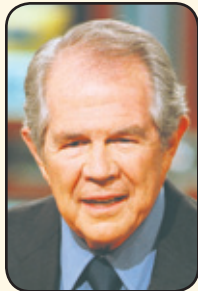
“I came down here to buy a television station and I didn’t even own a television set,” he said.

Robertson said his first deposit in the network’s corporate account was \$3.

“You take what God has and you praise him for it,” he said. “Now at the end of 50 years, I can look back, and I said it’s all God.”

Robertson’s network now produces programming in dozens of languages across about 200 countries. Robertson ran as a Republican for president in 1988, and later channeled his supporters into the Christian Coalition. His last endorsement was of former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in the 2008 Republican primaries.

Over the years, Robertson has been criticized for various comments, most recently for suggesting that a man whose wife has Alzheimer’s could get divorced to marry another woman. He later said he was “misunderstood” and thinks spouses should support each other during illnesses. **BT**



Pat Robertson

‘Abandoned his leadership’

SBC professor says Adam’s sin was in listening to his wife

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — A Southern Baptist seminary professor said at a September “Biblical Manhood & Womanhood” conference that Adam’s sin was in listening to his wife.

Thomas White, vice president for student services and associate professor of systematic theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, where the conference was held, said Adam “abandoned his leadership responsibilities and directly disobeyed God” by accepting forbidden fruit offered by Eve in Genesis.

“The beginning of God’s curse on Adam indicated that he fell because he heeded the voice of his wife, which contradicted God’s established order and represented the first biblical example of abandonment of male leadership responsibility,” said White.

Defending a theology called “complementarianism,” which holds that men and women are both created in God’s image but assigned different roles, White rejected the “egalitarian” argument that the subjugation of women came as a result of the Fall and is something that Christ came to redeem.

“Eve was cursed on her God-given role before the Fall,” White said. “She is cursed on her role as a mother and as a helper. She will have pain in childbirth, and her desire will be for her husband.”

Other speakers at the daylong conference included Russell Moore of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Randy Stinson of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and Southwestern President Paige Patterson.

One session featured a panel of women including Southwestern Seminary First Lady Dorothy Patterson, who answered a question about whether her well-known affinity for wearing hats in public has anything to do with Bible verses requiring women to pray with their heads covered.

Patterson, who teaches women’s ministries at Southwestern, said the hats started when a woman who sewed clothing for her when she was a pastor’s wife in Arkansas offered to use leftover fabric to make one and she liked the way it completed the outfit.

But she said she doesn’t mind if people want to view it as an application of 1 Corinthians 11. Patterson said she tells students that because God foreknew her husband would eventually be in a public position that it is possible “the Lord put in my heart a desire to wear hats” as one way to “show that I wanted to stand under his authority.”

White said he doesn’t believe “there can be a more important debate” than the conference topic.

“I contend that if we lose the battle over the gender debate, we lose a proper interpretation of God’s word,” he said. “We lose inerrancy. We lose the authority of the Bible, and that is detrimental to the gospel.” **BT**

World Vision wins employee faith-statement case

By Lauren Markoe
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court will not hear a case involving three employees who were fired by the Christian humanitarian agency World Vision, allowing the relief group to maintain its mandatory statement of faith for its workers.

World Vision has spent four years defending itself against three former employees who were fired because they did not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ or the Trinity.

On Oct. 3, the high court refused to

reopen the case, leaving intact a ruling from the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that sided with World Vision.

The court’s decision “represents a major victory for the freedom of all religious organizations to hire employees who share the same faith — whether Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian or any other religion,” said Richard Stearns, the U.S. president of World Vision.

The 9th Circuit ruling found that World Vision did not violate an amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act in firing the employees. The court did not accept the employees’ argument that the work of World Vision was humanitarian, but not religious in nature. **BT**

Teens leave churches seen as judgmental

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

Why do young Christians leave the church? New research by the Barna Group finds they view churches as judgmental, overprotective, exclusive and unfriendly towards doubters. They also consider congregations antagonistic to science and say their Christian experience has been shallow.

The findings, the result of a five-year study, are featured in *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, a new book by Barna president David Kinnaman. The project included a study of 1,296 young adults who were current or former churchgoers.

Researchers found that almost three out of five young Christians (59 percent) leave church life either permanently or for an extended period of time after age 15.

One in four 18- to 29-year-olds said “Christians demonize everything outside of the church.” One in three said, “Church is boring.”

“Churches are not prepared to handle the ‘new normal.’”

Clashes between church expectations and youths’ experience of sexuality have driven some away. One in six young Christians said they “have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them.” And 40 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Catholics said their church’s doctrine on sexuality and birth control is “out of date.”

Kinnaman called the problem of young dropouts from church “particularly urgent” since many churches are used to “traditional” young adults who leave home, get educated, find a job and start a family before age 30.

“Churches are not prepared to handle the ‘new normal,’” said Kinnaman. “However, the world for young adults is changing in significant ways, such as their remarkable access to the world and worldviews via technology, their alienation from various institutions, and their skepticism toward external sources of authority, including Christianity and the Bible.” **BT**



Christian identity in U.K. outpaces church attendance

By Al Webb
Religion News Service

LONDON — A major new survey by Britain’s national statistics bureau shows that despite growing immigration and competition from other faiths, nearly seven in 10 Britons still describe themselves as Christian.

That doesn’t mean, however, that U.K. Christians actually attend church. In a nation of 60 million people, weekly attendance at Church of England parishes had slumped to 1.14 million as recently as 2008.

Nevertheless, the new study by the Office for National Statistics showed 69 percent of men and women in Britain professed to be Christian, even if they never or rarely saw the inside of a church.

The survey showed that 4.4 percent of respondents identified themselves as Muslim, 1.3 percent as Hindu; 0.7 percent as Sikh, 0.4 percent as Buddhist, 0.4 percent as Jewish and 1.1 percent as followers of other religions.

The ONS said its Integrated Household Survey queried 420,000 people and was assembled from five other polls that asked the same “core questions” over the space of a year.

Those numbers rarely seem to translate into filling pews. A 2007 survey of 7,000 Britons by the Christian charity Tearfund found that only one in seven went to church each month, and only one in 10 did so once a month. Nonetheless, the Christian Institute research organization saw some reason for hope in the new figures; spokesman Simon Calvert said “people want to identify themselves as Christian.” **BT**

Leland Center relocates to church facilities

By Robert Dilday
Religious Herald

ARLINGTON, Va. — The John Leland Center for Theological Studies moved at the end of August to new quarters in the busy Clarendon section of Arlington, Va., about three miles from central Washington, D.C.

The Church at Clarendon’s new 10-story building towers behind an older structure owned by the church and renovated both for its use and for the John Leland Center for Theological Studies.

The 10-year-old Baptist seminary is now housed in 11,000 square feet of space on the second floor of a three-story building owned by the Church at Clarendon, formerly First Baptist Church of Clarendon.

The building was renovated as part of a massive development project that retained the church’s Georgian façade but replaced the rest with a 10-story structure containing space for worship and education, and about 120 apartments, most of which are categorized as affordable housing.

The adjacent three-story building that houses Leland was originally the church’s

education wing; it was retained but renovated for both the seminary’s and the church’s use.

Clarendon is a densely populated section of Washington’s Northern Virginia suburbs, with an eclectic mix of trendy shops and restaurants, as well as luxury apartments, office buildings and upscale chain stores. The church is a half block from the Clarendon station of the Metro, Washington’s subway and light rail system.

“It’s a great move for Leland,” said Mark Olson, the seminary’s president. “It’s in the middle of a very urban environment, close to a busy Metro stop and very accessible to anyone in the D.C. area. There are tons of young people, especially at night. It’s an exciting place to be for a seminary that wants to be on the cutting edge.”

Since 2009, Leland had leased space from the Baptist World Alliance, whose headquarters is in Falls Church, Va., another suburb about five miles further west. Leland first held classes at Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, across the street from the Baptist World Alliance.

Leland is funded in part by both the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. **BT**

Poll finds **evangelicals stand apart** on evolution, climate change

WASHINGTON — White evangelicals and Tea Party members are less likely to believe in evolution and climate change than most Americans, a finding that could pose a particular problem for Republican presidential hopefuls.

The poll released in September also showed that a majority of Americans (57 percent) believes in evolution, and an even larger majority (69 percent) believes in climate change — though many still disagree that the phenomenon is based on human activity.

But most Americans do not insist that their presidential candidates share their views on these issues, nor do they believe scientists have come to a consensus on them, according to the poll conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute in partnership with Religion News Service.

The views of white evangelicals and Tea Party members stand apart.

Even though these issues aren't deal-breakers for most voters, they are "symbolically important for two groups that play an outsize role in Republican primary politics: white evangelical Protestants and members of the Tea Party," said Robert P. Jones, CEO of PRRI.

"Because evangelicals and Tea Party members hold views that are significantly different than the general population, the challenge for Republican candidates is to talk about these issues now in a way that will not hurt them later in the general election," Jones said.

On evolution, a third (32 percent) of white evangelicals affirm a belief in evolution, compared to two-thirds of white mainline Protestants, six in 10 Catholics and three-quarters of the unaffiliated.

On climate change, though strong majorities in every religious group say they believe the earth is getting warmer, white evangelicals (31 percent) are significantly less likely to believe the change is caused by

human activity. That compares to 43 percent of white mainline Protestants, 50 percent of Catholics and 52 percent of the unaffiliated.

The poll reveals an unusual political schism on climate change. Typically, Republicans come down on one side of a question, Democrats on the other, and independents in the middle, said Dan Cox, PRRI's research director.

On climate change, Republicans (49 percent) cluster with Tea Party members (41 percent) on whether there is solid evidence that the earth is warming. That compares to 81 percent of Democrats and seven in 10 independents.

"There is no reason for climate change to be a partisan issue," said Cox. "But the political leadership on the issue has led to a polarization of opinion, with Democrats and independents on one side and Republicans on the other."

Many Americans say they do not care much about a candidate's stance on either evolution or climate change: more than half (53 percent) say a belief or disbelief in evolution wouldn't affect their vote, and about as many say the same about a candidate who doesn't believe climate change is caused by human activity.



White evangelicals, however, care.

Only four in 10 evangelicals say a candidate's views on evolution would make no difference in their vote, and those who say they cared about a candidate's position say they would be less likely to vote for someone who believes in evolution.

By contrast, Americans overall who cared about evolution say they'd be more likely to vote for a politician who believes in it.

Tea Party members (33 percent), more than any other group, are more likely to support a candidate who does not believe in climate change. That compares to 16 percent of Republicans and 5 percent of Democrats.

Americans also doubt a strong consensus exists among scientists on climate change, a phenomenon that has frustrated the vast majority of climatologists who consider it a problem caused by human activity. Only four in 10 Americans believe a consensus exists.

A slight majority (51 percent) says a consensus of scientists believes in evolution, though evolution is overwhelmingly endorsed throughout the scientific community.

In other findings:

- On stewardship of the earth, 57 percent say God wants humans to live responsibly with animals and plants. A sizable minority (36 percent), however, prefers the idea that "God gave human beings the right to use animals, plants and all the resources of the planet for human benefit."
- Black Protestants are evenly divided on evolution, with 47 percent affirming it and 46 percent affirming creationism.
- Though most Americans believe in evolution, they disagree on its driving force. Of those who believe in evolution, 30 percent say it's driven by natural selection or another natural process, compared to 22 percent who say a divine being guides it.

The PRRI/RNS Religion News Survey was based on telephone interviews with 1,013 adults between Sept. 14 and 18. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. **BT**

More than **40 percent** of congregations now use electric guitars or drums often or always in worship, up from 29 percent in 2000.

One in five congregations that started since 2000 began in new suburbs.

Eight in 10 congregations said the recent recession had a negative effect on their finances.

Pockets of vitality

With exceptions, many U.S. churches struggling

American congregations have grown less healthy in the last decade, with fewer people in the pews and aging memberships, according to a new Hartford Seminary study.

But there are also “pockets of vitality,” including an increase in minority congregations and a surge in election-related activities at evangelical congregations.

The findings coming from the new Faith Communities Today (FACT) survey are based on responses from more than 11,000 Christian, Jewish and Muslim congregations in 2010 and more than 14,000 congregations in 2000.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the median worship attendance at a typical congregation decreased from 130 to 108.

“It means we have a lot more smaller congregations,” said David Roozen, author of the report, “A Decade of Change in American Congregations, 2000-2010,” and director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

The percentage of congregations with average weekend worship attendance of 100 or fewer inched up from 42 percent to 49 percent over the decade. More than a quarter of congregations had 50 or fewer people attending in 2010.

Across the board — among white evangelical, white mainline and racial/ethnic congregations — there was a decrease in attendance.

While the number of megachurches almost doubled over the decade, congregations with 2,000 or more weekly attendees make up just 0.5 percent of all congregations.

“There are more megachurches but, in fact, they’re getting an increasing piece of an overall shrinking pie,” Roozen told the Religion Newswriters Association annual conference in Durham, N.C., where he released the findings.

In many cases, congregations are seeing not only fewer people but also older ones in their pews. At least one-third of members in more than half of mainline Protestant congregations are 65 or older.

The pews have gotten so gray in mainline Protestant churches, he said, that “oldline” is now probably a better descriptor.

“Half of oldline Protestant congregations could lose a third of their members in 15 years,” he said. “And that’s about triple the rate for any other religious family.”

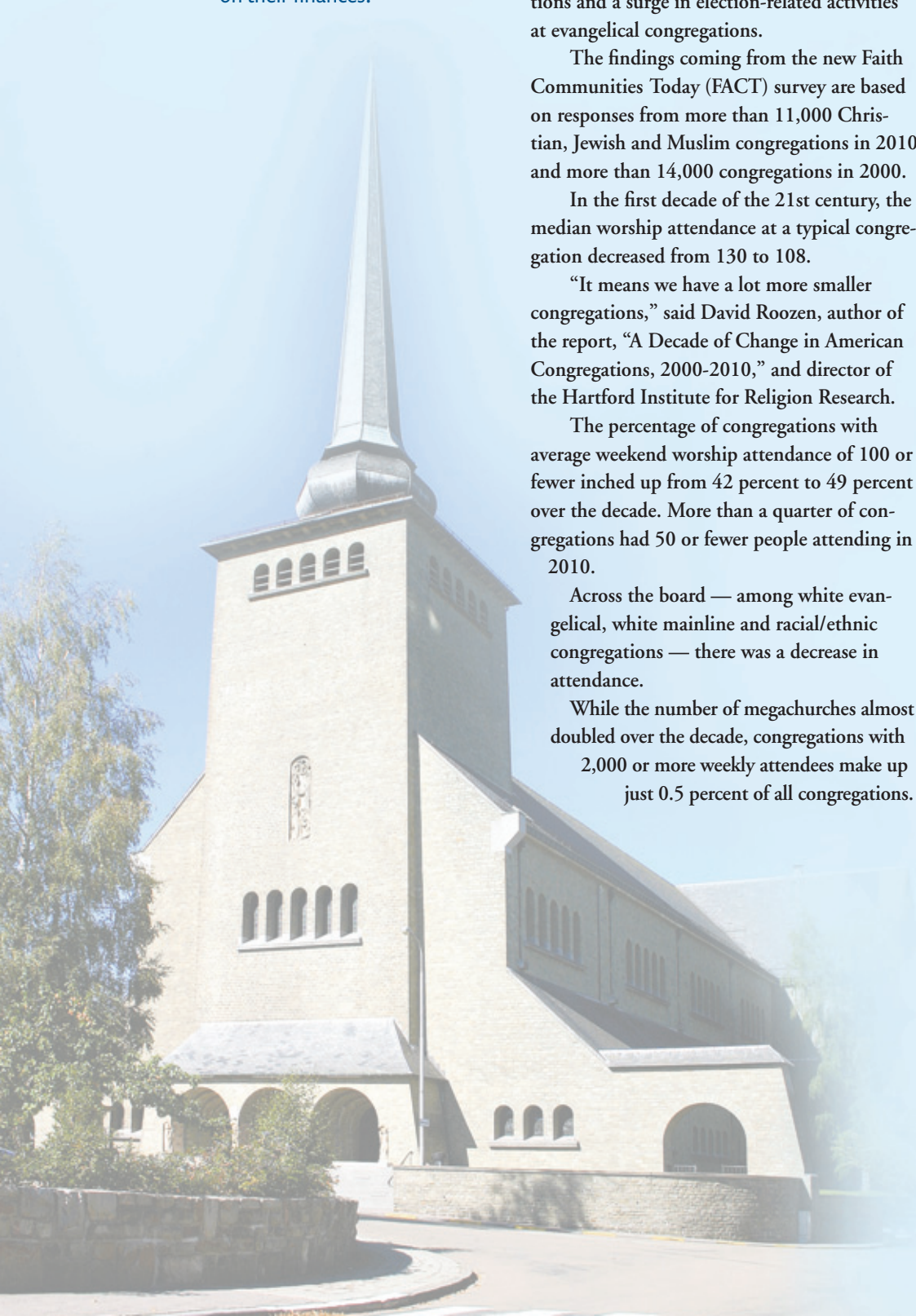
In the meantime, Roozen said, the racial/ethnic makeup of congregations is reflecting the U.S. Census Bureau’s prediction that minorities will constitute the majority of Americans by 2050.

The percentage of congregations with majorities of members from racial/ethnic groups, often including immigrants, grew from 23 percent to 30 percent over the decade. These congregations are disproportionately non-Christian or evangelical Protestant. They also tend to have younger members.

While black congregations’ involvement in voter education and registration programs has remained high — 55 percent in 2010 — researchers found significant changes in evangelical and mainline Protestant churches.

Evangelical churches involved in voter programs grew from 20 percent to 26 percent, while mainline congregations’ participation dropped from 16 percent to 12 percent. Half of non-black, evangelical Protestant congregations with more than 450 weekly attendees are involved in election-related programs. **BT**

In the first decade of the 21st century, the median worship attendance at a typical congregation decreased from 130 to 108.



Judaism. Without God?

Some American atheists say it's not far-fetched

BERKELEY, Calif. — For an atheist, Maxim Schrogin talks about God a lot. Over lunch at a Jewish deli, he ponders the impulse to believe — does it come from within or without? Why does God permit suffering?

Finally, he pulls out a flowchart he made showing degrees of belief, which ranges from unquestioning faith to absolute atheism. He stabs the paper with his pen.

“This is where I fall,” he said. “Zero.”

Still, Schrogin, 64, is a dues-paying member of Congregation Beth El, a Reform synagogue here in Berkeley. He is among its most active members, attending Torah study, and, for a time, heading its social action committee. He organizes its community service projects and works with leaders of other congregations to help the poor.

His two children were bar and bat mitzvahed. On Friday nights, he and his wife light Shabbat candles and recite Hebrew prayers. There is one song, sung by the congregation in Hebrew, that can bring him to tears.

Schrogin isn't alone.

At the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, many Jews who identify as atheists, secular humanists and other religious “nones” attend synagogue.

But others, like Schrogin, are active, integral parts of a religious community that, ideologically, they stand apart from.

“Atheism and Judaism are not contradictory, so to have an atheist in a Jewish congregation isn't an issue or a challenge or a problem,” Schrogin said. “It is par for the course. That is what Judaism is. It is our tradition to question God from top to bottom.”

Atheism is entrenched in American Judaism. In researching their book *American Grace*, authors Robert Putnam and David Campbell found that half of all American Jews doubt God's existence. In other groups, that number is between 10 and 15 percent.

Those figures have some in the Jewish community alarmed. A recent issue of *Moment*, a magazine of Jewish thought, asked influential Jews if Judaism can survive without



Maxim Schrogin is a member of Congregation of Beth El in Berkeley, Calif., and an atheist. RNS photo.

God. The answers were split.

“I'm not sure,” Leora Batnitzky, a Princeton professor of religion, wrote in *Moment*. “The question comes down to what it means to sustain a belief in God in Judaism, and that's a complicated issue” — and one that Jews have been debating for centuries.

Unlike other religions, Judaism has often embraced its atheist strain. The 18th-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza was excommunicated from his Jewish community for equating God with nature. Today, his writings are studied by many Jews.

In the 1920s, American Conservative Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan developed the theology of what would become Reconstructionist Judaism, founded on the idea that God is not personal, but a summation of all natural processes. Four decades later, Reform Rabbi Sherwin Wine came out as an atheist and founded “Humanistic Judaism,” which emphasizes secular Jewish culture and history over belief in God.

“Atheism is not much discussed in Jewish life,” said Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University.

“An individual who attends synagogue, participates in Jewish communal affairs, and contributes heavily to Jewish charities would undoubtedly be considered a very fine Jew, without asking questions about whether or not that person believed in God.”

Which means rabbis and their

congregations welcome the doubter.

“The atheist challenges knee-jerk faith,” said Rabbi Naomi Levy of Nashuva congregation in Los Angeles. “I love when the atheist asks, ‘What's the point of prayer?’ or, ‘Why are you following these rituals?’ These questions cause us to think, to give thoughtful responses, to reassess our own beliefs and convictions.”

Shaul Magid, a professor of modern Judaism at Indiana University, said atheists may join synagogues because American Judaism lacks “a vibrant secular Jewish movement.”

That's what prompted Jennifer Cohen Oko, a Washington, D.C.-based writer, to join a Reform synagogue, her first. Neither Cohen nor her husband believe in God, but, like many Jews, they joined for their two children.

“I want my kids to understand they are Jewish, to be proud of being Jewish and to understand their heritage,” Cohen said. “And then they'll have a choice. If they want to go that way (towards belief in God), great. If they don't, they'll have a sense of where they came from.”

Children are what brought Schrogin to Beth El, but he has stayed for the sense of purpose organizing its community service projects has instilled.

“My rabbi said, ‘You know Maxim, God doesn't care whether you believe in him or not. All that he cares is that you do the right thing.’ Our action in the world is much more important.” **BT**

Full-time media: Rob Bell isn't first megachurch pastor to leave the pulpit for publishing

For pastors with ambitions to reach huge audiences, there's often no better platform than the megachurch, which has given rise to powerhouse media empires from T.D. Jakes to Max Lucado to Joel Osteen and many others.

But some high-profile pastors are opting to leave congregational ministry altogether to pursue publishing and other media ventures full time. And that, some observers say, carries its own risks and rewards.

In September, up-and-coming pastor Rob Bell announced he's leaving Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Mich., in December. Bell's best-selling book, *Love Wins*, raised more than a few eyebrows with the premise that hell doesn't include eternal torment. Now he's moving on.

"Our founding pastor, Rob Bell, has decided to leave Mars Hill in order to devote his full energy to sharing the message of God's love with a broader audience," the church said in a statement.

Bell's resignation makes him the latest in a string of celebrity pastors who have said goodbye to weekly sermons, potluck dinners and other staples of church life.

A New Kind of Christianity author Brian McLaren, *Crazy Love* author Francis Chan, *Deep Church* author Jim Belcher and the popular British Bible scholar N.T. Wright have all left their church leadership positions in recent years.

Having left high-profile pastoral roles, these big-name pastors have become prolific publishers. But not all evangelicals are convinced the gospel is well-served when pastors

trade a local flock for a global one.

Within hours of the Mars Hill announcement, best-selling author and Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren was on Twitter, saying pastors who leave churches have less impact and no base for credibility.

"Speaking tours feed the ego = All applause & no responsibility," said one tweet from Warren. "It's an unreal world. A church gives accountability & validity."

It's not uncommon for megachurch pastor-authors to consider leaving church leadership, according to Rick Christian, president of Alive Communications, a Colorado Springs, Colo., literary agency that represents megachurch pastors. At a certain point, some feel more like a CEO than a shepherd, Christian said, and can be tempted to leave the headaches behind — especially when they're making good money from royalties.

But he encourages them to go slow and remember that "there's something inherently great about the accountability that comes with" leading a congregation. Authors who leave that world incur new risks, he said.

"You can have somebody who leaves for the wrong reasons and becomes a lone ranger," Christian said. "They're just running and gunning for the Lord on planes, in hotels, zipping around at 30,000 feet. You can lose touch very quickly."

Others agree parish life keeps communicators grounded. Elaine Heath, associate professor of evangelism at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology, noted a long history of leaving the parish for wider outreach opportunities — even Methodism founder John Wesley gave up a settled pulpit to be an itinerant preacher.

But in today's world, she said, book tours and online virtual relationships are not



enough to sustain a pastor's moral authority.

"Sometimes God calls someone like Brian McLaren to a 'global parish,'" Heath said. "What I need to know in order for such a person to remain credible is that they are still part of a local faith community with whom they pray, worship, and serve in ministry. ... Nothing can take the place of flesh and blood community."

To be sure, many megachurch pastors still find value in sustaining congregational ties. Lucado, for instance, earns his living from various publishing ventures and the royalties on more than 80 million books sold, but he still serves without salary as minister of preaching at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio.

"From a business standpoint, I just think there is a grounding that happens in the local church," Christian said. "It's not for everybody. Seasons can change; callings can change. But if you're called in (to church ministry), make sure you're called out for all the right reasons." **BT**

"There's something inherently great about the accountability that comes with 'leading a congregation.' Authors who leave that world incur new risks."

Rick Christian of Alive Communications

The Lighter Side

By Brett Younger

Up in the Air

I now know all about flying between Atlanta and Wilmington, N.C., thanks to the gracious people at First Baptist Church, where I am serving as the interim preacher. This column is just a small percentage of what I know.

Soaring 30,000 feet above your problems makes your problems seem small. This dreamy feeling lasts about five minutes.

From my house to Parking Lot A, it is exactly 33 miles unless you forget that the sign directing you to parking says “Rental Car.” Put your parking ticket over the driver’s side visor carefully. If your ticket somehow makes its way under the seat, it may take a while to find it. Write precisely where your car is parked on the back of the Park ‘n’ Ride ticket. “Between two trucks” may not be helpful two days later.

You are not expected to tip the shuttle driver unless he or she carries your bags. This is why you keep your bags close to you. Do not say, “I was pretty cute that day,” as the security officer checks your photo I.D. These people are not easily amused. On the flight from Atlanta, leave yourself 30 minutes for security and the train to your concourse. On the flight from Wilmington, you can get to the airport five minutes before your flight.

Do not go to the security line on the far right in Atlanta. If they don’t have enough people to fill the “suspicious looking characters” line, you may end up with your hands over your head in an X-ray booth that was featured in several episodes of *Star Trek*. Sky-Miles Club members (I’m only 75,000 miles or 150 trips to Wilmington from Platinum status) know that the TSA doesn’t really care if you keep your belt on, but your shoes are still a big deal. Efficient travelers roll our eyes at people who don’t know how much three ounces is.

The attendant at Gate D40 is the best: “I’ve got 300 Delta dollars for someone who



loves their mother. You can be slightly inconvenienced today and visit your mother for free at Thanksgiving. What kind of ungrateful child wouldn’t do that?”

“We’re boarding zones one and two” is an invitation for passengers in zone three. Most travelers believe that any bag will go into the overhead bin if you push hard enough. Go for the aisle seats. Seat assignments are more suggestions than assignments — especially if there’s a baby on board. (Most babies prefer traveling on Saturdays.) In much the same way, flight times are guidelines rather than genuine commitments on the part of the airlines.

The plane to Wilmington is not a 747 or even in the 700 Club. Sometimes we see geese pass. Passengers can be impatient. Twenty minutes on the tarmac is like two hours anywhere else. Frequent flyers are efficient people, but we know we’ll get there when we get there and with free peanuts — which cannot be opened in a dignified way.

Like most travelers, I no longer expect to be surprised. But on a recent trip back to Atlanta, a tiny Hispanic woman hesitantly got on the train to the main terminal. She seemed confused, but I worried that a Sky-Miles member asking, “Do you know where you’re going?” would seem condescending. She was trying to read the rapidly scrolling

directions (which I think are in French half of the time). Finally she asked, “Is this to pick up suitcases?”

She was not speaking in her first language — which puts her at least one language ahead of me.

I explained: “You want the fifth stop — after C, B, A, and T. You want baggage claim. That’s the last stop. I’ll be getting off there. I’ll show you.”

When we got to T, she nervously asked, “Are you sure?”

“Yes, we’ll get off at the next stop and go to the escalator on the right. When we get to the top we’ll take a left to baggage claim. Was this your first flight?”

She nodded, “Yes.”

When we got to the top of the escalator she didn’t need my help any more. Two girls about six and eight screamed as they waved their “Welcome Home, Mom!” poster. Dad beamed. Mom cried. The four of them danced and hugged. They were joyful, delighted and ecstatic. I wasn’t the only one who stopped to watch. Several travelers who had spent most of the day looking at their watches finally thought about something genuinely important. Efficiency isn’t much of a goal. **BT**

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

Silently into the night

Reblog

By **Tony W. Cartledge**
Contributing Editor

Word trickled out slowly — because he wanted no fanfare — that B. Elmo Scoggin died in his sleep as September turned into October.

Scoggin, who was near his 96th birthday, was professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary for many years. His deep love of Hebrew and his joyful but occasionally irascible spirit endeared him to generations of Hebrew students, including me.

Scoggin also harbored a deep love for Israel. He and his wife Hannah, who is Jewish, spent four years there in the early 1950s and devoted themselves to being goodwill ambassadors to the Jewish community. Scoggin worked on 30 archaeological digs in Israel, and hosted hundreds of students and friends on tours of the Holy Land.

After retiring from Southeastern in the

early 1980s, Scoggin gave himself to another passion: classical music. He volunteered for 25 years or more at WCPE in Raleigh, initially doing mundane chores and ultimately hosting a late night program he called “Music in the Night.”

In 2000, during a snowstorm that shut down the roads, he and another announcer stayed put, ate stale bread, and kept the radio station on the air for three days. In 2008, he was recognized with the Wake County Larry B. Zieverink Volunteer of the Year award.

Scoggin was a native of Rutherford County, N.C., where he grew up during the depression. He sold shoes to work his way through Furman University and went on to earn theology degrees at Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He and Hannah celebrated their 70th wedding



Elmo Scoggin

Selections from recent blogs at
baptiststoday.org

anniversary this past January.

Scoggin lived a quiet life, enjoyed fishing and flying, worked out regularly at the YMCA, devoted himself to Hannah, and served the community as best he could — but never sought recognition. In a 2005 interview with the *Raleigh News & Observer*, he said: “To aggrandize myself or try to be a star has never appealed to me.”

He wanted his death to be quiet, too, with no funeral service. There was no obituary in the local paper.

He’d probably be ticked with me for posting this tribute, but I have admired Elmo Scoggin for more than 30 years, and I am confident that many others would like to join me in offering a prayer of thanks for a man who truly made the world a better place. Whether he wanted the attention or not, he deserves to be remembered. **BT**

Seeking Christianity’s lowest common denominator may reveal its highest value

By **John Pierce**
Executive Editor

Martin Thielen has written a book titled, *What’s the Least I Can Believe and Still Be a Christian?* The United Methodist pastor and former Baptist preaching journal editor’s book is subtitled, *A Guide to What Matters Most*.

The idea came from Thielen’s encounter with a man named Danny who first claimed to be an atheist and then “upgraded ... to an agnostic.” After months of further exploration, Danny told his pastor friend: “I realize that I don’t reject Christianity. Instead, I reject the way that intolerant Christians ‘package’ Christianity.”

At that point Danny asked the question of Christianity’s minimum belief. It is important to note that he did not ask what is the least one can “do” and still be a Christian. His question was about belief — and clearly in response to the poor packaging of the Gospel done by many.

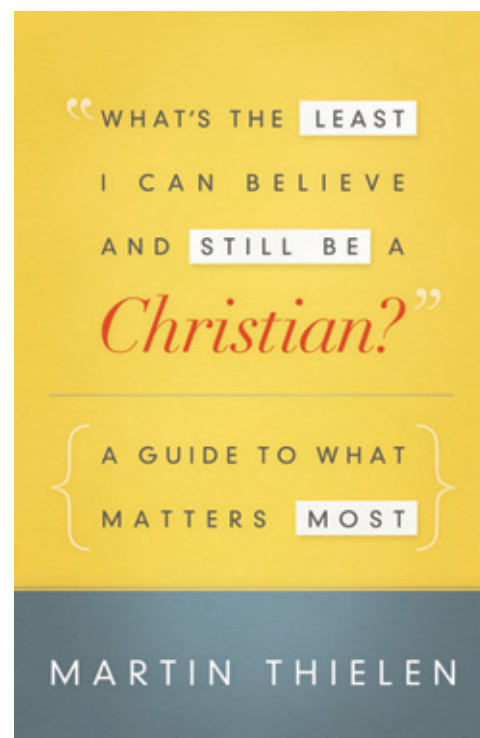
I’m reminded of author Charles Marsh’s telling of his father’s experience some years ago. Robert Marsh, a retired Southern Baptist

pastor who served Atlanta’s Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church among others, was serving an English-speaking congregation in Germany and was pleased when a young woman responded to his invitation to receive salvation and become a follower of Christ.

She showed some hesitation, however, and told the veteran pastor that she was drawn by the message of God’s grace through Jesus Christ but was unable to support all of the policies of then-U.S. President George W. Bush. The elder Marsh, according to his son, realized that too often Christianity picks up add-ons to the essentials of faith.

In *What’s the Least*, Thielen uses the first part of his book to assure skeptics of what is NOT necessary in order to be a Christian. These include believing such things as: God causes cancer and other tragedies; women can’t preach; Jews won’t make it to heaven; God rejects gay people; and everything in the Bible must be taken literally.

Then Thielen shifts his attention to the essence and essentials of Christianity: a belief in Jesus — whose life, teachings, example, death and resurrection bring to believers



new-found grace, hope and the most meaningful way of living.

Agree or disagree with Thielen on his particular lists. But it is hard to argue against his charge that Christianity often loses its essence and appeal by those who add requirements to the faith that Jesus did not and would not embrace. **BT**

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*Jud Reasons, associate pastor,
First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala.*

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

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

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

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

The Nurturing Faith Bible Studies in *Baptists Today* provide a complete curriculum for adults and youth to be used by Sunday school classes or other weekly Bible study groups. Class members get excellent weekly Bible lessons — along with the timely information in the news journal. And teachers have free access to abundant teaching resources at nurturingfaith.net.

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Isaiah 40:1-11

Dec. 4, 2011

Putting Hugs Into Words

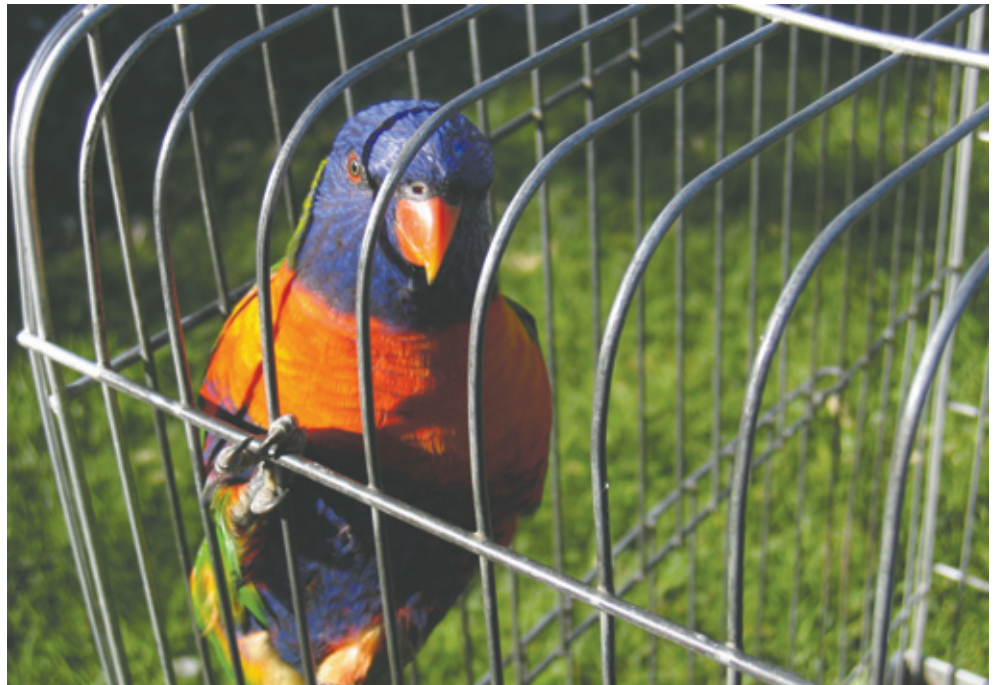
Our theme for the month, “An Old-Fashioned Christmas,” has nothing to do with snow scenes, cherry-cheeked Santas or childhood Christmas memories. Rather, during this Advent season we will examine lectionary texts from the “Old-Fashioned” Testament. The church has come to regard these texts, in one way or another, as having a prophetic connection to the coming of Jesus Christ. We often hear the texts read with no reference to their original context or meaning, so it’s appropriate that we devote some study to a closer look at them.

Which Isaiah?

The first of these texts is a message of comfort from a prophet that scholars refer to as “Second Isaiah,” “Deutero-Isaiah” or “Isaiah of the Exile.” Does the idea of multiple Isaiahs sound surprising? (See “The Hardest Question”)

The original Isaiah, often called Isaiah of Jerusalem, lived in the Southern Kingdom during the 8th century B.C. His world knew both prosperity and injustice. Wealthy Hebrews oppressed their poorer neighbors, disobedience to the law was rampant, and the worship of Canaanite gods was common. Time and again, Isaiah’s prophecies called for repentance and predicted judgment.

And judgment came: the Assyrians conquered Israel in 722 B.C., during Isaiah’s ministry. Judah managed to survive for a century longer before falling to the Babylonians in a series of defeats culminating with the torching of



Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

When we come to today’s text, however, the prophecy of judgment had long come to pass. Jerusalem had lain in ruins for 40 years or more, and Judah’s leading citizens had joined their kin from the northern kingdom in exile.

Living in exile

The Hebrew captives, many of whom had been born in Babylon, no longer needed to hear words of judgment, for they lived in exile and tasted judgment every day of their lives. They no longer needed threats, but hope – not words of condemnation, but of comfort.

And so there came a day when one who still studied the words and works of Isaiah was called by God to carry on the work of his ancient teacher (Isa. 8:16 suggests that Isaiah had a school of disciples). Like his mentor before him, this prophet believed he was privy to the very words of God, and called to proclaim them to the people of God.

Isaiah of the Exile is the first and only biblical prophet whose primary mission was to declare comfort and salvation, and he is arguably the most

powerful poet of all the Hebrew Scriptures. Those who know what it is to live in exile know just how crucial a word of comfort can be. 🕒

Comfort my people (vv. 1-2)

We are familiar with the temple-shaking story of how God called Isaiah of Jerusalem to become his spokesperson “in the year that King Uzziah died” (about 740 B.C.). Though it lacks the theatrics of Isa. 6:1-13, the exchange in Isa. 40:1-11 can be understood as God’s call to the new Isaiah, the commissioning of a new prophet to proclaim a new message to Israel. Nearly 200 years after Isaiah of Jerusalem first heard God’s voice, Isaiah of the Exile believed he also had been summoned to listen in on God’s heavenly council, and he learned that God was preparing to do a new thing:

“Comfort, O comfort my people,” the prophet heard God say. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins”

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(40:1-2).

To a people who had lost their home, their national identity and their self-esteem, the prophet was called to speak tenderly (literally, “to the heart”). Addressing the exiles as “Jerusalem,” though their city lay in ruins, was a reminder of the exiles’ heritage and an implicit promise that the people would once again inhabit their ancestral home.

The message may have been hard for Isaiah’s audience to believe, however. Could it be that God had forgiven their accumulated sins and said “Enough”? (compare 43:25; 44:21-22). As Paige Kelley pointed out years ago, however, “the comfort offered to Israel is not the comfort of a cheap grace that simply glosses over the sins of the past” (“Isaiah,” in the *Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972], 297). The people had suffered for their sins. Surely they would not have argued with the prophet when he proclaimed they had received a double share of sorrow.

Now, however, the time of suffering was over. The long trial had served its redemptive purpose. The time had come to express forgiveness and hope.

Prepare the way (vv. 3-5)

As the prophet experienced his “call to preach,” he heard a voice – presumably an angelic member of the heavenly council – crying out. 📖 As God said “speak to the heart of Jerusalem,” the divine messenger immediately called for the preparation of a pathway for God’s coming revelation.

“A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken’” (40:3-5, NRSV). 📖

The prophets often recalled Israel’s wilderness wandering following the

Exodus from Egypt as a time of both rebellion and purification. It is likely that similar thoughts would have been in the minds of both prophet and people.

The wilderness is not only a physical place, but also a common Old Testament symbol for exile, wandering and discipline (compare Ezek. 20:33-38; Hos. 2:14). Some people arrive in the wilderness innocently, while for others, it is a choice – and it is difficult to escape from the wilderness of the heart.

The Hebrew people commonly believed that a special manifestation of God’s glory had dwelt as a physical presence in the temple, and was closely connected to the Ark of the Covenant. They believed that the glory of the Lord had departed from Jerusalem when the temple was destroyed (see Ezek. 1:28; 3:23, for example).

The belief that God had departed from the temple was an apt metaphor for the nation’s personal relationship to God. Separation from God inevitably leads to wilderness living. But, the barren landscape of desert days was not intended as a permanent condition. The people of Israel could experience divine forgiveness, and their example could serve as a worldwide witness, a super-highway for God’s revelation of himself to others.

Thus Isaiah declared that God’s magnificent glory would return to his people, but the prophetic picture was bigger than Israel. The exiles’ return to Jerusalem would be just the prelude to a universal revelation of God’s glory, for “all flesh shall see it together,” he said. This adds a clearly eschatological context to the picture.

Looking at the text through a New Testament lens, believers have seen in Jesus’ life, work, death and resurrection the fulfillment of Israel’s task of “preparing the way” for God’s ultimate

revelation. Yet, we know that all is not done. In this season of Advent, we still look forward to the day when the full glory of Christ will be revealed to all (Phil. 2:9-11).

A firm promise (vv. 6-8)

As Isaiah’s experience in the heavenly council continued, he heard yet another voice instructing him to cry that “All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field ... the grass withers, the flower falls, but the word of our God stands forever” (vv. 6 and 8; v. 7 was not in the original text). 📖

The word translated as “constancy” (NRSV), “promises” (NET) or “goodliness” (KJV) is significant. It is the covenant word often used in scripture to describe God’s steadfast lovingkindness, a commitment that is sure. The loyalty of humans, like the beauty of a flower, is short-lived. But the word of God – the promise God makes to his people – is never-ending. 📖

And what was that promise, described as “the word of our God”?

The shepherd is coming (vv. 9-11)

Isaiah was to declare with strength and confidence that *God is doing a new thing*; that there is good news; that God will come in strength to deliver and comfort God’s people.

Isaiah could speak not only words of glad power, but also words of tender compassion. The same God who would defeat Babylon with a strong and mighty arm would also lift up the exiled people in tender and loving arms. God would gather the scattered flock, carry them close, and bring them to a place of security and rest.

Is that not what we long to hear? We, who feel exiled within ourselves, is this not good news? In this Advent season, as we contemplate the promise of Christ, we may also hope that our own experiences of exile are coming to an end, so we may look to God’s good future with trust and hope. 📖

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Isaiah 61:1-11

Dec. 11, 2011

Healing Broken Hearts

Can you remember times when you received really good news? What was the setting? Sometimes, news seems particularly good because it comes in times that are particularly bad. Such was the situation when a prophet rose up in Jerusalem to shout “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me ... he has sent me to bring good news!”¹

A new call (vv. 1-3)

As God called Isaiah of Jerusalem (Isa. 6:1-13) and Isaiah of the Exile (Isa. 40:1-11), so God also called the great prophet of the return to take up the prophetic torch. Today’s text (Isa. 61:1-11) may well reflect this prophet’s call.

In last week’s study we considered a time when many Israelites were exiled in Babylon, longing for the day when they could return to Jerusalem. The message of Isaiah 40 offered comfort and hope that God would blaze a highway of revelation through the desert and lead the people home.

Cyrus the Persian conquered the Babylonians in 538 B.C. and decreed shortly thereafter that Hebrew exiles could return and set up a vassal state – actually a sub-province of Persia – in Jerusalem. Many Hebrews chose to remain in Babylon, but others eagerly joined the first camel train going west. They traveled “home” to Jerusalem with visions of glory in their eyes, but soon came face to face with reality: Jerusalem was a desolate ruin, the neighbors were terrible, and prosperity was only a dream.



Yet, a prophet arose to proclaim that God had only just begun his new work: great things were on the horizon, and what had been broken would yet be healed.

Like other prophetic oracles, the text is couched in repetitive thoughts common to Hebrew poetry. The distress of the people is indicated by a series of descriptive parallels: they are oppressed and brokenhearted, captive and imprisoned. The depth of Israel’s despair is underscored by vv. 2-3, which refer to “mourning” no less than three times.

In contrast to this dismal state of affairs, the jubilant prophet declares that times are changing. A new age of salvation (the “year of the Lord’s favor”) is dawning, promising good news to the oppressed and healing for the brokenhearted, liberty to captives and release to prisoners. This message of comfort echoes the ministry of Isaiah of the Exile (compare Isa. 42:6-7).

The prophet promises joy: God will remove the ashes of mourning from their heads and replace them with resplendent turbans (“garland” is a forced translation). He will anoint them with oil as a sign of gladness. He

will give them a “mantle of praise” to replace their blanket of depression.

God’s goal is that the people stand tall and strong in their faith, like “oaks of righteousness” planted by the Lord. As in Isa. 60:21b, God’s glory is declared through the growth and prosperity of God’s people.

A new city (vv. 4-5)

The joyful introduction to the prophet’s poem (vv. 1-3) is framed by a jubilant closing hymn (vv. 10-11), and in between are a series of poetic promises, each providing more detail of what Israel can hope for in the coming age. The lectionary calls for a study of vv. 1-4 and 8-11 only, but we will briefly consider the entire text. As we do so, we note that the poet occasionally shifts from third person (“they”) to second person (“you”). This may suggest secondary insertions by a later writer, but could also mark changes in emphasis.

The returning exiles saw the fulfillment of Micah’s old prophecy against Jerusalem’s sinful leaders: “Because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,

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and the mountain of the house a wooded height” (Mic. 3:12).

But now, Israel would be empowered to “build up the ancient ruins” and “raise up the former devastations.” They will “repair the ruined cities” of Israel, which have been crumbling for generations (v. 4). But the people were struggling just to find shelter and eke out a bare living. How could they rebuild a resplendent city?

They could do this, Isaiah said, because “strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines” (v. 5). In the prophet’s mind, Israel was embarking on a holy mission. He believed the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the restoration of temple worship were so important that non-Israelites would tend the farms so Hebrews could focus on the rebuilding.

A new priesthood (vv. 6-7)

The sacred nature of the task is underscored by v. 6: “But you shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.” Echoing the promise of v. 5, the prophet declared that other peoples would provide support while the Hebrews devoted themselves to God. 📖

That other nations should support Israel with both work and wealth is an unexpected double blessing. The prophet seems to suggest that this will come about as reparation for the double penalty Israel had already paid (Isa. 40:2). 📖

A new covenant (vv. 8-9)

Why would God bestow such a blessing on Israel? Because “I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them” (v. 8).

Israel had suffered in exile, and even their return to ruined Jerusalem was a reminder of how much they had lost. God had brought judgment on

Israel because of their sin, robbery, and wrongdoing, but now, the prophet declares, God is about to reverse their fortunes and give them an opportunity to start anew. God will make a new covenant with Israel, an everlasting covenant.

God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob foundered on the failures of both the patriarchs and their descendants. God offered a new covenant to Israel at Sinai, but the biblical record suggests that the people were consistently unable (or unwilling) to keep their part of the covenant. God had made an “everlasting covenant” with David (2 Samuel 7, the subject of next week’s study), but his descendants no longer ruled and the promise didn’t seem so permanent.

Even so, prophets declared that God still offered Israel a new and everlasting covenant (Isa. 54:10; 55:3; 59:21). They imagined a day when God and Israel would live in such joyous unity that “all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed” (v. 9).

A new song (vv. 10-11)

The last two verses of the joyful text echo the exuberant praise of the opening section. In vv. 10-11, the speaker sings in behalf of Jerusalem, and from the perspective of the preceding prophecy’s fulfillment. While some assume the singer to be Isaiah, others see the text as a drama in which one or more other persons would sing the closing hymn.

The hymn of praise contains verbs in the perfect tense, which usually indicates past action. Prophets often spoke of good news to come as if it had already happened. Grammarians refer to this use of perfect verbs for a future event as a “prophetic perfect” – the proclamation of an event so certain that it can be described as having

already happened.

The hymn praises God for the promise of salvation, using metaphors of celebratory clothing: a robe of righteousness, a headdress, jewels (v. 10). Note how these reflect v. 3a’s reference to a garland (headdress) of praise, oil of gladness, and a mantle of praise (see also Eph. 6:14-17). The joyous image of a bride and bridegroom in wedding garments emphasizes the mutual joy of both parties, now living in covenant together (cf. Isa. 62:5, Jer. 33:11, Rev. 21:2).

As v. 10 reflects v. 3a, so v. 11 echoes the agricultural metaphor of v. 3b, which describes Israel as “oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD.” The prophet declares: “For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations” (v. 11: note that the poem opens and closes with the unusual title *Adonai Yahweh*, “the Lord GOD”).

Just as a garden brings forth fruit in the proper season, so God’s planting will surely mature, Isaiah said. Israel will grow in righteousness and in praise to God (compare Isa. 55:10-11). And what is more, this will happen publicly, in the sight of the nations. Suffering Israel’s final vindication would be known to all.

A new claim

There is just one problem with this impressive prophetic promise. It didn’t happen – at least, not in Isaiah’s lifetime or that of his hearers. Like other promises that have an eschatological character, however, the prophecy served to give the people hope, and to keep them going. It might not have been fulfilled in their lifetimes, but that did not mean it would not be fulfilled.

Jesus would have something to say about that when he adopted the first part of this text as his mission statement (Luke 4:18-21), and his hearers were amazed. (For more, see “The Hardest Question.”)

Youth

December 4-December 25

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

Preparing for a Better World

It is the season of Advent, and during Bible study you probably expect to hear the familiar stories about the birth of Jesus. However, this December we will be looking at several Old Testament passages. Why would we read from the Old Testament during Advent?

The church has come to regard these texts as prophesying the coming of Jesus. For example, if you read Mark 1:2-3, you will see that a section of today's passage from Isaiah is quoted (vv. 3-4), suggesting that John the Baptist is the messenger who is preparing the way for the Messiah.

Of course, when the words we read in Isaiah were written, they were unaware of the coming of Jesus hundreds of years later. Their words were focused on offering a word of hope to the Hebrew people. Why? Their temple had been destroyed, their nation conquered, and they were living as captives

in Babylon. They needed the hope that comes from knowing that God was planning to do new things in their lives and in their world.

We may look at our world and feel a bit like the Hebrews. We may feel like captives in a world full of crises, violence, corruption, greed and unfairness. People suffer and feel powerless. Read today's text from Isaiah 40:1-11. Does it point to a God who hears our fear and hope for a better world?

Advent is a Christian season of waiting and preparation for the coming of Jesus. The season reminds us that Jesus continues to come to us, to comfort us, to surprise us. Just as the people in Isaiah's time needed again to hear of God's love and promises, we too need to know that Jesus' coming is for us and for our world.

Will the coming of Jesus this Advent prepare you to better do Christ's work in our world?

DECEMBER 4

Think About It:

When you think about the problems of our world, where do you find hope that things will get better? How do the words from this passage in Isaiah remind you that God is still at work?

Make a Choice:

When you consider our world and your future, do you feel powerless to bring change? How does the birth of Jesus give you hope that you can make a difference in the world?

Pray:

Share your fears and concerns about your life and our world with God. Ask for patience and strength that God will work through you to bring hope to others.

Good News

Do you like to get good news? A high grade on a test or word that you have made the team come as happy and welcomed news. But when we are in the midst of a bad situation that changes into something good ... that is really good news.

In today's text from Isaiah, the prophet is speaking to a community of Hebrews who have been allowed to return "home" to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon, only to find it in ruins and surrounded by unfriendly neighbors. It is a bad situation, and many despair that all hope of a good future is lost. The words of Isaiah speak God's promise to be with the people and return goodness to their lives.

Sometimes it is tempting to see God working in only spiritual terms: "God cares for us, God is with us, God hopes for us."

These are all quite true. But it is clear in this passage that the way people live and treat one another is of enormous interest to God. Isaiah says, "He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners ..." (v. 1). God not only cares for the people, but also will take action to protect them and see that their lives are made better.

Why did God send Jesus? Why was he born that first Christmas? In Luke 4:18-21, Jesus reads a portion of today's passage from Isaiah as he begins his ministry. Upon completion of it he says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). What does this tell us about what Jesus wants to accomplish? Is that work finished, or is there still much work to be done?

DECEMBER 11

Think About It:

How does this passage change the way you understand the hope God offers through Jesus? What good news do we hope to hear from Jesus in our time?

Make a Choice:

Each time we remember the birth of Jesus, we are challenged to follow a God who continues to care about people and their lives. What sort of "gift" does God want us to give to others this Christmas?

Pray:

Thank God for caring about us enough to send Jesus. Ask God to give you wisdom to better follow in Jesus' steps, working to make life better for those in our world.

David Cassady and Jeremy Colliver



Promises, Promises

Have you ever been given a promise? It likely had "strings attached" so that if you did something, the promise would be kept. For example, "If you make good grades, we will buy you tickets to the concert." Those promises are nice, but even nicer are promises that have no requirements.

This Sunday our study takes us to a story involving King David found in 2 Samuel. The plot of the story can be summarized in a few sentences.

King David is bothered by the fact that he lives in a palace, while God only has a fancy tent for a tabernacle. The King wants to build a wonderful temple for God. He consults with the prophet Nathan, who initially loves the idea. However, God comes to Nathan that night in a dream and gives him

a message to deliver to the king. Nathan goes to King David and tells him that God does not need or want a "house," but rather God will build a "house" (a dynasty, not a building) for King David and the people of Israel, regardless of what they do in the future. It is a gift.

This event from 2 Samuel is extremely important, because it shows a shift from "strings attached" promises to "no strings attached" promises from God. Another word for this sort of promise is "grace." When we experience grace, we are given something good without having to earn it or deserve it.

We read this text in the season of Advent because the greatest act of grace is the giving of Jesus. The promise of Jesus is that God's love is given to us regardless of whether or not we earn or deserve it.

DECEMBER 18

Think About It:

Have you ever been promised or given something without having to earn it, or perhaps even when you did not deserve it? How did that feel?

Make a Choice:

God offers you love and presence, regardless of what you do or will do. How will you choose to respond to this sort of gift? How does it change you?

Pray:

Thank God for the gift of a promise without strings attached. Ask God for the strength and love to share that same sort of gift with others.

A Son Is Born

If you have heard Handel's *Messiah*, the words in today's text will be familiar to you.

"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us, authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." We immediately think these words are about Jesus — and they certainly describe him.

However, these words were originally penned in the 8th century B.C., as the prophet was speaking hope to the Israelites by pointing to the ways God was working for their future.

When you read the scripture for today, notice how uplifting the words and imagery feel. That is because it was written for a people who were living in dark, difficult days. They were poor, struggling under systems

that were often unjust and that held people down. The promises provided in the text are very real — things like peace, justice and relief from oppression.

Sometimes we may be tempted to act as if our faith is simply a personal add-on to our lives. Does it really make a difference beyond ourselves? Are God's promises to make our world better real to us? Do we feel called to be followers of Jesus who work to change the world for the better for people who hurt and suffer?

Each Christmas we celebrate the coming of Jesus and we may even hear the beautiful words from today's scripture. What a wonderful time to recommit ourselves to following this Jesus who came not only to change you and me, but also to transform our world and bring light to those who live in real darkness.

DECEMBER 25

Think About It:

If someone asked you why Jesus came to earth, what would you say? Does today's scripture passage enrich how you understand Jesus' purpose?

Make a Choice:

As you mature, your understanding of Jesus and your faith can also mature. How will you choose to live differently in the coming year because of your fresh understanding of Christ?

Pray:

Express your wonder to God at the sort of love that is shown in the coming of Jesus to us and our world.

Bible Study

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

with Tony W. Cartledge


Dec. 18, 2011

A Forever Promise

When you make promises, are they often conditional? Some of God's covenant promises to Israel were like that. Much of the Old Testament narrative is based on the belief that God had promised blessings to Israel, but only so long as the people were faithful and obedient.

Last week's text (Isaiah 61) promised a new, everlasting covenant between God and God's people. That was not the first such promise, however. King David also knew what it was to receive a forever promise.

A busy king stops to think (v. 1)

Imagine what it would be like to sit where King David sat in the early years of his reign in Jerusalem. David's life had been a whirlwind of activity for many years, but one day he realized that he had time to think about things beyond personal survival and the establishment of the kingdom: "the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him" (v. 1). 

A thoughtful king (vv. 2-3)

As David sat in his handsome new palace, he seems to have been overwhelmed by a single thought: "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent" (v. 2).

David saw the incongruity of enjoying his own fine house while the Ark of the Covenant, where Yahweh was thought to dwell above the cherubim,



was still consigned to a tent. It was a big, fancy, colorful tent, but it was a tent nonetheless.

David knew that everything he had accomplished was due to the power of God at work within him. It was Yahweh who had given him strength to defeat lions and bears while he kept his father's flocks. It was Yahweh who gave him the courage and skill to defeat Goliath and spark Israel's victory over the Philistines. It was Yahweh who had given him favor in Saul's eyes, and it was Yahweh who had later protected him from Saul's jealousy. It was Yahweh who had aided David in the wilderness, and who had ultimately given him the kingdom.

It was customary in the ancient world for kings to build a temple to their patron god as one of their first acts of power. Building an impressive temple to the national god served not only to demonstrate royal piety, but also to centralize royal power by demonstrating a strong bond between god and king.

David would have understood the political advantages of such a move, but the text implies that he was also

motivated by a genuine sense of respect and reverence for God. It didn't seem right to him that he should live in a fine house with cedar-paneled walls while Yahweh dwelt in a portable tent. And so, he thought: "I will build a house for Yahweh."

David knew, however, that the construction permit for such a building should be acquired from God himself. So, David took his plans to the prophet Nathan, who is first mentioned here. Nathan seems to have served as David's official court prophet and thus his primary liaison with Yahweh. Delighted to learn of David's plan, he encouraged the king to do what was in his heart.

Not my house, but yours (vv. 4-11)

But that night, Nathan could not sleep. David had been given rest, but Nathan had lost it. He came to realize that a prophet can speak too soon, as God appeared in a night vision and challenged the assumption that God wanted or needed a house made with human hands.

God's message in vv. 5-7, which

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Nathan was to convey to David, could be paraphrased as “A house? You think I need a house? You think I *want* a house? You think I would rather be stuck in a house than to come and go as I please?” Perhaps God wanted David to understand clearly that God could not be limited to any building, however honorific it might be. 🇺🇸

Rather, God instructed Nathan to give David a firm message: “This is what the LORD of hosts says: I took you from the pasture and from your work as a shepherd to make you leader of my people Israel. I was with you wherever you went, and I defeated all your enemies before you. Now I will make you as famous as the great men of the earth. I will establish a place for my people Israel and settle them there; they will live there and not be disturbed any more. Violent men will not oppress them again, as they did in the beginning and during the time when I appointed judges to lead my people Israel. Instead, I will give you relief from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you that he himself will build a dynastic house for you” (vv. 8b-11, NET).

Here, the whole story turns on the use of a marvelous and powerful play on words. The word “house” has a double meaning here. David wanted to build for God a house of wood, stone and mortar. God wanted to build for David a house of security in which his descendants would rule Israel forever. David wanted to build God a temple. God wanted to build David a dynasty.

The NET (above) clarifies the powerful pun by adding “dynastic” (not in the text) to “house” when it applies to God’s promise.

It is hard to appreciate the magnitude of this turn of events. What began as an act of personal piety and political power was transformed into a promise of divine and unconditional grace. As a result, Nathan’s dynastic oracle in 2 Samuel 7 can arguably be seen as the turning point of the entire Old Testament.

We should not underestimate the importance of this text, for it is the

foundation of the theological bridge that leads from law to grace. This story of God and David is the first step on a new path that leads ultimately to the story of Jesus and all the undeserving Davids in the world, including us. This account is at the root of all evangelical theology, for it is the beginning of the gospel.

To this point, God’s relationship with Israel had been one of master and servant. It was a conditional relationship in which God was faithful, but divine blessings were dependent on Israel’s obedience, and the Israelites were no more inclined to obedience than we are. Read the book of Deuteronomy. Read Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings. It is the same story told time and again in different ways. When Israel was obedient, God’s blessings were abundant. When Israel rebelled, it seems they were abandoned. The relationship between God and people turned on the word “if.”

But now things are changing. With God’s covenant promise to David, a new element enters the picture. It is the element of grace. In this covenant with David, God makes a promise that is not conditioned by his obedience, or the obedience of his children. Rather, it is an *unconditional* promise of undeserved grace. Yahweh will bless David’s house and establish his dynasty upon the throne.

The promise is not without limits: if David’s descendants prove to be disobedient, God will allow them to experience the natural effects of their sin – “punishment with the rods of men” is the way it’s put – but God will never withdraw his steadfast covenant love. David recognized the importance of this, and offered a heartfelt prayer of thanks (2 Sam. 7:18-29). 🇺🇸

When Saul disobeyed one time too many, God cut him off and withdrew his spirit. For David, God promises something new. “Your house and your

kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever” (v. 16). The operative conjunction has been changed from “if” to “*nevertheless*.” God promised that his choice of David’s descendants as the leaders and agents of salvation for Israel would never change.

A new son of David

David’s descendants may not have remained on the throne, but they remained. As Christians, we believe that a time came when God chose to enter the world in a new way, through the person of a man named Jesus, descended of the house and lineage of David. In Jesus Christ, God completed the work of amazing grace that began in the Old Testament and runs into the New. Through the life and work and death and resurrection of Jesus, God offers to us salvation that is not predicated on our works or our perfect obedience, but on the grace of God alone.

Our hope in God is not based on a human “if,” but on a divine “nevertheless.” Even though we are weak, even though we fail, even though we fall short of God’s ideal, God loves us still. David’s story demands that we consider our own response: how we will respond to the awesome, amazing grace of God. Are we still trying to build a house of good works, or will we accept the house of grace and promise that God has already built for us? Grace awaits, and it is amazing, indeed.

*Our hope in God
is not based on
a human “if,” but
on a divine
“nevertheless.”*

Bible Study

with Tony W. Cartledge

Isaiah 9:2-7

Dec. 25, 2011

A Son Is Born

Where did you first hear Christmas celebrated with the words “for unto us a child is born, unto us a child is given ... and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (KJV)?

It may have been in the stirring strains of Handel’s *Messiah*, or in a cantata such as John W. Peterson’s *Night of Miracles*, or it might simply have been in a sermon.

However we may have heard them, those words have become a part of our Christmas celebrations, as ingrained as the sheep and the manger and the baby Jesus. We hear them as an integral part of the Christmas story, a prophetic prediction of the coming Christ.

These words are so familiar, it may be hard to hear that the prophet responsible for Isa. 9:2-7 almost certainly had nothing of the sort in mind: Isaiah would be amazed to learn what his oracle of inspiration has come to mean in the context of the church.

In today’s lesson we’ll explore what Isaiah, not Handel, had in mind when he envisioned a world of hope wrapped up in the swaddling clothes of a child.

A troubled time (v. 1)

The lectionary text begins with the prophetic oracle in v. 2, but we cannot begin to understand Isaiah’s message without some understanding of the historical context. We get a glimpse of that in 9:1, which follows directly on the final verse of the previous chapter



(8:22). Indeed, in the Hebrew text, 9:1 is numbered as the last verse in the previous chapter.

The political setting of Isaiah 7-11 appears to reflect the aftermath of a devastating invasion by the Assyrians, probably around 733 B.C. It speaks of “distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish,” and the threat of “thick darkness” (8:22). These images carry over into 9:1, which predicts better days to come: “But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish” was spoken to the northern tribal lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, which had been the first to be overrun by the Assyrian forces and thus “brought into contempt.”

Isaiah sees light ahead, a “latter time” when God “will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.” These three descriptors may be alternate names given to those areas by the Assyrians. Isaiah speaks of a day when the pervasive darkness and gloom will give way to light and hope.

A vision of hope (vv. 2-5)

The poetic oracle of vv. 2-7 has been described in ways ranging from a psalm of thanksgiving to an accession hymn to a royal birth announcement. However we might classify the text, it clearly offers a hopeful outlook to Isaiah’s audience.

Verse 2 picks up on the contrast between darkness and light from v. 1, declaring that “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined” (NRSV).

Note again that the verbs imply past action, though the prophet wrote in a time of darkness and appears to be speaking of future events. In a fashion typical of Hebrew poetry, the second line advances and intensifies the thought of the first: “darkness” becomes “deep darkness” (*tsalmawet* – the same word sometimes translated as “shadow of death” in Ps. 23:4). But, the people “have seen a great light” because “light

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



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has shined on them.” As the opposite of darkness, light promises the hope of salvation.

With v. 3, the prophet shifts from a third person observation to a second person address, praising God for having “multiplied the nation” and “increased its joy.” 📌 The word translated as “multiplied” doesn’t necessarily refer to a growing population; it could also mean “you have made the nation great” or “you have enlarged the nation,” which may catch the meaning better.

Whether the “enlargement” is in people or in power, the result is rejoicing. Isaiah sees a nation walking out of darkness, into the light, celebrating newfound strength and confidence. Two metaphors call up joyful images: successful farmers beaming at the sight of a banner harvest, and victorious soldiers dividing the booty taken from their vanquished enemies (v. 3b).

The military metaphor morphs into reality with v. 4, as the prophet proclaims freedom from Israel’s foes, whose “yoke,” “bar” and “rod” – all symbols of oppression – have been (or will be) broken in a victory as unexpected as Gideon’s unlikely triumph over the Midianites (Judges 6-7).

In the heady aftermath of victory, Isaiah predicts celebratory bonfires built of bloody clothes and battle boots (v. 5) – but such happy times are not yet.

How could the prophet’s suffering hearers believe that such things would happen? What sign of hope might mark a turning point in the fortunes of Israel and Judah?

A child of promise (vv. 6-7)

As in 7:10-17, Isaiah finds hope in the birth of a child. Indeed, he speaks as if the child has already been born: “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us ...” (v. 6). Did Isaiah have in mind the birth of Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz who would later become one of Judah’s most fondly remembered kings? 📌

Whether or not Isaiah was thinking of Hezekiah, there is no question that he had in mind a descendant of David who

would lead with authority and preside over an era of unprecedented glory for the nation.

Even so, how do we reconcile the thought of an earthly ruler with the expansive titles he attributed to the coming king? 📌

“Wonderful Counselor” raises no flags, for it simply implies something like “Extraordinary Strategist” or “Wise Advisor,” an appropriate characteristic for a king in a time of war.

But what are we to make of the name “Mighty God”? Although kings in Egypt and Mesopotamia sometimes claimed to be gods, this was not the case in Israel. Biblical coronation hymns suggest, however, a tradition that God “adopted” the king (see Psalm 2:7).

Many Hebrew names include God (*el*) or Yahweh (usually *-iah*) as an integral element. For example, “Isaiah” means “Salvation of Yahweh,” “Elijah” means “my God is Yahweh,” and Hezekiah means something like “Strengthened by Yahweh.”

The title “Mighty God” (*’el gibbôr*) is spelled as two words, however, and the same term is used in 10:21 with clear reference to God. This leads us to assume that the king in question, at the very least, bears a very close relationship with God.

The title “Everlasting Father” offers a conundrum for interpretation. 📌 It might be intended to express hope that the coming king, who would be in the Davidic line, would represent the everlasting dynasty promised to David in 2 Samuel 7 (see last week’s lesson).

Like “Wonderful Counselor,” the term “Prince of Peace” raises few questions. People naturally idolized a king who brought peace and security for his subjects.

With v. 7, the prophet clearly turns to the future. He sees the coming king’s authority and rule of peace growing continually, endlessly, a tangible fulfillment of the promise that David’s

descendants would rule over an everlasting kingdom.

The new king would bring more than security, however. He would rule with the ideals of justice and righteousness “from this time onward and forevermore.”

Such promises sound too good to be true, don’t they? Isaiah knew that his hearers would be skeptical, too. Thus, he concludes with the assuring claim that “the zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”

A puzzle for interpreters

How do we interpret this text? We can see how it functioned as a promise of hope for troubled Judahites in the 8th century B.C., but we are much more likely to remember it from quotations in the New Testament. Isaiah almost certainly hoped that Hezekiah would fulfill his hopes, but when that did not happen, later believers transposed his prophetic prediction to a future messiah. The gospel writers believed the birth of Christ finally fulfilled the promise of a child who would live into the names “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6), one who would establish a just and peaceful dominion without end (9:7).

This text challenges us to do more than celebrate the birth of Jesus, however. Instead of simply spiritualizing Isaiah’s message, we should remember that the people of our world also face days of darkness and gloom. We also long for light and security, justice and righteousness that are not only a future hope, but also a present reality.

As children of God and followers of the Prince of Peace, we are called to devote our best efforts toward bringing peace and justice – security and equality – to the world in which we live.

As we recall Isaiah’s promise that “the zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this,” let us remember that we are counted among the hosts of those whom God has called to live as model citizens of the Kingdom, working for peace and justice throughout the earth.

Adventures with LULER

the Hound



Kelly Belcher

P

icture a cool shady spot by a stream, a full picnic basket on a blanket, a canoe on the shore, a woman with a fly fishing rod on the water bank, your iPod playing your favorites, and Luler the hound dog asleep on the sand. Seems like a vacation! Peaceful, relaxing, restful.

But Luler's not really asleep. She is relaxed, but if she hears a noise or senses a movement, her ears will prick and her nose will twitch in the air so she can find out what's up. This way of being relaxed but not asleep is important to dogs, and also to people who want to worship. Yes, I said worship!

When Jesus grew tired from preaching, healing and taking care of people, he would go out on a boat to a shady place by the lake or to a quiet spot in the woods, and he would pray and rest.

The Idea Box

Giving someone rest makes a great gift idea. Cut out the coupon below and give copies to every person on your gift list for the holidays. Put a coupon in your Christmas stockings!

We call our church worship room a sanctuary, which means "a holy place of rest and safety." Wilderness lands set aside for animals and plants to be safe from people, traffic or buildings are called sanctuaries. Maybe this is why being outside can feel restful. We people can be relaxed and more like wild animals. For a little while we can forget about things that worry or burden us.

Many people feel restfulness in the church sanctuary, too. But you do not have to be in the sanctuary to have rest or to worship. You can worship in any place where that restfulness is, just as Jesus did. Jesus knew God would meet him in worship, and God will meet you in your restful worship time too.

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THE BOW WOW

Luler says that in December, as holidays make life busy, it would be good to find a secret spot where you can go to pray and be restful — a place where Luler the Hound Dog would like to lie. Go there every day for a few minutes of sanctuary. God will meet you there.

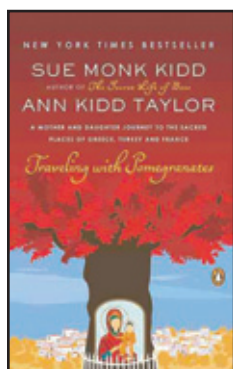


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Signature



Sue Monk Kidd and
Ann Kidd Taylor

Traveling with Pomegranates

What started as a trip to Greece, Turkey and France to celebrate a young woman's college graduation and her mother's 50th birthday turned into an awakening and deepening in their relationship and eventually a bestselling book. Of course, a bestseller was bound to result when the mother on that trip was inspirational-writer-turned-novelist Sue Monk Kidd, the acclaimed author of *The Secret Life of Bees*.

I came to understand the significance of the published memoirs of this mother-daughter team after hearing them discuss at a book tour their individual journeys and also the writing process involved with *Traveling with Pomegranates*. To that event, I shall digress for a moment.

Speaking to a large audience of females, with a few males sprinkled among them, the “50-something” Kidd and “20-something” Taylor were honest and engaging. Ann Kidd Taylor told how that while on the overseas trip she disclosed to her mother the depression and ultimately self-rejection she experienced as the result of a graduate school rejection letter. Her “fear of failure was stronger” than her “desire to find purpose.” Ann was unsure of her purpose and desired professional path, but knew she did not want to become a writer — and, in fact, fought the idea of following in her mother's footsteps.

Her purpose began to take shape, however, as she reflected on her graduation trip and studies abroad in Greece and recalled her spiritual heroes Athena (belonging and relating to self), Joan of Arc (courage) and Mary (maternal and loving side). The inspiration for *Traveling with Pomegranates* emerged, with Ann intending to write as the sole author. In the spring of 2003, however, she asked for her mother's “voice.”

The book took 1,095 days to write, and was no doubt a challenge to the relationship of the mother-daughter team. Sue admitted that it was the “hardest but most satisfying book” she has ever written. She recounted the difference in their writing styles, with Ann producing text quickly but Sue penning her words in a slow and deliberate manner.

Her unhurried pace in delivering *Pomegranates* somewhat parallels Sue's journey as a small-town southern wife, mother and writer. Sue followed a traditional path rearing children, serving in Baptist volunteer missions and writing non-fictional works such as meditations for *Guidepost* — although she admits she

struggled with giving up independence in her expected roles.

Some of her struggles emerged in her first book, *God's Joyful Surprise*, which describes the beginnings of her spiritual search. Her second book, *When the Heart Waits*, reveals a deepening of Sue's voice and recounts her spiritual transformation at midlife. Then, she really “pushed the button” with a book addressing feminist theology, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*.

In her mid-40s Sue began to experience a sense of mortality/ending/loss, but also felt the start of something new — a type of “renaissance.” She longed to write fiction, but said she “lacked the audacity to proceed.” That “audacity” came, however, from something as simple as a bee.

While on a trip, a bee followed her from “Mother Mary's house” to the tour bus and onward. Taking this as a sign to write a novel, Sue went home and wrote *The Secret Life of Bees*, although a writer's conference had given her little encouragement on the project — and the rest is history.

The Secret Life of Bees has now sold more than 6 million copies, spent about 3 years on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and been published in 35 countries. It has won numerous awards, is widely used in high school and college classrooms, and has been produced on stage and adapted into a movie. Her second novel, *The Mermaid Chair*, has also been a bestseller and the recipient of awards.

Sue Monk Kidd's writing career took yet another detour with the writing of *Traveling with Pomegranates*.

Along with her daughter, Sue returns to the pilgrimage themes of her non-fiction works by addressing issues of loss, search and return.

Loss is expressed through visits to such places as the Acropolis and Cathedral of Athens in Greece, search at the Notre Dame Cathedral and Garden of Venice in France, and return at the Palanis Nunnery and Convent and Sanctuary of Demeter in Greece. Interestingly, the sections also reflect back on the “home” area of South Carolina.

Readers may detect symbolism in the places, persons and mythical characters described in the 40-day journey of Sue and Ann. Depending on the reader's personal need and experience, one may identify themes of life transitions, rediscovering, reinventing, reconnecting, relating, self-revelation, encounters with surprises and small miracles, finding pathways, etc.

Traveling with Pomegranates is a creative and delightfully illustrated work. Although not intended to portray a spiritual quest, it hints of pilgrimage and renewal and metamorphosis through the act of “journaling.” Warm and inviting, like a personal diary, it evokes wisdom from a feminine perspective and challenges readers to be transparent, open and self-revealing. Some may even place it in the literary genre of Elizabeth Gilbert's bestseller, *Eat, Pray, and Love*. Whatever the reader's evaluation, *Traveling with Pomegranates* accomplishes Sue Monk Kidd's description of a good book: It “affects one's deepest feelings ... touches the heart ... inspires one to change.” **BT**



From Faulkner ... to Foster

As a follow-up to an article published in the February issue of *Baptists Today* that surveyed a larger audience of scholars/authors, I asked selected Baptist scholars and writers the same question: “Other than the Bible, what three literary works have had the greatest impact on your life?” Respondents were asked to consider all literary genres when pondering the question that could be rephrased as: “What three literary works have proven to be pivotal in the shaping of your identity or sense of vocation?”

Sheryl Ann Dawson Adams, professor of theology and church history at the Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity: 1) *The Family Nobody Wanted* by Helen Doss, 2) *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, and 3) *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller

William Lloyd Allen, the Sylvan Hills Baptist Church professor of church history and spiritual formation at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology: 1) *Absalom, Absalom!* by William Faulkner, 2) *The Other Side of Darkness: Meditation for the Twenty-First Century* by Morton Kelsey, and 3) *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard Foster

Rosalie Beck, associate professor in the Baylor University department of religion: 1) *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* by Virginia Mollenkott, 2) *Silence* by Shusaku Endo, and 3) *The Works of Henrik Isben* by Henrik Isben

Robert Canoy, dean and professor of Christian theology at the Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity: 1) *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 2) *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* by Jürgen Moltmann, and 3) *Night* by Elie Wiesel

Tony Cartledge, associate professor of Old Testament at the Campbell University School of Divinity and contributing editor for *Baptists Today*: 1) *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* by J. R. R. Tolkien, 2) *Riddley Walker* by Russell Hoban, and 3) *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* by Brian McLaren

Russell W. Dalton, associate professor of Christian education at Texas Christian University’s Brite Divinity School: 1) *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, 2) *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* by Thomas H. Groome, and 3) *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* by Phyllis Trible

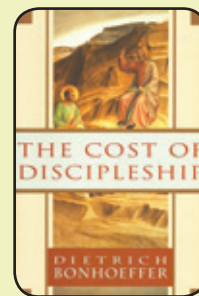
Nancy L. de Claissé-Walford, professor of Old Testament and biblical languages at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology: 1) *The Prophets* by Abraham J. Heschel, 2) *The Source* by James A. Michener, and 3) *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* by James A. Sanders

David E. Garland, dean and William M. Hinson professor of Christian scriptures at Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary: 1) *The Power and the Glory* by Graham Greene, 2) *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, and 3) *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner.

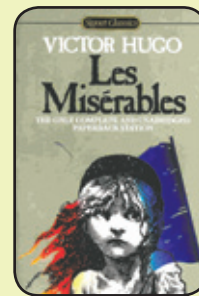
Timothy George, dean and professor of divinity at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School: 1) *The Confessions* by Saint Augustine, 2) *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin, and 3) *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan

William Hulitt Gloer, the David E. Garland professor of preaching and Christian scriptures at Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary and the director of the Kyle Lake Center for Effective Preaching: 1) *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, 2) *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson, and 3) *Silence* by Shusaku Endo

SCHOLAR FAVORITES



The Cost of Discipleship
by Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Les Misérables
by Victor Hugo



The Lord of the Rings
by J.R.R. Tolkien



Silence
by Shusaku Endo

... to Fosdick

A look at the books that shape Baptist scholars

David P. Gushee, distinguished university professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology and director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University: 1) *Letters from a Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King Jr., 2) *Rich Christians in the Age of Hunger* by Ronald J. Sider, and 3) *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Steven R. Harmon, adjunct professor of Christian theology at Gardner-Webb University's School of Divinity: 1) *Systematic Theology* (in three volumes) by James W. McClendon, 2) *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* by Geoffrey Wainwright, and 3) *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* by George A. Lindbeck

S. Mark Heim, the Samuel Abbot professor of Christian theology at Andover Newton Theological School: 1) *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, 2) *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, and 3) *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* by George Eliot

Furman Hewitt, retired professor and director of the Baptist House of Studies at Duke Divinity School: 1) *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, 2) *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and 3) *Dear Mr. Brown: Letters to a Person Perplexed by Religion* by Harry Emerson Fosdick

E. Glenn Hinson, senior professor of church history and spirituality at Baptist Seminary of Kentucky: 1) *The Great Stone Face* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, 2) *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography* by Albert Schweitzer, and 3) *The Confessions* by Saint Augustine

Bill J. Leonard, the James and Marilyn Dunn chair of Baptist studies and former dean at Wake Forest University's School of Divinity: 1) *The Sign of Jonas* by Thomas Merton, 2) *A Theology for the Social Gospel* by Walter Rauschenbusch, and 3) *Brother to the Dragonfly* by Will D. Campbell

Mark Olson, president of the John Leland Center for Theological Studies: 1) *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, 2) *God and Man at Yale: Superstitions of "Academic Freedom"* by William Frank Buckley, and 3) *Paul* by N.T. Wright

Phyllis Rodgerson Pleasants, the John F. Loftis professor of church history at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond: 1) *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, 2) *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. Tolkien, and 3) *The Book of the Psalms*

Walter B. Shurden, minister at large and retired executive director of the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University: 1) *Shunting Compound: the Story of Men and Women Under Pressure* by Langdon B. Gilkey, 2) *The Second Coming* by Walker Percy, and 3) *Where Cross the Crowded Ways: Prayers of a City Pastor* by Ernest T. Campbell

William M. Tillman, the T.B. Maston professor of Christian ethics at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon Seminary: 1) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas S. Kuhn, 2) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* by Howard Gardner, and 3) *The Struggle to Be Free: My Story and Your Story* by Wayne E. Oates

Brett Younger, associate professor of preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology: 1) *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* by Frederick Buechner, 2) *The Power and the Glory* by Graham Greene, and 3) *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* by Ronald J. Sider **BT**

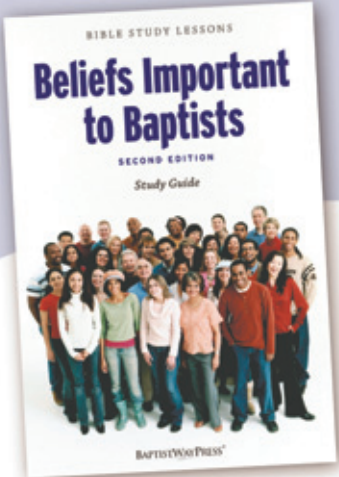
—M. Blake Kendrick is associate pastor for students and spiritual formation, First Baptist Church of Greenwood, S.C.

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Graduates find enrichment overseas before starting grad schools, careers

MACON, Ga. — What if college graduates didn't go straight into graduate school or an entry-level job? What if they had opportunities for reflection and service that also gave them international exposure and experience?

What if, from the time a student enrolls as freshman, he or she is encouraged to discover a long-developing "life dream" rather than to simply declare a major?

Those were the ruminations of Scott Walker, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas, that led to the ServiceFirst program he hatched at Mercer University in Georgia.

"The uniqueness of ServiceFirst is that it is for graduates — not a degree-oriented program but a service-oriented program," said Walker.

The new program that has sent more than 30 graduates to various parts of the globe over the past two years is part of the larger "Institute of Life Purpose" that Walker directs at Mercer.

NEW DISCOVERIES

Jay Hood, who graduated from Mercer in 2010 with degrees in English and Southern studies, went to Bangkok, Thailand, rather than directly to graduate school. There he learned from cross-cultural experiences and discovered a gift for teaching.

"Bangkok is perhaps the most international city I've ever been to," said Hood. "There are people there from everywhere; the entire place literally thrives on tourism."



"Mercer's Service First program fundamentally changed my life," said Adam Mauldin, who was part of a team teaching English in China. (Below) Tyler Jenkins taught classes and befriended students at Ricks Institute in Liberia. (Contributed photos)

Many adjustments were required, he said, such as riding motorbike taxis that are both fast and dangerous.

"On a darker note, it's hard to ignore the level of poverty in which most people live in Thailand," said Hood. "Bangkok is a first-world city, but Thailand is a third-world country. Workers who build the five-star restaurants and hotels, the people who wait on you in a restaurant, and who give you your ticket at the movie theater, live so far below the poverty line that it's difficult for us to imagine."

Now Hood is a graduate student at the University of Mississippi where he is studying English literature.

RIGHT FIT

Alicia Jonah, who also spent nearly a year in Bangkok, didn't exactly do ServiceFirst first; she went to law school for a year before deciding such an experience was just what she needed.

"At first I was scared and unsure of making the move to Thailand, but with the help



and guidance of Dr. Walker, I was able to gain the most out of my move," she said. "By going through ServiceFirst, I was able to learn more about myself and gain an independence I would have otherwise never found."

She is now considering a career in

international diplomacy or international aid. While Thailand was right for her, she said the ServiceFirst program does a good job of matching the student with the place of service.

Walker said that finding “a place of service that fits” is an essential part of the program — and that many options exist.

“We are a linking organization,” said Walker. “We are coming up with a menu of things we can link graduates to.”

Peace Corps, Teach for America and other volunteer-oriented organizations provide service opportunities as does the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship — which he describes as “really helpful to us.”

LIFE AS ‘THE OTHER’

Neil Boggan served at the Philippines Baptist Theological Seminary in Baguio City, from August 2010 until April 2011. Unlike most ServiceFirst participants, his experience followed graduate school.

Boggan is a 2009 graduate of Mercer’s McAfee School of Theology who did undergraduate studies at Berry College in Northwest Georgia.

“Experiencing life as ‘the other’ is crucial to building empathy and understanding with those whom are different from you,” said Boggan of his experience in the Philippines. “It is also an enlightening path to self-awareness and discerning one’s vocational calling.”

Boggan speaks of another benefit from participation in ServiceFirst: “In addition, having opportunities to work overseas boosts one’s résumé in this era of globalization.”

New grad Tyler Jenkins spent January to June of this year as an educator at Ricks Institute, a Baptist-oriented boarding school located in Virginia, Liberia.

“I taught eight classes, including middle school geography and high school reading,” he said. “This experience not only strengthened my belief in hope, but most importantly, in Jesus Christ.”

NEXT STEPS

Graduates who complete their terms with ServiceFirst say the experience helps them take the next steps with greater clarity. Those steps are as individual as the graduates.

Mark Young and Abby Rowsell both graduated in 2010 and went to China to teach English. After completing their service, Rowsell chose to join the Peace Corps and is now teaching in Africa.

Young has enrolled in New York University Law School in hopes that he will one day teach law. Raised in a small town, he said his



experience in China not only helped clarify his next steps but also gave him a broader worldview.

LIFE DREAMS

Walker, who grew up in a missionary family in the Philippines and is a Mercer alumnus and former trustee, developed his dream apart from any particular campus and now hopes other colleges and universities will adapt the program.

“Sometimes you have to get a sense of what you want to do and propose it,” said Walker of his own emerging dream.

He explored recent research that suggests “a new stage of adulthood” has emerged for 20-somethings who tend to marry and begin families later in life and need more specialized and advanced education than previous generations.

Walker said he wanted to do this work within a college curriculum since “typically higher education doesn’t focus on dreams, purpose.”

He raised the needed funds to launch the program and found Mercer president Bill Greenwood to be receptive to the concept.

“I hope this can be used at other schools,” said Walker. “I think the key here is: Is this helping the lives of students?”

Adam Mauldin thinks so. He was part of a team that taught public school teachers in China to teach English. His ServiceFirst experience made a great impact on more than one level, he said.

“Mercer’s ServiceFirst program enabled me to see places I had only read about in a textbook,” said Mauldin. “I traveled to a far-away land and met new people. Over the year I broadened my understanding of the world, and also of myself.”

Mauldin, who also “met the girl of my dreams” through this experience, added: “Mercer’s ServiceFirst Program fundamentally

Mercer graduate Jay Hood describes Bangkok, Thailand, as a “first-world city” in a “third-world country.” His ServiceFirst experience confirmed a calling to teach, said Hood, who is now doing graduate studies in English literature at the University of Mississippi.

changed my life, and I will forever be grateful to have been lucky enough to experience it.”

LARGER PURPOSE

ServiceFirst is different from the popular Mercer on Mission program — also a brainchild of Walker’s — that engages students in service learning.

“The uniqueness is that (ServiceFirst) is for our graduates,” he noted. “They don’t go as students like study abroad or Mercer on Mission.”

But ServiceFirst is definitely a continuation in educational development, he added.

“There are some things you can learn in a classroom and some things you can’t learn any other way than to be there,” he said of the extended, post-graduation, overseas service experiences.

A post-graduation experience through ServiceFirst is the culmination of the broader mission of the Institute of Life Purpose said Walker, who teaches related classes and seminars to assist students in exploring the larger meaning of vocation (calling) rather than simply a career choice.

“Some students will never sit down and talk with someone about life dreams,” said Walker, who also offers personal counseling and consultation.

“Instead of saying, ‘Fill out this form,’ I will say, ‘Let’s sit down for coffee.’”

Students, who do, often come away with a new awareness of dreams that have long been rooted in their lives.

“The larger purpose of the Institute (of Life Purpose) is to help students discover within themselves that ‘life dream’ that has been evolving within since infancy,” said Walker. ServiceFirst, he added, “helps you put wheels on a dream.” **BT**

—For more on the ServiceFirst program, visit mercer.edu/servicefirst.

Agile leadership

RICHMOND, Va. — Educator, ethicist and author Bob Dale, who is retired from the Baptist General Association of Virginia where he directed the Center for Creative Church Leadership, now devotes a major part of his time and talent to coaching leaders.

His latest of two dozen books on leadership and congregational dynamics is titled *Growing Agile Leaders: Coaching Leaders to Move with Sure-Footedness in a Seismic World* (Coach Approach Ministries, 2011).

Baptists Today editor John Pierce asked his former seminary professor some questions related to the book's subjects. He kindly responded.

BT: Many words have been used to describe effective leadership. You chose "agile." Why?

BD: "Agile" describes leaders' ability to correct quickly. In a changing, careening, suddenly global world with unprecedented levels of complexity, leaders are thrown off-stride and often feel completely overwhelmed.

Agility helps leaders regain their balance, get traction again, and move ahead with confidence — that's the ultimate survival skill for leaders in chaotic settings.

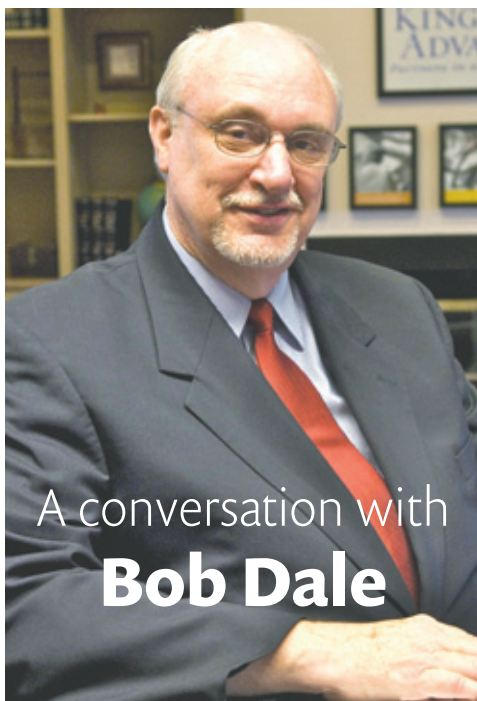
BT: Once associated primarily with sports, "coaching" is now widely used in leadership circles. What does it mean, and why is it important?

BD: Leader coaching is a hot resource right now, but it's more than a buzz word. Coaching brings thought partners alongside leaders. A thought partner is a "guide on the side, not a sage on the stage."

Leading churches can be a lonely, isolated, ingrown role. In an era when we've marched off our old maps, coaches contribute an objective set of eyes, a sensitized pair of listening ears, and an exploratory note to conversations.

The person being coached sets the agenda, makes the decisions, and takes the actions. But, they are emboldened by knowing the coach walks with them while helping broaden options, focus possibilities, and clarify next steps.

Certified coaches don't teach, do therapy, mentor or consult. Coaches, as thought



partners, are peers in a growth-oriented, solution-finding relationship. While equals, the coaching client is always in charge in coaching relationships. When the relationship has served its purpose, the coach steps into the background, and the leader forges ahead with new agility.

BT: Where would you suggest a young ministry leader turn his or her attention first to grow?

BD: The deep foundation for leadership is the leader's own self and soul. Clarity about identity, beliefs and values provides the stance for steady leadership.

"Tricks of the trade," although interesting and sometimes helpful, are no substitute for personal maturity. Theories change every day, but faith and inner calm are stabilizing leadership anchors. Leaders are unlikely to become better leaders than our souls and selves will support. Inner security is our GPS on stormy seas.

More than just young leaders, leaders at all stages of life and ministry are stretched today. In the book, I mention three kinds of leaders who are especially on the spot right now.

First, the Young Meteors — fast-track leaders with high potential — are often in over their heads and mostly recognize their plight.

Second, the Wardrobe Travelers are leaders who, like Lucy in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, feel they've stepped into a different world and are disoriented.

Third, the Old Gunslingers face late ministry challenges and wonder if they're up to the task. Each group is pressed by success, and all will have to become more agile to remain effective leaders.

BT: Can too much be said about flexibility in such a fast-moving cultural context in which ministry takes place? How does a leader avoid being overwhelmed by such constant shifting?

BD: Today's leaders are often overwhelmed. Feeling stuck or outgunned is understandable in a seismic world.

It's tough to lead now. Followers and leaders alike are confused and frequently refused. Leadership is a higher risk than ever before. We cope with huge changes in current leadership demands.

Our world has been described in "post-something" terms. That means, in simplest terms, we haven't lived here before and we haven't faced these challenges previously.

We're confronting radically new leadership contexts. Leaders need new, agile steps to navigate this dance floor.

BT: In my own work in recent years, I've found "seizing the moment" when unanticipated opportunities arise to be more effective than charting an inflexible long-range plan. Surely there are risks in both. But remaining organizationally nimble enough to walk through new doors as they open seems to be working well. Any thoughts on that?

BD: I like your instincts. Current leadership contexts are so crazy and unpredictable that agility is the only way forward, the only way to stay afloat.

Look at today's military as an example. Traditional battle lines of nation-against-nation wars have vanished, and special operations have become the only way to deal with non-state foes.

Flexible, nimble, seizing the moment, agile — that's the way we lead in a wiki-world. **BT**

Seasons of Ministry:

Transitioning gracefully throughout a ministry career

By Chris Gambill

As a minister for 30 years and a church consultant for 20, I have both participated in and observed numerous ministry transitions. Some have gone quite well; others have gone poorly.

There are some basics for transitioning well that carry over to all types and phases of ministry. Mastering these basics is critical to navigating the challenging emotional, spiritual and psychological territory of transitions.

It is important to remember that transitions have two parts. Transitions always begin by ending a set of relationships and end with establishing new ones in another place. Both aspects require thoughtful planning in spite of surrounding emotions.

Prepare for the end

The first step to ending well at a place of ministry is to identify key ministries or issues that need to be handled well in order not to be diminished in the transition. Having a "transition conversation" with key leaders is critical in order to pass on important information, plans and leadership responsibilities.

Another important step is to recognize the need for emotional closure and make a plan for saying goodbye to those with whom you minister. Allow people to say goodbye in ways that are meaningful for them, even if they are not what you would prefer.

Anticipate a variety of emotional responses to your departure and give space for people to experience and exhibit a variety of emotions such as grief, confusion, anger and joy. (Yes, some will be glad you are leaving!) Don't take all the emotional responses personally as an evaluation or critique of your ministry. At some level, they are simply emotional responses to change and are not necessarily about you.

Even if you are not leaving on the best of terms, communicate your love and hopes for the congregation's continued effective ministry. In other words, always take the high road emotionally and spiritually.

Make a plan for connecting with the larger congregation that is appropriate to the size and context.

If you are leaving under duress, do not take out your frustrations on the larger congregation — and especially not from the pulpit. Practice grace. Model the Christian behavior you want them to exhibit.

Create healthy boundaries

Establish healthy boundaries by making it clear that you care about them personally, but will no longer be their minister. Encourage them to call upon and accept their new minister as their spiritual shepherd.

Create physical and emotional space for them to connect with your successor. Be cautious about responding to emails and phone calls, especially if they are critical of their new minister. Less is often more when trying to transition gracefully.

Assume the best of the new person who takes your place. Resist the urge to share your thoughts or opinions about changes, new directions or initiatives.

Plan and make "hand-offs" to other ministers or caregivers when possible for any individuals who need special attention. Although you may want to make pastoral visits or conduct funerals, return to provide ministry to congregation members only at the invitation of the new minister.

It is also important that you disengage emotionally from your former congregation. Give yourself space to grieve. Then seek to establish relationships at your new place of life and ministry.

If you are retiring and remaining in the community, strongly consider finding another

congregation where you can worship and participate for at least a year. This will help reduce the likelihood of the congregation continuing to view you as their minister and help avoid the temptation to compare the new minister to you.

Develop new connections

Be thoughtful about connecting well with the people at your new place of ministry. It is wise to identify key stakeholders and engage with them early on.

Make a plan for connecting with the larger congregation that is appropriate to the size and context. Don't burn yourself out trying to meet and visit everyone in a large church during the first six months.

Create a formal covenant relationship with your new place of ministry and celebrate its initiation in the context of worship, such as with a service of covenanting and installation.

Learn all you can about your new congregation. How do they describe themselves? What are they passionate about? What are their priorities for mission and ministry? Do they have a vision and plan for the future? What leadership style do they prefer? Find the places where their preferences are a healthy match for your preferences and style.

Congregations are first and foremost relational entities, not programmatic ones, so focus on building healthy, positive relationships as a first priority. Solid relationships are the foundation for any successful ministry. After building healthy relationships, invite the congregation to work with you in creating and/or clarifying a vision for future mission and ministry.

Even after your transition is complete, keep working on relationships. This is not a "once and done" task. Congregations are always changing, and the work of building healthy connections never ends. **BT**

—Chris Gambill is senior consultant and manager of congregational health services for the Center for Congregational Health based in Winston-Salem, N.C.



Pastor: Azalea Baptist Church (ABC) in Norfolk, Va., is seeking the person God has called to be our next pastor. ABC is affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist General Association of Virginia. We are seeking a proven pastor, with a strong pulpit presence, a Bible teacher and a leader with organizational skills to lead us. ABC is a mission-minded church seeking ways to reach out to our local community. Candidates with an accredited seminary degree are preferred. Send résumés to Pastor Search Committee, 3314 E. Little Creek Rd., Norfolk, VA 23518 or to azaleaeducation@aol.com.

Associate Pastor: First Baptist Church, Albemarle, N.C., is seeking a full-time associate pastor/minister of education for church life, outreach and missions. A seminary degree is preferred. FBC affirms the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message* and recognizes the call of women to leadership roles. Address résumés/inquiries to revrog@fbc-albemarle.org.

Associate Minister: The First Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn., a progressive, inclusive, creative CBF congregation in the heart of the city, seeks a full-time associate minister to serve in one or more of the following areas of church life: youth, children, family, recreation, missions, college and career. We are looking for the highest quality minister to bring onto our church staff and are willing, within reason, to shape the title and job description to the passions and skill sets of the minister. The associate minister will have the opportunity to serve in all pastoral roles, but must have a passion for one or more of the areas mentioned above. A seminary degree or the equivalent and experience are preferred but not required. Love of ministry, creativity, work ethic, vision and organizational skills are essentials. Send résumés to dbreckenridge@fbcmemphis.org.

Associate Minister of Music and Worship

Master of music degree and theological training preferred

Résumés:
First Baptist Church
401 N. Laurel Ave.
Corbin, KY 40701
(firstbaptistcorbin.org)

John F. Bridges is assistant vice president for advancement for religious studies at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, N.C., where he has been director of church relations for seven years.

Terry Hamrick will retire June 30, 2012, as coordinator of missional visioning for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship where he has served for 15 years. Previously he served churches as minister of education.

David Hawes is pastor of Fair Bluff (N.C.) Baptist Church. He formerly served as minister of youth and children at Sandy Plains Baptist Church in Shelby, N.C.

Norman Jameson is assistant dean for development for the Wake Forest University School of Divinity. He is the former editor of the North Carolina Baptist newspaper, *Biblical Recorder*.

Monty Jordan died Sept. 28 in Nashville, Tenn., at age 78. He served as pastor of two churches in Washington, D.C., and two in Tennessee. A memorial service was held at First Baptist Church of Jefferson City, Tenn.

Evelyn Geer McCartney of Vero Beach, Fla., died Sept. 12 at age 91. She was active in the First Baptist Church there and a supporter of many causes including *Baptists Today*.

First Baptist Church in Eatonton, Ga., has two new staff members: **Daniel McCullough**, minister of youth, and **Glenn Harrell**, minister of music. McCullough previously served at First Baptist Church in Lyons, Ga. Harrell is the owner of Wesley Music Company in Gray, Ga.

Robert B. Setzer Jr. is pastor of Knollwood Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., after serving as pastor of First Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., for 15 years.

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Danny Russell, pastor

First Baptist Church, Tryon, N.C.
Jeff C. Harris, pastor

First Baptist Church of Cornelia, Ga., is seeking photographs of these ministers:

Adonnas Everett Booth, 1898; General J. Jackson, 1900; James Allison Johnson, 1906 and 1934; Benjamin David Porter, 1910; William Jesse Barton, 1916; John G. Black, 1917; Joshua Columbus Ammons, 1920; James Luther Claxton, 1922; Dolphus William Edwards, 1942; Henry Charlton Brown, 1944. Please contact the church (706-778-4412) or Sue Blair (706-778-2954, sueblair@windstream.net).

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BAPTISTS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Eight months into the war, the South is clearly winning the conflict that has now claimed thousands of lives. While the North grows restless, the Confederates continue racking up battlefield victories.

White Southern Baptists, rejoicing in the success of the Confederate war effort, remind their fellow white southerners to abstain from sin (African slavery not counted as such) in order to ensure God's continued blessings upon the southern nation:

Convening for their annual meeting, Alabama Baptists issue the following statement:

"... We feel obliged as lovers of God and of our country, to acknowledge the stress in which we now find ourselves, but above all, we do recognize the hand of God in leading us into our present condition ...

We wish also, to express our gratitude to God for having given us a chief magistrate who has, in all his official acts and proclamations, recognized the dependence we all feel on the Almighty Ruler of the Universe for success in the present struggle, for every blessing we enjoy.

And we trust our whole people will strictly observe the days appointed by civil authority for fasting and prayer, and that they will humbly approach the throne of grace, to confess their sins before God, and to supplicate blessings upon our country and our rulers, our people and our armies, and all those interests which are dearer to us than life itself; and that the Prince of Peace may gain new victories ..."

One of the Confederate-proclaimed days of fasting and prayer takes place this month. In Georgia on the appointed day, Mercer University professor (and future Mercer president) Henry Holcombe addresses the Georgia legislature:



The scoffer and the infidel may question the sincerity of the christian, or if not, they will perhaps be surprised to learn that to his mind the most cheering evidence of our success in this war is this acknowledgment of God so wide spread in the hearts of the people ... This then is the chief reliance of the christian patriot in this emergency. It is gratifying to see that this devout and proper spirit so generally prevails, and it should be the great aim of all who love God to cultivate and cherish it....

Here then is joyful news to thousands of Christian patriots who burn with desire to aid their country's cause, but who know not what to do. All you have to do is to be good, and in being good you are doing good; and in doing good you are securing the favor of God and contributing your share towards enlisting Him on the side of our armies

My countrymen, we are certain of success in this war if we but use the right means ... Let us 'seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' and trust that all other things will be added ... the days of Millennial glory would come, and the whole world would be subject to the gentle reign of the Prince of Peace!"

Against the backdrop of growing Christian nationalist euphoria among Southern Baptists, a scholar-in-the-making is adapting to a new lifestyle as an infantryman in Virginia's Norfolk Light Artillery Blues.

Crawford H. Toy, an accomplished

150 YEARS AGO

November 1861

young man and one of the first students of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is an ardent supporter of the Confederacy. In addition to his duties as a soldier, Toy in time also becomes a chaplain in General Lee's army.

His friends in the army write of his devotion to the study of languages, and Toy is known to pull out his books during lulls in battles. Toy survives the war, and the world remembers him as an outstanding Harvard professor.

Yet Toy's journey from the battlefield to Harvard is firstly a Baptist story. In 1869, SBTS hires the 33-year-old Toy as an Old Testament professor. Popular with faculty and students, he remains at SBTS until 1879, at which time his increasingly "liberal" views concerning the historical accuracy of the Old Testament lead to his firing, paving the way for his Harvard career.

Toy thus becomes representative of the next major salvo in the Southern Baptist war over biblical literalism. An approach to biblical interpretation that sanctioned African slavery and led to the war to defend the practice, biblical literalism in the post-war years trained its guns upon modern science as represented by Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution.

This war continues to the present day in Southern Baptist life, as 21st-century Southern Baptist theologians and historians yet dismiss Toy as a heretic. **BT**

—For a daily journal along with references to source material, visit civilwarbaptists.org.

Hand-in-Hand

Career missionaries, short-term volunteers most effective when working together, one Baptist leader discovers

Should the growing emphasis on short-term mission trips come at the expense of long-term mission efforts?

That is the question Larry Hovis, executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, raised following an August trip to Haiti with a team from Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem.

Following a challenge at the CBFNC's general assembly last March, Hovis decided to join the effort to help to build houses and treat some basic medical needs of Haitians in the Grand Goave area.

Haiti is still struggling to recover from a devastating earthquake of January 2010 that left more than a million people homeless. After the trip, Hovis issued a challenge to Fellowship Baptists in CBFNC's newsletter.

"I propose that CBF Christians and churches make the following pledge: for every dollar we spend to send a team on a short-term mission trip we raise another dollar for the support of the field personnel with whom they work and their colleagues around the globe."

Hovis estimated that the recent trip to Haiti cost about \$15,000. Under his proposal, a similar amount would be raised for global missions.

"If every short-term mission team followed this practice, we would be able to increase the number of our career missionaries and significantly strengthen our mission efforts around the globe," he said.

"Ironically, the more volunteers we send on short-term mission trips, the more vital our field personnel become."

Hovis said that he is thankful that Baptists no longer "outsource" mission work to professional missionaries without taking personal responsibility for global missions. But he raised another question: "Has the pendulum swung too far in the other direction?"

Hovis worries that Baptists now think that because they can afford to travel all over the world, vocational missionaries are no longer needed.

"It's not either/or, but both/and," he said. "Our recent trip to Haiti made that very clear — at least to me."

Hovis said a book, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself*, suggested to him by his daughter, Lauren, who went on the trip as well, influenced his thinking. Authors Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert address faulty assumptions about the causes of poverty that can result in strategies that harm the ones trying to be helped.

"I found the book to be extremely thought-provoking and it caused me to question, filter and analyze our mission trip (and all mission work) from a whole new perspective," Hovis said.

"Our CBF efforts are done with the Haitians, not for them, empowering them ultimately to provide for themselves, rather than perpetuating a culture of dependency," he said. And the trip convinced Hovis of the need for "professional" missionaries.



Larry Hovis urges churches to give one dollar to support career missionaries for every dollar spent on mission trips.

"They get to know the people and the culture and ensure that our brief work is done in a way that helps rather than hurts those we purport to serve," he said. "Ironically, the more volunteers we send on short-term mission trips, the more vital our field personnel become."

Lauren Hovis, a student at the University of North Carolina, said the trip helped her learn what it means for Christians to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

"And this doesn't include riding down on a white horse deeming to save and show the poor souls the light of the world in their very dark piece of the world God has yet to reach," she said. "It means joining their community in the work God has already laid out for them and celebrating the fact that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ."

CBF partners with the Haiti Housing Network, which hopes to build 1,000 permanent houses in the Grand Goave area over the next three years. Each house, built with rubble from destroyed buildings, costs about \$4,000 to construct. The network employs local laborers to build environmentally friendly, culturally appropriate houses, according to its website.

Workers pour rubble into 12-inch thick, cage-like wire structures that form walls. Cement plaster is then added to both sides. The end result is a 280-square-foot, permanent house. The network tries to minimize social disruption by building houses in established neighborhoods whenever possible.

Hovis said the process of building rubble houses fascinated him — and that he "emerged from this week hot, tired, and sore, but also spiritually renewed" and with a clear understanding that the work of vocational missionaries and short-term volunteers goes hand-in-hand. **BT**

Other side of the story:

Mother cares for her son's Amish victims

LANCASTER, Pa. — Terri Roberts was eating outside with a co-worker on a bright October day when an ambulance wailed nearby and a helicopter swooped overhead.

As she often did at a siren's sound, Roberts said a quick prayer. "Little did I know what I was praying for," she said.

Walking back to her office, Roberts heard the phone ring. It was her husband, Chuck.

"I need you to come to Charlie's house right away," he said, referring to their 32-year-old son.

Terri jumped into her car. The radio broadcast said there had been a shooting at an Amish schoolhouse in nearby Nickel Mines, Pa., where Charlie sometimes parked his milk truck.

Terri worried: What if Charlie had been shot while trying to rescue the children? What if he had been killed?

As she pulled into her son's driveway, she saw Chuck talking to a state trooper. She clambered out of the car.

"Is Charlie alive?" she asked.

"No."

It was Oct. 2, 2006, and Charles Carl Roberts IV had just shot 10 Amish schoolgirls before turning the gun on himself. Five girls died. Five others were seriously wounded.

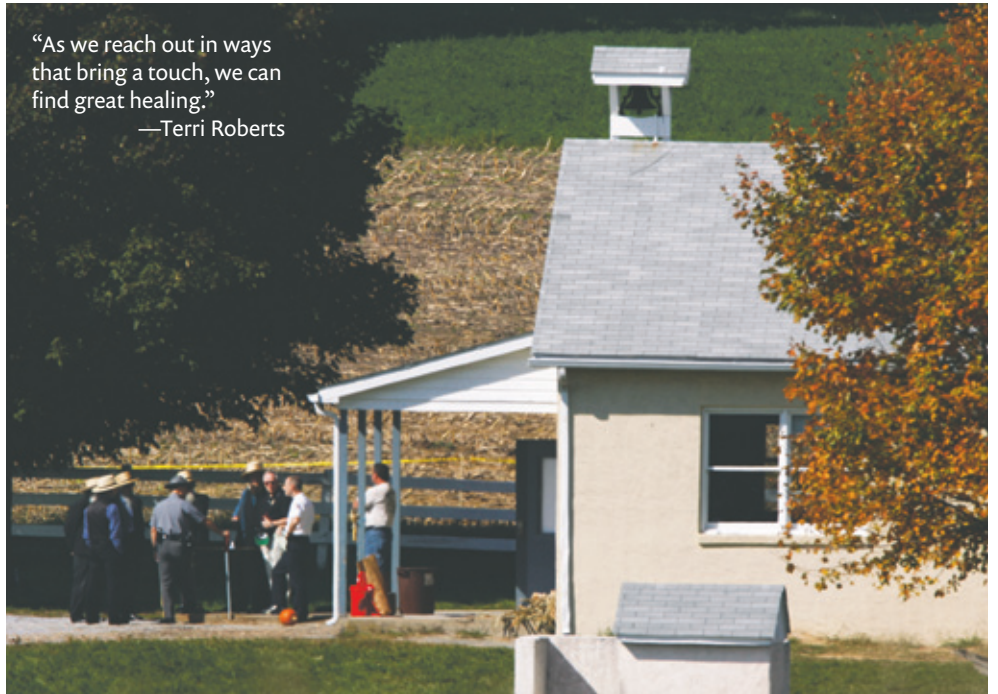
"Not only was my son not alive, he was the perpetrator of the worst crime anyone could ever imagine," Terri Roberts said.

After the shooting, the world was riveted by the remarkable display of compassion shown by the Amish, as the quiet Christian sect embraced the Roberts family and strove to forgive its troubled sinner. Five years later, the other side of the story is not well known — that of a grief-torn mother seeking the still, small voice of God in the aftermath of tragedy.

One place where Terri has found peace is at the bedside of her son's most damaged, living victim — a paralyzed schoolgirl, now 11. During their weekly visit, Terri bathes and talks to her, brushes her hair and sings hymns.

"As we reach out in ways that bring a

"As we reach out in ways that bring a touch, we can find great healing."
—Terri Roberts



touch, we can find great healing," Terri said.

Terri Roberts, now 60, declines most media requests. But she has shared her story at conferences and churches. In March, Faith Church in Lancaster posted an audio recording of her spiritual testimony on its website; she confirmed its accuracy for this article.

On the day of the shooting, Terri crawled into a fetal position, feeling as if her insides were ripped apart. Chuck, a retired policeman, cried into a tea towel, unable to lift his head. He wore skin off his face wiping away tears.

Family and friends poured into the Roberts' home in Strasburg, Pa., a small town about six miles from Nickel Mines. No one knew what to say. Later that evening, an Amish neighbor named Henry, whom Terri calls her "angel in black," arrived at their house.

"We love you," Henry insisted, and continued to comfort Chuck for nearly an hour. Finally, Chuck looked up. "Thank you, Henry," he said.

"I just looked at that and said, 'Oh Lord, my husband will heal through this.' I was just so thankful for Henry that day," Terri said.

Three months after the shooting, Chuck and Terri Roberts began visiting the victims and their families. Terri invited the surviving girls and their mothers to picnics and tea

parties at her home.

She yearned to connect with Mary Liz King, the mother of a paralyzed girl named Rosanna. King explained how her trials were different than the rest of the victims. Their daughters had died or healed, whereas Rosanna, unable to move most of her body, requires constant care.

She cannot walk, talk or eat, yet Rosanna is aware of her surroundings and attends an Amish school, her father, Christ King, said in an interview. Terri approached Mary Liz and offered to help care for Rosanna.

Almost every Thursday evening since, Terri has visited the Kings for several hours, singing to Rosanna, cleaning her bedclothes, bathing her limp body and reading her Bible stories.

"She's got to be an awful strong woman to be able to do that," said Christ King.

Terri Roberts wishes her son had reached out for help in dispelling his dark moods. Charlie Roberts said in a suicide note that he hated God after the miscarriage of his first child. Faced with similar suffering, his mother has taken the opposite path.

Her son cursed God; she trusts in prayer. Her son acted out his rage; she reaches out in reconciliation. **BT**

“All my life I was taught how to die as a Christian, but no one ever taught me how I ought to live in the years before I die.”

The sunset of life

Billy Graham reflects on growing old

For much of his long life, Billy Graham has had one main title: evangelist. But in a new memoir set in the twilight of his remarkable life, Graham

reveals a lesser-known side of himself: a grieving and ailing widower who has difficulty getting up from a chair or putting on his shoes.

“I can’t truthfully say that I have liked growing older,” Graham writes in *Nearing Home: Life, Faith, and Finishing Well*, which hit bookstores last month. “At times I wish I could still do everything I once did — but I can’t.”

To be sure, his book includes his signature focus on evangelism, asking non-Christian readers numerous times to come to Jesus before it is too late. But most of the book’s 180 pages are filled with messages on growing old, or preparing younger readers for the reality of old age.

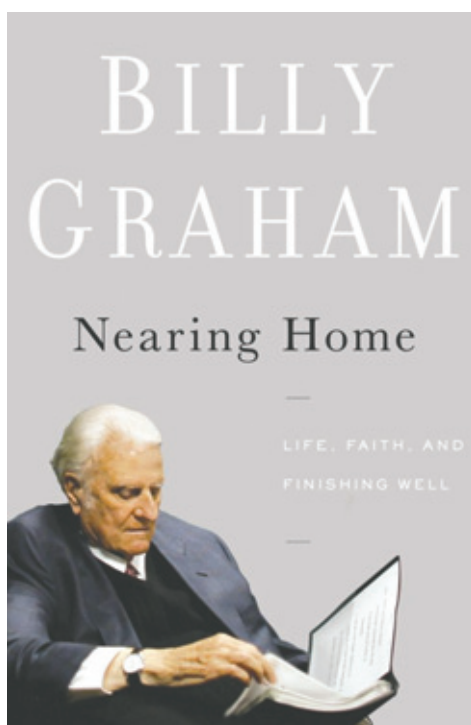
“All my life I was taught how to die as a Christian, but no one ever taught me how I ought to live in the years before I die,” he writes in the introduction. “I wish they had because I am an old man now and believe me, it’s not easy.”

So Graham, who turns 93 on Nov. 7, has become a teacher of sorts in “How to Grow Old 101.”

Stay involved, he recommends. And spend wisely. As the great-grandfather of 43, he warns against going into debt buying expensive gifts for grandchildren.

Prepare a will and medical directives to reduce family conflict after you’re gone, he advises. And look out for the “hidden perils” of depression, anger and self-absorption.

“Sometimes I have to force my mind to turn away from whatever problem is absorbing me at the moment and make myself focus on



the needs of others,” he writes.

Despite their limitations, he assures, the senior years can nevertheless be rewarding. He cites biblical examples, including Moses, who died at 120 after leading the Egyptians to the Promised Land, and Elizabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist though “well along in years.”

“Are you willing to be used by God regardless of being bound by physical ailments, financial constraint, or the loneliness of growing old?” asks the man who once crisscrossed the world but now seldom leaves his home in the North Carolina mountains.

He counsels on a range of possibilities: getting involved in church or other ministries, helping others who may be ill or grieving, and building a mature faith through books and Bible study.

“God forbid that we should ever retire from prayer, the sweetest work of the soul,” he writes.

Graham even manages to find humor in the gradual loss of senses that accompanies old age.

Recalling hearing younger people screaming “Can you hear me?” into their cell phones, he said: “It’s sometimes comical to hear the younger generation ask their peers to repeat themselves.”

For years, news reports have chronicled Graham’s physical decline: pneumonia, hearing and vision loss, even tripping over his dog. His wheelchair, cane and walker now are close to his bed, and he dictated the book that took him several years to write.

“I often wonder if God, in his sovereignty, allows the eyesight of the aged to cast a dim view of the here and now so that we may focus our spiritual eyes on the ever after,” he writes.

Graham reserves his most poignant prose about grief for his beloved wife Ruth, who died in 2007, two years after he held his last official crusade in New York. He always thought she would outlive him.

“Not a day passes that I don’t imagine her walking through my study door or us sitting together on our porch as we did so often, holding hands as the sun set over the mountaintops,” he writes.

In recent years, Graham has marked his Nov. 7 birthday with a media release about his hopes for a heavenly home. In the book, Graham writes that he looks forward to death because he’s eager to be reunited with his wife.

In the meantime, he appreciates the “touches of Ruth” in each room of his house.

“Before long Ruth and I will be reunited in heaven,” he writes. “More than ever, I look forward to that day!” **BT**

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*“In some ways,
we’ve become the
church on the square.”*

‘Just Folk’

Pastor Mart Gray makes many community connections at the church’s Just Folk coffeehouse in downtown Elba, Ala.



Congregation’s in-town coffeehouse offers daily selections, needed connections

ELBA, Ala. — In this county-seat town in Southeastern Alabama, the place to be at lunchtime is the Just Folk coffeehouse right off the town square.

Mere steps away from the courthouse across the street, it’s where locals who are working in town go for the daily special, conversation and a good piece of pie.

It also happens to be the church office for Covenant Community Church and where pastor Mart Gray spends time talking with people.

On the day I was having lunch with Mart at Just Folk, the daily special was lasagna served with salad and breadsticks. The dessert of the day was Hershey pie.

But Ken, who said he comes to the coffeehouse every day for lunch, swears by the chicken salad.

“I eat the same thing pretty much every day,” says Ken. “And they know how I like my chicken salad sandwich.”

Ken is handed his lunch at the counter by a server who waits for him to open up the sandwich. Then she hands him the Louisiana hot sauce — because she knows that’s how he likes it.

NEW START

In 2004, Mart Gray was serving as coordinator for Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. His office was a couple of doors down from

where the coffeehouse now stands.

At the same time, he was helping guide the start of Covenant Community Church and the congregation’s new building that was under construction a few miles away.

“We started the church in 2004 ... and had our first service in the new church building on Sept. 11, 2005,” said Mart.

Soon after, he decided to resign as Alabama CBF coordinator to serve as full-time pastor.

Then, in 2007, the church acquired the in-town space as a gift from the Cash family in Elba.

“We had a dream for a coffeehouse where people could gather,” said Mart. “And I knew that it would be good for the church to have an office where I could meet more people.”

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, some businesses and residents began to move out of downtown Elba because of past flooding. But eventually, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rebuilt the levee and Auburn University’s Urban Studio — a part of the school of architecture that seeks to bring life into older, smaller communities across Alabama — surveyed and reported on their findings.

“They suggested that Elba make the downtown area a destination for gathering ... a place for people to meet and get to know each other,” said Mart, “and a place where art, entertainment and food could bring people together — which was exactly what we were thinking.”

ARTFUL APPRECIATION

The coffeehouse opened in 2008 and held its first concert that fall featuring singer/songwriter Ellis Paul. Just Folk now has a monthly concert series and sells season tickets with 65 to 75 people at each concert.

Performers and patrons alike love the space and the intimacy of the coffeehouse that, like the church building, features the work of local artists.

A painting over the fireplace in the coffeehouse, called “Dinner on the Grounds,” is the commissioned work of artist Toby Hollinghead who wrote a story to go with the painting.

Various paintings and crafts line the walls and shelves in the coffeehouse, and a craft festival is held at Christmas. The church uses art for spiritual expression and education as well.

The first painting received by the congregation was an offering of thanksgiving by a woman who was displaced by Hurricane Katrina. She came to Elba where Covenant members gave her shelter and a sense of community during her transition.

An artist, she told Mart that she was going to paint them a picture. When she was ready to move and settle into a new home, she left the painting behind as an offering of gratitude.

The congregation was amazed by the woman’s painting of an angel that stands more than six feet tall and now hangs among others in the fellowship area of the church.

LUNCH TIME

Three years ago, the deli next to the coffeehouse closed and several people wondered aloud if some church members might consider offering lunch. So a kitchen was added to the coffeehouse, and now lunch is served with the help of church volunteers.

One church member, Patty, volunteers more than 40 hours a week to keep the restaurant open and the food prepared. Other church members volunteer for a day or two during the week.

“Just Folk is where it’s at,” said Jimmy, who volunteers at the coffeehouse on Wednesdays. “The pay is great too — a chicken salad sandwich and a Coke!”

The coffeehouse is also the home to the church’s youth group and hosts their Bible study time and fellowship. Although the big screen television on the wall shows news during the lunch hour, it also features the youth Bible study DVD curriculum and the women’s Bible study program.

In addition, the coffeehouse space is offered free to other faith groups who need to hold a meeting or a fellowship downtown.

SIGNATURE MINISTRY

“Some people may ask why a church runs a coffeehouse,” said Mart. “But the people of Covenant really believe that this is our

signature ministry. It’s a way to connect to the people of our community.”

Since opening Just Folk, the Covenant congregation has grown — but the ministry impact is even greater.

“We’ve had some people join Covenant, but we also have people who have simply become part of a fellowship of people who come to meet and talk at the coffeehouse,” said Mart. “In some ways, we’ve become the church on the square. There are days when you may just need someone to talk to — and a piece of pie.” **BT**



“The people of Covenant (Community Church) really believe that this [coffeehouse] is our signature ministry,” said pastor Mart Gray.

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